

Rural European population facing the challenges of global citizenship education

La población rural europea frente a los retos de la educación para la ciudadanía mundial

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Abstract

Supporting the creation of a critical citizen, with deeply rooted community values of solidarity and active compromise to the spread and development of those values, is making means believing in a better world in which no one can nor should feel excluded. Nevertheless, this is met with differing opinions. This study approaches attitudes towards Global Citizenship Education specifically through the framework of the population of rural Europeans who participated in the Rural DEAR Agenda – EYD 2015 Project. In order to do, quantitative research was carried out based on a survey and questionnaire developed. The questionnaire focused on interest in international solidarity; for example, opinions and attitudes towards injustices suffered by impoverished countries, as well as opinions surrounding the possibility of changing this situation. The results obtained reveal a shocking reality in many ways relative to international solidarity and a low level of compromise regarding taking action to change the current situation.

Palabras clave: attitudes, education for development, European rural areas, global citizenship education, public opinion.

Resumen

Apoyar la creación de un ciudadano crítico, con valores comunitarios arraigados de solidaridad y compromiso activo con la difusión y el desarrollo de esos valores, es hacer creer en un mundo mejor en el que nadie pueda ni deba sentirse excluido. Sin embargo, esto topa con opiniones divergentes. En este estudio, se abordan las actitudes hacia la educación para la ciudadanía global, específicamente a través de la población de europeos rurales que participaron en el Proyecto Rural Dear Agenda – EYD 2015. Para ello, se llevó a cabo una investigación cuantitativa basada en una encuesta y un cuestionario previamente elaborados. El cuestionario se centraba en el interés por la solidaridad internacional; por ejemplo, las opiniones y actitudes ante las injusticias que sufren los países empobrecidos, así como las opiniones en torno a la posibilidad de cambiar dicha situación. Los resultados obtenidos revelan una realidad chocante en muchos aspectos relativos a la solidaridad internacional y un bajo nivel de compromiso en cuanto a la adopción de medidas para cambiar la situación actual.

Keywords: actitudes, educación para el desarrollo, zonas rurales europeas, educación para la ciudadanía mundial, opinión pública.

1 Introduction

The need for global citizens who try to change the world into a more just, humane place is becoming ever more evident and, at the same time, pressing. It is difficult to ignore that global citizenship education (GCE) is key to reaching that goal, and that, every day, it is becoming more and more clear that «there is a need for old barriers to be dismantled and debates to be developed further that may lead to a new form of education for global citizenship» (Davies *et al.* 2005, p. 67). Thus, the need to support well-educated, aware citizens willing to act and be guided by solidarity, equality and human rights is one of the most solid arguments in recent educational debates (Starkey 2012, Díaz 2005). Educating global, critical citizens capable of facing challenges in such a complex, ever-changing society is of utmost importance (Peterson & Warwick 2015).

GCE is crucial to achieving this type of citizen «training» and, to do so, it is essential that this education is accessible to everyone.

Rural areas need to have adequate GCE, to encourage certain attitudes and abilities that enable a citizen's comprehension of and attention to the global need to defend a more just, solidarity-driven, and democratic world (Banks 2008). However, few studies exploring the particulars of rural public opinion on these issues have been done. Furthermore, studies on rural public opinion related to educative processes are practically non-existent. General reference to the issue, while not central to these studies, can be found in works by Boström and Dalin (2018), as well as Hirowatari (2019). The present study looks to develop a deeper understanding of rural European citizens' attitudes towards different issues related to GCE. Thus, municipalities participating in the Rural DEAR Agenda EYD – 2015 were analysed, specifically from the following countries: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Spain, Greece, Italy, Malta, and Poland.

Lastly, this study means to contribute to the advance of rural European citizens' sense of responsibility, awareness and compromise to human development and sustainability.

2 Global citizenship education

The historical development of GCE has been touched on by authors from various countries. These authors have linked changes in GCE to the most relevant economic discourses of the time, which, according to Selby and Kagawa (2001) or Scheunpflug (2021), mean that GCE should encourage a strong character of critical consciousness. These authors, in general, affirm that «development education practice in most industrialized countries emerged in response

to the de-colonization process» (Bourn 2011, p. 12). Currently, GCE is going through a period of globalization or, according to Takkac and Akdemir (2012), globalism. This is due to the tendency to think that «we are citizens of individual countries, and it is through those countries that we can best effect global issues» (Kerr 1999, p. 281). In that way, there is a general belief that citizens need to be more socially responsible, more conscious of the problems affecting the world as well as the causes of poverty and inequality and behave in accordance with bettering the well-being of the world's most affected areas (Monk 2014, Murray 2006, Santamaría-Cárdaba *et al.* 2021).

Keeping in mind that «contemporary era puts at risk the capacity individuals have to think of themselves as a member of a community with shared purposes» (Solís-Gadea 2010, p. 3181), citizens must be trained to be critical thinkers. Because of this, Andreotti (2006, 2011, 2013) added the word «critical» to GCE (critical global citizenship education). This author points out that the development of critical consciousness is necessary for citizens to understand global issues that affect the society in which they live (Pashby *et al.* 2020).

The present study is based on current GCE, which is understood as an educational process whose objective is to train free-thinking, critical people who can understand the challenges present in relationships between countries from North to South, and are, as much, aware of social reality (Celorio & Celorio 2011, Smith *et al.* 2016). In this way, GCE can be defined as «awareness, caring, and embracing cultural diversity while promoting social justice and sustainability, coupled with a sense of responsibility to act» (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller 2013, p. 1).

Therefore, GCE is extremely relevant to society: trying to create a critical, global citizen dedicated to the defense of Human Rights and who wants to change the world to «a less ugly society [...] one that is less evil and more humane» (Freire 1997, p. 115).

The question arises of how to define a «global citizen». Different studies point out the complexity behind establishing a set definition of such a concept because there are «multiple interpretations of what it means to be a citizen» (Salter & Halbert 2017, p. 3). In line with this idea, Andreotti (2011) ascertains that the complexity of GCE arises from the need to interpret the notion of a global citizen from different angles. Authors like Isin and Turner (2007) contribute a critical view related to the need to create global citizens by saying «a citizen exists originally within the political confines of a state, and until a genuinely global state exists that has sovereign powers to impose its will, it is misleading to talk about the global citizen» (Isin & Turner 2007, p. 14). Based on the afore mentioned ideas, and as De Paz (2007) and Wood and Black (2014) also affirm, a global citizen needs to be active in the defence of human rights, try

to prevent situations of injustice and make the world a better place for everyone.

In short, this study can be framed by the idea that the GCE sees education as key to spreading people's «awareness of self and others, empowers them, and educates them to become responsible global citizens» (Smith *et al.* 2016, p. 4).

3 Rural DEAR Agenda EYD – 2015 Project

As mentioned above, this study is derived from the European project, Rural DEAR Agenda EYD – 2015; a project whose objectives were two-fold, as explained in OCUVa (2016): (1) establish a diagnosis of GCE in the rural areas of the participating European countries through different studies and, (2) taking the diagnosis into account, propose a Rural Agenda of measures towards the improvement of GCE in these European areas, in order to foster change towards sustainable development. Through the implementation of the measures included in the Rural Agenda, the idea was to also promote a participative GCE model, which is included in the 2015 European GCE strategy. This involves the use of inclusive, efficient, and innovative strategies in rural municipalities.

This project was proposed and developed by entities from seven European countries. It was carried out by a consortium of peers from the University of Valladolid and the Provincial Council of Valladolid (Spain), as well as those in charge of the coordination of the FOPSIM project (a foundation whose objective is achieving specific advances in favour of marginalized groups, social protection and inclusion) (Malta), SAN (a university founded in 1995 with experience working with underprivileged groups) (Poland), the Local Authority of the municipality of Idalion (a rural area found in the Nicosia district) (Cyprus), the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Vratsa (Bulgaria), the Regional Authority of Molise (a region whose capital is Campobasso) (Italy), and the University of Tesalia (a public university founded in 1984 whose administrative centre in Volos) (Greece).

The Rural DEAR project was divided in various phases. The first phase centred on carrying out a diagnosis of the GCE situation in rural European areas. More specifically, it consisted of: an analysis of the way local press in these regions covered issues related to GCE, a survey created to take inventory of the actions taken through educational institutions and by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and a survey to capture public opinion in the rural areas involved in the DEAR project about some relevant topics for GCE. This article focuses on the study of public opinion of the European rural population, the specific objective being to analyse personal

attitudes, commitment, and participation in development actions, by finding out the type and frequency of actions, as well as the factors influencing decisions.

The second phase, labelled «accompaniment», included three activities: the organization of working groups, according to country with the objective of providing different points of views on GCE; a meeting with a panel of experts who used the Delphi Method, to come to a consensus on the basic principles of GCE, and the gathering of best GCE practices in the participating regions.

The third phase, named «pilot phase», consisted of carrying out innovative experiences and GCE polite projects that responded to the needs of the rural areas. These pilot projects were supported by public announcements offering funding and technical consultation to support their creation.

The final phase of the project was the publication of a relevant Agenda for GCE in rural areas, a product of all the input gathered from each phase.

Overall, the goal of the European project, Rural DEAR Agenda EYD – 2015, was to encourage the commitment of rural European citizens to solidarity and participation in the support-help network, as well as spread awareness of their shared responsibility in the development of a more sustainable planet.

4 Methodology

Taking into account that the main objective of this study was to take the pulse of public opinion in rural European areas about certain issues of interest related to GCE practice, including questions of attitude and character, and that this pulse would be strong enough to come to conclusions that would help guide later actions focused on this type of population, a quantitative methodological focus was chosen, putting the focus on obtaining certain objective measurements and applying statistical analysis. More specifically, a non-experimental design focused on an essentially descriptive study of the surveys was considered *post-facto*, due to the complexity of the social phenomenon under observation, as well as the conditions under which the study was carried out.

The instrument used to gather information was a questionnaire designed *ad hoc* for this study and consisted of questions grouped into four categories, as can be seen in OCUVa (2016). These questions were of mixed typology and included multiple choice, short answer, and open-ended responses, as well as questions with answers presented on different levels of the Likert scale. Because this survey was done in seven different European countries, it was translated to the official languages of each of the participating

countries. Participants were also given the possibility to either fill out the survey in paper or digital format. The selection of participants was done by applying a mixed multi-stage sampling method, in which a convenience sample by conglomerates was used to mark off the geographic areas where the surveys were done (Cea 2001). At the same time, quota sampling for participant selection was carried out, since there was no probabilistic sampling available and, «even so, a representative sampling of the population is needed» (Cardona 2002, p. 130). The participants had to be, at least, sixteen years of age and be registered on the census of the European areas shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1
Participating European areas

Quota sampling was defined according to different age ranges, oscillating between 16 and 74 years of age. Quotas are defined primarily based on criteria of representativeness, based on age, which was the main variable of segmentation, using weighting coefficients that gave greater weight to the sectors or strata of younger age. The age strata defined range between 16 and 74 years and are the following: 16-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65-74. In addition, groupings have also been established according to the educational level of the participants: Below Primary, Lower Secondary, Post-Secondary or Above, Primary and Upper Secondary (age > 16). The theoretical sample size established for the study was 2800 participants, thus 400 for each participating country. To finish, the data gathered was filtered, creating a real sample, which was no different than the theoretical sample (see Table 1).

Number of questionnaires planned		Completed questionnaires		
Age	#	#	Men	Women
16-24	840	797	359	438

	Number of questionnaires planned		Completed questionnaires	
25-34	560	568	252	316
35-44	462	493	247	246
45-54	378	460	219	241
55-64	280	356	177	179
65-74	280	352	183	169
TOTAL	2,800	3,026	1,437	1,589

Table 1
Number of questionnaires planned and number of completed questionnaires

Three thousand twenty-six questionnaires were filled out, more than the initial sample size planned, which proved useful when balancing out the sample size with the type of sampling, maintaining a fixed margin of error at 90% and $P = Q$ in $\pm 5\%$ for each country and $\pm 1.8\%$ for all the population.

5 Results and discussion

5.1. Sociodemographic data

The demographic data collected from the people surveyed were the variables *gender* and *education*. As planned, the qualitative variable, *gender*, allowed for a well-balanced sampling distribution, with 47% of participants being women and 53% men. At the same time, the variable *education* revealed that most of the people surveyed had completed a quite high level of education, with barely 6% having only completed primary level education or less (see Figure 2).

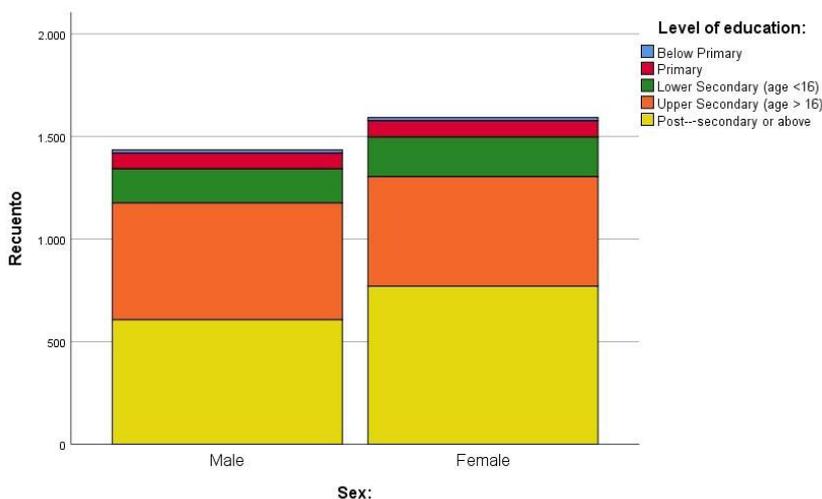


Figure 2
Sex and educational level of participants

5.2. Information of interest and follow-up

The first group of questions on the interest of the survey for this study was designed to analyse the participants' interest in news covering GCE, as well as how closely they kept up with that type of news. Questions aimed at collecting this information were presented on a Likert scale with levels ranging from 1 to 5, that records the participants' degree of interest and attention to the news, 1 being the lowest and 5, the highest score. The answers extracted helped understand that the degree of keeping up with news depends on the topics dealt with.

News on human rights generated more interest than the other topics, with an average of $\bar{x} = 3.22$, although this interest was not more statistically significant than other topics, whose averages were low, as shown in Table 2.

In this case, the greater interest of European citizens in human rights can be because «one central purpose of a state education system is the transmission of common mandatory standards such as the human rights» (Starkey 2012, p. 21). Likewise, this finding shows how, as Hung (2012) and Kiwan (2012) pointed out, that today's speech about citizens is more and more closely related to human rights. In fact, organizations such as UNESCO (2015) and authors such as Osler and Starkey (2018) point out that we must continue to produce global citizens who defend social justice and the fulfilment of human rights.

<i>To what extent do you follow...</i>	\bar{x}
News and information about world affairs, issues, and politics in other countries around the world	3.18
News and information about human development	3.11
Global situation reports from the United Nations	2.50
The evolution of the Millennium Development Goals	2.44
International non-profit organizations' activities	2.67
News on human rights around the world	3.22

Table 2

Measurements of participants' attention to news related to GCE

Additionally, on focusing on the variables with lesser averages or variables of lesser interest, we can find that they tended to refer to the United Nations (UN), to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), or to NGO-related activities. These results show that issues, such as UN or MDG reports, so very relevant at an international level, have not reached the population well enough to perform an exhaustive, even active follow-up thereof. Moreover,

the population's lack of interest in UN reports can be due to, as Thakur (2016) supports, the many frustrations this organization gives rise to.

On the other hand, the little attention to the MDGs by the participating public opinion is surprising. As Abbar *et al.* (2016) states, issues related to climate change in recent years have received a lot of public attention. Additionally, as Abel *et al.* (2016) point out, these objectives benefit social welfare, which makes getting information to citizens about them absolutely necessary if they are to be carried out.

Regarding the low interest in NGO activity, it is understandable that these organizations are not especially catching the attention of citizens in rural areas in Europe although they are a fundamental part of a society that tries to bring awareness to the population so that they can act in defence of human rights (Klímová-Alexander 2017). If, as Ribeiro *et al.* (2016) state, educational policies should necessarily encompass the education and training of a democratic citizen and encourage population to collaborate with NGOs, then we are facing a considerably large educational gap.

If one keeps in mind the education level of the European participants in this study, the results of the public opinion survey in this article can be interpreted as follows: those European citizens surveyed who have achieved high levels of education do not actively follow news related to NGOs, MDGs or the UN. Castillo (2009), who carried out a study on European citizens' civic attitudes, agrees with Miguel (2012): the higher the education, the more interest a citizen has in GCE-related issues. In this study, only 6% of participants had primary education studies or lower the, which means this study's results were different than those of the afore mentioned authors; in other words, the results obtained in this study allow us to infer that the relationship between interest and educational level is not correlative, as people with higher levels of education do not tend to actively follow news related to these issues either (Koirala *et al.* 2018).

5.3. Personal contribution to the improvement of poverty-stricken countries

The next set of questions on the survey linked to this study were aimed at understanding if the surveyed people knew their actions could contribute to change for the better in poverty-stricken countries. The responses gathered revealed that only 27% of participants were being aware of the impact of their actions and tried to help poor countries. However, 31% recognized the impact of their actions on the situation and admitted they did not do act, because they think they did not have the knowledge required to collaborate. 42% of those surveyed believed that it is not even their

responsibility: 18% of them believe is the politicians' responsibility, and 24% believe they cannot do anything to change the situation.

This data revealed that 73% of the surveyed citizens took no action against existing inequalities for whatever reason. It is worrying to find similar results from other studies, such as that conducted by Gómez (2017), on the population of Zaragoza (Spain), or by Miguel (2012), on the population of Castile and León (Spain). Both authors found the presence of passive, conformist attitudes, to the extent that some participants thereof believe change in the face of such complex situations as impossible.

It is noteworthy that, as shown in Figure 3, significant differences exist between nationalities and education levels. Regarding the former, Polish citizens seem to be more aware, and most claim to act. On the other hand, most participants from Bulgaria claim it is the politicians' responsibility. Regarding the latter, education level, participants in the surveyed countries with studies higher than secondary school, consider themselves aware of the situation and

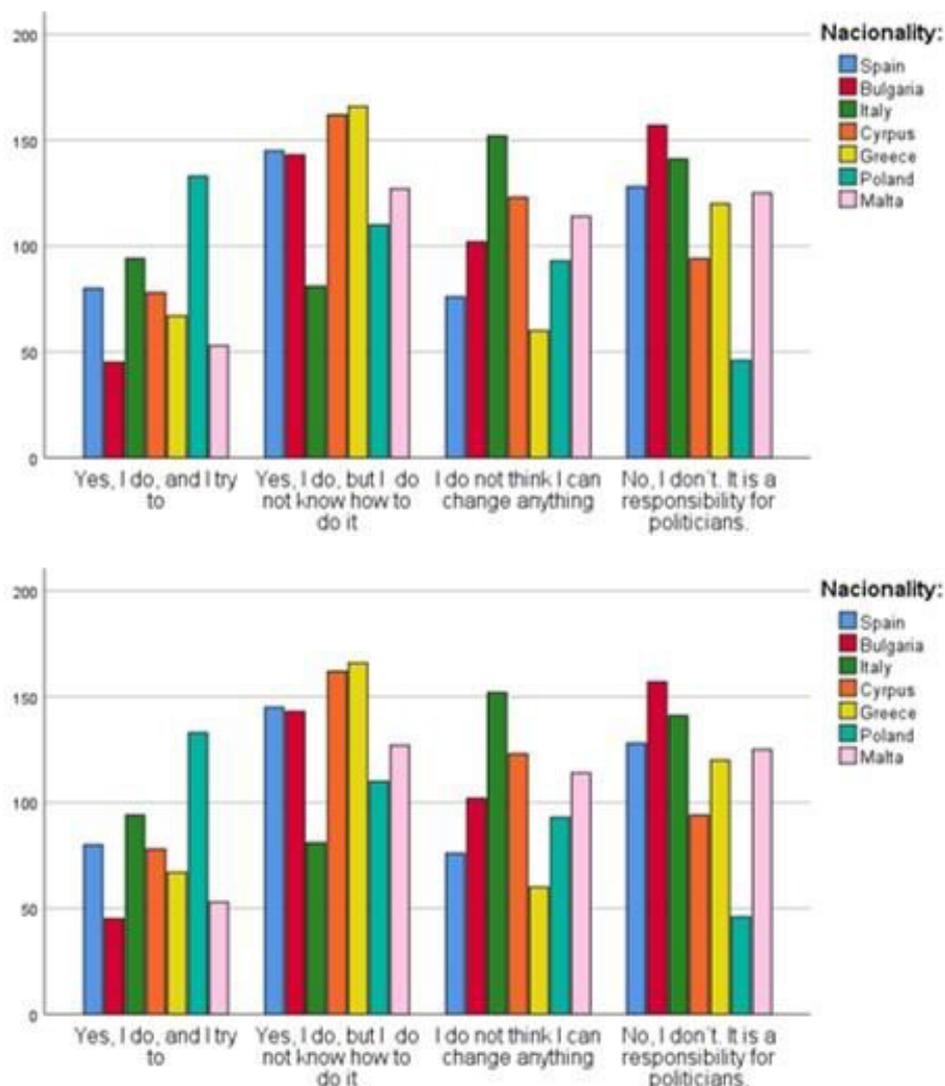


Figure 3
Personal contribution according to nationality and level of education

try to act accordingly to help poor countries. Nonetheless, a high percentage of them tend to believe they cannot change anything. The participants with post-secondary or higher education studies are aware yet say they lack the knowledge for action. They also show an increasing trend to not act, because they think it is the politicians' responsibility.

Little cooperation of citizens shows «human condition is marked by a lack of life quality for many in the global community, a fact emphasized by the qualifier “undeveloped” applied to countries and regions» (Pashby 2015, p. 357). In their study, Varadharajan and Buchanan (2017) show popular attitudes seemed to be empathetic at first, but, nevertheless, the citizens had very limited knowledge of the true situation of poverty-stricken countries. This lack of information could be at the heart of the results of this study: if citizens cannot understand their role in a global society and the importance of advocating for the improvement of the world, they will not try to adapt their habits of personal contribution to the situation of developing countries. Therefore, the creation of global citizens must be encouraged: «Developed countries should not abandon the poor to their plight» (Birdsall *et al.* 2005, p. 152).

5.4. Participation to counter act the situation of poverty-stricken countries

The third set of interest questions in this study included those focusing on citizens' participation in actions to minimize, correct and contribute to solving the critical situation developing countries are going through. As mentioned above, the European citizens surveyed had a low level of commitment to the participation in social actions related to the fight for the mitigation of developing countries' plight. This leads to thinking that the results regarding participation in these types of actions would follow the same trend, and that is exactly what was shown.

For this reason, most participation (again, measured on a 1-5 scale) was concentrated around actions that only required sporadic, momentary, or economic participation, such as buying fair trade products, donating money, or doing volunteer work. Scheepers and Grotenhuis (2005) found that citizens generally tended to help poor societies through money donations. Even though European citizens should be more dedicated and should go beyond mere donations, there is no doubt that monetary gifts are important, since «poor countries require help through international transfers, because they believe many countries have benefited from the exploitation of their resources during colonization» (Momirovic *et al.* 2016, p. 83). Furthermore, as shown in Table 3, an ANalysis Of Variance (ANOVA) showed significant differences (Sig. < 0.05) between gender when it came to participation in educational development or volunteer programs.

Actions	Sig.
Educational development programs	.001
Buying fair trade products	.595
Sponsoring children from impoverished areas	.496
Political actions for helping the poor	.002
Donating to organizations that help the poor	.118
Active participation as a member of a development organization	.020
Volunteering	.017

Table 3

ANOVA test results regarding gender and actions to combat the situation of poor countries

On the other hand, average participation of those surveyed in political action, as well as being affiliated with activity in development-oriented NGOs, is quite low and the difference between genders is statistically significant. These results are in line with what Loader *et al.* (2014) commented on regarding political apathy among young people, which is derived from the fact that many citizens do not follow through on their duties as participative citizens in a democratic society. Low level of commitment can also be seen in a study by Gómez (2017), in which most surveyed citizens had «never participated in development education programs, youth sponsorship, political actions to aid developing countries [...], organizations or volunteering» (Gómez 2017, p. 20). Moreover, this lack of interest in political action or affiliation to associations can be found in other countries like the United States, where «many political observers are concerned about the decreasing political involvement of Americans» (Dalton 2008, p. 92).

To sum up, the commitment of citizens to participation in social actions of solidarity aimed at improving the quality of life of those in developing countries is low on average and is limited in large part to economic donations or periodic participation.

5.5. Valuing the impact of actions aimed at improving the situation of poverty-stricken countries

The last set of questions analysed asked participants to value (again, based on a 1-5 scale) the reason behind participating in actions mentioned in the previous question. Their responses ranged from medium to high value, ranging from 3.22, taking action to feel better as a person, to 3.51, acting because the situation is untenable. Meanwhile, other reasons behind taking action to help solve poverty-related problems in other countries were: feeling like part of the problem, thinking that wealth distribution is unfair, and believing help is necessary. Table 4 presents the ANOVA test results contrasting these alternatives with the participants' gender, which shows significant (Sig. < 0,05) differences between men and wom-

en in all the options, except when acting due to the feeling of being part of the problem.

Reasons to act	Sig.
Because it makes me feel like a better person	.000
Because I feel my help is needed	.000
Because the distribution of wealth is unfair	.009
Because the present situation is not sustainable	.034
Because we are part of the problem	.105

Table 4

ANOVA test results contrasting gender with the influences behind taking action to help poverty-stricken countries

This distribution of responses shows there are various reasons—personal and collective—whereby people collaborate and act to help improved the situation in disadvantaged countries. Otake *et al.* (2006) point out that some of these reasons could be related to happiness, and that a citizen's own well-being is improved through kind actions and behaviour towards others, *i.e.*, happiness increases when one tries to help disadvantaged people or countries. Furthermore, Tagkaloglou and Kasser (2018) highlight that, if one wants to increase participation in improving the situation of developing countries, it is important to develop a motivational component that fosters active participation.

In general, those who take part in such actions do it for a series of reasons, a combination of personal and collective commitments.

6 Conclusions

The results of this study show that there is a long way to go to keep rural citizens informed, educated, and committed to issues of international solidarity. There are shortfalls in terms of following and valuing news and personal commitment to making the world a better, fairer place.

The participants in this study reported that they do not follow the news about MGDs, NGO activity or UN reports. However, great interest in news related to human rights was found. Increasing interest in human rights is also reported in a series of studies by Clark and Sikkink (2013), and Fariss (2014), who affirm that exposure to information about human rights is increasing more and more over time. Additionally, the Europeans' lack of attention to NGOs activity contradicts the fact that local NGOs are ever-more involved in the dissemination of reports that unveil abuse, which are then used to implement actions in defence of human rights (Hill *et al.* 2013). Nonetheless, the most surprising observation is—without a doubt—

that important international issues like those of MDGs or UN reports have not reached the rural European citizen: this must change in order to guarantee a more sustainable and humane future.

Moreover, two conclusions can be drawn from the results obtained in terms of personal attitude and participation linked to GCE. The first is that most study participants do not act to help poor countries. This is not a result of ignorance of the situation but rather believing that their actions would not actually gear change or thinking is not their responsibility. In view of this apathy, Arocena *et al.* (2015) established that educational establishments, notably universities, should incorporate research on items included in GCE, trying to promote social inclusion and the creation of global citizens who defend human rights globally (Könönen 2018). The need to create global citizens is becoming increasingly important and should be supported not only by education but by political action too.

The second conclusion is related to the participation of the population in actions favouring the improvement of poverty-stricken countries. The people surveyed in this present study showed a low level of commitment to these types of social, solidarity-oriented activities. Actions were rare and often limited to economic collaboration. Andreotti (2016) and Kapoor (2014) agree that new, more efficient educational goals should be implemented to cover all GCE issues and prevent the importance of acting as a global citizen from being forgotten.

It is noteworthy that teachers play a key role because, as Holden and Hicks (2007), as well as Bryan and Bracken (2011), point out, for GCE to be effective, teachers need to be able to understand and motivate students to get to know existing relationships between different parts of the world. On the other hand, one must recognize that the motivation behind the few times that the rural citizens participated in actions in favour of poverty-stricken countries was rooted in personal and collective commitment.

Finally, these results help us draw a general conclusion that nowadays no education duly fosters the creation of global citizens in rural areas in Europe. In view of this situation, it is important to adapt GCE to the characteristics of rural populations to improve the attitudes of these European citizens. For that reason, GCE teaching should be supported, helping to create critical global citizens who understand there is another «way to do things, another way to live: adapting the market to society, replacing competition for cooperation, adapting economy to an economy of nature and sustainability of basic needs» (Díez 2012, p. 87). Therefore, when deal with education, we are not referring to its more technical or instrumental aspects but to a vague goal instead: changing the horizons of students' happiness so that personal growth, human development, and solidarity guide our way of life.

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