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Community Development through Summer Camps

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Introduction

Summer camps are widespread in many countries and have a long history. Their contribution to children's and young people's leisure and recreation is widely acknowledged, as is their usefulness as an educational resource. That large numbers of children and young people across Europe attend summer camps is well-known; according to Eurofound (2020), most of the twenty-seven countries analyzed record student attendance at camps, and in twelve countries (including Spain) over 50% of young people take part. However, another study carried out in the member countries of the European Union (Plantenga & Remery, 2017) stated that when the availability, use, and quality of this service was assessed, it was seen that out-of-school services lacked structure and quality. Despite being an especially important and relevant topic in political discourses and international organizations, most countries do not define the service clearly and precisely (OECD, 2011).

According to Eurofound (2020), many European states centralize their planning of educational leisure at national level, including the laws and decrees that underpin how these activities are organized. But camps are implemented locally, and municipalities play a significant role in designing and providing this leisure activity, both during the year and during holiday periods. Coinciding with previous publications (Eurofound, 2007), the formula for success was to be found in public-sector support, community involvement, integration between services and spaces, and the inclusion of minorities.

Improving the quality of summer camps and access to them requires local community policies. The municipal policy, which is a policy of proximity to families, must also address summer camps. Some children and adolescents can access private camps or community-based initiatives, but in many cases, this offer is insufficient, and many families cannot afford them.

This work focuses on Catalonia, a territory in Spain with extensive experience and a long history of organizing these services during the summer months. Beyond private initiatives, the public administration—mostly local—has been meeting the need to offer camps in the summer (when schools are closed). The objective is to guarantee the continuity of educational actions for all children during the holiday period, and at the same time offer a service to many families that cannot care for or accompany children during the school holidays (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2020). This context and opportunity frame this work.

This article aims to establish and validate some basic principles to guide the deployment of what summer camp offers from a perspective of municipal public policy. To this end, we made a case study of the experiences of one municipality as a strategy to investigate more thoroughly the effects and educational opportunities of summer camps.

The Socioeducational Potential of Summer Camps

There are several domestic and international frameworks and regulations that emphasize children's and adolescents' right to educational leisure as well as its value. In fact, only the public sector can guarantee the nondiscriminatory provision of basic services, especially those that should be available to all.

The Educational Contribution of Leisure

Educational leisure favors the development of personal dimensions and life skills. The work carried out by Marzo et al. (2019) demonstrated the positive effects on competences—such as learning to learn, social and civic skills, initiative, entrepreneurship, decision-making, problem-solving, flexibility and teamwork—besides significant improvements in mathematics, language, and other academic skills. Moreover, evaluations of the programs showed that educational leisure can boost a student's academic progress by two months, especially in language skills, compared to the average academic progress of students in a typical school year (González, 2019). Along the same lines, the Wallace Foundation's experience with the National Summer Learning Project (Browne, 2019) concludes that summer learning can and should be part of year-round work. Thus, it helps reduce opportunity and achievement gaps between children and young people from different family income levels. Research in the United States points toward academic improvement in children and young people when they participate in leisure activities, and especially if they do so throughout their schooling (Crosnoe et al., 2015). The work of Patočková et al. (2022) also concludes that a student's participation in leisure activities positively affects subsequent performance, although it clarifies that the activities must be intellectually stimulating.

The case of Portugal is especially paradigmatic, with improvements in PISA results—world reference indicators in the achievement of basic skills—and a radical reduction in course repetition and dropout rates (Fialho, 2013). In 2020, the Curricular Enrichment Activities (AEC) program was implemented in almost all of the country's state schools, ensuring that students—especially vulnerable ones—had access to an evening educational offer complementary to daytime school education.

Evidence of the effectiveness of summer camps for young people with special needs was also observed. Flynn et al. (2019), suggested there are improvements at the social, emotional, and behavioral levels, and participating in a summer camp youth program can reduce social isolation, provide a sense of social and community belonging, and improve self-esteem.

Although this learning cannot solely be attributed to leisure education, it is certain that this educational framework provides a privileged context for comprehensive, experiential, and intensive learning. In this sense, the work of Richmond et al. (2019) on identifying learning highly attributable to attendance at summer camps showed that the very nature of the camps helps students accept differences and be more present, independent, persevering, and responsible. Several studies have shown that summer camps contribute positively to a young person's social and emotional environment (Wilson & Sibthorp, 2018; 2019).

Leisure Education in the Community

Numerous international studies provide evidence of the value of extracurricular activities for learning and for improving areas such as social cohesion or conciliation (Nagaoka et al., 2015; Afterschool Alliance, 2016; Peterson, 2013). Also, the Network for Youth Success' (n.d.) afterschool programs identify results attributable to activities in areas such as academic success, the prevention of obesity, or the reduction of crime rates. Yuen et al. (2005) explored how participating in these leisure activities fosters social capital and a sense of community based on the experience of an international camp.

Informal practices and participation in leisure-time activities and volunteering were identified as factors that prevent exclusion (Walsh et al., 2014), as they allow participants to build a community and contribute to increasing social cohesion (Palasí, 2019; Novella et al., 2014). At the same time, in Catalonia, the reasons that educational leisure contributes to the activation of citizen networks have been identified (Morata & Garreta, 2012). Catalonia offers programs that are close and connected to the territory, promote culture and diversity in the community, and generates community spaces that are approachable and accessible to citizens.

Implementation Approaches in Summer Camps

Ripoll et al. (2019) pointed out that rethinking community education projects from a broad perspective involves taking into account four dimensions: (1) equality, (2) high-quality personalized pathways, (3) networking and connection between school and nonschool hours, and (4) the development of the community's potential through governance. To succeed, we must make summer camps a primary municipal policy and base them on these four principles.

Summer Camps and Equity

For many years, free time has been enriching education and culture for the middle class and families that enjoy a certain level of education. A lot of evidence supports this; if public bodies do not offer specific proposals to those who cannot afford it (or do not see the need for it), inequality increases. For example, in Catalonia, the ombudsman (Síndic de Greuges de Catalunya, 2019) denounced that opportunities to access educational leisure were not available to all children, nor were they of the same intensity and quality. These inequalities of access are related to territorial inequalities of educational leisure availability, and therefore require that the administration promote local plans to boost educational leisure, especially in municipalities with socially disadvantaged areas. Another example was found in an extensive qualitative study in nine European and Canadian countries with a sample of over fifty-thousand young people (Badura et al, 2021). In this study, a strong correlation was identified between participation in educational leisure (leisure-time activities) and socioeconomic well-being.

It is therefore necessary to ensure educational leisure is not only offered to specific groups because they have economic or cultural resources or because they lack them. In this regard, analyses such as those by González (2019) show the more that leisure is determined by families' economic capacity, the greater the risk of it reproducing social inequalities. Baker and Hannant-Minchel (2022) drew attention to gender roles in these activities and the need to critically consider them. There are also matters such as a lack of information, a lack of valuation, or the perception of usefulness. In all cases, we must detect and eliminate barriers to summer camps, and facilitate conditions for existing leisure to become a space where diverse social profiles can coexist.

To guarantee equity and quality, ensuring diversity is essential. In this regard, Iglesias and Espona (2017) proposed measures such as flexibilizing enrollment, facilitating payment, considering sociocultural diversity in the educational team itself, presenting educational projects in schools and also in the public space, or offering specific training in interculturality to teams. According to an ExpandED Schools report (2013), there is a gap of six-thousand hours of learning between children from vulnerable environments and their middle-class companions. Of these six-thousand hours, about 1,080 hours are related to summer leisure activities.

Summer Camps and Quality

To achieve quality in educational leisure and carry out effective programs, it is important to highlight the importance of connecting summer learning with the rest of the year's studies. We therefore go deeply into the value and educational potential of summer activities to reinforce and compensate for a significant part of academic learning and skills, and ask administrations to implement specific policies (McCombs et al., 2019). However, since the case of Summer Programs in the United States, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires schools and districts to adopt evidence-based programs when programs are federally funded (Public Act 114-95, 2015). Oncescu and Fortune (2022) also went deeply into this matter and analyzed how municipal professionals handle access to recreational activities for families with few resources.

In Sweden, for example, by law leisure or out-of-school centers are integrated into the country's education system and are controlled and monitored by the Ministry of Education and Science. This approach ensures that summer camps are explicitly commissioned to offer stimulating recreational and leisure activities for children, along with other more academic ones. They must also be connected to schools' compulsory curricula since the summer camps' quality criteria are consistent with the objectives of the national curriculum. Integrating them into the educational system and, consequently, with the educational laws of a territory, can favor quality criteria in learning objectives (Lager, 2019). The Swedish case is relevant because this integration took place in 1998, and despite the different economic crises, discursive discrepancies, and cuts, the camps are currently an example of a successful connection between school and social learning. Educational leisure is perceived from a single point of view, and all children between the ages of 6 and 13 have the chance to participate since the activities are generally institutionally part of the school. These approaches are accompanied by evidence that the complementary and compensatory role favors equity in childhood (Hjalmarsson & Odenbring, 2020). For decades, German-speaking countries (i.e., Germany, Austria, and Switzerland) have been committed to full-time education that takes into account educational leisure and integrates it into their schools. In particular, the quality factors that can be evaluated to access state funding are related to the type of management, the link between curricular classes and the activities offered, the culture of learning and interdisciplinary cooperation, and the participation of students and their families, among others (Samper, 2018).

Each of the experiences and examples mentioned above are aspects to consider when assessing the quality of summer camp programs or proposals. In what we consider to be quality summer camps, camp proposals or initiatives must meet most of these attributes: stimulating activities, connection of school and leisure learning, evidence of the depth-of-learning, inclusive access, careful evaluation systems, adequate funding, trained educators, provision for the participation of children and their families, and so forth.

Summer Camps and Networking

Networking in this area is based on the principle that learning on nonschool time favors school learning and vice versa. Consequently, the work process must be developed throughout the academic year. Ripoll et al. (2019) discussed this connection between school time and holiday time, and they identified success factors such as strong and stable leadership, the establishment of a common project, the existence of monitoring and evaluation tools, or the pedagogical guarantee with a well-trained educational team with low turnover and a pedagogical purpose. This model advocated personalizing learning in the sense of giving the learner a voice and involving them in the decision about what they learn and how they learn it (Coll, 2015).

The development of full-time school or Ganztagsschule in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, showed that, among other benefits, its implementation requires greater cooperation between teachers and other educators, volunteers, or external alliances, and closer relationships between educational staff and children (Schüpbach et al., 2012; Samper, 2018)

Summer Camps and Governance

Acting in a coordinated manner involves connecting the territory's agents, projects, and resources; the most appropriate approach to achieve this is participatory management with a community dimension. Based on experiences in Barcelona, Diaz-Gibson et al. (2015) examined the different models of collaborative governance in

educational projects and showed that municipalities must achieve distributed leadership and a common agenda to reach agreements in a municipality. Similarly, Kliczkowski et al. (2014) argued that the local level is the most suitable for guaranteeing educational equity and inclusion, since, among other things, it enables the actors to conceive education-based co-responsibility and educational planning in terms of equity and informative pedagogy. In this sense, the analysis by Minarro and Samper (2018) on the French case study pointed out the importance of financing, and warned of unfavorable results if proper attention is not guaranteed.

In England, the Full Services Extended Schools experience before the economic crisis of 2008 had a series of positive effects not only on students, but also on families and the local community itself. The subsequent evaluation argued that the best way to develop this transformational potential is through a local strategy that involves school coordinators and leaders, is sustained over time to achieve a stable partnership, and allows spaces for reflection between all the agents involved (Cummings et al, 2007; 2011).

Methodology

The methodology used to establish and validate guidelines for summer camps from a perspective of municipal public policy consisted of various strategies. This methodology took place between 2022 and 2023, however, the authors carried out data collection from summer camps previously (between 2019 and 2022). The authors participated in the preparation of this work, in addition to designing, developing, and evaluating each of the following strategies:

a) In February, 2022, a work group was formed of six professionals with experience in organizing, managing, and evaluating educational leisure activities for children and young people. The group members have accumulated experience (between five and fifteen years), and their work can be considered reliable, since half of them have responsibilities in the management and coordination of municipal summer camps. This group started to draft guidelines for summer camp proposals as a municipal public policy. It employed an inductive process based on the grounded theory model (Harding, 2019; Guetterman et al., 2019), from which a specific matter expands the reflection to higher or general considerations. This favored the generation of the theory (Trinidad et al., 2006). A total of five sessions of three hours each were held to formulate a structured proposal for guidelines in four areas: networking, equity, quality, and governance.

b) In December, 2022, a group of experts validated the guidelines initially proposed for promoting summer camps from a municipal public policy perspective. Following the indications of Morgan (1998), the group designed a dynamic and participatory session. The group of experts comprised of four experts in the socioeducational field in nonformal educational contexts (with sufficient experience to validate the understanding and suitability of the proposed principles). The results obtained enabled us to improve and simplify the draft.

c) In February, 2023, a discussion group session following the indications of Barbour (2014) and Fàbregues et al. (2016). We formed a group of seven professionals with diverse backgrounds and responsibilities in organizing and planning child and youth leisure: youth workers, heads of strategic planning, education managers, a social educator of a socioeducational entity, and a manager of an association of companies of educational services in child and youth leisure. The discussion session enabled us to check the solidity of the proposal as well as the guideline's clarity (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015).

d) From February to November, 2023, the results obtained were tested in a case study by applying the proposed guidelines for implementing summer camps as part of a municipal policy. A single situational case study was carried out (Rodríguez et al., 1999) using embedded design (Yin, 2009). It is especially interesting to explore the explanations that articulate, substantiate, and ensure the functioning of these summer camps from the perspective of a municipal public policy and model.

e) In December, 2023, the authors analyzed the results and all the available information.

The proposal of guidelines for implementing summer camps as a municipal public policy applied in the case study is summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Guidelines for Implementing Summer Camps as a Municipal Public Policy

Axes	Guidelines
Governance	Have a clear political mandate
	Establish a collaborative model with entities
	Draw up a communication plan
Networking	Understand the educational circumstances
	Position the program in the educational network
	Link the commitment to the camps with the other agents and learnings
Equity	Promote access to summer camps based on priority areas of action
	Ensure inclusion throughout the educational process through networking
Quality	Establish quality criteria
	Offer support for quality and enriched learning
	Make an evaluation plan to improve quality

Main Results from the Proposals for Associating Summer Camps with a Local Educational Project

The methodological process described resulted in a guide that provides useful indications to municipal authorities on how to contribute to a summer camp model from the full-time educational perspective (Soler et al., 2022), understood as education that integrates all possible educational agents, time and places. A proposal that takes into account that people learn and are educated everywhere (Ripoll et al., 2019). With an educational approach that aims to connect time, place, learning, and educational agents in municipalities, and that proposes to offer everyone more and better opportunities. It is not a protocol or manual to be followed strictly, since each municipality—and it's government and citizen structure—has its own particular circumstances.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the home confinement that began in March, 2020, had a profound effect on the management of summer camps. When the guidelines were tested in a practical case at the Girona City Council, in Girona, Spain, the summer camps that began in July, 2020, were the first time the children of the municipality had returned to participate at an in-person educational activity. The establishment of preventive measures—reduction in the size of work groups, the use of hygiene products, and, especially, communication with families—represented an extra cost of 150,000 euros, which was financed with additional resources from Girona City Council and made it possible to hold the summer camps in suitable conditions with a reduction of only 25% of participants, compared to the previous year (around 50% in neighboring cities).

It is likely that applying these guidelines may take between two and four years in order to establish the network, adjust rhythms and processes, and ensure that the overall work is coordinated. It should also be considered that in large municipalities the technical complexity and municipal organization chart may need adaption. However, in smaller municipalities, some of the proposed measures or entities may not be needed.

The guidelines developed in the implementation guide were applied in the municipality of Girona as a case study. (A municipality with 101,932 inhabitants according to the Statistical Institute of Catalonia, IDESCAT). The purpose was to evaluate its usefulness, applicability, and results. This provided evidence that enabled us to check a large part of the proposed measures and guidelines. Below are the results pertaining to eleven measures structured according to areas of governance, networking, equity, and quality.

1.1.   Governance

Measure: *Have a Clear Political Mandate*

Evidence compiled in the Girona City Council case study that supports this measure:

- *A structure was created within the People's Rights Area of the City of Girona* with participation of the Youth, Social, Education, and Sports services.

- *The Municipal Technical Board for managing the municipal summer camp program was created* (led by the Youth Service). This Board shows the actions carried out separately by the Youth and Sports services. Over the first five years of joint work, the number of places offered and occupied increased by 10% each year.

- *Municipal objectives were defined in each sector of the city*, and the municipal Social Services were involved as key agents in each territory. This enabled us to develop a wide-ranging program without excluding any neighborhood in the city. After the first five years of implementing this strategy, there is an extensive summer camp offer (that covers a full month's activities) in all the city's neighborhoods.

- *The annual approval of a program was agreed upon*. This fully documents the management conditions of the municipal summer camp program, and gives us a guide for all the agents involved that provide transparency and are well-considered—especially by the entities that organize summer camps.

- *A specific commission was created with the IT department to create an application for managing registrations*. This coordination significantly improved service efficiency.

- *A management team was hired for seven months a year to manage the municipal summer camp program*. This team monitors and controls the activities and mechanisms in place to guarantee equity.

Measure: Establish a Collaborative Model with Entities

Evidence compiled in the Girona City Council case study that supports this measure:

- *A model for offering the activities was defined based on long-term collaboration agreements with citizen entities.* This model optimizes the quality of the service and adds value to these entities' activities. During the first five years of signing long-term agreements (four-year agreements) with citizen's entities, there was a 60% increase (fifteen to twenty four) in the number of new associations joining the program.

- *This model is still operating.* The solid structure is favoring a number of entities whose yearlong activities are mostly performed by volunteers. The associations that participate in the City of Girona Council's summer camps program say that the possibility of making employment contracts under appropriate conditions would enable them to build stable, experienced educational teams.

- *Collaboration with diverse citizen entities whose objectives match those of the municipal administration*. Examples of diverse citizen entities include recreation centers, scout troops,

sports clubs, theatre school, and the like. This makes it possible to diversify the offer, and to propose a distinct and attractive offer for many kinds of families in certain territories. This diversity enables the program to specialize in activities related to popular culture, plastic arts, music, nature activities, cinema, crafts, cooking, technology comics, theatre, dance, circus, football, or basketball.

Measure: Draw up a Communication Plan

Evidence compiled in the Girona City Council case study that supports this measure:

- *The municipal program model was clearly communicated over several years.* The campaigns informed citizens that the Girona City Council guaranteed the quality of all activities in the municipal program, regardless of the organizing entity. The families who participated in the satisfaction surveys valued the program quality very highly.

- *The communication strategy was essential for building trust and acceptance amongst families.* At some key moments, such as the end of home confinement just before the 2020 summer campaign, the communication strategy highlighted the offer's exceptional nature. The number of places occupied in the municipal summer camp program fell by 25% (in other municipalities it fell by up to 50%), and we consider this was due to the high degree of trust and acceptance among the city's families.

Table 2. Summary of Evidence in Governance Area

Measure		2019	2022
Have a clear political mandate	Occupied places by children	2,991	3,170
	% of city's neighborhoods with a full month's stay between July and August	80%	100%
	Number of professionals in the support team	2	4
Establish a collaborative model with entities	Entities with which Girona City Council established a collaboration agreement	15	24
	Number of monitors hired by the organizations that organize the program's activities	375	462
Draw up a communication plan	Average score in the quality surveys to families	8.2	8.5
	% reduction of occupied places in the pandemic year (2020)	In Girona: 25%	In other municipalities: 50%

Report of the Area of People's Rights, Girona City Council (2019) and (2022) Measure: Understand the Educational Circumstances

1.2.   Networking

Measure: Understand the Educational Circumstances

Evidence compiled in the Girona City Council case study that supports this measure:

- *The analysis of the summer camp offer is regularly updated.* In this way, we can decide how to configure the municipal summer camp program. By intentionally limiting places in some activities, especially in sports camps, we can repeatedly adapt the offer to the territory,   making it easier for other educational offers to reach the minimum number of registrations needed to make them viable.

- *The Municipal Education Service leads the program management, taking over from the youth section.* This makes it easier for the information obtained and updated by the Municipal Education Office to be incorporated into the process of deciding on the program's characteristics.

Measure: Positioning the Program in the Educational Network

Evidence compiled in the Girona City Council case study that supports this measure:

- *Each year, we draft a document containing the municipal coverage objectives for each sector of the city;* it contains the number of camps, schedules, and places. This document is the basic guide for reaching agreements on this strategy with entities that organize summer camps within the municipal program.

- *A relationship of mutual trust is reached with the citizen's entities that organize summer camps.* Specifically with twenty five different entities.

Measure: Link the Commitment of Camps with the Other Agents and Learnings

Evidence compiled in the Girona City Council case study that supports this measure:

- *The link between summer camps and schools is strengthened.* The approach taken in the summer of 2020, which was prepared during home confinement, was decisive in this regard. During this time, schools were particularly receptive to the educational proposal offered by summer camps.

- *Schools provide information on children's basic learning needs.* In the summer of 2020, this information was sent to the entities that organized the camps so they could take it into account in their activity programming. This strengthened the learning connection.

Table 3. Summary of Evidence in Networking Area

Measure		2019	2020
Understand the educational circumstances	Extension of activities beyond the summer period	0	2
Positioning the program in the educational network	Number of documents on the coverage of camps in different sectors of the city	0	7
	Number of schools that made contributions to summer camp programming	0	10
Link the commitment of the camps with the other agents and learnings	Number of public schools with which the enrollment process was coordinated	0	10

Report of the Area of People's Rights, Girona City Council (2019) and (2022)

1.3. Equity

Measure: Promote Access to Summer Camps Based on Priority Action Areas

Evidence compiled in the Girona City Council case study that supports this measure:

- *A subsidy mechanism was established based on family income levels.* There are seven levels that represent seven proportional fees, and the council assumes the difference. This allows more than 30% of the program's participants to benefit from a reduction in the camp fee.

- *The Inclusion Plan within the Municipal Summer Camp Program of the City of Girona has a coordinating technician and sufficient resources to provide approximately thirty support monitors for children with special educational needs.* This enables camps to provide quality care that ensures children with special educational needs receive the attention they need.

Measure: Ensure Inclusion Throughout the Educational Process Through Networking

Evidence compiled in the Girona City Council case study that supports this measure:

- *The city of Girona leads a coordination mechanism with schools, primary care social services, and citizen's entities.* Coordination enables us to detect families with difficulties in accessing activities, and to attend to their needs.

- *Primary care social services directly monitor approximately 10% of the program's participants* (with links to families and educational centers). This ensures quality care for these children.

Table 4. Summary of Evidence in Equity Area

Measure		2019	2022
Promote access to summer camps based on priority action areas	Number of children with income support according to income bracket	1,102	1,201
	Number of children enrolled through the Inclusion Plan	289	450
	Number of support monitors planned through the Inclusion Plan	30	32

Ensure inclusion through-out the educational	Number of support points for home school enrollment in public schools	0	10
Process through networking	Ensure inclusion throughout the educational	300	320

Report of the Area of People's Rights, Girona City Council (2019) and (2022)

1.4.   Quality

Measure: Set Quality Criteria

Evidence compiled in the Girona City Council case study that supports this measure:

- *The city of Girona has a system of twenty indicators to assess the fifty camps adhered to the municipal summer camp program.* Some of these indicators obtain information from the families' perspective.

- *We apply a scale based on the system of control indicators to establish collaboration agreements with entities in the municipality.* This ensures transparency and quality in this process.

Measure: Offer Support for Quality and Enriched Learning

Evidence compiled in the Girona City Council case study that supports this measure:

- *We ran several training sessions for educational teams of entities that organize summer camps in the municipal program.* This increases the quality of activities in key areas, which we select each year.

- *Each year, the City Council of Girona makes a call for subsidies for leisure education institutions in the city;* the subsidies are endowed with thirty thousand euros. This enables entities to consolidate their organizational structure.

Measure: Draw up an Evaluation Plan to Improve Quality

Evidence compiled in the Girona City Council case study that supports this measure:

- *The municipal summer camps program management team drafts a document on improvement proposals to be implemented in the program's next edition.* This enables continuous improvement of the program.

Table 5. Summary of Evidence in Quality Area

Measure		2019	2022
Set quality criteria	Number of evaluation indicators for summer centers	10	20
	Number of collaboration agreements with entities regulated by the system of indicators	20	21

Offer support for quality and enriched learning	Number of training sessions for education teams	1	2
	Financial contribution (euros) to leisure education entities	30,000	30,000
Draw up an evaluation plan to improve quality	Number of improvement proposals systematized	0	20

Report of the area of people's rights, Girona City Council (2019) and (2022)

Discussion

To successfully promote a public offer of summer camps in a given municipality, we aligned the experience analyzed with the vision of conceiving education as a common good, based on dialogue between socioeducational agents (UNESCO, 2022). In this broad conception of full-time education or school (Sintes, 2015), most educational reforms have focused on organizing school time and the length of the school day. They have also paid special attention to family reconciliation, in an attempt to integrate school and nonschool time, acknowledging how these spaces contribute to children's and young people's educational success. Likewise, these broad conceptions of education have taken into account inequalities in access according to a family's cultural and economic levels (Badura et al., 2021; Bouffard et al., 2006).

A solid and decisive public policy in the field of educational leisure must acknowledge the development of the sector, its contributions to social cohesion, and the new skills and knowledge its participants acquire. Many countries agree on promoting longer schedules and considering informal educational contexts (in this full-time education approach). Evaluations and international organizations (Eurofound, 2007; World Bank, 2011; OECD, 2012; Eurofound, 2020) recommend, however, developing policies that extend the quality and equity of the school day, and not only increasing the amount of learning opportunities (without also addressing the two previous areas). The conclusions reached after implementing these guidelines in a case study shows the need to consider several previously planned and complementary actions. Specifically, and in the first place, special committees and management teams have been organized from the field of governance and other municipal departments under distributed leadership and a common agenda, as pointed out by Diaz-Gibson et al. (2015). Moreover, these decisions in the field of governance with a community vision are complemented by targeting objectives according to specific contexts of the same municipality and with the ability to efficiently communicate the model itself as an educational program. Sintes (2015) affirmed that the most integrated models are those that most significantly favor children, young people, family, and community. That is, those that include the various actors from the beginning, and those that are represented in the decision-making and orientation spaces of the services.

Secondly, from an equity perspective, several actions have been identified and evaluated. The provision of human and economic resources, and the municipal transversality between areas of the same city council, have created conditions that favor a socially fair educational offer. This feature also aligns with the warnings of authors, such as González (2019), to ensure that educational leisure does not cause segregation and reproduce inequalities.

The Russian Federation is a good example of a state system of summer camps that has been operating successfully for over a hundred years. The experience gained has created a strong and important tradition of connecting children with healthy outdoor activities (Ilina, 2024). However, as noted by Anunchin et al. (2017), it is important to keep track of the organizations providing this service before making decisions at the federal and regional levels. The American Camp Association (ACA) is an example of an independent organization formed by professionals who provide quality summer camp programs. Despite its independence, it is committed to expanding and valuing the camp experience through diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and practices (Meerts et al., 2024); through rigorous research (to expand the visibility of summer camps); and through providing information on laws and regulations related to the camp community.

Thirdly, regarding quality, the actions collected are consistent with the proposals of Fredriksson et al. (2018). It is evident that educational quality indicators and proposals for contextualized training (or planning solid evaluation) can all be achieved, and can contribute to establishing a public agenda focused on organizational change and strengthening of community action. The review by Samper (2018) on implementing a full-time school model in the German context adds to the relevance of political commitment (at various administrative levels), financial stability, distributed leadership, and quality assessment.

Finally, and regarding networking, it is noted that the methodological approach proposed in the case analyzed becomes a connection between the other areas previously analyzed. That is, it is a network task based on distributive leadership that generates mutual trust between agents, that strategically connects school and nonschool hours (Ripoll et al., 2019), and that conditions the educational offer from specific objectives according to each territory. In the study by the Smith Family (2010; Sintes, 2015) the schools that have the strongest relationship and collaboration with the environment (hub schools) develop more intense community work dynamics, which positively revert to all the agents involved. If we take into account the experience of Portugal (Fialho, 2013), it is advisable to strengthen the role of community by identifying the resources capable of offering educational opportunities in the territory, and that these are not imposed from supralocal spaces.

Conclusions

The contribution made has highlighted: (1) the educational potential of summer camps within the framework of an intentional public policy, and (2) conditions that facilitate or hinder their deployment. From the analysis of a case study, evidence and results have been presented that support the proposal made, and that have lead us to conclude the socioeducational relevance and the possibilities of establishing a municipal public offer for high-quality children's and young people's leisure activities.

However, it seems appropriate to ask the following question: Can we state that summer camps are a reflection of primary municipal educational policies? That is, for what practical reasons are they are not generalized public policies—or part of them? Below are some considerations that we believe impede this desirable goal.

In relation to extrinsic factors, Glover (2015) considered that it is necessary to deepen the social repercussions of these initiatives and their communication to society. There is a need to promote legislative mechanisms that favor this type of educational action by municipalities in the long term. Another critical aspect is that summer camps fall into a specific economic and political market, and the proposed and analyzed actions and measures calls for, and places, municipalities in an active leadership role within this market. From the English experience we can learn that educational reforms must be sustained over time to develop long-term actions, and that to optimize efforts and resources, the strategy must be developed locally (Cummings et al, 2007; Cummings et al, 2011).

Regarding the intrinsic factors, it is advisable to deepen the correspondence between municipal policies and supra-municipal policies. The experience analyzed also highlights the need to more thoroughly consider the evaluation indicator criteria that these public educational initiatives must meet in summer. Often, evaluations of these activities focus on matters such as the target population, participant or family satisfaction, or the number of activities promoted. But, other variables and indicators must also be incorporated with a clear criteria; these may include their effect, and their connection with the rest of the educational space and agents throughout the year; or the quality of the support provided, and the personalization of the learning offered to children and young people. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, although there is evidence of the enormous contribution of educational leisure, which has been compiled over many years, at the European level there is still no consensus on its definitions, components, and factors. For example, specific and quantitative data have been compiled on the use of services, including ratios, group size, budget, and staff qualifications (Plantenga & Remery, 2017; Eurofound, 2020). However, due to the lack of generalizable data, no reference is made to qualitative aspects such as the type of actions, the pedagogical methods employed, or the structure itself.

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