



**PANDA**



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**AUDIO TRANSCRIPT OF THE INTERVIEW WITH JÓSAN PLANTÓN HELD IN THE AUDIOVISUAL ROOM OF THE UCM FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK On 05/09/2022**

Q:

We begin our interview in the context of the Spanish team of the European project, Panda with Jósan Plantón, head of the area of participation of the Fundación Secretariado Gitano, field partner of the European project Panda.

It is necessary to highlight that the Fundación Secretariado Gitano is a very relevant and important foundation in the Spanish context, with more than 60 years of intervention with the Roma ethnic group and with 40 years of life since it was constituted as a foundation. It has 67 branches throughout Spain.

Well, we are going to start by asking you to share your professional experience in relation to children's participation in decision-making and we would like you to define for us what child participation in decision-making means to you.

A:

First of all, I would like to thank you for having counted on me to have this little conversation about child participation, which is one of the issues that I deal with in the area of participation at the Fundación Secretariado Gitano, as you have said.

Within the area of participation, we work with different age groups. And we work with Roma children. And well, as part of my experience with participation issues, well, it has allowed me to have a slightly broader vision when it comes to collaborating with other organizations that also look after children's rights so that they are guaranteed. And well, thinking about child participation, on reflection, it is a right that is included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and it must be guaranteed that children can generate their own opinion, so that they can express it freely on any issue that affects them; so that they can be taken into account when establishing measures that have an impact on their daily lives and, in turn, it must be guaranteed that any child can exercise this participation on an equal footing with the rest.

Q:

Do you think that in recent years, apart from that progress and that recognition in article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, what progress do you think has been made in relation to children's participation in decision-making?

A:

Fortunately, yes there has been some progress when we talk about children's rights, we think about education, health and it is true that ultimately, we think about participation. Historically, participation has been given a second place, we should think that participation is a key right for boys and girls to play an active role in society as citizens. When the importance of participation has been understood, the public authorities have been working harder and harder to ensure that this right is guaranteed.

We are immersed in a strong and constant social transformation and society is increasingly demanding that children are in these spaces of representation and decision-making to be able to raise their voices and express their own opinions. Therefore, children also demand to be in these spaces of representation and decision-making, and the public authorities have been supporting initiatives so that children's opinions are increasingly considered, as well as those of the rest of the citizenry.

The latest advances have been the creation of the State Council for Child and Adolescent Participation, and for example, work is also being done on a law that protects children's associations, so this is a sign that the public authorities are advocating for this.

Q:

You have talked about those elements or those issues that have enabled this progress, but what issues do you consider or what difficulties arise for these advances to be real and effective?

A:

Sometimes adults doubt children's capacity and maturity to make their own decisions. This is what is known as "adultcentrism". I think this has been one of the main barriers to children's participation that has been slow to gain momentum. We cannot overlook the fact that child participation is not guaranteed under equal conditions for all children, children belonging to the most vulnerable group, such as Roma children, [we have to say that the Roma population in Europe is one of the largest minorities] have additional difficulties in being able to participate due to lack of resources, lack of information, etc. Therefore, public authorities must guarantee that all children can participate and have a say in the issues that affect them, taking diversity into account.

Q:

Jósan, looking to the future, looking forward, from your professional experience, what measures do you think should be implemented at a technical, political, or methodological level to ensure that this participation in decision-making by children is real?

A:

As I said before, when we think about children's rights, we sometimes relegate participation to the background, so when we are going through difficulties, for example, when we have recently gone through a health crisis or an economic crisis, etc., in the end we prioritise other rights and establish measures to respond to these needs rather than participation. For this reason, public authorities should encourage programs and more initiatives that promote child and adolescent participation.

I was lucky enough to accompany boys and girls in forums for debate and opinion that were held virtually, in which they were the ones who were the ones to participate. protagonists. This gave them motivation and security..., being able to give their opinion, being able to discuss an issue that was affecting their education, their family and even their own mental health, which made the situation, being able to give their opinion freely, being able to discuss it, more bearable. Furthermore, this also allowed us to generate a vision of how the boys and girls themselves were experiencing this situation, which is why these types of spaces are very necessary, they are very enriching and should be encouraged and promoted by the public authorities.

Q:

You have commented a little bit on what are those measures or those actions that would encourage or promote decision-making at a more political, more strategic, more practical level, but what do you think, in professional reality, would be the tools or what would the professional teams need to make participation and child participation really effective?

A:

In terms of resources, we need specific programs that address child participation, because if we dedicate more time to promoting child participation, then in the end the results will be more effective. We also need more financial resources for programs of this type, and above all, we need to work with the family so that there is increasing confidence in the capacity and maturity of boys and girls themselves to be able to participate in any field, to be able to participate in family life, to participate, I mean to make decisions in their own matters, in the educational field, in their own schools and in everyday life. When it comes to establishing measures to promote participation, I have realised from my professional experience that boys and girls have an incredible capacity to have a say, and they are very clear about what they want and what they don't want. So, at the professional level, we must work and create spaces for children to learn to participate in these spaces; and to take their opinions into account, to raise them to the public authorities so that when it comes to establishing measures, these opinions are incorporated. Mainly in the professional sphere, we need to place a lot of emphasis on this, on promoting these kinds of spaces that bring us closer to all children.

Q:

We have talked about economic resources, time, space, the need for awareness-raising actions to give prominence and relevance to everything that has to do with being able to listen to the voice of children, but there is also something important that has to do with evaluation instruments, how are we going to evaluate or how are we going to assess the degree of real participation that children have, what do you think would be the appropriate instruments or what evaluation indicators would help us to know in a reliable way that participation is real?

A:

With participation, our aim is to contribute to social transformation, so the main thing is that participation has an impact on the lives of the people who participate. In the

initiatives and programs carried out to promote child participation, there must be clear objectives and a clear set of objectives.

A:

With participation we aim to contribute to social transformation, so the main thing is that participation has an impact on the lives of the people who participate. Initiatives and programs carried out to promote child participation should specifically have clear objectives and measurable indicators that indicate that the participation of boys and girls has been effective and relevant. In addition to establishing indicators that guarantee access to participation for all boys and girls regardless of their status. This is also very important because we tend to think of childhood as something general and this is not the case because boys and girls are diverse. There is diversity and they start from a different point of departure, so it is very important to establish indicators that guarantee that all boys and all girls have a place, regardless of where they come from and their condition, because you cannot establish general measures for all children, because each boy and each girl has their own needs, and the groups they belong to have their own needs; and you have to tackle those needs and establish measures in a transversal way for some specific problem of boys and girls.

Q:

To conclude, and if you like, would you like to share any conclusions about what we have talked about and what your professional experience in relation to children's participation entails?

A:

Well yes, I would like to share some reflections: On the one hand, children's participation is a transforming and educating tool so that the boys and girls themselves acquire their own criteria and opinions on the issues that concern them. On the other hand, to conclude, we should understand participation in a broader sense as social participation, which encompasses all areas in order to highlight the different realities and diversity of children.

Q:

Thank you very much Jósan for sharing and dedicating this time to us and thank you very much for all the work you do at the Fundación Secretariado Gitano.

A:

Thank you for counting on us.