

What works to promote community engagement: Strategic plan for volunteering and participation in Andalusia (Spain)

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Abstract

This article describes the design of the “First Comprehensive Strategic Plan for Volunteering and Citizen Participation in Andalusia,” which establishes the priorities and strategies for promoting citizen engagement in the Autonomous Community of southern Spain. The drawing up of the strategic plan was developed in two phases. First, a theoretical analysis of the effective practices for promoting citizen participation was conducted. Second, the opinion of a total of 35 representatives of Third Sector organizations was obtained. The review of evidence-based practices made it possible to identify 13 basic strategies for community awareness, education for participation, volunteer management, and the development of inter-organizational networks. Next, 19 interviews were conducted with representatives of the most prominent social entities in the region and two participatory workshops with 16 leaders of the volunteer movement in Andalusia were held. The results showed the existence of a consolidated social fabric, with a “community of practice” constituted over two decades in which awareness-raising

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and training strategies have been effectively combined to promote volunteering. Representatives of the Third Sector consider educational strategies for participation as a priority, such as service-learning, early participation experiences during adolescence and the training of volunteers and members of associations. On the other hand, although social organizations are aware of the need to adapt to new forms of participation (more individualized, one-off, or episodic), they generally defend strategies that contribute to a higher level of organizational commitment. The resulting plan integrates measures to promote participation and volunteering through cross-cutting actions.

INTRODUCTION

Strategic planning has been a common management tool in the public sector since the 1980s and has established itself as an innovation that helps improve the performance of government agencies (Berry & Wechsler, 1995; Bryson, 2010; Johnsen, 2015). In the field of citizen participation and volunteering, strategic design has been used effectively in the establishment of priorities, the coordination between organizations and the community adjustment of policies to local contexts (Bryson, 2018; Wolf & Floyd, 2017). Therefore, it not only improves the relevance, adequacy and acceptability of policies, but it also has an impact on the results obtained from the intervention.

In this study, we describe the development of the “First Strategic Plan for Volunteering and Participation in Andalusia,” based on a dual process of (1) identifying evidence-based practices and (2) the participatory establishment of priorities. The article is divided into two parts. In the first part, we review the volunteering plans implemented in the region between 2003 and 2020 and we present the reasons that have led to expanding their content (incorporating other forms of citizen participation in addition to volunteering). Through an analysis of normative needs, we identify which actions are effective in promoting participation and volunteering. With the resulting inventory of effective actions, we select a set of “exemplary programs” that can serve as a guide in designing the interventions to be developed in this area. As a result, we obtain the theoretical structure of the plan. In the second part, we collect the opinion of representatives of the Third Sector in Andalusia. Through interviews and participatory workshops, we assess the perceived needs and establish the intervention priorities according to the social entities responsible for putting the Plan into practice.¹ This second phase allows us to validate the theoretical structure of the plan and introduce considerations on the feasibility, relevance and adaptation of the previously formulated strategic axes.

Therefore, in this study we follow a sequence of two steps that are connected to each other. The initial objective of the research-action process was to determine what is effective in promoting

¹The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable requests from the authors. Our study followed a qualitative methodology, all relevant information is provided in the methodology section. This work was not a part of a preregistered project.

citizen participation. Second, it was intended to determine which strategic axes of intervention were relevant, feasible and appropriate for the Third Sector in Andalusia. The Andalusian case we describe below highlights the need to combine evidence-based practices with the community adjustment of strategic plans.

NORMATIVE ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE PARTICIPATION AND VOLUNTEERING

To determine which strategies are effective in promoting volunteerism and citizen participation, a secondary analysis of the existing systematic reviews on the subject was carried out. Specifically, eight systematic reviews on volunteering, community participation, and civic engagement were examined (Bagnall et al., 2018; Burton et al., 2004; Einolf, 2018; Ianniello et al., 2019; Jenkinson et al., 2013; Smith, 1994; Smith & Cordery, 2010; Zakocs & Edwards, 2006), along with three meta-analyses on volunteering and service learning (Bowman, 2011; Celio et al., 2011; O'Mara-Eves et al., 2015).² The thematic analysis made it possible to identify a series of common principles in successful participation experiences. Exemplary programs that could serve as models in the design of interventions were also identified.

In this section we first make a summary of the four previous volunteering plans developed in Andalusia. We then summarize the principles of effective participation and the exemplary programs identified through the thematic analysis. Based on this background, we explain the theoretical structure of the Volunteering and Participation Plan.

Volunteering plans in Andalusia

The development of four volunteering plans in Andalusia in the period between 2003 and 2020 contributed to the creation of a broad associative fabric, together with the training of the different players involved in citizen participation. As a result, a community of practice has been established around volunteering in Andalusia.

According to the General Registry of Volunteering Entities,³ most non-governmental organizations that channel voluntary action in Andalusia emerged alongside the formulation of regional plans. At the same time, successive strategic plans (in 2003–2005, 2006–2009, 2010–2014, and 2017–2020) established community awareness of the value of volunteering as a priority and developed specific actions to promote it. Among other activities, information and community preparation campaigns were carried out, awards were established to recognize volunteers and associations, social agents were involved in promoting citizen participation and positive behavioral patterns and exemplary practices were disseminated. Apart from that, non-profit entities largely finance their activities with subsidies provided by the regional public administration (Maya-Jariego et al., 2020).

Second, volunteering plans have made a decisive contribution to the training of volunteers and association staff. Training and qualification actions have received specific funding on an ongoing

² To select systematic reviews and meta-analyses, we systematically searched Google Scholar using the terms “volunteering,” “community participation,” and “civic engagement.” A total of 68 relevant bibliographic references were obtained and used in the literature review. Then, for the secondary analysis, only those publications that provided specific information on effective intervention strategies, with a comparative perspective, were selected.

³ Established by Law 7/2001, of 12 July, on Volunteering in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia.

TABLE 1 Strategic actions of volunteering plans in Andalusia (2003–2020)

Actions	Plans			
	(2003–2005)	(2006–2009)	(2010–2014)	(2017–2020)
<i>Community awareness</i>				
Andalusian volunteering conference				
Andalusian volunteering award				
International Volunteer Day				
Campaign on participation				
<i>Volunteer training</i>				
Training plan on participation				
Associative management workshops				
Volunteer schools				
Volunteer pools				
<i>Systematization of the practice</i>				
Volunteering platform				
Associative resource centers				
Volunteering forum				
Volunteering observatories				
<i>Community innovations</i>				
Guides on effective practices				
Community coalitions				
Transfer of results				
Community-based initiatives				

Note. Own creation.

Source: I, II, III, and IV Andalusian Volunteering Plan. Some of the most representative activities are selected in each line of action. The shading in the columns indicates which actions were implemented in each of the four previous volunteer plans.

basis throughout the entire period analyzed. This has frequently resulted in courses aimed especially at the volunteer staff of the associations. Regulatory frameworks, action protocols, skills accreditation systems and initiatives for the recognition of organized voluntary activity have also been designed. However, training actions aimed at the associative movement in general have also been developed. In this case, they are normally workshops for the technical and managerial staff of non-governmental organizations, to promote community leadership, remove the barriers to local participation and encourage the organizational capacity of associations. A promising action in this area are the educational programs for participation with children and teenagers, given that they favor the development of skills that increase the likelihood of civic participation during adult life (Guillaume et al., 2015).

Consequently, over the two decades covered by volunteering programs in Andalusia, a network of entities that promote and make use of voluntary participation in the region has been formed. As shown in Table 1, they are the result of awareness and training actions maintained over the years. The organization of regular conferences and meetings, volunteering schools, the establishment of public policy forums and the creation of advisory entities have generated the capacities and organizational context that make effective community participation possible. That is the role played, among others, by the Andalusian Volunteer Platform, resource centers for associations and volunteering observatories.

From volunteering to citizen participation

The four plans developed so far in Andalusia have focused on promoting volunteering. However, they have also had a complementary impact on associative life, with specific actions to strengthen non-governmental organizations and develop the leadership, management and participation skills of their members. Not surprisingly, even in its most individualized forms, volunteering occurs in institutional contexts, which shape participation processes (Hustinx, 2010).

In this respect, a certain weakening of the organizational commitment has been described in the new forms of volunteering, with the predominance of instrumental uses linked to the provision of services (Zurdo, 2011). Hence the need to establish a framework that contemplates the different expressions of volunteering, and in a broader sense, the different forms of community participation.

On the one hand, social volunteering, usually focused on the provision of aid, and as a general rule, linked to the implementation of social programs, has been gaining space both in population representation and in the establishment of political priorities. This modality has been shown to be especially effective in improving the coverage and adaptation of social, educational, and health services. Therefore, in practice, it develops the principles of complementarity and community control in public policies. However, volunteering may also take a political dimension to the extent that it is linked to citizen mobilization initiatives, channels participation in decision-making or forms a direct part of collective actions for social transformation. This second modality is based on the potential to promote critical awareness and act as a catalyst for social change.

Moreover, citizen participation also takes a variety of forms through community-based initiatives, neighborhood groups, political activism, re-commodification proposals, and social movements in general. Volunteering has also been found to be significantly associated with these other forms of participation (Smith, 1994).

Principles of effective actions for promoting participation

Promoting participation is a medium- and long-term process that requires functional organizational contexts and involves mobilizing pre-existing resources in the community. It can also be facilitated by the use of information technologies. We have summarized some of the principles of effective actions for promoting participation in Table 2.

First, collective action is usually based on the development of personal relationships. Both in the case of trade unions and in the civil rights movement, it has been proven that personal contacts play a fundamental role in political participation. For example, attendance at demonstrations and public events is largely related to having close friends who also participate in these events (McAdam, 1986). Likewise, involvement in non-governmental organizations and community-based initiatives typically entails devoting time to interpersonal interaction and building relationships with fellow members. That is why it is common for collective action to have a celebratory component and promote sociability.

Second, community participation usually means, as a general rule, maintaining the commitment of members over time, even when the results are not immediate or involve a far-reaching socio-cultural change. Hence, the perseverance of active minorities and opinion leaders is decisive in increasing the level of community awareness and achieving improvements that affect the population as a whole (Moscovici et al., 1969). Both determination and resilience are at stake in

TABLE 2 Principles of effective actions for promoting participation

Actions	Description
Develop personal relationships	Political participation is facilitated by the development and maintenance of “strong ties” between the participants.
Reinforce small achievements	Successes increase the sense of collective self-efficacy and reinforce community participation.
Persist	It is often necessary to maintain the objectives over time, despite the fact that immediate results are not obtained.
Encourage functional organizations	Train leaders, develop the participation skills of members or provide consultancy to improve associative life.
Create community networks and coalitions	Establish public policy forums, health round tables, federations, and other inter-organizational coordination mechanisms.
Prioritize endogenous development processes	Mobilize local community resources
Build alternative community contexts	Self-organized initiatives, such as community gardens or self-help groups, offer an alternative to the conventional services.
Use information technologies	Take advantage of opportunities for self-organization, networking, and efficient resource management.

Source: Own elaboration.

this case. On the other hand, any small achievement offers an opportunity to strengthen confidence in the group’s own abilities. In turn, the sustainability of collective action is based partly on maintaining a positive expectation about the feasibility of the objectives.

Third, grassroots organizations constitute “mediating structures” that articulate community life and channel the participation process. In the case of the neighborhood movement, the positive impact of structured training for leaders and members of community organizations has been confirmed. In New York City, the Block Booster project consisted of training the board of directors of neighborhood associations, while providing consultancy to improve their operation. In those city blocks where this intervention was implemented, an increase was observed in the level of citizen involvement in neighborhood problems and other communal issues (Florin & Wandersman, 1990; Prestby et al., 1990). It also had a positive impact on the individual well-being of the participants.

Another alternative consists of creating networks of organizations, and in general, promoting coordination mechanisms. The existence of federations, forums and participation round tables strengthen associative life. For their part, community coalitions facilitate collaboration between local entities, prevent the duplication of services and contribute to the creation of shared norms (Butterfoss, 2007). All these initiatives improve the degree of community preparation for the implementation of programs.

In fourth place, citizen participation is more feasible and sustainable when it is based on pre-existing resources in the community. On the one hand, it is about supporting endogenous development processes, which mobilize local capacities. On the other hand, it consists of promoting interaction contexts that are alternatives to conventional services, for example, through self-help groups. All this facilitates the flow of initiatives from the bottom up. A paradigmatic case can be found with the actions of the *Grameen Bank*, which provides micro-credits for local development to low-income communities. In this case, the financial aid is conditional on the participation of women in the community and the establishment of group regulation mechanisms in

credit management. In this way, together with the financial investment, community mechanisms are launched that contribute to the sustainability of the initiative (Vermaak, 2001).

Finally, the organizational and relationship-building potential of information technology can also be harnessed. Crowdfunding platforms are a good example of how technological tools facilitate collaboration and efficient resource management (Gerber & Hui, 2013; Mayer, 2019), to the point that they have been attributed the ability to “organize without organizations” (Shirky, 2008).

From the previous review, it can be deduced that some of the effective actions to promote participation are based on: (1) the management of incentives and the behavioral reinforcement of participants, (2) the qualification and training of leaders and members of associations, (3) the strengthening of community cohesion and interpersonal relationships, and (4) the promotion of associationism and community-based organizations. Following these four principles, below we review some of the most outstanding evidence-based practices in promoting volunteering and citizen participation.

Exemplary and promising programs in promoting participation

Citizen participation is not always effective in the development of public policies (Ianniello et al., 2019). In practice, participation processes depend on the degree of information available from the different groups involved, the attitude of public officials, the degree of community representation and the resulting group dynamics, among other factors. For it to be effective, it is important that long-term interactions take place, with the active commitment of all those involved (Ianniello et al., 2019). As we will see below, the implementation of this process can be facilitated by actions of (1) raising awareness, (2) training and (3) organizing stakeholders, as well as (4) the development of community coalitions and inter-organizational networks.

Community awareness and involvement

Among the most common strategies to encourage participation are campaigns to promote the value of active citizenship. They usually try to convey a positive image of volunteering, either by disseminating ideal models of behavior (Septianto et al., 2018) or disseminating its positive effects on health, employability, and psychological well-being (Jenkinson et al., 2013; O'Mara-Eves et al., 2015; Paine et al., 2013). They also tend to influence those social causes that connect with the reasons for voluntary participation. It has been proven that awareness programs on pro-social attitudes generally provide a socialization context with positive effects and have repercussions on the degree of citizen involvement.

On the other hand, voluntary service organizations are mostly rooted in local communities, in such a way that the development of social cohesion and psychological sense of community contributes indirectly to increasing citizen participation (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). To do this, it is effective to create green areas that offer interaction opportunities, and in general, design behavior scenarios that facilitate intergenerational relationships or relationships between the various groups that make up the local community (Bagnall et al., 2018). It is also recommended to organize community meetings and involve local leaders, and provide continuity, when they exist, to previous community regeneration programs (Burton et al., 2004; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2010).

However, in order for social marketing and community development strategies to be functional, they must take into account the costs of participation. Many people do not have the time required

to engage in pro-social activities or face different barriers to participation. This requires the management of reinforcements or the implementation of volunteer recognition programs (Stillwell et al., 2010). It can also be useful to divide tasks and offer opportunities for episodic volunteering, which generally imply a lower response cost. In this context, both developing relationships with other volunteers and encouraging commitment to the organization prevent abandonment and facilitate volunteer retention (Hyde et al., 2016).

Education for participation

Training activities can also contribute to improving community involvement. Among others, the positive impact of service-learning programs, the development of early participation experiences during adolescence and the training of association management staff have been documented.

Volunteering opportunities during adolescence predict greater citizen engagement during adult life (Guillaume et al., 2015; Lawford & Ramey, 2017). The first experiences of citizen involvement, whether in community activities or extracurricular activities organized at school, allow teenagers to form interpersonal relationships in their immediate environment while developing skills for participation (Celio et al., 2011). This is a critical evolutionary development period, in which habits are established that may have a later impact (Maya-Jariego, 2021).

Among the formal education strategies, it is worth outlining service-learning programs, which integrate community service activities into the academic curriculum. These programs are especially effective when they offer students opportunities to reflect on their practical experience. It is also important that they involve representatives of the community, that they take into account the point of view of the young participants and that they are clearly connected to the academic objectives (Celio et al., 2011). When these conditions are met, the students develop skills for participation and also increase their degree of civic commitment (Billig et al., 2005).

Moreover, the training can be aimed directly at community leaders and senior staff of grassroots organizations. In the case of neighborhood associations, it has been proven that both organizational consultancy to improve their operation and the training of the leaders of the neighborhood movement increase citizen participation and the perception of community empowerment (Florin et al., 1992; Perkins et al., 1990). Associative living requires specific organizational skills that can be projected into collective action (Christens & Speer, 2011).

Management of participation

Both volunteering and citizen participation in general are deployed in organizational contexts. Public institutions have a key role in guaranteeing the conditions that facilitate the emergence of civil society entities (Edwards, 2004). On the other hand, deploying the right management strategies throughout the volunteering life cycle improves recruitment and the continuity of participation.

Two of the strategies that have yielded good results are the development of codes of good practices for volunteering management, together with support for the training and strengthening of associations. In the first case, volunteering is divided into a series of stages (recruitment, training, and retention of participants), in which it is recommended to perform a set of actions that have been shown to be functional. In the second case, associative living is usually promoted through the granting of subsidies, the transfer of infrastructures and the necessary technical assistance.

In the Third Sector, a series of volunteer management practices have been established that facilitate the recruitment and sustained motivation of volunteers. A volunteer manager, who is part of the organization's paid staff, is often used to communicate, offer guidance and provide ongoing support to the volunteer staff. As a general rule, it is recommended to establish a written protocol where the rights, duties, and tasks to be performed by the volunteers are defined. Moreover, among other measures, it is important that they have training opportunities, have insurance coverage and that some form of recognition for their work is established (Einolf, 2018; Smith & Cordery, 2010).

However, one of the measures that has a transversal impact on the various forms of participation consists of the determined support by the state in creating autonomous or semi-autonomous entities of civil society (Hadenius & Ugglá, 1996). This normally translates into the provision of direct subsidies to associations or the financing of infrastructures that make associative living possible, such as premises or civic centers. There is empirical evidence that government funding has a positive impact on the functioning of non-profit entities, which in turn promote the empowerment of citizens and their active political participation (LeRoux, 2007).

Development of community coalitions and inter-organizational networks

Citizen participation is strengthened by the existence of intermediary organizations, such as federations, inter-organizational networks, community coalitions, and entities that indirectly support the infrastructure of the associative movement (Prentice & Brudney, 2018). There may be formal groupings or one-off collaboration initiatives. On the one hand, the federations provide direct support to the associations in fulfilling their goals and act as spokespeople for the Third Sector. This allows them to occasionally adopt a more confrontational attitude with the public administration (Holgado & Maya-Jariego, 2022). On the other hand, a community coalition is a group of representatives from various grassroots organizations who collaborate to achieve a common goal. The impact of community coalitions on the level of citizen participation tends to depend on the existence of a positive climate, leadership, the density of inter-organizational relationships, and shared decision-making (Butterfoss et al., 1996; Zakocs & Edwards, 2006).

There is evidence that being connected to multiple voluntary associations has a positive impact on the level of political participation (Teorell, 2003). Moreover, public institutions can contribute to creating a space for greater citizen commitment when the cultural diversity of the different groups involved is respected (Mayan et al., 2013).

Finally, we can also mention the existence of intermediary entities that try to strengthen associative living through the exchange of information, the systematization of the practice and science-practice transfer actions. This function can be fulfilled by university centers, networks of associations, professional associations, and information exchange centers or "clearing houses," among others (Prentice & Brudney, 2018).

Structure of the strategic plan for volunteering and participation in Andalusia (2022): Consolidated and emerging areas

In accordance with the above analysis, the *Plan de Voluntariado y Participación Ciudadana en Andalucía* [Andalusian Volunteering and Citizen Participation Plan] established 13 basic

TABLE 3 Strategies to promote participation and volunteering in Andalusia.

		1	2	3	4
<i>Awareness and motivation strategies</i>					
1	Marketing campaigns to disseminate the positive impact of volunteering				
2	Promote a sense of community and participation opportunities				
3	Awards and programs for recognizing volunteering				
4	Facilitate one-off or episodic volunteering (collaboration in small tasks)				
<i>Education for participation</i>					
5	Early experiences of participation in school for teenagers				
6	Service-learning programs (external practices in the community)				
7	Training of association leaders				
<i>Management and organization strategies</i>					
8	Development of codes of good practices for volunteering management				
9	Direct subsidies for the maintenance of associations				
10	Provide infrastructures that facilitate associative living (civic centers)				
<i>Setting-up community coalitions</i>					
11	Federations and inter-organizational networks				
12	Community coalitions				
13	Centers for the exchange of information and systematization of the practice				

Source: Ministry of Equality, Social Policies and Conciliation for the Andalusian Regional Government (2022). From 1 to 4, the assessment made by an expert on the degree of development of each action in the four previous Volunteering Plans is indicated: 1 *Not at all developed*, 2 *Somewhat developed*, 3 *Fairly developed*, 4 *Very developed*.

strategies for promoting citizen involvement in the region (Junta de Andalucía, 2022). Table 3 lists these actions, together with the assessment of the degree of previous development from which each case starts. To do this, we based our research on examining the funding allocated to each of them in the previous volunteering plans and on the normative judgement of an expert in volunteering. Eight international good practices in promoting volunteering were also selected that could be used as a model for their replication, with the relevant adaptations, in the autonomous community of Andalusia.

Starting from the analysis of the four previous plans, we verified that the most consolidated intervention strategies are the citizen mobilization campaigns, which normally revolve around motivational and attitudinal content. Like in other areas of action, awareness-raising activities, information campaigns, and specialized conferences help create “communities of practice” and prepare the population for the behavioral change that they want to promote (Maya Jariego & Holgado, 2021). This has been done for years in Andalusia through volunteer recognition programs and campaigns to promote the value of citizen participation.

In a second level of development, it is worth noting the subsidies to entities of the Third Sector, the training of staff of associations and the creation of networks of organizations. These are

actions that combine the provision of infrastructures with the training and governance of the associative movement. This push has been reflected in the registration of 2990 associations into the registry of volunteering entities over the last 20 years. It is also worth mentioning the existence of the Andalusian Volunteering Platform, which groups together over 400 Third Sector entities and plays a leading and coordinating role in the Andalusian associative fabric. The new plan designed in 2022 foresees the continuity of these types of informative, training and associative strengthening actions. As a whole, they provide a base from which to contribute to the further development of civil society.

However, many of the evidence-based practices that we have identified in the previous section still have little roots in Andalusian associations. This is the case of early educational experiences and community-based actions. In this respect, only a few pioneering or incipient initiatives can be mentioned. For example, in the province of Cádiz, the Resource Centre for Associations promoted an education network for youth participation, which has obtained promising results in the level of community involvement of young people aged between 13 and 20 years old (Moreno, 2015). There are also entities that have established volunteering management protocols in which they combine the development of skills, community support, and social transformation initiatives⁴ (Ministry of Equality, Social Policies and Conciliation, 2022).

Community coalitions and the systematization of the practice are among the actions with the lowest level of development. Community coalitions have barely had any impact, despite being a strategy that, when given the right conditions, usually offers positive results (Butterfoss, 2007). Likewise, although there are resource centers for associations and volunteering, their full potential to improve the provision of services and contribute to the systematization of the practice has not been exploited (Livet et al., 2008). Added to all of this is the interest expressed in the new plan to encompass the neighborhood movement, local community involvement, and other forms of citizen participation that transcend the instrumental use of volunteering into the implementation of public policies.

EVALUATION OF THE PERCEIVED NEEDS AMONG THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE THIRD SECTOR IN ANDALUSIA

Methodological approach

After reviewing which actions are effective in promoting participation and volunteering, individual interviews and participatory workshops were held with representatives of the Third Sector. Specifically, 19 interviews, with a cumulative duration of about 21 h, and two participatory workshops ($n = 16$), with a cumulative duration of four and a half hours, were conducted. The key informants selected corresponded to social organizations with (1) a higher budget granted in the public calls for aid from the Andalusian Regional Government to entities of the Third Sector and (2) a greater prominence according to the degree of centrality in the network of entities of the Third Sector (Holgado & Maya-Jariego, 2022). Additionally, entities suggested by the General Secretariat of Social Policies, Volunteering and Conciliation for the implementation of good practices

⁴ To mention a few examples: *Fundación Ítaca* and *Asociación Pro-Diversa* have structured volunteering plans; *Fundación Prode* and *Asociación Aspreato* have advanced volunteering management protocols; and *Movimiento por la Paz, el Desarme y la Libertad* (*Movement for Peace, Disarmament and Freedom*) and *Asociación A Toda Vela* incorporate community-based strategies.

into volunteering management were also taken into account. Therefore, considering interviews and workshops, there was the participation of 35 representatives of the Third Sector in total.

Both in the interviews and in workshops with experts, their opinion was obtained on (1) the evolution of volunteering in Andalusia, (2) the incorporation of generic contents on citizen participation into the strategic plan, and (3) the identification of good intervention practices and exemplary programs in Andalusia. In the interviews, they were also asked to score, on a scale from 1 to 6, the importance, feasibility and existence of antecedents of the 13 previously identified strategies to promote participation and volunteering. As regards the scale, 18 respondents were fully completed.

The interviews and participatory workshops were transcribed and analyzed by the working team. During the workshops, two members of the team acted as observers and identified the main ideas. In the analysis phase, one of the researchers proposed a list of topics and strong ideas that appeared transversally in most of the interviews. The initial summary was analyzed through an iterative group discussion process until reaching conclusions by consensus in the interpretation of the fundamental ideas. The process was repeated with the information obtained in the workshops.

Key results

In the opinion of the participants, Andalusia has a consolidated social fabric, which is partly the result of the awareness and training actions developed in the four volunteering plans implemented over the two preceding decades. In that period, a process of professionalization of the Third Sector, in general, and the management of volunteering, in particular, has been observed. This coincides with a certain rise, especially among the younger generations, of episodic, one-off or instrumental forms of participation.

The representatives of the Third Sector consider that the 13 strategies proposed for the promotion of participation and volunteering in Andalusia are relevant and feasible. In Table 4 we have summarized the quantitative assessment made by the interviewees, who in most cases give a score above 5 (out of 6). However, among the actions considered necessary by the key informants, those related to education for participation, the training of volunteers, and in general, training activities stand out. The representatives of the Third Sector interviewed consider all the measures proposed in the Plan pertinent, although they give priority to those of an educational nature.

With regard to the exemplary interventions developed in Andalusia, the participants consider that volunteering integrates naturally with mentoring programs and provides transformational personal experiences. On the one hand, one of the keys to the mentoring programs consists precisely of the development of personal relationships in which the most experienced individuals act as positive role models while providing social support and accompaniment to the people they tutor. These functions fit perfectly with the characteristics of volunteering, as it is expressed through relationships based on empathy, personal contact and proximity.

For us, the most successful volunteering is the mentoring project with children who have left sheltered residences, that is, older children who are alone, even if they are adults, but do not have a family... They are normally of immigrant origin. We are looking for mentors, who we train and who interact one-by-one with each child. There we mix, for example, a human resources director of a large company with a boy who has just left a child protection centre and who barely speaks Spanish. (...) Seeing how that relationship between them weaves together... meeting up for coffee or to play sports... or meeting up for any family celebration... and seeing how

TABLE 4 Assessment of intervention strategies ($n = 18$)

		Importance		Feasibility		Background	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<i>Awareness and motivation strategies</i>							
1	Marketing campaigns to disseminate the positive impact of volunteering	5.24	.90	5.47	.62	4.47	1.42
2	Promote a sense of community to increase participation opportunities	5.65	.79	4.88	1.17	3.59	1.42
3	Awards and programs for recognizing volunteering	4.47	1.77	5.41	1.00	4.94	1.09
4	Facilitate one-off or episodic volunteering, with collaboration in small tasks	4.31	1.74	5.25	1.13	4.25	1.69
<i>Education for participation</i>							
5	Early experiences of participation in school for teenagers	5.88	.33	5.53	.80	3.88	1.58
6	Service-learning programs (external practices in the community)	5.47	1.06	5.47	.74	4.40	1.59
7	Training of association leaders	5.19	1.11	5.00	1.15	4.00	1.59
<i>Management and organization strategies</i>							
8	Development of codes of good practices for volunteering management	5.71	.59	5.47	.62	4.18	1.74
9	Direct subsidies for the maintenance of associations	5.24	1.20	5.29	.99	3.65	1.69
10	Provide infrastructures that facilitate associative living (premises and civic centers)	5.24	1.20	5.35	.93	4.29	1.40
<i>Training of community coalitions</i>							
11	Federations and inter-organizational networks	5.65	.99	5.18	1.13	4.71	1.40
12	Community coalitions	5.71	.59	5.12	.99	4.38	1.63
13	Centers for the exchange of information and systematization of the practice	5.59	.62	4.88	1.27	4.06	1.89

Note. Scale from 1 to 6. Source: own creation, interviews with representatives of the Third Sector.

this opens up enormous possibilities for the boy to feel supported and integrated... is very important. And then for the other person, for the adult mentor, it means opening up their family or vital spectrum in a very important way. Completely. (...) This is one of the initiatives that we are happiest about because it makes the children really change their lives, and the experience for the mentor is amazing. Basically, it consists of sponsoring a boy or girl and connecting them to the society in which they must be included. [E2, Foundation. *Childhood, adolescence and youth*]

On the other hand, volunteering experiences have a transformational potential, values of solidarity are developed by themselves and the commitment of the participants to benchmark social organizations is increased. This is observed, for example, in international development cooperation initiatives, whether through short stays or long-term volunteering.

The type of international volunteering organised by various entities in Andalusia is, for me, the way. It is true that I would call them “caring holiday programmes” (...), what happens is that they have prior training, a prior selection process and a subsequent insertion... In other words, the volunteer experience impacts you in such a way that later you have to get involved in the internal affairs of the organisation... it is a shock that opens your eyes, you see what is there, you bond emotionally (...) and you get involved. There are also programmes linked to the structures: first you have to be within the organisation for a while and then I send you. (...) Finally, there are entities where volunteering has an admirable implication: it is not only tending to the street (...) but the volunteer has to decide and has to be the representation of my organisation in public or political spaces. [E9, *Resource Centre*]

Third, the interviewees also mention the creation of networks of non-governmental organization and resource centers. Platforms of entities have played an active role in training the third sector through support actions and volunteer schools. Specific networks have also been created in development cooperation organizations, programs against poverty, services for people with disabilities, or the actions of local corporations in the field of public health, among others. These networks play a prominent role in representing the Third Sector and in political advocacy initiatives.

The work we perform on the platforms is serving people who want to do volunteering. We make this first welcome and then they will perform volunteering at the 3,000 entities that may exist in Andalusia. But what we do on platforms is welcome: we ask the person what they want to do, we train them, we support them and then they end up volunteering. We prepare for volunteering, but it is not for us, it is for others. (...) We provide meeting spaces. The transversal vision that we have as a platform has a value that affects both entities and volunteers (...) in administrations, universities, companies, and in all the agents that have some type of role in promoting volunteering. [E7, *Resource Centre*]

The most relevant trends in volunteering in Andalusia are summarized in Table 5. According to those interviewed, the existing associative infrastructure facilitates the exercise of volunteering. However, the professionalization of the sector and the increasing demands to manage volunteer staff add new difficulties. The most significant challenge consists of obtaining the long-term commitment of a group of people who now mostly approach the entities to carry out a specific collaboration and on a specific task. Lifelong involvement is much less common than it was before. This makes it necessary to adapt the policies to promote participation.

DISCUSSION

The *Plan de Voluntariado y Participación Ciudadana en Andalucía* [Andalusian Volunteering and Citizen Participation Plan] is a strategic planning tool that provides continuity to the four

TABLE 5 Trends and challenges of volunteering in Andalusia

Trends and challenges	Description	Illustration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Andalusia has a consolidated social fabric 	<p>The Third Sector is made up of many social organizations, covering a great diversity of interests and social needs, with a high degree of internal structuring. Both the organizational infrastructure and the capacities of the different actors involved make the voluntary participation of interested persons possible.</p>	<p><i>“There are many initiatives in which volunteering can be channelled. There are a lot of organizations, for example, to help drug addicts or to help immigrants, or to collaborate with people with disabilities or with the LGBT community. There are many places where you can volunteer. Anyone who wants to volunteer can do so. There are a lot of diverse options.” [E2]</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professionalization of the Third Sector 	<p>The Third Sector has largely oriented its activities towards the provision of services and the implementation of programs. This has been reflected in some cases in a relative lower presence of volunteers in social entities, together with a more instrumental link, related to the application of certain programs.</p>	<p><i>“We have experienced a moment of decline in the level of volunteering in the social sector, possibly due to the professionalization of the sector itself. Many people who 20 years ago channeled their concerns through volunteering have suddenly realized that working in the social sector is a real possibility where one can organize their professional life. Many young people now join organizations as social workers or as social educators.” [E2]</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professionalization of volunteer management 	<p>External controls, codes of good practice, quality assessment and improvement procedures, or the requirements to obtain financing, among other factors, have prompted the application of protocols in the participation of volunteer personnel. This affects the recruitment, training, maintenance, and evaluation processes of organized voluntary action. Consequently, they increase the degree of regulation and demand of volunteering, conceived as a complementary human resource to the permanent staff of the organization.</p>	<p><i>“Now it is quite a challenge, how to incorporate volunteers with increasingly demanding regulations. Volunteers are part of your staff, and they intervene with your users. That is a very good thing. But you need resources to be able to manage it. If you work with minors, you need the person to certify that they have not committed sexual crimes or that they have training in the field of gender equality, or in the field of risk prevention... It is necessary due to our own quality standards... and because the public administration requests it. But to cover the requirement of 50 hours of equality training, I have to manage it and it has a cost, really.” [E2]</i></p>

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

Trends and challenges	Description	Illustration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rise of episodic, punctual, or instrumental forms of participation 	<p>Participation expressed through a stable and comprehensive commitment to social organizations has been giving way to occasional collaborations, in specific programs and for a shorter period of time. These are contributions with a weaker level of commitment. Through volunteering, especially young people seek to develop their personal skills, gain experience, establish social relationships, and generate new personal opportunities.</p>	<p><i>“Now we are connecting with young people. Their motivation is different because normally their interests are very focused on very specific issues... 20 or 30 years ago you had volunteers who came to even be in the administration of the entity or lend a hand with the papers. People who had other professions and who wanted to help. Now, however, we tend to have more volunteers related to specific groups. For example, volunteers who want to work with immigrant children of legal age who are alone. In many cases, this group brings together volunteers, adults, perhaps teachers, who want to help teach Spanish to these types of children. But they come towards a very concrete activity. Very focused on something specific.” [E2]</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The challenge of managing episodic volunteering 	<p>Social entities have to adapt their strategies for recruiting, training and maintaining volunteers to a new reality. As a general rule, the entities see it as necessary to reinforce the commitment with the organization, to guarantee the sustainability of the participation and deepen the type of relationship that the volunteers maintain with the community environment.</p>	<p><i>“The generational renewal of volunteering is quite a challenge. In my organization volunteers have a high average age, and we face the difficulty of connecting with the concerns of younger volunteers. Now there are volunteers for whom their connection with the entity is purely functional. They come, give Spanish classes in the immigrant project, give two hours of Spanish to the group that you have prepared, and they leave. And that’s it. But there is another volunteer who, in addition to his task (because all volunteering has a functional part), seeks a deeper contact with the entity, participates in other types of activities (...) Maybe people who come to do more functional volunteering end up transforming... and stay. Establishes a stable bond with our organization.” [E3]</i></p>

volunteering plans in Andalusia developed between 2003 and 2020, while expanding the thematic coverage to include other forms of citizen participation. Following a participatory research-action process, we verified that both community awareness strategies and volunteer training activities have been consolidated over two decades of promoting the Andalusian associative fabric. However, the strengthening of social organizations and the establishment of collaboration networks still have enormous development potential. In this study, we identified a total of eight exemplary programs that can guide the integration of the instrumental uses of volunteering in the framework of citizen participation, considered in a broader sense.

Participation can take a wide variety of forms, ranging from sharing information or formal consultation to citizen control of the entire process (Head, 2007). This is what has led to it being considered a “ladder,” with different levels of community involvement (Arnstein, 1969; Connor, 1988). Each step entails specific challenges and requires appropriate actions. The strategic plans constitute one of the public policy tools that can promote the skills necessary to develop citizen commitment, ranging from episodic volunteering to collaboration in the provision of public services (Bovaird, 2007). In our study, the representatives of the Third Sector in Andalusia agree that volunteering is only one of the forms that citizen participation adopts. However, they consider that it is capable of having specific promotion actions. At the same time, they admit that the strengthening of associations indirectly contributes to the promotion of volunteering.

Hence, they attribute great importance to both education for participation and community service activities during adolescence. Volunteering is a transformational experience, with which values and skills are developed that can later be transferred to other contexts of participation. This is in line with some evidence from previous literature. Early experiences play a relevant role in the development of associative leaders (Christens et al., 2022), especially when they occur in a context of cultural diversity (Bowman, 2011). They can also encourage social awareness and promote empathy with vulnerable populations (Gardner & Emory, 2018).

Third Sector entities are exposed to double the tension: with the community they represent and with the Public Administration on which they depend financially. On the one hand, social organizations understand volunteering as an “organized caring action,” which is why they face great difficulties in adapting to the new forms of individualized participation and one-off or episodic volunteering. Hence the importance they attribute to accompaniment actions, which channel and guide the individual motivation to participate. On the other hand, they are aware that both the professionalization of the sector and financial dependence can sometimes conflict with the direct representation of the needs of the community (Maya-Jariego et al., 2020).

In this study, a high consistency was observed between the normative needs and perceived needs. First, the representatives of the Third Sector generally validated the proposals of literature-based intervention axes. Second, the exemplary programs identified in Andalusia were also related to evidence-based practices. According to representatives of the Third Sector, volunteering provides transformational experiences and fits in especially well with those interventions that are channeled through personal relationships. This turns volunteering into a training and learning opportunity for the participants (Diprose, 2012). Likewise, and in the opposite direction, education for participation is one of the most effective strategies to promote volunteering (Guillaume et al., 2015).

Throughout our study, of a qualitative and exploratory nature, we detected some topics that may be of interest to delve into in future research. Although we found that the effective strategies for promoting volunteering and participation are transversal (applicable in different contexts), it would be interesting to perform a systematic comparison of the different forms of participation and the ways to promote them. It would also be relevant to examine how volunteering (or

participation in general) is integrated with the different types of programs. All this would serve to improve the community adjustment of psychosocial intervention strategies (Maya-Jariego, 2021).

Recommendations and practical implications

In the development of the strategic plan in Andalusia, 13 effective actions to promote participation and eight exemplary programs in the promotion of volunteering were identified. The eight examples of exemplary programs can be consulted as [Supplementary Material](#). This selection of evidence-based practices is useful for establishing intervention priorities and, in fact, they were used to define the strategic axes of the plan itself. However, they can also be used as a guide in the design of programs, as they provide positive models of action, with specific guidelines for their implementation in practice (Yapor & Correa, 2020). On an operational level, the exemplary programs could even be incorporated into the calls for subsidies, both to define the lines to be funded and in results-based management. Thus, the calls for public funding not only channel resources for the provision of services, but also become a tool for continuous improvement in the implementation of programs (Maya-Jariego et al., 2020).

Another practical aspect is to establish the monitoring bodies of the plan,⁵ which carry out reviews with the necessary frequency to assess progress, incorporate improvements and assess the final impact (Feria, 2017). In this area, representatives of the Third Sector tend to defend the need to call advisory councils with the scheduled frequency and respect their role in drawing up proposals. When implemented under the right conditions, strategic planning can have a positive community impact (Watson-Thompson et al., 2008).

This study highlighted the usefulness of combining normative and perceived needs in policy analysis. Normative needs provide a theoretical analysis of the social problem, while perceived needs incorporate the point of view and subjective expectations of the population. In the design of volunteering policies, it was useful to start from prior scientific knowledge about which interventions are effective in promoting citizen participation. However, we also adopted a participatory approach that allowed us to adapt these evidence-based practices to the characteristics of the context. Our study illustrates the benefit of combining effectiveness and community fit criteria in policy making. This is a strategy that improves the acceptance of policies and the accessibility of programs by the population.

CONCLUSION

Andalusia has around 3000 non-governmental organizations registered in the registry of volunteering entities. The collective of associations, foundations and federations, among other legal forms, make up a densely connected social fabric, organized around provincial and regional volunteering platforms. The development of four specific volunteering plans over two decades has contributed to the establishment of a community of practice, which preferentially carries out

⁵ In Andalusia, the Andalusian Volunteer Council carries out advisory reports prior to the approval of the strategic plans, develops proposals and conducts a regular evaluation of the development of the plan. The reference regulations are as follows: Decree 66/2021, of 19 January, regulating the organization and operation of the Andalusian Volunteer Council and the Provincial and Local Volunteering Councils in Andalusia.

awareness-raising and training actions. In that period, there has been a process to professionalize the Third Sector and the management of volunteering, mostly linked to the financing of the public administration.

Within this framework, social entities generally declare themselves receptive to the design of a comprehensive plan that expands its thematic coverage by incorporating transversal strategies to promote participation. As far as content is concerned, training activities such as service-learning and education for participation are considered a priority. The development of skills through early training experiences is especially relevant in a context in which volunteering is adopting forms of episodic or one-off involvement. Volunteering entities aspire to strengthen the organizational commitment of their members and volunteer staff, and describe a situation in which they see it as a priority to promote the associative basis of participation.

This study refers to a specific case of strategic planning in southern Europe. However, the lessons learned from this experience are transferable to an international context. On the one hand, the strategic axes of intervention correspond to evidence-based practices that have shown their effectiveness in different contexts and different populations. On the other hand, the adaptation to the specific context of the Andalusian region illustrates how, despite having a selection of proven programs, it is necessary to adapt them to the peculiarities of the environment in which they are going to be implemented, in order to guarantee their relevance, viability, and adequacy. This specific case also illustrates how once the social fabric has been developed and the management and leadership capacities of the representatives of the Third Sector have been developed, there is a better disposition to innovate in training strategies.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable requests from the authors.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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