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A Space For Citizen Participation Through Final Degree Projects: Promoting The 2030 Agenda And The Sustainable Development Goals

A Space For Citizen Participation Through Final Degree Projects: Promoting The 2030 Agenda And The Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract

In today's society, Sustainable Development Goals set a roadmap for our daily work, both educationally and socially. On this basis, this Educational Innovation project creates networks between students, teachers and entities, promoting an excellent scenario to connect academia with praxis. The overall objective of this work is to delve into the potential of the project from a polyhedral vision involving students, social organizations and lectures. Based on a qualitative perspective, the active participation of students, teaching staff and third sector organizations has been encouraged throughout the process. Likewise, the whole process has been documented through focus groups, automatic writing exercises and a systematic record of the work. The analysis of the documentation generated has been developed through a deductive-inductive categorisation of the information using NVivo (Windows) and Iramuteq (0.7 alpha 2) software. It is worth highlighting the markedly dialogical and participative nature of the methodologies

proposed for the development of the TFGs, as well as the process of coordination, systematization and evaluation of the entire innovation project. These findings allow us to corroborate some of the evidence provided by the scientific literature when it comes to pointing out the added value of pedagogical proposals such as Service-Learning or Research-Based Learning in Higher Education and more specifically in the framework of the development of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: participation; active learning; higher education; educational methods

Resumen

En la sociedad actual los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible marcan una hoja de ruta en nuestro quehacer diario, tanto a nivel educativo como social. Partiendo de esta base, este proyecto de Innovación Educativa crea redes entre alumnado, profesorado y entidades fomentando un escenario inmejorable para poner en relación el área académica con la praxis. El objetivo general de este trabajo es ahondar en las potencialidades del proyecto desde una visión poliédrica implicando a alumnado, entidades sociales y profesorado. Tomando como base la perspectiva cualitativa se ha fomentado la participación activa del alumnado, profesorado y entidades del tercer sector en todo el proceso. Asimismo, todo el proceso ha sido documentado a través de grupos focales, ejercicios de escritura automática y un registro sistemático de los trabajos. El análisis de la documentación generada se ha desarrollado a través de una categorización deductivo-inductiva de la información mediante los softwares NVivo (Windows) e Iramuteq (0.7 alpha 2). Los resultados destacan el marcado carácter dialógico y participativo que han posibilitado las metodologías propuestas para el desarrollo de los TFGs, así como del propio proceso de coordinación, sistematización y evaluación de todo el proyecto de innovación en su conjunto. Estos hallazgos permiten corroborar algunos de las evidencias que la literatura científica arroja a la hora de señalar el valor añadido de propuestas pedagógicas como el Aprendizaje - Servicio o el Aprendizaje Basado en la Investigación dentro de la Educación Superior y más concretamente en el marco de desarrollo de los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible.

Palabras clave: participación; aprendizaje activo; educación superior; métodos educativos

Introduction and objectives

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A space for citizen participation

Sustainable development is not a new concept, as it emerged in 2015 with the 2030 agenda and the promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Márquez *et al.*, 2021; Meira, 2015). This term has historically been linked to environmental sustainability and the economic development of countries, among others (Caride, 2017; Márquez *et al.*, 2021). It has also often been presented from a biased view from the West and from European centrism (Mejía *et al.*, 2021).

However, the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2015, 2020) marks a milestone as state and government authorities and representatives of various countries at the United Nations (UN) Assembly set out what should be priority development goals in the face of major global challenges.

There are many critical voices that refer, among other aspects, to the use of vague, non-specific and operational language in its drafting; to the lack of specific indicators on real impacts on communities and the planet; to the political rhetoric when in reality we know that these proposals often clash head-on with the prevailing free market; or to the lack of will for development or the repeated failure of the international community to comply with previous agreements and commitments (Gómez, 2018). Martínez and Martínez (2016) speak of "the existence of power asymmetries in the construction of the agenda in the multilateral sphere" and of the "direct result in this, limiting the incorporation of critical elements with transformative potential" (p.21). It should also be noted that the field of education does not escape these critical manifestations (Alonso-Sainz, 2021; Meira, 2015; Vázquez et al., 2020).

On the other hand, it is necessary to emphasise that this agenda is making it possible to open up processes through which ways of doing things can be rethought and initiatives that seek to work in the search for a better world can be set in motion, representing an important activator of civil participation (López, 2018), specifically in youth participation and, therefore, in university participation (Cebrián, 2019; Garrido, 2021). In terms of education, these goals are in line with the Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2018), which underlines the need to ensure and guarantee the right of all students to access, presence, participation and academic success. In this same sense, university students are embarking on various processes of dissemination and promotion of the 2030 Agenda (Arcos et al., 2018; Garrido, 2021; Miñano and García, 2020; Priegue and Sotelino, 2016). These processes, either from the curricular framework through pedagogical proposals such as Service-Learning (SL), Research-Based Learning (RBL), etc. or from university volunteering, represent an important training framework in line with what we can call the development of a curriculum (explicit and hidden) for Social Justice.

Methodologies for engaging and developing SDGs in higher education

Higher Education must be attentive to the challenges presented by an ever-changing society, challenges that the UN includes in the 2030 agenda (United Nations, 2015). To do so, it must be aware of the tools at its disposal, as well as its capacity to act and react to these challenges. Often they are found in narrow and overly bureaucratised frameworks (Muñoz, 2019; SDSN Australia/Pacific, 2017), which do not allow for the necessary flexibility, adaptation of content, method, etc. Some proposals in the international scientific literature and in various institutional documents refer to these aspects.

These are some of the methodologies:

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has its roots in European architecture schools of the 19th century, especially in Rome and Paris, and was incorporated into the educational field with the New School movement and the influence of Kilpatrick (Knoll, 1997; Imaz, 2015; Torrego and Martínez, 2018). This methodology encourages students to work on projects linked to real situations and various disciplines (Boss and Krauss, 2007; Bender, 2012).

Secondly, Challenge-Based Learning (RBL) focuses on confronting students with real environmental challenges, accompanied by resources and guides to implement solutions (TEC de Monterrey, 2020; Gezuraga and García, 2020; Rodríguez-Borges et al., 2021). A notable case is that of the University of Western Australia (Malmqvist et al., 2015) focusing on issues such as poverty and waste management.

Service-Learning (S-L), which fuses learning and community service, where students work on real needs to improve their environment (Puig and Palos, 2006), also falls within this framework. It stands out for its ability to actively involve students, encourage reflection, and build alliances for the implementation of projects (Martínez, 2018; Martín and Puig, 2017). One example is the project of the University of Burgos that promotes intergenerational interaction in local day centres.

On the other hand, Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) encourages students to design and implement research to answer questions within a specific field, always under the supervision of a research teacher (Malcom, 2014). There are different types of ABI, depending on the level of student involvement, as shown in the figure proposed by Peñaherrera et al. (2014).



Figure 1. ABI models based on student ownership (Peñaherrera et al., 2014, p. 208).

Finally, all these methodologies can be integrated into a *community engagement* model in the university context, given their capacity for *community engagement* within the university framework (Langworthy and Turner, 2003; Winston, 2015; UPM, 2020).

The GHrAL ODS3 project. A space for innovation, participation and contribution to the SDGs from the Final Degree Projects.

Final Degree Projects appear in the Higher Education scenario with Bologna (Gómez et al., 2018), this work is aimed at the application of the general competences associated with the degree, to enable students to search for, manage, organise and interpret relevant data, normally in their area of study, to make judgements that include a reflection on relevant social, scientific, technological or ethical issues, and to facilitate the development of critical, logical and creative thinking and judgement (BOPV, p. 6).

At the University of the Basque Country, specifically in the Bachelor's Degree in Social Education at the Faculty of Education of Bilbao (FEB), the TFG are assessed as works of 12 credits and 300 hours in different modalities, including research, intervention, creation and entrepreneurship (Faculty of Education of Bilbao, 2021). In this context, the educational innovation project "GHrAL ODS3" arises, focused on the relevance of addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in final degree projects in the field of Social Education.

This project seeks to:

- Consolidating collaboration between the ELF and social organisations focused on the SDGs.
- To explore new routes for action and engagement in the face of contemporary challenges in our society.
- Actively involve students in these dynamics.
- The emphasis on methodologies that promote hands-on learning, empathy towards the most vulnerable populations and the promotion of pro-social values stands out. The added value of these works lies in their unique ability to promote social engagement both inside and outside the university environment.

The GHrAL ODS3 project involved students and teachers from the FEB, specifically from the Degree in Social Education, and professionals from different social organisations in Vizcaya. With a duration of 18 months, the initiative has followed several stages detailed in table 1.

Table 1.

Phases of EIP development.

Moment	Actions
1. April 2020- September 2020: Design and Planning Phase	1.1. Establishment of a procedure for the development of the TFGs through the ABI and ABP methodology relating them to the SDGs. Faculty 1.2. Detection of needs to be addressed. Teachers and collaborating entities.
2. September 2020- October 2021: Implementation phase.	2.1. Selection of the research and research-intervention theme to be carried out based on the demands and needs related to the SDGs detected through: - The teaching staff -The professionals of the different collaborating organisations - Trainees. - Ongoing research in this area. 2.2. Contrast between teaching staff, students and collaborating entities with the aim of definitively specifying the subject matter, objectives and work schedule of the TFG Teaching Staff- Students-Collaborating Entities. 2.3. Initial evaluation through a focus group "what do we expect from this process, what do we project in it, how can we work...? Faculty, Students and Collaborating Entities 2.4. Group training on different topics (Methodologies, Ethics, Bibliographic searches...): Teaching staff, collaborating entities and students. 2.5. Fieldwork tutoring in subgroups (by subject) on each TFG. Faculty and students. 2.6. Individual tutorials for the development and completion of each TFG in the research or inquiry-intervention modality. Faculty and students.
3. June 2021- November 2021: Results Analysis Phase	3.1. Evaluative meeting - Focus group (achievement of learning objectives, achievement of collaboration objectives...). Teachers- Students- Collaborating Entities. 3.1.1. Transcription of the focus groups for subsequent analysis. Teachers - Students 3.1.2. Qualitative analysis 3.2. Drawing up the first teacher-student reports 3.3. Return to the social entity or organisation of the results in different formats (blog, talk, news...) Teachers- Students-

Collaborating Entities

4. September 2021- March 2022: Dissemination phase	4.1. Presentation of the TFGs at the UPV/EHU Student Congress. Faculty- Students- Collaborating Entities. 4.2. Presentation of scientific articles and papers at international conferences. Faculty- Students- Collaborating Entities.
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Source: own elaboration

The work carried out in this project has been developed within the framework of the ABProy (Al-Balushi and Al-Aamri, 2014) and ABI (Peñaherrera et al., 2014) methodologies. These methodologies have characteristics that facilitate the achievement of the project's objectives. Firstly, they place the students at the centre of the learning process, adopting a leading role in its development. Secondly, they work on the contents from real contexts, carrying out tasks that can be replicated in professional performance. In addition, both methodologies generate synergies between different disciplines present in their studies, developing connections between the learning done so far, and thus creating a global vision of what has been learned (Ayerbe and Perales Palacios, 2020).

In this context, the objectives of this work are the following:

- To highlight the potential of the project to generate spaces for participation.
- To make visible the strengths offered by some active methodologies within the framework of final degree projects.
- To deepen the achievement of the different SDGs addressed.
- Collect participants' evaluations of their participatory process.

Method

Methodology

In the process of the project, different data collection and analysis techniques have been carried out, all with a marked qualitative and dialogical character. The qualitative identity is reflected in the collection of data, as well as in its analysis, through processes that value all perspectives from a plane of equality of the research team (taking as a basis the construction of joint knowledge through dialogue with the participants (Gläser-Zikuda, 2020; Jorrín Abellán et al., 2021). In this way, the active participation of all agents in the process has been encouraged (Arandia et al., 2010; Díez-Gutiérrez, 2020; Ferrada, 2017).

Participants

In terms of the people participating in the project, we can distinguish 3 different profiles, all of them linked to the degree in Social Education. The student body is made up of 20 students in the final year of the degree who are studying the Final Degree Project (TFG). As for the teaching staff, there are 7 teachers who teach or have taught on the degree course and who have also directed a TFG of the students taking part in the project. The project has also counted on the participation of 4 social entities that actively collaborate in the students' work.

Access to participation in this project has been marked by belonging to the Degree in Social Education and by the willingness of teachers, organisations and students who wanted to collaborate in it, as a public invitation to participate was made and participation was voluntary.

Tools for information collection

Various tools were used in the information gathering process. Two focus groups were conducted, one at the beginning of the project in which the project objectives were determined, as well as the steps to be followed, and another one at the end of the project, thus being able to evidence the formative process of all the actors involved. The focus group script addressed five key questions related to (1) participants' knowledge about the SDGs; (2) expectations about the project; (3) personal/professional contributions to the project; (4) the detection of the value of the TFGs developed jointly between students-entities-university; and (5) the assessment of the initiative. In addition, all participants were invited to carry out an automatic writing activity in order to collect previous knowledge and establish a starting point on the SDGs. To this end, an initial question was posed to which the group had to respond: What do you expect from this project and its process of joint reflection? Based on the question posed, the participants were given 7 minutes to write.

Subsequently, data was recorded and extracted on participants, SDGs present in the projects and the preparation processes and methodologies used. In this sense, the students' Final Degree Projects were obtained, and the information relating to the project was extracted. Basically, the SDGs that were most worked on in each of the projects and the way in which they were related to the specific topic were recorded.

To conclude, a final *Focus Group* was organised in which the different parties were able to share their impressions of the overall process, as well as the details of each phase of the process. In addition, within this session, a joint reflection on the weaknesses, threats, strengths and opportunities (SWOT) that the project has offered could be made.

Table 2 summarises the tools used throughout the data collection process:

Table 2.

Tools for the collection and systematisation of information.

Tool	Target
Initial <i>focus group</i>	Presenting the project Gathering first impressions/expectations
Automatic writing	Knowing the starting point for understanding the SDGs
Job registration	Systematise information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of students • Number of teachers • Collaborating entities • SDGs to which contributions are made • Type of methodologies used
Final <i>Focus Group</i>	Sharing processes that we have worked on together Collect final impressions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDGs to which we have contributed • SWOT analysis of experience

Source: own elaboration

Analysis of the information

All the information was transcribed and subsequently analysed using Nvivo (Windows) and Iramuteq (0.7 alpha 2) software. With Nvivo (Windows), the information was analysed deductively and inductively. That is to say, on the one hand, a categorisation and analysis was proposed based on the theoretical review carried out, and on the other hand, emerging categories that emerged spontaneously in the discourses were incorporated (Dávila, 2006). In order to guarantee the consistency of the categorisation created, it has been reviewed by two researchers.

Specifically, four main categories have been defined: (1) Knowledge of the SDGs; (2) Awareness; (3) Involvement; (4) Shared processes. The categorisation used for the analysis of the collected discourses is presented below:

Table 3.

Categorisation used for the analysis.

Category	Definition
Knowledge about the SDGs	Participants' level of information on the SDGs before and after the project.

Awareness-raising	Awareness of the need to address the SDGs from an eco-social perspective.
Involvement	Involvement of different profiles (students, teachers, professionals).
Shared processes	Benefits of shared projects between the university and third sector entities.

Source: own elaboration

Furthermore, an analysis of the textual data was carried out using the Iramuteq software (0.7 alpha 2). In order to delve deeper into the discourses of the protagonists, different Tgen figures (forms or slogans that are treated together as a whole) have been created. The analysis of lexical similarity has been used to observe the interrelation of words, as well as the degree of relationship between them, since the rate of mutual approximation of words can be more or less significant (Chi-square test) (Camargo and Justo, 2013).

Results

With regard to the first objective, we must highlight the active participation of the three main axes on which the project is based: students, teaching staff and organisations. Specifically, 8 TFGs have been closely linked to the work carried out in various social entities in our environment, all of them under a study format, which reinforces the possibility of ABI (*Research Based Learning*).

Another 12 works have not been developed directly in collaboration with an entity, but they have been raised under the commitment of knowledge and contribution to the development of the SDGs, below, we collect some voices that value this aspect:

"I see it as very important to develop Final Degree Projects within Social Education from the perspective of the SDGs, weaving alliances between the academic and professional worlds" (Alum_13).

"It is a plus... to work in the field... so that the dissertation does not remain on a meaningless shelf. It can be very interesting, but it should be worthwhile in order to move forward, to contribute..." (Alum_10).

"Closeness to the social reality, collection of demands, strengths, weaknesses and needs more adjusted and specific" (Alum_6).

Likewise, in relation to the second objective, it has been confirmed in the different focus groups in which both students, teachers and organisations have participated, that the promotion of active learning methodologies promotes the understanding of the

SDGs and their incorporation as a roadmap in the different projects as an opportunity to create TFGs linked to praxis "to do our bit in this type of work that is necessary for students and that they can contribute by responding to real needs" (focus group _3). However, despite the fact that there is a feeling of ignorance and utopian belief in them, "at the organisation we have incorporated the SDGs linked to some of our projects, but nothing more. My level of knowledge is limited" (focus group_4), in the different focus groups, the need to create projects such as this one, in which the SDGs and networking between teaching staff, students and organisations are highlighted, was reinforced "The project is very positive. Otherwise the academic and professional realities would become increasingly distant" (focus group_4).

Similarly, and linked to the third goal, the different TFGs have responded to six SDGs, including: SDG 3, which refers to health and well-being; SDG 4, related to quality education; and SDG 17 linked to the generation of partnerships to achieve the goals (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Group reflection on the work of the SDGs in the different TFGs.

Likewise, in relation to knowledge about the SDGs, we can say that it has increased considerably over the course of the different sessions held. In the initial sessions there was a clear lack of knowledge about the goals and their relationship with Social Education: "GF4: NO, from the organisation we have incorporated the SDGs linked to some of our projects, but nothing else. My level of knowledge is limited". However, in the last sessions the perception changed. Here are some of the students' phrases on the subject: "It is closely related" (Alum_1), "One needs the other" (Alum_3), "Sustainability is the future" (Alum_2), "Awareness, coexistence and environment" (Alum_5).

In this same line, through the SWOT analysis carried out at the end of the project (see figure 3), it has been possible to observe the weaknesses, strengths and proposals for improvement. On the one hand, students value positively participating in new innovative projects that promote coordination between the Bachelor's Degree in Social Education and external agents. Carrying out the TFRs linked to third sector entities has provided students with experience in the field of Social Education at a training and direct intervention level, which has enriched their learning process and has fostered their commitment to the SDGs and the profession of Social Education. On the other hand, the weaknesses of the project have been identified. Above all, the pandemic reality and the teaching methodology and bimodal sessions have made it very difficult to maintain a fluid relationship with both the students and the collaborating entities. This has meant that some students are not motivated by the process and are not aware of the relationship between the SDGs and Social Education.

Finally, proposals for improvement include the need to create mini-research projects that motivate students regarding the need for research in the field of Social Education. As well as creating a broader network that involves more teaching staff, students and organisations with the aim of promoting the incorporation of the SDGs in teaching and professional practice (figure 3).

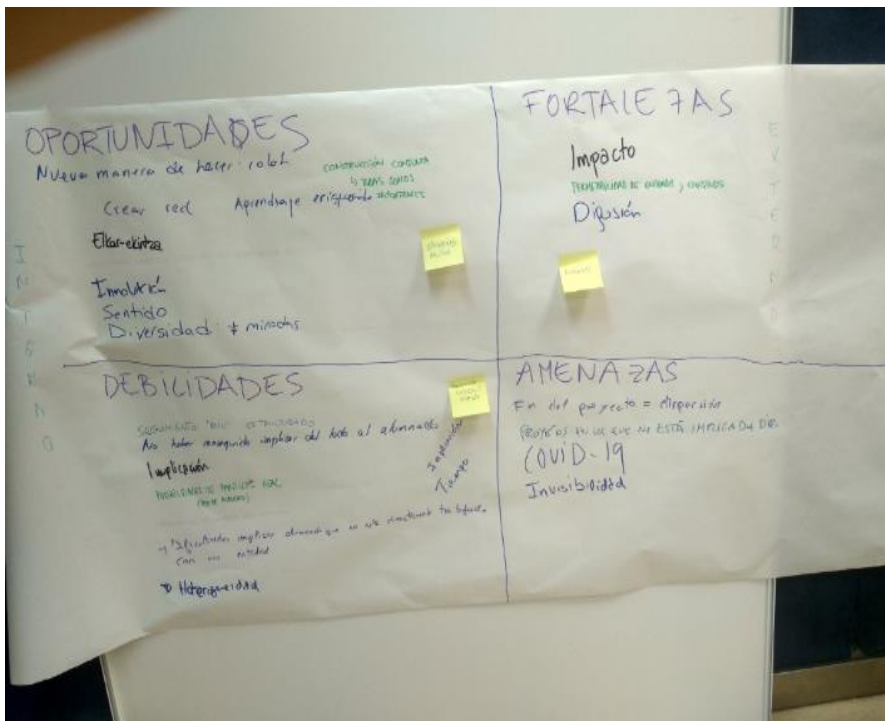


Figure 3. SWOT analysis of the experience

These ideas were reinforced in the automatic writing exercise in which the voices of the participants were explored in depth. In order to go deeper into the discourse of the participants, a Tgen was constructed with all the words (Figure 4).

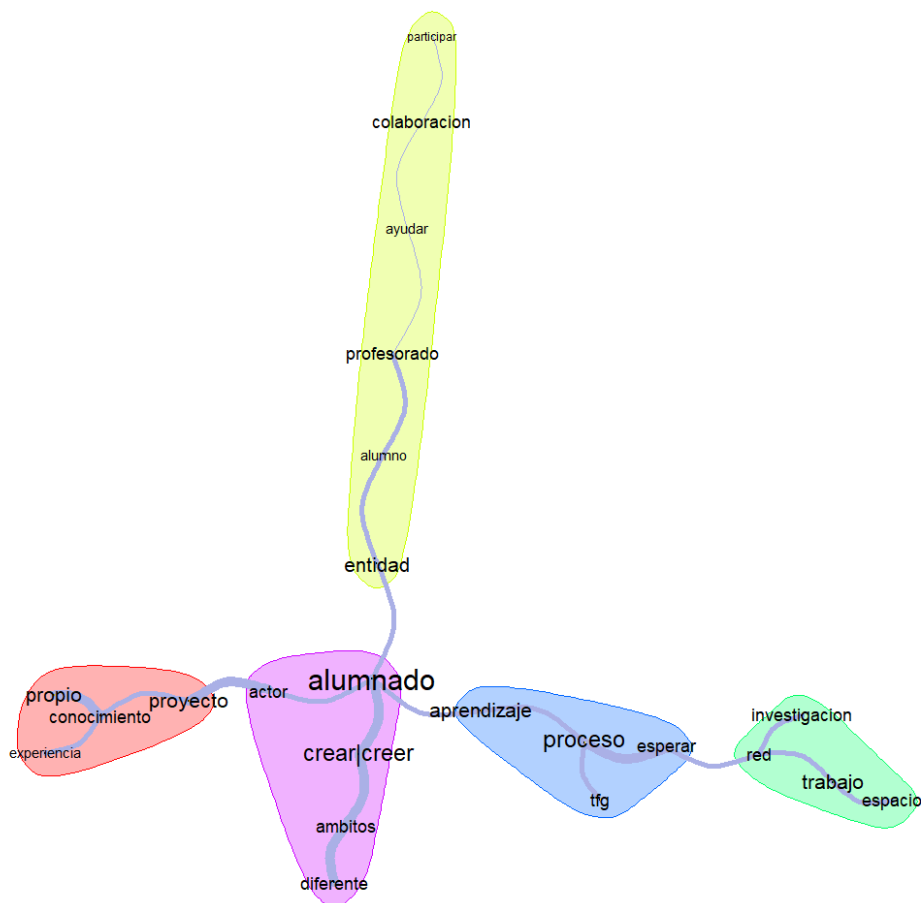


Figure 4. Results of the lexical similarity analysis created on the basis of the automatic writing texts.

From this analysis it can be seen how the participants focus on five key dimensions. On the one hand, it can be seen more clearly how the agents who participated place the students at the centre of the project as the main actors. In this way, the process experienced during the project is reinforced, giving special emphasis to the learning acquired and the TFGs carried out. Likewise, the process generates a networked space for learning and research between students, teaching staff and organisations. As can be seen in the image, the potential of the project stands out for the union of different areas of collaboration and help through which knowledge is generated.

Finally, different challenges for the future have been identified to enable the sustainability of the project and guarantee the continuity and involvement of all the agents, as shown in figure 3. Specifically, it is necessary for the teaching staff involved to continue to deepen the implementation of active methodologies in their teaching work. In this sense, it would be advisable to review the teaching guides of the different degree subjects involved in the project in order to introduce the relevant modifications in terms of content, methodology and assessment. With regard to students, it is necessary to generate tools that help them to participate and reflect continuously throughout the process. To this end, the possibility is proposed of introducing into the project the creation of a portfolio that collects their narratives and concerns. And with regard to the entities, it is necessary to continue reinforcing the alliances between university-entities to create common projects based on practice that have an impact on society. It also highlights the need to give greater visibility to the project in networks and other media to promote circles of inclusion.

Discussion and conclusions

The GHrAL ODS3 innovation project has proved to be a space for participation that has made it possible to make various contributions within the framework of the development of the 2030 agenda and in the meeting of various social and educational agents within the university-society.

We can corroborate the suitability of the methodologies used in responding to the challenges of modern societies. Project-Based Learning, through Challenge-Based Learning and Service-Learning, as well as Research-Based Learning, are powerful tools for bringing together learning and social engagement, as other studies point out (Gezuraga and García, 2020; Langworthy and Turner, 2003; Winston, 2015).

This type of work makes it possible to establish synergies, spaces for collaboration and joint generation of knowledge, giving meaning to the learning that is acquired in the Faculty on a day-to-day basis. This aspect is also highlighted by other authors (Martínez, 2018; Folgueiras et al., 2019; Martínez, 2018).

The joint work carried out between students, university teaching staff and organisations to improve the SDGs through active methodologies and the results obtained from this process are particularly relevant. Thanks to the aforementioned triangulation, as well as the methodologies used, students have managed to approach the SDGs in a more practical way and have become involved in real situations, contributing their knowledge as future social educators working towards a fairer and more equitable society. Along the same lines, the teaching staff focus their tutoring efforts on the Final Degree Projects, not only on their academic nature, but also on their social nature.

In particular, it is worth highlighting the approach to SDG 17 - Alliance to achieve the goals - where there is a special activation of the participation of various social agents,

in different spaces of citizen mobilisation, an aspect that is of special interest within the training of university students and within the commitments that the university in general, more specifically a public university, as is the case of the University of the Basque Country, has to acquire.

The systematisation we have carried out throughout the process and the results obtained have shown that most of the work carried out has concentrated on 6 SDGs, which makes us reflect on the need to make efforts to open up to other spaces for participation and collaboration.

This type of work, as we have seen, requires a significant level of involvement (Folgueiras et al., 2019; Mayor et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2021), a great deal of work to mesh between different cultures (academic - professional - associative) and a slow reflection on the principle of reality, in terms of the possibilities of participation of students, teachers and professionals of the entities, all of them agents that coexist in a framework of a multi-skilled society (Pérez et al., 2015).

However, the reflections, evaluations and learning generated throughout this project have encouraged us to continue strengthening this line of work, which will continue in the next 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 academic years through a project that will continue to focus on a markedly dynamic, horizontal, dialogical and participatory nature.

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