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Article

A comprehensive education for an economically sustainable society in the Argentine Republic

Patricia G. Vázquez

Center for Research and Development in Applied Sciences (CONICET-CIC-UNLP), Faculty of Exact Sciences, Universidad Nacional de La Plata, La Plata 1900, Argentina; vazquez@quimica.unlp.edu.ar, pgvazquez@hotmail.com

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Abstract: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development establishes education as a fundamental tool to raise awareness about the importance of sustainable development, highlighting the importance of aligning educational policies in Argentina with international standards. There is growing interest and some promising initiatives in sustainable education in Argentina, but significant barriers still must be overcome. Teacher training and the integration of sustainability into curricula are key aspects that need attention to move towards an educational system that fosters an active commitment to sustainable development.

Keywords: social inequality; trends in education; vulnerability; economic gap

1. Introduction

Amid the vast cultural diversity that defines in Latin America today, education is considered a complex and dialectical social phenomenon. In order to analyze it, it is primarily necessary to contextualize it at the regional, sub regional and country level. And even within each country, it is implemented differently in accordance with the conditioning factors, since education appears to be shaped by economic factors, in addition to being constrained by its inherent limitations. Factors such as poverty and exclusion and the distribution of wealth must be considered [1]. Latin America's arrival at so-called modernity, as a historical process, was aligned with its pressing demands for development and freedom, while simultaneously drawing on the historical experiences of France and the United States as points of reference. The 19th century ended with a liberal political spirit. This philosophical stance was neither assumed mechanically, nor embraced uncritically, but was adopted by each country as the foundation of a necessary process of change in education [2]. The current problem is to ensure an education with solid learning and the acquisition of tools that allow lifelong learning. It is a priority to advance in the determination of a concept of quality of education and the sustained work of all the actors in the process in quality management [3]. On the other hand, climate change, environmental degradation and pollution are reaching a global consensus and are currently discussed in the media, academic meetings and political agendas around the world [4]. Sustainability must inevitably be integral to any comprehensive response to the complexity and urgency of today's environmental challenges. The relationship between human development and environmental impact cannot be regarded as straightforward. On the one hand, people living in rich countries and with higher levels of education are more likely to lead lifestyles that leave a harmful footprint on ecosystems. This comportment has encouraged people to modify their personal attitudes and everyday behavior to support recycling, reduce waste, conserve energy and improve water sanitation [5]. It is widely

recognized that education plays a fundamental role in the search for sustainability and the achievement of sustainable societies [6]. Therefore, many countries incorporate these issues into their curricula and educational programs [7]. According to the study by Rodríguez García et al. [8], the progressive increase in publications related to sustainability in the educational field is highlighted, which indicates a growing relevance of this topic. The authors observe that sustainability should not only be understood from an environmental perspective, but should also integrate social, economic and institutional contexts. In Argentina, education has become an important pillar to achieve a sustainable economy and society. This paper presents how this evolution has occurred, showing a growing interconnection between the aforementioned elements. The concept of sustainable development should be reflected upon, moving away from mere economic growth but as an essential component to mitigate inequalities in social development.

2. Methodology: Obtaining new results

The existing body of research demonstrates the fundamental role that education plays in the life of a country, its society and its economy. Employing a methodology grounded on different principles, it aims to address research gaps in a country characterized by diverse climates, disparities in public well-being and challenges related to environmental sustainability in urban areas of Argentina. The ecologist Donella Meadows [9], best known for being the author of The Limits to Growth [10], asked her students "What would the world be like if there were no hunger?" at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, back in the 1970s. They found it difficult to answer, so Meadows set out to change that situation, creating a global movement, known as systems thinking. It is now considered essential to face major global challenges such as the Sustainable Development Goals. Individuals engaged in systems analysis strongly adhere to the concept of "leverage points", defined as specific locations within a complex system where even a minor change in one aspect can trigger significant alterations throughout the entire structure. Meadows initially presents her original first nine points to intervening in a system [11], subsequently offering a revised list of twelve points (**Table 1**) [12]. Systems thinking has become a fundamental approach to address the complexity of contemporary social and environmental phenomena. It is in this context that Gual [13] highlights the need to develop systems thinking skills. This understanding is crucial to promote sustainability through innovative approaches. Noboa [14] contends that comprehending social reality requires a holistic perspective that accounts for the interactions shaping it.

Table 1. 12 points for intervening in a system (in increasing order of effectiveness) [12].

12	Constants, parameters, numbers (such as subsidies, taxes, standards).
11	The sizes of buffers and other stabilizing stocks, relative to their flows.
10	The structure of material stocks and flows (such as transport networks, population age structures).
9	The lengths of delays, relative to the rate of system change
8	The strength of negative feedback loops, relative to the impacts, against, they are trying to correct.
7	The gain around driving positive feedback loops.

Table 1. (*Continued*).

6	The structure of information flows (who does and does not have access to information).
5	The rules of the system (such as incentives, punishments, constraints).
4	The power to add, change, evolve, or self-organize system structure
3	The goals of the system.
2	The mindset or paradigm out of which the system, its goals, structure, rules, delays, parameters arises.
1	The power to transcend paradigms

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Argentina in numbers

The population of the Argentine Republic as of 1 July 2022 amounts to 46,234,830 inhabitants (INDEC [15]).

According to data from the Ministry of Health of the Argentine Republic in 2022, the crude birth rate reached 10.7 per thousand and the mortality rate 8.6. Regarding the Argentine demographic evolution, an upward growth rate is recorded until 1914, mainly due to the high immigration rate, a moderate growth between 1914 and 1947, and an even slower growth rate from 1960 to 2001. This is explained by the demographic transition process and, in 2010, a slight increase is seen with an average annual growth rate of 11.4 per thousand [16]. **Table 2** presents the population data by sex and masculinity index, median age and population density, according to the province corresponding to the year 2022 [17]. To comply with the statistical quality standards required by INDEC, the category of the responses to the question on sex recorded at birth is redistributed between the categories Woman/female and Man/male.

Table 2. Population by sex and masculinity index, median age and population density, according to provinces, corresponding to the year 2022 [17].

Jurisdiction	Population			Masculinity index (1)	Median age (2)	Population density
	Total	Sex				
		Men	Women			
						hab./km^2
Total	45,892,285	22,186,791	23,705,494	93.6	32	12.5
Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires	3,121,707	1,439,873	1,681,834	85.6	39	15,161.3
Buenos Aires	17,523,996	8,470,569	9,053,427	93.6	33	57.3
24 partidos del Gran Buenos Aires	10,849,299	5,226,941	5,622,358	93.0	33	2,875.3
Interior de la provincia de Buenos Aires	6,674,697	3,243,628	3,431,069	94.5	33	22.1
Catamarca	429,562	210,464	219,098	96.1	31	4.2
Chaco	1,129,606	547,655	581,951	94.1	29	11.3
Chubut	592,621	291,412	301,209	96.7	33	2.6
Córdoba	3,840,905	1,856,395	1,984,510	93.5	33	23.3
Corrientes	1,212,696	589,009	623,687	94.4	30	13.6

Table 2. (*Continued*).

Jurisdiction	Population			Masculinity index (1)	Median age (2)	Population density
	Total	Sex				
		Men	Women			
						hab./km^2
Entre Ríos	1,425,578	693,547	732,031	94.7	32	18.2
Formosa	607,419	296,810	310,609	95.6	29	8.0
Jujuy	811,611	393,590	418,021	94.2	31	15.2
La Pampa	361,859	177,858	184,001	96.7	34	2.5
La Rioja	383,865	187,348	196,517	95.3	30	4.2
Mendoza	2,043,540	989,578	1,053,962	93.9	32	13.7
Misiones	1,278,873	626,076	652,797	95.9	28	42.8
Neuquén	710,814	349,088	361,726	96.5	32	7.5
Río Negro	750,768	366,857	383,911	95.6	33	3.7
Salta	1,441,351	702,839	738,512	95.2	29	9.3
San Juan	822,853	401,201	421,652	95.1	30	9.3
San Luis	542,069	265,327	276,742	95.9	31	7.2
Santa Cruz	337,226	167,133	170,093	98.3	31	1.4
Santa Fe	3,544,908	1,710,259	1,834,649	93.2	34	26.6
Santiago del Estero	1,060,906	521,543	539,363	96.7	29	7.7
Tierra del Fuego, Antártida e Islas del Atlántico Sur	185,732	92,340	93,392	98.9	31	0.2
Tucumán	1,731,820	840,020	891,800	94.2	30	76.7

(1) Masculinity index: number of men per 100 women.
(2) Corresponds to the population in private homes.

Figure 1. The political map of the Argentine Republic, with its provinces and capitals [18].

It should be noted that the average density is 14.4 inhabitants/km^2, excluding the departments of Antarctica and the South Atlantic Islands. **Figure 1** shows the political map of the Argentine Republic, with its provinces and capitals [18].

3.2. Argentina and poverty

The goals of the 2030 Agenda are uncertain as countries struggle with inflation, climate change, and wars, among other calamities. Inflation influences energy and food prices, spreading increasing inequality in societies [19,20]. Regarding the global situation, the World Bank warned that by 2023, there would be almost 700 million people living in extreme poverty [20]. If we recall the content of the Brundtland report and its quote that "a world in which poverty is endemic will always be prone to ecological and other catastrophes" [21] then vulnerable populations are those who suffer from inclement weather such as hurricanes, storms, floods, etc. The direct consequence of this phenomenon is to increase poverty and famine [22]; for example, the current war in Ukraine fundamentally affected wheat and corn prices [23].

Poverty in Argentina has been studied from various perspectives, reflecting its complexity and multidimensionality. Before beginning the study of poverty by geographic regions in Argentina, it is necessary to remember that the poverty line considered in this case is that of the country as a whole, in order to be able to appreciate the situation including its different standards of living. Thus, it is not surprising that Patagonia has very low poverty rates (around 15%), compared to the rest of the regions. The relatively poorest region is the NEA (northeast of Argentina), presenting rates close to 50% in 2002. A notable case is that of the NOA (northwest of Argentina), since it is the only region that presents a downward trend in the poverty rate. A similar behavior is also observed in the Cuyo region [24]. Da Silva et al. [25] in their article on the social policies adopted in Argentina to combat poverty, analyze the low effectiveness of the policies applied, which do not address the structural causes of the problem. The article written by Chao [26] provides a comprehensive analysis of poverty in Argentina through an approach that integrates social and economic aspects. Poverty must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that not only affects individuals in terms of income, but also is related to the social capital and social networks that families possess. This suggests that public policies must consider these dynamics to be effective in reducing poverty. The use of various scales to measure poverty contribute to a deeper understanding of the situation faced by Argentine households, as no single measure accurately reflects the reality of families in vulnerable conditions [24].

Numerous works constitute an instrument for reading poverty. In this line, we can highlight numerous works by CEDLAS (Center for Distributive, Labor and Social Studies – National University of La Plata) among which we can point out the approaches of Gustavo Busso [27]. Also the work of Busso et al. [28], proposes to understand the increase in the poverty rate in Argentina between 1992 and 2002. Other works supported by the measurement problem are those of Casanova [29], on the notion of poverty traps in relation to the linearity of income. Similarly, Conconi and Ham [30], are concerned with defining a notion of poverty based on the idea of constructing multidimensional poverty measures. Meanwhile, Alejo and Garganta

[31], focus their research on the Permanent Household Survey to break down poverty into two: chronic and transitory. Poverty has been thoroughly examined; to exemplify, Sen [32], distinguished two main dilemmas which were posed either on the conundrum of the identification of the poverty spectrum or the construction of an index to evaluate the poverty of citizens. Moreover, Zhou and Liu [33], distinguished Sen's contribution on poverty nomenclature in the 'capability approach', especially on the issue of what poverty really is: 'a deprivation of basic necessities', not only a matter of low income standards. Poverty, inequality and social exclusion are therefore integral parts of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs: 1, 6 and 10), emphasizing the multidisciplinary nature of the above-mentioned issues. Moreover, the intrinsic elements of the 2030 Agenda and the measurement of poverty, inequality and polarization would significantly improve integrated policy pathways in national and international forums [34].

3.3. Sustainable development in Argentina

According to Rawls' concept of social justice, inequalities loom across social classes or manifest themselves in discrepancies between communities [35]. Poverty eradication is the central theme of the SDGs (UN 2016) [36]. The core SDGs for poverty and inequality are SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, and 11 [37–39]. Regarding poverty eradication, the most important is SDG 1. SDG 1.2 calls for halving the population below the poverty line [40]. While SDG 1.3 puts emphasis on socially excluded, vulnerable, unemployed and disabled people. However, not all notions of poverty are addressed in SDG 1. SDG 10.3 applies to reducing inequalities that focuses on people living in the bottom 50% of median income [41].

To analyze sustainable development in Argentina, it is useful to look at its current state and especially at trends in matters of conservation, energy use, consumption, public policies, etc. and other factors that reflect how the country is progressing toward ensuring its future generations access to the natural resources essential for their survival.

According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Argentina is the ninth country in the world with the greatest natural wealth and biodiversity. In addition, it has one of the seven natural wonders of the world, the Iguazu Falls. Argentina has an enormous diversity of fauna and flora thanks to its size and the climatic varieties conditioned by factors as diverse as latitude, altitude, etc. In Argentina, three very different geographical areas can be distinguished: plains in the central and northern areas, regions with dense vegetation and extensive areas of palm groves and grasslands; plateaus in the southern area, plateaus and mountain ranges (Patagonia) and mountains in the western area, mountainous, hilly relief, with scarce vegetation. On the other hand, according to the Sustainable Development Goals of the Argentine Republic, by 2030 [42], the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions must be reduced by at least half. In addition, implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including minimum levels, achieving broad coverage for the poor and vulnerable. Also, ensure that all children complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Regarding per capita economic growth in

accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, a growth of the gross domestic product of around 3% per year. It must strive for the development of reliable, sustainable, resilient and quality infrastructure, including regional and cross-border. Seeking affordable and equitable access for all. Finally, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective institutions, such as schools that are accountable and inclusive at all levels [42].

3.4. Sustainable education in Argentina

Sustainable education in Argentina has been the subject of growing interest in recent years, reflecting a commitment to sustainable development at all educational levels. As practices and theories related to education for sustainability are explored, various initiatives and approaches have been identified that seek to integrate these concepts into the national educational system. The chapter by Hernandez et al. [43] offers a critical view on the implementation of education for sustainability in higher education institutions in Latin America. The authors highlight that, despite the growing awareness of the importance of sustainability, the effective implementation of educational strategies that include environmental considerations remains limited. This is partly attributable to the lack of specialized training, which hinders the incorporation of these topics into the curriculum. Regarding cognitively complex activities, these are generally broad, and allow the student to get closer to reality and learn more meaningfully. As a general trend, it was verified that the items with the highest specific weight are environmental issues (35%) and recycling (28%). Consequently, the educator must overcome the deficiencies that the textbook may present by fostering additional cognitively demanding activities, incorporating questions and problems that require substantial application of knowledge, and, where feasible, covering a broad range of content related to sustainability, while also incorporating a more global perspective, including human and economic considerations [44]. Koskela [45] discusses education for sustainable development, stressing the importance of aligning educational policies with international standards. For example, Barth and Michelsen [46] call for the creation of spaces for informal Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), in universities through facilitating activities such as peer discussions and voluntary work. Informal learning can also drive organizational changes towards sustainability. In fact, there has been a promising development in the private sector regarding the sustainability performance of companies, partly due to informal, non-formal and, in some cases, formal learning (**Figure 2**) [45].

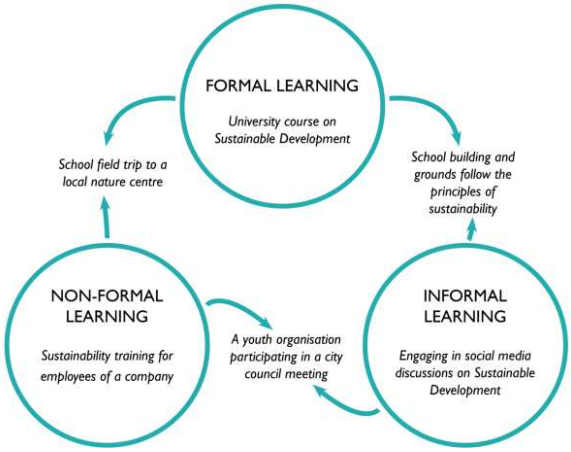

Figure 2. Examples of how learning for sustainability can take place in formal, non-formal and informal settings or in activities that blend different forms of learning [45].

In conclusion, there is a growing interest and some promising initiatives in sustainable education in Argentina, but significant barriers still must be overcome. There is a need to include specific examples in Argentine educational contexts, which could provide solutions tailored to local particularities. Teacher training and the integration of sustainability in curricula are key aspects that need attention to move towards an educational system that fosters an active commitment to sustainable development.

4. Conclusions

The need to integrate approaches that foster critical reflection and ethical commitment in the search for sustainable solutions is highlighted. Education and active participation in the construction of inclusive societies are key elements to advance towards poverty reduction, applying systemic thinking in educational, social and economic practice.

To conclude this point, I thought of Pedro Bonifacio Palacios, whose pseudonym was Almafuerte, an Argentine teacher and poet, who was born on 13 May 1854 and died on 28 February 1917, in La Plata. His work is characterized by the strength and passion in his verses, which address themes such as love, social injustice and the fight for ideals. He wrote a poem called ADIÓS A LA MAESTRA (Farewell to the Teacher) (**Figure 3**) [47]. The poem exemplifies, simply and extensively, the role of the teacher in the most vulnerable social classes. The poem is presented below:

Figure 3. The teacher in the most vulnerable social classes [47].

Sublime worker,
blessed lady:
evening has come
for you too.
The evening, which says:
rest!…the hour
of saying goodbye to the children
But do not despair, holy teacher:
not everything in the world
is gone;
you will always be
our compass,
the only dear
second mother!
As the months go by,
as the years go by,
we will be adults,
brilliant perhaps…
but never will the greatest or strangest events
completely deflower
eternal childhood!
In the midst of the faces
that lovingly preserve
the noble, the pure
filial memory,
like a solemn
vision of Minerva,
your image, lady,
will have its place.
And wherever
the law of the environment
will want to
nibble our lives,
nail our cross,
the school must rise
fantastically,
like a sumptuous
great tower of light.
Do not moan, do not cry
holy teacher:
not everything in the world
is gone;
you will always be
our compass,
the only dear
second mother!

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