Implementing global citizenship education policy: The bargaining process of NGOs in some European Countries

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Abstract

This research looked at the growing space that Global Citizenship Education (GCE) is gaining in educational policy worldwide, and at the role Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) played in GCE agenda setting and policy implementation. Based on a comparative policy analysis carried out in 10 European countries, the political agency of NGOs was explored, underlining opportunities, tensions, and challenges, especially in their contribution to national strategies to integrate GCE into national educational systems.

Keywords: global education, comparative policy analysis, GCE national strategy, education for sustainable development, development education

Introduction

Within the last decade GCE has gained momentum worldwide in school practice and academic debate, and especially in Europe many national governments are introducing educational polices to integrate GCE into school curricula (Concord, 2018; Global Education Network of Europe [GENE], 2018). Likewise, an increasing number of studies on GCE conceptualizations have recently become available (Andreotti, 2006; Andreotti & De Souza, 2012; Gaudelli, 2016; Mannion et al., 2011; Oxley & Morris, 2013; Pashby, 2011; Peters et al., 2008; Sant et al., 2018; Shultz, 2007; Stein, 2015; Tarozzi & Torres, 2016; Torres, 2017), but only a few have considered the early attempts of implementing GCE policies by national governments. By examining complex and multilevel implementation processes of GCE policies, this article focused on the peculiar role played by one particular political actor: NGOs. For the purpose of this paper an NGO was defined as an organization which is structured at a national or international level (with a national branch), with social or political aims to address issues related to development assistance, environmental issues, sustainability, and human rights.

Drawing on selected results from a large piece of comparative research carried out in the framework of *Global Schools* (Global Schools, 2016), an EU co-funded project, this paper examined the function of NGOs as political actors, and their bargaining process in some EU countries. These are the negotiation processes by which they engage with other institutional and non-institutional political actors in promoting and enacting GCE education policy. Through a comparative examination, this article described and explicated the political role that NGOs have

played in some European countries, paying special attention to their involvement in the elaboration of national strategies.

This article argued that NGOs, civil society, and grassroots social movements played a crucial political role in widening the decision-making basis and brought critical voices from below into the global political arena. In particular, unlike governmental bodies such as Ministries, Departments, and National Agencies (Tarozzi & Inguaggiato, 2018), NGOs tended to be more adaptable, and able to reconcile the agenda of different political actors. In so doing, they had the potential to shape educational processes with regards to GCE. The political participation of civil society in decision-making processes in education was also important, as bottom-up approaches were more equitable and promoted democratic engagement. Nevertheless, to make this participation real and successful, NGOs were required to raise critical and independent voices, and to avoid being incorporated into the political agendas and procedures of governmental organizations.

According to Rizvi and Lingard (2010), educational policies cannot be regarded as a mechanical result of the political action of governments. Agenda setting, policy formulation, and implementation are always complex interactive and multi-layered processes, where several political actors intertwine their visions, ideologies, and agencies. Therefore, policy research provides an important viewpoint to inquiring GCE's understanding, by examining and contrasting visions and differing political assumptions and GCE conceptualizations as they emerge among the different actions of a variety of actors.

This article is structured in four parts: a) A brief outline of the contrasting visions in which the elusive concept of GCE is rooted, demonstrating the need for policy research to understand GCE's underlying ideologies; b) An introduction to the design and method of comparative research, comparing some models of GCE implementation in primary schools across ten EU countries; c) Analysis of select results, explaining, in particular, the political role of NGOs, their strengths and weaknesses, and especially their contribution to National Strategies to integrate GCE into educational systems; and d) Finally the results are discussed against the framework of academic debate regarding some critical issues in the role of NGOs as a global civil society.

GCE: Contrasting Visions and Conflicting Agendas in Europe

Although there is a long tradition of global education in Europe (Bourn, 2015; Davies, 2006; Davies et al., 2005; Dower, 2003; Heater, 2002; Pike & Selby, 1988), since the 2012 UN Global Education First Initiative the global dimension in education has been strongly promoted by the international community, in particular by the United Nations (UNESCO, 2014; 2015; Pashby, 2018), which supports initiatives worldwide to facilitate the circulation of a *framing paradigm* (UNESCO, 2014) across schools. More importantly, GCE is explicitly mentioned in target 4.7 of Agenda 2030, Sustainable Development Goals.

In the European context, following the well-established approach of global education, the GCE manifold container has had the merit of merging several themes under the same notion, or at least under the same vague and indefinite umbrella term, incorporating a number of topics such as: Environmental Education, Citizenship Education, Development Education (DE), and their related topics (Mannion et al*.,* 2011), as well as the global education tradition, which are regarded as

educational responses to global issues and current challenges such as migration; intercultural dialogue; human rights; and environmental and sustainability issues.

From a policy point of view, while no official policy to integrate GCE into European education systems exists, governments have added GCE to educational curricula (Goren & Yemini, 2017; O'Connor & Faas, 2012), but the forms that GCE has taken varied greatly (GENE 2017; Tarozzi & Inguaggiato, 2018). In Europe, the GCE antecedent of global education can be traced back to 1997 with the Global Education Charter, adopted by the Council of Europe (Georgescu, 1997). Afterward, it was only mentioned as a sub-item, until the Maastricht Declaration—embraced in 2002 by the Council of Europe, which represented a framework for a European strategy on global education (Forghani-Arani et al., 2013).

However, despite this increasing political prominence, GCE remains a highly contested notion (Hartung, 2017; Jooste & Heleta, 2017; Marshall, 2005). There are different and sometimes contrasting reasons underlying what Mannion (2011) and others defined as a "curriculum global turn" (p. 444).

On the one hand, there has been a growing wave of usage promoted by supranational agencies such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which has sponsored GCE in the framework of a neoliberal economic knowledge discourse (Ball, 2012). Here GCE was intended to form entrepreneurial citizens, able to navigate an increasingly interconnected global labor market (Camicia & Franklin, 2011). In this vein, GCE aimed to educate people for the global free market, with an emphasis on flexibility, free market thinking, and a belief in technological progress (Hartung, 2017; Schattle, 2009; Veugelers, 2011). On the other hand, there has been a more critical vision of GCE that emphasized equality and social justice as fundamental educational goals (Bourn, 2015; Davies, 2006; Jefferess, 2008, Tarozzi & Torres, 2016), or advocated for a post-colonial perspective (Abdi, 2015; Andreotti, 2006, 2011, 2015).

Such diverse views in the framing of GCE show that it is open to many different conceptual, political and educational interpretations (Gaudelli, 2016; Shultz, 2007; Torres, 2017), is addressing different goals, and is rooted in contrasting visions and political assumptions (Enns, 2015; Oxley & Morris, 2013; Stein, 2015; Veugelers, 2011). As a result, all these diverging standpoints reveal what claimed elsewhere that an overall global perspective in education cannot be regarded as neutral from an ethical or political perspective. GCE in particular cannot be considered as theoretically objective, politically neutral, and normatively apolitical (Tarozzi & Torres, 2016). This is not only because every educational practice is political per se (Freire, 1985), but also because some of its core concepts, such as globalization and citizenship, can be viewed from different and sometimes even opposing angles.

Comparing GCE Policies in 10 EU countries

Due to the multiple stances in which GCE can be rooted, to understand and compare education policies and different political actors requires a clear understanding of the different ideologies behind the general call for GCE, gained by looking at complex policymaking processes in national educational agendas. Moreover, while theoretical studies on GCE conceptualization have proliferated recently (Andreotti, 2011; Camicia & Franklin, 2011; Enns, 2015; Gardner-McTaggart, 2016; Mannion et al., 2011; Parmenter, 2011; Pashby, 2011; Salter & Halbert, 2017;

Veugelers, 2011), in Europe, empirical research on GCE educational policies is lacking (Goren & Yemini, 2017). Exceptions are few and these mostly relate to national case studies (Hartmeyer & Wegimont, 2016).

Not surprisingly, there are very few comparative policy analyses on the implementation of GCE policies across Europe. This may be because comparative research on complex and multi-level processes of policy agenda setting, formulation and implementation of public educational policies (Gunter et al., 2014) are difficult. However, it is clear that such research is surely essential to understand in a contextualized way a global concept that risks being misconceived as abstract, immaterial or reduced to naïve internationalism.

Due to the complexity of the political scenario, involving a number of powerful political actors—international, national and local governments, different ministries, NGOs and school authorities—this study does not focus on linear policy implementation (Hill & Hupe, 2002). Moreover, being aware of the controversially defined notion of *policy* in literature (Bacchi, 2009; Ball, 1990; Dye, 1992), in this research a policy has been considered in a processual way, as a comprehensive policy enactment (Braun et al., 2010) of ideas into practices encompassing various plans, programs, and guidelines.

Accordingly, without enough empirical evidence to reconstruct the multi-layered discourse (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) surrounding such a policy process, this analysis will focus on the political role of non-governmental political actors and the bargaining process between them and governmental actors. The rationale for focusing on NGOs is that this political agent emerges from the present analysis, as well as from other research (GENE, 2017) as key actors in the early attempts to implement GCE policies in the majority of EU countries.

Drawing from the three-year comparative policy analysis *Global schools*, this article addresses one of the research questions that has guided the thematic analysis, namely that which aims to explore who the main actors are, and their role in promoting or hampering the integration of GCE, by focusing in particular on the role played by NGOs. This research sample focuses on 10 European countries, which were partners of a co-funded Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) project. These countries cover various geographic and linguistic regions in Europe: Nordic/Baltic (Latvia), Central (Austria, Czech Republic), Eastern Europe (Bulgaria), Western Europe (France, UK, Ireland), and Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal) (Global Schools, 2016).

Results are grounded in two main sources of data:

1. Recommendatory and normative policy documents (186 documents from 10 partner countries, and 10 from supranational bodies such as the European Union or international institutions, i.e., UNESCO, OECD). Policy document synopses were compiled in English to sort policy documents originally written in several European languages, following a common coding scheme.

2. In-depth interviews with key informants; 10 policymakers (authors of documents, political executors of the education policy dispositive) and 10 practitioners (teachers, educators, principals) were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews sought to explore the

political debate related to GCE implementation into school curricula. Key informants were asked about the GCE enactment process, about the role of key political actors, and to understand the political discourse beyond the policy documents collected by researchers. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in the native language. An extended summary in English was circulated among researchers.

A report, named *Country's Policy Analysis* (CPA), was elaborated for each country, following an analytical scheme shared by the research team that was based on the policy documents and interviews. CPAs are national accounts describing the origin and development of global education, the ongoing policy agenda on GCE, and the role of diverse political actors in it. These reports served as a further source of comparative analysis.

An inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), carried out by two independent coders, was used to interpret data. Some coding procedures of the constructivist grounded theory approach (Tarozzi, 2020a; Charmaz, 2014) were used. Data were handled through NVivo, the software for qualitative data analysis. This software supported researchers in the initial coding process and in creating conceptual maps and diagrams based on theoretical coding. The inductive analysis followed the open coding procedures and it generated initial codes which were then grouped in larger themes and categories following the theoretical coding procedures.

Coding produced three macro-themes that were further conceptualized by developing their sub-categories and properties, as well as the conceptual links between them. The three macro-themes were: (a) *GCE conceptualization*: the ways in which this notion has been expressed through national terms and various adjectival educations; (b) Processes and *modes of translation* of GCE in primary schools, (c) positioning, functions and *bargaining roles of political actors*.

Since the role of the Ministry of Education (ME) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in the political process of policy formulation and implementation (Tarozzi & Inguaggiato, 2018) has been explored elsewhere, this research concentrated on the analysis of the last macro-theme, *bargaining roles of political actors*. This stream of research showed that one of the conditions for a successful policy enactment was a fruitful combination of a vertical dimension (policy coherence among all levels of government and political scales) with a horizontal one (active involvement of learning communities, networks, stakeholders).

In the following section, select results are presented by highlighting the political role of NGOs in promoting GCE policy and practice in two main fields. First outlining the NGOs' five main areas of engagement and achievement and, secondly, focusing on what emerged as their pivotal political role (i.e., the promotion of GCE National Strategies).

Results: The Political Role of NGOs

NGO Main Areas of Engagement

Research outcomes showed that at the time of data collection, only in Finland was GCE policy fully integrated with the primary school national curriculum. Since the 2014 reform, global education and global learning were integrated in a number of ways into the national core curriculum (Jääskeläinen & Repo, 2011).

Nevertheless, in many other European countries, NGOs played a role in the early attempts of GCE policy-making, especially in bottom-up National Strategies. Their role was recognized in all the CPAs, but was particularly evident in Latvia, Portugal, Spain, and England. Sometimes operating in close cooperation with institutional bodies (Austria), or in partial opposition (France, Bulgaria).

> The most active players and those who further development of the global education field in Latvia are from the NGO sector, and they are member organizations of LAPAS (…) that represent more than 30 member NGOs. (Latvia, CPA).

> Non-Governmental Development Organizations are the main actor in the field of DE in Portugal. (…) The main role of NGDOs in the introduction of GCE in formal education is due to their projects within schools, giving classes to the students but also doing teachers training and developing materials (…) There is also advocacy work that needs to be highlighted. (Portugal, CPA).

Comparative analysis indicated that ME and MFA were the fundamental political governmental actors for GCE implementation. However, they did not always cooperate significantly with each other or with other key stakeholders, including local authorities, higher education institutions, educational bodies, media, and, above all, NGOs. Therefore, the bargaining process between governmental and non-governmental organizations in enacting a global policy was one of the key issues for the effective translation of a policy agenda in the schools. "There are often rather tense relations between NGOs and the state authorities". (Bulgaria, CPA). "It is important to stress that despite NGOs' efforts there is not strong coordination between NGOs and the Italian Foreign Affairs Ministry." (Italy, CPA).

In particular, NGOs are fundamental political actors in the following five main areas of engagement and achievement:

1. Promoting New Sensitivity

Without NGOs, awareness on global issues may never have emerged in schools in some of the analyzed countries. It was NGOs who largely affirmed the term *Global Citizenship Education* (Austria, Czech Republic, Italy, Portugal). Elsewhere, they stimulated a move from the term DE to GCE (Italy), even though at an institutional level *DE* still prevailed in some countries, especially in the MFA language. Broadly, NGOs were commonly responsible for disseminating a new sensitivity about these issues in the school context.

> Many initiatives to introduce GCE lessons and activities in primary school are developed and implemented by NGO's. Resources, lessons, activities and support material is available incorporating themes such as: DE, sustainability and climate change, intercultural education and human rights. (Ireland, CPA).

In general, NGOs brought GCE or DE from the margins to the mainstream of the education discourse. This was perhaps not surprising, as the term was traditionally owned by NGOs and spreading it could also be seen as a way for them to raise their profile, to communicate their message, and to consolidate their ability to conduct fundraising and advocacy.

2. Advocacy and Lobbying

NGOs built national and regional platforms to spread information, resources, and good practices across some of the countries. Namely, national examples of this can be found in Portugal (Platform

of Development NGOs), Spain (CONGDE), France (Educasol), Latvia (LAPAS), and the Czech Republic (Global Development Education and Awareness Work Group of the Czech Forum for Development Cooperation). However, there were also European umbrella networks such as CONCORD and Bridge 47. Since they were organized in platforms, they cooperated and lobbied at the national level (Italy), advocated (Portugal, Spain, Czech Republic), and embodied a bottom-up political approach (Portugal, France); and they also stimulated awareness-raising and critical understanding of global issues (Spain).

3. Teacher Education

In most of the analyzed countries, NGOs provided continuous professional development for teachers (Austria, England, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain); initial teacher education (Austria, Bulgaria), teachers' support (Ireland, Italy, Portugal), or teacher *concienciación* according to a Freireian approach (Spain).

4. Innovative School Activities

NGOs also directly carried out activities with children, usually involving both teachers and students, in a range of projects and activities (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Ireland, Portugal); they provided active, transformative, experiential, socially-relevant and learner-centered pedagogies (England).

5. Creating and Circulating Teaching Materials

Additionally, NGOs prepared and disseminated guidelines, lesson plans, activity descriptions, and support materials (Latvia, Portugal); rewarded the best programs (England); collaborated on the preparation of official materials (Czech Republic); and translated and adapted pedagogical materials and educational resources (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Italy), for formal and informal education (Latvia).

Unlike institutional bodies, flexibility and adaptability allowed NGOs to bridge the gaps between diverse actors, and, in particular, to disseminate the concept and practices of GCE among them by combining the agenda of different governmental institutions. Significantly, this has often seen them assume a strategic role in promoting and supporting the creation of multi-stakeholders National Strategies, as clearly recognized by an Austrian policy-maker:

> NGOs are an important bridge to the practice. They support teachers; their materials and experience are widely used. It is positive that they are well represented in the Strategy Group. They are partners on the same level. (Austria – Interview 1).

NGOs and GCE National Strategies

Aside from their advocacy and lobbying role, one of the NGOs' major areas of engagement was related to their impact on the political sphere and, in particular, to their efforts in promoting a National Strategy on GCE or DE (Austria, Latvia, Portugal, Czech Republic) involving multiple actors, thanks to their aptitude for networking between different actors. This could be regarded as a sixth area of engagement, since in four of the analyzed countries NGOs played a crucial role in promoting GCE National Strategies.

National Strategies are shared agendas for a durable GCE vision aimed at ensuring structural support, constant funding, coordination, and policy coherence. Many supranational bodies, such as UNESCO or some European agencies, like Global Education Network of Europe, have recently invited and supported national governments in adopting such strategies.

These strategies were usually supported by the MFA, in cooperation with other ministries (particularly ME, but also Ministry of Environment). At the time the research was conducted, among the countries studied, some form of strategy existed in Austria, Czech Republic, Portugal, Ireland, Latvia, and Spain, but there were also strategies in Finland, Germany, Poland and Slovakia and, subsequently, in Italy. In most cases, NGOs have played an important role in the process of building a National Strategy, but the level of involvement depended on the type of strategy. There were indeed different forms of strategy, based on their *ownership* (Hartmeyer & Wegimont, 2016). Consequently, our analysis showed that National Strategies can be placed along a continuum of stakeholder engagement, from an extreme bottom-up approach (with a key role for NGOs) to another extreme represented by ministerial or multi-ministerial ownership (see Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of the National Strategies in the Countries Examined

Country Examined	Promoting Actor	Year of Issuing	Strategy Topic	NGOs' Role
Austria	Ministry of Education/ Ministry of Foreign Affairs	2009	Global Learning	Influential
Portugal	NGO Platform	2010	Development Education	Influential
Czech Republic	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	2011	Global Development Education	Advisory
Ireland	Ministry of Education (Department of Education and Skills)	2014	Education for Sustainable development	Advisory
Spain	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	2007	Development Education	Advisory
Latvia	NGO	2008	Development Education	Key, but unsupported by governmental organizations
Italy	NGO and Local authority	2018	Global Citizenship Education	Key, but unsupported by governmental organizations

The NGOs' bargaining role was especially visible in bottom-up multi-stakeholder National Strategies. These enhanced an effective collaboration between diverse political actors, including government (ministries or national agencies), civil society organizations, local authorities, expert groups, and educational institutions (school and university). Examples of these highly collaborative, multi-stakeholder National Strategies could be found in Austria and in Portugal. In Austria, the *Global Learning Strategic Group* comprised both the ME and MFA working side by side with NGOs, and some Pedagogical Colleges. In 2009 this multi-stakeholder working group issued the *Global Learning Strategy* (the Austrian Strategy for Global Learning in the Austrian education system). The ME chaired the group, while MFA provided financial support, even to NGOs. In Portugal, a National Strategy for DE (2010-2015, renewed and re-launched with a new action plan in 2018) has been promoted by a *Strategic Group*, composed by Camões, the former Portuguese Institute for Development Assistance, the Directorate-General for Education (part of the ME), the Portuguese NGO Platform, and Centro de Intervenção Para o Desenvolvimento Amílcar Cabral, an NGO and member of GENE. Here, the main promoter of the whole process was civil society, through a platform of NGOs. In this case, civil society took the initiative more effectively than in Austria, then state actors followed up by taking over lead of the process.

Additionally, a National Strategy for *Global Development Education* has been issued by the MFA in the Czech Republic which incorporates all the major stakeholders including state ministries (ME and Environment), NGOs, the Council for Foreign Development Aid, the Council for Sustainable Development, the Czech Development Agency, and some education and research institutions such as the body conducting school inspections. This working group coordinated all the actors' activities related to the development and application of the strategy across the country.

In Spain, in 2007 the Dirección General de Planificación y Evaluación de Políticas para de Desarrollo [General Direction for Evaluation and Planning of the Development Politics] of the MFA issued the *Spanish Strategy for Cooperation and Development Education*. This document was created through a highly participative process involving the State, the autonomous communities, local authorities, NGOs, universities, trade unions, and enterprises.

A particularly interesting case is Ireland, where after the 2007 *Development Education Strategy Plan* by Irish Aid (an agency of MFA), the ME (Department of Education and Skills), has issued two National Strategies, namely on Education for Sustainable Development (2014) and Intercultural Education (2010), working with key national institutional stakeholders, including two major umbrella associations: Irish Development Education Association and the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organizations.

Bottom-up multi-stakeholder initiatives that are less supported by governmental institutions, and therefore less impactful in schools, could be seen in Latvia and Italy. In Latvia, civil society promoted the multi-stakeholder *Development Education Guidelines* (for the years 2008-2015) for spreading global education initiatives in both formal and informal sectors. In Italy, a *National Strategy for Global Citizenship Education* was discussed in 2017 by a multi-stakeholder group chaired by a representative of local authorities and a NGOs' platform. The document was approved in early 2018 by the National Council for Cooperation and Development, an advisory body of the MFA, immediately before the national elections which led to a change of political majority.

There is evidence of the positive effect of the adoption of a National Strategy on a country's policy, whether it be a protocol, an agreement or a formal strategy, in particular in teacher education, funding projects, and awareness-raising. However, these various forms of strategies can only be effective on the condition that there is a real and symmetrical dialogue between governmental organizations, with wide stakeholder buy-in and a long-term phased implementation strategy that is economically sustainable. Nevertheless, the strategies examined in this study barely cover a timeframe of medium to long term. Longer strategies are preferable as they are less affected by political change and provide a more stable financial foundation. In the analyzed countries, strategies last about 5 years on average: Five years in Austria (2009-2014), four in the Czech Republic (2011-2015), and six years in Ireland (2014-2020).

In summary, the NGOs' role is significantly relevant for several reasons. First of all, unlike institutional organizations, NGOs' structures and procedures are generally more open to change and structurally flexible. Moreover, they often introduce new ideas, critical voices, and innovative approaches into the national political arena. This is particularly relevant when they can include voices from the Global South, given their traditional commitment to supporting these communities (Bourn, 2015). Finally, in bringing together the agenda of different political actors, they effectively contribute to creating links between different actors and diverse topics. For all these reasons, their

active participation in the GCE national policy-making process is a sign of the political inclination to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach for the governance of global education policies at the national level.

However, some challenges also emerge both from the data analysis, and from the literature, in the political role played by NGOs at the national and global level that cannot be concealed. In the following section, some criticisms of the NGOs' role, taken from the literature, are discussed in relation to the research results.

Discussion: Challenges for NGOs

In the last decade, a wide debate has questioned the political role that NGOs, especially international ones (INGO), as well as many other civil society organizations, can play in bringing civil society's voice into the educational policy debate and global decision-making processes (Fogarty, 2011; Kamat, 2004; Martens, 2006). Therefore, the five main areas (see section NGO Main Areas of Engagement) of engagement and achievement in promoting GCE highlighted above have been prominently questioned**.** In particular, their role in advocating for a political strategy to implement GCE, constantly negotiated with other political actors, has been questioned.

As further expanded on Tarozzi (2020b) study, this section discusses the main criticisms of the bargaining role of NGOs in enacting GCE policy, in the light of research results, and the literature on the political responsibility of NGOs as a *new global civil society* (Kaldor, 2003; Castells, 2008) generated by globalization processes in a cosmopolitan democracy (Archibugi & Held, 1995; Archibugi, 2008). After addressing criticisms of the controversial role of NGOs in promoting new sensitivity and advocacy and lobbying (areas 1 & 2), tensions with the school system in promoting innovative educational value-based approaches (area 4) will be examined.

The Controversial Advocacy Role of NGOs

NGOs' role in (transnational) educational policymaking has been increasingly regarded as controversial (Berry & Gabay, 2009; Bourn & Kybird, 2012; Tota, 2014). In particular, Lang (2013) warned about the risks of the *NGOisation* of social movements and civil society, resulting in a depoliticization of their agency and practice. Tota maintained that the inclusion of international NGOs in transnational political spheres could be regarded as a source of legitimacy for global institutions "in the dimensions of morality, legality, technical competence, democracy, and charismatic leadership" (Tota, 2014, p. 94). From a different viewpoint, Standish (2012) criticized NGOs' value-based education for promoting their own agenda, perspective, and worldview, or for securing additional income, communicating information, and key messages about their activities (Bourn & Kybird, 2012).

More recently, the social perception and media representation of NGOs has been dramatically embittered, exasperated by their commitment to, for example, rescuing migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean Sea, a narrative that is often instrumentally exploited by sovereigntist governments. An emblematical example of this can be found in a survey conducted in 2019 in Italy, which demonstrated that trust in NGOs has dropped from 80% in 2010 to 39% in 2019 (Pagnoncelli, 2019). However, this research does not provide enough evidence to support the

above criticisms, and its author firmly disapproves of the instrumental criticisms recently raised against NGOs' actions, and their criminalization for their actions in favor of refugees and migrants.

The controversial advocacy role of NGO is also highlighted by researchers' reflective accounts who confirmed that NGOs sometimes risk isolation and demonstrate tendencies towards self-reference. Some data showed that they have their own strong ethical and values framework, and this vision does not seem to be negotiable. This well-established ethical identity could therefore undermine their above- mentioned ability to negotiate values, ideas, and approaches with different actors. However, this important issue would require further research.

The data also highlighted the risk that activities and projects could sometimes be selected because they boost the organization's visibility. As one NGO activist sincerely claimed, the current global *edu-business* (Ball, 2012) constantly requires NGOs to raise funds, and some areas are more suitable for this purpose than longer-term educational projects (Weber, 2014).

> I think it just would come down to the sort of very boring practical element of time, and everyone is so busy chasing funding to be in existence in six months, that I think the things that do go fairly quickly are the presence of big platforms, especially if you've got to fund yourself to get there or to start having more advocacy roles that don't maybe set outcomes that you could then report back on… (UK, NGO activist).

Another potential challenge for NGOs' independent advocacy role was their dependence on public funds. Being typically supported by a MFA's funds, their independence is often threatened. Here, an English NGO activist mirrored Bourn & Kybird's (2012) claim that NGOs tend towards accepting rather than questioning governmental development policy:

> So, I think in a freer funding environment, many more interesting projects come out and people are less driven to just look after their own - but of course they do because they need to pay the building rent and everything and make sure they've got full costs recovery on all the projects they undertake" and "Somebody I heard called it *mission drift*. Wherever the funding is, we do that, and then suddenly now actually we do this, and I think it means that it's destabilizing. (UK, NGO activist).

Furthermore, a Czech teacher clearly demonstrated her negative feelings about the motivation for NGOs getting involved in teacher education programs: "I feel like they often just want to get money." (Czech Republic, teacher).

Moreover, NGOs, especially as global civil society, have been criticized for softening their critical voices (Tota, 2014), for depoliticizing global governance (Jaeger, 2007), or even for becoming accomplices to a hegemonic drive to *civilize* less developed countries (Berry & Gabay, 2009), and to promote a vertical form of global citizenship (Shukla, 2009). Although there was no evidence in the data set supporting these criticisms, which were probably less evident on a national scale and within EU countries, these shortcomings should be taken seriously into account since they could provide food for thought to civil society organizations.

However, within a national political sphere, it was evident that local NGOs are more recognized in the local community, considered as reliable partners in the public political sphere, and regarded as an agent of democracy (Kamat, 2004) and participation, even when they introduced a global outlook, and a sensitivity toward the Global South, into national policy debate.

Tensions With School Pedagogical Culture

This study's results do provide clear evidence on the issue of the fluctuating relationship between NGOs and school pedagogical culture in promoting an innovative values-based approach in teacher education and school activity. Following other studies that demonstrated the nature and consequences of the interaction between NGOs and schools serving communities of diverse social backgrounds (Yemini et al., 2018), this research confirmed that NGOs' flexibility in some cases facilitated the dialogue with school staff. An Italian teacher observed:

> My experience taught me that NGOs also know how to network, how to carry out projects together and I believe that we have a high and profitable level of collaboration with them. Of course, to be able to work even better, they have to be supported; supported mostly by national governments. With local authorities, in my opinion, the dialogue has worked better. (Italy, teacher interview 3).

Due to their constitutive attention to reducing global poverty and supporting Global South communities, INGOs brought an unprecedented far-reaching global outlook into school practice and a new commitment to fighting economic inequalities. Moreover, in education, INGOs, which have been producing DE programming since the late 1950s (Weber, 2014), introduced into formal education untraditional learning approaches that were more transformative, participatory, and critical.

However, in carrying out school activities, different perspectives, worldviews, beliefs or even contrasting cultures among stakeholders' cultures appeared. NGOs risked overemphasizing affective and ethical dimensions while paying less attention to the cognitive dimensions, (Marshall, 2005) and to knowledge and skills (Scheunpflug & Asbrand, 2006).

Those transformative and critical pedagogies aimed at securing global social change through empowerment, democratic engagement, and a strong values base around equity, human rights and social justice (Bourn, 2015) quite often produced potential (or actual) conflicts and tensions among traditionally politically-neutral teachers, as observed by another Italian teacher who asserted "NGOs educators do not have real experience in school activities and adequate preparation in teaching methods". This divide was less related to differing conceptualizations of GCE than it was to different pedagogies and teaching approaches. Another teacher remarked that NGOs activists "should not substitute teachers in class".

Conclusion: Theoretical and Practical Implications

The research on which this contribution draws has investigated the *emerging* process of GCE implementation in educational policy (data were collected in 2015-2016). Such a process depicted a very fluid situation that is rapidly changing, under different and sometimes contrasting forces. On the one hand, emerging nationalisms across Europe tend to contradict the global dimension in citizenship education and foster a national civic educational perspective; on the other hand, supranational governmental bodies and the *Agenda 2030* put some pressure on national governments to introduce a global dimension in formal education, through a variety of means, which are at times institutionally-driven and at times driven largely by local initiatives. Everywhere, this latter policy agenda encompasses multi-layered processes, including many powerful political agents—supra-national, national (with different ministries), local authorities, NGOs, higher education institutions, and school authorities. In this scenario, NGOs, and more

generally Civil Society Organizations, played a vital role in the early attempts to implement GCE in national educational policies across Europe.

Comparative research across the EU shows that NGOs have played a pivotal role in five main areas of engagement, and especially in establishing multi-stakeholder national strategies encompassing various actors (GENE, 2017; Tarozzi & Inguaggiato, 2018). In playing their crucial bargaining role among different political actors they contributed to widening the decision-making basis and bringing grass-root movement voices into the political debate. Being institutionally and organizationally more flexible than governmental bodies, they were in the best position to negotiate and to create connections between different key actors such as various ministries, local authorities, universities, and school communities.

Moreover, from a practical viewpoint, even if in promoting school activities and circulating teaching materials, sometimes tensions emerged between NGO activists and school staff, NGOs engaged traditionally politically neutral teachers in introducing untraditional learning approaches and in raising voices committed to value-based approaches. While this cooperation was a valuable driver of innovation in school practice, this transformative approach also created conflicts with traditional school staff. Therefore, NGOs' educators should be careful not to become trapped in self-referencing isolation, instead ensuring that they remain open to understanding school learning environments and their unique features and constraints. To keep the dialogue open, both NGOs and school staff should make every possible effort to conciliate tensions and conflicts which may arise from diverse theories, visions, and pedagogies. Research pointed out the need for a more holistic and multi-stakeholder approach, encompassing the cooperation between different political actors and in particular the need to bridge the gap between NGOs and school staff.

In summary, NGOs' role is critical in education policy agenda setting, formulation, and implementation, as they can promote a collaborative agenda and close the gap between political actors separated by different aims, procedures, but also by different languages and bureaucracies. To do so, however, NGOs need to challenge their potential isolation and self-referencing, defend their cultural independence, and overcome tensions which could undermine their ability to build fruitful alliances with teachers as agents of change.

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