

Towards an understanding of the emergence of bridging issue fields around sustainability challenges: The case of the media and child well-being Chapter in Argentina

Abstract

With a population of 106 million young people between under 24 years-old (representing 20% of the total population) and poverty rates of 30 percent among the youth, tackling children well-being emerges as a critical piece towards addressing sustainable development in Latin America, the most unequal region in the world (ECLAC, 2019). In particular, digital technologies have been considered a privileged tool to tackle children well-being issues concerning poverty, employability, social inequality, among others. We study the case of an emerging cross-sector initiative that gathers relevant stakeholders in the media, education, and non-profit sectors seeking to deploy digital technologies to enhance children well-being in Argentina. The present case study offers an opportunity to enhance our understanding about the emergence and consolidation of issue fields.

Introduction

The concept of children well-being is often used as an all-encompassing, ambiguous concept (Pollard & Lee, 2003). Whereas no consensus had yet been reached on its definition, the notion of well-being has been referred to as a multi-dimensional concept including dimensions such as material living standards, health, education, personal activities, political voice and governance, social connections and relationships, environmental health, and security (physical and emotional) (Amerijckx & Humblet, 2013; Raghavan and Alexandrova, 2014; Sen & Fitoussi, 2009;).

With over one third of internet users worldwide being under the age of eighteen (Livingstone & Bulger, 2017), digital technologies appear as a privileged arena to tackle children current, as well as future well-being. In particular, digital technologies have been deemed to offer unique opportunities for young people to acquire valuable technical, as well as personal skills for the new world of work. Specifically, technical capabilities, abilities related to digital safety, digital rights, and digital emotional intelligence are considered critical skills to break cycles of poverty that have run down intergenerationally, and achieve social mobility, in the ongoing Fourth Industrial

Revolution (Tufekci, 2012; Tuñón & Poy, 2017).

As a grand challenge -i.e., a long standing and multifaceted social issue- tackling children well-being through digital technologies defies easy solutions (Ferraro et al., 2015). Moreover, it renders solutions implemented by individual organizations or governments less effective (George et al., 2016). For this reason, cross-sector collaboration initiatives are considered a promising approach to address this challenge (Bode, Rogan & Singh, 2019; van Tulden & Keen, 2018).

Management literature has conceptualized cross-sector collaboration in terms of issue fields. An issue field is understood as a space where members of different sectors interact with one another with the purpose of negotiating coordination to address an issue at hand that is cared for by members (Di Maggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995). Issue fields are mechanisms by which rising societal concerns may evolve into somewhat durable arenas for social coordination (Furnari, 2016). Whereas ground-breaking conceptual work about the definition and categorization issue fields has already been developed, little is still known about the processes by which issues fields may be formed and consolidated over time (Zietsma et al., 2016). The present work attempts to bridge this knowledge gap.

Methods

Qualitative methods have been deemed essential in conducting wellbeing research in developing countries, since they may provide a deeper understanding on the complexity surrounding this issue, as well as the nuances of the cultural context (Camfield, Crivello & Woodhead, 2009). This research is based on an in depth, inductive case study of an emerging cross-sector initiative that gathers relevant stakeholders in the media, education, and non-profit sectors seeking to deploy digital technologies to enhance children well-being in Argentina. The media and Child well-being Chapter provides a platform for collaboration for leaders of organizations pertaining to the three sectors of society.

We are conducting ongoing interviews to Chapter members, based on a common set of questions. The open-ended nature of our questions allows us to better understand the mechanisms that contribute or hinder the collaboration process. In an iterative process, we have interviewed 31 key

stakeholders as they joined the Chapter, contrasting data collected on previous rounds of interviews. Participant observation in Chapter events as well as documentary analysis provides further insight on the dynamics of the evolution of this emerging field.

Expected Contribution

This study will contribute to the growing stream of organizational approaches to grand challenges. Building on the notion that grand challenges demand collective action, our framework shows how the dynamics between multiple stakeholders to advance towards SDGs related to child well-being in the Latin American context.

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