Article

Values-Based Education and the Promotion of Social Participation in Children's Educational Leisure Organisations

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Abstract: As recent research has shown, the importance of integral development during childhood is a highly relevant issue linked to promoting values and participation styles in healthy and safe leisure environments, which serve as significant educational spaces for participants. Research shows that education in values is a foundation for citizens to commit to others and embrace diversity as a value and an enriching circumstance. In educational leisure spaces for children, personal and group identities are built around equity, justice, and inclusion, all of which generate greater social cohesion. The study universe of this work was made up of non-profit organisations working in the field of children's educational leisure in the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Madrid. The methodology used was mixed and developed in three phases. The results presented here correspond to the first phase of the study (qualitative method) and focused on a content analysis, for which the categories of analysis related to education in values and the promotion of social participation were identified. Likewise, the results correspond to a specific territorial context, the historical territory of Bizkaia (northern Spain), specifically to ten non-profit organisations that develop their activity in the field of educational leisure time. The results have been organised around education in values, spaces and dynamics for social participation, and the vision of the sector's future. The results highlight the entities' role in methodological innovation, ethical commitment, the transmission of values, and the cultivation of participation from an early age through different activities. In conclusion, it emphasises the need for the children's educational leisure sector to address the challenges of contemporary society.

Keywords: educational leisure; values; participation

1. Introduction

This article takes an in-depth look at children's educational leisure, a fundamental vital area in childhood in which fun, learning, and values formation meet and coexist naturally. In recent decades, there has been a growing interest in understanding and promoting the integral development of children through leisure experiences that not only entertain but also contribute to educating more integrated and well-rounded people with more tools, and they also have a positive impact on the construction of a more participatory and ethical society.

Thus, leisure is a complex phenomenon that fulfils various functions, influenced by the context in which it is experienced. The diversification of the leisure offer generates the need for practices that reinforce individual identity, placing the person in the position of making decisions influenced by internal and external factors as pointed out by Lazcano and Madariaga [1]. Its positive direction is linked to a rewarding experience, both on an individual and social level, making it a fundamental determinant of well-being and quality of life in modern societies [2]. Caride [3] stresses that leisure is not simply "surplus time" but an opportunity to activate and develop human experience, even in crises.

In this context, autonomy and the capacity to make decisions become essential for free time to become authentic leisure. Vargas Llosa [4] warns about transforming leisure into

a business that could accentuate social exclusion, underlining the importance of placing debates on leisure at the centre of citizenship and politics' concerns. Various authors [5,6] also point out that in the relationship between leisure, education, and network society, a complex pedagogical and social scenario emerges that requires new ways of teaching and learning, revealing leisure pedagogy as a significant field for social education and a complementary tool to other educational initiatives.

Research shows how educational and sociocultural leisure activities contribute significantly to social cohesion, especially at the neighbourhood level, by promoting participation and social support [7,8]. In this sense, participation in educational leisure and sociocultural activities is directly related to the construction of citizenship and the development of social cohesion in the community.

In this sense, recent studies [9,10] corroborate the nuclear role of leisure in the promotion of social cohesion; the work was carried out by different entities and types of centres and managed from a socio-educational approach within the framework of a diverse society as well as the importance and determination that leisure has throughout the different life cycles (childhood, adolescence, youth, adulthood, and third and fourth age).

Sociocultural action in the community network has an impact not only on social cohesion in the neighbourhood but also on general aspects such as the fight against social inequalities.

1.1. Values Education: Sowing the Seeds of Character

The process of values education in childhood is a fundamental pillar for the formation of people committed to society. Several studies [11,12] underline the importance of educational leisure experiences in the transmission of fundamental values. Leisure is not only an attractive medium for teaching but also a fertile ground for cultivating empathy, solidarity, and responsibility [13].

Educational leisure time (educational leisure), defined as activities organised for children for recreational and educational purposes, constitutes an integral fabric for leisure education, together with public or private leisure services [14]. Participation in this time is distinguished by the fact that it is voluntary and has an impact on personal development [14]. In this context, leisure emerges as a key element leading to building more inclusive communities and environments [15]. To promote inclusion and build inclusive communities, Stodolska [16] emphasises the importance of flexible leisure and sociocultural provision sensitive to the needs of diverse communities, including ethnic minorities and immigrants.

Interculturality is a decisive factor in today's society, with migration increasing to establish the link between educational leisure and the transmission of values. In the particular case of interculturality, the aim is to promote integration (not assimilation):

- Commitment to transversal action in all areas of society;
- Intelligence and competence by fostering the capacities of all resources dedicated to this type of action;
- Reduction of language, socioeconomic, and digital divides;
- Active collaboration with generalist media and social networks denoted by socially influential content creators;
- Anti-discrimination on the grounds of origin, awareness-raising against racism and xenophobia, and community mediation.

To this end, local spaces for intercultural intervention are proposed:

- Formal and leisure or free-time education;
- Neighbourhoods and community spaces;
- Cultural, artistic, and sporting events.

1.2. Social Participation: Games That Build Bridges

Children's social participation in educational leisure activities [17] plays a fundamental role in their holistic growth during childhood and also in shaping a cohesive and cohesive

society. Recent research [18,19] has highlighted that interaction in play environments contributes to strengthening children's social skills and also acts as a catalyst for promoting essential civic values, such as respect, tolerance, and inclusion [20].

In educational leisure, children can learn and build a personal and social identity that embraces inclusivity and is based on equality. This approach facilitates positive experiences of recognising diversity and promoting understanding and appreciation of differences between people. Active participation in these activities influences children's individual development and shapes their future participatory trajectories regarding citizenship behaviour, associative life, and social engagement, as evidenced in different studies on this issue [21–23].

Additionally, educational leisure (educational free time) is a strategic space to foster participation and social engagement, critical elements on the path towards inclusive societies. Interaction in this context not only results in the acquisition of social and emotional skills but also nurtures a sense of belonging to a wider community. Creating positive and meaningful experiences during educational leisure contributes to forming active and aware citizens, which is essential for moving towards societies that value diversity and promote social inclusion [24]. In this sense, educational leisure is positioned as a means for personal development and a powerful tool for collectively constructing more integrated and cohesive communities where diversity is respected and the needs of each person participating in projects and activities are met.

1.3. Children's Educational Leisure Organisations: Agents of Transformation

Organisations dedicated to children's educational leisure play a pivotal role in configuring enriching experiences for children. Through innovative programmes tailored to the needs of this social group, these organisations offer fun moments and catalyse learning and personal development [25]. The design of activities that foster creativity and critical thinking becomes a beacon that guides children towards acquiring key skills for their future. No single entity or experience in educational leisure can progress without collaboration with other entities, services, and institutions. Public institutions must consider involving community agents, including professionals and volunteers, to implement effective policies and actions in this field [26].

Ultimately, leisure and sociocultural action play a crucial role in social cohesion, education, and promoting inclusive societies, highlighting the importance of educational leisure as a space for children's holistic development. However, the contemporary context also poses challenges, such as the co-commercialisation of leisure and its possible impacts on social exclusion [27]. In this regard, attention to debates about equity in access to leisure and the sustainability of recreational practices becomes crucial to ensuring comprehensive and equitable leisure development [28].

In conclusion, leisure and free time not only represent moments of recreation but also constitute an enriching social fabric that reflects the identity of the place. The effective management of these recreational resources can contribute significantly to the construction of a more inclusive, participatory society aware of its cultural heritage [29]. Therefore, it is essential to guarantee universal access to educational leisure, especially for the most vulnerable groups, from a perspective of inclusion and attention to diversity [30].

Another important aspect is collaboration and networking, establishing the so-called educational ecosystems, based on the interdependence between all the actors that make up a community.

These are necessary to showcase the interdependence between all community agents and the educational opportunities for children and adolescents outside school hours, looking at integral lifelong development, which is imperative for these ecosystems to be operative [22].

- Commitment and cooperation of public administrations with the third social sector in each territory.

- Work from a cross-cutting approach to build comprehensive educational proposals that cover different ages, cultures, and social situations.
- Intervention with families regarding child and adolescent populations. Recognising the contribution of educational leisure, value transmission, and participation in the cultural programming of the communities must be matured.

By way of summary, it is worth noting the following relevant ideas when focusing on children's educational leisure organisations as promoters of education in values and the promotion of social participation in childhood and adolescence.

First, education in values is a tool linked to human development in its most integral sense and of great importance in today's society. Education in values promotes solidarity, coexistence, and a love for nature. Educational leisure promotes values such as coexistence, respect, empathy, equality, solidarity, and critical thinking. Without these and other ethical principles that define us as human beings, it will be difficult to build a better world.

Second, enjoying educational leisure is a time that allows us to build community spaces of coexistence and a recognition of diversity since educational leisure conceives participatory processes from an active role of all participants, who become the main protagonists from the beginning to the end of the leisure proposals that are developed. In this sense, it is worth highlighting how play and the distribution of responsibilities among participants generate a deep-rooted sense of belonging, group identity, and cohesion.

Third, the organisations that develop educational leisure programmes are spaces in which, through leisure, the creation of bonds that provide emotional security is fostered. The organisations that emerge from educational leisure are places where people learn to respect others and to be appreciated for who they are, not for what they do. All of this makes it possible for educational leisure to facilitate the rooting of the community in a physical territory, a landscape and a place in which quality relationships are established, harmonious coexistence, and the recognition of diversity.

2. Materials and Methods

The study universe of this work was made up of non-profit organisations working in the field of children's educational leisure in the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Madrid.

The methodology used was mixed and developed in three phases. The first phase consisted of a content analysis of the public documentation of the organisations (websites, activity reports, programmes, etc.), focusing on aspects relating to the work carried out in the field of education in values and the promotion of social participation. During the second phase, a questionnaire was designed to collect specific data on the activity of the organisations in the field of education in values and the promotion of social participation, and in the third phase, focus groups were carried out to compare the data and reflect on the future of the sector.

The results presented here correspond to the first phase of the study (qualitative method) and focused on content analysis, for which the categories of analysis related to values education and the promotion of social participation were identified. Likewise, the results correspond to a specific territorial context, the historical territory of Bizkaia (northern Spain). The following section presents the results of the analysis of 10 non-profit organisations (Table 1) that conduct their activity in the field of educational leisure time, belonging to Astialdi Sarea (Network of Organisations for Social Intervention and Education in Leisure Time in the Basque Country). As the total number of organisations in the Basque Country is made up of more than 100 organisations, the decision was taken to select the organisations that form part of this network, as it brings together the organisations with the longest track record and the largest number of participants.

Table 1. Description of the entities.

Entity	Field of Action
Ainara Aisi Taldea	Children's and Youth Leisure Club. Educational work with children and young people, managed by young volunteers. Objectives: To create educational leisure spaces for children, adolescents, and young people and to value free time; to promote Basque culture and the Basque language and encourage its use and customs; to establish relations at neighbourhood, municipal, territory, and country level; to promote community and network work; to educate in values; and to foster diversity and inclusion.
Aisi—Hezi Fundaziona	Foundation for promoting Free Time and the Basque language. Objectives: To promote the comprehensive education of children, adolescents, and young people in leisure time by transferring resources to the social agents working in this field; to be a reference point for the leisure time sector, encouraging its improvement and modernisation and influencing entities' development.
Arduradun Eskola	School focused on training young people educating in different areas of free time. Objective: To train educators recognised for their great capacity to carry out their work and commitment to social transformation through education.
Bizkaiko Gaztetxoen Koordinakundea	Coordinator of leisure and free time groups. Objective: To promote the integral education of children and young people in human values, knowing the critical centre of reality and being able to modify it.
Bosko Taldea	Federation bringing together the different youth associations that work in the field of educational leisure time in Salesian institutions in the Basque Country. Objective: To be an institution that coordinates and unifies the educational and action criteria of the member associations.
Euskalerriko Eskautak Bizkaia	Federation of Scout groups. Objectives: To promote safe environments for children and young people with activities with no room for any kind of violence; to facilitate participatory environments in which the family and society take part; to develop preventive policies for children and young people as a whole during ages filled with changes and which are decisive for future maturity.
Hezkide Eskola	School created to respond to the needs of parish leisure time groups. Objectives: To strengthen these groups' work and offer training to the monitors and directors of these educational leisure time groups.
Hezten Astialdi Taldea	Free time training school. Objectives: To educate children, young people, educators, and families, working on developing non-formal education from a professional and up-to-date perspective.
Ede Fundazioa	Foundation that integrates social organisations. Objectives: To generate lasting, inclusive, and sustainable changes through knowledge, direct intervention, and the development of social economy and inclusive employment projects.
Gaztetxo Hezkuntza Mugimendua	Association that works in the field of educational leisure time. Objectives: To educate children and young people in socio-educational values so that they have a critical view of society and can transform it.

As part of a script for a more extensive content analysis to collect relevant information on children's educational leisure organisations, including aspects related to organisational characteristics (e.g., legal form, foundation, field of action, programmes and projects, target public...), specifically in this article, the results related to the following 3 variables are used and presented:

1. Work about values-based education;
2. Spaces and dynamics for social participation;
3. Vision of the sector's future.

The researchers' university's Ethics Committee approved this procedure in March 2023. From an ethical point of view, the research is deemed adequate in protecting and avoiding risks to the participants and respecting their autonomy. It also complies with the methodological, ethical, and legal principles that should apply. There are no risks for the participants, establishing adequate measures that offer sufficient ethical guarantees during the study. The project takes into account the regulation on personal data protection (EU 2016/679) approved by the Commission and the Council of the EU in April 2016 concerning the informed consent procedure; access to personal data; the use of data in the public interest; and the responsibilities of this project's authors.

3. Results

This section presents an annotated description of the results obtained after analysing the distinctive characteristics of organisations dedicated to children's educational leisure; their influence on education in values; the active promotion of social participation, especially through volunteering; and an examination into the sector's future.

3.1. Values Education

Social changes in the 21st century are no longer local or restricted in character. They manifest themselves globally and spread at the speed of communication networks, which are widely used on a collective and individual level. These networks are today a determining factor in shaping the values of children, adolescents, and young people, not only in Western countries but also in Eastern and developing countries. The interconnection is global, and the values transmitted can easily be manipulated or lead to confusion if they are not duly reinterpreted and adapted to each local and individual experience. Hence, the importance of organisations dedicated to education in values within private leisure.

The entities not only provide entertainment but also stand out as seedbeds for values education [31,32]. Empathy is positioned as a core value and embedded in activities designed to foster mutual understanding and respect:

- Cultivating Active Citizenship: Values education extends to forming active citizens. Programmes promoting social responsibility and civic engagement are directly linked to building a more ethical society.

In relation to the areas of social volunteering, adolescents and young people show special interest in areas of leisure such as sports, digital or educational, focusing on educational leisure, which is precisely the channel of the transmission of the values in which these organisations work, promoting a greater influence in other aspects in which young people show less interest, such as development cooperation, social and health culture, or consumption.

- Boosting critical thinking: The ability to think critically is promoted through activities that challenge children to question, analyse, and reflect. This approach strengthens their ability to make informed ethical decisions.
- Sustainability and contact with nature: An integral component of the values guiding activities involves more than mere observation; it encourages children to feel and understand our essential link to the ecosystem and our dependence on its sustenance and development for survival and social well-being.
- Development of social equity: Overcoming the great inequalities growing in recent decades is also a fundamental objective of all organisations working within the educational leisure time framework, as they understand that a society that is disintegrated and disconnected into groups with unmet needs is unjust and unequal.

According to data from the organisations, in recent years, the number of adolescents and young people (between 15 and 25 years of age) who participate in their programmes and who show a desire to change the current model of society has grown (Figure 1).
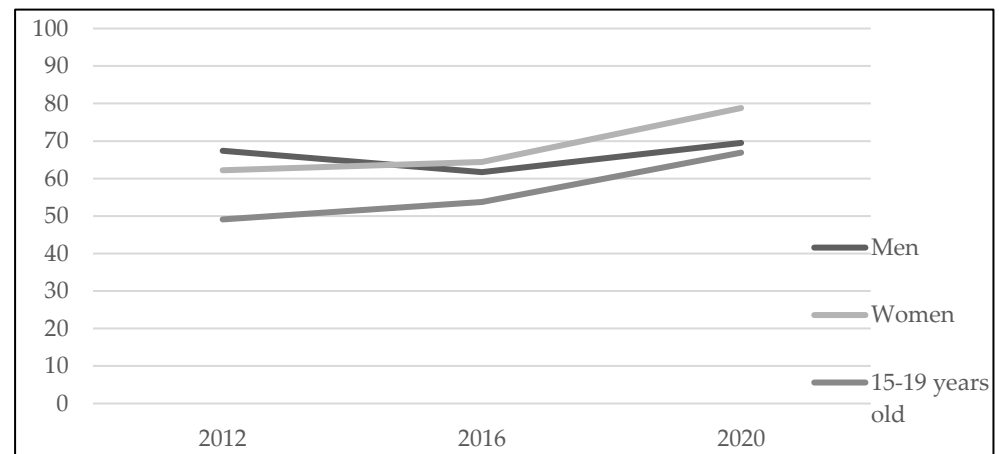
Figure 1. Desire to change the current model of society for those between 15 and 19 years old by sex and year (%).

3.2. Promoting Social Participation

The digitalisation of the current generation of teenagers and young people is a new component from a sociological point of view. It is not only a new communication tool, but a whole virtual space in which new ideas and their ramifications are born and grow, influencing real life. This powerful capacity for influence means that on many occasions, its use can become a form of abuse. Individual or shared digital leisure was already an unstoppable force almost a decade ago. In the face of this momentum, organisations are shown to be catalysts for social participation, especially through children's volunteering.

Over the last 20 years, young people's perception of participation in public affairs has been positively modified thanks to the work carried out by social participation organisations, which have not only managed to change the perception of taking sides in community affairs but have also managed to promote a critical spirit and a desire for change based on community values. Let us take participation in volunteer activities as an example (Figure 2).
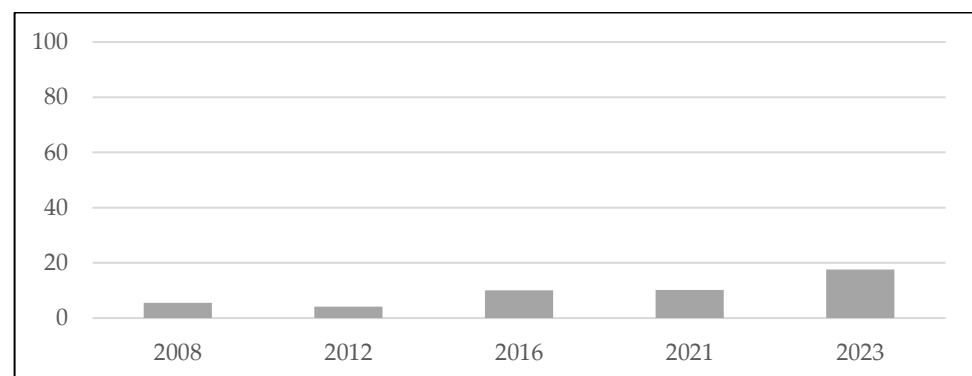

Figure 2. Carry out volunteer activities between 15–19 years old (%).

Children's active participation in volunteering initiatives is associated with increased self-esteem and a perception of their ability to impact society [32,33] positively:

- Connection to the community: Promoting social activities and cooperative projects strengthens children's connection to their environment. This connection contributes to developing a sense of belonging and community responsibility.
- Social skills development: Participation in children's volunteering activities is linked to the significant development of social skills, including effective communication, teamwork, and empathy.

3.3. Future of the Sector

If we take as a generational reference the so-called Generation Z, i.e., those people born between the mid-1990s and the beginning of the 2010s, we can see that one of the great driving forces in their body of values is the promotion of sustainability and environmental awareness, and these mark the future of participation in leisure and free time movements in the transmission of values. The accessibility of information networks has provided today's adolescents and young people with a window onto a world of knowledge of environmental problems and their intimate relationship with the phenomenology of the social problems derived from them. Generation Z emerges as an agent of change through tangible and quantifiable actions such as responsible consumption and sustainable purchasing decisions as well as influence on the economy through social networks and reinforcement in education and empowerment as a generation that not only receives training but also wants to be part of the process. Figure 3 shows the evolution of the desire to participate in public affairs among 15–29 year olds with a gender perspective.
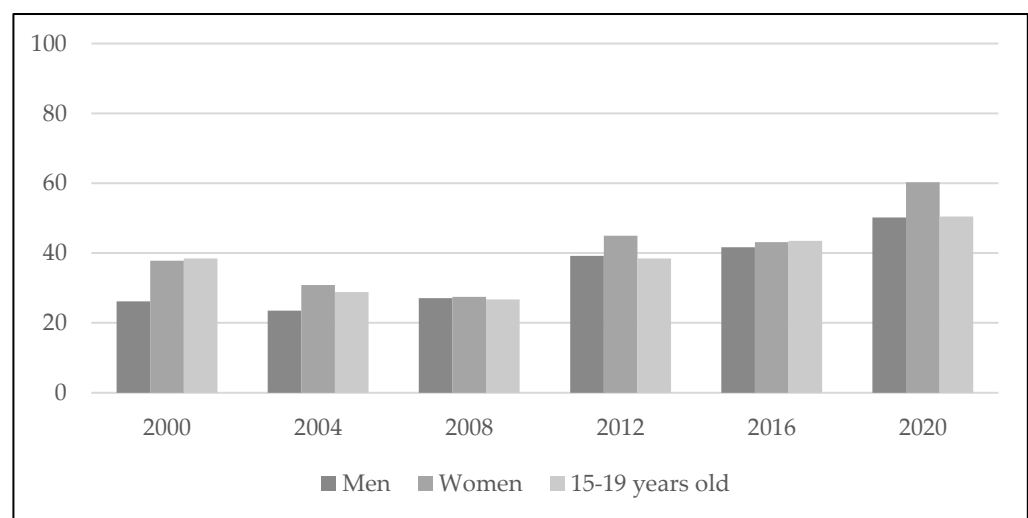

Figure 3. Desire to participate in public affairs among people aged 15 to 29 by sex and year (%).

The projection into the future highlights trends and challenges that will shape the evolution of the children's educational entertainment sector. An increasing integration of educational technologies, such as interactive platforms and digital games, is anticipated to enrich the educational experience and adapt to the preferences of the digital generation:

- Global collaboration: Connecting entities at the international level is essential. Global collaboration will facilitate exchanging best practices and create more enriching and culturally sensitive programmes.
- Ethical and social challenges: While the sector promises a bright future, it faces ethical and social challenges. Equity in access to these experiences and adaptation to changing family dynamics will require inclusive strategies and diversity-sensitive policies.

In conclusion, the results show an enriching portrait of children's educational leisure as a dynamic field where entities stand out for their innovation, ethical commitment to the active transmission of values, and capacity to foster the active participation of children in society. This sector, marked by constant evolution, is preparing to face future challenges with a clear vision and a continuous commitment to children's integral development.

4. Discussion

The results show how leisure has become a catalyst for social cohesion and citizen participation in the Basque region, which is characterised by its strong sense of community. Local organisations, educational programmes, and cultural events have contributed to

enriching educational leisure activities, promoting values of inclusion, diversity, and active participation [33].

This analysis of organisations dedicated to children's educational leisure activities reveals fertile ground for constructing fairer and more participatory societies. As we delve into the intricacies of education in values, social participation, and the role of specialised organisations, a panorama is revealed in which leisure becomes a powerful tool for sowing seeds that will germinate into committed and ethical citizenship [34].

A common idea shared by all definitions of "values" involves their inevitability. The notion of value accompanies the human condition, as individuals are inherently beings with values. Culture and values constitute people's habitats; thus, individuals cannot be understood without values, nor can the person's construction be without the appropriation of values [35]. Values are also "ideals", abstract in nature, our decisions and choices, guiding our ways of being and acting, and manifesting themselves in modes of conduct and behaviour. In short, values require a repository to rest and to express themselves. In other words, they acquire meaning when made explicit in something or someone, implying they are neither observable nor evaluable. Still, their expression and manifestation in specific contexts, situations, and people are possible [34,36]. Thus, values penetrate all dimensions of the person: the cognitive dimension, as they are structures of knowledge; the behavioural dimension, as they influence and give coherence to the way of acting; and the affective dimension, because of the intense emotional bond and commitment they evoke.

Although values have a certain stability, they are not immutable, as they rely on the dynamic relationship between people and their environment. Similarly, Ruiz Omeñaca [36] states the following:

> People form a value system that is stable enough to give continuity to their actions and flexible enough to reorganise it in the light of personal maturity processes, individual experiences and social and cultural changes (p. 15).

It is necessary to underline that values are neither taught nor inculcated but discovered and learned since neither autonomy nor the incorporation of a set of principles in someone's personal life is achieved through indoctrination or mere words [30]. Learning values presupposes experiences, such as those offered in the framework of educational leisure activities. Educational leisure time with the transmission of values contributes to developing seven key personal and professional competencies that can reduce social inequalities [37,38].

The learning generated in values-based educational leisure activities, in addition to helping children and adolescents grow as individuals, is a key educational agent that contributes to breaking the cycle of child poverty and preventing the social exclusion of children and young people in vulnerable situations. Specifically, participation in educational leisure time activities that converge in value systems contributes to developing basic educational competencies and their associated values. In addition, the entities that develop their activity within the framework of educational leisure promote the acquisition of essential competencies through various activities.

The fundamental aspect of these entities is that they promote programmes and activities that advocate educational leisure linked to equality and social inclusion, which foster actions with an impact on equal opportunities and treatment, respect for diversity, intercultural coexistence, the fight against xenophobia, and education in human rights [35–38]. Values-based educational and participatory leisure are instruments for inclusion, equality, and participation.

In conclusion, it should be noted that organisations dedicated to children's educational leisure stand out for their flexibility and adaptability, demonstrating an ability to adjust their programmes to the changing needs of children.

- Methodological innovation is a distinctive feature, focusing on educational methods beyond the conventional, promoting active participation and practical experiences.

- Sustainability, inclusion, and multiculturalism are key concerns, with many entities incorporating eco-friendly practices into their programmes, reflecting a growing awareness of social and environmental responsibility.
- The importance given to continuous training and sharing the results of studies and research in courses, forums, and debates stands out.
- There is a growing sociocultural and linguistic link with the environment, taking part in the associative fabric and family ties in the neighbourhood, community, or municipality.
- The relevance of maintaining a stable collaboration with the institutional fabric is underlined through economic contributions and mutual enrichment in elaborating institutional plans and projects responding to population needs.

Finally, it should be stressed that, in the current crisis context, we must prevent educational leisure time from becoming another factor of differentiation and exclusion for those with less access. In this sense, it is necessary to reinforce the mechanisms to achieve equity, demanding greater resources so that everyone, both from the administrations and society, can participate in leisure activities.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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