

Article

The Impact of Public Policies on the Educational Promotion of Inclusive Recreational Spaces

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Abstract

Introduction: The educational promotion of inclusive recreational spaces remains a key challenge for public policies, particularly in contexts where gaps persist between regulation and implementation. **Objective:** This study analyzed the impact of public policies on the promotion of inclusive recreational spaces in the canton of Milagro, focusing on accessibility, pedagogical use, and social inclusion. **Methodology:** A mixed-methods approach was applied, with a non-experimental, cross-sectional, descriptive–correlational design and an explanatory component. The sample included teachers, administrators, technical staff, and community members. Data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. **Results:** Findings showed a favorable regulatory framework but only partial local implementation. Significant positive relationships were identified between policy implementation and accessibility ($r = 0.62, p < 0.01$), educational use of recreational spaces ($r = 0.58, p < 0.01$), and perceived inclusion ($r = 0.65, p < 0.01$). Although the existence of inclusive public policies was highly recognized ($M = 3.98, SD = 0.71$), lower scores were observed for their effective application ($M = 3.14, SD = 0.92$) and monitoring mechanisms ($M = 2.89, SD = 0.95$). Gaps were also identified in teacher training for inclusive recreation ($M = 2.97$) and in the adaptation of recreational spaces to functional diversity ($M = 3.02$). **Discussion:** Results align with previous studies emphasizing the need to integrate public policies, education, and territorial planning. **Conclusions:** Strengthening policy implementation and coordination is essential to consolidate inclusive recreational spaces with sustainable educational impact.

Keywords: accessibility; education; inclusion; policies; recreation



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1. Introduction

The promotion of inclusive recreational spaces has become a strategic component of educational and social development, as equitable access to recreation, play, and physical activity is increasingly recognized as a fundamental right and a determinant of well-being [1]. In Latin America, particularly in Ecuador, persistent territorial and social inequalities continue to limit access to safe, accessible, and educationally meaningful recreational environments.

From an educational perspective, recreational spaces extend beyond leisure settings and can function as pedagogical resources that foster socio-emotional development, participation, coexistence, and respect for diversity. Evidence suggests that the accessibility, design, and management of these environments influence the inclusion and well-being of children, adolescents, people with disabilities, and older adults [2,3]. Nevertheless, many

recreational spaces still fail to meet universal accessibility standards or to be intentionally integrated into educational processes [4,5].

In Ecuador, public policies and legal frameworks formally recognize inclusion, accessibility, and equality as guiding principles for education and territorial development. However, previous studies have identified a persistent gap between regulatory provisions and their effective implementation, resulting in limitations for the consolidation of truly inclusive recreational environments [6,7]. These challenges are particularly evident in intermediate cities, where rapid urban growth often exceeds the capacity of local planning and management systems.

International and regional literature highlights the importance of aligning public policies, environmental design, and educational practices to promote inclusive participation. Approaches such as Universal Design for Learning have expanded beyond classroom settings and have been proposed as frameworks for the development of accessible recreational environments responsive to diverse needs [8–10]. Likewise, studies in Latin America emphasize the role of recreation in promoting well-being, social participation, and quality of life [11–14]. However, existing research has primarily focused on educational interventions, accessibility conditions, or public space management independently, with limited attention to the interaction between these dimensions through the lens of public policy.

This limitation reveals an important research gap. Few studies have examined how public policies shape the educational promotion of inclusive recreational spaces at the local level, particularly in Ecuadorian contexts. Research conducted in specific cantons remains scarce, restricting the availability of evidence to support context-sensitive decision-making and the development of sustainable inclusion strategies.

The canton of Milagro, located in the province of Guayas, provides a relevant setting for addressing this gap. As an expanding urban area characterized by social and cultural diversity, Milagro faces challenges related to territorial planning, recreational space management, and the articulation of educational and social policies. Analyzing this context offers the opportunity to understand how public policies are translated into local practices and how they influence the educational use and inclusiveness of recreational environments.

Therefore, the present study aims to analyze the impact of public policies on the educational promotion of inclusive recreational spaces in the canton of Milagro, Guayas. Specifically, it seeks to identify the existing regulatory framework, examine the perceptions of educational and community stakeholders regarding policy effectiveness, and analyze the gaps and opportunities associated with the articulation between public policies and inclusive educational practices. By providing empirical evidence from a local perspective, this study contributes to the literature by integrating public policy, recreation, and inclusive education within a single analytical framework and offers practical insights for policymakers, educators, and territorial planners committed to advancing inclusive development.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Method

The research was conducted under a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative procedures with the aim of obtaining a broad and in-depth understanding of the impact of public policies on the educational promotion of inclusive recreational spaces in the canton of Milagro, province of Guayas. The choice of a mixed approach was justified by the complex nature of the object of study, which required both the systematic measurement of perceptions and objective conditions, as well as the contextual interpretation of discourses and institutional practices. This methodological approach made it possible to articulate the generalization of results with the comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon in its real context.

From the perspective of the type of research, the study was classified as non-experimental, since the variables were not deliberately manipulated but observed as they manifested in their natural context [15]. In accordance with this approach, a cross-sectional design was adopted, as data collection was carried out at a single point in time, allowing the description and analysis of the state of public policies and their perceived impact within a specific period.

Regarding the level or scope of the research, the study combined a descriptive–correlational level with an explanatory component. The descriptive level made it possible to characterize existing public policies, the conditions of recreational spaces, and the perceptions of educational and community actors. The correlational level enabled the examination of relationships between the implementation of public policies and variables associated with accessibility, educational use, and inclusion of recreational spaces. Finally, the explanatory component sought to identify factors that contributed to understanding how and to what extent public policies influenced the educational promotion of these spaces. This methodological combination was aligned with the stated objectives and with the need to generate useful evidence for decision-making [15].

2.2. Participants

The study population consisted of actors directly or indirectly linked to education, recreation, and public space management in the canton of Milagro. Three population groups were considered: (a) teachers from public educational institutions at the basic and secondary levels, (b) administrators and technical staff involved in educational and municipal management, and (c) community members who regularly use public recreational spaces.

The sample was selected through a non-probabilistic purposive sampling method, based on criteria of relevance and accessibility, which was consistent with the mixed-methods approach and the applied nature of the study. This strategy was considered appropriate because the research sought to obtain information from participants with direct experience and contextual knowledge regarding the educational use of recreational spaces and the implementation of public policies within the canton of Milagro. In particular, administrators and technical staff were selected due to their involvement in policy execution and public space management, while teachers and community members were included because of their active participation in educational and recreational settings.

Furthermore, purposive sampling facilitated the inclusion of key informants capable of providing in-depth and context-specific perspectives that would not have been adequately captured through random selection procedures. This approach is frequently employed in mixed-methods studies addressing complex social phenomena in localized contexts, where the relevance of participants' experiences is prioritized over statistical representativeness.

However, the use of non-probabilistic sampling implies certain limitations regarding the external validity and generalizability of the findings. Consequently, the results should be interpreted as representative of the perceptions and experiences of the participants included in this study rather than as directly generalizable to all educational institutions or communities in Ecuador. Nevertheless, the evidence generated provides valuable insights into the local dynamics of policy implementation and may serve as a basis for future studies employing probabilistic sampling strategies or comparative analyses across different territorial contexts.

The study population consisted of actors directly or indirectly linked to education, recreation, and public space management in the canton of Milagro. A total of 200 participants were included in the study, distributed among teachers, administrators and

technical staff, and community members, as presented in Table 1. The largest group comprised basic and secondary education teachers (60.0%), followed by community members (25.0%) and administrators and technical staff involved in educational and municipal management (15.0%).

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by participant group.

Participant Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Basic and secondary education teachers	120	60.0
Administrators and technical staff (education/municipality)	30	15.0
Community members (users)	50	25.0
Total	200	100.0

In order to ensure the relevance, validity, and quality of the collected information, differentiated inclusion and exclusion criteria were established for each group of participants considered in the study: teachers, institutional administrators and technical staff, and community members who use recreational spaces. The definition of these criteria ensured that participants had relevant experience and knowledge regarding the object of study.

2.2.1. Basic and Secondary Education Teachers

a. Inclusion criteria

- Being an active teacher in a public educational institution in the canton of Milagro.
- Having a minimum of two years of professional experience in the Ecuadorian education system.
- Developing or having developed educational activities linked to the use of recreational, sports, or leisure spaces, either within or outside the educational institution.
- Voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study by signing informed consent.
- Completing the data collection instrument in full.

b. Exclusion criteria

- Teachers with less than two years of professional experience.
- Teachers without an active link to educational institutions in the canton of Milagro during the data collection period.
- Participants who did not accept the ethical conditions of the study or withdrew their consent.
- Questionnaires with significant omissions or inconsistent responses that prevented analysis.

2.2.2. Institutional Administrators and Technical Staff (Educational and Municipal)

a. Inclusion criteria

- Holding managerial, technical, or administrative positions in educational institutions or municipal departments in the canton of Milagro.
- Having responsibilities related to education, recreation, sports, social inclusion, or public space planning.
- Having at least one year of experience in the position or function performed.
- Voluntarily agreeing to participate in semi-structured interviews, with prior informed consent.
- Possessing direct knowledge of public policies, programs, or projects related to recreational spaces and inclusion.

b. Exclusion criteria

- Institutional staff without direct involvement in educational, recreational, or territorial planning processes.
- Officials with less than one year of experience in the position.
- Participants who did not authorize the recording or use of information for academic purposes.
- Incomplete interviews or those with insufficient information for qualitative analysis.

2.2.3. Community Members Who Use Recreational Spaces

a. Inclusion criteria

- Permanently residing in the canton of Milagro.
- Regularly using public recreational spaces (parks, courts, squares, or others) in the canton.
- Being over 18 years of age at the time of data collection.
- Voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study and signing informed consent.
- Having the capacity to respond independently to the questionnaire administered.

b. Exclusion criteria

- Individuals not permanently residing in the canton of Milagro.
- Occasional or sporadic users of public recreational spaces.
- Minors.
- Incomplete questionnaires or responses that did not allow statistical processing.

2.3. Procedure

The research procedure was carried out in four clearly defined phases, ensuring the systematicity and replicability of the study.

Phase 1: Document review and instrument design. In the first stage, an exhaustive review of regulatory documents, local development plans, and scientific literature related to public policies, inclusive education, and recreational spaces was conducted. Based on this review, data collection instruments were designed, ensuring their coherence with the research objectives and study variables.

Phase 2: Instrument validation. Two main instruments were developed: (a) a structured questionnaire aimed at teachers and community members, and (b) a semi-structured interview guide aimed at administrators and technical staff. The questionnaire included dimensions related to accessibility, educational use, perception of inclusion, and the impact of public policies, using a five-point Likert scale. Content validity was established through expert judgment, with the participation of five specialists in inclusive education and public policies, who evaluated the clarity, relevance, and coherence of the items. Reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, obtaining a value of $\alpha = 0.91$, indicating high internal consistency.

The interview guide was also validated through expert judgment and allowed for a deeper interpretation of quantitative results, addressing aspects related to policy implementation, difficulties, and opportunities in the local context.

Phase 3: Data collection. The instruments were administered in person over an eight-week period. Questionnaires were applied in educational institutions and community spaces, with prior authorization from the relevant authorities and informed consent from participants. Interviews were conducted in institutional settings, recorded with prior authorization, and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

Phase 4: Organization and analysis of information. Quantitative data were coded and organized into a database, while qualitative information was systematized through categorization matrices. This process enabled the integration of results and ensured coherence across different levels of analysis.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in accordance with the research objectives and the adopted methodological approach. For quantitative data, descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used. At the descriptive level, frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to characterize participants' perceptions regarding the impact of public policies on the educational promotion of inclusive recreational spaces. At the inferential level, correlation tests (Pearson's coefficient) were applied to identify significant relationships between the implementation of public policies and variables such as accessibility, educational use, and perceived inclusion.

Qualitative analysis was carried out through thematic content analysis, following a process of open, axial, and selective coding. This procedure made it possible to identify emerging categories related to the effectiveness of public policies, implementation barriers, and opportunities for improvement in the context of the canton of Milagro. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data strengthened the internal validity of the study and allowed for a comprehensive interpretation of the results.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

This study involved a non-interventional social science research design based on voluntary questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with adult participants. No biomedical procedures, clinical interventions, collection of biological samples, or experiments involving vulnerable populations were conducted. Therefore, formal approval by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Research Ethics Committee was not required under the applicable national regulations governing minimal-risk social research in Ecuador. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles established in the Declaration of Helsinki for research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, all participants received information regarding the objectives of the study and provided informed consent. Participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous, and confidentiality and data privacy were guaranteed throughout the research process.

3. Results

This section presents the results obtained from the analysis of the data collected through the two instruments applied (structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews) to the three samples considered: teachers, institutional administrators and technical staff, and members of the community who use recreational spaces in the canton of Milagro, province of Guayas.

3.1. Results Related to Specific Objective 1: Identification of the Regulatory Framework and Public Policies Related to Inclusive Recreation and Education

The documentary analysis and the information provided by administrators and technical staff allow the identification of a regulatory framework that explicitly recognizes inclusive education and recreation as social rights. Participants indicate the existence of national policies and local ordinances aimed at accessibility, the use of public space, and the promotion of sports and recreation. However, the results show a perception of partial and heterogeneous implementation of these policies in the territory.

The perceptions obtained from the interviews with administrators and technical staff revealed that current public policies provide general guidelines for the promotion

of inclusive recreational spaces; however, important limitations persist regarding their operational implementation, monitoring, and evaluation at the local level. These qualitative findings were supported by the quantitative results presented in Table 2, which summarize the perceptions of teachers and community members regarding the existence, clarity, implementation, and monitoring of inclusive public policies.

Table 2. Perception of the existence and application of inclusive public policies.

Item Evaluated	Mean	SD
Existence of public policies on inclusive recreation	3.98	0.71
Clarity of policies for the educational field	3.62	0.83
Effective application of policies in the canton of Milagro	3.14	0.92
Monitoring and evaluation of implementation	2.89	0.95

As shown in Table 2, participants widely recognized the existence of public policies promoting inclusive recreation ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.71$). However, lower mean scores were observed for the effective application of these policies ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 0.92$) and for monitoring and evaluation mechanisms ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.95$). This pattern was consistently reflected across the three participant groups, suggesting a persistent gap between the regulatory framework and its practical implementation at the local level.

3.2. Results Related to Specific Objective 2: Perception of Educational and Community Actors Regarding the Effectiveness of Public Policies

The descriptive analysis of questionnaire responses allowed the characterization of teachers' and community members' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of public policies in promoting inclusive recreational spaces for educational purposes. The comparative results for each participant group are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Perception of the effectiveness of public policies by participant group.

Participant Group	Mean	SD
Teachers	3.21	0.84
Community members	3.05	0.88
Administrators and technical staff *	3.46	0.79

* Value obtained from the categorization of interviews.

As shown in Table 3, administrators and technical staff reported the highest perception of policy effectiveness ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.79$), followed by teachers ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.84$) and community members ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.88$). Teachers indicated that public policies partially support the educational use of recreational spaces, particularly through improvements in infrastructure and accessibility. However, they also identified limitations in the systematic integration of these spaces into pedagogical processes. Community members acknowledged specific improvements in some recreational areas but reported that many spaces still fail to fully satisfy inclusion criteria, especially for persons with disabilities and older adults.

The qualitative findings obtained from interviews with administrators and technical staff complemented these quantitative results by indicating that the effectiveness of public policies largely depends on the availability of financial resources, inter-institutional coordination, and active community participation. Overall, the convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence supports the existence of moderate policy effectiveness while highlighting persistent challenges in translating policy provisions into inclusive educational practices.

3.3. Results Related to Specific Objective 3: Analysis of Gaps and Opportunities in the Articulation Between Public Policies and Inclusive Educational Practices

The correlational analysis examined the relationship between the perceived implementation of public policies and variables associated with the accessibility, educational use, and inclusiveness of recreational spaces. The correlation coefficients obtained for these relationships are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlations between public policy implementation and key variables.

Correlated Variables	Pearson's r	p
Policy implementation—Accessibility of spaces	0.62	<0.01
Policy implementation—Educational use of spaces	0.58	<0.01
Policy implementation—Perceived inclusion	0.65	<0.01

As shown in Table 4, statistically significant positive correlations were found between the perceived implementation of public policies and all three analyzed variables. The strongest association was observed with perceived inclusion ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$), followed by accessibility of recreational spaces ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$) and their educational use ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$). These findings indicate that higher levels of policy implementation are associated with more accessible, educationally relevant, and inclusive recreational environments. The magnitude of the correlations can be interpreted as moderate to strong, highlighting the role of public policies as a key factor in promoting inclusive recreational spaces.

Despite these positive associations, the descriptive analysis revealed persistent gaps between policy design and practical implementation. The main shortcomings identified across the evaluated dimensions are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Identified gaps in the educational promotion of inclusive recreational spaces.

Evaluated Dimension	Mean	Interpretation
Teacher training in inclusive recreation	2.97	Low
Adaptation of spaces to functional diversity	3.02	Moderately low
School–municipality articulation	3.18	Moderate
Community participation	3.34	Moderate

As presented in Table 5, teacher training in inclusive recreation received the lowest evaluation ($M = 2.97$), indicating that professional development remains one of the principal challenges for the effective educational use of inclusive recreational spaces. Likewise, the adaptation of recreational spaces to functional diversity obtained a moderately low score ($M = 3.02$), suggesting that accessibility improvements have not yet been fully achieved. By contrast, school–municipality articulation ($M = 3.18$) and community participation ($M = 3.34$) received comparatively higher evaluations, indicating greater opportunities to strengthen collaborative governance and shared responsibility in the planning, management, and educational use of inclusive recreational spaces.

3.4. Integrated Results from Interviews with Administrators and Technical Staff

The content analysis of the interviews allows the identification of recurring categories that complement and explain the quantitative results. The most frequent categories are: (a) limitations in financial and technical resources, (b) the need for greater inter-institutional articulation, and (c) the educational potential of recreational spaces not being fully utilized.

Administrators and technical staff indicate that there are local initiatives aimed at improving recreational spaces; however, these are not always designed from an inclusive educational perspective. They also highlight that the absence of specific evalua-

tion indicators makes it difficult to measure the real impact of public policies in the educational field.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study allow for a comprehensive interpretation of the impact of public policies on the educational promotion of inclusive recreational spaces in the canton of Milagro, Guayas province, revealing significant regulatory advances as well as structural limitations in their territorial and educational implementation. Overall, the results confirm that the existence of public policies aimed at inclusion and recreation constitutes a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to ensure sustainable inclusive educational practices in recreational spaces, which is consistent with recent scientific literature.

The widespread recognition of the existence of inclusive public policies identified in the results is consistent with Núñez & Gaona and Torres [6,7], who argue that the Ecuadorian legal framework explicitly incorporates principles of inclusion, equity, and accessibility. However, the moderate evaluation of their effective implementation observed in Milagro reveals a persistent gap between normative design and practical execution, a phenomenon also documented in other urban contexts in the country [2,3]. This gap is particularly relevant in the educational field, where the absence of clear operational mechanisms limits the translation of policies into concrete pedagogical practices.

The interpretation of these results suggests that public policies, although formally adequate, lack systematic articulation with the educational and community actors responsible for their daily implementation. This finding is consistent with Jiménez et al. [16], who emphasize that public space management requires effective coordination among institutional levels and the active participation of local actors to achieve sustainable impacts. In the case of Milagro, the perception of insufficient monitoring and evaluation of policies reinforces the need to strengthen local governance systems.

Regarding the perception of the effectiveness of public policies, the results show moderate evaluations among both teachers and community members, while administrators and technical staff present a slightly higher assessment. This difference can be interpreted as a perception gap between those who design or manage policies and those who experience their direct effects in recreational and educational spaces. Previous studies show a similar trend, where managerial levels tend to positively assess regulatory advances, while end users identify limitations in accessibility and functionality [4,5].

From an educational perspective, the moderate evaluation of the effectiveness of public policies in the pedagogical use of recreational spaces is consistent with Hinostroza et al. and Orosco et al. [13,17], who indicate that inclusive recreational strategies often depend on isolated teacher initiatives rather than consolidated institutional guidelines. In this sense, the results of the present study confirm that the educational potential of recreational spaces in Milagro is not systematically utilized, which limits their contribution to educational inclusion.

The positive and significant correlations identified between the implementation of public policies and variables such as accessibility, educational use, and perceived inclusion provide relevant empirical evidence on the structuring role of public policies. These findings are consistent with Frolli et al. and Saini et al. [8,9], who argue that inclusive environments require coherence among regulations, environmental design, and educational practices. In the case of Milagro, the results indicate that when policies are perceived as more effectively implemented, recreational spaces present better conditions for inclusion and educational use, reinforcing the importance of strengthening their effective application.

However, the persistence of gaps identified in teacher training and in the adaptation of spaces to functional diversity shows that the implementation of public policies is not evenly distributed across the different dimensions of inclusion. This finding is consistent with Saona et al. and Valdés et al. [11,12], who highlight that inclusive recreation requires not only accessible infrastructure but also specific pedagogical competencies that enable the transformation of recreational spaces into meaningful educational environments. The limited teacher training identified in Milagro suggests that public policies have not sufficiently incorporated continuous training strategies focused on inclusive recreation.

Likewise, the partial adaptation of recreational spaces to functional diversity observed in the results is consistent with Maldonado et al. [5], who show that physical and functional barriers persist even in contexts where accessibility regulations exist. This alignment reinforces the idea that accessibility should not be understood solely as a technical requirement, but as an integral component of educational and recreational planning. In the case of Milagro, the perception of moderately low accessibility indicates that public policies do not consistently guarantee truly inclusive environments for all individuals.

The articulation between schools and municipalities emerges as a key dimension in interpreting the results. The moderate evaluation of this articulation suggests that coordination efforts exist, but they do not reach a sufficient level of systematicity to generate sustainable impacts. This finding is consistent with Jiménez et al. and Rua et al. [18,19], who emphasize the need for coherence between educational policies and territorial actions to achieve effective inclusion. In this sense, the study results confirm that the lack of inter-institutional articulation limits the educational potential of recreational spaces.

On the other hand, community participation shows a relatively higher evaluation compared to other dimensions, which can be interpreted as a strategic opportunity to strengthen the educational promotion of inclusive recreational spaces. This finding is consistent with Galarza et al. [20], who highlight the role of the community in the social appropriation of recreational spaces and in the promotion of inclusion. In the context of Milagro, community participation constitutes a resource that could be enhanced through more participatory and context-sensitive public policies.

The qualitative analysis of interviews with administrators and technical staff reinforces these interpretations by identifying limitations in financial and technical resources, as well as the absence of specific evaluation indicators. These limitations are consistent with Crespo & Verdugo [3], who argue that formal compliance with regulations does not guarantee inclusive functionality if not accompanied by evaluation and continuous improvement processes. In this regard, the results of this study provide contextualized evidence of the need to incorporate monitoring and evaluation systems that allow measuring the educational impact of public policies on recreational spaces.

Overall, the discussion of results allows for the conclusion that the impact of public policies on the educational promotion of inclusive recreational spaces in Milagro is characterized by partial implementation, with significant regulatory advances but weaknesses in the practical translation of these guidelines. This pattern is consistent with the reviewed national and international literature, which emphasizes the need for comprehensive approaches that integrate public policies, teacher training, territorial planning, and community participation [10,14,21].

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the relevance of approaches such as Universal Design for Learning and inclusive recreation as guiding frameworks for public and educational action. From an applied perspective, the results show that the effectiveness of public policies depends on their ability to generate real conditions of accessibility, educational use, and inclusion in specific local contexts. In this sense, the study contributes to expanding existing knowledge by providing localized empirical evidence

that directly engages with the contributions of the twenty studies analyzed, strengthening the understanding of the phenomenon in the Ecuadorian context and, specifically, in the canton of Milagro.

Although the findings provide relevant evidence regarding the relationship between public policies and the educational promotion of inclusive recreational spaces, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of non-probabilistic purposive sampling limits the generalizability of the results beyond the specific context of the canton of Milagro. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as representative of the experiences and perceptions of the participants included in this study rather than of the Ecuadorian population as a whole. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the research design precludes the establishment of causal relationships and does not allow for the examination of changes in policy implementation over time. Finally, the reliance on self-reported perceptions may have introduced response biases associated with participants' experiences, expectations, or institutional roles. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating probabilistic sampling strategies, longitudinal designs, and comparative analyses across different territorial contexts.

The study also has important implications for policymakers and educational professionals. For public authorities, the findings highlight the need to move beyond the formal recognition of inclusive principles and strengthen implementation mechanisms through systematic monitoring, context-sensitive evaluation indicators, and inter-institutional coordination between municipal and educational sectors. Likewise, investment in the physical adaptation of recreational spaces should be accompanied by strategies that ensure their effective educational use. For educators and school administrators, the results emphasize the importance of continuous professional development in inclusive recreation and the intentional integration of recreational environments into pedagogical planning. Enhancing collaboration among schools, local governments, and communities may contribute to maximizing the educational and social benefits of inclusive recreational spaces and promoting more sustainable models of territorial inclusion.

5. Conclusions

The present study contributes to understanding the role of public policies in the educational promotion of inclusive recreational spaces within a local Ecuadorian context. By integrating educational, community, and public management perspectives, the research provides a comprehensive analytical approach to a topic that has frequently been examined from fragmented or predominantly normative viewpoints. In this sense, the study expands the available evidence on the relationship between public policies, recreation, and educational inclusion, highlighting the importance of analyzing these processes within specific territorial realities.

One of the main contributions of this research lies in demonstrating that the effectiveness of public policies depends not only on their formal recognition within regulatory frameworks, but also on the existence of implementation mechanisms capable of translating inclusive principles into sustainable educational practices. This finding reinforces the need to move beyond declarative approaches and adopt governance models that prioritize coordination, monitoring, and context-sensitive decision-making.

From a practical perspective, the study underscores the relevance of strengthening collaboration between educational institutions and local governments to maximize the educational potential of recreational spaces. Likewise, it highlights the importance of promoting continuous professional development initiatives focused on inclusive recreation and ensuring that recreational environments are planned and managed according to princi-

ples of accessibility and diversity. These actions may contribute to creating more equitable opportunities for participation and learning among different population groups.

The localized evidence generated in the canton of Milagro offers useful guidance for policymakers, educators, and territorial planners involved in the design and implementation of inclusion-oriented initiatives. Although the findings are context-specific, they provide valuable insights that may inform similar processes in other territories facing comparable challenges related to recreation, education, and social inclusion.

Finally, future research should continue exploring the long-term effects of public policies on inclusive recreational practices through longitudinal and comparative approaches. Expanding the analysis to other Ecuadorian contexts and incorporating participatory methodologies involving communities and students could further strengthen the evidence base required for the development of more effective and sustainable public policies aimed at promoting inclusive recreational spaces.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review was waived because this study consisted exclusively of minimal-risk social research involving the analysis of public policies and educational information, without biomedical procedures, clinical interventions, collection of biological samples, or identifiable personal data from participants. In accordance with the Ecuadorian Ministry of Public Health Agreement No. 00005-2022 (Regulation for the Approval and Monitoring of Human Research Ethics Committees, CEISH), studies of this nature may qualify for exemption or simplified ethical review when they do not involve identifiable participants, sensitive personal data, vulnerable populations, or interventions affecting human subjects. Therefore, formal review by a Human Research Ethics Committee was not considered necessary for this study.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all the subjects who participated in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The datasets presented in this article are not readily available due to privacy and ethical restrictions associated with the protection of participants' confidentiality. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to the corresponding author and will be considered on reasonable request, subject to applicable ethical and confidentiality requirements.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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