

FROM PRACTICE TO POLICY: REFLECTIONS FROM THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS TO DESIGN A DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION STRATEGY IN VALENCIA (SPAIN)

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Abstract: This article will reflect on the participatory process and content of the Education for Development Strategy (for the formal education sector) of the Autonomous Community of Valencia. Over a period of eight months, the author co-ordinated a team that conducted the design of the strategy. In this process, local and regional public administrations, and several teachers and practitioners from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were involved. The article presents the process, the content of the strategy and reflects on three main aspects: participation; the challenges for the implementation of the strategy; and the influence of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It concludes with some personal reflections on the good and bad aspects of this experience and on the author's role in this process.

Key words: Development Education; Formal Education Sector; Strategy; Valencia; Sustainable Development Goals; Public Administration; NGOs; Participatory Process.

Introduction

Since the global financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent austerity measures imposed by the European Union, the Spanish development aid sector has experienced a challenging period. Spanish development aid fell from €4,728.41 million in 2009 to €1,414.57 million in 2014, the latest year for which official figures are available (Cooperación Española/Spanish Cooperation, 2017). However, in recent years this trend has started to be reversed with an increase in funding and, consequently, an upturn in activity in the statutory and non-governmental organisation (NGO) sectors. A certain economic revival, the easing of financial pressures on Spain from the European Union and new municipal and autonomous governments elected in

2015, at least partly explain the increase. In addition, areas such as development education (DE) are becoming more central in local and regional public policies. The effects of the economic crisis and the resulting increase in poverty and inequality in Spain have been related to development debates and placed the citizens of the global North at their centre (CONGDE, 2012). In this way, DE has acquired a more central role in the public sector and the mainstreaming of DE in formal education has been a consequence of the new local and autonomous governments elected in 2015.

A new, more socially engaged government elected in 2015 followed a 20-year period of conservative rule in Valencia, and has boosted development cooperation in general and DE in particular. The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been the main narrative for this new period of Valencian Development Cooperation. To understand the enormous influence that the SDGs have had on Valencian Development Cooperation, it is necessary to explain its particular context. Between 2008 and 2011, a criminal plot headed by Rafael Blasco of the regional authority responsible for the development assistance of the Autonomous Community of Valencia, allegedly diverted between €6m and €9m of public aid. At the time of writing, there are already 20 people involved in this plot awaiting trial, nine of whom have already been convicted in a previous trial (including Rafael Blasco himself) (#justiciacasoblasco, 2017). The new government elected in 2015 needed, imperatively, to cleanse the image of Valencian development cooperation and it found in the SDGs a legitimation and a narrative that allowed it to be detached from previous corrupt practices. That is why, in the draft of the Valencian Cooperation Law, the autonomous government states its intention to ‘extend and integrate the SDGs into all policies and spheres of action of the Autonomous Government through a total government approach’ (Anteproyecto Ley de Cooperación y Desarrollo Sostenible de la Comunidad Valenciana / Proposed Draft Cooperation Law and Sustainable Development of the Valencian Community, 2017: 2).

It is in this context that the author received the commission to design the DE strategy as part of the formal sector work of the Valencian development cooperation strategy 2017-2021 (from here onwards the Strategy). This article describes the process that was carried out, some general guidelines of the Strategy and some reflections grouped around three themes: the participation of different actors in the process, the challenges for its implementation and the influence of the SDGs.

The design process of the Strategy

The methodology for the Strategy was designed to promote an inclusive and participatory process to include the largest number of social and institutional agents related to DE in the educational sector of the Autonomous Community of Valencia. Virtual and face-to-face participatory spaces were opened up for this purpose and various techniques were used during the eight months of the Strategy’s design process (March-October 2016). This was promoted by a planning team comprised of six members of the Universitat Politècnica de València (Technical University of Valencia). The following table summarises the main features of the Strategy design process.

Table 1: Main characteristics of the strategy design process

Phases	Participation spaces	Activities of the Planning Team
Diagnosis (March-June 2016)	3 workshops in Valencia, Castellón and Alicante. Web page in-box. NGOs and schools’ reflective documents. Group interviews. Steering Group	Bibliographical review of European, national and autonomous regulations and DE position papers of NGOs at European, national and regional level. Analysis of NGOs and

		<p>Schools reflective documents and web in-box.</p> <p>Analysis of workshop information.</p> <p>Discussion on the Strategy's methodology.</p>
<p>Design of strategic areas (July-September 2016).</p>	<p>3 workshops in Quart de Poblet, Elche and Vila-Real.</p> <p>Web page in-box.</p> <p>NGOs and schools' reflective documents.</p> <p>Group interviews.</p> <p>Steering Group.</p>	<p>Analysis of NGOs and schools' reflective documents and web in-box.</p> <p>Analysis of workshop information.</p> <p>Action proposals.</p>
<p>Final drafting (September-October 2016).</p>	<p>Steering Group</p>	<p>Final drafting</p>

In the face-to-face workshops held in the first and second phases of the Strategy's development, representatives of autonomous and local governments, primary, secondary and university teachers and NGOs members participated. Especially relevant has been the role of the Steering Committee composed of 14 people: members of the Valencian NGO platform, staff from various administrations of the development aid and education sectors, and DE experts with extensive experience in the sector. This Committee supported the entire process by contrasting and validating the different actions proposed by the Planning Team and the results that were

being obtained. It has also been essential to promote the broad and diverse participation of the different actors in the different spaces.

The Strategy

The Strategy has a timeline of five years (2017-2021), correlating its actions with the temporal scope of the new Master Plan of Valencian Development Cooperation (2018-2021). Its vision of DE is inspired by European (European Council, 2007; DEEEP, 2011) and national strategies (CONGDE, 2012) and the ideas of various authors (Ortega, 2007; De Paz, 2007; Boni and León, 2013). It understands DE as education for global citizenship based on the following five interlinked principles:

- The *political* vision of education: it has to do with the idea of the citizen not only as a right-holder but also as a practitioner, who exercises his/her rights and responsibilities. It also refers to the political sense of education and to the educational community as an agent of change. Finally, it introduces the vision of social justice and the importance of advocacy and social mobilisation for change.
- The *ecosystemic vision*: it embraces a broad sense of the ecological problem, not just limited to the environment, and with an interdependent outlook. It also includes reflections on the quality of life, the sense of ecological values and the ‘greening of the self’, that is, the fact that people have to be recognised as part of problems and solutions.
- *Identity*: refers to everything that concerns recognition and appreciation of difference, multiple identities that make up the human being (including the identity of a global citizen) and the exclusions that exist due to differences.
- The *glocal* element: that which connects local active citizenship with the global. It also includes the vision of the school open to local environments and networking as a privileged space for building *glocal* citizenship.
- The *pedagogical* element: it connects fundamentally with the

tradition of critical pedagogies that come from popular education. It emphasises the experiential and collective construction of knowledge, the vision of a conscientisation and transformative education, and the use of active and collaborative methodologies.

Inspired by those five principles, and based on the information gathered in the diagnosis phase, four key areas of action emerged:

- Training;
- Coordination;
- Changes in regulations and procedures;
- Organisational culture.

Training refers to all those activities that aim to educate through global citizenship education and outline how it relates to other educations. In addition, this field of action places special emphasis on those active and collaborative methodologies that allow the implementation of DE in different formative spaces: classroom, school, neighbourhood, global sphere, etc. The main target audience for the training is teaching staff but training actions are considered for other actors that support the formative processes in DE, such as NGOs or public administrations. In addition, the Strategy emphasises activities that support the sharing of DE experiences: seminars, conferences, meetings, etc.

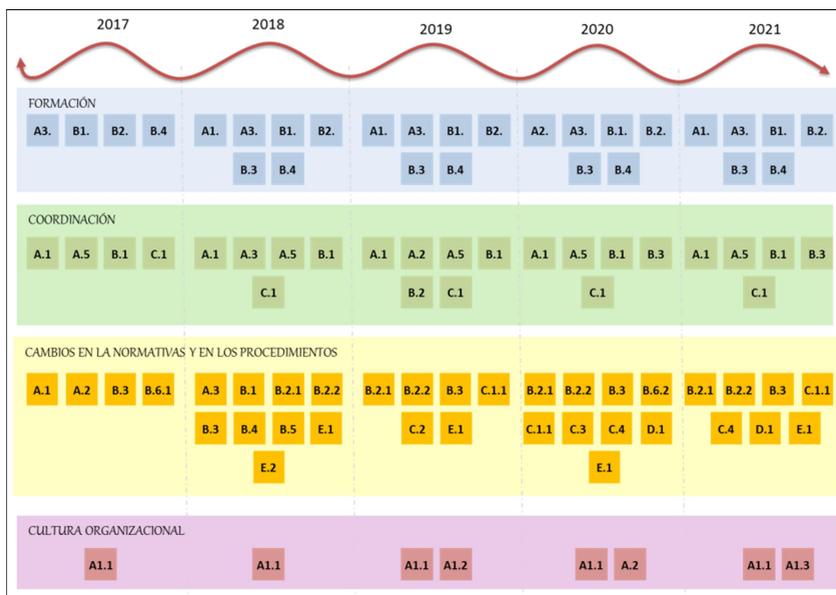
Coordination refers to all those initiatives that involve open spaces of joint work between public and private actors. The Strategy emphasises that it is important not to duplicate spaces, and recommends harnessing and strengthening those that already exist to make them truly participatory. Of particular relevance is the Valencian Council of Cooperation and the Interdepartmental Commission that brings together different regional public administrations and municipal coordination spaces relevant to territorialise SDGs also plays an important role.

The third area of work is *changes in regulations and procedures*. It is crucial that the current calls for funding DE actions are better adapted to the reality of educational processes. The Strategy suggests changes in the calendar of budget calls, in the time horizon of the projects, in their evaluation systems and in the administrative processes that articulate the calls. Another relevant area is the change in the educational regulations that define the school curriculum, which in turn has an impact on the educational materials used. It also suggests advocating for changes in the university curriculum, especially in those degrees that will prepare future educational professionals. In this area is also stressed the importance of *communicating and disseminating* the Strategy to involve all the relevant actors and also to ensure that the proposed changes in the regulations are understood by policy-makers, technical staff and practitioners.

Finally, the last area of work is *organizational culture*. The Strategy raises the importance of fostering another culture of learning based on evaluation and shared knowledge creation. For this reason, the Strategy proposes actions in the area of evaluation and monitoring to assess the effectiveness of the Strategy's implementation. These are changes in people, in organisations and in regulations and procedures. It also proposes a change in the culture of the evaluation of educational actions, to know how the actions derived from the Strategy are having an effect among the educational community.

These four areas are articulated in several action proposals which operationalise each of the areas. It also proposes a timetable for carrying out the different actions and identifies the most relevant actors. Figure 1 below graphically summarises this operative part of the Strategy.

Figure 1: Action proposals for the four areas of the Strategy (2017-2021)



Reflections on the process and implementation of the Strategy

On participation in the process

Among the different spaces for participation planned in the Strategy, two were especially successful: the Steering Committee and the workshops in the diagnosis phase. Regarding the former, it was a very fruitful space of collective work because of its mix of perspectives and experiences. The fact that people came together from autonomous and local administrations, both from the field of education and cooperation, NGO practitioners and experts in DE (in addition to the Planning Team) was crucial in four senses: to disseminate the process of the Strategy and encourage participation; to define in a realistic way the action proposals of the Strategy; to offer a complementary perspective; and to help balance the power relations in the meetings of the Steering Committee.

Also very fruitful were the first face-to-face workshops held in Valencia, Castellón and Alicante attended by 64 people. Above all, numerous teachers from across Valencia participated, in addition to NGO practitioners. This supported the gathering of a lot of information for the diagnosis of issues to be addressed and for the design of actions. One of the keys to explain this high participation rate was the fact workshops were carried out in CEFIREs (Centros de Formación, Innovación y Recursos Educativos/Training, Innovation and Educational Resources Centres), which are the places where primary and secondary teachers come to be trained. In exchange for their participation, they received a certificate of attendance. This small incentive, along with the familiarity of the training venues, was an important element in the success of the workshops.

The most successful workshop in the design phase was held in Quart de Poblet (municipality of Valencia), which was attended by 31 people, mostly from NGOs. In this second phase, we decided to carry out the workshops in municipalities other than the capitals of the three provinces. This decision in favour of decentralisation (and taken in agreement with the Steering Committee) worked well in the case of Quart, but not in Elche and above all in Vila-Real, which was attended only by nine people. Likewise, it seems to me remarkable that throughout the design process of the Strategy, university faculty members were hardly involved, despite wide-ranging efforts to bring them into the process. Nor was it possible to involve other NGOs apart from those in the development sector. In my view, DE or education for global citizenship remains a term that speaks mainly to the development cooperation sector, despite a comprehensive vision of the four principles of the Strategy. In addition, the fact that it was the DE Strategy in the educational field, could also have discouraged the participation of other organisations.

About the implementation of the Strategy

Delivery of the Strategy had to start in January 2017 and at the time of writing (July 2017), only some of the planned actions have been implemented. A DE Technical Group has been created by the Valencian

Cooperation Council but has not yet begun work. This raises the question of whether the Valencian Cooperation Council should have such a central place in the development of the Strategy, an issue that was discussed at length in the Steering Committee. On the one hand, we gain legitimacy through the participation of the Valencian Council but, on the other, not all actors involved in the delivery of the Strategy are represented in the Council. However, a positive measure of implementation of the Strategy has been the introduction of some change in the regulations for financing DE projects: two-year projects instead of one-year projects, new criteria for the ex-ante evaluation of DE projects, which include the obligation to carry out didactic programming of the actions, where learning objectives and methodologies must be specified.

In my opinion, these actions demonstrate the will of the regional government to implement the Strategy. However, NGOs, universities and other public administrations are not playing a very active role in the implementation of the Strategy. There are very few NGOs that specialise in formal education, and in general, they are overloaded with work and with a small staff which makes it difficult to participate in coordination spaces between the organisations and different administrations.

About the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs

As discussed in the introduction to this article, the SDGs are a powerful narrative for the regional government and the Strategy takes account of this influence. The positive side is that a real effort is being made to ensure that Agenda 2030 does not remain only in the sphere of development cooperation but is integrated into other departments (education, environment, health, etc.) that are normally marginal to sustainability discourses. However, this powerful influence is sidelining other important issues for NGOs such as those contained in the Valencian Pact against Poverty. The loss of a traditional field for NGOs (such as the poverty agenda) for the benefit of a more global discourse (such as the SDGs) has been contested by some organisations. In addition, the SDGs and in particular their indicators are in danger of overshadowing the content of Agenda 2030 and becoming the

objective of cooperation policy. As Fukuda-Parr, Yamin and Greenstein (2014) point out, this is the ‘power of numbers’ that had many negative effects on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

Conclusion

My assessment of the design process of the Strategy is generally positive. It was the first time that a DE Strategy was designed in the Valencian community and the fact of having high level participation from a range of different actors in the development cooperation and education fields has been a positive influence on the Strategy. However, there have been negative outcomes too: everything indicates (at least up to now) that the implementation of the Strategy will depend very much on the impetus of the regional government, which also has its own agenda. Agenda 2030, which has a positive influence (especially in a context such as that of Valencian development cooperation), could marginalise other demands from civil society or could narrow development co-operation too much to compliance with SDGs indicators. I also see a danger in putting too much trust in formal coordination spaces that are not always the most operative.

Finally, I want to reflect on my own role in this process. As a researcher and teacher in the field of DE, coordinating the design of the Strategy has meant a great learning opportunity that is not free of contradictions. I also have my own vision of DE, which has surely impregnated some parts of the document. But, the bulk of the Strategy is the result of the participation of the different actors involved, especially the Steering Committee. I also ask myself what my role in the implementation of the Strategy should be? Should I push to activate the formal spaces provided or stay more on the margins leaving the leading role to the legitimate players in the field of cooperation and education? I suppose that these kinds of dilemmas are frequent in exercises of this type, where the academic identity is mixed with the one of the activist committed to DE. In any case, I continue to learn by doing and reflecting.

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