Development Education in European Rural Areas: The Work Done by NGODs

La educación para el desarrollo en las zonas rurales europeas: el trabajo realizado por las ONGD

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Abstract

Non-governmental organisations for development (NGODs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) are key actors to the development of solidarity, a priority goal in European Union policies. NGODs and CSOs carry out Development Education (DE) projects and programmes, among other tasks. Rural DEAR Agenda-EYD 2015 (Development Education in Rural Areas 2015) is a European project analysing DE initiatives by NGODs and CSOs in rural areas in seven European countries: Italy, Spain, Greece, Poland, Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Malta. A questionnaire was designed and sent to these NGODs/CSOs. In addition, there were three working group sessions in each country, involving all the relevant stakeholders. The project consisted in the analysis of fields of action, target populations, types of funding, action planning, and evaluation. The results show that in rural areas fewer initiatives are conducted, they are not especially designed for their target populations, and they have serious limitations in the aspects analysed.

Keywords: Development Education, non-governmental organisations for development, civil society organisations, European Union, rural areas.

Resumen

Las organizaciones no gubernamentales para el desarrollo (ONGD) y las organizaciones de la sociedad civil (OSC) son actores clave para el desarrollo de la solidaridad, un objetivo prioritario en las políticas de la Unión Europea. Las ONG y las OSC llevan a cabo proyectos y programas de educación para el desarrollo (ED), entre otras tareas. Rural DEAR Agenda-EYD 2015 (Educación para el Desarrollo en Zonas Rurales 2015) es un proyecto europeo que analiza las iniciativas de ED de las ONGD y las OSC en las zonas rurales de siete países europeos: Italia, España, Grecia, Polonia, Bulgaria, Chipre y Malta. Se diseñó un cuestionario y se envió a estas ONGD y OSC. Además, hubo tres sesiones de grupos de trabajo en cada país, con la participación de todas las partes interesadas relevantes. El proyecto consistió en el análisis de los campos de acción, las poblaciones objetivo, los tipos de financiamiento, la planificación de la acción y la evaluación. Los resultados muestran que, en las áreas rurales, se desarrollan menos iniciativas; no se encuentran especialmente diseñadas para sus poblaciones objetivo, y presentan serias limitaciones en los aspectos analizados.

Palabras clave: educación para el desarrollo, organizaciones no gubernamentales para el desarrollo, organizaciones de la sociedad civil, Unión Europea, zonas rurales.

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1
Introduction

The Treaty on the European Union (TEU) or Maastricht Treaty (2010) considers solidarity as a priority in European foreign policy. According to it, the European Union (EU) must promote peace and sustainable development, fight poverty and protect human rights. These principles are related to the objectives of Development Education (DE), as its essential values are respect for life, cultural diversity, social justice and equal rights, as well as solidarity and shared responsibility to create a common future (UNESCO 2015). Therefore, working with DE within the EU should be a priority and so it is collected in the European Consensus on Development Education (2007), that establishes the objective that everybody in Europe has access to information about the causes of global problems and can make a difference to create a more just and sustainable world. Based on the EU definition of DE, it must be understood that solidarity should focus primarily on impoverished countries, since it is a primary goal:

> To contribute to the eradication of poverty and to the promotion of sustainable growth through public awareness and education approaches and education approaches and activities that are based on values of human rights, social responsibility, gender equality, and a sense of belonging to one world (European Multi-Stakeholder Steering Group on Development Education 2010, p. 5).

As pointed out by Gadotti (2008), there is a need for another society, less cruel for humanity, with more solidarity and, to achieve it, the DE is an essential base, thus showing a deep, unavoidable interrelation between solidarity and DE.

However, the principles guiding the EU are far from reality. Every day, people die at the borders of Europe when trying to escape poverty or war, or to have a better life. Moreover, economic and social inequality is growing even within EU members. In this context, non-governmental organisations for development (NGODs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) play a crucial role. NGODs have contributed to the fight against inequality since the early twentieth century (Korten 1990; Ortega Carpio 1994; Senillosa 1998; Balbis 2001; Treviño Rangel 2004; Park 2007; Boni 2014; Salinas Ramos 2014; Bourn 2015a; Ortega Carpio, Sianes & Cordón 2015) building bridges in an effort to find solutions to specific problems (Edwards & Fowler 2002; Park 2007; Rajacic *et al.* 2010; Ribeiro *et al.* 2012; Martínez-Scott 2014; Muñoz Chacón 2015; Ribeiro, Caetano & Menezes 2016). However, we are now witnessing the debate over the role of NGODs, especially large organisations, in favouring consumer solidarity to the detriment of solidarity itself (Ballesteros García 2002, Erro Sala & Ventura 2002, Darnton & Kirk 2011, Iranzo 2017), which is thus brought into question, especially in developing countries (Clark 1991, Hulme & Edwards 1997, Centre Tricontinental

1998, Llistar 2009, Plataforma 2015 & Más 2011, Iranzo 2017). To a large extent, the quality of the work done by NGODs shall depend on the depth of critical thinking and analysis of poverty among their members (Foley 2008).

These discussions can help improve the quality and deepen the ethics of the work done by NGODs. However, there is another hindrance that has often been overlooked. NGODs in Europe have focused mainly in EU urban areas, neglecting rural areas (Edwards & Hulme 1995). Even when the rural population is smaller, it is necessary to carry out DE projects in rural communities, since it is often here that cultural traditions, territories and economic activities are being upheld (Gómez-Quintero *et al.* 2017). DE is characterised by being an education that is not possible to achieve without the learners being participants and protagonists of it, and by being directed towards social transformation (Bourn 2014). These two characteristics require the DE to address the context of the people who participate in it and their own characteristics. It is evident that the population of rural areas has different features and, therefore, the actions, projects and programs should reflect this specificity and use strategies adapted to the rural reality.

We understand DE as an essential tool to share information about the cause of both local and global development issues, as well as of the injustice and inequality they bring about, so that citizens can make specific commitments and undertake participatory and transformative action (Carracedo Bustamante, Domenech Llorente & Pérez-Miguel 2017). Against this background, and in the context of the European Year for Development 2015 (Rural Dear Agenda-EYD 2015), the Rural DEAR Agenda project was established with the aim of raising social awareness of the need for human sustainable development and for support of the Strategy for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in rural areas in Europe.

One of the objectives of this project (and of this paper) is to analyse the type of actions that NGODs and CSOs are carrying out in connection with DE in European rural areas. Concretely, in this paper it is studied the priority areas and the topics addressed in the actions developed by the NGODs and CSOs, as well as the existence or inexistence of strategic plans and of evaluations prior to or after the actions. It is also analysed the population groups to which they assign their actions, the financing sources and the existence or inexistence of specific activity characteristics developed in rural areas regarding to those carried out in urban areas.

This issue is a very relevant one. The nature of the DE leads to the connection with the local, and therefore the actions of the priority areas and the issues addressed in the actions developed by the NGODs and CSOs, as well as the existence or not of strategic plans and evaluations prior to or after the actions NGDOs and CSOs in these areas, have their own characteristics, since the local has to

be related to the global, highlighting this way the interdependence of both dimensions. On the other hand, the DE channels an interest to participate in the decision-making on local and global problems and this participation must take place in rural areas.

In addition, the strategies must be different in rural areas, because the population is also different: geographic dispersion, composition differences in terms of age, areas with demographic gap, greater evidence of interdependence with nature, manifestation of cases of difficulty in accessing technological resources…

The own reality of rural areas must become an educational objective. Indeed, the DE in these areas should provide resources for a rural context reading and its opportunities and threats to achieve a more just and more sustainable world. These resources should also be provided for the transformation of rural reality.

2
Rural DEAR Agenda

The Rural-EYD 2015 project was a response to Raising Public Awareness of Development Issues and Promoting Development Education in the EU, a call from the European Commission funded by the EU and coordinated by a team of researchers from the Observatory of International Development Cooperation at the University of Valladolid (OCUVa). With partners from seven EU countries —Greece, Bulgaria, Malta, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Cyprus—, the project is aimed at gaining knowledge of DE in rural areas in the participating countries.

The project began in 2015, EYD, a year dedicated to EU foreign action and the global role of Europe, and the year of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their replacement by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including «No Poverty», «Reduced Inequalities», and «Sustainable Cities and Communities». Rural DEAR Agenda-EYD 2015 (Development Education in Rural Areas 2015) is based on a previous project carried out by the same team: *Educación para el Desarrollo en Castilla y León: cómo vemos el mundo* (Miguel González 2012), which involved a DE diagnosis in Castile-León (Spain), region that has a clear predominance of rural areas. Thus, Rural DEAR Agenda-EYD 2015 is aimed at extending the team's knowledge of DE and analysing methods beyond their near context.

The project is divided into three stages: stage 1 consists of a DE diagnosis in rural communities in Europe from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders: learning centres, NGODs, CSOs, the civil society, the media and DE experts; stage 2 is a follow-up in three different activities: working groups to learn about the ideas, arguments and approaches of DE actors (Pérez-Miguel & Domenech

Llorente 2017); communication with DE experts using an adapted version of the Delphi method (Torrego & Marbán 2017), and compilation of good practices in DE (Domenech Llorente *et al.* 2017); stage 3 focuses on support to DE projects in rural communities through open calls in the participating countries. It will be followed by a DE agenda in rural areas designed with the collaboration of all stakeholders.

3
Method

This paper focuses on DE diagnosis in European rural areas from the perspective of NGODs and CSOs, which are key actors in DE development in rural environments. The diagnosis was designed with the aim of analysing DE in depth and learning from practice, identifying both mistakes and successful experiences in DE methods and assessing their impact in the participating countries: Bulgaria (Vratsa), Cyprus (Idalion), Greece (Thessaly), Italy (Molise), Malta, Poland (Łódzkie), and Spain (Valladolid).

Before making the diagnosis, NGODs and CSOs were identified that worked within the territory of participating countries. To do so, the databases of European and national NGOD organisations were used, such as Concord-European NGO confederation for relief and development, BPID in Bulgaria, CYINDEP in Cyprus, the NGOD Co-ordinator in Spain, the Hellenic Platform for Development in Greece, CONCORD Italia in Italy, SKOP in Malta, and Grupa Zagranica in Poland.

In order to make the diagnosis, a questionnaire based on Ruiz Varona's (2012) model was used. This tool has two important characteristics: (1) it is targeted at data collection on NGO and CSO activities, and (2) it applies to predominantly rural areas.

The original questionnaire was adapted following McKernan's (2001) stages. After being reviewed by experts, assessed by a group of nine people (university professors, representatives of local governments, and NGOD members), and translated into the official languages of the participating countries (from an original version in English and following a discussion of key terms to avoid interpretation problems), it was shared with all project partners at a meeting held in Valladolid (Spain). At this meeting, the partners discussed the questionnaire, cleared all doubts and agreed to send it to project participants by e-mail.

The final version of the questionnaire had 11 closed-ended questions (yes/no and multiple choice). These questions are raised with the objective of quickly knowing if they work ED in the rural area; if they carry out different programs than those implemented in the urban area; if they work in schools, cultural centres, etc.; if

they use own or public funds for it, or if they perform subsequent evaluation. In addition, there are five open-ended questions, aimed at gathering information about the organizations under analysis (Martínez-Scott *et al.* 2017) delving into the issues previously discussed. The purpose of the questionnaire is not to get values in the topics from which to make inferences; what is intended is to obtain a descriptive overview of the reality of the NGODs and CSOs practices, hence a statistical validation has not been specifically programmed.

The questionnaire, targeted at NGODs and CSOs in rural areas in the participating countries and submitted to a lot of them, was aimed at an overview of the work done by these organisations in rural areas.

As agreed by the partners, the questionnaire was sent by e-mail. A second e-mail was sent three months later as a reminder. Meanwhile, the websites of NGODs and CSOs in the selected regions were visited and, where available, messages were sent to them asking them to answer the questionnaire.

To understand the selected regions better, the idea was to gather information about 20 % of the organisations working in them. The goal was met in all countries. In some, like Cyprus, Italy or Malta, the percentage of answered questionnaires was almost 80 %.

One hundred seventy nine questionnaires were sent, with 81 answers obtained. In Table 1 it is showed their distribution by region.

Total	Bulgaria (Vratsa)	Cyprus (Idalion)	Spain (Valladolid)	Greece (Thessaly)	Italy (Molise)	Malta	Poland (Łódzkie)
81	14	7	15	14	18	9	4
179	36	10	37	32	37	12	15

Table 1
Number of questionnaires per region (Martínez-Scott *et al.* 2017)

The representativeness of the organizations that responded was also consulted with the partners of each country participating in the project. It can be asserted that the most active organisations or those with the greatest development of their structures responded. It is important to emphasize this fact in the case of Poland, in which the small number of questionnaires answered belongs to organizations with the indicated characteristics.

In addition, in 2015 and 2016, three working group sessions were held in each country, involving 7 to 10 participants. The working groups included representatives of local governments, NGODs/CSOs, and learning centres (Pérez-Miguel & Domenech Llorente 2017). They were aimed at getting familiar with the ideas, arguments and approaches of DE action/implementation actors rural areas in Europe, for greater diagnostic accuracy.

At the working group sessions, the presence and activity of NGODs and CSOs in rural areas were discussed, as well as their impact, the assessment of their work, the funds they used and their funding sources. The information gathered at the meetings was then used to check the results of the questionnaire.

4
NGODs, CSOs, and Development Education in European rural areas

This section focuses on the work done by NGODs and CSOs in the field of DE in rural areas in Europe. It includes data on planning, specific activities, financing, and comparisons between rural areas and urban environments, for analysis of their role and suggestions for improvement.

4.1. Action planning

Most participating NGODs and CSOs consider awareness raising and DE as priority areas. Only 15 (8 in Bulgaria and 5 in Italy among them) gave a negative answer to this question. Against this background, it is striking that most organisations lack strategic plans to work on both priority areas. As shown in Table 2, only 45 % NGODs and CSOs have strategic plans for both areas, while 17 % have strategic plans for only one of the areas and 38 % have no plans at all.

Region	Awareness raising and DE strategic plan	Awareness raising strategic plan	DE strategic plan	No strategic plan
Bulgaria (Vratsa)	2	2		10
Cyprus (Idalion)	6	1		
Spain (Valladolid)	12	1		2
Greece (Thessaly)	8	2		4
Italy (Molise)	7	2	2	7
Malta	1	2		6
Poland (Łódzkie)	1		1	2
Total	37	10	3	31

Table 2
NGOD/CSO strategic plans for awareness raising and DE (Martínez-Scott *et al.* 2017)

DE action planning is an essential tool; for actions should be adapted to both the target population and the environment (Park,

Senegačnik & Mbugua Wango 2007; Bebbington, Hickey & Mitlin 2008; Rajacic *et al.* 2010; Bourn 2015a). This is one of the basic principles for NGOs, and therefore for NGODs. It is striking, then, that 33 of the 81 answering the questionnaire do not conduct preliminary analyses to gain knowledge of the situation of the target population and their perceived needs. The highest numbers of organisations without preliminary analyses are in Italy (13 out of 18) and, to a lesser extent, in Malta (3 out of 9), as shown in Table 3.

	Preliminary analysis		**Ex-post evaluation**	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Bulgaria (Vratsa)	12	2	5	9
Cyprus (Idalion)	5	2	7	0
Spain (Valladolid)	11	4	15	0
Greece (Thessaly)	9	5	7	7
Italy (Molise)	5	13	10	8
Malta	6	3	5	4
Poland (Łódzkie)	3	1	3	1
Total	51	30	52	29

Table 3
Preliminary analysis and ex-post evaluation of DE action (Martínez-Scott *et al.* 2017)

Likewise, ex-post evaluation of projects, programmes and actions taken in the social sphere is essential too. Moreover, it is the standard procedure, not only for accountability issues but also so that stakeholders can discuss the results and learn from them (Rodríguez San Julián *et al.* 2014). Evaluation is a vital stage in DE project implementation (Edwards & Hulme 1995, Argibay & Celorio 2005, Rajacic *et al.* 2010, Bourn 2015b, Valero Amaro 2015) in rural areas, given its fundamental role in improvement processes, accountability and learning (Rodríguez San Julián *et al.* 2014).

In spite of this, 29 out of 81 organisations do not conduct ex-post evaluation of the actions they take. Here the highest percentages can be seen in Bulgaria (9 out of 14) and, again, Italy (8 out of 18). Without the ex-post evaluation, their implementations are incomplete, as they are unable to identify mistakes, learn and correct them, and assess the effectiveness of their actions. In Greece, Cyprus, Spain, and Italy, some of the organisations conduct ex-post evaluations but do not do preliminary analyses. Their actions are incomplete too, and their effectiveness is compromised by the lack of knowledge of the real situation they are meant to address.

4.2. Working fields and target groups

DE encompasses a wide range of fields: environment, human rights, interculturalism (Krause 2010, Boni 2014), fair trade and ethical consumerism, joint responsibility, political education, SDGs, welfare, social justice and equality, rights and freedoms (St. Clair 2006, Boni & Pérez-Foguet 2008, Smith 2008, McNeill & St. Clair 2011, Bourn 2015a), causes of poverty and capabilities approach (Sen 2005, St. Clair 2011, Nussbaum 2015), gender (Nussbaum 2000), etcetera.

Given this variety of subjects, it can be interesting to identify those being addressed by NGODs in rural communities in Europe. There are two most organisations work with: environmental education and sustainable development. In one way or another, they are dealt with in all participating countries, either through projects or programmes, or by means of individual actions.

Other subjects addressed are human rights, gender, food sovereignty, fair trade and ethical consumerism, and SDGs. It is interesting to note that only five questionnaire respondents deal with SDGs only a year after the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals, an ambitious UN project to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure peace and prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda:

> This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. We recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.
>
> All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind (United Nations 2015, p. 1).

This omission could be the result of thorough critical analysis of the SDGs (and their predecessors, MDGs), along the lines of Tkacik (2015) and Asah (2015) or to a lack of interest in this line of work. The latter draws attention (Boni 2014) to the need for a deeper analysis of the correspondence between the theoretical approaches of organisations and their practices in rural communities.

Most actions taken in rural areas are targeted at the general population, with no distinction of particular segments. There are, however, a high number of activities for learning centres and, to a lesser extent, for youth, community centres and associations. Seniors (over 60) are the least frequent target of DE actions. This is a surprising fact, for rural areas tend to have an ageing population. They do not seem to be a priority target for the organisations that took part in the survey (only two in Greece, one in Bulgaria and one

in Malta). Neglected targets also included women's associations, migrants, and ethnic minorities.

4.3. Action funding

As to the type of funding organisations rely on for DE action in rural areas, there is a wide range of sources. Each country has its specific approach to support ED (Höck 2004, Scheunpflug & McDonnell 2008), from internal funding by NGOD and CSO members to financing by public agencies: donations from public institutions, subsidies from local or national development agencies, aid from European programmes, and so on.

Interestingly, a high number of organisations say they use their own funds, even when public subsidies are available in the countries where they operate.

Moreover, most organisations allocate more financial resources to urban rather than rural areas, mainly for two reasons: ageing population in the latter and easier access to the former (even if rural communities tend to be more willing to participate).

This reveals the importance of discussing whether funding by public agencies, especially the EU, should be regular, coherent (Carbone 2008; Sianes, Ortega Carpio & Cordón 2013), and have continuity in rural areas, which are often overlooked. Many NGODs and CSOs in the survey refer to the additional costs of DE action in rural areas, mainly in terms of mobility (most organisations have their headquarters in the city).

4.4. DE in urban and rural areas

DE projects «are planned according to their goals, their context, their target population and the resources available» (Argibay & Celorio 2005, p. 135). These should be the case for DE approaches to be adequate. There are obvious differences between rural and urban environments, not only in everyday life but also in their populations, their ways and habits. Actions must, of course, be adapted to these two different environments. However, the survey reveals that only a few organisations make distinctions between DE activities in urban and rural areas. The general perception seems to be that the same practices are carried out in both (66 answers). In sum, the organisations carry out the same projects in urban and rural communities, with minor adjustments. Even so, it is worth highlighting the detailed description of the practices carried out by Spanish and Italian NGOs. These points to the fact that the differences are mainly due to the approach they carry out, cantered on training workshops aimed at women's groups to promote both gender equity and women's rights. The methodology used is based on collective participation and construction since the rural reality is reflected in the situated reflection that is carried out among all

the participants of the implemented actions. Another difference pointed out by these organisations is based on the receptivity of the proposals, since they allude to the fact that in rural areas there is usually a greater proximity between people and the agricultural reality and practices related to sustainable development.

However, in most of the responses no evidence was found of models especially planned or designed for rural areas, but only campaigns or actions originally devised for urban areas and adapted to rural environments. The NGODs or CSOs in the survey do not seem to have considered the possibility of designing special DE actions for rural communities.

5
Conclusions

Based on the analyses of the data collected, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The survey shows that most organisations carry out the same activities or implement the same practices in urban and rural areas, without taking population characteristics and environmental features into account. Few studies are performed to profile the target rural population, so that DE actions match its characteristics and thus become more effective. To this point, participatory actions should be implemented promoting gender equity in which women and young people are the main recipients.
- Planning is very important when taking quality DE action. Preliminary analysis and ex-post evaluation can help when adapting DE to rural areas. The lack of preliminary analysis can lead to inconsistencies or inadequacies that may hinder performance and ultimately lead to failure in goal achievement. Likewise, ex-post evaluation is the most effective tool for improvement, as it helps identify and solve mistakes so as not to make them in future projects, and assess relevance, impact, effectiveness and participation, among other factors. To analyse the impact of the actions carried out, it is essential to design an evaluation plan that has precise indicators, carry out a monitoring, collection and analysis of information, with all of which an evaluation report must be written. Is important to carry out all this process together with all the actors that have participated in the process.
- The answered questionnaires showed no evidence of public budgets specifically allocated to DE and awareness raising in rural areas. Public administrations should get involved if DE goals are to be achieved, especially in rural environments, envisaging, consolidating, and ensuring financing resources to prevent rural areas from being overshadowed by cities.

DE should be a topic of interest in rural areas on the European agenda, with the development of specific actions that contribute to social change towards fair and sustainable development, that is, to creating a better world for all.

6
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