

Interviewer: Welcome to this podcast about the PANDA project, which is the acronym for Participation and Partnership for Action. It is a KA202 project and it is funded by the European Union as part of the Erasmus Plus Programme.

The PANDA team is a community of academics and practitioners from eight partners in four countries, which aims to support social workers in working with young children to improve their participation rights.

The Complutense University of Madrid is participating in this project through the Faculty of Social Work.

Today we are pleased to be speaking with Sonia Moncada Bueno, a psychologist with extensive experience in the field of public policies, especially in preventive policies, and currently General Director of Families, Children, Education and Youth of the Government Area of Families, Equality and Social Welfare of the Madrid City Council.

Good morning, Sonia.

Sonia Moncada: Good morning.

Interviewer: I would also like to introduce you to Javier Pomar, Head of the Children's Rights Unit of the Madrid City Council.

Good morning, Javier.

Javier Pomar: Hello, good morning.

Interviewer: And, Marta Blanco Carrasco, a member of the PANDA team at the Complutense University of Madrid, who is joining me on this podcast.

Good morning, Marta.

Marta Blanco: Good morning.

Interviewer: And this is Esther Mercado García, Coordinator of the PANDA project at the Complutense University of Madrid.

Well, as you know, today we want to explore the issue of child participation in the City Council. So, with regards to this issue, we would like to know, Sonia, what is the vision or the model of participation in Madrid City Council?

Sonia Moncada: Well, thank you very much for this opportunity to explain to you our model of participation, a model that we are very proud of, and which was launched in 2017. Since then, it has been evolving, it has been changing, although the basis of the whole project has always been the same, which is to listen to children in order to promote, in public policies, the viewpoints and proposals of children from the city of Madrid.

That is our model. It is a model of community intervention and it is a model of listening and participation, of promoting the participation of children in general. It is true that it is framed within the Department of Child Protection, but there is a reason for this and this is that it is the Department responsible for the promotion of all children's rights and it is the department responsible for drawing up and

coordinating the Children's Plan of the Madrid City Council. That is why it is in this Department.

There are other areas of government in this City Council. There is an area of government, known as the area of Transparency and Citizen Participation, which has a Directorate General for Participation, with which we collaborate, but we collaborate fundamentally to disseminate this project, because they have overall responsibility for the participation of all the citizens of Madrid, but we have a specific responsibility to promote and listen to the children of our city.

Interviewer: Great. Thank you very much. One of the issues that we have seen internationally is that there are different models regarding child participation, and therefore we would like to know more about the model or the framework that Madrid City Council is working on.

Sonia Moncada: Yes, I tell you how we do it, how we set up this project, because I think this will help explain things.

It is a project that begins, first, with the recruitment of children, with raising awareness among children, especially in schools, but also in associations, community centres, etc. They are made aware of this project and are then recruited and involved to become involved.

You know that Madrid is a very complex city, it is a very big city that is divided into 21 different districts. So, we have this participation project in the districts, so that in the districts there are child and adolescent participation points, participation points where children sign up. From these participation points, the children's participation commissions are organised. In Spain, these participation commissions are regulated by law, by the Child Protection Law of the Community of Madrid, which establishes that there must be Child and Adolescent Participation Councils.

We organise the COPIAS in the participation points of the districts. Correct me Javier, if I am wrong.

Javier Pomar: Exactly.

Sonia Moncada: We organise the COPIAS, the COPIAS are the Commissions for the Participation of Children and Adolescents. Who participates in these COPIAS? Well, it is also a very participatory process because it is the children themselves who choose the participants of the COPIAS. What these COPIAS do is host debates on topics of interest. We have a Dynamization Service for Children and Adolescents, which we created through a contract, a public tender contract in which there are companies specialised in dynamization, in children's dynamization. Companies apply for the project and the best company wins, as in all tender processes. And they are simply in charge. I want to stress that they do not influence what the children think, nor do they direct them about where they must go, nor what they have to say or how they say it. The children are free to raise issues. What they do is to activate (dynamise) these groups and organise the groups' answers and give this information back to them. In other words, they

oversee; helping them to organise themselves. Then they also help them to present the proposals in an articulate, orderly way and so on. This is where the Dynamization Service comes into play. But it all starts with the children, they are the ones who propose the topics, they are the ones who ultimately select the topics to be dealt with. They are the ones who look for the information to generate the debate and they are the ones who reach the conclusions, the proposals. And this is a process that, in the first place, is presented to the districts, to the Municipal District Boards. And if there are COPIAS, the COPIAS work at district level. There is also the COPIAM, the same organisation but ending in M – which stands for the Commission for the Participation of Children and Adolescents of the city of Madrid.

And what do we do here? Well, here we organise. There are two sessions; there are two plenary sessions for children and adolescents; there is a plenary session for children up to 12 years old and a plenary session for adolescents from 12 to 16 years old, because we believe that the interests and proposals of each of these groups are different and they also work better in a more comfortable, more differentiated way.

Well, then we take the proposals of the boys and girls who have worked in these working groups and these ideas/proposals are taken to the Plenary. And in the Plenary, all the political groups listen to them. They listen to them and have to respond to them. But this is not the only thing we do. We also do something else; once we have received all the children's proposals, normally, of course, they affect many areas of government. I will tell you that children's concerns, well, they go a long way to making the world a better place.

I would say that, in conclusion, what children want is a better world, they want a more egalitarian city, a fairer city, a cleaner city, a safer city, a city without violence, an inclusive city, a city that respects the environment. They are concerned about the great issues and movements that exist right now - social, cultural and so on and this is reflected in the proposals which affect many areas.

What we do has evolved because in the beginning we simply listened to them, we presented their [the children's] proposals in the plenary and there they [the children] debated with the politicians. And it is very interesting to see how now the politicians answered them. And this was followed by question time and they [the children] intervened. There was a very rich and enriching debate. What we do now is that we send all the proposals to the corresponding areas of government and all the government departments must provide us with answers that we then give to the children. And this is another thing that we have more recently introduced as we have evolved. Before we did not send the proposals back, now we have a feedback session on what the areas/departments tell us they are going to do with the children's ideas and proposals. Javier, isn't this what were you saying before?

Javier Pomar: Yes, there is also an issue that seems important to me, and that is that young people are becoming aware of the complexity of Public Administration and there are proposals that come from other bodies, especially from the

Community of Madrid and so, they are appearing in the Plenary Sessions that correspond to the Community. We have also done something important and that is to be able to raise it with the Regional Ministry of the Community of Madrid, which obliges them to reply because before they also sent the information to the Community, but there was no response from the politicians of the Community, right?

So, I think that the Community has become more involved and that we are providing broad participation. We are really a reference for other municipalities, given the complexity of the city of Madrid, because there are other Participation Commissions in small towns of 500 or 1,000 inhabitants, but 21 districts and half a million children under the age of 18, is complex, isn't it? I think that is also important.

And then we are also in international spheres including collaboration with UNICEF and Save the Children. They are also there.

Sonia Moncada: And another issue that Javier always stresses is that we have managed to ensure that now the areas themselves, when they are going to carry out a project, ask us to consult with the COPIAS to seek their opinion. We think it is fantastic because we have managed to make the areas of government aware; first, that they know about it, that this mechanism exists, but then second, that they are the ones who seek the opinion of the children and ask us for their opinion. So, we think it is fantastic because it's something that hasn't happened before and it's starting to happen.

Interviewer: Great. Following on from what you were saying, regarding the issue of COPIAS and COPIAM, that they are being listened to, right, and that the policy makers were giving answers regarding the different departments/areas of responsibility, we would like to know, apart from them giving an answer, to what extent are these children's interests materialised in public policies or measures that are carried out in the city of Madrid?

Sonia Moncada: Well, it is not always easy. I will give you an example of a very difficult subject, for example. There are times when children ask us for things that take years to develop. For example, a few years ago they asked us for a specific park for teenagers. I think it is an incredible idea because it is true that there are no specific spaces for teenagers. Well, we made this proposal here, of course, the Department of Works was involved, the Department of the Environment with parks and gardens, etc., etc. How far have we progressed? Well, we have got the design of the park, we have designed it, we've got the site and we've designed it with them. It is an incredible park; we have the model. We have the model but I mean, we have not got the park yet. It is a big investment. So, we have not achieved it, I mean, but there is awareness of this issue, right?

Then there are other issues that are considered and included in the projects, such as the whole issue of cleanliness, rubbish, lighting, areas, etc., all of that is included. Of course, our children's plan is absolute, that is, we include all the proposals. In the last one, for example, there was a beautiful proposal that was

made to us to put the names of the streets of Madrid in Braille, which is a beautiful proposal. Well, we sent it to the Accessibility Strategy of the city of Madrid. And they have included it as a plausible topic. They have accepted it. So, well, little by little, we are gradually including the proposals, those that are plausible and that are, do not involve a large amount of money and are not complex, they can be done immediately, while those that, as I say, involve a significant complexity, have a budget behind them that must be obtained, approved and so on, are more complicated. But, well, we insist on this. We are there, behind this adolescent park and we will not stop until we get it, right, Javier?

Javier Pomar: Yes, of course.

Interviewer: You were talking earlier about the achievements of this model of participation, that they [children] are listened to, that [policy makers] they respond to them, and that when projects are presented in the different areas, children's opinions are taken into account. But we would also like to know what challenges remain in terms of child participation.

Sonia Moncada: Well, I think the main challenge is the extension of the project. We started in 2007, with 112 participants. Right now, we have 3,323 participants. We must reach more children. And I think this is a challenge. It is a challenge. And I think that right now with all the social networks and all the channels we have, all the telematic possibilities for participation, we are not using them as much as we could.

So, I think this is a challenge that we still must insist on. The extension of COPIAS and the much increased participation of boys and girls.

I think this is an important challenge and then another, another important challenge, of course for us, because it is, for example, achieving a request from the boys and girls, which is that there be two plenary sessions. In other words, now we have a Children's Plenary to listen, but they want a Children's Plenary to return. We are making this return right now here at the General Management level. We have also invited political groups to attend this return so that they also know what we do. But they want it complete. This is also another challenge, huh? Give them two moments of prominence, eh? within what is the plenary session of the Madrid City Council, with the presence of the Mayor who is always in all the plenary sessions. And well, this is another challenge, that is, to improve on the foundation that has already been made. Above all, I believe that in this increased participation another challenge is to make all the achievements through the COPIAS proposals visible, for example, the braille proposal or the park. The COPIA symbol would be there in those projects so that that it can be seen that it is a project promoted by COPIA.

This is not always easy because there are many times that children propose things that are already being done in some way, so that they are intensified, but it is already being done. For example, the safe route to school, well, there is a project for a safe route to school, so, well, it can be intensified and it can be improved, but the project is done. But there are very specific proposals for

children and we want to give them visibility. In other words, when a COPIA project comes out, it becomes visible that it has been a project promoted by COPIAS and give them that visibility.

Interviewer: I do not know if the Madrid City Council is proposing a new participation model or if it is going to continue with the same model that is being used now.

Susana Moncada: Let us see that yes and I do not want to tell you. I believe that we must insist on this model, we believe that we have a very good model. What we want is to extend it. Well look, we have a system in our services that include an improvement system with the opinions of the users of the services. Well, one of the things we want is to listen to the children using the services and for that we must adapt the language and the resources to the language of the children.

So, what we are promoting is that participation also comes from there, it comes from the evaluation of public services by children. We do have a system of complaints and suggestions, which is a bit difficult for children, because it is a complex system in which adults already have some difficulty, because children do not even want to talk, and because we also want to be involved in coordinating with the Citizen Participation service to make all this easier. There are some, we call them SIREs, which are SIR [suggestions and complaints system]. Well, we want there to be an SIR child, so that they also evaluate us in some way, right? Rate our services and help us incorporate children's points of view on what the services are. We already have this in the Government Area services, in the Child Care Centres, in the Family Support Centres. We already have it incorporated in this, but we want this to be outsourced, disseminated, and generalized in all City Council services, sports centres, libraries, that is, in all those services that boys and girls attend.

Javier Pomar: I think there is also something else that has been interesting about child and adolescent participation which is that the General Directorate for Citizen Participation is going to create a space for direct participation, initially for adolescents and later for children like DECIDE Madrid. It will mean that children can make proposals at an individual level and then they can study or see those, either in the COPIA or those that they value the most, since they can also be raised to the Plenary. So right now, we are creating it jointly from the two General Directorates but it seems to me that this is a bit, it reflects what Sonia said before about being able to extend participation to the entire city and to all children.

Sonia Moncada: That is a project, I do not know if you know the processes, the participatory budgets of the Madrid City Council. Well, in Madrid it keeps certain budgets for projects promoted by the people of Madrid. Thus, these projects are presented and voted for by the citizens on the DECIDE Madrid portal. As Javier has said, at the moment there is no space for childhood and adolescence and Citizen Participation wants to create that space. And these projects are voted on by the citizens and are budgeted and executed. For example, in this General Directorate we have launched several of these projects. We have the Casas Grandes, which was launched by participatory projects. These are meeting

places for parents with children from 0 to 3 years old to promote the family bond and the relationship between parents and children. That it is a beautiful project or we have, for example, the office for Independent Living for people with intellectual disabilities, OVIDI, which is a participatory project that succeeded and is now a reality. So, well, that is what we want, as Javier says, and I think this part of the fact that there is a fabric in Madrid for children and adolescents is very important.

Interviewer: Yes, we would like any suggestion or recommendation for politicians on public policy measures or managers in this case or professionals who work on children's issues. Any recommendations or suggestions of where we should go to promote children's participation in a general way?

Sonia Moncada: Well, let us see, I think that for any project to go ahead it must have a budget behind it. This is the first idea. Lines cannot be launched without knowing that it costs effort and personal effort by the work teams and costs budgetary effort. So, this is a first suggestion.

So, encourage them, that is, it is no longer a recommendation, but a stimulus to encourage them to listen to childhood, adolescence, because they make us better. In other words, I think we must listen to our boys and girls because it helps us realize the wonderful boys and girls we have and makes us be better, be better people, be better professionals and believe more in the humanity. In other words, I encourage you to promote this type of project because it really is very satisfying, you will enjoy it.

Javier Pomar: And I would address the technicians, especially in the social field, that we listen to them before taking measures or decisions, right? Many times, we work with families, but without children. We do not involve them in the processes or sometimes inform them of the decisions we make. We refer them to a resource, but without previously discussing it with them to explain it to them. It seems to me that it would also be important at the individual level, not only at the community level, as the Madrid City Council does and, in fact, in the nurseries and resources we do have that presence of children with groups and with the individual, don't we. But it seems to me that the technicians should embed the principle that children are citizens, it is not a project for the future, but that they are already here, and in Madrid they represent more than 17%. So, it is a significant number.

Interviewer: For our part, thank you very much for your availability and participation. I do not know if there is anything additional that you would like to add or if you have a question. I think for our part the general vision was well framed and we have nothing more. And I insist again, thank you very much for your willingness and participation in this podcast within our PANDA project and above all the collaboration with the City Council, which also collaborates with us within this project.

Thank you very much, Sonia.

Thank you very much Javier, Marta.