Non-formal civic education in Spain: a social cartography approach

Abstract

The work of non-governmental organizations in promoting citizenship competencies is one of the most effective forms of civic education today. Nonetheless, it has not received much attention from academia. This present research, using the method of social cartography and qualitative content analysis, analyzes the non-formal civic education work carried out by 156 non-governmental organizations in Spain. The results give an overview of the scope, target audience, types of activities, and topics that these organizations address, providing some significant examples. Additionally, the research includes an analysis of the institutional context in which these organizations operate based on 10 in-depth interviews. Finally, the findings point to the need to further focus on this type of education, integrate it into educational systems, and provide these non-governmental organizations with adequate resources to effectively carry out their work.

Introduction

Interest in civic education in the context of public policy has grown significantly since the 1990s, to the point of becoming a concern in a majority of institutional agendas in numerous countries (Bozec, 2016; Campbell, 2019; Kells, 2022). This interest, however, is not new (López-Meseguer, 2022), but has been largely renewed through advocacy by supranational organizations and institutions, such as the Council of Europe's Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (2010), and the Council of the European Union's Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018). The United Nations, on the other hand, has emphasized the need for Global Citizenship Education (GCED) for a number of years and through various initiatives (UNESCO, 2014), explicitly stating "Education for sustainable development and global citizenship" as Target 4.7 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 of its 2030 Agenda. Another interesting aspect, which situates us within the context of the present work, is the emphasis placed by such institutions on the need for the greater involvement of civil society in this type of education (Ryen & Jøsok, 2023), such as the statement that (Council of Europe, 2010, p. 11):

> "Member states should foster the role of non-governmental organisations and youth organisations in education for democratic citizenship and human rights education, especially in non-formal education. They should recognise these organisations and their activities as a valued part of the educational system, provide them where possible with the support they need and make full use of the expertise they can contribute to all forms of education."

Literature on non-formal civic education and the development of citizenship competencies

Despite the importance attributed to civic education, subjects related to citizenship have been rather ineffectively introduced into general education (Hernández & Galáis, 2021; Wahlström, 2022), with studies, such as Campbell's (2019), emphasizing that informal and non-formal contexts seem to have a greater impact than formal ones in developing civic knowledge, attitudes, and values. Bearing these findings in mind, this research focuses on what has been termed non-formal civic education. Non-formal education can be considered to encompass "any planned programme of education designed to improve a range of skills and competences, outside the formal educational setting" (Council of Europe, 2010, p. 8). For an activity to be considered, more specifically, non-formal civic education, it should meet three criteria (López-Meseguer et al., 2023): a) be primarily conducted (mixed formulas may exist) by a civil society organization or a public entity separate from schools or universities; b) have a structured nature; c) have an educational purpose related to matters of citizenship.

Several studies have highlighted non-formal civic education as a particularly effective tool in promoting citizenship competencies, in programs concerning a range of issues, such as the environment, social action, participation and volunteering (Donvaband & Hoskins, 2021; Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Myoung & Liou, 2022). Furthermore, the findings of a recent survey, conducted by Slavkova and Kurilic (2023) of 434 European organizations in 21 countries, describing and quantifying the variety of civic education activities, highlighted the needs of boost effects by developing learning ecosystems of non-governmental organizations, of addressing funding issues, and of cultivating greater support from the scientific community, especially concerning the evaluation of activities. Following this research, in Spain, most of the activities carried out in the non-formal

sector are conducted by "foundations," a legal term encompassing various types of institutions (e.g., association, society, forum, organization, etc.). The most common areas of focus include social inclusion, international development, civic engagement and community building, and employability. In this regard, the studies conducted have primarily focused on childhood, with the aim of promoting civic education from an early age (e.g., Álamo-Bolaños et al., 2024). However, actions directed at other sectors of the population, such as young people and adults, are also observed (Brown, 2018). The lack of studies addressing the multiple possibilities offered by non-formal civic education in the Spanish population hinders a more detailed analysis of the current context of these educational processes. It would justify the importance of this research, as it would allow for a clearer understanding of the reality of non-formal civic education in Spain.

Given that an analysis of the literature shows that global citizenship education is gaining increasing prominence in global public policy, and that globalization processes create the need to reconsider how citizens participate in complex and interdependent societies (Alejo, 2020), non-governmental organizations play a fundamental role in citizenship education processes (Tarozzi, 2022; Sen, 2021) and as an alternative to the state in providing civic and global citizenship education (Noh, 2019).

Finally, it is worth mentioning a group of studies that analyze the phenomenon of non-formal civic education from ideological perspectives. Brown (2018) argues that the excessive focus on social action by non-governmental organizations implies an individualization of social risk close to neoliberal ideology. This would imply that the individual is considered the main agent of change, rather than the political and social system (Coelho et al, 2022). It is important to remember, in this regard, that studies on civic education have long reiterated the connection between civic education and ideology

(López-Meseguer & Martínez Rivas, 2023; Sautereau & Faas, 2023), which should therefore be an aspect to consider in any related research.

The present study

Though the scientific literature highlights the relevance of national and international non-formal civic education, to our knowledge, no studies have yet provided a detailed analysis of its development in the Spanish context. Indeed, social research in this field has tended to be integrated within broader international studies that do not explore the reality of each nation in depth. There is therefore a need for a detailed study of the current state of non-formal civic education in specific countries, such as Spain, that would enable the creation of a mapping as a starting point for improving its quality.

This present study aims to analyze three particular aspects of non-formal civic education: 1) the scope and target audience of non-formal civic education activities carried out by organizations in Spain; 2) the type of activities carried out and the civic work themes that receive more and less attention from the identified organizations; c) opportunities seen and challenges faced by the identified organizations.

Method

The methodological approach of the present study was primarily qualitative and exploratory in nature, and involved a social cartography study of 156 non-governmental organizations based in Spain, including 10 interviews aimed at exploring the type of work carried out and the challenges faced by civic educators. The analysis strategy, on the other hand, was guided by the principles of qualitative content analysis.

Methods, analysis, and methodological considerations

The use of social mapping in this work falls within the perspectivist paradigm (Liebman & Paulston, 1994), according to which social cartography can be considered a "methodological approach based on textual analysis and the representation of social

phenomena through maps that reinscribe and structure a multiplicity of perspectives or ways of seeing these phenomena" (Gorostiaga, 2017, p. 888). For our research, it was deemed the most comprehensive research methodology among possible options, in allowing for the elaboration of a detailed, dense and profound description of non-governmental organizations, the work they do in civic education, and the difficulties they face in carrying out such work.

The research was conducted in six consecutive operational phases. In Phase 1, a concept-guided categorization strategy (Gibbs, 2018) was used to review research papers, institutional reports and pronouncements, at both national and international levels, in order to narrow down the theme and create an index of categories and codes. Phase 2 then saw the application of a validation procedure to a pilot test involving 20 organizations, in order to ensure the relevance of the previously identified categories, and to incorporate newly identified categories and their operational definitions.

To compile the final sample, Phase 3 used a two-step identification process, first identifying, from public databases, approximately 1200 organizations fitting the study's target, and second selecting a sufficiently diverse sample (Flick, 2004) in terms of the organizations' characteristics (territorial scope, funding, size) and the civic education topics addressed. With the aim of obtaining a final sample of organizations that would allow a comparison of different civic education activities (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), a total of 156 organizations were selected for mapping, thus clearly achieving theoretical saturation (Rowlands et al., 2016).

In Phase 4, manipulative data categorization was conducted by the research team in two steps. First, to elaborate frequency counts, a database was created from the previously generated categories, categorizing each organization via a web document analysis. Second, using the same categories, qualitative evidence was gathered to gain a better

understanding of the descriptive data. Then, in Phase 5, in order to achieve an even greater depth of data and give more of a voice to the protagonists of non-formal civic education, 10 in-depth interviews (Kvale, 2007) were conducted in parallel with the leaders of organizations, selected, once again, according to the criterion of maximum heterogeneity.

In Phase 6, qualitative content analysis of the gathered data was carried out according to the methodology of Mayring (2014). Quantitative content analysis was conducted to elaborate basic descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) for the qualitative variables included in the study, using the spreadsheet software Excel, version 18.0. Additionally, a descriptive thematic analysis (Gibbs, 2018) was applied to the information available in the web documents and obtained from the interviews. This analysis was conducted simultaneously by two researchers, then subsequently reviewed by the rest of the research team, and included both deductive and inductive strategies in order to reinforce the rigor of the research (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

The six phases of the study therefore allowed the fulfillment of the main qualitative research validity criteria of Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007). Nonetheless, it is important to underline the exploratory nature of the study. As the literature review revealed, many studies only indirectly address the field of non-formal civic education. This study is therefore pioneering in designing and applying a research strategy precisely tailored to this specific research subject.

Results

The results of the present study are organized into three sections, presenting, first, the quantitative analysis, then, the qualitative analysis, and, finally, a discussion of the results of the interviews regarding opportunities and challenges.

Scope, audience, work areas and activities in non-formal civic education

Scopes determined in the descriptive study were coded according to the reference context activities addressed, defined as local, regional, national, or international. As shown in Figure 1, the analysis revealed that 41.7% ($n = 65$) of the examined organizations had an international scope, with the local scope ($n = 7$, 4.5%) being the least categorized.

It should be noted here, for interpretive purposes, that an organization was considered to have a local scope if its actions were carried out in a specific limited place or locality. The regional scope was considered to refer to institutions operating within the reference context of a specific Autonomous Community (Spanish region). Organizations with a national scope were considered to be those that developed their activities in more than one Autonomous Community, potentially covering all or a significant part of the Spanish territory. Finally, organizations with an international scope were considered to aim, at least in one action or activity, at contexts located outside of the Spanish territory.
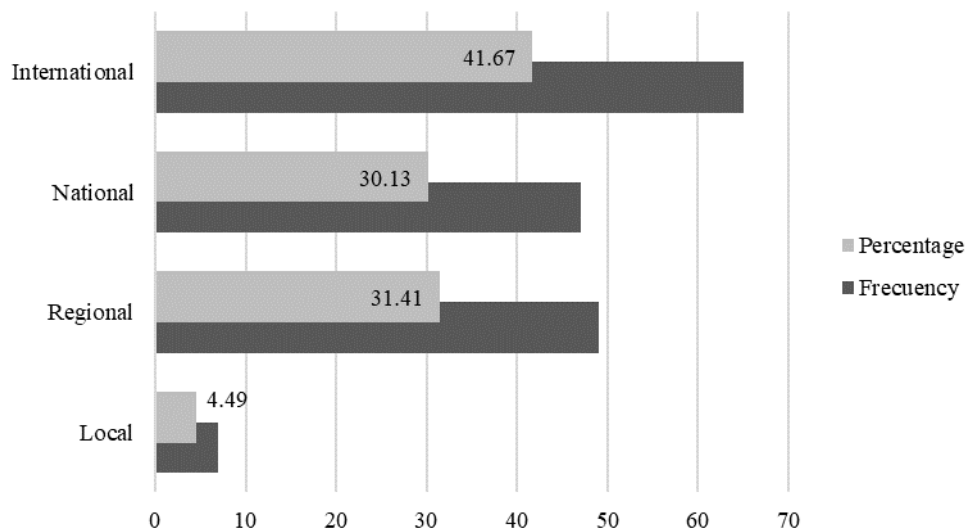

Figure 1. Scopes of the studied organizations

Regarding the audience of the activities carried out by the examined organizations, it is important to note that many organizations did not specify target age groups. Therefore, in order to facilitate the interpretation of the findings of the present research, when specified, ages were sorted into separate groupings of children/adolescents, young people, adults, and seniors, and, when not specified, were considered to cover all groupings. Thus it was observed, as shown in Figure 2, that activities predominantly addressed young people ($n = 148$), followed by adults ($n = 135$), children/adolescents ($n = 116$), and, lastly, seniors ($n = 89$).
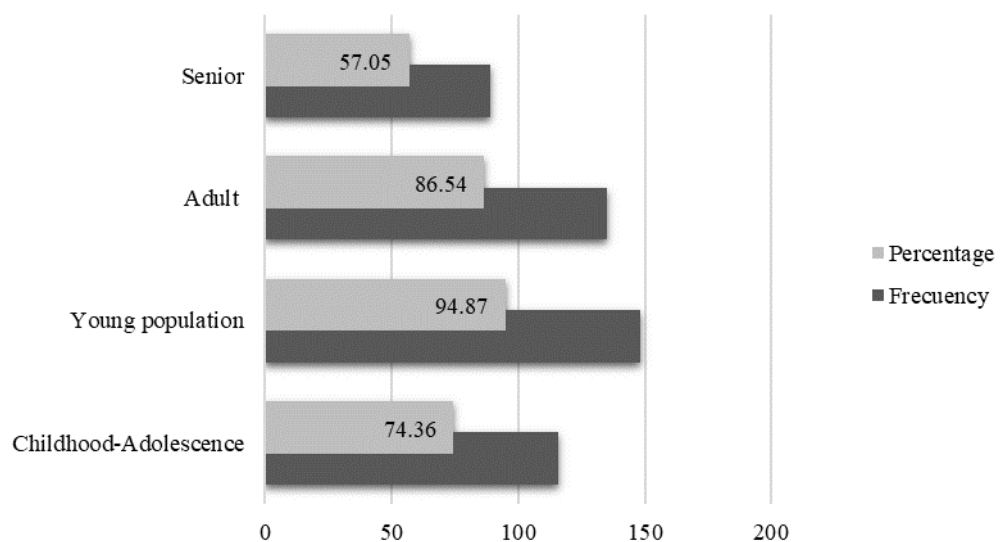

Figure 2. Target audiences of the studied organizations

As for the topics of interest of the examined organizations, many did not focus their activities on a single theme, but, valuing dynamism and diversity, tended to plan multi-thematic activities. Figure 3 summarizes the target themes of the analyzed organizations, revealing that civic engagement ($n = 90$) and social action ($n = 84$) were those of highest interest. Conversely, interreligious education ($n = 20$), historical memory ($n = 19$) and responsible consumption ($n = 21$) were those less targeted by the organizations included in this study.
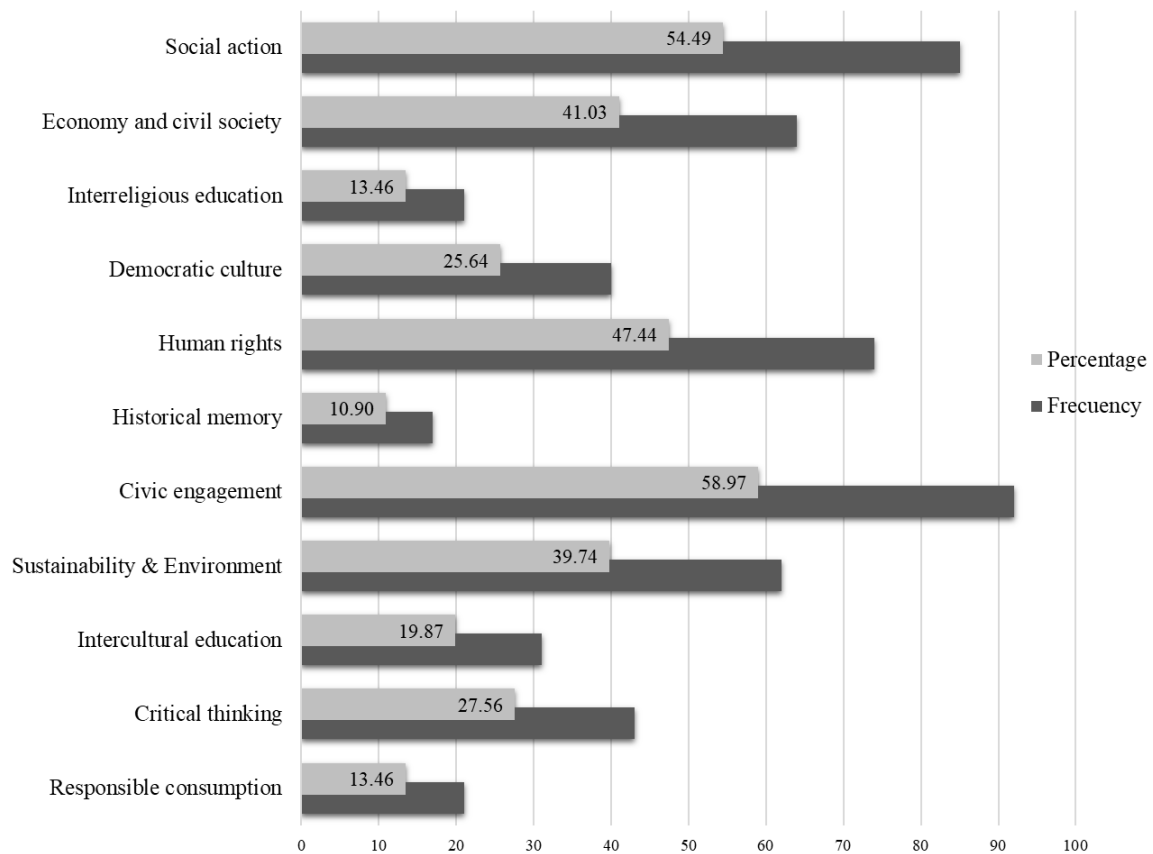
Figure 3. Target themes of the studied organizations

Finally, the specific types of activities planned and carried out by the studied organizations were analyzed. As shown in Figure 4, the most developed activities were those related to training ($n = 119$), dissemination ($n = 110$), and project design, development and support ($n = 104$). In contrast, the least addressed types of activities were those related to denouncement and social protest ($n = 34$), and awards and recognitions ($n = 34$).
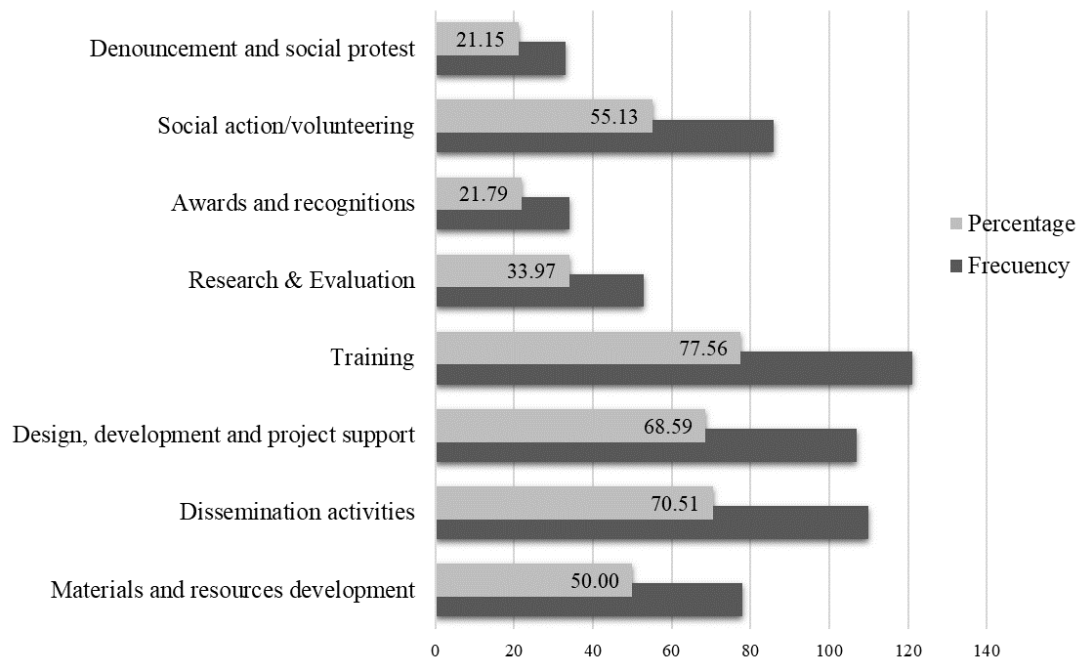
Figure 4. Types of activities carried out by the studied associations

Non-formal civic education activities

Reflecting the described diversity of scopes, target audiences, target themes and types of activities in the studied organizations, what follows below is an analysis centered around the target theme, giving priority to the most outstanding initiatives of civic education.

Related to the theme of responsible consumption, activities were identified with very diverse purposes, contexts, scopes and target audiences, ranging from education programs in schools to awareness-raising campaigns aimed at the entire population, and from the topic of reducing society's ecological footprint through to fair trade actions, the solidarity economy, the promotion of responsible consumption, and the sustainable use of natural resources. One of the most notable initiatives regarding this theme was a consultation space for the promotion of responsible and sustainable consumption (Initiative 1, I.1), offering a wide range of services, including technical support and training for responsible and sustainable public procurement, training on and awareness-raising of fair trade and

responsible consumption, and the organization of sustainable events for responsible consumption, all with a civic education approach, and aimed at various population groupings.

Related to the critical thinking theme, encompassing activities aimed at questioning preconceived ideas or beliefs, were educational programs, debating spaces, publications to promote the personal and civic development of young people, and awareness-raising campaigns on social issues. Two particularly interesting initiatives were identified, the first (I.2) aimed at recognizing, promoting and disseminating educational projects that, while contributing to the development of skills related to information literacy, also promoted critical thinking, responsible audiovisual creativity, values and social cohesion, and the second (I.3) aimed at promoting the humanistic education of students and lecturers at Spanish public universities, with a view to encouraging the participation of young people in society.

Activities aimed at understanding, respecting and valuing cultural diversity were included in intercultural education theme category, and commonly included programs of exploration of different cultures and initiatives to promote social cohesion, as well as advisory services and publications on interculturality. Of particular interest regarding this theme was an artistic, creative and diverse socio-cultural initiative (I.4) to bring together all community stakeholders in developing a sense of identity and responsibility in relation to the neighborhood and its socio-cultural context, and in addressing and finding solutions to social issues such as racism and Islamophobia. Also noteworthy regarding this theme was an educational initiative (I.5) to create resources and activities for different age groups, from four to eighteen, on interculturality and forced migration, focused on reading, language, and visual and bodily expressions.

Under the sustainability and the environment theme were activities to understand challenges related to the environment, including projects to raise awareness on environmental issues, more or less systematic educational interventions aimed at pupils in early childhood, primary and secondary education, family leisure activities, and research. Of particular interest in this theme category was an internationally-oriented educational initiative (I.6) aimed at improving the environmental management of educational institutions and their surroundings, involving entire school communities at all educational stages, with a special emphasis on engaging students in carrying out environmental awareness and consciousness-raising activities.

Regarding civic engagement, organizations sought to promote active participation of citizens in social and political issues, with programs to support various groups at risk of exclusion (e.g., minors, addicts, supervised youths, the incarcerated) and community development, and other initiatives related to climate change, armed conflicts, discrimination, freedom of expression, economic justice, and food sovereignty. Two initiatives were of particular relevance regarding this theme. The first was an initiative (I.7) funded by the City Council of Madrid to incorporate, at compulsory secondary and Baccalaureate education stages, specific content on disinformation and hate speech into subjects such as English, French, Philosophy, History, and Mathematics. The second initiative (I.8) was an award program to recognize artistic actions demonstrating a commitment to addressing the challenges of society and the planet.

The human rights theme frequently appeared in relation to lines of work of the analyzed organizations, as part of international agreements and with full institutional recognition. The work activities were very diverse and included programs, publications and other actions aimed at raising awareness across all segments of the population and at defending and enforcing human rights. Regarding this theme, of particular note was an

initiative (I.9) involving an online course, for educators, municipal technicians, NGOs, political leaders and students, focused on understanding the history of human rights and the culture of peace, and providing resources and tools for their promotion at local and international levels. Another noteworthy initiative (I.10) was a publication by researchers and activists regarding the impacts of eviction processes in family, school, and community settings, with the aim of raising awareness among the population.

The democratic culture theme was addressed by actions such as seminars, publications, awards, participatory processes, educational programs, reports and events aimed at promoting democracy as a form of political and social organization. An initiative (I.11) of particular interest in this theme category was a regular seminar addressing the general public on democracy, tolerance, the foundational aspects of democracy, and the factors that make it viable. Another initiative (I.12) was a series of deliberative forums aimed at promoting reflection and dialogue on the future of Europe, engaging students in a simulated participatory process, in order to better understand the foundations of participation in the European context.

Activities related to the interreligious education theme sought to promote understanding, respect and appreciation of religious diversity and its manifestation in the public sphere, through religious exchanges, educational programs, research, conferences, and training sessions. In this theme category, it is worth mentioning an initiative (I.13) to explore the public's perception of religious experience in the public sphere and its contribution to civic education. Another initiative (I.14) was a series of dialogue groups aimed at exchanging religious knowledge, building relationships between different communities, and valuing the religious dimension as a fundamental aspect of individuals and communities.

Regarding the theme of economics and civil society, activities involved the promotion of economic, financial and social studies, public events, training programs and advisory actions on understanding the functioning of markets and civil society institutions, and employment and professional entrepreneurship training for vulnerable groups. One initiative of note (I.15) was a training and support project for micro-entrepreneurs on aligning their businesses with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Another initiative (I.16) was a program to promote the integration of the Roma population into the labor market, with various actions, such as awareness-raising campaigns against prejudices and discriminatory practices, support for the creation of new businesses, and active employment policies specifically addressing the Roma population.

Finally, addressing the social action theme was a wide range activities, such as food collection campaigns, legal advice for vulnerable groups, and school support programs, aimed at the care and training of individuals and groups at risk. Two initiatives, of very different natures, were of particular relevance regarding this theme. The first (I.17) was a project to engage young volunteers in improving the physical, mental and social well-being of individuals over 65 years of age, through several activities, both in-person and virtual, to promote intergenerational interactions and overcome the digital divide. The second initiative (I.18) involved the establishment of an office for reporting xenophobic behaviors in both public and private spheres, for providing assistance to individuals and groups victimized by discrimination based on ethnicity or migratory status, and for providing information on aspects of Spanish society that immigrants may be unaware of.

Opportunities and challenges in non-formal civic education

Beyond inquiring about the non-formal civic education activities carried out by organizations, the in-depth interviews, furthermore, specifically focused on opportunities seen and challenges faced. We have indicated the number of the organization from which

the quotation comes (organization 1 to 10; O 1-10). Reflections were therefore made on emerging needs of social interest and on opportunities for new lines of action to address them. For instance, one of the interviewees emphasized the importance of "*being able to anticipate things that are coming and being able to contribute to addressing a challenge*" (Organization 5, O.5).

Another set of opportunities identified among the interviews related to how the leaders of the organizations perceived youth as a driver of social change. They highlighted: the contributions that young people can make through leisure activities and in their free time, "*that they can dedicate their free time to all of this*" (O.9); their capacity for leadership, in "*that young people become agents of change, and in turn, leaders who promote this leadership*" (O.7); and the generational renewal of the teaching profession, mentioning that "*for us, the previous step is very important, novice teachers*" (O.4).

Furthermore, the establishment of collaborative networks was cited as an opportunity for mutual promotion and enrichment, considering, for example, that "*there is an opportunity to learn from what other institutions do*" (O.7), and, to increase the impact of their activities, that "*In this way, we can reach many more young people*" (O.9). The COVID-19 pandemic was also referenced as a context that had generated opportunities and was a cause for reflection on their activities, for example, by mentioning that "*the pandemic has showed us that global citizenship is needed more than ever*" (O.4).

On the other hand, allusions were made to the prestige and social credibility of organizations with experience in a certain delimited field, as an opportunity to continue developing activities in line with the work for which they are identified as leading references, an example being "*the social work we carry out is usually well valued and well seen by Spanish society, and that is an advantage because you work with authority*" (O.3).

Several interviewees mentioned available economic resources facilitating the continuity of their activities, for example, referring to: the use of leftover resources for subsequent programs, in saying that "*we continue to use many of the resources we had from previous programs*" (O.10); the search for new contexts in which to implement successful programs; and new sources of funding to ensure the viability of projects.

Other opportunities mentioned in the interviews, though less frequently than the previous examples, related to civic engagement, research, diversity, the independence of the social sector, and the environment.

Regarding challenges, the most recurrent theme that emerged from the data analysis of the interviews was funding, such as mentioning that "*The obstacles we face, in reality, are purely economic*" (O.3). Indeed, organizations referred to significant hurdles in finding financial resources, such as commenting "*It is not easy to finance this type of activity, so there's a significant handicap*" (O.2). Such difficulties were seen to condition the type, duration and sustainability of activities, considering, for example, that *"In the end, we depend on subsidies quite a bit in order to be able to create new training resources"* (O.6), or that "*Due to lack of resources lately, we haven't been able to carry out this activity*" (O.10). Several organizations indicated that they tried to overcome such obstacles by seeking external partners to share objectives and/or funding with, mentioning, for example, that "*We form alliances to carry out projects and seek out financing. In this regard, we are already working on finding funds and subsidies*" (O.4).

A second set of challenges faced by organizations in carrying out their educational work in the field of civic education pertained to the target audience and engagement, in that, for example, "*The challenge is that the target we address is complicated*" (O.5), and *"As far as challenges go, the biggest is increasing participation in general, reaching more young people*" (O.9). Similarly, several organizations reported issues with the social

appreciation of activities and its limitation to a very specific profile of citizen, commenting, for example, that "*It's not valued. It's seen as something useless, for dreamers, for hippies, as a model destined for failure*" (O.8).

A third set of challenges referred to by interviewees was the social impact of their activities and evaluating that impact. It was mentioned, for example, that "*we know that we produce an effect, but an effect that is difficult to measure, it's true, because there are always so many variables*" (O.10). Other interviewees indicated that a certain challenge lies in how to increase the impact of their efforts, commenting, for example, that "*sometimes some programs still don't have the impact we would like*" (O.3).

Furthermore, organizations mentioned difficulties in creating new collaboration networks between different institutions, and how this limited funding for their activities and the desired social impact, stating, for example, that "*there is very little habit of collaboration, cooperation, open sharing or co-financing*" (O.8). Similarly, several interviewees expressed organizational, internal management, or leadership problems that hindered activities, indicating, for example, that "*we have some difficulties coordinating such a large and widely spread out team, with not everyone in the same office*" (O.1).

Finally, the COVID-19 health crisis was mentioned as a particular challenge that highlighted technological and digital deficiencies in social organizations, increased social exclusion rates, and had repercussions on the youth population. For example, one interviewee commented that "*It has impacted a lot on the way young people are and live. A concern and challenge for us is gaining the commitment of young people. It used to be easier*" (O.9).

Other challenges referenced in the interviews, though less frequently, were changes in the use of technology, increasing research, and the ideological or political independence of the organization being occasionally a subject of controversy.

Discussion

The first aim of this study was to analyze the scope and target audience of non-formal civic education activities. The findings indicated that activities carried out by nearly half of the studied organizations had an international scope, followed by a regional, national, and, finally, local scope. This diverges from international studies such as the one by Donvaband & Hoskins (2021), a systematic review that focused on the national and local scope of analyzed work activities. An explanation may lie in how organizations are funded, considering that, in Spain, in particular, international funding (from the European Union) prevails, and may therefore require a greater number of actions aimed at cooperation between different countries (Slavkova & Kurilic, 2023).

Regarding target audiences, the results indicated that activities predominantly addressed young people, followed by adults, children and adolescents, and, to a lesser extent, seniors. Systematic reviews such as the one conducted by Fitzgerald et al. (2021) reported similar data, emphasizing the importance of young people in civic education programs. These authors furthermore highlighted a need to integrate formal, informal and non-formal civic education spaces in order to promote civic development in a more community-based context (Slavkova & Kurilic, 2023). This implies increasing the relevance of civic education across all age groups, with a particular emphasis on minority populations (Bondy, 2014), including children and adolescents (Myoung & Liou, 2022), adults (Ünal & Kaygın), and seniors (Kramkowska et al., 2019).

Regarding target themes, the second aim of analysis of the present study, over half the organizations focused their activities on promoting civic engagement and social action, with aims such as increasing the participation of citizens, and bringing attention to and training disadvantaged individuals. This is in line with previous literature on non-formal education in Spain, which has paid considerable attention to volunteering and service-

learning (Sotelino Losada et al, 2019). In accordance, one study by Slavkova & Kurilic (2023) indicated that around 50% of civic education activities in Spain are focused on civic engagement. On the other hand, the significant attention placed on human rights and environmental issues reinforces the idea of a growing inclination towards addressing global issues by these types of organizations. Indeed, it has been reported that as much as 56.3% of the organizations in Spain are engaged in activities linked to human rights education (Slavkova & Kurilic, 2023). Furthermore, at the European level, the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament (2022) has recently warned about the need for civic education to be attentive to the environmental crisis.

In terms of the type of activities carried out by the organizations, diverse actions were documented, contributing to the development of what we have defined as citizenship competence. On one hand, the absence of a systematic and rigorous evaluation of the examined civic education programs and initiatives, as discussed in other studies (Tallon & Milligan, 2018; Campbell, 2019; Donvaband & Hoskins, 2021), highlights the need for greater attention in this regard. On the other hand, it should be noted that the scientific literature has primarily focused on analyzing the effectiveness of various training programs or initiatives, without paying much attention to the full range of activities that can be considered as non-formal civic education, which have, instead, been presented in this present work. Studies can be found in the literature emphasizing the effectiveness of volunteering (Cheng & Sikkink, 2020), global citizenship programs (Alejo, 2020), human rights initiatives (Blatmann et al., 2010), participatory processes (Barros, 2017; Agurto & Torres, 2020), urban activism (Hetrick et al., 2020), civic art (Robinson et al., 2019; McDonnell, 2018), museum visits (Bowen & Kisida, 2018), and programs carried out online with a deliberative approach (Smith et al, 2009; Strandberg, 2015), among other

activities. However, it is not so much the thematic area related to citizenship that is addressed, but rather the quality of the activities themselves.

Finally, regarding the institutional context in which civic educators operate in the non-formal field, the lack of funding among third sector organizations is a recurring issue that pushes them to seek new funding avenues to continue their activities (López et al., 2020). Indeed, the results of the present study indicate that participation in collaborative networks represents an opportunity to increase the impact of an organization's activity, as well as a new way to obtain funding, in line with that which has been suggested by Saudade & Olímpio (2019). However, challenges in establishing new alliances and shared objectives that increase the availability of funding was evidenced by the findings of the present study. In this regard, the role of public institutions in collecting and publicizing information on civic actions is relevant, since, according to Hong et al. (2019), interventions should be interconnected and address issues relating to the context of globalization in which we find ourselves. On the other hand, Jaraíz-Arroyo & González-Portillo (2021) have stated that internal collaboration dynamics between civic organizations and external collaborations with other funding agents, such as public institutions, have developed in a context of welfare capitalism, where a logic of service provision prevails. In this context, the corporate positioning of the organization in the social landscape is important (Jaraíz-Arroyo & González-Portillo, 2021), as confirmed by the results of the study evidencing that prestige and social credibility of organizations represents an opportunity for development, since it facilitates the sourcing of funding and participation in collaborative networks.

The results of the interviews evidenced the existence of organizational, internal management and leadership problems that hindered the activities of the organization, a matter that should be subject to improvement, considering that good leadership is key to

the proper functioning of social entities (Gómez et al., 2018). In addition, the COVID-19 health emergency was seen to place social organizations in an unprecedented situation, revealing the technological and digital deficiencies of social institutions (Larrégola et al., 2020).

Conclusions

This work represents a starting point for the analysis of the non-formal civic education activities of non-governmental organizations in the Spanish context, presenting findings, situating them within the existing literature, and bringing to the fore a series of considerations regarding the relevance and contributions of the research.

Firstly, the work describes the situation of a significant number of organizations, which, among other activities, dedicate a substantial part of their work to civic education. Specific cases have been presented that underline the importance of a research topic that has been largely unexplored until now. Additionally, this work established its own methodology for addressing this field, which may serve as a reference for further studies in other European countries, allowing comparable data on the state of non-formal civic education in Europe to be obtained. In addition, the exploratory nature of this work may encourage the consolidation of non-formal civic education as a research area of interest for the entire field of social sciences.

Secondly, the results clearly indicate the need to promote systematic and rigorous evaluations in this field, so that the most effective practices can be supported by public institutions, and incorporated in a more or less institutional way. However, in addition to measuring the impact of actions on target groups, the results suggest further study is needed of public funding for civic education initiatives, which would highlight the level of commitment in each of the areas of interest, and therefore the challenges faced in implementing social and educational policies.

Thirdly, the research may have a social impact on governmental and non-governmental institutions interested in implementing initiatives in non-formal civic education, as the data gathered forms a dashboard and the foundation of a network of associations promoting civic education, which complements other similar initiatives at the European level. Furthermore, taking into account the diversity of initiatives and lines of work in civic education in the non-formal sphere, this work could serve as a guide for professionals in the field of formal education, thus advancing towards networking, while enriching the lines of action of public policies in this area.

Finally, regarding limitations and prospects, it is worth noting that the qualitative methodology, while allowing for greater depth in this exploratory phase, limited the scope of the research. For this reason, a questionnaire is currently being prepared to expand the scope of the research. This questionnaire is also being developed in collaboration with other European colleagues, which would facilitate comparative analysis. Another significant limitation was the fact that the characteristics of governmental, as opposed to non-governmental, organizations that carry out non-formal civic education were not examined. This aspect should be addressed in future research, despite the difficulties of obtaining data from such organizations.

Conflicts of Interest

Funding

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