

# YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND EDUCOMMUNICATION IN VULNERABLE CONTEXTS. CASE STUDY WITH SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL ORGANISATION IN BARCELONA

COMPROMISO CÍVICO JUVENIL Y EDUCOMUNICACIÓN  
EN CONTEXTOS VULNERABLES. CASO DE ESTUDIO  
CON ENTIDAD SOCIO EDUCATIVA EN BARCELONA

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**Abstract:** This article aims to understand how manifestations of civic engagement emerge in young people from vulnerable contexts and how educommunicative processes could be useful in understanding how they connect with civic engagement. These results stem from the case study of a Horizon 2020 project that took place from January to June 2022 with young people aged 16-18 from an educational association in the Raval neighbourhood in Barcelona. It involved 32 workshops in which we applied participatory audiovisual methodology and ethnographic work based on participant and non-participant observation. The results identified that the educommunicative process allowed young people to develop a collective outlook and a social identity that favoured awakening their interest, expressing opinions and reacting to the problems of their context. Thus, we conclude that these processes can contribute to guaranteeing the rights of young people to participate in civic and political life with a diverse perspective that pays attention to their own motivations and ways of expressing themselves.

**Keywords:** Educommunication; Audiovisual; Civic engagement; Young people; Non-formal education.

**Resumen:** Este artículo tiene por objetivos comprender cómo surgen las manifestaciones de compromiso cívico en jóvenes de contextos vulnerables y cómo los procesos educomunicativos podrían ser útiles para entender la forma en que conectan con el compromiso cívico. Los resultados se desprenden del caso de estudio de un proyecto Horizon 2020 que se desarrolló de enero a junio de 2022 con jóvenes de entre 16 y 18 años de una asociación educativa del barrio de El Raval en Barcelona. Se realizaron 32 talleres en los que se aplicó la metodología audiovisual participativa y el trabajo etnográfico basado en la observación participante y no participante. Los resultados identificaron que el proceso educomunicativo permitió a las personas jóvenes desarrollar una mirada colectiva y una identidad social que favoreció despertar su interés, manifestar opiniones y reaccionar ante las problemáticas de su entorno. Así, se concluye que estos procesos pueden contribuir a garantizar el derecho de las personas jóvenes a participar en la vida cívica y política con una mirada diversa que preste atención a sus propias motivaciones y formas de manifestarse.

**Palabras clave:** educomunicación; audiovisual; compromiso cívico; jóvenes; educación no formal.

## 1. Introduction

There is growing concern about the declining of civic participation through the generations and how the youth of today are becoming less and less involved with their communities and civic issues (Andersen *et al.*, 2021). However, despite the vast amount of literature on civic engagement, the discussion around its definition and conceptualisation is extremely complex, since the term is often used imprecisely and depends on each author's view of how people should be involved in public affairs (Phan & Kloos, 2023). This has led to contradictory and unreliable results on civic engagement, and there is still much debate as to whether the gap in civic participation is growing or not (Gaby, 2017).

Young people's participation in civil matters is especially relevant at certain moments in history, particularly at the height of political, social, and economic crises (Wegemer, 2023). Doolittle and Faul (2013) note that there is an increasing tendency to view social problems as something private, and that they should therefore be addressed through charity rather than engagement in campaigning and social justice. According to these authors, one consequence of this is that young people are becoming more distanced from public affairs, politics, and civic life. Gerodimos (2008) also mentions how, as a result of liberal democracies, younger people tend to have a more fragmented and individual outlook, and hence find it hard to be positive about the individual capacity to bring about change.

As a result, the discussion about how young people relate to public affairs has mainly focused on civic engagement as a duty, rather than taking the perspective of participation in political and civic life as a public right, as set out in the EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027), which includes, both in its principles and in its goals, the right for young people to participate in the development of policies and the importance of their democratic participation (EU, 2018).

However, there are still many barriers that hinder young people from exercising these rights on equal terms, which mainly affects children and young people belonging to marginalised groups (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). One of these barriers is the lack of diversity in views of civic participation and the lack of literature and research from the perspective of civic engagement in vulnerable or ethnic minority populations (Phan & Kloos, 2022; Wegemer, 2023; Gaby, 2016; Logan *et al.*, 2017). Generally, there is little consideration of the structural problems and power dynamics that come into play when talking about civic participation in an unequal society, which further accentuates the disadvantages faced by young people from vulnerable backgrounds (Augsberger *et al.*, 2018).

Much less consideration is given to contexts of violence, such as gender violence, harassment, discrimination, and many other types of violence suffered by young people and which might provoke negative responses or self-exclusion from civic and political life for the simple fact of not feeling part of a society that rejects them. Hence, from the epistemology of communication for peace, which empowers people's sense of collectivity to face adversities, the goal is to overcome discrimination and the systemic denial of the right to participate in political and civic life by empowering young people as socio-political agents of change (Ocampo, 2020).

All of this is especially necessary when considering that even today many studies on the gap in civic engagement between vulnerable and privileged populations are emphasising the lack of civic engagement among racial or ethnic minority groups, based on an approach that maintains the structures of the system and associates engagement to such actions as voting and volunteering and ignores other forms of social participation, such as activism and defence (Phan & Kloos, 2022; Logan *et al.*, 2017).

This highly non-inclusive view as to how civic engagement should be interpreted particularly excludes youth groups in vulnerable contexts, who are generally the ones that use non-hegemonic methods for participating in the public sphere. Mihailidis *et al.* (2021) mention how young people belonging to ethnic or racial minorities generally use alternative media to get themselves heard and, ultimately, to participate in political life.

That is why it is important to pay close attention to young people's possibilities for accessing and using technology and new media, since these condition their participation in the public sphere linked to today's media ecosystem, which is where the vast majority of young people's civic and political expression is generated and propagated. As Mihailidis *et al.* (2021) stress, in a context where there are so many socioeconomic inequalities, media education programmes need to be promoted.

For all these reasons, alternative educational spaces play an important role when it comes to understanding the diversity of forms of civic engagement that exist among young people and fostering their participation in political and civic life. Educational proposals are required that depart from the existing normative worldview and which examine the inequalities and limitations for civic participation from the perspective of young people themselves (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017).

From this perspective, educational spaces are presented as "spaces of socialisation, conflict, plurality and coexistence" (Collet-Sabé, 2018: 107) in which each participant has the opportunity to contribute from their own

capabilities and intelligence. Cooperation between peers, the construction of meaning and the complexity of co-production are thus reinforced (Collet-Sabé, 2018).

### **1.1. Educommunication and audiovisuals in the educational space**

Educommunication is not easy to define as its very name presents a number of possibilities that range from the “media literacy” and “media education” of the Anglosphere to the “didáctica de los medios” (media didactics) and “pedagogía de la comunicación” (communication pedagogy) of hispanic tradition (Kaplun, 1997).

But it is not only the diversity of names, but also the fact that they take two very different approaches; on the one hand, there is the instrumental approach originating from the Anglosphere, focused on the use of technology, as opposed to a dialogic approach that views educommunication as a process of awareness and reflection for social action and changing the world.

In this latter approach, the educommunication process is the means by which people, while learning, recreate and transform the reality in which they are immersed (Barbas, 2012). It is based on the view that it is people or social groups themselves who must discuss their own situation through dialogue and participatory processes. To do so, communication processes are put at the service of the most vulnerable groups, fostering the participatory and democratising function of communication (Barranquero-Carretero, 2007).

This study therefore takes as its reference the communicative-educational conception framed in the dialogic and critical tradition inspired by the work of Paulo Freire (1970), who views dialogue as the fundamental element for liberation from oppression. Meanwhile, from the communication perspective, it seeks to offer spaces for social change within people’s education processes (Sena, 2019).

These transformations seek to advance beyond the instrumental perspective and not only include the acquisition of media skills within the context of formal education, but also pay special attention to the contribution of the “media education process to the development of the person (autonomy, creativity, critical attitude, empowerment, social participation, values, ideology and thinking)” (Bermejo-Berros, 2021: 112).

Furthermore, Aparici (2010), using the words of Kaplún and Servaes and Patchanee Malikhao, stresses the importance of self-management within educommunication processes, putting the emphasis on forms of active participation. It needs to be the same people who get involved with, problematise

and investigate a certain phenomenon; who also need to be the ones who plan and produce media messages and content (Aparici, 2010).

Hence, educommunication plays an important role in the construction of a culture of peace by understanding both educational and communicative processes that focus on social change guided by the very same groups that suffer from structural problems. A culture of peace is not only a state of non-war or of no direct violence, but also implies a process of permanent construction associated to social justice (Arévalo, 2014) and the reversal of unequal, exclusive and violent relations (Cerdas-Agüero, 2015). In opposition to this culture of peace, Galtung (1990) speaks of cultural violence in which any aspect of a culture is used to legitimise direct or structural violence.

So, communication is a key element for building a culture of peace as it shapes public and cultural discourse to foster dialogue, the construction of citizenship and the encouragement of recognition and respect for other people (Nos Aldás *et al.*, 2008; Arévalo, 2014). As Arévalo (2014) comments, communication for peace implies “communication processes aimed at promoting social justice and transforming violence through peaceful means” (62).

This approach, which is focused on the relevance of communication processes, is complemented by the view from the field of education that seeks understanding and the resolution of conflicts, promoting a critical interpretation of reality by children and young adults as the first step towards getting boys and girls to become active agents who help to bring about structural changes (Ocampo, 2020).

Hence, educommunication, as a practical and theoretical approach that unites both disciplines, takes up the challenge of promoting possible new communication and education systems, while taking into account the dynamic media ecosystem in which young people move. The audiovisual realm is thus a tool that is frequently used in educommunication, since it can be a powerful resource to work from the perspectives of different actors and to empower them as content producers. Audiovisual material has often been used for social change by breaking down hegemonic discourses and dominant representations (Arciniega *et al.*, 2022).

Furthermore, as it is an everyday resource that young people are comfortable using (Fernández-Planells, 2016), they are able to control the construction and production of content using tools they already know and handle. The process that an audiovisual production entails gets them to think of themselves as a social group, to problematise on the basis of their own realities and to act as a community, all of which are fundamental aspects for fostering civic participation.

In this article, we share part of the results of one of the case studies included in the Horizon 2020 project «Educational Common Spaces. Passing through enclosures and reversing inequalities» (SMOOTH), the goal of which is to understand the role that democratic, horizontal, and self-managed education plays in the reversal of inequalities, for which purpose different case studies are being conducted in formal and non-formal education contexts in seven European countries.

In the case study on Barcelona (Spain), an audiovisual project was conducted with young people from a non-formal education association in El Raval, a stigmatised neighbourhood where 50% of the population are of migrant origin and where social action is in major demand due to its high unemployment rate (Barcelona City Council, 2018). The case study was based around the design and execution of educommunication workshops within the framework of a participatory action research study, and throughout the whole process an ethnographic study was performed based on participant and non-participant observation.

## **2. Objectives**

This article presents the experience of a case study conducted with young people from 16 to 18 years of age from El Raval neighbourhood (Barcelona), aimed at understanding how expressions of civic engagement arise among young people from vulnerable contexts and finding out whether educommunication processes could be useful for understanding how they connect with civic engagement.

Starting from the premise that these youngsters are the people who have the knowledge to generate a critical view of the issues that affect them and the ways in which it can be expressed, our intention is to depart from hegemonic perspectives. Hence we make no attempt to assess how much these young people from El Raval engage with public affairs based on concepts and indicators of civic engagement that are foreign to them; but instead seek to understand how educommunication processes might be useful for understanding how these young people relate to civic engagement.

## **3. Methodology**

The field work was carried out between January and June 2022. The sample for the case study was made up of 30 youngsters of between 16 and 18 years of age in vulnerable situations and who were users of an extracurricular centre run by a non-formal socio-educational organisation in the Raval neighbourhood of Barcelona. Everyone who goes to the centre is referred by social services or local schools and they all come from extremely difficult back-

grounds. They visit the centre twice a week after school and receive comprehensive support that also includes academic reinforcement. The majority of these participants are first or second generation immigrants, mainly from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Morocco, although most of them have a good grasp of the Spanish and/or Catalan languages too. The sample is divided into two groups: the Wednesday group, made up of between 10 and 12 youngsters (G1); and the Thursday one, made up of between 16 and 18 people (G2). Both groups were 50% male and 50% female. As for the educators, one male and one female participated throughout the whole process and others sporadically attended just some sessions. Meanwhile, 3 researchers were there throughout, two of whom ran the sessions (1 man and 1 woman) while the other was a non-participant observer.

### 3.1. Data collection

#### 3.1.1. Participatory workshops

The case study involved the design and implementation of educommunication workshops within the framework of a participatory action research study, which is described as “a methodological approach that has the dual objective of intervening in a certain reality (action) and of creating knowledge or theories around that action. Therefore, the results of a research study that uses this methodology must be both an active intervention on a reality and the construction of theory or knowledge through research” (de Oliveira, 2015: 279).

The core of the design and execution of the workshops was the implementation of the participatory audiovisual methodology (PMA) (Arciniega-Caceres *et al.*, 2022), which combines the principles, on the one hand, of educommunication, whose purpose is group construction and creation through the symbolic exchange of the flow of meanings (Barbas, 2012) and, on the other, of the potential of audiovisual language as something that young people feel comfortable with and that has a long history of being an instrument for social and political intervention (Bula & Fidalgo, 2016).

The workshops were developed in conjunction by the researchers and educators from the centre and were structured into 32 sessions (16 per group). Each workshop lasted one hour, although this was adapted to the characteristics of each group, and was replicated twice a week (G1 and G2). One of the most important decisions before beginning the case study was the choice of the topic that would serve as a common thread. Given that most of the youngsters were finishing or had just finished compulsory education, the educators from the centre proposed that the general theme should be their views of the future, although the need was emphasised for the participants to



choose the angle from which they would approach the topic, with the ultimate goal of capturing their views and reflections in an audiovisual piece.

The workshops were structured into 5 stages that were recorded in audiovisual format (photographs, audio, videos). The first stage consisted of group discussions of their ideas about the future and what they felt about it. In the second, they discussed their relationship with the audiovisual medium and the formats that interested them most and why. In the third stage, the young participants investigated ideas of the future among the younger boys and girls from the same association (from 4 to 15 years of age). In the fourth stage, they reflected on the variety of perspectives that had emerged from themselves and others in relation to the future and, following pre-production and production work, they expressed their concerns in an audiovisual format. Finally, the fifth stage was an interactive exhibition for the whole community, focused on the reflection process and not on the final outcome.

As a whole, this audiovisual-based educommunication process resulted in the creation of two audiovisual pieces produced by the participants themselves in each of its phases, from the choice of topic right through to the editing. One was a video-podcast that criticised the education system (G1) and the other was a video of interviews with adults and teenagers about the obstacles that young people have to overcome in order to be happy (G2). The audiovisual pieces were thus a pretext to foster dialogue around the young people's interests, to create a shared text (script, storyboard) and to generate spaces for self-governance in the distribution of roles and decisions about the pieces.

### 3.1.2. Participant and non-participant observation

In all cases, two of the researchers ran the workshops and did participant observation complemented by the material prepared by the two groups during the sessions, such as reflections on post-its, group murals, storyboards, scripts and collages, among others.

Meanwhile, a third researcher did non-participant observation, filling in a purpose-made observation file that included six sections: space, attitudes, participation, teamwork, discourse, and relationship with adults; paying special attention to cultural and gender differences.

The 'space' section highlighted place as a symbolic detail that provided us with information about the participants' relationships with their peers, differences between genders, and concentration of participation, among others. For its part, the 'attitudes' section aimed to explore how the participants reacted to the proposals presented and how they changed (or did not) as the sessions progressed. We also tried to find out what interested them and how they expressed that interest. As for the 'participation' section, this put special

emphasis on the different ways of doing so and on adult intervention in the processes. The aim of the 'teamwork' section was to investigate how they worked together and reached consensus, in active listening, negotiation and distribution of roles. Meanwhile, the 'discourse' section focused on understanding the ideas and problems that were raised and how, in form and substance; whether they expressed their feelings confidently, with fear, with anger, and whether they did so individually or as a group, and so on. Finally, in the 'relationship with adults' section, we wanted to find out what kind of relationships the youngsters had with the centre's educators and also explored how they forged relationships with the researchers. The idea was also to identify whether hierarchical or power relationships emerged, and if so, how they functioned.

### 3.2. Data analysis

Two types of material derived from the workshops were used for data analysis, namely 12 transcripts of the recordings of the participatory workshops and 32 observation files.

Analysis of these two materials was performed on the basis of 5 categories associated to civic engagement and educommunication that emerged from the theoretical framework and are detailed in the following table:

**Table 1. Categories for data analysis.**

Categories	Codes	Theoretical basis
Goal 1: Understand how expressions of civic engagement emerge in young people from vulnerable contexts.		
Identity construction	as young people as part of the neighbourhood as members of the association	Importance of a sense of belonging to the group and similar experiences related with situations of inequality (Phan & Kloos, 2023; Miranti & Evans, 2019)
Problems of interest	Education - work Financial situation Neighbourhood Family	Inclination of young people towards social justice and towards the structural problems they face (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013)
Community	Intergenerational relationships Individual - group view Teamwork	The community as an essential element for fostering participation (Miranti & Evans, 2019)

Goal 2: Find out whether educommunication processes might be useful for understanding how young people connect with civic engagement.		
Relationship with the media	Instrumental use Reflective use	Beyond instrumental use of the media, media skills need to support the development of people's personal autonomy, as well as their social and cultural engagement (Ferrés & Piscitelli, 2012)
Construction of media discourse	As a mechanism for protest As a mechanism to express discontent	Alternative media as spaces for young people's counter-hegemonic narratives (Mihailidis <i>et al.</i> , 2021)

Source: the authors.

These 5 categories were used to systematically analyse the transcripts and observation files.

#### 4. Results

The results are structured into three sections corresponding to the two goals that were set, namely the identification of structural problems, community work and ways to get heard. While the first two sections directly relate to Goal 1 (understand how expressions of civic engagement emerge in young people from vulnerable contexts) and the final section connects to Goal 2 (find out whether educommunication processes might be useful for understanding how young people connect with civic engagement), it is essential for these results to be interpreted holistically.

It is important to note that the categories are transversal, and the goals are interdependent, hence the need to appreciate how expressions of civic engagement arise in these young people, beyond the hegemonic forms of public participation, in order to find out whether educommunicative processes might be useful to understand these ways of connecting with civic engagement. Indeed, an understanding of the way these people relate with the media and how they construct and use media discourse will help us to understand alternative forms by which civic engagement can be expressed, which are closely tied to the construction of anti-hegemonic discourse and alternative forms of communication.

#### 4.1. Identification of structural problems

One of the main results regarding the way that the groups of young people dealt with the process of constructing the audiovisual pieces was the complexity of their view of the system. Having the tools to produce a shared discourse and to present it in the form of an audiovisual piece first involved going through an educommunication process in which the emphasis was on joint reflection and dialogue (first, second and third stage) and which helped them to appreciate that the individual problems they face are actually structural problems. They went from an individualistic view to a collective one, discovering along the way that “the personal is political” (Hanish, 2006).

One example of this was how they came to conceptualise the future. Although the topic was imposed, the idea was for the youngsters to openly debate, reflect and lead the discussion towards their views and interests. It was observed how, in the early stages, the groups imagined the future from highly individualistic and neo-liberal perspectives. In the initial workshops, when they were asked “how do you imagine the future” or “what the future is for them”, the prevailing answers were related to what they wanted to be when they grew up, whether or not they were going to have a family, and what jobs they wanted to do, probably because they were used to responding to adult-centred pressure and neo-liberal demands to know from an early age what they want to be when they reach adulthood.

I want to be a doctor, then I'm going to get married. When I'm married, I'm going to travel. That's in 6, 7 years (P6, G1, February 2 workshop)<sup>1</sup>.

The financial component and purchasing power also emerged as an important aspect in their ideas of the future. Many of the participants highlighted the desire to be millionaires or associated a desired future with their consumption capacity.

A collection of sneakers, a giant room with coloured sneakers (P4, G1, February 2 workshop).

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<sup>1</sup> The people's names have been coded to protect their anonymity. Each participant is assigned a letter and a number. The young participants are identified with the letter P and a number (for example, P1); while educators are assigned the letter "E" and a number (for example, E1) and researchers the letter "R" and a number (for example, R1). Also, the Wednesday group is called G1 and the Thursday group is called G2.

The quotes extracted from what the participants said in the workshop transcripts are referenced by “workshop”, for example: (P3, G1, February 2 workshop); and the researchers' notes, reflections, and so on extracted from the observation files are referenced by “observation”, for example: (G1, February 16 observation).

In Pakistan, in my homeland. With my wife if she's still alive. And that's it. With an iPhone 20 (P3, G1, February 2 workshop).

It was when it came to the construction of a joint discourse that they could transfer to the audiovisual format that they began to associate the future with the problems that affect them closely and from a more collective and critical perspective. By sharing similar experiences and views, they began to think of themselves as a social group in two mutually complementary ways. On the one hand, they raised issues around their identity as residents of El Raval, and on the other they questioned the problems that they face as young people. This means that they not only reflected as a group, but also came to connect as young people from a very particular neighbourhood and thought about how that influences their lives, both positively or negatively, thereby generating a shared identity.

#### 4.1.1. As part of El Raval

The participants' relationship with the neighbourhood where they live is a complex one. They are often very critical of it, highlighting the insecurity, filth, and chaos. However, at the same time, they recognise it as their community, as a safe place where their friends, family, and the educational association they go to are, the latter also being an important part of their lives. When asked about the support they need to achieve their future aspirations, many mentioned the neighbourhood or the association.

P1 says: "my neighbourhood, everyone knows me, I have my friends and family here" (G1, February 16 observation).

They do not feel the same about Spain or Barcelona, with which they do not feel identified. On the contrary, they often consider them to be obstacles given the situation that they are in, where they probably feel tainted by their status as immigrants or being from immigrant families. During the initial stages, many mentioned that they saw themselves moving away from Spain or Barcelona in the future, either to other European countries or back to their countries of origin.

They all recognise that things are hard for them in Spain, so this is a general issue. As well as thinking that their future does not lie within Spain (G1, February 16 observation).

The decision as to what topic they should address in the audiovisual piece also evidenced their sense of belonging to the neighbourhood. Many of the ideas that came up had to do with highlighting the problems faced by people who live in El Raval, especially young people. The observations of the first workshops in stage 4 (when they started putting together the script or story-

board), reveal their interest in touching on a topic related to the neighbourhood:

They're saying that they would like to do something with people from El Raval (G1, May 4 observation).

The topic of "Making young people's lives of El Raval visible" through video interviews with parents and young people from inside and outside of El Raval (parent and child interview) to raise awareness of what parents and children experience at that stage (G1, May 4 observation).

As a result of this, Group 2 decided to interview people from El Raval. At first, they wanted to do this in residences and associations in the neighbourhood to contrast the adult and youth perspectives, but they eventually decided to interview people in the street, specifically in Rambla del Raval. They felt it was important for the streets in their neighbourhood to appear in the background when recording the videos.

#### 4.1.2. As young people

Due to viewing themselves as young people, a perspective arose that absolved them of responsibility for the situations that they experience. As mentioned before, in the initial stages of the case study the groups had a highly individualistic view of their future. This led them to believe that the difficulties that they are or might be going through depend exclusively on them. That is, they saw themselves or their personality as an obstacle. Most members of both groups mentioned laziness as a hindrance, such as not being able to get up in the morning and the motivation to do what they want. These ideas refer, above all, to their attitude towards school and education.

However, as the joint discourse became more complex, there was greater recognition of the collective nature of these situations, whereupon they became more aware that their problems, difficulties and obstacles were not just about themselves. Instead, there is an underlying system or context that hinders their progress. The dialogues and discussions between the participants when constructing the message and content of the audiovisual piece encouraged discussions like the following:

—P10 says that the yellow group gives good advice, which is that "you should study."

—P1 says: "And if they have problems at home, how are they going to study?" (G2, May 5 observation).

On the one hand, Group 1 delved deeper into the specific discussion about the education system and how it affects them as young people. In awareness that the audiovisual production that they were creating was giving

them the chance to criticise or denounce certain problems, the conversation revolved around how school targets fail to heed the youngsters' own objectives, and how they feel about this.

Young children's strengths are not enhanced, what education does is make kids feel useless and this brings them down (G1, May 4 observation).

Why doesn't the education system take young people's interests into account? (G1, May 25 observation).

The outcome of this discussion was a video-podcast, where the very choice of title already shows that the participants were taking a critical view: "They ask a lot, they give little: What we young people think about the education system." The podcast is structured into 4 episodes. The first is about being forced to study something you do not want to. The second, "school rules", addresses nonsensical school regulations that the pupils neither understand nor agree with. The third, "the obstacles of the education system", speaks about ways that the education system hinders children's development. And in the fourth, "things we want at school", they present proposals to make schools better.

Meanwhile, Group 2 focused its discussion on the uncertainty in which young people live, the difficulties they face, how they feel about the situation, and most of all how this might affect their motivation and self-esteem.

"What prevents young people from being happy?", interviews with young people and adults, we would like to convey the idea that there are obstacles ahead (G2, May 5 observation).

To adapt to situations that we face and motivate children to keep going (G2, May 5 observation).

The group decided to do video interviews with young people and adults to compare their views and thus highlight how things do not necessarily go as planned. The idea was to find out whether adults' concepts of happiness had changed from when they were young and if what they had studied had affected them in any way. Meanwhile, the young people were asked what makes them happy now, how they imagine themselves in the future and whether they think their concept of happiness will change. Although it is not the central subject of the video, the topic of education and studies also has an important role in their feelings of uncertainty. This is also shown by their choice of title, "Untitled Future", and in the final message that "The future isn't written."

## 4.2. Community Work

The process of exploring ideas of the future and producing the videos also had an impact on the participants' relationship with their immediate community, meaning both with the younger children at the centre and between themselves as peers.

Regarding the former, as part of their work they designed and developed activities to explore ideas of the future among the younger members of the association. When they started designing these activities, the groups had a somewhat condescending view of those boys and girls, especially the youngest ones, perhaps replicating the adult-centric way that they themselves were viewed by their seniors. They did not think that the smaller children would be able to consider the future, or supposed that their ideas of the future would be far removed from reality:

(Small children) do not have that notion of the future because for them it's all a very long way off. They say, bah, it'll come (P8, G1, March 2 workshop).

It's an unreal future (P9, G1, March 2 workshop).

This view was modified once they started doing the activities with the boys and girls. Little by little, they came to realise that not only did those children have a very realistic vision of the future, but that they were also capable of articulating those ideas. This also reinforced the older children's identification with the neighbourhood, for they came to appreciate how capable those local boys and girls were of aspiring to very specific things. They were surprised and proud to find, for example, that a lot of girls dreamed of doing jobs or activities that tend to be stereotyped as male, such as medicine, football or anything to do with technology. This also got them thinking even more about how the education system influences socialisation into different gender roles.

Audiovisual production allowed the groups to work as a team, negotiating, reaching a consensus, and distributing roles depending on what they fancied most or according to their personalities. This affected the two groups differently, as they both had their own dynamics.

Group 1 (video-podcast), at the start of the case study, was already a fairly cohesive unit as the members knew each other well. During the discussions in the initial stages, before the audiovisual component, there was already fairly fluid dialogue among the group. However, there were more introverted members who did not get enough of a chance to voice their opinions due to the sometimes, albeit unintentional, overwhelming participation of more extrovert members. Although people were willing to listen, we researchers had to intervene to make sure everybody got to have their say.



In contrast, when working on the audiovisual pieces, the involvement of the people who found it harder to speak became more necessary and noticeable. By wanting to take charge of what being behind the camera entailed, their role was an essential part of the final product and carried a great deal of responsibility. And their work was appreciated when the finished work was shown. Also, when some of the more introverted members saw the podcast being developed and the dialogue that it was generating, they wanted to be part of the discussion in front of the cameras (as moderators or guests).

Group 2 (video interviews) was a less cohesive group and they did not know each other so well. A lot of them did not even know the other people's names. This meant that the dialogue was less fluid, in addition to the fact that it was a larger group, which was why the researchers chose to divide them into smaller groups. The audiovisual component was important for the group, because they felt more comfortable working on it, preparing and organising the storyboard and doing the filming. When it came to content creation, they were quickly divided between those who made the storyboard and those who prepared the interview questions. Also, when recording the video, they very spontaneously agreed that everyone should take turns doing all the different roles.

In both groups it was the youngsters themselves who managed the negotiations and consensus, with very little adult intervention. To structure the content of the audiovisual pieces, they separated into smaller groups and then pooled their ideas, and the process of choosing other people's ideas and adding some of their own seemed to come very naturally to them.

—P6 says that in the interview proposed by the red team they could ask questions about the topic of education.

—R1: "No doubt about it, they could ask questions about that."

—P1: "Perhaps we could ask the children what they think about their education."

—R2: "So the topic would be..."

—P6 says: "What perspective did they have as children and then compare that with what has happened since then" (G2, May 5 observation).

#### **4.3. When they have the means to get heard**

Another of the interesting results that came out of the joint creation of the audiovisual piece was how the educommunication process was able to open the full range of possibilities for the youngsters to relate to the media and how this affects the way they connect with civic engagement.

When discussing the participants' uses and perceptions of the media, during the initial stages of the project their use was very clearly instrumental.

R1: "What other things have you found out in recent months through audiovisual products?"

P3: "A documentary."

E1: "Me, for example, I found about cooking recipes from videos."

P2: "Me too."

P4: "Me, video games."

P1: "I've also seen things about trade, history and stuff on YouTube."  
(G1, February 23 workshop).

However, when digging deeper into the role that the media plays in their everyday lives, ideas emerged that associate the media with awareness. This shows that the participants do take into account the fact that the media can serve purposes other than the instrumental one. However, they see it as something distant or complicated.

R1: "How have audiovisual contents influenced your life?"

P2: "By raising awareness."

R1: "What can we convey with an audiovisual product?"

P2: "Any feeling, but you need to have the creativity to do that."

P3: "Respect for someone."

P1: "Joy, sadness, melancholy. You can convey anything, but you need to have the creativity to do it" (G1, February 23 workshop).

As the educommunication process progressed, a change could be noted in the discourse as to what they could or could not do with the media. At first, the youngsters perceived that ordinary people could not do anything with audiovisual media, and that it was only large corporations or famous people that could.

—R2: "And why not talk about that?"

—P9: "Because nobody's going to take any notice of us" (G1, March 2 observation).

However, when they saw audiovisual media as a possible means for protest or complaint, they began to feel motivated and became more involved in the discussion and audiovisual production. This led them to feel more identified with the subject and also as a group. By getting the chance to make their opinions visible, they were expressing their need to be listened to and understood, above all, by adults.

Who would you like it to be aimed at? Suitable for all audiences, for young people to realise that they are right, and also for parents to feel challenged (G1, May 4 observation).

Life is hard and seeing how views of it change, we want adults to see things from a child's perspective (G2, May 5 observation).

All of this shows how young people need their own spaces to be able to express themselves and how, in a certain way, they feel ignored in an adult-centric world when they want to address adults. Furthermore, the education process makes them aware that their perspective is valid, that they want to defend it and that they have a means, in this case audiovisual media, to do so.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

This audiovisual-based education experience has highlighted how young people are critically aware of the situations they go through and the structures of the system in which they live. As Checkoway and Aldana (2013) mention with regard to civic engagement, young people do tend towards social justice in their everyday lives, although this attitude is not conceptualised as such. They are aware of the forms of discrimination and oppression that affect them closely, although they tend to be so from an individualistic perspective, which is caused by the system itself. Hence, it is important for education to consider spaces and processes for the practice of civic engagement and to involve young people from a variety of contexts as the protagonists (Checkoway & Aldana, 2013).

The case study presented herein shows how education processes, in this case based on audiovisual production, can be a useful tool to provide young people with the platform for reflection that they need in order to develop their own discourses, perspectives and practices. The boys and girls from the association autonomously managed and constructed a message that was associated to their own problems, and showed that all they need are the kind of spaces that are generally not provided by more formal and traditional education.

A person's experiences as a result of existing hierarchies in society can influence their likelihood of participating in civic engagement (Phan & Kloos, 2023). The participants' shared identity of being young people from such a stigmatised neighbourhood as El Raval was the springboard for developing the content addressed in their audiovisual pieces. Both groups' discussions revolved around the labels and difficulties they face due to being young and living in El Raval, something which generated a common vision and which motivated them to construct a shared message.

Furthermore, being able to create an audiovisual piece from their own perspective promoted reflections about their own possibilities for raising awareness of themselves and about their environment. As Mihailidis *et al.* (2021) note, educommunication can contribute to community building and collective action, especially through alternative media that contain counter-narratives and highlight inequalities. The groups were more willing to create the audiovisual piece once they started to become aware of their power to portray the unequal situation in which they live in El Raval. The tools available to them were a motivation to get involved, and thus generated civic engagement.

The work that the participants did together during the video production process was also important to consolidate ties among the groups. According to Miranti and Evans (2019), a sense of community is essential for community participation, one component of which is membership of a group and mutual influence within it, which are viewed as opportunities to participate in community life. Among the participants, the process that the educommunication experience entailed thus not only reinforced the sense of belonging among peers and led to greater trust in the collective project, but also helped to generate a greater sense of belonging to the association, as they came to feel more identified with the other young children and teenagers and, in a certain way, their self-confidence was boosted by feeling appreciated as people with agency.

This experience helped to grant them the possibility of civic engagement from their own views and experiences, rather than imposing a specific way of doing so (voting, volunteering, etc.). Being able to raise awareness and convey ideas to other people, especially to people from another social group (adults), about their views of the education system and the difficulties they face, meant they really were actively participating in public life. The audiovisual pieces also gave them the chance to do so using the knowledge and tools they already had or that were available to them.

As mentioned by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009), the right to be heard requires a major effort from adults, not only to collect young people's opinions on their different manifestations and forms of expression, but also to integrate them in participatory decision-making processes, beyond institutionalised, traditional methods. Along these lines, in the case study presented herein, although we adults did accompany the youngsters throughout the process, we did not take part in the decision-making and it was left to them to decide on the subject, and they were especially autonomous with regard to the critical perspective from which it was addressed.

Therefore, this educommunication experience is presented as a possibility for working with especially vulnerable young groups outside of institu-

tional channels and for ensuring their right to be heard, thereby making them participants in democratic life with the capacity to influence political decisions, especially in matters that are of personal concern to them.

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