

THE CROSSCUTTING ROLE OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) AND AGENDA 2030 IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF OFFICIALS IN SPAIN

Introduction

The National Institute of Public Administration (INAP) is an executive agency (or arms' length body) of the Secretary of State for Public Service, attached to the Ministry of Finance and Public Service with a focus, among others, on the recruitment, training, and improvement of public employees, with a long trajectory of more than 75 years in these fields of action. In fact, it is the reference centre in Spain for these policies.

In accordance with Article 2 of its Statute, approved by Royal Decree 464/2011 of 1 April, the Institute's essential purposes are:

- a) Develop and implement policies for the recruitment and training of public employees in the field of their competences.
- b) Promote and conduct studies, publications and research in matters related to the Public Administration.
- c) Maintain cooperation and collaboration with other administrations and training centres for public, national, and international employees.

These essential purposes are supplemented and extended in the broad range of functions contained in Article 3 of the Statute, among which we may highlight the following:

- The recruitment of officials in managerial professions across ministries in all the rungs of the ladder, as well as participation, where appropriate, in the processes of selection of bodies and scales entrusted by the provisions in force to other centres or specialised bodies.
- The training and improvement of the public employees of the General State Administration and its public bodies, as well as of the other entities of the state public sector.
- The “selective courses” (initial training) of managerial professions across ministries.
- Training and further development, within the framework of the inter-administrative training plans and in the terms provided for by the provisions in force, of the public employees of the entities forming part of the local administration, as well as the recruitment of officials of the Local Administration with national qualifications and the selective courses of that scale.

INAP's Strategic Plan 2021-2024

The INAP has just approved the first multiannual Strategic Plan for the period 2023 -2024. The renewal of the current formative model revealed necessary from the four following premises:

- A strategic vision within training policy.
- An open model that takes advantage of the wide possibilities of the current context.
- An adaptive, collaborative, and flexible model focused on the real needs of potential participants.
- And finally, a transversal and transformative model that understands learning as an organizational value.

All these elements converge in the INAP Learning Strategy, which added to the collaborative elaboration process, rounds the strategy as a disowned factor of organisational and personal development, in which the “communication” factor becomes key and essential.

The ten main points can be highlighted:

1.- The fact of **anticipating** and defining before the beginning of the year the specific field of how far the learning activities are going to go so that the other promoters of training activities can establish their corresponding scope, is key to not duplicate efforts and resources.

2.- The emphasis on the **senior executive programme** and the creation of the School of Public Management aligns with what should be the processes of innovation and change, which leaders should be the first to know and promote. If we genuinely want to implement at the organisational level a “learning culture” that transcends the purely individual realm, given the fact that now more than ever in these uncertain times the role of leaders is essential.

3.- There is also a reorganisation of training programmes with the creation of the new **International Learning Programme**. It is necessary to seek alliances within and outside our immediate environment and, above all, to learn collaboratively and benchmark what similar schools of Government are doing. Often enormous amounts of time and resources are wasted in trying to solve “problems” that sometimes in other organisations have long ceased to be so.

4.- The determined progress towards **training of public employees by competencies and the design of specialised itineraries** also seems a defining point in the Strategy. Training and consequently learning by skills is the best way to bring knowledge to the reality that surrounds us. It is also essential to learn in a practical way with the acquisition and development of knowledge, skills and abilities that are expressed in posts across public organisations.

Therefore, promoting a competency-based learning model that opens the door to the mutual recognition of certifications between different actors of the so-called learning community for the employment of public administrations seems like a significant impression.

5.- In the so-called “knowledge economy” the public sector has proven that is willing and able to **create value** (Mazzucato, 2019), in connection to the newer concept of the “society of ignorance” (Innerarity, 2022), through their leaning policies. Moreover, the learning programs of public employees embed the power of transforming the administration from within, and this aspect should not be disdained in the INAP’s Learning Strategy.

6.- The Learning Strategy **stimulates the coordination and collaboration** between all the promoters of training activities from the public sector, as well as encourages the elaboration of similar documents in other territorial areas (CCAA, City Councils, etc). This also represents an opportunity for INAP to consolidate its centre stage role in the training centres system in Spain.

This goes along with the promotion of exchange programmes and the sharing of learning resources between the public administrations, becomes of utmost importance in present times. It is something that has not yet really materialised, beyond some practices based on pure voluntarism. Therefore, the Strategy becomes a new impulse and catalyser.

The “INAP Social”, the civil service online network powered by INAP, and its Training Community, with its so-called *dynamisers* (or community managers) at the forefront, could do a great deal of work in this regard. Today it brings together nearly 4.000 training practitioners and prescribers with a strong sense of belonging.

7.- The treatment and attention now boosted to the **Local Administration training programme** deserves differentiating and is now clearly aligned with the needs and expectations of its public employees (which are undoubtedly different from those of the State or regional administrations). The design of the different training activities envisaged in it cannot undermine the essential role of local towns, especially in deserted villages and towns in central plateau in Spain.

8.- Enhancing and promoting other learning models beyond the purely formal ones is also relevant in the Strategy. Along with more traditional and formal learning models, informal learning approaches, especially those based on social and collaborative learning processes, must coexist, and find new room at INAP. Today we know that the best teachings are acquired in the workplace itself and, in any case, in informal spaces of happenstance and banter.

In the design of the training activities, the Strategy includes, enriches, and promotes informal learning typologies.

9.- To promote and publicise the importance of a **learning culture** at the organisational level. The INAP has organised by the end of 2022 a learning activity called “Promotion of a learning culture in public administrations” that

proved to be of great interest. It was aimed at public employees, who do not necessarily provide services in training units or HR, to help them become aware of the importance of organizational learning in a professional context and of the need to make this learning process a strategic responsibility that favours transformation and change. The Strategy wants to promote this view, make it more widespread in the public sector and provided the tools necessary for this.

10.- Boost learning in the workflow. To address the strategic dimension of learning, it is necessary to ensure that the main source of learning is day-to-day work so that we ensure that each worker obtains from their work environment the learning necessary for their continuous adaptation. In short, that learning is a process that occurs in the workflow, an almost invisible activity, which is intermingled with our functions. As stated by Michelle Weise, “lifelong learning” expert and former chief innovation officer of Strada Education Network’s Institute for the Future of Work, speaking “the workplace as a classroom of the future” (Weise, 2021). The current context imposes a model in which having an attitude to learn, day by day, lifelong really, becomes more necessary than ever.

INAP’s training programmes must be based on this important ground and must be oriented and aimed at achieving those goal.

Moreover, the Learning Strategy and axis number 1: connecting competencies to principles and values of the public service. Connecting social demands with performing civil servants. This axis is of the utmost importance in the VUCA (an acronym that stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, all descriptors of a situation difficult to analyse, respond to or plan for) or even BANI (another more recently used acronym made up of the words 'brittle', 'anxious', 'nonlinear' and 'incomprehensible', described by American anthropologist Jamais Cascio) societies we live in. this requires new skills, especially for senior managers. As OECD puts it: “Today’s policy advisers need an understanding of what has worked well in the recent past and how these successes can be adapted and scaled to current problems, while responding to the local context. They need skills to design solutions informed by advances in behavioural economics, social finance, sociology and ethnography, and the range of services delivered through networks of actors” (OECD, 2017, p. 34).

The importance of this kind of contents is ever more plausible these days. There is not a real need for a further explanation when we look around what is going on in the world right now and where we come from in the last couple of years. The interesting thing is that we may agree on the fact that Agenda 2030 encapsulates a great deal of the answers to find a way forward from those challenges: greener, more inclusive, and more resilient public administration in “poli-crisis” times, as Edgar Morin described (UNESCO, 2021). Therefore, training in SGDs opens the door to some sort of solution... or at least to some kind of hope.

The SGDs in INAP before the 2022-2025 training Plan

What has happened at INAP in the last 7 years, the time between the adoption of Agenda 2030 and the approval of the first SGD training Plan in 2022? This training plan does not operate in a previous vacuum, since Spain has instruments for the implementation of the Agenda that allow it to be framed in a series of objectives and global actions of our country.

First, it takes some time to realise the importance of the Agenda 2030 in the specific context of the civil service.

Second, 2018 marks a change in the importance of the Agenda 2030 in the Spanish national political agenda. The new government the Council of Ministers learned, on June 8, the 2021 Progress Report that includes the Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 as a tool to achieve that Spain complies with the Agenda 2030.

Third, the preparation and approach leading to the subsequent approval of training programme took quite some time for the definitions and elaborations.

Fourth, the pandemic imposed a delay in everything, changing priorities, but at the same time offered time to reflect and to increase the perception of such importance, therefore the need to have such a training Plan.

And in the meantime, some activities conducted in this period resembled to what is now embedded in the Plan, shaping foregoing activities offered to the civil service.

It is characteristic the fact that all such activities were scattered all over the training programmes, either for senior or for more junior public employees, shaping a disperse mosaic of unconnected courses and workshops. In other words, at INAP you could find courses on social, justice, diversity, equality, and others, but out of context. Suffice to mention just a few training activities in 2020 and 2021 linked directly and indirectly to the goals:

- Website accessibility reporting.
- Responsive public procurement
- Integrity in public procurement.
- Spanish sign language
- Prevention of violence against women.
- Fundamentals of equal treatment and non-discrimination.
- Administrative jargon adapted to society.

Now the sole existence of a coherent Plan, better or worse, offers the possibility to analyse as a whole and within a common framework all the challenges posed by the political, economic and administrative context and to confront a number of solutions with a strategic approach. It can be better described in five points:

One, integrate in a single framework all such activities, and therefore for potential participants register in an overarching Plan with specific and well now by now goals,

Two, connect it with the Agenda 2030 in a kind of overarching, crosscutting response to what is needed or demanded to this training institution. This should be done in line with the target 17.14, enhance policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD), much in the guise of what the OECD has recommended: to “build capacity in public administrations for PCSD, and align training strategies and programmes for public actors with the principles and integrated nature of the SDGs” (OECD, 2021, pág. 32). So, in summary the challenge here would be to end up the vision of silos across government dropping a synergistic approach in the whole of the policy cycle.

Three, communicate and diffuse better both to potential participants from public administrations, their managers and to society as whole. This, no doubt, helps us reduce a gap that was previously identified at INAP: we need to communicate more and better, to cast what we arduously do in the back office to the learning community.

Four, respond to a political input express by the Spanish Senate in 2020 and the government’s commitment within its public policies, expressed for instance in the annual budgeting process. All of this we will explore in the following paragraphs.

Five, connect with a growing trend across the OECD’s Schools of Government that “offer programmes on new types of leadership and management, transparency and innovation, and about half offer programmes on crisis management, digitalisation and SDGs” (OECD, 2022, pág. 8). This also ensures the possibility of more interactive and interchangeable learning programmes worldwide, especially in Hispano-American countries in the case of Spain.

The first INAP’s SDGs Training Plan 2022 – 2025 (SDGTP)

- Origins: This Training Plan implements a 2020 parliamentary initiative in Spanish Senate by which the Government was urged to “advance in the design, development and dissemination of a training plan to transfer skills to public administration workers and to provide technical staff with the necessary knowledge for its implementation and achieve a true coherence of public policies”. Likewise, the transformative measure number 6, Promoting a civil service with the knowledge and capacities to implement the SDGs, of the Spanish Action Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is boosted with this Plan.
- Strategic approach: the aim of advancing in the transversal implementation in the public administration. This will be attained by offering the necessary tools to the civil servants.

This Plan is fully in line with the new Learning Strategy 2023 – 2024, mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Therefore, they will be implemented in successive INAP annual training programmes. Coherence with the overall strategic goals of the professional development of Spanish officials is of foremost importance. Being so, SDGs are also present in all

initial training for new waves of recruitment of senior officials. Hence, it has now become a trend within the strategic axis number 1, “principles and values of the administration”, together with the 2021-2024 Open Government Training Plan and the 2023-2024 Equality and Non-discrimination Training Plan. These two connect directly with some SDGs, number 5, gender equality, in particular.

In this regard, the real key aspect of this approach can be well seen within the strategy’s axis one, called “principles and values of the public administration”. This is where these training activities envisaged in the SDGs training programme fit perfectly right. That is, they aim at marking an Administration adapted to new environments and social realities. It also sets its goal in adapting the organisational culture of public organisations and the actions of employees and public employees to the current social demands. This axis covers a wide spectrum of content: open governance, transparency and participation, public integrity, gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence, equal opportunities and non-discrimination of people, sustainable development, SDGs, and environmental impact of public policies, as well as issues of professional ethics and integrity.

- Cross cutting: the Plan includes both the vision and a set of training activities, both generalist and specific (SDG aligned budgeting; legal memo drafting or the design of public policies and regulatory frameworks). This will facilitate its transversal bent, which is already ingrained in the Agenda 2030 itself and INAP’s Learning Strategy. First, by sharing its contents with the rest of Spanish Administrations, thus contributing to impregnate to the maximum extent possible the training activities all over the civil service.

Also, during the process of elaboration, which was an open and shared one, a number of conclusions were reached by the working group:

- The importance of transversal training of SDGs in the different training activities: regulatory production, strategic planning or contracting.
 - Specific workshops for technical focus groups, seeking community creation.
 - Create spaces and opportunities for the transfer of knowledge in the public sector.
 - Training through conferences, workshops and learning communities. Therefore, a practical approach.
 - Creation of fora and working spaces.
- Structure: This Plan is structured in two types of training activities by their nature:

- Training activities of a basic nature. They are those that will facilitate the acquisition of conceptual bases and the development of basic skills. These are crosscutting activities that formed the precepts of the existing activities at our training centre.
- Training activities of a specific nature. They are those that will facilitate the development of skills related to the performance of specific functions or positions. These constitute new in approach and provide a sense of the specifics that lay inside the Agenda 2030 for the civil service. We will see more of this later, given the fact that this type of training de facto defines the Plan.
- Those supplementary actions of the plan, such as activities for more senior roles, the inclusion of SGD's contents in the initial training programmes as well in the so-called decentralised activities for local entities, and finally, 2 or 3 conferences on the subject and the diffusion of good practices in the implementation of the Agenda 2030 in Spain at the three levels of Public Administration will be organised.
- Professional development in the civil service. It is a fact that SDGs training activities exist throughout the education system and the UN have recently offered a new edition of the “SDGs Learning, Training and Practice”¹ between partners and organisations from different sectors as explained in the final report (UN, 2022, pág. 21). But we pioneer this practice within the specific needs and requirements of the Spanish civil service in the belief that public policy holds a special relevance in the implementation of the Goals. At the same time, both the basic and specific activities promote a professional development of public employees, improving their skills and boosting a cultural change towards more service-prone open organizations through the full range of action carried out in the public sector.

As mentioned earlier, we need to stop to analyse the specific activities that define the SDGs Training Plan. Not only the stem from the Agenda itself but tackle functions typically characteristic of the senior civil service like budgeting, local towns management, legal drafting, and a specific activity to enhance the policy coherence for sustainable development in the public administration.

Last, the Plan is a living project, therefore subject to constant change and adaptation. In fact, we are already considering the possibility to include some training activity specially to reinforce its “teaching green” side. Just inspired by some of the recently designed [The Federal Sustainability Plan](#) of the United States Administration “on how to manage climate risks, including how climate change hazards may impact Federal programs and what steps they can take to

¹ [2021 SDGs Learning, Training and Practice | Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(un.org\)](#)

prepare for these impacts”. Or the Irish one focuses in its One Learning platforms on “Education for sustainability”. These recent experiences come from the close collaboration with the Network of Schools of Government of the OECD, demonstrating that international cooperation brings on new ideas into real shape.

The way forward after de SDGTP. Next steps

2023 is the Year of Skills, according to the European Commission (European Commission, 2022). On its [website](#), the Commission states that “the green and digital transitions are opening up new opportunities for people and the EU economy. Having the relevant skills empowers people to successfully navigate labour market changes and to fully engage in society and democracy. This will ensure that nobody is left behind and the economic recovery as well as the green and digital transitions are socially fair and just. A workforce with the skills that are in demand also contributes to sustainable growth, leads to more innovation, and improves companies' competitiveness”. In addition, “The Council Conclusions of 8 June 2020 invite Member States to “explore possible models for public and private financing of lifelong learning and the development of skills on an individual level” (General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, 2020, pág. 10). This learning should include “a particular focus on the upskilling and reskilling of the workforce, taking into account gender equality, environmental sustainability” (p. 11).

In this regard, at INAP we have also elaborated and published the first Digital Competencies framework, specific for public servants across all the public administrations. This is implemented within the Spanish Recovery and Resilience Plan aimed at the modernisation of the administration, in which we project to upskill more than 250.000 civil servants until 2025. The latest version of the Framework derives from a specific modification to enhance those skill that the civil servants must have in order to improve the universal accessibility of the design of digital public services (INAP, 2022). Therefore, bringing closer our SGDs training programme to the honing of digital skills across government.

The Plan was born with the aim of being completed, reviewed, and updated periodically, which will allow us to incorporate training activities that accompany the processes of change and improvement. The reviews should be conducted in coordination and dialogue with the different actors involved. This will be done during the year 2025 in a thorough final assessment report.

Digitisation of public services is a fact, and it is here to stay. Now, besides encouraging a new logical culture within our organizations we must hone our abilities to keep that process human centered. And in many aspects any learning strategy with strong components of SGDs in it will help us strike the right balance and a sustainable way forward. Therefore, together with the IT savvies and non-IT staff prone to technological disruption, both should bear in mind the principals and values engrained in public services. Agenda 2030 offers that set of skills and sensitive approach and at INAP we try to incorporate it at the heart of our activities.

No doubt, teaching sustainable goals will contribute to tackle from within the challenges nowadays democracies face: first, it is seen as necessary to improve trust in its institution. Honing integrity and efficiency skills among public employees not only can help in it but is deemed to be essential. Second, proved strength to the State and its democratic/pluralistic values is considered also as crucial. This lies within the SDG training programme, as an undeniable way forward for democracies insufflating these shared values to their forefront workers as well as their decision makers.

Conclusions

It is advisable to firstly conclude, after what is been said in this paper, that we are clearly in front of a subject in which this are easier said than done. and let us not say we do them with a real impact on people and organisations. Nowadays anyone in the civil service sector would advocate for the cross-cutting approach of the SGDs and the grave need for the implementation of sustainability as a principle. Who would not openly support the training in ethical public values that must guide all public action, such as transparency, effective equality, inclusion, diversity, sustainable development, accountability, representativeness, participation, or integrity?

Nevertheless, the OECD has included “achieving the 17 SDGs committed to by UN member state” among the “multidimensional (wicked) problems” (OECD, 2017, p. 16). In consequence, the question about how this is going to be achieved rests with an awkward answer. And as the President of the US, John F. Kennedy said, "we do these things not because they are easy, but because they are hard". And lengthy and much necessary. So here is the answer: INAP’s own SDGs training Plan.

The 2030 Agenda is an opportunity for change that cannot be missed, and requires a lifelong learning approach, training in the skills needed to face a changing and uncertain future, learning that meets social and environmental needs and promotes lifestyles consistent with sustainable development.

A conference was organised on March 2, 2022. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, aimed at the people responsible for designing training in Agenda 2030 and its SDGs in the different ministerial departments, in addition to the focal points of the 2030 Agenda in the Ministries that are part of the Government’s Delegated Commission. Representatives from thirteen ministries participated. Their conclusions were drawn in this paper, underlining the importance of the crosscutting approach.

Of course, some caution and humbleness need to be asserted here. Ambitious as it might be, the INAP’s SDGs training programme is only the first one and it is limited in the population targeted. Therefore, many lessons will be learnt as it unfolds, and more expansion of participants and a sustained effort shared with other training centres in the public sector will be needed before we call it a day. Therefore, the real challenge still lies ahead.