

# **Collaborative leadership to subvert marginalisation: The Case of the Socio-educational Team in Los Asperones, Málaga (Spain)**

David Herrera, Jesús Juárez and Cristóbal Ruiz-Román

Department of Theory and History of Education, and Research and Diagnosis Methods in Education (University of Málaga, Spain).

## **Abstract**

This article analyses collaborative leadership within a network that consists of socio-educational organisations, both primary and infant schools, and social services, which attempts to subvert the social inequality experienced by those living in Los Asperones, a slum area in Málaga, Spain, who suffer from extreme exclusion. This study is based on evidence from a qualitative ethnographic study which consisted of focus groups and interviews conducted with representatives from all of the groups involved with work in the area, as well as observations of various socio-educational actions. The findings show the foundations, strategies and challenges of collaborative leadership in this setting. The foundations notably included a commitment shared among the agents that are part of the network, the recognition of the value of the ‘other’ and the pre-eminence of ‘we’ over ‘I’, shifting from ‘ego-based leadership’ to ‘eco-based leadership’. The methodological strategies identified were taking co-responsibility for the initiatives undertaken, trust, good communication and negotiating shared time and spaces. The data revealed that the challenges that could weaken or hinder the network's collaborative action were lack of time and political dependencies.

**Keywords:**

Collaborative leadership; network-based work; marginalisation; social pedagogy; socio-educational synergies

## **Collaborative Leadership: from the strength of a leader to the strength of synergy**

Approaching collaborative leadership involves forsaking the concept of hierarchy for a different mode of organisation, where leadership no longer refers to a structure where there is a single guiding, driving force, but to a synergistic effort that brings together several driving forces. The idea of synergy goes beyond a structure, and entails a process. Collaborative leadership, therefore, has more to do with a synergistic process of driving forces than with a structure marked by the strength of an individual leader. In collaborative leadership, the weight of leadership does not fall on a leader, but on the whole group (Bolívar 2015). Pearce and Conger (2003) defined this understanding of collaborative leadership as a dynamic and interactive ‘process’ among team members to achieve group goals. A ‘process’ in which the participants are a community with shared intentions, purposes and visions.

The distinction made by Miller (2017) is helpful when addressing the idea of collaborative leadership, as it shows the transition from a form of leadership that pivots on an ‘ego’, an ‘I’, a person, to collaborative leadership, which revolves around a community, an ‘ecosystem’. The strength of collaborative leadership lies in this ecological approach, a new way of managing participation where the various agents become jointly responsible for themselves and for the community and the environment they are creating (Civis and Longás 2015, Ruiz-Román, Calderón and Juárez 2017). In other words, rather than subordinating participants, collaborative leadership is based on the fact that all actors involved feel part of the project (Bolívar 2012). In effect, collaborative leadership does not try to subject the group to the leader's ideas, but it is based on a feeling of belonging, on the opportunity all members have to exercise leadership (Frost 2008), and on mutual trust. Luhmann (1979) defined trust as a strategy to address social complexity. Trust allows social complexity and future projects to be

faced more securely (Úcar and Ruiz-Román 2017). Trust is the key to generating a shared feeling of shared leadership.

In order for this feeling of ‘being a part of something’ to arise, some authors have highlighted the importance of creating a climate where professionals feel recognised (Essomba, 2006). The members of a group who work together recognise the importance of having a shared bond, which arises from the creation of rapport between those who participate in a common history. A good work environment must include an opportunity for people to express themselves freely, share their emotions and feel cared for and listened to (Ruiz-Román, Molina and Alcaide 2018). In order for leadership to be effective, human relations must be placed at the centre of the action, even above educational strategies and material resources (Sennet 2012).

Álvarez (2002) pointed out that this recognition of the ‘other’ in collaborative leaderships is constructed on the basis of a heterogeneous space marked by using different approaches and a horizontal structure. Different studies (Ritacco 2011, Ruiz-Román, Molina and Alcaide 2018) on dynamic, good practices of collaborative leadership have stressed the importance of ensuring horizontal relationships between the workers from the different bodies involved. This horizontal character results from cultivating a close relationship between them. It is, therefore, the product of a shared effort where everyone feels they play a leading role; they also have a joint vision that is built from heterogeneous ideas in a search of the common good.

## **Context and Methodology**

### ***Los Asperones area in Málaga, Spain***

Los Asperones was built as a result of a 'Plan to Eradicate Shantytowns' (*Plan de Erradicación del Chabolismo*) that was launched in Málaga in 1987. The idea was to temporarily move a significant number of families there, most of them Roma, who lived in substandard housing,

and then to relocate them to different areas of the municipality (and the province) within a maximum period of five years in order to ensure their integration into the area. More than thirty years later, they are still waiting to be relocated.

The housing built was located more than two kilometres from the most peripheral areas of Málaga, which means that residents are separated from the rest of the city, both physically and, above all, socially. The characteristics of the single means of transport that connects the area with the rest of the city hinders communication, and has greatly contributed to the isolation and greater exclusion of these people over the past three decades.

The plot where the housing estate is located was surrounded by a rubbish dump, the municipal vehicle depot, several scrap car sites, and the cemetery. All of these are services were fundamentally aimed at managing —material, organic and human— waste. Originally, there was also the ‘dog pound’, where (among other things), animals were put down. On the face of it, it does not seem to be a suitable place for building housing and moving people to live there. In addition to the distance from the rest of the city, all the services mentioned above form a belt around the area that acts as an invisible border and marks it as a ghetto.

Concentrating the population in that area, far from providing them with a better life, made their lives substantially more difficult. In fact, since then they have been even more marginalised.

At present, 274 families (IMVM, 2014) live there, which translates into approximately one thousand people. A very important part of that population continues to live in extreme poverty. The work situation is catastrophic. More than two thirds of the population do not have any income (Juarez 2017), and many families do not have sufficient resources to meet their basic needs.

Given the numerous shortcomings in these people’s life conditions, survival compels

them to live in a crushing present and constrains their future potential. Their situation is a somewhat permanent dead-end that conditions their life expectations.

In addition to having been exiled, side-lined, located in a reifying environment (Freire 2002), and transported to a parallel world (separate from that of the mainstream culture), there is a strong social stigma attached to this population. This means that they are permanently at risk, which greatly curtails their advancement and perpetuates their circumstances.

### ***The network within which collaborative leadership occurs - Los Asperones***

The purpose of this paper is to analyse collaborative leadership within the network that has been formed between the school in Los Asperones and the different bodies involved in socio-educational actions there. To do so, this network will be described and contextualised first.

The network has been created on an ad hoc basis at the initiative of the participating bodies. Given the many different difficulties to be addressed, the participants believed that they needed to work in an integrated and collaborative way if they were to have any possibility of moving forward.

The network is a space of coordination for various kinds of agents. Some of them belong to public administrations, whereas some others are private, not for profit, organisations. The public organisations included in the network are:

(1) ‘Maria de la O’ infant and primary school (known in Spanish as CEIP). The school is controlled by the regional authority, and is essentially responsible for the schooling of children from the age of 3 through to completion of primary education.

(2) Local nursery school, which serves children aged 0 to 3.

(3) City of Málaga Social Services, which carry out various types of training

interventions with different age cohorts.

The non-profit private bodies that are part of the network are: INCIDE, Cáritas, MIES and Chavorrillos. In general, these bodies carry out educational actions: workshops, school support services, absenteeism programmes, drug addiction support services, programmes for prison inmates, family education and other educational actions, as well as ensuring food supply.

The network works collaboratively to set common objectives in order to subvert the social handicaps faced by the population living in this area, and to fight for the dismantling of the current arrangement and the integrated rehousing of these families.

### *Some methodological notes*

The study used an interpretative approach with a qualitative methodology. This took the form of a case study on network-based work carried out among the different bodies operating in the area known as Los Asperones.

The data was mainly collected from 7 focus groups, which were originally intended to refine the interview scripts, in addition to gathering information. A total of 56 semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of all the groups that were in some way connected to the interventions carried out by the network. In parallel, 8 ethnographic observations of different socio-educational situations in the area were audio-visually recorded.

Each of these data sources is described in the tables below, which indicate the quantity and diversity of information sources that were used:

[Insert Table 1]

The focus groups helped establish a relationship between the research team and the different actors, as well as fostering an understanding of their individual circumstances. This informed many of the subsequent interviews.

The following table lists all the semi-structured (individual and group) interviews conducted, and includes some basic profile information of each of the informants:

[Insert Table 2]

As can be seen, not only informants from all the groups linked to the network were interviewed, but a number of interviews were also carried out with key actors at different levels: Political actors and public managers; expert fieldworkers; and users with first-hand experience of the situation being analysed.

Below is the table that records the ethnographic audio-visual recordings carried out about the different socio-educational situations:

[Insert Table 3]

A large amount of data was collected and synthesised using an emergent and inductive methodology to create categories for analysis. All the information was categorised using Atlas.ti v. 8 software for qualitative data analysis.

The categories were divided into four blocks: 0. Identity; 1. Area situation; 2. Construction and maintenance of exclusion; and 3. Transformation. The results and analyses presented in the following section were extracted from the last block, mainly from the following categories: 3.1. CEIP María de la O; 3.2. Socio-pedagogical work by the other organisations; 3.3. Network-based work; and 3.4. Resilience

## Results

### *Fundamentals of collaborative leadership in the Asperones Network*

*'We see a lot of pain': From a shared vision to a shared commitment.*

It is true that we are here all day and we see things and we see a lot of pain. (Headteacher, María de la O Infant and Primary School)

The statement 'we see a lot of pain' goes a long way to understanding the background for collaborative leadership in Los Asperones. It was made by the school headteacher, one of the leaders of one of the area's local organisations, and was not expressed in the first person singular. He did not say 'I see' a lot of pain, but rather 'we see' a lot of pain. This is not an exception. A similar view was expressed by the nursery headteacher, another leader of a local organisation.

Everyone is more involved. If everyone washes their hands this is useless. (Nursery school headteacher)

It is interesting to note that not only did the headteachers of both schools speak in the first-person plural, but that their comments were also along similar lines. Seeing the pain together results in a joint ethical response: 'We do not wash our hands of this.' Washing one's hands of something implies looking the other way, not seeing the pain. Therefore, in the shared fact of recognising and seeing the pain of the other, an ethical imperative arose for these leaders: 'Everyone is more involved'.

It is also worth noting that as consequence of this act of jointly seeing the pain and the need to address it, these leaders pointed to two lessons they had learned, which helped them

adopt a collaborative leadership style among the organisations and professionals that work together in Los Asperones.

The first lesson is that they ‘feel’ the need to be and work with other colleagues. The leaders in Los Asperones are faced with an extreme social emergency, and they do not feel comfortable undertaking initiatives unless they rely on the other agents involved. On the contrary, they reported that they ‘like to feel dependent’.

We also like to be dependent, so we say: 'MIES [association] do this with me'; 'Caritas [charity], join me'. (Headteacher, ‘María de la O’ infant and primary school)

The second lesson they reported on was the need to have the attitude that ‘everyone counts’, that everyone has something valuable to contribute.

We all count. What I see is that we need so much help ... (Teacher 1, ‘María de la O’ infant and primary school)

Resident 1: We are in the Evangelical church, but the [Catholic] religion teacher manages really well, he’s a guy of God. So that’s it. It doesn’t matter which church you’re in. He is Catholic and I am Evangelical, but he is a guy of God. He comes here with us, and he also does a lot of good stuff for young people, because he is a very worthwhile guy. You know what I mean? The Evangelical church is not the only one that is worthwhile.

(Interview with a resident from Los Asperones)

Collaborative leadership therefore emerges thanks to the recognition of the value of diversity. Everyone is essential, no single person is self-sufficient, and everyone contributes to the new collaborative dynamics and initiatives.

This is perceived as a truly educational process for professionals, which emanates from witnessing the other's pain together. The process is as follows: First, they see the other's pain; then they understand that they have to address that pain; but in doing so, they feel they have limitations, so they need to be supported by other colleagues; and, finally, by working hands-on with other colleagues they discover that 'everyone counts' and that their views are not the only one that are 'worthwhile'. A motto has emerged from this process and has become established among the professionals working in Los Asperones:

Union makes strength (...) and if it [the network] did not exist, we would basically sink. All for one. Here we are one for all, there's no such thing as my children and their children are not here, here the children are everyone's (Teacher 2, 'María de la O' infant and primary school)

This sentence emphasises the need to 'join forces' and create an axis for collaborative leadership. The informants see the necessity of working together, because there is such an extreme level of exclusion in Los Asperones that it is impossible for only one person or one agent to take the initiative and deal with it. The professionals involved believe that it is necessary to assess and boost any possible initiatives. The 32 years of exclusion experienced by the residents in the area has made the professionals working there come together around the motto: 'all for one'. All for a child. As Teacher 2 says, *'These are not my children, they are everyone's children'*. Again she uses the first person plural possessive form, 'our' children, rather than the singular form 'my' children.

*'There is no soloist, there is a chorus'. Moving from I to We. From Ego-based Leadership, to Eco-based Leadership.*

I always say that this wants to be a chorus. There are no soloists here, only a choir. So here we all sing. (Headteacher, 'María de la O' infant and primary school)

This metaphor used by the school headteacher summarises the essence of collaborative leadership in the area. Networking at Los Asperones is not led by a ‘soloist’ who is accompanied by ‘back-up singers’. The metaphors of the ‘soloist’ and the ‘choir’ capture some the recognition that different voices are needed to take the initiative, and to reach agreements and make decisions together.

A choral work is very much needed. We all sing as one, but with different voices, because we are different. But there is no single voice singing alone, or at least that is not the intention. There is a line, there is a score that we all agree on (...) What we are seeking is that no single person sings and says: This is the way to go'. At least that is the intention, that somehow, we have shared leadership. It is difficult, but that is somehow what we intend to do. (Headteacher ‘María de la O’ infant and primary school)

The metaphor of the ‘soloist’ and the ‘choir’ echoes something that was mentioned at the start of this article: The ‘we’ form stands above ‘I’ form. Collaborative leaders need to replace personalising roles by shared leadership; they need to leave single prominent voices to one side and incorporate voices that gradually alternate and become modulated by the needs at each given moment. This requires that the different leaders sometimes not only take steps forward, but that also know how to take steps back or stand still so that others can walk forward.

In a choir, voices are balanced. Balance does not mean that all voices are equal, or that all of them have to be active at the same time. Balance refers to a shared distribution of pre-eminence. In the collaborative leadership in Los Asperones, balance means that there are different agents who act at different times and in different spaces, to ensure that the network’s

performance produces a harmonious sound. This balance means implies that ‘nobody washes their hands of their joint responsibility’.

Hence collaborative leadership in Los Asperones is not a form of ‘Ego-based Leadership’, but rather of ‘Eco-based Leadership’. When the network-based action is marked by Ego-based Leadership, it tends to be hijacked by the leader’s view or interest. In fact, sometimes collective action may be conditioned by ‘Ego-based Leadership’ and its purely personal interests. This is the case when the leader fails to see further than their own interests and may endanger or conflict with the group's interests. However, collaborative leaderships are based on Eco or Ecological Leadership, which, as its name indicates, always has the needs and interests of the group at heart.

In this way, the work remains closer and there are obviously some people who coordinate this and ensure that people that work from the same perspective. This is really important, it is a really important pillar, we have a brilliant team, (...) there is a very committed team here and that shows in their work  
[Summer School Director at Los Asperones (Chavorrillos Association)]

### ***How the agents working in Los Asperones engage in joint leadership***

‘When someone notices there is a certain need, says: Let's do something’. *Two actions: undertaking initiatives and joining others'*

The different initiatives proposed by the different agents in the Socio-Educational Team in the area arise from the detection of real, specific needs. Urgent and strategic needs are prioritised. The professionals working in the area have direct contact with the residents, and identify those aspects that need to be addressed at each given time.

When someone notices there is a certain need, they say: 'Let's do something'. For example, we saw there were women looking for things to eat in the rubbish, which had never been seen in Asperones before. Looking because of the crisis. So we said we have to do a course, we have to do something. We came up with a cooking course. (Headteacher, 'María de la O' infant and primary school)

Each of the network's agents commits to propose different initiatives to meet the needs that have been identified, and the working group is in charge of coordinating and seeing how each agent can contribute to the different initiatives that arise. In this way, it works in a more ecological way, since it saves energy, avoids duplication and its interconnected nature makes it possible to seek balance and synergies.

And then someone asks what we are going to do this year: 'I'm going to do a home economics workshop for women aged twenty to twenty-five'; 'I'm going to work with children from ...'. We work with children from five to twelve years old and the MIES association works with children from twelve to sixteen years old. Then, for example, if someone from the City Council takes on absenteeism, and Cáritas takes on more individualised educational support for the twelve to sixteen year olds, if the City Council identifies a child with a developmental disorder, they start working with Cáritas, and Cáritas supports them (Social Services Coordinator 1)

The different organisations self-manage any joint actions proposed. It is true that Socio-Educational Team has meetings to discuss the status of the programmes or actions that are being implemented, but each small cluster has full freedom to self-organise.

Thanks to the fact that they are weaving a network together that attempts to cover the most basic needs, the population of Los Asperones can take some steps to advance in other ways (educationally, socially, in employment terms. etc.). If they were not working in this way, the urge would be to only satisfy basic needs and there would be no further aspirations for them.

It is in these results the value of collaborative leadership lies, since everybody makes proposals for initiatives that are supported by the other agents.

If we do not cover children's basic needs, children cannot learn; if children do not eat, if children do not rest, if children do not have adequate footwear, if they cannot afford to buy medicines, if their basic needs are not covered, you cannot ask them to come to class, to sit down, and to perform like any student from any other place. They need to have these basic needs covered, because it gives them stability, and within that stability we can try to work on the curriculum and what they need to learn. But I really cannot even imagine what would happen, how I would manage to work if these associations did not take the initiative and carry out their actions (Teacher 3, 'María de la O' infant and primary school)

*'I trust them 100%': Building ties and generating a climate of collaboration and trust*

We had the first meeting in early July, before starting the academic year. The [Los Asperones] social worker came to see me and I kind of let myself be led by her. She told me what she needed and I trust her 100%' (Head of Studies, 'Universidad Laboral' secondary school)

Communication is essential in building trust; and vice versa: trust also fosters communication. Therefore, both trust and communication are the two great pillars for collaborative leadership among the agents and professionals involved, and are essential for successful network-based actions. Trust is key, but to build trust you have to be generous. Merieu pointed out that to generate trust in others you have to start by trusting them. And it was precisely this process that was described in the statements given by the Head of Studies of one of the secondary schools attended by the Los Asperones students: 'I trust her 100%.'

Luhmann (1979) defined trust as a strategy to reduce the complexity and uncertainty of social life. Trust allows us to anticipate the future and move towards it with greater security. Trust diminishes or dissipates fears, and generates more horizontal relationships.

Another thing is the camaraderie within the team, because [it's not the same ] if you do a job where you do not get on with your colleagues. We get on very well with each other here (Teacher 4, 'María de la O' infant and primary school)

Collaborative leadership becomes possible precisely by relying on these horizontal relationships. The two previous statements showed that trust makes it possible to question vertical or distant relationships between professionals, and to allow a trusting, horizontal relationship to emerge where everyone can be 'at ease' with their colleagues.

This [in relation to the educational community] is a family, because I consider it as my family, because it is more than that, I see them more than I see my own family and sisters (Cook, 'María de la O' infant and primary school)

In this way, trust not only makes coexistence more pleasant, but it also facilitates communication within the Asperones network and facilitates co-responsibility among the different agents.

Well, everything I can tell you about this network-based work is positive, very positive, very, very positive. We strongly rely on what others are doing (Coordinator of the INCIDE association in Los Asperones)

Affective relationships between us have improved a lot and have helped us to move forward, to be courageous, to always say it can be done. The relationships between us have improved, and in this way, they are also better for the children, families ... (Educators' Focus Group)

### *Sharing Time and Space*

Trust is born out of trust and in turn generates trust. But the trust built in Los Asperones was built on shared time and space. The different agents combine different programmes to this end. Professionals deliberately seek activities and actions for their programmes or interventions that can be carried out jointly and/or on a cross-cutting basis. Some examples include:

The summer school is the clearest example. In the summer school we did not say this [educator] was in Cáritas and this one wasn't (Coordinator 1, Summer School Social Services)

Throughout the year, common activities were carried out by teachers, by morning classroom trainers, and by extracurricular educators (Director, Los Asperones Summer School, Chavorrillos Association)

There are multiple activities where everyone works jointly, sharing the same commitment. Spaces where everyone puts themselves at the service of the activity, forgetting where they work, to form a team with the rest of the community. This does not only concern professionals' activities, but also manifests itself in the context of cultural or religious differences, where the community works collaboratively with other workers in the area who have with different ideological stances.

Resident 1: They are Catholic and we are Evangelical, and we are supposed to be a little different ... but we get on very well. They come here to our meeting place, we talk to them and we do things together (Interview with Los Asperones resident)

Again, it was highlighted that ‘My beliefs are not the only acceptable ones.’ People recognise the value of the other and their contribution to the community. This recognition promotes the opening up of each agent and each organisation involved, creating space and time for communication between them.

### ***Challenges in collaborative leadership***

#### *The challenge of communication and the lack of time*

While evidence was provided above as to how shared time strengthened collaborative leadership, the lack of time can also be seen as a handicap for this type of leadership. The overload of tasks and of actions to be carried out sometimes makes it difficult to find the time to have meetings, come together and agree on a common line of action.

If we had more chances to see each other more, if we had meetings more often, yes ... of course. If we were able to have more time for all that (Community Educator, Cáritas)

It was seen that while having time for meetings generate trust and made the network stronger, but when insufficient time became a handicap for collaborative leadership. As shown earlier, shared time and space facilitates communication and trust, which gives rise to more horizontal relationships that make collaborative leadership possible. According to some of the network's professionals, the lack of time to be able to have meetings sometimes interfered with communication. Some of them thought that their network partners did not always prioritise the team's activities in the same way.

Above all I want us to talk about this, I think that's great and fantastic, but that we also have to develop the plan for the academic year to ensure we're properly organised (Social Services Coordinator 2)

Some professionals emphasised that sometimes communication and coordination, which is necessary for collaborative leadership, left a lot to be desired. It was pointed out that when fluid communication was lost, 'efforts were made to be coordinated again'. Therefore, it was acknowledged that over the years there had been times when communication had not been optimum. One informant also noted that, in spite of this, there was an underlying effort to recover communication again and return to those initiatives that boosted the network.

At times we have been very well coordinated, at other times not so well. But in those instances, efforts are made to coordinate with each other again. It's necessary to maintain this, from my point of view (...), to have this attitude to ensure good coordination with each other and respect the individual role everyone has, and working to achieve the same purpose (City Council Social Services Coordinator 2)

*'They have other goals': Political dependencies*

This section highlights one of the most important weaknesses of the collaborative leadership of the network in Los Asperones: the lack of autonomy of the network in certain areas and aspects that are subject to 'decisions from above'.

Those who are above us who are the decision makers have the power to change things ... (maybe we cannot) they don't have that vision. So sometimes we think the wrong decisions are made (City Council Social Services Coordinator 2)

There was clearly some frustration among professionals who felt powerless in the face of what they believed were ‘some wrong decisions’. A kind of limbo seemed to exist between the two levels of intervention: that of the experts (on the field), and that of the political sphere.

It is like anyone who is working side by side on the field. These are the people who know, who realise what is going on. (...) [Regarding the bosses] they could perhaps think, that is, make decisions that are in line with our goals, but they have other objectives. They are not the same (City Council Social Services Coordinator 2)

This distancing was caused by political leaders having ‘different objectives’. The objective that brought the network's professionals together was to address the ‘pain they saw’ on a daily basis; but it was evident that the political leaders' goals were not the same. We do not have reliable evidence to know what the politician's objectives are, but the statements provided made it clear that addressing the ‘pain seen’ every day by the professionals in Los Asperones was not one of them.

It is more a matter of will, of attitude, of wanting to trust what is being done. (Social Worker, INCIDE association)

When professionals and programmes are in a precarious situation, there is no doubt that there is a political responsibility for failing to adequately support the socio-educational intervention and network-based actions in Los Asperones.

Let's see if I can explain it. For example, if they stop the project within ten months, it won't do any good, because the problem is much more firmly rooted than that. (Coordinator, INCIDE association, Los Asperones)

Faced with this distancing between policy makers and professionals who work on the ground, a strong sentiment emerged among professionals, especially those employed by public authorities:

We work for the public authorities, but we do not want to be their accomplices. (Headteacher, 'María de la O' infant and primary school)

Thus, some evidence was found of a distancing between the political sphere and the sphere of professionals, which caused the collaborative leadership carried out by the latter to be vulnerable. And yet, they engage in resistance work together by developing initiatives collaboratively, as has been described in this paper.

## **Conclusions**

This article has highlighted the importance of collaborative leadership as an approach to subverting social marginalisation. When exclusion is present, joint work and leadership can be highly beneficial to counter it. This study has offered some evidence about the need to build the foundations and strategies for collaborative leadership, and has described some of the challenges involved in this endeavour.

The fundamentals of collaborative leadership in the case of Los Asperones were found to be the need to have a joint vision and a shared commitment, with diversity being understood to be a potential where there is no such thing as 'I do' but 'we do' (Ruiz-Román, Juárez and Molina 2019). The findings show the need to speak in the first-person plural, striving for 'eco-based' leadership instead of 'ego-based' leadership, which relies on the community and not on a single leader (Miller 2017). Eco-based leadership has greater capacity for transformation than ego-based leadership, since it entails making joint efforts and seeking coordination and balance

between the different actions. This is of vital importance, particularly in situations of marginalisation, where there is a more urgent need for a joint struggle and where the process of change is more sustainable and systemic (Ruiz-Román, Calderón-Almendros and Juárez 2017, Bush and Glover 2014). Its potential lies in a shared vision and commitment, where leadership relies on the strength of the overall team.

The article has also highlighted different elements or strategies that have contributed to the development of collaborative leadership, such as the feeling of belonging, and developing ties and trust among the members of the network. A suitable work environment contributes to the evolution of socio-pedagogical intervention (Herrera and De Oña 2016). And a sense of belonging and trust are constituent elements of such an environment. Trust has emerged as a prevalent aspect in this study. It has contributed to the strengthening of the nodes/links among team members, encouraged communication and promoted shared work and horizontal relations. It can be said that it is a core element of co-responsibility. Along these lines, Wheatley and Frieze (2011) have indicated that complex cases are better dealt with through dialogue and co-creation. An unsuitable environment within the network could otherwise undermine collaborative leadership and all the operational dynamics that derive from it.

Finally, this study proposes facing new challenges in collaborative leadership. It was seen that there was a lack of time to schedule coordination meetings and to programme the different activities to be carried out by the different organisations. This situation hinders an optimal intervention with people, especially in situations of social exclusion (Melendro, De Juanas and Rodríguez 2017). It was also noted that there was a distancing between the interests of the experts who worked in the field with the residents, and the interests of those who looked at the situation from a distance and had political responsibilities. To meet these challenges, it would be necessary to improve collaborative leadership efforts by focusing on the community

(Bolívar 2012; 2015), and to strengthen the commitment to the team, despite the social and political complexity that affects social exclusionary contexts.

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**Table 1.** Focus Groups

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Focus Groups carried out in Los Asperones
Mothers of school students (who attended ‘María de la O’ infant and primary school)
Teachers who had been at the school for less than 4 years
Teachers who had been at the school for more than 4 years
School dining room supervisors and residents
Requena Family. A family who has lived in Los Asperones from the very beginning of the process (longitudinal view)
Boys and girls from the ‘Trampolín’ (springboard) programme. Programme aimed at adolescents and young people intended to help them seek educational and/or employment success after compulsory education
Social educators from different organisations involved in the network

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**Table 2.** Interviews

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Distribution of interviews by agents
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3 Members of the Management Team
13 Teachers from ‘María de la O’ infant and primary school
5 Students
7 Family members of students
3 School Administration and Services Staff
2 City Council Social Services Coordinators
4 experts from different organisations (Cáritas, MIES, INCIDE, Chavorrillos)
3 Headteachers at secondary schools attended by the adolescents from Los Asperones
1 Director of the Centre for Early Childhood and Nursery Education (0 to 3 years) from Los Asperones
4 Interviews with Summer School members: Director, educator and 2 volunteer group interviews
2 Group interviews with community groups (Adult Education Students and young participants in Leisure Activities)
1 Manager and 1 parishioner from the Evangelical Church of Philadelphia
1 Doctor who services Los Asperones
1 Director and Manager from the housing and rehabilitation association (AVRA)
5 Local politicians: 4 members of the Local Council ( <i>Employment, Social Affairs and Education</i> and <i>Family Affairs</i> ) and 1 District Council member

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**Table 3.** Observations

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Audio-visually recorded observations
School surroundings
3 x classes of various subjects.
3 x sociocultural activities held in the area
Workshop held with youths from the area

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