

Editorial

A scientific journal as a form of resistance

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When, in January 2012, the Centre for African Studies of the University of Porto (CEAUP) and the Fundação Gonalo da Silveira (FGS) met for the first time, the most immediate horizon of work seemed to be the possibility that a researcher from CEAUP might be interested in systematising the experience of FGS's first five years of work in Development Education and Global Citizenship (DGCE), helping to build its working memory in this area, essentially related to intervention in the school setting. However, within the first few minutes of conversation, this agenda shifted towards two broader and interconnected themes: the first concerned the theoretical and conceptual questions related to DGCE and the need for these to be more thoroughly worked through and deepened by actors in the Development field; the second was related to the lack of recognition of DGCE in Portugal, not only within Academia, but also within the NGOs themselves. At that point, a hypothesis emerged linking the two questions: could the lack of knowledge production and scientific reflection in this area, in our country, be one of the causes of this lack of recognition? Within this framework, several ideas began to emerge, still in a rough form, one of them related to the possibility of CEAUP's scientific journal, *Africana Studia*, beginning to include articles on DGCE and eventually dedicating one of its issues to this theme.

Despite the enthusiasm generated by the meeting, the informality of the process and the limited availability of those involved, combined with geographical distance, meant that the second meeting only took place four months later. Even so, the importance of the theme had left no one indifferent and, quite naturally, it was possible to reach a systematisation of shared ideas and objectives and even sketch out a first "action plan" for work-

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ing on DGCE at the level of teaching and academic research, which was later developed remotely – it was at that point that the idea of creating a digital scientific journal on DGCE first emerged. In addition to sketching out this plan, the fundamental importance of integrating the active participation of non-European visions and perspectives was reinforced, as was the intention for the process to strengthen DGCE as a promoter of alternatives, taking on a counter-power role – form/process is content.

At that time, in the midst of the implementation of the *Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies*, commonly known as the *Troika Plan*, we were united by the wish for a path grounded in shared perspectives:

- A VISION... the relevance of DGCE in the context of our current society;
- A NEED... the deepening of scientific research in DGCE and a stronger connection between higher education and civil society;
- A RECOGNITION... the importance of using alternative methodologies for the joint creation of knowledge and of horizontal, collaborative logics of reflection, for the transformation and increased credibility of actions on the ground;
- A HOPE... the opening of spaces for creating relationships of learning and mutual reinforcement between the actions of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs);
- A BELIEF... the promotion of the values and relevance of DGCE as a sign of resistance in the face of the prevailing landscape of crisis and austerity and of the dominant political, economic and social orientations.

The third meeting took place another four months later and, given the reality in terms of resources and availability, it became clear that we should initially focus on the objective of systematising knowledge in the field

of DGCE and making it available and structured for other interested people, so that it could be more easily used in teaching and research, as well as in the day-to-day practice of actors on the ground. Thus, with the means available, over the following months we were able to move forward with the process of bibliographic selection and the development of the first reading files.

When, at that time, the funding line for Development Education (DE) projects opened up through Camões – Instituto da Cooperação e da Língua, I.P., there was a clear wish to put together an application to this funding line based on the reflection and work already carried out over that first year of informal collaboration, giving shape to the possibility of dreaming up a more integrated project, based on the five shared perspectives outlined above. This is how the project *Sinergias ED: Knowing in order to act better – promoting research on DE action in Portugal* came about, which included in its process the proposal to create a specific digital scientific journal in the field of DGCE. With the project's approval for co-financing, a first cycle came to a close, creating the conditions to start implementing what had begun to be dreamed of, and the initial idea of creating a scientific journal continued to develop, be completed and be integrated until it finally took shape as the specialised, peer-reviewed digital journal *Sinergias – educational dialogues for social change*, whose first issue was launched in December 2014, almost three years after that first meeting in the cold days of January 2012.

Resistance

Throughout the various editions of the *Sinergias ED* project and these 20 issues of the *Sinergias* journal, there have been many questions and decisions that needed to be made in order to render intentional the choices for a practice that we identify as

coherent with the principles and values of DGCE, and which give it the distinctive mark attributed to it – that of being a welcoming space, open to experimentation and plurality, giving visibility to alternatives and forms of resistance in the face of an unbalanced status quo that promotes injustice.

Right from the start, some of these questions and the choices that were made stand out:

- the choice of the journal's title, introducing the word *dialogues* as an indicator of the proposed way of creating knowledge – collaboratively – and opting for the use of the expression social transformation as a broader and therefore more inclusive concept of a plurality of alternative proposals, coming from different geographies, with the ultimate goal of *social transformation*, not confining itself solely to Eurocentric concepts such as that of DE;
- the choice of free access to the journal, with the aim of achieving maximum dissemination and accessibility;
- the diversity of languages in which it was decided to accept the submission of texts (Portuguese, English and Spanish), as a response to the hegemony of the English language in the production of scientific knowledge;
- the composition of the journal's Scientific Council and Editorial Board, made up not only of researchers with experience in the field of DGCE, but also of civil society actors of recognised standing in their practices, in a horizontal relationship, thus seeking to connect the fields of research and action;
- the explicit choice to publish texts of different natures, originating both from academia and from other knowledge-generating contexts, questioning the elevation of scientific knowledge as the only kind capable of reaching

the truth, thereby underestimating other forms of knowledge.

This long journey of more than 12 years of the journal and 20 published issues has naturally raised a number of other questions, dimensions and crossroads that we believe are worth sharing.

One of the recurring themes was the structure of the journal. While for some, given its scientific nature, the journal should have a defined and constant structure, for others the journal should respond to the type of calls and proposals that arose, maintaining a logic of flexibility and adaptability as a counterpoint to traditional formal rigidity. As a result, it was decided to keep some more classic, structuring sections – such as the *Thematic Dossier*, the *Interview*, the *Key Document*, the *Critical Review*, *Recent Publications* and *Thesis Abstracts* – while leaving room for other sections to emerge in response to the type of demands that arose, as was the case with the sections *Other Articles*, *Practices* and *Debate*. Issues also emerged from the International Meetings promoted by the project, whose structure was likewise adapted to that different context.

In the early issues, and because there was initially a clear idea of the authors we wanted to “bring” into DGCE in Portugal, a process began by invitation, that is, articles were commissioned through direct contact and requests. However, as the issues went by, we felt that, especially for the *Thematic Dossier* section, it would be important to begin a process of publicly opening up the call for articles, thereby democratising access to participation. Despite the risk, this change ended up producing surprising results, since texts began to be received from different parts of the world, with a predominance from Latin America, consistent with the possibility of publishing in Portuguese and Spanish.

These positive results were both a reflection and, at the same time, proof of the

fact that the journal's international reach had exceeded the best initial expectations. Contributing to this was the journal's distinctive proposal, particularly with regard to the diversity of publication languages, but also the stance adopted right from the early years of the *Sinergias* journal as a challenger and promoter of connection and joint work between similar journals published in other countries, embracing a collaborative rather than competitive logic and opening up spaces of opportunity to "do things differently". A reflection of this stance was the pioneering promotion of a meeting between journals, making use of the 1st International Meeting of the *Sinergias ED* project, as well as the production of two issues of *Sinergias* in joint articulation with some of these scientific journals.

From the 3rd edition of the *Sinergias ED* project (2018-2020) onwards, the project embraced the idea of *Community*, which had emerged from the evaluation of the 1st edition. The project moved from a structure more centred on the team to a more democratic structure, organised around thematic *Collaborative Working Groups*, which each member of this community is invited to join, with each group collaboratively establishing its annual objectives and its processes of collaboration and learning. One of the *Collaborative Working Groups* created was the *Knowledge group*, which in the 4th edition (2020-2023) was renamed *Reflection and Action* around the *Sinergias* Journal, which, among other things, was responsible for editing the journal. In this phase, the questioning deepened, with new proposals and models being put forward.

One of the main debates addressed the limitations of the hegemonic language format used in the processes of knowledge production, validation and dissemination, generally writing. In this way, an increasingly coherent pursuit of the aims of DGCE was undertaken, promoting the publication of dif-

ferent languages, be it video, poetry or other more visual forms, in a logic and search for enriching scientific communication, giving it greater diversity and promoting greater accessibility.

Another of the group's concerns was to align the peer review model with the journal's own principles and values, making it a more dialogical, inclusive and pedagogical model. The *Sinergias* journal, which claims to want to be a space for dialogue between academia and civil society, a place where knowledge produced in organisations and in educational practices on the ground would have the same legitimacy as knowledge produced in higher education institutions, ended up privileging academia in its process of validating submitted texts. The journal could not be content with questioning, in its articles, the hierarchy between academic and non-academic knowledge, if that same hierarchy continued to structure the way it validated what it published. After intense debate, and in order to value all forms of knowledge, a new peer review model was established, in which the two people selected for review – the peers – came from distinct fields of action, for a more complementary vision – from academia and from civil society – and for greater coherence between the production of knowledge and its validation.

Furthermore, because we see ourselves as being in a process of learning and of facilitating learning, and because we recognise the relevance and potential of including contributions from authors less experienced in scientific writing, a third, singular possibility was opened up in the review process (in addition to acceptance and rejection). When the reviewing peer identifies a text that, while not yet meeting the formal requirements of a scientific article, reveals potential and brings relevant contributions, the author is informed of the possibility of embarking on a supported rewriting process. Although this process is demanding for the Editorial

Board and has therefore only taken place at certain moments, it has been regarded as a conscious and intentional commitment to a way of doing things that serves the purposes the journal proclaims.

The indexing of the *Sinergias* journal was also one of the themes reflected upon throughout the project's editions. Indexing a journal means choosing which classification system it wants to be recognised in, and these systems are not neutral. On the table was always a discussion about the dual and contradictory role indexing can play. On the one hand, indexing can be understood as complicity with the logic of commodifying knowledge. The major bibliometric indices, with their rankings and impact factors, have contributed to turning scientific production into a competitive game in which whoever publishes most in the most highly rated journals wins, regardless of the social relevance of what is published. The *Sinergias* journal, committed to the democratisation of knowledge, would have good reasons to stay outside this system. On the other hand, not being indexed is also a form of invisibility. A journal that does not appear in reference indexing databases is a journal that researchers do not find when carrying out their searches, that libraries do not subscribe to, that does not reach potential authors and readers beyond already existing networks. The democratisation of knowledge also depends on dissemination and effective access. After in-depth reflection, and in line with all the journal's principles and editorial line, it was decided to submit the journal to two indices: DOAJ – *Directory of Open Access Journals*, and ERIH PLUS, belonging to the *Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills*. Both are open-access journal indexes, without bibliometric rankings, committed to the idea that scientific knowledge should be freely accessible.

The processes of submission and registration in these databases had an unforeseen

but welcome consequence, as they helped to make more explicit the open-access values and principles inherent to the journal, such as, for example, including the *Creative Commons* licence, making the policy on the use of texts clearer.

Celebration

This commemorative issue invites us to pause, look back and celebrate a journey. A journey marked by the hope of trying to collectively build a scientific journal that questions, debates and tries not to reproduce the very power mechanisms it criticises.

Beyond the content linked to Social Transformation, we constantly seek to critically question ourselves about the ways in which scientific writing operates, seeking out and experimenting with alternative paths. Who writes? Who validates? Who reads? Who is left out? Which languages are recognised? Which forms of knowledge are legitimised? Which power relations are reproduced, even when we try to combat them?

The paths found are necessarily experimental and are testimonies to a journey in search of coherence. The various issues published are the result of questioning, reflective processes that invariably gave rise to various critical moments. We try to see these moments as opportunities for learning offered to the *Community*. From them we have learned: i) that the most significant learning is not always expressed in final results, but happens precisely in the dialogue between processes and products; ii) that the *Sinergias* journal is a mirror of the diversity (of actors, methodologies, formats, ways of thinking) that the *Sinergias ED* project embraces, and that these processes go on shaping the journal; iii) that the journal is a space for reflection on alternatives that matter to the fields of DGCE, which asserts itself in a present in which political, economic and social challenges remain pressing; iv) and

that one of the journal's traits of identity is its affirmation through difference in a context of ever-increasing commodification of knowledge, subordinated to dominant logics of power.

Looking to the future, we recognise that none of these questions is closed. On the contrary, in a time marked by persistent inequalities, the discrediting of democratic processes, ecological crises, wars, hate speech and new forms of exclusion, the need for critical, plural and accessible spaces remains as urgent as it was at the moment the journal was first imagined.

That is why, for us, to celebrate is also to resist. To resist haste, competition, the invisibilisation of knowledge, the rigid hierarchy between those who think and those who do (not least because this dichotomy is, in itself, questionable), and the idea that knowledge only has value when it is quantified and indexed.

With this in mind, this commemorative issue presents a different structure, containing only two sections: a section linked to "Memory and Celebration", which, besides offering a broader reflection on memory, learning and transformation, presents various free-form accounts from people connected to the *Sinergias ED Community* who wished to celebrate and recall with us various experiences and feelings lived within it; and a section entitled "Resistances", made up of debate texts exploring different forms of Resistance for fairer societies, in keeping with the thinking of the *Sinergias ED* project.

But to celebrate is also to give thanks. To thank all the people who, over these 20 issues, have given shape to the journal: members of the Scientific Councils and Editorial Boards of the various issues; authors; reviewers; members of the *Sinergias ED Community*, particularly all those who have been part of its *Reflection and Action around the Sinergias Journal* Collaborative Working Group; not forgetting all the people who

read, shared, cited, used and questioned the published texts. A word of thanks is also due to the institutions that have participated in and supported the *Sinergias ED* project and the publication of *Sinergias*, starting with the promoting NGOs (CEAUP and FGS), through several other institutions that became increasingly involved in the various processes to which they were invited, and not forgetting the funding bodies that made the realisation of this dream possible, with special mention, at the national level, of Camões – Instituto da Cooperação e da Língua, I.P. (co-financer of the project's 5 editions) and, at the international level, of the Global Education Network Europe (GENE).

This gratitude is inseparable from the recognition that *Sinergias* was never the work of a single person, nor of a single institution. It was built like a web: made up of many threads, some more visible than others, but all necessary to sustain a shared space. Perhaps this is one of the fairest images with which to close this editorial – **the journal as a web of relationships, learning and commitment, as a place where different voices come together to think, jointly, about fairer, more democratic and more supportive ways of inhabiting the world.**

Reaching this issue does not, therefore, mean reaching a full stop. It means renewing our willingness to keep listening, keep questioning, keep learning, keep opening space for other voices, other languages and other ways of producing knowledge. We celebrate the path travelled with gratitude. But above all, we celebrate it as a commitment to the path that is still to come.

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