THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF SOCIAL AGENTS IN YOUTH LEISURE: STRATEGIES FOR INTERVENTION

LA PRÁCTICA PROFESIONAL DE LOS AGENTES SOCIALES EN MATERIA DE OCIO JUVENIL: ESTRATEGIAS PARA LA INTERVENCIÓN

A PRÁCTICA PROFISSIONAL DOS AGENTES SOCIAIS EM MATÉRIA DE ÓCIO JUVENIL: ESTRATÉGIAS PARA A INTERVENÇÃO

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyses the professional practice of thirty-four social agents who work in the field of youth leisure in Spain. It focuses on the strategies they use in intervention, namely objectives; inter- and intra-institutional methodology and coordination; funding sources; communication and dissemination strategies; and evaluation system. The main objectives were to identify professional practice in youth leisure from the perspective of social agents and define indicators that could serve as a starting point for identifying good practices in this field. The methodological framework used evaluative research that was diagnostic, exploratory and descriptive in nature. A pilot study was conducted. Data on the professional practice of the respondents were initially collected by the use of an open-ended questionnaire, followed by the administration of a closed questionnaire based on the content analysis of the answers given to the first questionnaire. The aim was to identify common indicators of professional practice and establish a benchmark that could be validated. The results identified eight key indicators that could be used as benchmarks to develop high-quality intervention in youth leisure, which relied on the work and the assessment of the experts consulted.

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PALABRAS CLAVE:
tiempo de ocio
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RESUMEN: Basándose en una muestra de treinta y cuatro (34) agentes sociales, este artículo analiza su práctica profesional en materia de ocio juvenil, a nivel nacional. Se incide en las estrategias utilizadas en la intervención, a saber: objetivos; metodología y coordinación inter e intra institucional; fuentes de financiación; estrategias de comunicación y difusión; y sistema de evaluación. Ante ello, se afrontan como principales objetivos identificar la práctica profesional en materia de ocio juvenil desde la perspectiva de los agentes sociales y definir indicadores que sean el punto de partida para identificar buenas prácticas en este campo.

Se aborda un marco metodológico centrado en la investigación evaluativa de carácter diagnóstica, exploratoria y descriptiva. En este contexto, se configura un estudio piloto, cuyas técnicas de recogida de datos sobre la práctica profesional de los encuestados han sido en primer lugar, el diseño de un cuestionario abierto, seguido de un segundo cuestionario cerrado que ha partido del análisis de contenido de las respuestas dadas al primero, con el fin de identificar indicadores comunes de la práctica profesional y así poder establecer un patrón de referencia que pueda validarse desde la misma.

Finalmente se identifican ocho indicadores clave como referentes para desarrollar una intervención de calidad en materia de ocio juvenil, desde el trabajo y las valoraciones de los expertos consultados.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:
tempo de ócio
juventude
investigação
indicadores sociais
avaliação

RESUMO: Baseado numa amostra de trinta e quatro (34) agentes sociais, este artigo analisa a sua prática profissional em matéria de ócio juvenil, a nivel nacional. Incide nas estratégias utilizadas na intervenção, a saber: objetivos; metodologia e coordenação inter e intra institucional; fontes de financiamento; estratégias de comunicação e difusão; e sistema de avaliação. Neste sentido, os seus principais objetivos são identificar a práctica profissional em matéria de ócio juvenil desde a perspetiva dos agentes sociais e definir indicadores que sejam o ponto de partida para identificar boas práticas neste campo.

A abordagem metodológica utilizada centra-se na investigação avaliativa, de carácter diagnóstico, exploratório e descritivo. Neste contexto, desenvolveu-se um estudo piloto, cujas técnicas de recolha de dados sobre a práctica profissional dos questionados foi em primeiro lugar, o desenho de um questionário aberto. Seguiu-se um segundo questionário fechado, que partiu da análise de conteúdo das respostas dadas ao primeiro, com o fim de identificar indicadores comuns da prática profissional e assim poder estabelecer um padrão de referência que pudesse validar-se a partir da mesma.

Finalmente identificam-se oito indicadores chave como referentes para desenvolver uma intervenção de qualidade em matéria de ócio juvenil, desde o trabalho e das avaliações dos peritos consultados.

1. Introduction

This study is focused on the professional practice of social agents who work in the field of leisure and youth. The evaluation of their intervention is essential to ensure the quality and continuous improvement of their work performance. Several authors, including Orte, Amer, Pascual and Vaqué (2014), have defended the idea that 'the evaluation of professionals' implementation [of intervention strategies] constitutes an instrument for the communication and legitimisation of the role of these professionals. It is important to understand their assessments and collect the maximum amount of information by way of feedback' (p. 179).

This aspect is fundamental to understand how programmes, projects and activities are carried out in the field of leisure and youth and whether they are successful; and to learn about the role played by social agents in the use of multiple intervention strategies. Evaluation is a tool that supports the planning process (objectives, methodology, resources, coordination, dissemination...) in order to discover future actions based on the knowledge obtained after interventions have been implemented.

Finally, establishing indicators (Pérez Juste, 2000) is important in order to identify good practices for intervention with young people in the field of leisure. This is the main area of interest in this study, with a view to improving the quality of life and the overall development of this population group.

2. Study rationale and objectives

2.1. Leisure and youth

Young people spend a large part of their free time engaging in leisure activities. This, combined with study and/or work, allows them to balance social and life commitments. Youth has never enjoyed so many means and resources to have fun and enjoy themselves. However, a significant percentage are bored and others do not have healthy leisure models in their immediate circles (García-Castilla, De-Juanas, & López-Noguero, 2016). Some only find enjoyment in forms of non-advisable consumption, such as alcohol and drugs, which are sometimes the main cause of accidents or problems related to sexuality and/or violence. These

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issues also have an impact on their education and qualification.

In this sense, 'consumption among young people (not only regarding leisure, but also in terms of status within their peer groups) causes imbalances in young people's education' (Doistua Nebreda, Pose Porto, & Ahedo González, 2016, P. 135). For this reason, in order to improve youth leisure and enable strategies that reduce the effects of unhealthy leisure consumption, it is a priority to identify the actions carried out in this field, establishing strengths and weaknesses, while identifying action strategies for improvement (Pérez-Serrano, Poza-Vilches, & Fernández-García, 2016).

It is essential to avoid carrying out a segmented, decentralised intervention, and to opt instead for social action that promotes shared work scenarios and youth inclusion processes, in an attempt to meet to social needs and seek public and/or social legitimacy, as well as to make an impact on the interaction and participation of young people (Paz & Unás, 2010; Fantova, 2007).

In view of the above, a quality intervention is necessary to justify the actions performed by the professionals who work with youth.

2.2. Evaluating interventions for improvement

Designing the indicators was the first task in evaluating the quality of the interventions in this study. Establishing these parameters is helpful in planning, managing and evaluating the interventions carried out regarding leisure in a more rigorous and participative way. The need to reinforce the planning conducted by schools and programmes was confirmed, including evaluation indicators that allowed a systematic collection of information, evaluating its quality and participants' satisfaction. It is also important that all those involved actively participated in the planning processes (FEAPS, 2007).

Depending on the scope of the evaluation, there are different types of indicators: 'social indicators can be used for macro-social analysis, in the evaluation of a national plan, policy or programme. At programme or project level, evaluation indicators are used to identify the changes implemented and their impact' (Picado, 1999, p. 3).

There are different definitions of indicator, each of which highlights its most important characteristics. Following the definition of the *Agencia para el voluntariado y la participación social* (Agency for volunteering and social participation) (2002, p. 1), indicators 'are specific quantifiable facts or expressions whose scores make it possible to measure the suitability, effectiveness and efficiency of a project'. This definition also

acknowledged that 'to make a proper evaluation, it is necessary to specify indicators and make them apparent from the beginning' (p. 1).

The *Asociación Española para la Calidad* (Spanish Association for Quality) (2017, p.1) defines indicators as 'means, instruments or mechanisms used to evaluate to what point or to what extent strategic objectives are achieved'. Mondragón (2002) agrees with the above definition and specifies that 'indicators are essential [...] in assessing institutional performance aimed at achieving the goals and objectives set in each of the areas of action of government programmes' (p. 54).

Based on these and other definitions of this concept, the most important characteristics of evaluation indicators include the following: they are part of a theoretical or conceptual framework (Mondragón, 2002); specific and explicit (Mondragón, 2002); temporally available (Mondragón, 2002, Martínez, 2010); relevant, useful and appropriate (Mondragón, 2002; Martínez, 2010); not restricted to a specific action (Mondragón, 2002); clear and easy to understand (Mondragón, 2002, Martínez, 2010); valid, reliable and comparable (Mondragón, 2002, Picado, 1999, Martínez, 2010); sensitive to changes in the phenomenon concerned (Mondragón, 2002); and they meet the objectives set in the programmes and projects (Picado, 1999), while also allowing for the evaluation of strategies, processes and achievements (Quintero, 1996).

By establishing an action framework based on this definition of indicators, social agents will be able to identify problems and make the necessary changes in the process in order to achieve a continuous improvement in the quality of the work performed, as well as to evaluate the results obtained and their role and tasks in the field of youth leisure.

2.3. Professional practices in youth leisure

The challenge for the experts who work in this field is to design and implement intervention projects that respect the social and cultural diversity of young people, with the aim of enabling them to participate in healthy and sustainable leisure activities, based on the principles of respect and equality, regardless of their origin (nationality, race, culture, gender, religion), or any inherent social and/or personal features (Poza-Vilches, Pozo-Llorente, Gutiérrez- Pérez, & López-Alcarria, 2017).

Public recognition of the work carried out by an institution or group of professionals involves the identification of good practices.

Good practices can be defined as 'successful experiences, with high quality standards, which

have been demonstrated to have positive effects on the target population based on evidence or on predetermined criteria' (*Boletín del Observatorio de la Exclusión Social* [Bulletin of the Social Exclusion Observatory], 2017, p. 1). However, 'the detection of good practices not only serves to reward or recognise a job well done. Publicising successful experiences facilitates common learning, the expansion of high quality standards in social intervention, and the creation of new innovative projects and ideas' (*Boletín del Observatorio de la Exclusión Social*, 2017, p. 1).

For this reason, all of the social and institutional agents working in youth interventions need to be extremely committed, and therefore they should have a leading role in the process. Finally, it is worth noting that the work of social agents in leisure and youth is not always sufficiently funded or resourced. In this sense, participation is key, 'since despite a possible budget reduction, the commitment of the different agents and of the participants can maintain a high level of quality for a given project, and enable it to evolve over time' (Doistua, Pose & Ahedo, 2016, p. 141).

Bearing these theoretical foundations in mind, the objectives of the study are:
a) To identify professional practices in youth leisure from the perspective of social agents.

b) To define indicators to be used as a starting point for the identification of good practices in the field.

3. Methodology

The methodological framework was focused on evaluative research, specifically, on a diagnostic, exploratory and descriptive evaluation carried out on the basis of 34 professional experiences in the field of youth leisure in Spain.

Making an evaluation of this kind involved considering professional intervention as a reflective action that provides an opportunity for practice-based ongoing learning and improvement, taking an educational perspective; and including a summative dimension by weighting the results based on the objectives set in the intervention, so as to qualify and establish new strategies (Tejedor, 1990, Villar & Medina, 1998, Pérez Juste, 1999, McDonald, Boud, & Gonczi, 2000 and Marí, 2007).

The design of indicators emerging from the self-evaluation of the social intervention was essential for the identification of good practices in the field of youth leisure. The evaluation indicators would make it possible to define the actions, characterise practices and establish their

strengths and weaknesses, in order to reflect on the actions taken and establish new intervention guidelines for improvement to meet the leisure needs of young people (Gullone & Cummins, 2002; Casas, 2010).

3.1. Instruments

Given that this was an exploratory pilot study, it was considered that the most appropriate method to collect data on the participants' professional practices was an open-ended questionnaire. This was followed by a closed questionnaire, based on a content analysis of the answers provided in the first questionnaire. The aim was to identify converging points to identify indicators and establish a benchmark validated by the practices of the social agents involved. The questionnaire was deemed to be the best tool to ensure that professionals would be able to respond freely (Bisquerra, 2009). Bearing in mind that this is an exploratory study, the questionnaire was used as a starting point to help to delimit similar cases of intervention, as well as the discrepancies to design a protocol of indicators to validate high-quality professional practices in the field of youth leisure.

This questionnaire was structured into two blocks, which clearly delimited the information collected:
1. The independent variables were: age; sex; highest qualification obtained; autonomous region where their practice was based; years of experience; employment situation; and position currently occupied.
2. The dependent variables were: objectives; inter and intra-institutional methodology and coordination; funding sources; communication and dissemination strategy; evaluation system.

The open-ended questionnaire was based on seven questions that referenced the independent variables and five others which collected information on each of the dependent variables.

In the closed questionnaire the independent and dependent variables indicated above were taken as reference. The independent variables corresponded to the first 7 items and the remaining 36 referred to the dependent variables, with the following distribution: objectives (4 items), methodology and coordination (16 items), funding (4 items), communication and dissemination (6 items), system evaluation (6 items). All of these were assessed on a scale of 1 to 3, depending on the degree of importance attributed to them (1 = indifferent; 2 = important; 3 = very important).

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3.2. Participants

A sample of thirty-four experiences was analysed, based on the opinions of the social agents who had been selected through convenience sampling. The sample included 59% men and 41% women.

Of the participants, 32.4% were between 46 and 50 years old; 20.6% were between 41 and 45 years old; 14.7% were between 51 and 55 years old; 11.8% were between 26 and 35 years old; and only 5.9% was between 36 and 40 years old.

The social agents represented eight Spanish autonomous regions: Madrid (30.3%); the Basque Country (24.2%); Castilla y León (18.2%); Andalusia (15.2%); and Galicia, Aragon and Asturias, with 3% each.

Regarding their qualifications, 41.2% had honours degrees (*licenciados/graduados*); 29.4% had a master's degree; 11.8% had ordinary degrees (*Diplomados*), 8.8% had a PhD; and 8.8% had been trained up to the second level of Vocational Training.

The working life of the experts was more than 21 years for 37.5%; between 6 and 10 years for 28.1%; from 16 to 20 years for 18.8%; and between 11 and 15 years for 15.6% of the participants.

Their professional practice occurred primarily in positions related to social organisations (39.4%), the public administration (36.4%) and private companies (15.2%). The remaining 9% were volunteer social agents, volunteer workers in social organisations, and volunteer workers in private companies and social organisations (3% each), as shown in Figure 1.
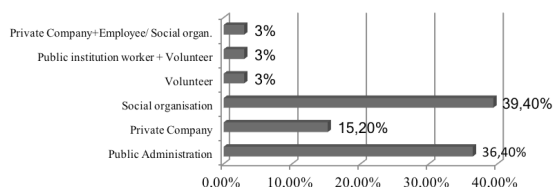

Figure 1. Employment situation

3.3. Procedure

In general terms, the information obtained in the first questionnaire was analysed according to the steps used in content analysis of qualitative data, as follows:

a) Transcribing the information provided in the answers given by the 34 participant experts.
b) Processing the data using the Atlas.ti 7.0 programme in order to classify the responses into categories.
c) Coding the data through a mixed coding process: fast coding vs. manual coding
d) Interpreting the data according to the meta-category tree and the nodes defined in the coding.

Following Poza-Vilches (2008), this strategy does not analyse so much the style of the text, but the ideas expressed in it; the perceptions that professionals expressed regarding their professional practice were used to discover trends and even identify possible intervention benchmarks that would help to define quality indicators in this practice.

SPSS (v.23) was used to conduct descriptive statistical analysis of the data obtained from the second questionnaire. The analysis was highly reliable (Cronbach's alpha = 0.844).

4. Results

The results are discussed according to the five dimensions of analysis employed. The results obtained from the second questionnaire were used to qualify the data through the statements provided by the social agents in the first, open-ended instrument.

Regarding leisure-related objectives, it was found that fostering youth involvement and carrying out actions that promote cross-cutting values are key to successful professional practice involving youth leisure. All the agents surveyed considered both objectives to be especially important. The first objective had an average of 2.88 (out of 3), a standard deviation of 0.33 and a coefficient of variation of 0.11, which confirmed the high level of consensus reached. The second most valued item was related to the design of actions that promote cross-cutting values and rapport to meet the needs of this target group. Its mean of 2.79 and a coefficient of variation of 0.17 also showed the degree of consensus and unanimity reached in the responses, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Priority objectives in social intervention from practice						
OBJECTIVES	Very important (%)	Important (%)	Indifferent (%)	Average	S.D.	Variation Coeff.
• Encourage youth involvement in leisure activities demanded by this group	88.2	11.8	.0	2.88	.33	.11
• be involved in healthy leisure activities that promote cross-cutting values in youth relationships and meet the demands of this group	82.4	14.7	2.9	2.79	.47	.17
• Strengthen network structures among bodies / companies that promote joint actions on youth leisure	55.9	44.1	.0	2.56	.50	.20
• Establish new dissemination and communication strategies for both these activities and existing resources in this area that motivate youth to participate and integrate.	55.9	38.2	5.9	2.5	.61	.25

This was confirmed in the answers given by the professionals to the first questionnaire, which emphasised the importance of:

‘Implementing programmes and measures for healthy leisure, in order to meet the needs and demands of young people, by providing spaces, technical experts, recreational resources, etc., as well as offering a broad range of activities in various forms: focused on entertainment, recreation, sports, culture, art, etc., including those that promote values education and equal opportunities on a cross-cutting basis’ (E 28).

Other professionals reiterated the importance of values education:

‘Values education, conflict management and resolution, vision of the future, the importance of training, rules to ensure rapport ...’ (E 3); ‘Encouraging work in values’ (E 12).

All this is based on the prominence given to the involvement of young people in their leisure, by:

‘Developing activities that have are important for young people’ (E 15); and ‘developing and supporting leisure actions based on the demands that have been identified through the direct involvement of participants’ (E 6).

In terms of methodology and coordination, those with the highest score out of the 16 items were identified. As previously stated in the objectives, the participant social agents attributed a key role to the involvement of young people, which is a requirement for quality interventions. The respondents noted that the item ‘motivating youth and getting them involved in the activities that are proposed for their development’ was crucial in quality interventions, with an average of 2.85, a standard deviation of 0.36 and a coefficient of variation of 0.13. The item ‘building an action plan that makes young people key actors’ was given a high degree of importance by 100% of the agents, which was also corroborated by its mean (2.82) and its coefficient of variation (0.14). These were followed by other highly valued items that revolved around network-based coordination and the cost-effective and efficient management of resources to satisfy the demands of young people, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Methodology and coordination						
METHODOLOGY AND GENERAL COORDINATION	Very important (%)	Important (%)	Indifferent (%)	Average	S.D.	Variation Coeff.
• Motivate youth to be involved in the activities that are proposed for their development	85.3	14.7	.0	2.85	.36	.13
• Carry out an action plan that makes each young person a key player in their life process	82.4	17.6	.0	2.82	.39	.14
• Network coordination between the different resources: institutional, educational, social, contextual	70.6	29.4	.0	2.70	.46	.17
• Promote activities that address the profiles, concerns and needs of young people as a group	67.6	32.4	.0	2.68	.47	.22
• To make available or profitable the resources in the city or district as open spaces for meeting and developing an inclusive and integrating leisure.	67.6	32.4	.0	2.68	.47	.18
• Positively and profitably manage human and administrative, economic, political and social resources in the intervention in youth leisure.	61.8	38.2	.0	2.62	.49	.19

The experts surveyed revealed that another fundamental aspect was the need to:

'Strengthen the autonomy of youth groups by fostering and supporting their own initiatives, providing them with spaces and making resources available to them' (E 13); and to 'promote personal development through leisure, to ensure that leisure activities are fulfilling for the individual' (E 4).

It was also noted that young people need to feel motivated and be offered proposals that are attractive enough to satisfy their needs and expectations, encouraging them to have a leading role. The underlying premise was that:

'The methodology used should be participatory, allowing young people to express their opinions and needs, and making them the key players in the educational action' (E 8). Also 'the participation of parents in youth leisure activities needs to be encouraged' (E 10).

In order to achieve high-quality interventions, there was a high degree of consensus when it came to the basic funding sources, which most participants thought should be mainly (national) public (as corroborated by an average of 2.76 (out of 3) and a coefficient of variation (0.16)), and also from the European Union, with an average of 2.70 and a coefficient of 0.16. These agents did not explicitly consider co-financing or even private financing as a proposal for economic management in social intervention. Therefore, for these agents, advocating public funding is a basic priority for the development of quality actions, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Funding

FUNDING	Very important (%)	Important (%)	Indifferent (%)	Average	S.D.	Variation Coeff.
• **Public funding (municipal, provincial, regional and national)**	**76.5**	**23.5**	**.0**	**2.76**	**.43**	**.16**
• **European funds**	**73.5**	**23.5**	**2.9**	**2.70**	**.52**	**.19**
• Co-funded by private social organisations	39.4	54.5	6.1	2.33	.59	.26
• Private funding (contribution from fees)	30.3	48.5	2.2	2.09	.72	.35

Below are some quotations from the professionals involved regarding the above. They defended that:

'Public funding should support and guarantee stable, long-standing leisure programmes for young people in hardship' (E 16). This funding includes, for example, financial support from 'town councils, county councils, autonomous regions …' (E 1).

In contrast, other professionals who worked in specific programmes reported that their resources come from the specific bodies that endorsed them.

'The funding sources were from the programme itself (European Social Fund)' (E 2). Such as the Erasmus + Programmes, European Youth Exchanges, among others.

However, it should be noted that funding is deficient and difficult to obtain in this area of work. The participants voiced their dissatisfaction with this issue:

'It is one of the weaknesses; since we are a training institution, it is difficult for us to find funding sources for activities related to youth leisure' (E 7).

Table 4. Communication and dissemination

COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION	Very important (%)	Important (%)	Indifferent (%)	Average	S.D.	Variation Coeff.
• **Use of virtual social networks and other means related to the use of ICT (social networks, emails, digital newsletters, ...)**	**79.4**	**20.6**	**.0**	**2.79**	**.41**	**.15**
• Information through word of mouth	52.9	41.2	5.9	2.47	.61	.25
• Specific information and dissemination campaigns (meetings, talks, workshops)	47.1	41.2	11.8	2.35	.69	.29
• Information points strategically distributed for decentralised mass dissemination and by topic	44.1	50.0	5.9	2.38	.60	.25
• Printed dissemination (posters, brochures, flyers, ...)	29.4	58.8	11.8	2.18	.63	.29
• Use of traditional media: radio, press, television	23.5	70.6	5.9	2.18	.52	.24

As stated by the social agents surveyed, the use of social networks and ICT media is essential for gaining accessing to young people, and ensuring that information and resources are made available to them within each specific social action. This was reflected in an average of 2.79 and a variation coefficient of 0.15, as shown in Table 4.

Several experts stressed the significance of information and communication technologies to achieve effective maximum dissemination.

'Through new technologies and the use of social networks as fundamental tools for channelling and disseminating information aimed at the young population: web pages by the Local Council Youth Department, the Employment Area and the local government web portal, local officials' notice board, Facebook, Twitter, weekly mass mailing of electronic newsletters, emails with specific information to young people who are likely to participate in specific programmes, municipal electronic information panels located at different points in the city, etc.' (E 1).

Additional means included:

'The systematic use of new technologies as fundamental means of dissemination among young people: Youth Department website, Facebook and Twitter, weekly mass mailing of electronic newsletters, etc.' (E 5). The 'use of information and communication technologies: web page, blog and social networks; which must be constantly updated' (E 12). 'Use of social networks. Facebook, Twitter, etc.' (E 18)

As has been shown throughout this paper, it is essential to establish indicators in professional practice, especially when working with young people, measure achievements, follow up on the actions implemented and establish lines of action for improvement that improve the standard of intervention processes. The agents involved highlighted this (with an average of 2.82 and a coefficient of 0.14), and considered this item to be the most important to enhance the quality of interventions. This is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Evaluation system						
EVALUATION SYSTEM	Very important (%)	Important (%)	Indifferent (%)	Average	S.D.	Variation Coeff.
• Establish evaluation indicators (quantitative + qualitative) that measure the achievements obtained and that make follow-up actions possible	82.4	17.6	.0	2.82	.39	.14
• Importance of analysing and guaranteeing the fulfilment of the foreseen and executed.	67.6	32.4	.0	2.68	.47	.18
• Importance of an internal evaluation to analyse the organisation, management and coordination systems.	63.6	36.4	.0	2.64	.49	.19
• Close with an evaluation of participants' achievements	61.8	38.2	.0	2.62	.49	.19
• Starting from the different evaluation stages (diagnosis-follow-up-end-impact)	55.9	41.2	2.9	2.53	.56	.22
• Audit-based evaluation System: internal + external	47.1	50.0	2.9	2.44	.56	.23

The experts surveyed affirmed that both the evaluation of the process and the final evaluation are important:

'The evaluation system used includes both the annual monitoring phase and the final evaluation and impact phase. To this end, a series of reports are made that

contain the results and analysis of the data recorded during the whole process, according to the quantitative and qualitative indicators specified' (E 1). 'Defining follow-up and final indicators for the systematic and continuous collection of quantitative and qualitative data to be included in the annual evaluation

reports, according to the strategic lines and specific objectives set' (E 17).

In the evaluation process, social agents take into account many aspects, such as: participation; the quality of the interventions; the degree of completion of the actions foreseen in each measure; the functioning of coordination and control mechanisms, internally, externally and inter-institutionally; users' satisfaction; equipment, infrastructures, materials... These measure the scope and cost-effectiveness of the dissemination methods used: quantity, type and frequency, among others.

The final evaluation seeks to address issues such as:

'The level of compliance with the strategic lines that defined the plan; the degree of suitability of organisational procedures, the degree of general participation, user loyalty, etc.' (E 24).

Undoubtedly, evaluation is a very important aspect to take into account, as reflected in the following statement.

'We rely on the maxim that everything has to be evaluated, we must not be afraid of it and we must strengthen our self-assessment skills' (E 22).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The results obtained show the need to evaluate professional practice in order to identify the skills that the social agents put into play during their interventions; locate the strengths and weaknesses in the social management of youth leisure; and explain the minimum requirements that an intervention should meet to have good quality standards. These findings were based on the perspective of the social agents involved.

This initial approach is one of the strengths of this research. The starting point to provide strategies for improvement is becoming aware of the bureaucratic, political and economic constraints and the difficulties regarding participation management that exist in many of the youth leisure programmes, both public and private, and of the motivations that agents and young people have to promote change.

In contrast, the use of a very small sample of social agents and the idiosyncrasies of the individual circumstances encountered by these agents in their interventions, means that the 34 experiences analysed are unique experiences. This has made it difficult to find common patterns that validate minimum quality indicators for interventions. This weakness could be minimised by expanding the sample, especially in the administration of the second questionnaire, in order to establish trends and validate the indicator protocol used in this exploratory research.

As a summary, eight key indicators were identified by the sample of agents participating in the research as benchmarks for the development of high-quality intervention in youth leisure, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Key indicators
1. Encourage youth involvement in leisure activities demanded by this group
2. Be involved in healthy leisure activities that promote cross-cutting values in youth relationships and meet the demands of this group
3. Motivate youth to be involved in the activities that are proposed for their development
4. Carry out an action plan that makes each young person a key player in their life process
5. Public funding (municipal, provincial, regional and national)
6. EU funds
7. Use of virtual social networks and other communication media related to the use of ICT (social networks, emails, digital newsletters, ...)
8. Establish evaluation indicators (quantitative + qualitative) that measure the achievements obtained and make follow-up actions possible

The first four indicators address the importance of youth participation and involvement to ensure meaningful social interventions that fulfil the main objective, namely satisfying the demands of the young people for whom they are designed. From this perspective, as proposed by Francés (2008) and Vecina-Merchante, Alomar-Marí, Segura-Rotger, & Efedaque-Aguilar (2016), the young people concerned must be at the centre of these actions from the very beginning. Three factors should be taken into account (French, 2008): inclusivity, by ensuring true participation of all young people; intensity (young people should play a key role, since they execute these actions); and lastly, influence (the young population, their actions, their needs, their interests and expectations condition and influence the public policies of the context where the actions take place).

Indicators five and six show the importance of financial support for high-quality intervention strategies; and in particular, public funding and access to European funds. As was made clear in the *Plan Estratégico del Tercer Sector de Acción Social* [Strategic Plan for the Social Action Third Sector] (2010), 'public funding must be an important part of the overall funding, because it is the responsibility of the different State administrations to cover the cost of social actions, for which they have obligations and responsibilities (pursuant to their jurisdictional competences)' (p.52). In this same Strategic Plan, it was also noted that a new, more transparent funding model needs to be developed, which promotes accountability under standardised control and monitoring mechanisms, and guarantees the stability and effectiveness of the actions. This takes into consideration that, as the social agents of our study made clear in the first questionnaire, public budget allocation is often inadequate and insufficient to carry out the interventions, and to ensure that high standards are observed in their performance.

Regarding indicator seven, access to ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) and to the infinite possibilities available through their use is part of the daily life and activities (García & Del Hoyo, 2013) of young people (or, as they are currently called, of 'digital natives') (Prensky, 2001).

This indicator is particularly significant because, as García and Del Hoyo (2013) confirmed in a study on ICTs and young people, 'networks are clearly an information medium for this sector of the population, and young people select a particular network according to the type of need they wish to satisfy' (page 118). In other words, while Twitter tends to be the network they would use to keep themselves informed (according to 64.4% of the young people surveyed), Facebook (22%) and Tuenti (15%) were reported to be a medium used for their leisure activities and social relations.

Lastly, indicator eight refers to the need to define criteria, indicators and standards that make it possible to monitor interventions in order to quantify and qualify the achievements obtained, based on: the initial objectives, needs to be met, effectiveness, efficiency and effectiveness of the results, and impact. This will make it possible to establish the strengths and weaknesses of the process and channel proposals for improvement and quality enhancement. As San Fabián (2014, p.36) noted, 'the evaluation of public services and policies is today a demand for any management process that relies on the right to citizenship'. It is necessary to 'apply evaluation and social control processes both in the use of resources and in the relevance and effectiveness of their projects' (San Fabián, 2014, p.36).

To summarise, this system of indicators is only a starting point to continue researching what the requirements must be for social intervention to improve and enhance its quality. From this perspective, these standards will also enable the detection and identification of good practices in social action, and specifically, in working with young people in leisure issues, in order to use them as benchmarks for social development.

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