

ECER-Conference in Lisbon, September 2002

Network 5: Children and Youth at Risk and Urban Education

Conference paper:

**Conflicting notions of vocational training for youth at risk:
the case of social guarantee in Spain**

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Abstract

The latest Educational Reform in Spain introduced the concept of social guarantee as a strategy to address the vulnerability of young people with backgrounds of school failure. The development of Social Guarantee Schemes –SGS- has given birth to a variety of proposed initiatives including elements of both educational as well as social intervention. This paper intends to explore which are the models as conceived at different levels of practice –the administration funding them, the organizations running them, the methodologies developed by trainers- and the discourse developed by the different social agents involved in SGS in the region of Valencia. We want to assess SGS contributions and their limitations.

The paper is written within the framework of the research project “The formation of vocational identities in SGS. The impact of changes in the educational system in the processes of vocational training”, (SEC2000-0801), funded by the National Programme of Research and Development of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology.

INTRODUCTION

One of the main challenges of advanced industrial societies is the fight against social exclusion and vulnerability: The construction of an inclusive society which guarantees citizenship with its inherent rights and which are a symptom of democratic progress.

This challenge is a priority for the European Union, as is clear from its programmes and recommendations about the fight against exclusion, educational policies on diversity, as well as the generation of employment as a key for social integration. The region of Valencia, as Objective 1, has benefited from funding programmes which have enriched the variety of mechanisms for social integration in at-risk situations.

Social Guarantee was introduced in the context of the last Educational Reform as a strategy to combat the vulnerability of young people at risk. The fact that they are specified in the Law of Education of 1990 gives them a particular relevance. The short history of 8 years of SGS allows us to make a first assessment of the different ways in which they have been implemented in different regions in Spain.

Our aim in this paper is to analyze how different notions of Guarantee Schemes have an impact upon socioeducational practice, allowing different kinds of experience, socialization and learning. They also have an impact on a kind of vocational identity and of understanding of work. We will use data obtained through an analysis of the regional legislations which annually regulate the management of SGS. We have constructed a database of the SGS which have been running for the past 8 years taking into account several of their features.

We differentiate between two great approaches of SGS: on the one hand, as single training actions attempting to provide young people at-risk with a professional qualification; on the other hand, as part of a wider strategy applied in a territory in order to provide young people at-risk with different sources of competences and tools, in the context of the construction of individualized transition pathways along which the young person is accompanied by an adult.

The first model conceives SGS as a vocational alternative for young people, as a resource identified with a funding mechanism, isolated actions against lack of qualification and unemployment. These are fragmented actions, conceptualized as

courses which are of short length and which beginning and end depend upon the source of funding. This is the dominant model, promoted by the administration and which tends towards a homogeneity of structure and intervention. It is inspired by the school system, with a similar time frame, curricular differentiation and subject juxtaposition, lack of links between institutions to which the young person addresses, lack of comprehension of the diversity of situations of youth, limited role of pastoral care, lack of articulation with the territory.

The other model is radically different, conceiving SGS as part of an integral action before personal histories of failure, taken from a network of initiatives coordinated territorially and with an approach towards accompanying the person in their educational process in the long term. It is based upon three axis:

- a) Personal supervision of individual transition pathways, based upon career and personal guidance.
- b) Emphasis on the local dimension of the SG, which crosses local policies of schooling, failure prevention and recovery of the young person; but also mapped against local policies against unemployment as well as social policies against exclusion.
- c) Institutional and local coordination: promoting partnership among experiences of SG, inter and intramunicipal networks, joint experiences of training trainers, coordination and planning of actions avoiding overlapping and competing structures.

SOCIAL GUARANTEE SCHEMES: BETWEEN EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS

Our initial question for this paper is the following: How is the educational administration handling students who don't achieve the certificate of compulsory education? When looking at the regional administration in Valencia, it has developed since 1994 Social Guarantee Schemes, recognized by the Spanish Education Law of 1990 (LOGSE). It is the educational administration the one responsible of the management of educational policies, and these are translated into educational tools, therefore in educational practices to be developed in *a priori* equally educational contexts. In the following pages, we will try to demonstrate the existence of different

educational contexts and practices which make us believe there is more than one way to understand what is a Social Guarantee Scheme.

Such SGS do have certain elements in common with formal education, like the following:

- a normative reference and space provided by LOGSE;
- a compensatory role which is developed through a subject dealing with instrumental skills in SGS curricula;
- its recruitment, basically among schools and trying to recover youth with a record of school failure.

There are, nevertheless, some other elements which bring SGS closer to vocational training:

- a final feature rather than a preparatory one: they are oriented to exit the school system rather than to remain or reenter it; while most other educational pathways for the same age cohorts often foster continuation in education (Báscones, 1995);
- the absence of the majority of mechanisms of control that the formal system usually enjoys: SGS show an absence of decrees establishing their minimum basic contents –there is no core curriculum-, no evaluation is required; they are de-institutionalized and therefore they may be taught out of schools; they are jointly managed by two administrations –the departments of education and economy-; they are run under funding mechanisms which are reviewed every year, there are hardly any qualification requirements of teachers working in them (Marhuenda, 1998).

NORMATIVE RULES AND LEGISLATION AS POLICY DRIVERS

We will try to see now how SGS have evolved in different regions in Spain, with differential legislation, and how pretty different realities happen named under the same acronym.

There are some of these regions which seem to put much greater emphasis on the address of SGS, focusing in serving their needs, while others devote their efforts to

control the organizational aspects of SGS while the beneficiaries come to a second place. Cataluña, for instance, develops the figure of SGS around the concrete needs that young people attending them has. Andalucía, on the contrary, intends to use SGS as a tool to achieve reentry of young people into the formal educational system, thus paying much attention to its academic aspects rather than to the preparation for an occupation: it is not strange that all of its SGS take place within schools. In Valencia, like in Navarra, the emphasis is greater upon organizational issues; yet the particular approach towards the aims of each SGS are left to the promoting institutions. This facilitates, particularly in the case of Navarra, to foster occupational aims, at the same time that it provides the whole tool with a central element around which the rest of the curriculum is arranged: the specific profession for which they train.

Despite the previous, we perceive in SGS similar elements to those revealed in previous research (Martínez, 1998) and in official reports (Consejo Escolar del Estado, vv.aa.; INCE, 1998): the insufficient length of the programmes in order to achieve its declared aims; the lack of any sort of accreditation; the scarce funding of the schemes in relation to other educational pathways; the inability to facilitate the formation of training teams specialized in such a resource; its conception as isolated measures rather than one more step in the transition pathways of youth at risk; the lack of relational dynamics with the labour market and; finally, the lack of an appropriate follow-up of young people in their process of entry into the labour market. Despite independent research as well as official reports have shown these, the administration has made no effort to consider these criticism and reform its regulations.

PECULIAR FEATURES OF SGS IN VALENCIA

In the Valencian Community, SGS are conceived as a vanguardist training pathway with the following features:

- they have the chance to enjoy an integrated curriculum design, in which there is hardly any subdivision among subjects and all of them are arranged around the axis provided by the occupational profile;
- the innovation in their management with relation to all other ways to manage an educational offer: they have much greater flexibility, heterogeneity as well as a strong lack of institutionalization;

- the high flexibility and the scarce regulation degree is one of its more significant features, which facilitates their adaptation to changes following labour market rationales.

Despite the Valencian model of SGS entails enough elements so as to consider them as one more failed attempt to facilitate transition of young people at risk into the labour market; some of their features may also give room for alternative practices: because it focuses on organizational regulations, and because it allows for other institutions –not only schools- to deliver SGS, there is a flexibility here which made us consider its chances to develop the second model of social guarantee that we have drawn at the beginning of the paper.

In order to check our hypothesis, we have analysed SGS in Valencia developing a database which would allow us to check the following structural and administrative aspects:

- the number of schemes funded by the educational administration each academic year since its origins, its geographical distribution and the fluxes of incorporation and retreatment of institutions and towns in which they have been offered in the past years;
- the distribution of programmes according to the sort of institution running it –municipalities, non-profit organizations and schools.;
- the distribution of programmes according to the chosen modalities: offering a working contract to some of the students, offering them the chance for work placements; or offering them the chance to have just a practical training in the workshop;
- the distribution of the programmes according to the groups of individuals they are addressed to; and
- the distribution of the programmes according to the occupational profile for which they train.

Through the previous classification and differentiations, we are trying to see what are the social roles that SGS play as driven by the regulations drawn by the educational administration and by the management criteria applied by the institutions running them (the different priorities, modes of justification, the assessment of the proposals among

others). There has been much talk about the 'parking' role of SGS, is it fostered or defined by the public administration?

When considering the official aims set by the administration, as well as how the addressees, needs and possibilities are defined by the legislation, the apparently professionalization drive of SGS vanishes. More than half of the aims are not linked to a professionalization, they rather try to foster habits and dimensions which are indeed useful for life in adult society, but not to a specific profile in any professional area. Rather than preparing young people for an occupation, it seems that the public administration conceives SGS as positioning resources for individuals according to a predefined social order, particularly in a predefined position within the social division of work. But let us see what has come out of the data we have analysed.

CONFLICTING NOTIONS OF SGS: THE ROLE OF PROMOTING INSTITUTIONS IN THE VALENCIAN REGION

Since the implementation of SGS in the region in 1994, there has always been an attempt to give room to municipalities to run the programmes. Yet, in the past years there is a growing trend among public secondary schools to run them, of which there were hardly any in the beginning years. Such an increase is having an impact upon the role of non-profit organizations, which are experiencing an important decrease in their numbers. There are also secondary private schools involved in running some programmes: despite they cover only 10% of them yearly, they are basically the same schools and they seem to have won their own reduced space among all other institutions. Nevertheless, the trend for the near future seems to be that it will be mainly municipalities and public secondary schools to run SGS in the region.

Looking at the total numbers of SGS run since 1994, we can see nonetheless that there is a very particular interest on the side of private secondary schools to run SGS, because three of them are among those who have run a largest number of programmes throughout the years. It is clear, however, that this particular interest has also shown up for certain municipalities, which despite its relative small size have run large amounts of programmes along these eight years. They seem to have both the will and the ability to run several programmes a year, therefore trying to use them as a differential resource for the particular needs of the youth in those towns.

It can also be seen that, among the most important running institutions, both private secondary schools as well as non-profit organizations show a record of good practice and a tradition in progressive education which is well known in the region among institutions in the field of social work. Such a socioeducational record has provided them with the ability to run programmes even in different towns; despite this practice has been forbidden by the department of education recently, as it understood it consisted in subcontracting practice rather than straightforward management of the programme. Yet, our own assessment of this fact is different: we tend to think that such institutions have compromised themselves with the development of Social Guarantee as a way to develop transition pathways for youth at risk. This explanation is plausible when considering their previous experience in providing socioeducational services, when taking into account their involvement with Social Guarantee since the very beginning and when looking at the amount of programmes they have run, despite the cheapening of them which we will point out now.

If we look then at the funding provided by the administration, it was of approximately four and a half million euros in 1994, for a total of 96 programmes. In 1995, there were already 139 programmes covered by a bit more than six million euros. In year 2001, with a total of 241 schemes, the overall budget was of something less than eight million euros. 70% of this budget comes from the European Social Fund. We can probably talk here of a cheapening of the costs of running a SGS: while the average cost per programme was of 46000 euros in 1994, it is nowadays of 32768 euros tough, indeed, the total number of programmes has far more than doubled along this period.

If we now take into account the occupational profiles which have had a greater success, it is the sector of agriculture (gardening included) the one which shows larger numbers, with more than 15% of the programmes –something that happens despite most of the programmes are taught in urban areas-; followed by tourism and hotelry, with almost an 11% of the schemes. Maintenance of cars reaches 8.2% of the schemes, services to people cover 8.1% of the programmes and 7.7% are devoted to housing occupations and public building. Therefore, these five occupational sectors cover more than 50% of the programmes.

Nonetheless, we have also looked in detail what has happened since the entry of public secondary schools in SG back in 1997. There were only 4 of them that year, while they have increased to 76 in year 2001. This has implied a change in the trend of

occupational profiles: there are now more non-industrial profiles in offer, which introduces certain problems like saturation in formal vocational education –the case of administration and secretarial occupations-. There are also consequences with regard to chances for entry into the labour market of the addressed population: the lack of any recognized accreditation, the preparation for occupations which require low levels of qualification, occupations which show high rates of geographical mobility, with an easy access which does not require basic training in many cases, temporality of the jobs, seasonality of the occupations, etc., all of these are elements which seem to point to the use of SGS for the benefit of the public schools running them rather than for the sake of the young people to whom they are addressed.

It seems that for public schools, SGS are a space for the rest of young people at risk of abandoning the system and while they reenter them. But, precisely for this reason, they have an important academic feature rather than an occupational one. Most of them do not adapt their offer to the needs of the labour market in the region, but rather to the chances to continue studying VET in the same schools. The emphasis put by the department of education in getting public schools to run SGS seems to be related to its will to relocate teachers and to use the resources which those schools have already allocated rather than to serve the needs of students which have repeatedly failed in those schools. While the department of education has applied the criteria of entry into the labour market in order to deny the funding to other organizations (non-profit institutions, municipalities), this principle does not apply when dealing with public secondary schools. This trend of the department of education to bring SGS into schools and get them out of other institutions seems more important than other possible aims like responding to the demands of qualification that local labour markets have or even to the needs of young people, who are indirectly suffering the decisions taken by the department of education.

DRIVING FORCES ON SGS OR THEIR AIMS AT RISK

Since the entry of public secondary schools in the scene of SGS in Valencia, we perceive a strong push for achieving reentry into the educational system of their addressees. Yet, this reentry is only possible through the achievement of the Graduate in Secondary Education, and this is surprisingly not fostered strongly enough by the very features of SGS.

Secondly, the aim of achieving entry into the labour market seems to have been laid on the hands of non-profit organizations running SGS. We can then preview a specialization of institutions which will drive to different roles played by each of them in the overall management of SG. Given the fact that non-profit organizations are decreasing among the institutions funded to run SG, it seems that the aim of using them for entry into the labour market has been pushed to a corner and it is not the major force justifying this resource any longer.

Thirdly, there are various elements which show a trend towards a growing deterioration of the structural features of the Schemes: the inability to prolongue them for longer periods of time except in very exceptional occasions –when most occasions are exceptional when dealing with these beneficiaries- makes it almost impossible to be able to achieve three different aims –entry into the labour market, reentry into the educational system, personal development- in one year, even more if we consider that 10 years of compulsory education have already failed at that with the same people.

Fourth, the lack of stability of trainers and teachers working in SGS is another worrying element. Because each scheme is only funded for an academic year –only 10 months!-, because there is the obligation to write a new application every year –with disregard of the results of the previous ones-; the impossibility to sign funding pluriannual agreements; all of these make it really hard for many institutions to be able to keep a stable and consistent team of trainers and teachers. This implies not benefiting of the expertise which many of them acquire and increase along the years. Some institutions are able to keep them, like public secondary schools, while it is very hard for others, like municipalities.

Fifth, there is also the risk of making of SGS rather a funding mechanism than an educational pathway, dilluting the responsibilities that the public administration has and spreading it among a wide array of different institutions, with various interests in the SG not always according to their intended aims.

We can therefore conclude that, while for certain running institutions the SG is one more resource among their educational resources to serve the needs of the young people out of school; for the public administration they are one more occasion to show its neglect of responsibilities.

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