EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT - AN ADVOCACY NETWORK PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to advance the understanding of advocacy networks in educational contexts by identifying their key features and examining how they connect with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). An exploratory qualitative study was conducted in three Brazilian educational institutions that operate as networks and develop projects related to sustainable development. The findings characterize the three core dimensions of advocacy networks—strong ties, information flow, and multilevel actors—demonstrating their relevance for the management of the projects analyzed. The results indicate that these advocacy initiatives are directly linked to sustainable development and contribute to ten SDGs, highlighting how education extends beyond institutional boundaries and generates tangible impacts within local communities. The study offers both theoretical and practical contributions by refining the understanding of advocacy networks from an educational perspective and providing insights for managers seeking to organize and strengthen networks oriented toward sustainable development.

Keywords: advocacy networks; sustainable development goals.

1 Introduction

Advocacy networks are commonly defined as voluntary, reciprocal, and horizontal forms of organization composed of individuals and collective actors—such as companies, groups, and institutions—who collaborate to pursue shared objectives with an explicit social purpose (Keck & Sikkink, 1999). This organizational arrangement has proven particularly relevant in educational projects, as education for sustainable development increasingly requires the integration of formal learning with experiential and community-based activities (Melles, 2019). Such configurations enable the development of tools that support individuals and communities in addressing social change, recognizing emerging challenges, and mitigating future crises (Storey et al., 2017).

Macpherson (2016) emphasizes that advocacy networks are driven by the collective energy of individuals united around common values, such as education, community engagement, social equity, and sustainability. These shared motivations not only mobilize actors but also sustain long-term collaboration. In this sense, education-based advocacy networks constitute fertile ground for initiatives aligned with sustainable development, as they combine learning, civic engagement, and social transformation.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by the United Nations in 2015, represent a global commitment to ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring dignity for all by 2030 (UN, 2015). Adopted by 193 member states, the SDGs call for coordinated action across public and private sectors, civil society, and educational institutions. Among the seventeen goals, particular emphasis is placed on ensuring that learners acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development through education that fosters human rights, gender equality, global citizenship, and cultural diversity.

Research suggests that the SDGs offer an integrative framework that connects environmental, economic, and social dimensions, making them a valuable reference for evaluating sustainability-oriented projects (Dalampira & Nastis, 2019). Within educational settings, advocacy networks aligned with the SDGs may therefore serve as effective mechanisms for translating global agendas into localized action and

community impact.

The purpose of examining advocacy networks within educational projects for sustainability is to better understand how these networks are configured in practice and how their characteristics support project organization and resource mobilization. Educational institutions represent a particularly rich empirical context, as they naturally encompass diverse actors and initiatives that align with the core dimensions of advocacy networks identified by Keck and Sikkink (1998).

Prior studies have highlighted the importance of advocacy networks in advancing sustainability goals, while also noting gaps in understanding how specific network features shape performance. Cristoff et al. (2017), for example, emphasize the relevance of organizational behavior in transnational advocacy networks but stop short of detailing which features most effectively support goal achievement. Building on this gap, Vizzoto, Verschoore, and Gavronski (2021) demonstrate that although the literature frequently references the core characteristics of advocacy networks, empirical studies often examine them in isolation rather than as an integrated set.

Responding to these limitations, this study moves beyond analyses focused solely on teachers and students to conceptualize educational projects themselves as advocacy networks composed of multiple actors, organizations, and community partners. Accordingly, the research aims to identify key organizational features of advocacy networks in educational environments and examine how these networks establish connections with the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Advocacy Networks

Advocacy networks are composed of social movements and non-governmental organizations; however, they may also include individuals or groups from the public and private sectors, foundations, educational institutions, intellectuals, and the media. These networks can operate at the national level as well as across regional and international boundaries, typically focusing on mobilization and information dissemination strategies aimed at influencing the behavior of governments, private companies, or international organizations in pursuit of specific

goals (Keck & Sikkink, 1999).

These goals are often associated with values or ideals that social institutions struggle to address or keep pace with amid rapid social change, whether due to institutional limitations or deeply rooted traditions. The dynamics of advocacy networks develop through interactions among actors operating at different levels, ranging from individuals and local communities to international non-governmental organizations (Christoff & Sommer, 2018).

When operating across borders, advocacy networks may also be defined as transnational advocacy networks (TANs). In this context, their objective is often to create a "boomerang pattern," achieved by activating transnational connections that exert pressure at the global level and influence multiple countries simultaneously (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). According to the authors, certain characteristics contribute to the effectiveness and success of advocacy networks, including strong ties among members, consistent flows of information, and the presence of actors occupying multiple levels or roles. They further argue that TANs tend to be more effective when their objectives are linked to concrete harms affecting individuals, such as environmental issues that threaten communities and cultures.

Accordingly, the relevance of the network's objective plays a central role in producing tangible social outcomes, as issues that directly affect society are more likely to mobilize collective engagement. In this sense, environmental and sustainable development concerns—given their increasing prominence in societal and organizational agendas—constitute fertile ground for network engagement (Clemente, Ginger & Diaz, 2019).

Recent studies indicate that although advocacy networks and sustainability have long been subjects of scholarly discussion, they continue to attract attention from diverse analytical perspectives. One notable example is Schapper (2020), whose work offers a comprehensive examination of the triad proposed by Keck and Sikkink (1998). The author investigates environmental and climate policies by focusing on local experiences of actors seeking to influence international policies through strategic use of information and other resources to transform community practices. Additionally, a recent literature review emphasizes the need to assess whether the constructs proposed by Keck and Sikkink (1998) remain effective pillars for transnational

advocacy network projects and whether these features continue to produce concrete results (Vizzoto, Verschoore, & Gavronski, 2021). This reinforces the importance of further empirical research, such as the present study.

Just as organizations adopt strategies to achieve their objectives, advocacy networks do so by mobilizing actors as connecting links. The stronger these connections, the more robust the network becomes, and, consequently, the broader its reach. Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue that the presence of actors operating at multiple levels strengthens advocacy networks, as diversity among participants enables a wider range of strategies to address challenges and pursue shared goals. Therefore, networks benefit from incorporating actors occupying different roles, including organizations, NGOs, political partners, individual participants, and other stakeholders. Educational projects are particularly well suited to this configuration, as they naturally involve multiple levels of actors, such as students, teachers, partner organizations, and local communities.

Another crucial dimension for understanding advocacy networks is the flow of information (Gerber, 2011; Never & Betz, 2014). For transnational advocacy networks in particular, well-established information flows are essential for maintaining cohesion among actors who are often geographically dispersed.

Granovetter's (1973) distinction between strong and weak ties contributes to this discussion. He suggests that strong ties typically exist among similar individuals, generating redundant information flows due to shared characteristics, and therefore do not necessarily constitute an advantage. In contrast, Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue that strong relationships among network actors are a significant advantage, especially in sustainability-oriented advocacy networks. They demonstrate that shared events and mobilization efforts can bring actors into contact and foster strong ties, which in turn reinforce the network. Unlike Granovetter (1973), they contend that strong ties do not necessarily produce redundancy; rather, they are essential for the continuity and effectiveness of transnational advocacy networks, particularly when actors are separated by considerable distances (Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

Expanding the understanding of how advocacy networks are tactically organized facilitates the development of management practices oriented toward achieving network objectives. It also enhances the capacity of networks to engage

with communities, promote dialogue, and disseminate their goals—especially when network outcomes have the potential to generate tangible benefits and foster social and developmental change. This is particularly evident in advocacy network projects implemented through education, which seek to address sustainability challenges and contribute to sustainable development.

2.2 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The world has experienced significant social advances alongside numerous technological innovations and substantial economic growth, particularly over the past 30 years, during which hundreds of thousands of people have been lifted out of poverty (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017). However, according to the same report, societies continue to face persistent and severe challenges. These include violence and armed conflict, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation, growing social inequalities, rising youth unemployment, and persistent gender disparities, with women earning approximately 25% less than men in equivalent positions worldwide (BSDC, 2017).

In response to these global challenges, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also referred to as the Global Goals, were established as a universal call to action to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all people. Adopted in 2015, the SDGs comprise a set of 17 goals, further articulated into 169 specific targets designed to operationalize these objectives and guide global development efforts.

The SDGs are grounded in a spirit of partnership and pragmatism, encouraging informed decision-making to improve quality of life in a sustainable manner for both present and future generations. They provide clear guidelines and targets that countries can adapt according to their environmental priorities and contextual challenges. As an inclusive agenda, the SDGs address the structural causes of poverty and seek to unite diverse actors around shared commitments to social, economic, and environmental transformation (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). From this perspective, Crist, Mora, and Engelman (2017) emphasize the importance of addressing the interconnections between population dynamics, food production, and biodiversity protection through a framework centered on human rights, women's rights, and, critically, education.

When applied to the educational field, this perspective highlights the central role of education in advancing the SDGs. Kopnina (2020) argues that education can serve as a strategic platform for simultaneously addressing social, economic, and environmental objectives. Such pedagogical approaches position education as a foundation for social sustainability and ecological citizenship, while empowering minorities and youth. They emphasize human rights, progressive universal education, and the principles of the circular economy, fostering learning environments that are more inclusive, reflective, participatory, and oriented toward the development of critical learners.

The SDGs encompass an ambitious and comprehensive set of environmental, social, and economic objectives aimed at facilitating the transition toward a more sustainable future. Although the goals are global in scope—addressing issues such as climate change, life below water, peace, and justice—there is increasing recognition of their strong local dimension (Jones & Comfort, 2019). In light of this, the present research seeks to examine how advocacy networks in education are organized through their projects, assessing the dimensions that structure these networks and analyzing the extent to which their initiatives align with the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. Research method

This study is characterized as exploratory research, understood as a preliminary investigation aimed at examining a phenomenon through the use of multiple techniques. Such an approach allows the researcher to better define the context under analysis and to formulate more appropriate and refined propositions (Stebbins, 2001).

The research adopts a qualitative approach, employing a case study method. According to Stake (1995), a key criterion for case selection lies in choosing cases that maximize learning potential. In line with this perspective, three Brazilian educational networks were selected based on their size and the national scope of the activities they develop. Through the analysis of these cases, it becomes possible to uncover new insights into the construct under study, particularly regarding the forms of organization, management practices, and defining characteristics of advocacy networks in the educational field.

Table 1 summarizes the identification of the cases while preserving research confidentiality, presenting selected characteristics of the educational networks investigated.

Table 1: networks characteristics

Institution	Focus	Characteristics
Network 1 (N1)	High School, Technician, Technological and Post Graduation courses	The education network has 23 units allocated in a Brazilian state, with more than 50 thousand students enrolled. It has numerous national and international partnerships and hundreds of extension projects with a socio-environmental concern, contributing to socio-economic and cultural development.
Network 2 (N2)	Basic and High School	It has 13 units in the national territory and serves about 15 thousand students. It has international partnerships. It carries out the community and charitable projects - solidarity is a virtue awakened in the students' daily lives, through campaigns to collect warm clothing and food, visits to asylums and orphanages, among other activities.
Network 3 (N3)	Basic and High School	It has units in 24 cities in Brazil, is present in 80 countries, and serves around 500 thousand children, adolescents, and young people. It has several projects that seek to promote inclusion and minimize the impact of social, educational, and economic inequalities. Social transformation takes place based on actions that include services focused on the integral development of students and their families and communities, in addition to providing new perspectives for the future for children, adolescents, young people and adults in situations of social vulnerability.

Source: Designed by the authors (2021).

Following Eisenhardt (1989), and in order to understand how social responsibility activities are organized within educational projects and how they are connected to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions was developed. This instrument was grounded in the Advocacy Networks theory proposed by Keck and Sikkink (1998), focusing on identifying network characteristics that may indicate stronger alignment with the objectives pursued by these initiatives.

The interviews were conducted in November and December 2019 and were recorded and transcribed during the data collection process. In total, ten individuals were interviewed: four from Network 1, four from Network 2, and two from Network 3. All respondents were either members or coordinators of the projects under analysis. The interview data were examined using Bardin's (2011) content analysis technique, which comprises three stages: pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and treatment and interpretation of results. Accordingly, the findings were interpreted based on predefined analytical categories derived from advocacy network theory, as presented in Table 2, which focuses on network motivations, strong ties, information flows, and the presence of actors operating at multiple levels.

Table 2: categories for analysis

Motivations	There are two types of problems that seem to be most effective for the functioning of a network: problems involving physical threats to vulnerable individuals or situations, especially when there is a clear and short chain of responsibility (so that the result is also visible and quick); and issues involving equal opportunities.
Strong Ties	The relationships between the actors in a network are of great importance. Events can help to mobilize the people/partners of the network, putting them in contact with each other, creating bonds that help the network to achieve good results within its projects.
Information Flow	The flow of information is necessary for the network to create a strong campaign for its projects, seeking results again. Although catalytic events help to bring people interested in the cause of the project, keeping them together and unified in what the project aims requires organization and communication.
Multilevel Actors	Multi-level actors reinforce the strong ties of the network, probably because they bring a diversity of strategies and create connections to act in accordance with these strategies to achieve the project objectives.

Source: Adapted from Keck and Sikkink (1998).

Projects related to sustainable development were identified, all of which were directly or indirectly connected to the educational field. Most initiatives involved strong engagement with stakeholders embedded in the networks, generating significant social impact through the activities developed by each project. Table 3 presents the different thematic areas addressed by the educational institutions, highlighting initiatives that engage with social and environmental dimensions across multiple fronts. Although these projects vary in organizational characteristics, they share common features: all are developed within educational networks, operate through diverse partnerships, and pursue social, educational, and sustainability-oriented objectives.

Table 3: description of institutions' projects

Institution/ Network	Projects	SDGs targeted
N 1 (Interviewees: I1, I2, I3, I4)	-Human Rights Commission (role of women, diversity, domestic violence, bullying, suicide prevention, national human rights week). -Sustainability Paths (waste separation, soil degradation, composting, bidding).	2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 16, 17
N2 (Interviewees: I5, I6, I7, I8)	-Juvenile protagonism (propagation of skills such as leadership, communication, organization and planning, community support projects). - Young female empowerment. -Social assistance (well-being and preparation for the world of work, drug awareness, and suicide prevention).	3, 4, 5, 8, 10.
N3 (Interviewees: I9, I10)	-Education for immigrants. -Solidarity economy. -Volunteer work.	1, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17.

Source: Designed by the authors (2021).

Each institution develops more than one project, responding to distinct objectives and addressing different areas of social action. Network 1 (N1) included four respondents—two project coordinators and two project participants. Through

these interviews, two projects were identified that clearly fit within a network-based structure, involving partnerships among teachers, students, and the broader community. Some project activities were also conducted in collaboration with institutions from other countries. Network 2 (N2) comprised two project coordinators and two project participants, presenting three ongoing projects that involve the entire school community and address social development across multiple domains. Finally, Network 3 (N3) included two interviewees, both project coordinators, whose activities focused on community-based projects and international partnerships. As summarized in Table 3, all projects developed by the networks under study can be framed within the advocacy network perspective and demonstrate alignment with at least some of the SDGs.

4. Results Presentation

Considering the Sustainable Development Goals and the advocacy networks under study, the interview data indicate that the networks seek to foster co-responsibility through the objectives, actions, and motivations of the projects they develop. These initiatives aim to promote both social development and societal well-being, with a strong emphasis on integral and citizen-oriented education, as illustrated by the excerpts presented in Table 4.

Table 4 - Presentation and actions developed

Network 1	"Actions involving human rights on campus promote awareness actions, round tables, lectures, meetings with the civil server, students, involving the community, in addition to holding meetings with the group and colleagues" (I1)
	"(...) lectures, round tables and debates, we put posters and various actions on the Campus on various topics of interest, such as the issue of gender discrimination, fighting suicide during Yellow September. Partnerships with judges and prosecutors of the Public Ministry on the issue of domestic violence (...) "(I2)
	"The objective of the project is to carry out activities to raise awareness of human rights and also try to bring in several external partnerships that make this fight to show our students and raise awareness in our community" (I3).
	"The project seeks to evaluate all social, environmental, economic actions that think about sustainability within the campus" (I4)
Network 2	"It is an interdisciplinary project (...) life skills, such as socialization, teamwork, leadership, communication, resilience, focus, among others. The group also works with a focus on recycling materials and collecting non-perishable foods that are donated to the community, to needy institutions"(I5)
	"It is an approach that talks about valuing life, and when we talk about valuing life, we talk about planning, because they are young, when we talk about planning we talk about goals, investing in the professional, it's a investment in young people, so that they can place themselves in the labor market somehow"(I7).
	"The project is an international movement, which was founded by the UN Foundation. And it is precisely to encourage girls to be leaders in their local communities, and to be able to create these groups to act on the problems they face at school, in the

	community, in the neighborhoods. And if it is also possible to collect funds to invest in local or international social projects (...), to transfer to projects in other places, for example bicycles for girls in Uganda to be able to go to school, absorbent in schools in India"(I8)
Network 3	"Portuguese Class for Immigrants. It is linked to the Volunteer and Solidarity Association, which has as one of its fronts the Human Rights Reference Center (CRDH). Through teaching the Portuguese language, we are committed to helping them adapt to their new land" (I9). "Our network does a very strong job in the Amazon region. So basically our volunteer project has to do with this issue of serving these communities in greatest need. In the Rio Grande do Sul state our main focus ends up being in the area of education, you know, we have a lot... we have around 500 volunteers who work here, in social projects in the network's units"(I10)

Source: Designed by the authors (2021).

The interview reports made it possible to observe that respondents consistently emphasized the relationship between networked action and education in its broadest sense. This was particularly evident because the projects are embedded within educational organizations and extend the role of education beyond teaching, contributing to community value creation and social transformation.

In a teaching institution, the motivation is very great because it has an educational, citizen training nature and you see the result quickly. We get a lot of feedback from the students, you know, they did it in their homes, generating a replication of knowledge this year alone we composted 7.7 tons of garbage. We never send organic waste to the landfill again, which helps in one of the biggest problems, leachate, so we built a worm farm for the destination and combined it with teaching. (I4)

Students develop many skills linked to specific knowledge for their lives. We work on values such as sustainability, human rights, and volunteering through the actions of the project. (I5)

Other interviewees also highlighted the importance of participating in social projects. Respondent (I9) reported feeling honored to engage in these initiatives and expressed pride in the institution's commitment. The same interviewee read an excerpt from a testimony she had previously shared on her social network:

Volunteering is the combination of people, attitudes, and verbs. Rethink, transcend and transform. It is to combine, above all, with the other's dreams and pains. It is to unite humanity, hope, and dedication in the same act. Being a volunteer means experiencing a more just and supportive life, with fewer social ties and more emotional

ties. It is the most suitable exercise for those who want to take responsibility for making the world better - starting with themselves. When doing volunteer work, we create awareness and mature in different ways. The heart grows, the mind too. (I9).

The projects analyzed present diverse thematic orientations, including human rights, sustainability, youth leadership, valuing life, labor market insertion, and volunteering. Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue that advocacy networks tend to be more effective when their campaigns target objectives related to situations involving physical threats or vulnerability, such as environmental degradation. From this perspective, the project's objective becomes a relevant element for understanding its effectiveness. In this sense, the Sustainable Development Goals constitute a useful framework for assessing whether advocacy networks are aligning their activities with internationally defined sustainable development agendas proposed by the United Nations.

Following the interviews, and based on the analysis of project presentation documents and reports, it was possible to identify that all projects directly impact one or more SDGs. In Network 1 (N1), eight SDGs were addressed (SDGs 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 16, and 17); in Network 2 (N2), five SDGs were identified (SDGs 3, 4, 5, 8, and 10); and in Network 3 (N3), six SDGs were addressed (SDGs 1, 4, 8, 10, 12, and 17). These findings indicate that all projects place emphasis on SDG 4 (Quality Education), which is closely related to the core activity of the studied networks. Although not always explicitly stated as a primary focus, education appears consistently as an underlying dimension across network projects.

Additionally, SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) were addressed through project activities, reflecting a concern with enabling participants' insertion into the labor market, fostering economic opportunities, and contributing to inequality reduction. SDG 5 (Gender Equality) was described as particularly important within Networks 1 and 2, which developed activities directly related to this theme. SDGs 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) were explicitly reported by Networks 1 and 3.

In Network 1, SDG 2 (Zero Hunger and Sustainable Agriculture) was primarily associated with sustainability projects involving sustainable agriculture practices. SDG

16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) was also prominent, given the topics addressed by the institution's human rights commission and its partnerships with the Public Ministry and other public institutions working toward peace promotion. In Network 2, SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) stood out through projects addressing suicide prevention, ongoing health and well-being care, and awareness initiatives against illicit drug use. In Network 3, a direct connection to SDG 1 (No Poverty) was emphasized, particularly through projects involving immigrants and individuals in situations of extreme social vulnerability across different regions of the country.

Thus, the engagement of these institutions in debating and implementing projects from an advocacy network perspective demonstrates their commitment and social responsibility toward sustainable development. According to Sterling (2016), educational practices should not only contribute to achieving the SDGs but also foster deeper changes in consciousness capable of reconciling people and the planet. Education, therefore, requires reinvention and a renewed purpose, enabling it to assume the responsibilities demanded by contemporary challenges and to cultivate the agency necessary for transformative societal and organizational change. In this sense, advocacy projects emerge as new challenges that education can embrace and transform into tools for positive change. It is also important to note that, as educational networks, all actions undertaken by these institutions are inherently framed through an educational lens, reinforcing education's central role in advancing the SDGs.

5. Results Discussion

Considering these perspectives, advocacy networks oriented toward sustainable development appear to constitute a viable organizational arrangement for constructing agendas focused on social and environmental responsibility toward the planet. Sustainability-related activities must be of general interest, insofar as they aim at preservation for all (Pocock et al., 2016).

Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue that relationships among actors within a network are particularly important, as they create webs of contact that mobilize actors in support of network actions. Networks, after all, operate through their partners and individuals. Based on the interviews, the dimension concerning relationships among

network actors can be examined, and selected excerpts illustrate the interviewees' perspectives:

There is a period where a meeting is held for a certain time (...) where all campuses get together to discuss the relevant issues, afterward in our meetings we also discuss. In our meetings, we usually exchange information about projects, decide what needs to be done. (I3)

This excerpt from Interviewee 3 illustrates that relationships among individuals in the network are primarily shaped by activities that bring them into contact, such as meetings, lectures, and training sessions. Interviewee 10 further reports the existence of specific training initiatives for those involved in the projects. Many project reports indicate that the initial formation of networks often occurs among individuals who already share strong relationships and prior connections, based on common ties. As the network expands, however, responsibilities become more clearly defined and activities more structured. Consequently, relationships broaden beyond previous ties to include new individuals and organizations, with new partners joining and contributing to the network.

Dupuy (2014) highlights that strengthening relationships between the network and its partner community—and, consequently, reinforcing these ties—is one of the most effective ways to ensure the development of high-quality projects. This includes enabling financial flows that support network initiatives. Hadden and Jasny (2017) corroborate this finding, demonstrating how relational links function as channels for sharing principles and communicating activities, making them a critical aspect to be carefully considered in network management.

Another relevant dimension concerns information flow, which may be responsible for connecting actors across different regions who need to collaborate within the network and pursue shared objectives. Keck and Sikkink (1998) suggest that information flow is central to building strong campaigns around network goals. While major events may initially mobilize actors around a cause, sustaining engagement over time and achieving network objectives requires greater coordination and a more structured flow of information. The interviews provide concrete illustrations of information flows within the studied cases:

My communication normally with these partners, if they are people from schools (across the country) is in person, and outside I look for it by phone contact, I agree on a date with the person first, I talk, for the date of the activity to be carried out. People end up getting involved and becoming very aware of this cause, because, for example, the Civil Police, came to talk about violence and other topics, and when I proposed that they come (again, for the project) they really seemed to like the idea. (I7)

Throughout the interviews, respondents repeatedly demonstrated concern with the flow of information within their organizations. Many projects appear to adopt deliberate strategies to manage how information reaches interested audiences, paying attention to language, communication channels, and target groups. This concern is evident, for instance, in Interviewee 5's reference to adapting communication for an "older generation." This sensitivity likely reflects the extensive use of social media and technological communication tools in these projects—means that may not be equally accessible or appealing to all audiences.

Interviewee 2 also reports that communication tends to flow more effectively during face-to-face meetings, noting that actions organized through in-person interactions often achieve greater participation and impact. Overall, the interview data indicate a clear awareness that information flow is vital to project functioning and, consequently, a key factor in project management. Effective communication supports the dissemination of objectives and results and enables engagement with the community, whether at the local or global level.

These excerpts illustrate the centrality of information flow to network functioning, particularly in advocacy networks, which often rely heavily on voluntary engagement from members. Herring (2010) emphasizes that both within the network and between its members and partners, mechanisms are needed to mediate actions, translate objectives, and guide processes, with information serving as the primary driver of network activity.

Finally, the last dimension identified by Keck and Sikkink (1998) and adopted in this research as a foundational pillar of transnational advocacy networks concerns the presence of diverse actors operating at multiple levels. Just as organizations deploy varied strategies and rely on different collaborators to achieve their objectives,

networks similarly benefit from maintaining diversity among organizational and individual actors. This diversity contributes a wider range of ideas, actions, and competencies, facilitating the development of strategies aligned with network goals.

In this study, substantial evidence emerged regarding partnerships and multilevel participation, particularly because the projects are situated within educational institutions. These projects almost invariably involve young students and adult educators, already ensuring a basic level of actor diversity. Additionally, partnerships with community actors further enrich the diversity of participants involved in network activities.

I was also once invited to participate in a conversation with volunteers (from another institution) and it was incredible. I was able to tell about the experiences I had outside the country and about how today I work in the social area, uniting mission, and profession. I managed to make many contacts: we added ourselves on social networks and exchanged ideas for exercises that can be done in the classroom. It was very good. (...) The network itself has some more general partnerships. Every time I post something on social media, there is always someone offering to help, saying that they want to work there, collaborate in some way. I say that the first step is to register as a volunteer. I think next year we will have more people helping us with this project. (I9)

This excerpt, along with the broader set of interviews, demonstrates the networks' concern with incorporating actors from multiple levels into their social development initiatives and sustainability-oriented projects. All interviewees, at some point, emphasized the importance of diverse partnerships, recognizing that each actor contributes unique knowledge, skills, and relational resources, as well as access to new networks of contacts. Baigorrotegui (2019) supports this perspective, arguing that advocacy networks benefit from involving actors at multiple levels, including organizations, NGOs, government partners, and individual contributors, each bringing distinct qualifications to the network.

The emphasis on multilevel partnerships aligns with Keck and Sikkink's (1998) position, which contrasts with Granovetter's (1973) theory of strong and weak ties. Whereas Granovetter suggests that strong ties may offer limited informational diversity, Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue that strong ties are essential for advocacy networks seeking broader and more effective outcomes. These strong ties can be balanced by

incorporating multiple actors and partnerships, thereby combining relational strength with diversity of perspectives, resources, and advantages.

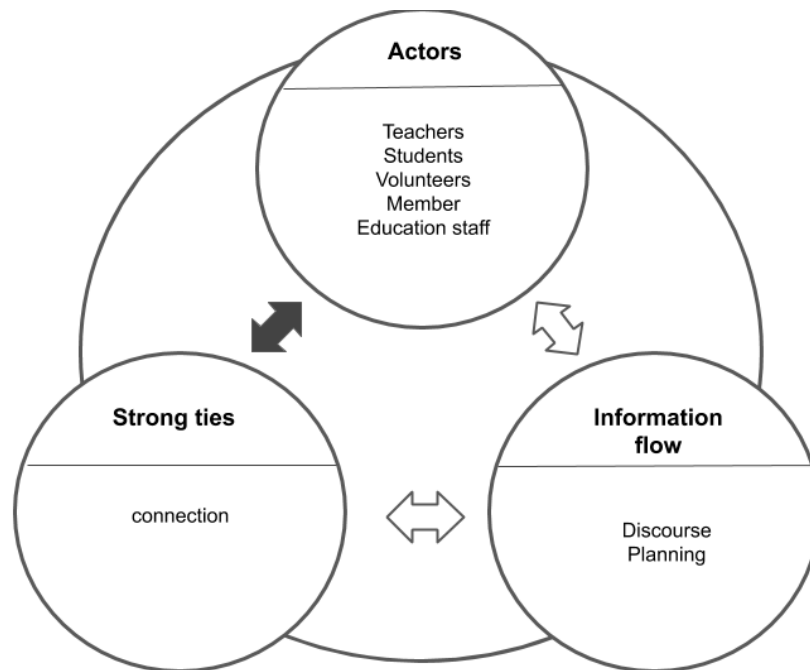**Figure 1**: advocacy networks in education projects structure (2020)

Figure 1 illustrates the structural configuration and information flow characteristic of advocacy networks, particularly when embedded in an educational context. The interviews both corroborate and extend the theoretical framework by clarifying network structure. Surrounding the network is the broader community and social environment, which both benefits from network outcomes and actively contributes actors and information. The figure emphasizes the strong connection between actors and strong ties, highlighting the wide range of participants—from young students to experienced professionals—typical of educational settings. There are no actors without ties, and the stronger these ties, the greater the likelihood that actors will work harmoniously toward shared objectives.

Information flow plays a critical role in binding diverse actors to a common trajectory, aligned planning, and shared results. It also reinforces ties by sustaining a coherent discourse among highly diverse individuals and organizations.

The scenario depicted in the interviews suggests that voluntary engagement predominates within these networks. Although two of the educational institutions are public and therefore part of the governmental sphere, participation in projects—

whether by individuals or organizations, volunteers or partners—is not formally mandated as part of professional obligations.

Overall, the interviews support the notion that the characteristics identified by Keck and Sikkink (1998) are actively valued and operationalized by advocacy networks. These characteristics contribute to more effective network management and goal achievement. At no point did interviewees indicate the absence of these elements; rather, their responses consistently reflect the presence and intentional organization of objectives, strong ties, multilevel actors, and information flows, each adapted to the network's scope and context. Consequently, advocacy networks linked to educational projects connect people and resources, promote sustainability from regional to global levels, and implement sustainable practices within communities (Motloch et al., 2007), extending beyond the institutional boundaries of education—both geographically and temporally.

6. Concluding Remarks

Advocacy networks provide an important space for civil society participation in political processes. While some of these networks take the form of social movements, others emerge through projects situated within educational institutions (Macpherson, 2016). Educational projects play a particularly significant role, as they engage the public and local communities while expanding their relevance by fostering collective perspectives that dialogue with scientific knowledge (Melles, 2019). As demonstrated in this research, many advocacy networks operate initially through activities rooted in local communities, gradually expanding their scope and, in some cases, reaching the transnational level.

The results of this study show that advocacy networks, corroborating the findings of Keck and Sikkink (1998), seek balance and demonstrate careful attention to dimensions that are fundamental to network functioning and project development. Dimensions such as information flow and the involvement of multilevel actors are understood as essential for creating and sustaining relationships among diverse network participants. These dimensions support the formation of partnerships, the circulation of knowledge, and the incorporation of new tools and practices into network activities.

This study makes it possible to delineate features that guide advocacy networks throughout project planning, implementation, and goal-oriented action. These features appear to be informally embedded in network practices, reflecting their centrality to network functioning, as originally proposed by Keck and Sikkink (1998). The findings indicate that these dimensions are not only theoretically relevant but also practically significant. Although they are not always formally planned or codified, they demand time, reflection, and intentional effort from project members and coordinators. This suggests that greater attention to these features—and their more deliberate cultivation—may contribute to more effective and efficient outcomes for transnational advocacy networks.

Consideration of these key dimensions of advocacy networks may contribute to a deeper understanding of the characteristics that should be emphasized in network management. When viewed through the lens of the Sustainable Development Goals, the projects analyzed— even when not explicitly designed with the SDGs in mind—demonstrate strong alignment with societal needs as articulated by the United Nations. This alignment highlights the capacity of advocacy networks to respond to global challenges through locally grounded action.

Educational projects introduce additional perspectives into this discussion. Even when such projects do not directly operate as transnational advocacy networks, they engage young people and community members who incorporate principles of networking, solidarity, and sustainable development into their formative experiences. The SDGs foster an international dialogue that extends beyond their practical accountability functions (Mbanda & Fourie, 2019), offering a shared vocabulary that can strengthen communication flows within advocacy networks and enhance connections among their actors.

The findings also point to promising avenues for future research, particularly in the development of management frameworks for advocacy networks. Such frameworks could clarify key elements involved in the preparation, implementation, evaluation, and maintenance of network activities, supporting both goal attainment and the engagement of new partners. In addition, Feldman (2012) emphasizes the importance of incorporating knowledge dynamics into studies of network functioning, especially in sustainability-related contexts that depend on collaboration and information exchange among diverse actors. Future research may therefore benefit

from examining the social impacts of transnational advocacy networks, including their effects on participants and communities, thereby broadening understanding of their significance—particularly within the educational field.

This study is limited by the specific database of cases analyzed and by the period during which the institutions were examined. Future research is especially encouraged in the post–COVID-19 context, as the pandemic may have altered societal perspectives on sustainable development challenges and, consequently, the ways organizations and advocacy networks respond to these issues.

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