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## SHOULDER TO SHOULDER? MASCULINITIES AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN LATER LIFE

### ABSTRACT

*Although Portuguese researchers are increasingly interested in studying ageing processes, adult education has not been giving older citizen's learning the attention it deserves. At the same time, while discourse on informal learning has been present for a long time, not many investigations have chosen it as a central theme. During the OMAL project, we wanted to first have an exploratory approach to older men's learning in the community which, at a certain point, needs a theoretical focus on masculinities. In this article, we present the results of two case studies related to fishing. Our findings point to some interesting comments both on the importance of informal learning and of symbolic spaces in the community, as well as promising results on the issue of masculinities. Our provisional conclusions allow us to redirect our future investigational efforts.*

**Keywords:** adult education, informal learning, community, men's learning, older adults

### Z RAMO OB RAMI? MOŠKOST IN NEFORMALNO UČENJE V KASNEJŠEM ŽIVLJENJU – POVZETEK

*Čeprav se portugalski raziskovalci vse bolj zanimajo za raziskovanje procesov staranja, potrebam starejših državljanov v kontekstu izobraževanja odraslih še vedno ni bilo namenjene dovolj pozornosti. Hkrati se le malo raziskav osredotoča na neformalno učenje, čeprav diskurz o omenjeni temi poteka že precej časa. V okviru projekta OMAL smo želeli narediti prvi korak k raziskovanju učenja starejših moških v skupnosti, kar je zahtevalo teoretsko raziskavo problematike moškosti. V članku predstavljamo rezultate dveh študij primera, ki sta povezani z ribolovom. Naše ugotovitve so prispevale nekaj zanimivih komentarjev o pomenu neformalnega učenja, simbolnih prostorov v skupnosti, poleg tega pa tudi nekaj obetavnih odgovorov na vprašanja, povezana s problematiko moškosti. Naše začasne sklepne ugotovitve bodo pripomogle k nadaljnji usmeritvi raziskovalnih naporov.*

**Ključne besede:** izobraževanje odraslih, neformalno učenje, skupnost, učenje moških, starejši odrasli

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## **INTRODUCTION: A GLIMPSE INTO PORTUGUESE RESEARCH ON AGEING AND LEARNING**

Over the last few decades, Portuguese researchers have shown a growing interest on ageing processes. Departing from an ecological perspective within psycho-gerontology, the works of Constança Paúl et al are central. They have approached the global changes in behaviour through the processes of ageing (Fonseca and Paúl, 2006; Ribeiro and Paúl, 2012), the crucial importance of social networks for the process of ageing, loneliness (Paúl and Ribeiro, 2009), and loneliness and disability in old age (Paúl, Ayes, and Ebrahim, 2006), among other issues. Additionally, sociologists have been concerned with this topic as well. São José (2012), for example, has been looking for divisions and inequalities within relationship between care and carers. There is also a strong strand of sociological research that focuses on the role of universities of the third age in the lives of the elderly. Learning and socialising at universities of the third age gives them the possibility to strengthen social networks and reinforce their social capital; it also has a crucial role by helping them in the difficult transitions from paid work to retirement (Veloso, 2011a, 2011b). Machado and Medina (2011) studied the elderly's learning trajectories, arguing for a positive influence of learning on their well-being (physical, psychological, social, emotional, and mental), self-esteem, and self-confidence. However, despite the number and variety of perspectives one can find in investigations of third age institutions, Veloso (2011a) acknowledges that a classical model of school was still partially in place and that one cannot say that a liberating education (in a Freirian sense) is being followed. Finally, the predominance of middle-class participants in this learning space was also clear – a pattern already noted in other European countries. Despite these and other advances, most of the research work has been done within the context of traditional disciplines of knowledge. Adult education, however, is not one of those fields. Thus, there is still much to be done, if our departure point or theoretical framework is adult education.

## **ADULT EDUCATION AND AGEING**

Adult education and adult educators in Portugal have not been giving older citizens enough attention. Veloso (2011a), according to an analysis of Portugal between 1985 and 2008, states there is an absence of global coherent policy on adult education in the particular dimension of older adult's learning, leading to the marginalisation of the sector. Therefore, it is logical to ask why there is a certain tendency for educators in adult education and institutions to “forget” about working with older citizens. Our short, speculative answers follow: firstly, working with older adults generally implicates simple assistance or short-term creative solutions to practical problems posed by older citizen's everyday lives. Physical and psychological constraints are to be expected from older citizens, especially the ones in advanced age. This is a form of action that has been not the priority of adult educators, who tend to be more focused on attaining change or social change through education, sometimes taking radical or humanist paradigms as an inspiration (Freire, 1997). These aspects are difficult to tackle and represent real limitations to the type of work adult educators like to do.

Secondly, it is social work and social work institutions (including third sector organisations) that have traditionally been “in charge” of these tasks; adult education and adult educators have been leaving the field to pursue work at other kinds of institutions.

Of course, this raises an additional question: Is the work of these institutions directed at simple assistance or is it based on a more profound philosophy of action? The aim of our research was to look closely at third-sector organisations and educators within these professional settings. Despite the fact that third-sector organisations are commonly referred to as alternatives to the state and the market, some factors that influence their actions have to be considered. Firstly, the culture of contracting civil society (Field, 2006) the neoliberal state has been enacting in the last decades has dramatically reduced the independence of third-sector organisations. State regulation and control have been transforming third-sector organisations into state partners. However, this seems to be a *very unequal partnership*: while the state keeps its power anchored in the law, third sector organisations fight for their survival. Secondly, the logic of the market tends to be a threat to the intermediate forms of social organisation. Those institutions are increasingly vulnerable, as they are weakened by, on the one hand, the vanishing policies of state social intervention (Andrade and Franco, 1997) and, on the other hand, the mechanisms of individualisation of the working institutions themselves (Autès, 2003). These two processes acting together had been responsible for the evolution of professions leading to the logic of services (in most cases, contracted services) and to the fragmentation of social professions. Therefore, it follows that one of our conclusions (Ricardo and Fragoso, 2014) was precisely that despite the fact that educators have a clear idea of working to promote participation, autonomy, and emancipation, there are significant obstacles at all levels to making this philosophy concrete. Our results depict a scenario of increasing interpenetration among the market, state, and third sector organisations; sometimes, the alternative is only theoretical.

There is, however, a subfield of adult education that transversely comes into contact with the cases we will present: community development and education, commonly called local development in Portugal. It emerged as an important field of practices in the mid-1980s and experienced a golden period until roughly the end of the century. In Portugal, community development served as particular inspiration for popular education (Fragoso, 2011): departing from local needs or community problems, there was work on the organisation and education of the population in order to facilitate change. A great deal of the work done in Portugal did not focus specifically on older citizens; instead, territories or communities at large were to be the centre of the action. However, these forms of popular development showed us the importance of non-formal and especially informal learning in communities. Therefore, it was only natural that we joined a group of researchers who, inspired by the research of Barry Golding (Golding, 2011), put together the OMAL (Older Men as Active Learners in the Community<sup>1</sup>) project. In it, we tried to take a first look at men’s learning in informal contexts in the community, taking for granted that masculinities would be also an important issue for our common framework.

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## AGEING, INFORMAL LEARNING, AND MASCULINITIES

Community education teaches us the importance of informal learning. Most of the time, we face deprived populations with a consequently low level of organisation and a weak associative ability. In these conditions, promoting processes of participation requires that informal learning take place along the processes. Even if researchers quite often prefer to focus on formal or non-formal learning, a significant set of important details are to be found in an informal dimension, at the same time that people participate in community action. In these processes, people learn (Fragoso, 2014) how to organise themselves to divide tasks, how to look for the information they need, and how to search for the institutions and social actors that might bring them funding possibilities and the ability to make decisions. People can learn how to discuss their options and to assume responsibility for the choices they made. In short, informal spaces of learning are crucial for the community to increase its level of organisation, to encourage participation, and to open doors so that adults can autonomously select those paths considered important for the future of the community or those activities that can have a positive effect on their lives.

Informal learning can give older men in particular a number of advantages, as Golding (2011) clearly demonstrates. Not only in concrete dimensions such as health or in men's contributions to the community, but also because men seem to have a different way of learning as compared to women: this different way of learning, that Golding argues to be social, local, and situated, can eventually be the key for us to test ways of diminishing the levels of exclusion of the male population, in a time where we should no longer hide that the problem is beginning to be felt in a number of different countries around the world (see Golding, Mark and Foley, 2014).

Connell's (2005) concept of *hegemonic masculinity* is fundamental to understanding the social and cultural construction of diverse masculinities in their relationship to power. It refers to gender practices that guarantee the legitimacy of patriarchy, leaving men in a dominant position and women in a subordinate role. Deeply anchored in a Gramscian notion of power, hegemonic masculinity subordinates all other alternative masculinities, including complicit and subordinated masculinities (Connell, 1987, 2005). In Portugal, masculinities started to be researched in the 1990s in the field of social anthropology. Almeida (1995) used Connell's *hegemonic masculinity* while researching in southern rural areas, and concluded that masculinity among young Portuguese peasants is a fragile condition, constantly subjected to vigilance and affirmation through discourse and performance. Today, however, there is already an interesting set of studies on the topic. For example, Amâncio (2004) shows how cultures reproduced through profession are gendered and still include important features of traditional hegemonic masculinity, even if these professions are now open to women. Laranjeira (2004) studied the attitudes of young adults, connecting the establishment of masculinity to behaviours implicating some kind of risk. Recent research uses the concepts of "old masculinity" and "new masculinity" to refer to transitional gender relations and male family roles experienced in contemporary Portugal (Wall, Abloom, and Cunha, 2010). Despite the popularity of modernist values,

gender role differentiation persists in Portuguese society. Thus, even if in recent decades we are witnessing a transition from the older model of “man as breadwinner” and “woman as caretaker” to a more democratic and egalitarian division of work and social roles, these transitions are not as swift as one might expect.

## METHODOLOGY

Within the framework of the OMAL project, we conducted two case studies in the region of Algarve (southern Portugal). In both, we tried to naturally understand the case (Stake, 1994), adopting an exploratory position (Yin, 1993), which allowed us to better formulate guidelines and questions for future investigations. The first case study concerns an amateur fishing club located in the city of Faro. In its initial stage, our approach included document analysis (members’ files, minutes of the meetings, etc.) and informal conversations with key informants to naturally understand the origins and evolution of this group mainly formed by men. Naturalist observation followed at different times of day; this included an observation of a fishing social event that took place at Faro beach. Finally, we conducted ten semi-structured interviews (Fontana and Frey, 1994) with different club members. In the second case study, we still looked at fishing, but in a different context: we discovered retired fishermen still working on shore six days a week, repairing nets or doing maintenance jobs in the boats. This approach was, of course, more difficult; in this context, every interview would seem unreasonable. Aside from observation, we had to use long periods of informal conversations. In the initial phase, these conversations did not have a precise objective of collecting information. In the second phase, we decided to try to guide the conversations towards the understanding of their past as fishermen, in a way trying to do a superficial biographical approach. We had to understand if the patterns of learning and socialising through their work as fishermen had something to do with these men’s lives today.

## BUILDING COMMUNITY: THE CASE OF THE FARO AMATEUR FISHING CLUB

The amateur fishing club in the city of Faro (southern Portugal) was created in 1956 by a group of eleven friends. Initially, they had their own unofficial competitions, but soon they built one team and started to compete officially. In a few years, they became regional, national, and international champions. Because of the need to guarantee the continuity of their successful performance in competitions, some members of the club decided to dedicate some time to teaching a group of young people the fishing techniques – and thus a new generation of champions was born. Today, the amateur fishing club is one of the best clubs in the country (top three); they have many of individual and team trophies at all levels. The club has the *status* of institution of public utility and has received the city medal for sport merit. This club offers some activities, like fishing competitions at various levels, social fishing, and indoor activities. The club’s teams that perform well at

regional competitions are allowed to compete in national competitions; if the teams rank in the first group at the national level, they have access to worldwide competitions. Social fishing on the weekends or during holidays with their families or friends is a central activity in which fishing appears to be a pretext for socialisation. These activities usually end with a common lunch at the club's bar. Some indoor activities like snooker, cards, domino, darts, and "drinking and talking" also take place in the club's bar. All of these activities seem essential to older men's social lives.

The elderly's participation in official competitions is not possible because of their physical limitations. These members participate in local or social fishing events and primarily use the club spaces for socialising, gathering and participating in social games like cards, snooker, and dominoes. These men see the club as their own space, a place where they feel good and with which they identify. Contrary to other similar spaces, socialising does not occur only among their age group. The games or simple conversations happen among people of very different ages.

Apart from the group of older men, it is possible to identify additional groups of adults or young adults in the club. There are the ones who have jobs and participate in fishing competition or social events. There is a group of young adults who are unemployed and hang around during the day, socialising with all the rest and playing games in the club. This seems to represent an important resource for their mental health and an anchor to feelings of belonging to the community. There are also some groups that have been built through professional relationships and, after retirement, the club space represents these men's meeting point. To summarise, the club spaces and activities are fundamental for the elderly to be able to socialise and to combat isolation, and represents a contribution to intergenerational socialising and learning.

Familial structure is deeply integrated in the club and its socialising patterns as well. It was surprising to see how men take their children to the club or to the social fishing events. This seems to contribute to a strong tie between family and the club. It is possible to find three generations fishing at the same time. At present, they teach fishing techniques to others, learning from each other and collectively in the most informal way possible. There are neither appointed nor hired coaches, nor scheduled, formal training sessions – oddly enough, if we think in the significant sports merit of the club. On the one hand, this means that complex fishing techniques are learned through an informal dynamic, similar to everyday learning occurring during socialising or other sorts of informal relations. On the other hand, it also shows the potential of learning from practice. These men are able to build a common narrative from practice which, of course, also has the consequence of depicting a strong sense of belonging. The sense of belonging, although in some cases departing from family, extends beyond family ties. As a sixty-three-year old man said, "Let me put it this way: there are men who don't have a family and this *is* a family..."

The women in the club seem to reproduce the traditional gender roles: women cook lunches or sell raffle tickets to raise some funds for competitions. This club has a young



woman in the bar; she manages and maintains the order there. This girl is respected by the men and she can function as a way to bring more women to the club. There are groups of women who are not members but still come to the bar, mainly to drink coffee during their pause as they work nearby. Although they are in the minority, female members use club spaces for socialising and also for social and official competition at all levels. Men stress that women are as good as men on fishing and respect them for that; this seems to be the key for their “acceptance” in a mainly masculine environment.

Club members are capable of establishing important ties with the larger community. We see a significant number of “non-official” members using the club spaces and the bar mainly for socialising. Club members are often volunteers for community projects related to the environment, the sea, or the lagoon. They participate in cleaning initiatives of green spaces or the islands surrounding Faro.

There are some strong symbols that bond people together and keep them going, which in this case have to do with fishing: various fishing objects, prizes, trophies, the sea, and the lagoon. All of these possess powerful images and object associations that make it easier for people to identify with the underlying norms and values. Although the club has no financial support, informality, friendship, and familial relationships seem to be the foundation of its success and reflect the concepts of identity and belonging central to community.

### **“SHOULDER TO SHOULDER:” WORKING (TOGETHER?) BY OURSELVES**

This case study has been developed around a fishermen’s community in the city of Olhão. The participants are a group of retired fishermen who currently dedicate their time to repairing fishing nets and doing maintenance on the boats. They are between 64 and 72 years old, all married and with children and grandchildren. These men’s working place is near the docks, from which vessels sail out to sea. It is also the place where the fish is discharged to be sold and resold. They work in short and narrow places similar to sheds, filled with all sorts of fishing material. There we find usually two men in the same space, each one doing his job. It is a typical male-only environment; there are always men arriving, others going out to sea, and still others who just want to talk to each other.

At an initial approach, these men are not very open to conversation. Although they do not refuse to talk, they do so curtly and superficially while they keep on doing their work. Their days are mostly spent working ashore. Their work week goes from Monday to Saturday, with a varied timetable, depending on the amount of work they have to do. They can start before 7a.m. and work until 4p.m./5.30p.m. They have a break for lunch, most of the times at their own homes, as they all live in Olhão. At the end of the day, depending on the season, they can keep on talking to friends in the avenue or near the market, or they go home. On Saturdays, and if the weather is bad and the sea is rough, they do not need to spend so much time repairing the nets, but if the weather is good they can work for entire days as the amount of work increases. This is why their weekend only consists of Sunday. On this day, they are free, they can rest, be with their families, and go for small walks or drives.

These men started this activity when they were small children, still attending primary school. Some of them succeeded in finishing primary school; and that made it possible to get a working permit and to attend the Fishing School or join the Navy. These qualifications allowed some of them to sail abroad for long periods of time and earn better wages. Others did not have the opportunity to study because they had to begin working earlier to help their families.

Most of them spent long periods of time in fishing ships, distant from their families, but with the company of their mates (masters, foremen masters, drivers, fishers, etc.). Some friendships have lasted until today. Despite a difficulty in noticing their real affective bonds, it has been possible to observe changes in their facial expressions when they remember those days and people. Maybe because it was the only life they knew, whether they liked or disliked it, and regardless of how hard their profession was, the memories of those times bring them comfort.

The routine on a fishing boat leads to repetitive procedures: casting the nets, mending others, collecting nets full of fish, depositing them in containers, casting the nets again and again... The communication established among these fishermen was mainly related to the tasks they had to do and little else. Because the job could not stop, the few breaks they had were used to make meals together, in groups, to play dominoes or cards, to talk a little, and, essentially, to rest. Some told us that the conversation was short because the men were of few words and they were there to work. Life at sea was very hard, as these men were subjected to precarious and dangerous conditions. They had to face storms in the high seas in small boats. The conditions of hygiene and nutrition were also much worse than that they experienced on shore.

We think that the profession and way of life of these men directly affects the way that they learn. For them, the fact of working in a group does not mean that there is a collective learning process. Although some of them have taken courses, they stated that what they have learned in formal terms was not enough to *be* fishermen. It was the everyday struggle at sea that taught them. In a boat, one learns primarily through practice and by observing the older or more experienced comrades. However, each man learns primarily by himself. It seems to be a form of relationship in which affection and sociability have very particular contours. What unites them is the work. However, it seems that there are no ties of affection among them, despite spending so much time together, confined to the boat in which they live and work for months, with only a few stops along the route. It is possible that these relationships, resulting from their biography and typically male, had been built through these labour relations, affecting the men of our case study, even today.

The work done ashore is different from what many of these men were used to doing at sea, but the means of learning is the same: through practice and with each other: "I had a cousin who was a land master and sometimes I used to be next to him, watched him, and he taught me, so I was learning to fix the nets." In their private lives, there is something in common: they all have children and *none* taught them the art of fishing, *none* wanted



the children to follow a profession connected to the sea. Some have a great fondness for teaching the younger generations and have always done so throughout life, and even after retirement they continue to do it... but their children represent a significant exception.

Having made professional trips (along the Portuguese coast, Mauritania, Senegal, South Africa, Angola, USA, Morocco), enabled them to come into contact with other cultures, customs, and languages, as well as to acquire knowledge of geography, management, and economics. The talent with which the two fishermen who worked abroad for a long time talk about various subjects from politics, the environment, social issues, etc. is obvious. We believe it would be interesting to pursue this matter further and to see if there is in fact a direct relationship between their cultural experiences outside of the country and the range of their backgrounds and interests.

For these men, it is very important to keep on working after their retirement, not only because they can feel socially useful and occupied, but also because they can be paid for work they are still able to do. Although sometimes they refer to how hard the life of a fisherman was, their connection to the sea is deep. For almost all of them, this was the only life they knew and to keep working allows them to continue to live with people who use the same language, sharing meanings and symbols. Also, all of the men in our case study admit that the fact that they can earn some more money is a key factor. It allows them to help their families financially. Some have unemployed children living with them. Two men claim that being active helps them to escape addictions (mainly alcohol). It is also a matter of being able to maintain a certain balance in their mental health. Some men even go to fix the nets on Sundays, or spend this day in the garden with fishermen or former fishermen, talking about football, women, and the sea.

The pattern of activity described here displays significant ambiguities. On the one hand, men feel good about no longer having to be away for long periods of time, being away from the family. There are men who reported wanting more time for themselves, to rest, to do leisure activities, and to give more attention to the family. On the other hand, however, the fact that they continue to have an occupation after retirement, six days a week, also means that the time spent with their families is not experienced as in other cases of typical pensioners. As money does not explain everything, there remains a central ambiguity: these men seem to want to stay away from the life of fishing, but at the same time they seem not to be able to live without it. It is also meaningful that some say explicitly that they are working just to escape family life – to escape an experience of everyday family company which only now, after retirement, they have truly experienced and maybe is frightening.

Some “typical” features of masculinity are evident in these men, for example, in the time we spent with them (even when we were quiet), we observed that they kept their distance. These men spend their days together, but remain separated in relational or affective terms – or in the terms with which women usually experience relationships, implicating affection and sharing feelings. Each of them works individually and speaks

little, even knowing exactly what the other one is doing. Even when they were closer in personal terms, at work everyone did their job and spoke little. However, we noticed that in this kind of relationship there is a certain comfort. They are alone together. They do not have to communicate verbally with the mate next to them, and yet, it seems important that he is next door, daily. In short, there is more than one way to be together, to not be alone, or to be apart.

## CONCLUSION

These findings allow us to stress the issue of masculinities. In the case of the amateur fishing club, we find that there is an ambiguity within gender relationships. At the same time, some women at the club still assume their traditional gender roles, that some women are also fishing champions makes them an appreciated presence at the club, and some expressed that the club should have more female members. It is important to note that a substantial part of the life at the club revolves around competition, but also around games of various types, in a kind of daily activity easily taken for “hanging-out” or doing nothing. That is, there is a mix of traditional characteristics attributed to men that would constitute part of the “old masculinity” and of different possibly new masculinities. Research on masculinities done in Portugal could be used to discuss our findings, namely, the notion that old masculinities and new masculinities refer to transitional gender relations and male roles (Wall et al., 2010). It is also important to stress that masculinities are a fragile condition subjected to constant vigilance and affirmation through discourse and performance (Almeida, 1995). Vigilance, in this sense, surrounds us in the multiple contexts of our life; however, modern life forces us to spend a significant amount of our time within working environments and with family, while time to devote to friends or leisure seems to be, at least in some cases, decreasing. At the fishing club, however, we find a high percentage of older men who are retired and a smaller group of younger, unemployed men. Consequently, we hazard that the informal character of the learning spaces we find in the club can function as new spaces in which men are freer to build their masculinities in a different way. On the one hand, they have more confidence in spending their free time in hands-on activities or in inconsequent forms of male relationships that mostly include hanging around and playing cards or other types of games. It is possible, however, that these informal spaces also function as opportunities for transitions in gender relations and the construction of gender roles.

The case of the retired fisherman working ashore also gives us pause, encouraging us to think about masculinities, but in a different direction. It is clear that while formally working, these men built very traditional gender roles around the central values and norms of work with other men, in a very particular environment (the totalitarian milieu of the fishing boats where they spent significant amounts of time). Some important factors were evident in the hard life of working as a fisherman: learning from practice and taking advantage of other experience, enduring the harsh conditions of everyday life, putting the job first and limiting relationships among men to the very few opportunities when they were not working or trying to rest. In this way, solidarity among mates was established through the experience of

suffering, and sharing in their case did not include a necessity of verbalisation or emotional summary. Therefore, it is only natural that, after retirement, these men maintain all of the indicators of old masculinities. Compensation alone does not fully explain why they keep on working. These men want to keep feeling useful and occupied; it is further understandable that they need to maintain a connection with their mates. However, we cannot forget the role of family in this issue. These men, while formally working, spent limited periods of time with their families (it would be quite interesting to know more about their family life from the perspective of women, but we did not have this opportunity at this time). When they retire, they are faced with having to have a daily, brand new form of relationship with their families, which potentially include some gender clashes as a result of a re-negotiation of duties within the family, for example. In our exploratory conclusion, these retired fishermen also still work in order to escape this bargaining and to be able to maintain the usual pattern of relationships they used to have while working.

The case of the fishing club also allows us to put forward some conclusions regarding learning. Firstly, it is important to stress that everyday life at the club shows interesting signs of inter-generational learning. Learning to fish is – although for some this could seem strange – a very technical issue that includes a great detail, as well as a good knowledge of the sea, the tides, the weather, etc. Although in a phase of the club's history some training sessions were organised, today members learn by doing. This experience is a practical learning that grows out of the experiences of others, functions as an extension of the family, and includes persons of every age. This constitutes an important collective narrative of practices. Mainly, however, it reveals that men prefer this kind of community-based, hands-on learning, provided they control the rhythms of learning – contrary to what happens when people engage in formal, non-formal learning and training. This is a conclusion that has been reported in others cases, as pointed out in a recent publication on older men's learning across a variety of different settings: "The most effective learning for most men with limited prior experiences of learning is informal, local, and community-based, which builds on what men know, can do, and are interested in," (Golding et al., 2014, p. 256).

Our findings also demonstrate the central importance of socialising and the effects it can have in maintaining the men's ties to community, combating isolation, and the natural decay of social networks with age. At the same time, the fishing club members demonstrate a considerable sense of belonging that seems to makes them more capable of contributing to the larger community in a positive way. The fishing club members build a valuable, symbolic space (Kurantowicz, 2008) around the specific symbols that have to do with fishing and the fishing competitions, the sea, and the lagoon.

Finally, it is important to understand our cases as exploratory and our conclusions as provisional. Mainly, we have the feeling that we are only taking the first steps into a hidden world – the world of informal spaces of learning in the community, characterised by significant diversity and difficult to comprehend in a short period of time. Now is the time to do a team reflection that makes us more capable of programming the next steps of our research.

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