



Out-of-school care for children living in disadvantaged areas

Portugal

Introduction and policy context
Out-of-school care at national level and in disadvantaged areas
Development of the workforce
Other aspects
Evidence of good practice
Case Study 1: National Charitable Society for Gypsies
Case Study 2: Cultural association “Windmill of Youth”
Case Study 3: OSC services of Ourique
Bibliography
Appendix

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Introduction and policy context

Socio-economic context

Portugal, in common with other Southern European countries, may be described as a country with a strong and explicit ideological commitment to families and children, but has a modest profile as far as social, family and childhood policies are concerned. In the past, social policy measures have been introduced later than in other Member States, mainly in the 1980s and 1990s, and usually in the context of severe economic constraints and a weak, albeit expanding, development of the welfare state. Nevertheless, the last fifteen years have witnessed a strengthening of government intervention in social provision and a strong commitment to supporting low income and socially excluded families with children. Examples of this are the introduction of Income Support in 1996, the setting up of governmental Programmes (PNAI, ESCOLHAS) to combat social exclusion and to speed up housing and social rehousing projects (PER), the increase in family benefits for low income and more vulnerable families with children (lone parent families and large families), and the expansion in service provision for families with young children.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s the general economic situation was extremely unfavourable to families with children, leading to an increase in poverty and social exclusion. It improved substantially in the second half of the 1990s. However, during the last five years, the economic climate has again not been very favourable to families, with GDP falling 1.1% in 2003 (and only increasing 1.1% in 2004, 0.3% in 2005 and 1.2% in 2006), with private consumption declining and the unemployment rate going up from 3.7% in 2002 to 7.5% in 2006. In this context poverty, due to problems of housing, unemployment, low wages and the very low value of a high proportion of pensions, continues to affect a large number of families. Portugal displays a very high rate of poverty: 21% of the population is estimated to be living in a “poor” household with an income below the threshold (Eurostat, 2003) compared to an average value of 15% for all European countries. The incidence of poverty risk is higher for elderly pensioners, especially for women, but it is also high for some families with children, in particular lone parents, couples with three or more children and immigrant families with young children.

Economic activity rates in Portugal are high for women and for men: 68% of women and 79% of men between the ages of 15 and 64 are economically active. The majority work full-time (84% of women and 93% of men) and have long working hours, Portugal and the UK have the longest working hours in the EU. The behaviour of families with children in relation to the labour market has changed significantly over the last few decades. There has been an increase in the work force participation of women, in particular of married women and those with young children, and a rise in dual breadwinning couples. By 2001, the activity rates of women in the childbearing age groups had increased to 83% (for women aged 25-34) and 80% (for women aged 35-44); dual-earner couples represent 67% of all couples with dependent children. These changes have had a strong impact on the reconciliation of work and family life in families with children. There has been a fundamental shift from a strong “family care” model, in which children were cared for predominantly by stay-at-home mothers or grandmothers, towards a pluralistic model of care arrangements. Family care provided by grandparents is still important when it is available, but a large proportion of families have to rely on child care services with long opening hours: crèches and paid childminders for the under three’s, nurseries for the three to six year olds, out of school care for children aged six and over, starting at 8.30 before the school day and after school care finishes at 5.30 pm.

Disadvantaged areas

There is no national designation of “disadvantaged areas”. There are, however, a series of indicators that have been used systematically by social services and surveys on deprivation in order to identify disadvantaged areas. The most common ones are unemployment, housing problems, low levels of education and high levels of school drop-out, large proportions of families who are dependent on Income Support, persistent poverty risk, immigrant families and ethnic minority groups (particularly gypsy families), higher incidence of domestic violence, juvenile delinquency and crime (often associated with high levels of urban segregation and isolation). Most of the areas identified as deprived or disadvantaged

are inner city areas and peripheral suburbs in the three largest cities in the country – Lisbon, Porto and Setúbal. However, over the last two decades, it is the peripheral suburbs that have come the main problems in terms of poverty and social exclusion.

Research on the regional distribution of poverty in Portugal shows that there is a higher incidence of poverty in rural areas (32% of households have an income below the threshold, many of them including pensioners with very low pensions) and in the larger urban areas of Lisbon and Porto (22% of families)¹. However, when it comes to the level of intensity of poverty, the situation is presented as extremely serious in the main urban centres: “(although) poverty is still predominantly rural, the situation is qualitatively worse in the urban centres” (Bruto da Costa, 1992).

Two areas of greater poverty risk are identified by Bruto da Costa:

- the rural areas of the Alentejo (in the south of Portugal);
- and the great urban centre of Lisbon.

Poverty in the large urban centres is partly explained by urban “bipolarisation” in the cities of Lisbon and Porto. Inner city areas gradually become more empty while peripheral suburbs grow, not only through the influx of migrants that settle in the shanty towns and social housing areas but also through the outward movement of families who leave for the suburbs in the hope of finding cheaper and better housing. In Lisbon this process has led to huge population growth in the town councils around Lisbon (Amadora, Sintra, Loures, Almada). This “emptying” of the city of Lisbon corresponds to the formation of suburban areas which have become the dormitories of the city. According to experts on poverty, this pattern of urban development presents major problems:

- housing problems, related not only to lack of housing for the more needy social groups, but also to problems that have to do with the bad quality of housing and the lack of basic infrastructure;
- mobility problems, which are related to the daily movements of the population from the suburbs to the city; in the context of insufficient and low quality public transport, private transport is preferred, thereby creating a major problems of access between suburbs and the city;
- unemployment problems: although Portugal has one of the lowest rates of unemployment, there is a high concentration of unemployment in some regions of the country;
- lack of infrastructure and services, which has to do with rapid demographic growth. As a result, there is a deficient network of social services, especially when those who must be targeted belong to the more vulnerable sectors of urban life: children and elderly people.
- high levels of insecurity and crime are also a major problem of suburban areas where there is a concentration of low income families, with low levels of education, low participation in the labour market, presence of ethnic minority groups, poor and deteriorated urban environments. These are ghettoized spaces, often thought of negatively by the inhabitants themselves.

¹ Studies based on the Surveys of Household Budgets.

The population residing in these disadvantaged areas is mainly Portuguese (80%) – with an over-representation of immigrants; there are more men than women, mainly as a result of the family migration processes in which men migrate first and bring their family later; the population is young (children and young people represent about 50% of the population); and household size is fairly high. There is also a sense of life course “precocity” associated with early dropping out of school, teen-age mothers, early entry into the labour market, early marriage, and early death.

Childcare policy in Portugal

Government child care policy falls into three broad phases over the last fifty years. During the Salazar regime, educational provision for children aged seven (for three, then four years of primary school) was the only publicly provided form of institutional child education or care. The child care commitments of working women were not addressed, as mothers and their families were seen to have full caring responsibility for. As women moved into the labour market in the 1960s, the private and voluntary sectors began to provide some services for preschool children (Bairrão et al., 1990).

The second phase entailed a radical change in attitude but a certain difficulty in expanding collective child care services. Public policies after the 1974 revolution addressed the child-care commitments of employed mothers in two ways: through legally-secured entitlements to leaves of absence, in particular paid maternity leave, and through formal recognition of the state’s duty to develop a national network of child-care assistance (Art. 67 of the 1976 Constitution). During the first years after the revolution, there was a consensus on the need to create alternative sources of support and care for small children, especially in economically and socially depressed areas. This led to an initial increase in the number of nursery schools, special schools for disabled children, and training courses for educators (Bairrão et al., 1997). Most of the increase in child-care institutions, however, was based on the initiative of work-place communities, grassroots movements, and voluntary organisations. It did not lead to a sustained increase in provisions for early-childhood education and care, due to difficulties in renewing this initial impetus and also due to the fact that most private and public financial investment in education was first directed towards the urgent development of other sectors of the educational system, such as basic compulsory education. Thus in the late 1980s, when the first reports on child care in Portugal came out (Bairrão et al., 1989; Ramirez et al., 1988), early childhood education was found to be incipient and poorly developed: only 31% of the three-to-five age group were in institutional child care which compared unfavourably to the rest of Europe. In Portugal’s second-largest city (Porto), the percentage of children in preschool education was as low as 28% in 1984.

This slow expansion of nursery schools for the first ten years after the revolution was, nevertheless, accompanied by some policy measures. Two main co-ordinating bodies were established for early childhood education and care: the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. The ME was in charge of nursery schools for the three-to-five age group in educational establishments belonging to the ME and in private schools; the MLSS was in charge of crèches, nursery schools and OSC services which are mainly after school clubs known as ATLs belonging to the MLSS and to private non-profit voluntary organisations. Another measure taken in order to provide a framework for institutional development was the legislation (No. 519-G2, 1979 and No. 119, 1983) on private non-profit institutions with ‘social solidarity’ aims, whereby the state recognised the important role of voluntary organisations in providing goods and services to children, families, elderly people, and communities and established state sponsorship (Capucha, 1995). Finally, a law on crèches and childminders (No. 158/84, 17 May, Ministry of Labour and Social Security) established a new form of child care called ‘family crèches’ which are childminders who provide care in their own homes for a small number of children below age three, the difference being that they are registered, sponsored, and monitored by a public or publicly-sponsored establishment.

The third phase in the development of child care has seen levels of provision grow steadily over the last twenty years and has brought them closer to those of other European countries. In 1994/95, 55% of the three-to-five age group were in pre-school education (compared to 29% in 1985/86), and by 1998/99 this had risen to 65% and by 2005 to 78%. Coverage rates for primary school children aged 6-10 in OSC services are not available but it is estimated that about 25% of these children were, in 2005, integrated in ATLS (after-school clubs, mainly provided by non-profit social solidarity institutions subsidised by the MLSS). However, since the new law (see below) that introduced compulsory after-school activities until 5.30 pm in all primary schools, the ME estimates that now 99% of primary school children are in OSC services (CAP, 2007).

Policy relating to the development of formal child care facilities for very small children below age three and to the development of OSC services has not been as high on the political agenda as preschool education. By focusing on preschool education for the over-threes, child care was envisaged initially from the point of view of the child's education, rather than from the point of view of families' needs for the reconciliation of work and family life. Despite this initial focus, consideration of families' and children's needs is now included in the new laws and the work/family issue has acquired a new legitimacy. Governmental recognition, within the 1999 and again within the 2005 governmental programme, of the need to support families and young children through service provision and to promote the reconciliation of work and family life, clearly points to the relevance that this issue has acquired. The need to expand service provision is linked to the establishment of a precise goal in terms of expansion of crèche facilities (for children below age three): to reach a coverage rate of 35% by 2009, it was estimated to be at 23% in 2005.

The provision of services for children below age three is mainly through the voluntary sector (particularly non-profit social solidarity institutions and establishments belonging to the *Misericórdias*), with State support from the MLSS and limited assistance from parents who pay for some of the costs of child care. The State (MLSS) provides early-childhood institutions for a small proportion of users, never more than one tenth, while the state-supported "third sector" includes over 80% of all users; the private profit-making sector compensates for the remaining gaps.

With regard to child care for three to five year olds, the levels of provision of preschool facilities have grown steadily over the last 20 years. In 1994/95, 55% of the three to five age group were in preschool education and by 1998/99 this had risen to 65%. There was a coverage rate of 53% for three year olds in 1998/99. Which rose from 42% in 1994. It was 65% for four year olds (55% in 1994) and 78% for five year olds (63% in 1994). Coverage varies by region, with higher coverage rates being reached more rapidly in the rural and semi-industrialised areas than in the large cities where many families with young children are concentrated. Many preschools located in highly populated urban centres have waiting lists. In the Lisbon area, the coverage rate is close to the average, whereas in two other big cities the coverage rates are well below the average: Porto with 52.7% and Setúbal with 48.2% (Wall, 2001). During the 1990s, strategies for development of pre-school provision passed from an initial model based on the idea of state ownership of a "public network" to a more pluralistic model characterised by a shift toward a private/public mix in which three main sectors are responsible for provision: the public sector (establishments belonging to local authorities and to national government, either the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity), the private non-profitmaking sector and the private sector. In 1998/99 the private share (profit and non-profit-making) of establishments for the three to five age groups was 54% (in number of users) with almost two thirds (63%) of this share belonging to the private non-profitmaking network. In the large urban regions, however, the relative importance of the private sectors is higher: 75% in the Lisbon area, 67% in the Porto area, 75% in the Setúbal peninsula.

In nursery schools and after-school clubs belonging to private non-profit institutions, the State pays for 62% of the costs and families for 38%. Funding is provided based on the cost for each child, and the amount per child is fixed annually by the State after consultation. The nurseries are open for ten to twelve hours each day, with canteens and after school activities.

In private and cooperative school establishments families pay for almost all costs (95%), but the law on preschool education allows for some sponsorship in these schools through the establishment of special development programmes. Opening hours are long, and the schools usually have canteens and heating-up services for meals. Many of them provide after-school activities such as music or sport classes and help with homework for which there is a charge.

Out of school care at national level and in disadvantaged areas

Overview

Although one of the main reasons for the public investment in childcare services is to provide care outside the family in order to prepare children for the education system, as well as their social integration and a healthy physical, emotional, and intellectual development, there is also the need to help parents in the reconciliation of their work and family responsibilities and to promote gender equality in employment opportunities. In Portugal, the national approach to children's development has been driven by a combination of these. However, the increase in pre-school nurseries in the 1980s and 1990s, with the aim of universal coverage by the end of the century, had more to do with the increasing awareness of the importance of pre-school for the future integration of children in the school system than with work/family or gender equality. On the other hand, services provided for those under three years old and OSC (after school clubs) were clearly connected to work/family reconciliation problems. On this basis, policy during the late 1980s and 1990s aimed to provide affordable OSC services and childcare for those households who needed it, but there was no idea of universal coverage of OSC.

However, over the last few years we have been witnessing a shift from an approach to OSC driven by work/family reconciliation considerations to one where there is increasing awareness of the importance of OSC services for the well being and healthy development of all children and, in particular, for their social integration for example in addressing reducing learning difficulties and truancy. This has led to new policy measures related to the compulsory provision of OSC in all primary schools, thereby making OSC almost universal for children aged six to 10. OSC is seen as an important strategy for integrating children with learning disabilities and difficulties, for preventing school drop out and for promoting the social inclusion of children and young people living in socially disadvantaged areas.

As mentioned above, one of the main objectives of social policy over the last 20 years has been to provide services for families with small children. Developments have followed four major lines. Priority was given to the expansion of services for children below age six. Services for day care and out of school care were built up mainly through the expansion of third sector institutions. Since the 1980s the State has subsidised Not for Profit Institutions which provide after (and before) school care, for children and young people.

These first two lines of development have led to high coverage rates of pre-school care and also to the integration of children in after school clubs. However, there were still many gaps at the level of out of school care², and this led to the third line of development: introducing OSC in all primary schools, by making it compulsory to have after-school activities between 3.30 pm and 5.30 pm. Law n°12 591/2006 set out by the Ministry of Education makes it compulsory for primary schools to be open until 5.30 pm (instead of closing at 3.30), a minimum of eight hours daily, and to provide extra-curricular activities. The extra-curricular activities are free, should not overlap with school hours (8.30 am - 3.30 pm) and should include a variety of activities that range from sports to arts, science and technology, computer technology, languages, and activities providing links to the community and to the European dimension of education. The framework law refers in particular to the importance of homework support activities, English and other language classes, physical education, music classes, other activities related to arts, and any other activities related to these areas. Homework support activities and English classes for the 3rd and 4th grade are compulsory and have to last at least 90 minutes per week; here, children do their homework and work on the issues they have learned in classes. The law

² Mainly gaps related to children from very low-income families who could not always get a place in a low cost 3rd sector institutions.

stipulates that extra-curricular activities in primary schools should be promoted by local authorities, parents' associations, Private non-profit Institutions of Social Solidarity (IPSS) and the school, with the school working together with at least one of the entities stated above (through the signing of a cooperation agreement). However, according to the new law, this cooperation should be carried out preferably with local authorities, even if funding is available for the different types of providers. As a result, local authorities have become the main "promoting entities" (90% of all the subsidized OSC providers in primary schools) so it is they who, at a national level, are deciding by whom and how these activities are to be provided. They have freedom to contract the workforce themselves, to outsource or to come to an agreement with NGOs (IPSSs) which are already providing this type of service for families. In planning these activities the resources of the community, namely music, theatre, and dance schools, cultural associations and Private Institutions of Social Solidarity are taken into account.

In practice, these agreements have led to different solutions being adopted in different regions and councils, as policy is very dependent on the latter. In a few councils, such as Amadora – a suburban area where council policy over the last five years has been to systematically develop OSC services in order to promote social inclusion and work/family balance – agreements were signed with some of the non-profit institutions which were already providing OSC services for families with children. In these cases, the council hands over the ME's subsidies to the non-profit institutions which organise the extra-curricular activities, and families only pay for the "extra support" they need after 5.30 pm. Agreements are quite flexible: sometimes the non-profit association moves into the school at 3.30 pm or just for "care support for families" at 5.30 pm, other times families and schools prefer their children to leave the school at 3.30 pm and go to the after-school club. In some of the large urban areas – the city of Lisbon is one example – the councils have chosen to provide primary schools directly with staff for OSC activities and have bypassed parents' associations and NGOs who were formerly organising or providing OSC services for those children. In other councils (see the Ourique case study) there was no explicit intention of totally bypassing the former afternoon club, but the success of the OSC services in all the primary schools has gradually led to a dropping off in the numbers of children attending the afternoon club during term-time. This has led many parents' associations and non-profit institutions simply to close down their afternoon clubs for children aged six to ten, to provide them only during school breaks or to think about investing more in OSC activities for children between age 10 and 16. Finally, in other cases, the OSC services in primary schools organised by the local council are still not operating as they should, with many gaps in the timetables (for example, in the council of Vila Franca de Xira) so that parents prefer to continue to send their children to the OSC paid services organised by NGOs.

Overall, this first year is an experimental one. It has produced different types of solutions to deal with former and emerging responsibilities for OSC services. The Union of Non-Profit Social Solidarity Institutions announced recently that OSC services for primary school children provided by IPSSs have fallen by at least 10%. As this is the first year of implementation of the compulsory provision of OSC in primary schools, it is still too early to draw conclusions on the exact impact of the new law; however, there appears to be a strong tendency for the displacement of NGOs and parents' associations by the universal, governmental provision. On the other hand, governmental provision is bringing more children aged six to 10 into OSC services. In the Ourique case study, for example, only children from one primary school used to have access to OSC services, whereas now the children from all six primary schools in the region are in OSC services after 3.30 pm.

Apart from "extra-curricular activities", the law encourages local authorities and schools to provide services for families ("apoio à família"), for the care and supervision of children before and after the compulsory OSC activities (i.e. before 8.30 am and after 5.30 pm). Families usually pay a means-tested fee of a maximum of 25 euros per month. This childcare support for the family may be provided by the same entities that provide OSC between 3.30 and 5.30 pm or by an NGO or by staff recruited specially for this purpose by the local authorities. A new agreement which is being negotiated between the government and NGOs establishes that the latter may be subsidised (by the MLSS) for providing these extra care services as well as OSC services when schools are closed.

Since 2001, there has been a special program called ESCOLHAS (Choices), the aim of which is to promote childcare and out of school activities for children and young people in disadvantaged areas (see the appendix for a short description of the Escolhas projects in *Curraleira*, Lisbon and in Porto).

This is a State-funded programme created in 2001, targeted at children from disadvantaged areas. When it was first created, it was a programme for crime prevention and the promotion of social integration for children over 12 from disadvantaged areas in the cities of Lisbon, Porto and Setúbal (about 50 neighbourhoods were identified). The idea was to organise a set of activities, initiatives and services in order to promote the integration of children in the surrounding community, by stimulating their growth and development and by keeping them out of trouble and off the streets.

In 2004, given the successful impact of the project, the programme was renewed until 2006. However, the project was expanded to target children aged six to 24, with the aims shifting slightly from the idea of prevention to the idea of promoting social integration in general for children from disadvantaged areas. The programme became nation-wide and more grass-roots based, highlighting the importance of local-level structures in the establishing specific projects for communities. Because the programme is now national, there has been an increase in the number of projects: 87 projects were funded, 33 in the North of the country, 29 in the Centre, and 25 in the South. Each project is set up through a partnership comprised of a level organisation and several partners forming a consortium. Overall, there are about 412 local institutions and 394 technicians involved.

In 2007 the programme was renewed once again (for 2007-2009). At present, it has 120 projects, 38 in the North of the country, 45 in the Centre, and 37 in the South.

The support given by the State includes financial assistance for the projects, support to train “mediators” and their inclusion in local communities, and technical assistance in setting up the project (diagnosis, local intervention plans, and evaluation of the projects). The programme is an inter-ministerial partnership involving the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Internal Administration, the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity, and the Prime Minister’s Cabinet, and is coordinated by ACIME (the High Commission for Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities).

In summary, the drivers for supporting the development of OSC are to help families reconcile work and family life as well as to enhance social integration. There has been a significant shift in policy in order to accommodate a more social and educational response to the needs of children. In this context, measures have been taken to extend the length of the school day so that children of all low-income families have access to out of school activities, homework support and care services. Special programmes have been set up to address the specific needs of children of disadvantaged areas for example, Projecto Escolhas, in order to prevent social exclusion, school drop-out, and juvenile delinquency.

Regulatory framework for OSC services

Apart from the above-mentioned 2006 framework law on OSC services in primary schools, there are two regulatory framework documents relating to OSC services:

- a technical guide compiled by the Directorate-General for Social Services (within the Ministry for Labour and Social Security);
- framework law 96/89 which outlines the conditions for setting up and operating profit-making OSC services.

Both documents set out similar guidelines and rules concerning the premises, staffing and equipment. The social services guide also mentions two other OSC services subsidised by social security. First, OSC services should be set up near

schools, in areas with high female employment activity rates, with a high concentration of children and young people, with families and children in vulnerable situations, and with low coverage rates for childcare services. Secondly, priority in admission should be given to children that are 'at risk', whose parents have difficulties in providing care, who have working mothers, who belong to lone parent or large families, who attend local schools and live in the neighbourhood where services were set up. Emphasis is also placed on the importance of the relationship of OSC services with the community, through meetings and regular contacts with the families, as well as through activities which build up connections between different groups and structures, and between institutions within the community.

Development of the workforce

Teams working in OSC services include teachers, social and cultural educators, social workers, arts and crafts instructors, psychologists, school “helpers” and more recently “mediators”, especially in disadvantaged areas.

It is important to distinguish between the staffing of the recent compulsory OSC in primary schools and the OSC services set up over the last two decades by NGOs and parents’ associations (usually outside but near school premises). The compulsory OSC always includes English teachers, teacher support for homework, music and gym teachers. Other activities and types of staff depend on the initiative of the local authorities and the schools themselves. For example, in the Ourique case study the local authorities send one environmental educator to primary schools and bring the children into Ourique one afternoon a week for swimming lessons. In Amadora city primary schools have access to cultural and social educators – for arts and crafts workshops and for “citizenship education” – who come from local cultural associations. Overall, staffing in compulsory OSC is closely related to the activities set out in the regulatory framework for universal governmental provision, and some parents complain that OSC activities are less diverse and interesting now. As one parent who used to organise a variety of after-school workshops at her children’s school says, *“Now it is really just ‘more of the same’, I mean the Out of School activities are not very different from what they do all day long at school. I am not saying that universal provision is bad, just that it has changed things at my children’s school – for the worse, because the parents’ association and its after-school workshops was just brushed aside”* (Mary, three children, founding member of the parents’ association of a public primary school in the centre of Lisbon).

In the compulsory OSC services in primary schools, the teachers who work there during the school day also have to cover the 90 minutes of homework support each week (usually taken as 45 minutes on two different days) and they are not paid for the extra hours. Some primary school teachers also take on some other activity, for example, in one of the Ourique primary schools, one of the primary school teachers offered to provide “story-telling” to fill in a 45-minute gap in OSC activities. Apart from these teachers and the paid teachers/social educators who come into the school, there are the school helpers (mostly women, with low educational levels). The latter are part of the full-time working staff belonging to the Ministry of Education. Most of them do not have any specific qualifications, but Job Centres are beginning to provide training for them. They clean, help with meals, and supervise children. When there are gaps in OSC activities, children are more likely to be supervised by a school helper rather than by a primary school teacher.

OSC services set up by NGOs or by specific programmes for disadvantaged areas (such as the *Escolhas* program) usually provide more diverse activities because their aims are wider and because their regulatory framework underlines the need for interconnection with families, local institutions and the community. Staffing in these services includes teachers and social educators as well as social workers, psychologists, performing arts instructors and ‘mediators’. Over the last ten years ‘mediators’ have been included in the staff of many NGOs, schools and other services working in disadvantaged areas, in particular with ethnic and minority groups. Usually they are young people from ethnic/minority groups who participate in the NGO’s activities and gradually become more involved in setting up activities themselves. They receive special training, through courses organised by the Institute for Employment and Professional Training in cooperation with other agencies (in particular ACIME – the High Commission for Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities). The legal status and the regulatory framework governing the training, skills and obligations of “socio-cultural mediators” was set out in 2001 in law 105. Mediators are expected to “promote the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities, by reinforcing intercultural exchange and social cohesion”.

Apart from these courses for mediators, there has been an increase over the last two decades in courses related to “socio-cultural education”, organised both at university level and by NGOs working with children and young people.

Measures to make OSC affordable to households on low incomes

Since the mid 1980's the State has subsidised third-sector institutions which provide OSC (mainly ATLS, that is, out of school clubs, which include not only activities for children but also fetching and taking from school, meals, and childcare services in the early mornings and late evenings). Families using these services pay lower fees than for private childcare services. Payment is means tested on income. Some NGOs working in disadvantaged areas exempt very low income families or reduce the fee substantially; in other cases (see case study *The Windmill of Youth*) families can do voluntary work in the association instead of paying.

Recent policy measures have made it compulsory for schools and local authorities to provide free OSC activities until 5.30 pm – and to organize subsidised childcare services before and after school (usually between 7 and 8.30 in the morning and between 5.30 and 7.00 in the evening). OSC activities between 3.30 - 5.30 pm are free of charge (subsidised by the Ministry of Education), thus making OSC affordable to all households. It is estimated that 99% of primary school children are now included in OSC until 5.30 pm (CAP, 2007).

Other aspects

Pattern of growth of OSC in disadvantaged areas

The growth of OSC in disadvantaged areas has taken place along two main lines: the development of compulsory OSC services in primary schools and the development, since the mid-eighties, of publicly-subsidised NGOs and projects working in disadvantaged areas (also encouraged, over the last few years, by the *Escolhas* Programme). There has been some development of OSC services at the council level, for example, the Ourique case study, where the local council set up free, public all-year-round OSC services some years back. In spite of these developments, there is still insufficient coverage of OSC services for children and young people in disadvantaged areas. Disadvantaged areas are located mainly in the large urban areas, in particular in the peripheral suburbs, but they also include children living in economically depressed rural areas similar to the Ourique region. There are a range of gaps. There are not enough organisations and projects to cover the large number of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. There are difficulties in engaging some children in isolated poorer rural areas, there is a lack of organisations and projects providing OSC services during school breaks and holidays; there is low number of projects and organisations providing OSC services for children aged nine to 12 who have just left primary school. Good practice from the case studies shows that children in these areas need not only out of school activities for two to three hours after school but also broader social and cultural activities which promote overall social integration. The *Escolhas* programme has been important in this respect and now has 120 projects in different disadvantaged areas, both rural and urban. However, many councils and projects which applied for support from this specific programme did not receive any.

Types and size of services

Types and sizes of services depend on the characteristics of OSC services. OSC services in primary schools, between 3.30 and 5.30 pm, tend to be centred on language, music and gym classes as well as homework support, and include all children at school. The services provided by non-profit institutions set up specially to promote social inclusion in disadvantaged areas have much broader objectives. There is a strong emphasis on the social development of the children and on the importance of children's integration within the family and the community. Activities which promote the children's self-esteem, provide tools for their development, promote learning in more exciting ways, and show them the outside world (trips to museums, access to the Internet, outings during the holidays, etc.) are emphasised. Work has been done with both parents and the community to provide parents with the necessary tools to better understand children and children's needs, as well as making parents responsible for their children's education and well-being. The case studies show that the kinds of activities and the size of services vary considerably, depending on the time of year, on the agreements with local schools, and on the kind of voluntary or governmental agencies, which go onto partnership with the institution/project providing OSC services. OSC services in disadvantaged areas often have more children during school breaks and holidays.

Workforce

As stated above in the Workforce development section, there has been some development in the types of staff working in disadvantaged areas, especially of 'mediators' and there is emphasis on recruiting people from the local community.

There is an increased awareness of the need to have psychologists and social workers integrated within the staff teams, as well as social educators.

Support for OSC in disadvantaged areas

In addition to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security's financial support to NGOs providing OSC services and the *Escolhas* Programme, some local authorities have set up special programmes to support and fund OSC activities in local communities. For example, the Lisbon municipal authorities have had a funding programme since 1992. The "RODA" project, for after school activities set up by schools, parents' associations or NGOs. The Amadora local authorities, a council covering a peripheral suburb which includes many disadvantaged areas have had a Programme called "Learning and Playing" which has funded activities for children in disadvantaged areas since 2002. The Ministry of Education has a programme which identifies areas in need of special intervention called "Territórios Educativos De Educação Prioritária". Although this programme is specifically designed for schools, emphasis is on projects that build up linkages between the school and the community. Funds are given by the State to schools which submit annual projects setting up activities for children which may include OSC services both in schools and in the community. This project is targeted to children living in disadvantaged communities and areas.

Practical support (business support, premises, equipment, staffing)

OSC activities in disadvantaged areas linked to NGOs/specific projects will be subsidised by the MLSS but they may also be supported by local authorities which provide premises or fund the equipment, and more rarely business support or private sponsorship. Private sponsorship, through donations, is received more often from non-profitmaking international organisations, such as AMI – *Assistência Médica Internaciona*. OSC services set up by AMI in the *Bairro da Flamengo* study have had some support from donations received by this organisation. OSC activities in disadvantaged areas are supported by different Ministries for specific activities for example, funding from the Ministry of Higher Education and Science for computers and Internet cafés.

In the *Escolhas* projects, support is given by the partners, and this support may include office and other equipment, as well as voluntary working hours, for example, in the case of the *Curraleira* project (see Appendix), volunteers from Doctors of the World provide administrative assistance by working in the project for a few hours a week.

Evidence of good practice

Evidence of good practice in disadvantaged areas

Good practices underpinning the case studies analysed in this report are related to the following main elements:

- a) the characteristics of OSC services
 - OSC services with no costs or low costs for families;
 - with long opening hours and flexible timetables, adapted to families' and schools' timetables/holidays in order to provide a maximum coverage for children who need care and activities while parents are working;
 - with a large variety of activities and bringing together a strong diversity in skills (teachers, mediators, arts and crafts instructors, social educators, psychologists, computer instructors, voluntary workers, staff from partnership institutions, etc.);
 - including children from different age groups (age 6 to age 18) and with some support for children with special needs (see "Indian" children in *Flamenga* case study and "gipsy girls" in case study 1) that need special tutoring, separate spaces or counselling;
 - with transport facilities for children who live further away (this is of particular importance in rural disadvantaged areas).
- b) the multiple aims of OSC services are an important factor of good practice in disadvantaged areas. Services are there not only to help families reconcile work and family life and to improve school attainment/activities, but also to promote the healthy development and the social integration of all children, by diversifying their interactions, their skills, and their contacts with the community and with the outside world
- c) the embeddedness of OSC services in a network of relationships/partnerships established between OSC services and schools, other agencies or local institutions working inside or outside the neighbourhood and in a community-based perspective encouraging initiative and self-support, generating empowerment and seeking to create bridges between children and other sectors of the community for example, older people, families, firemen, the police and health services.

Impact

To examine the impact of the national approach on OSC development it is important to understand the impact of recent governmental provision in primary schools and, to analyse the impact of policy measures which have subsidised NGOs and specific programmes for disadvantaged areas since the 1990s.

At a national level, the main impact of the new law on compulsory OSC services in primary schools is to have made OSC between 3.30 pm and 5.30 pm practically universal. The report from the follow-up commission (CAP, 2007) shows that 99% of primary schools now provide the obligatory OSC activities and that the majority have set up OSC on the basis of three types of activities: English, music and sports. This is also due to the fact that the OSC subsidy "per pupil" from the Ministry of Education is available for three activities, with the highest subsidy established for this particular combination of activities. Diversification of activities and of "promoting entities" is thus weak: 90% of OSC services are being provided and managed by local authorities (only 5% by schools, 3% by Parents' Associations and 2% by NGOs). The follow-up commission also underlines several difficulties, in particular the involvement of the teachers who are there during the "school" day is low, coordination between OSC and other activities is low, some schools do not have

adequate space for the activities and many lack equipment for certain activities. Some of the OSC teachers do not have the necessary skills or qualifications to adequately provide activities.

At a local level, research that the impact varies substantially according to the type of solutions and processes used by the “providing entities”, namely city councils, to build up OSC services. If the council bypasses existing OSC services, this means some loss in the quality and diversity of OSC. If the city council develops agreements with existing OSC services, mostly NGOs, it seems to be easier not only to keep up some of the good practices of OSC services in disadvantaged areas but also to ensure that these institutions are not displaced by the new law. In other cases, such as Ourique (case study 3), universal governmental provision has led to some displacement of previous services but the Ourique council, who provides and manages OSC services at both levels, has established connections between both types of provision by using some staff and equipment belonging to previous OSC activities, and by keeping up the former OSC services during school holidays. In a disadvantaged area, this is important in order to ensure that children continue to have access to different types of activities, access to support and to have OSC during the holidays. However, this creates problems in terms of staffing, spaces and finances, which have to be more flexible/adaptable than before.

The case studies show that the coordinators and the staff of compulsory OSC services in primary schools underline the importance of “universality” and the fact that all children aged six to 10 are cared for while parents work. They are less certain about the positive impact of the activities themselves, not so much of English and sports, but mostly in relation to music and homework support and its impact on school attainment. The 90 minutes of homework support is usually divided into two ‘blocks’ of 45 minutes. In practice this means that children only have homework or “study support”, as it is usually called, twice a week. Moreover, many coordinators and teachers believe that these 90 minutes are to teach children how to study rather than to help them with their homework. A frequent comment is that, “*We try to teach them how to work in the ‘study support activities’, but if they don’t do their homework at home, and families are not always of much help, then...*”. This contrasts with the practices in most ‘after-school clubs’ organised by private profit-making or non-profit-making institutions where children usually have to sit down and do their homework before going on to other activities (which is considered as a benefit for children and families).

At a national level OSC services developed by NGOs and specific programmes such as the *Escolhas* are considered to have had a positive impact on children, families and communities. It is estimated that about a quarter of children aged six to 10 were already attending OSC services before universal governmental provision. However, there were not enough places in publicly subsidised NGOs and families often had to face long waiting lists. In the *Escolhas programme*, the assessment report for 2004/2006 shows that 43,000 children and young people between age six and 24 were included in OSC projects (Guerra, 2007) and that 1,299 partners (schools, NGOs, local authorities, Commissions for the Protection of Minors and so forth) have been involved in the projects over the last six years. The report also underlines the following positive impacts:

- a) on children and young people: new and improved behaviour, more school attainment, new expectations in relation to the future, and the emergence of youth organisations;
- b) on families: more well-being related support and knowing where to go for support; new perceptions on children and young people
- c) at school: less violence and conflicts; more integration in school work and new expectations concerning school and professional attainment;
- d) in the neighbourhood: less violence and criminality, new perceptions concerning young people, more initiative in tackling local problems.

City councils, governmental agencies participating directly in the organisation of the programme, coordination teams and staff also highlight these positive impacts (see case studies: Windmill of Youth, Curraleira and Porto). However, NGOs and specific programmes working in disadvantaged areas absorb a lot of funding and have difficulties in showing positive results such as a turn-around in school attainment and reduction in juvenile delinquency. Coordinators of OSC services and staff recognise that impacts are difficult to obtain. The projects are seen to improve living conditions, to promote the social integration and the care of children, and to generate initiative and support in the community, but they are not considered as the only tool for the promotion of social integration of children. Mediators and other staff often emphasise that school attainment depends on schools, the attitudes of teachers and new programmes. In other words, these community-based OSC services are tools that alleviate the disadvantage of children and young people in these areas rather than solving it completely.

Methods

Fieldwork

Fieldwork was carried out along three main lines:

- 1) Interviews with policy-makers, both at governmental and local levels: this included interviews with:
 - a) The Director of the Directorate-General for the Innovation of Curricular Development (Ministry of Education) who is responsible for implementing and assessing OSC services in primary schools. A follow-up commission (CAP) has been set up and their first report (April 2007) was analysed for this report;
 - b) Members of city council boards who have developed policies/programmes for OSC in disadvantaged areas (Amadora and Ourique)
 - c) The coordinator of the *Escolhas* Programme
- 2) Interviews with coordinators and staff members of OSC services. Twelve interviews were carried out with staff members belonging to the institutions analysed in the case studies.
- 3) Field trips to the six OSC services described in this report were also undertaken. This was an important step in our research, since it provided an opportunity for closer and direct observation of OSC services and of the social contexts in which they are embedded. By travelling to the actual locations we were able to see the surrounding neighbourhoods, get a better understanding of context and of the population, as well as a better view of the types of services offered. We were able to talk to the people working there, to see the premises and the equipment and, also, to see how children and staff were interacting in the course of some of the activities provided.

Case Study 1: National Charitable Society for Gypsies

Ameixoeira - Lisbon

Description of the local area

Ameixoeira (belonging to the Lisbon district) is a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Lisbon, its boundaries marked by the Lisbon airport, a motorway going north, another motorway under construction, and the territorial boundary of the city which borders on two other municipalities. This area was considered a LUDA (Large Distressed Urban Area)³ case study because of its social and urban structural problems – lack of urban planning, poor quality of buildings and illegal ownership - which has been deteriorating due to high levels of social exclusion and the lack of initiative on the part of the population.

The neighbourhood has been regarded as a part of Lisbon since 1852; today it has an area of 185 ha. and an estimated population of 20,000 inhabitants. It is a heterogeneous urban area which includes a historical quarter, more recent illegal housing and some residential high-rise buildings (social housing). This has to do with the changes that the area has gone through: until the mid-50s, this was a summer residence zone for the Lisbon population, consisting of farms and old roads and alleys, few of which still exist. In the 50s, 60s, and 70s there was an increase in migration flows into Lisbon which, together with decolonization, resulted in increased demand for accommodation in Lisbon. This resulted in the growth of illegal housing and buildings not up to proper specifications. More recently, in the 1990s, the PER programme (Programme for the special rehousing of the population) built up a new neighbourhood with high-rise buildings involving the areas of the Peripheral Park and “Quinta da Torrinha”. This is the highly disadvantaged neighbourhood that we will be looking at in this case study.

The population of the neighbourhood (estimated at 3,300 people in 2004) is very young, and average family size is 3.3 persons per household. Most of the population is Portuguese, although there is a relatively small group of people from other countries, mainly of African origin. However, within the Portuguese population, there is a relatively large group (18.7%) of gypsies.

Families in this neighbourhood have low incomes, low educational levels and high levels of poverty, unemployment and inactivity. Women are concentrated in unskilled services, namely domestic service, industrial cleaning and retail, while men are employed in the building and transport sectors (lorry drivers, etc.). In 2004, 28.4% of the population was unemployed (with higher proportions for women - 29.3% - and for young people between age 20 and 24 - 38.5%); the unemployment rate for the gypsy population was 24.3%. Also extremely high is the proportion of the population aged 18 to 59 belonging to households where nobody has a job – 20.9%, as well as the proportion of individuals over age 15 living on income support (3.7%).

There is a high rate of illiteracy amongst the population (14.5%), and there are high levels of school drop-out (6.9%). The main aspect of this dropping out of school is that it occurs very early on (73.4% of the drop-out population falls within this category of early drop-out), a situation which is partly related to the fact that gypsy children are taken from school relatively early (especially girls).

³ LUDA is a research project of Key Action 4 “City of Tomorrow & Cultural Heritage” of the “Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development” programme within the European Commission’s Fifth Framework Programme. <http://www.luda-project.net/>

Social and child care services are poor, especially in the social rehousing area where the majority of gipsy families is concentrated. There are only 3 private non-profit institutions providing services for children: 2 institutions providing OSC services and one providing a kindergarten; further away, beyond the social rehousing neighbourhood, there is also a primary school, a local Health Centre, some NGO's and a few (5) locally-based associations. The lack of social services has to do with insecurity and the high levels of crime associated with the neighbourhood, on the one hand, and with the lack of public investment in areas such as the public transport network on the other, which in turn contributes to the isolation of the community.

The main concerns of the population are the dilapidation of public spaces, the lack of public transportation, the low quality of housing, insecurity, and the need for more shops and local services.

Background and description of the project

The National Charitable Society for Gipsies (“Obra Nacional da Pastoral dos Ciganos”) has existed as a Private Institution of Social Solidarity since 1985. This Institution has been working closely with the gipsy community since the 70s, focusing on the development of projects to educate and socially integrate children and gipsy women.

This Institution was called upon to work in this particular neighbourhood because of its previous recognized work within the gipsy community, and because a number of gipsy families were recently relocated there from other areas of the city.

OSC services are subsidized by the Social Security Services. Parents pay means-tested fees (which do not usually exceed 5 euros per month in this particular centre, since the many of the families are living on income support).

The facilities used were provided by the Town Council.

There are about 80 children attending OSC services, and they all have to attend the local school (a condition for obtaining OSC services). Even though there is a large gipsy community in this neighbourhood, children attending the OSC services are not only gipsies, but also Portuguese and African (lately there has been an increase in Ukrainian and Brazilian children attending OSC services, due to recent immigration from Brazil and the Ukraine).

OSC services in this institution are open from 8.30 am to 6 pm (opening hours vary in the different centres, according to family needs). OSC services are open from Monday to Friday (but not at weekends) and during school holidays during the year. During the school holidays OSC services have the same timetable (8.30 am to 6 pm). However, they close in August.

There is a small group of children that comes to the centre at 3.30 pm, when they finish school; however, the majority of children are from schools that are still divided into two different shifts (one in the morning from 8 am to 1 pm, and one in the afternoon from 1.15 pm to 6.15pm) so OSC services also vary according these different timetables. One group of children comes early in the morning and leaves for school after lunch (provided by the centre), and another group of children arrives at the OSC services at lunch time (and has lunch in the centre) and stays there until approximately 6 pm.

Although in this case the situation is very similar to what it used to be in the past, this is not always the case. For instance in the Social Centre of Musgueira, a nearby neighbourhood, the numbers of children attending the centre has decreased due to the introduction of ‘extended school hours’ in the local primary school. This centre, which also includes a kindergarten, study rooms open until 9 pm for junior high and high school children, and a centre and home help for the elderly, used to have six rooms available for OSC services and now has only one, with 20 children attending. OSC services are now open only from 3.30 pm to 6.30 pm (in the past the centre was open all day long), and they are still

trying to work out what to do this year (in the Christmas holidays, for instance, OSC services were only open in the afternoon, from 2 pm to 6.30 pm, which meant that lot of children had to stay at home alone or with older brothers and sisters).

OSC services in the National Charitable Society for Gypsies are provided in two different rooms, with two monitors in each one (monitors must have a secondary school certificate, or a degree in socio-cultural education, and they also need to attend the Institution's training courses), plus a person in charge for the management of the activities. OSC staff also includes a worker from Social Services (who is also available to help the rest of the community if needed), psychologists (sometimes there are psychology internships), someone responsible for the kitchen, and someone in charge of cleaning the facilities. Although not made on the premises, breakfast, lunch, and a small snack at the end of the afternoon are served to the children (the meals are prepared elsewhere, in the central services of the Charitable Society, and distributed to each centre).

A wide variety of activities is carried out in the OSC services, ranging from field trips to thematic workshops. They also include English classes, computer classes, and Gymnastics. At the end of each semester, as a celebration, there are friendly sports competitions between the different Centres.

The children are monitored closely; they have to do their homework and often have study periods in which they go over the subjects they learned at school. There is close contact between the local school and the OSC services, so that the monitors are always aware of how the children are doing.

Contact with families is also encouraged – the people responsible for OSC services always try to keep in touch with the families. Because of this close relationship, several people call on to the Institution in order to clarify legal doubts or ask for guidance on specific issues. The Institution thus works as a mediator between the families and the extended community.

Several courses of mediation are provided to the gipsy community (subsidized by the European Social Fund). These courses select elements of the gipsy community and train them as mediators who establish links between the gipsy community and the extended, outside world (nowadays, there is one person who was trained through these courses working in one of the centres).

There is also a close relationship with the local Health Centre, and teams are sent to the OSC services to provide medical care, such as vaccination and medical appointments, or family planning appointments (specific days when parents and families are called in).

The Institution also tries to keep in close contact with other centres and institutions working in the same area, in an effort to coordinate activities that bring the different sectors of the community closer together. This includes, for instance, what they call "Community Lunches", when a group of women from the community is called in to prepare a meal of typical food.

Finally, recent initiatives include an activity called "Garden Gatekeepers" promoted by GEBALIS (a department of the Lisbon city council responsible for the urban management of several neighbourhoods of the Lisbon area), based on the idea of putting children in charge of the management of Lisbon's public gardens. There is also what is called the "Community Vegetable Garden", where children are responsible for supervising and organizing a vegetable garden, with the help of the senior citizens of the community. These vegetables are used in the preparation of seven or eight different soups made by a group of women on what is called "Health Day" – when these soups are served to the whole community. Also, on "Health Day" there is a team from the local Health Centre available for appointments. As a result of this initiative, a book with different recipes is being written up by the children.

Evidence of good practice

Evidence of good practices related to this project is as follows:

1. The idea that children have to attend the local school in order to be registered for OSC services (thus making it compulsory for children to attend school);
2. Parents pay means-tested fees (low fees, since the majority of families depend on income support);
3. OSC services are open during the summer holidays (except for the month of August) and other school holidays, providing for child care and thus allowing parents to reconcile work and family life;
4. OSC services serve one hot meal a day (as well as breakfast and an afternoon snack), which means that children are able to have at least one good meal a day. This is very important since these are low-income, very poor families, who may lack the resources to provide their children with decent meals on a daily basis.
5. An effort is made for children to get the help they need for their school work and homework (as their parents lack the ability to do so). They are also integrated into a wide range of activities that they would otherwise be deprived of, such as English and computer classes (increasing their educational skills and learning abilities), as well as workshops (theatre, sculpture, painting, crafts).
6. Several measures are also taken to make sure the children (and in a broader sense, their families) have all the medical care they need: such measures are carried out in collaboration with the local health centre in order to stress the importance of issues such as family planning, vaccination campaigns and free medical care (these initiatives take place on specific days, such as festival days or thematic gatherings set up around the Vegetable Garden, in order to take advantage of the fact that the whole community is gathered in one place).
7. Elements of the community are used as mediators, especially between the gipsy and the non-gipsy community; these elements are sometimes incorporated into the working staff of the centre, thus creating employment for some members of the community;
8. There is a network approach that tries create partnerships with other local institutions in order to fulfil the needs of the children (the rest of the community is often included in this activities).
9. The centre is a part of a network and so there is backup from other centres, as well as shared knowledge in terms of experience and know-how.

Impact of the project

The main impact of OSC services has been to keep children occupied and off the streets. Since there is a relatively large group of gypsies in this neighbourhood, it is important to have plenty of alternatives because most of them (especially girls) are taken out of school at an early age; thus it is very important to try, on the one hand, to keep the children in school and, on the other hand, to open up other choices, activities and pathways for these children. OSC services try to prevent children dropping out of school early, by making it compulsory for children to attend school, by promoting their social integration on the basis of new activities and by helping with school homework.

Those involved in providing these services work closely with the children's families, based on a feeling of trust, and OSC services act as a place of counselling, helping families with practical problems such as legal advice, applying for

social support, and applying and looking for occupational training courses, thereby enhancing parents' social skills. There is also a strong emphasis on the improvement of their parental skills.

Furthermore, because of the local work carried out with other institutions and services, a sense of community is built up and emphasized: the population is called upon not only to participate in certain activities but also to act in order to solve problems and to combat a general feeling of social exclusion.

Key findings and lessons learnt

In this case, one of the main key findings is the idea of mediation, that is, the need to have a locally-based structure/institution that is well aware of the problems of the population and in whom the population can confide. The feeling of trust allows the population to confide in the services and to ask for help in order to improve living conditions. This is particularly important in a context where there are specific immigrant or ethnic minority groups because it brings the community together, thereby preventing the marginalization and social exclusion of these groups/families.

Another key finding is the fact that services take into account the economic deprivation of the population, by allowing services to be provided for free or at low cost. There is also a need for flexibility in the organization of services, which have to take into account the need for a less traditional organization (for instance, it is important to be able to receive children and/or their families and to have some activities in the evenings or during the weekend). This is important because, as mentioned above, emphasis is placed on the idea that these services must create bonds between children, families and the community in order to stimulate the healthy development of children. This means that OSC services are seen not merely as a place where children go after school, but are seen to participate actively in establishing the well-being, healthy development and social integration of the children.

Comments on the opportunity for transfer

The main difficulties in the transfer of this project have to do with a holistic approach to OSC services which implies the organization of a wide range of activities and initiatives, as well as the promotion of the social integration of children and their families. To do so, one must work closely with other local services and institutions, with the children's families and, in addition, come up with activities not only for the children but also for the community itself.

This means building up OSC services with long opening hours and flexibility in taking in children, their families and other members of the neighbourhood. It also means an emphasis on a community-based approach which relies on different activities, some support for families and strong mediation in relation to other institutions and services within the community.

This particular centre is part of a network, and so there is backup support from other centres, as well as shared knowledge in terms of experience and know-how. This is particularly important when staff have to work with immigrant families or ethnic minority groups where previous experience is of great assistance.

Case Study 2: Cultural association “Windmill of Youth”

Cova da Moura - Amadora

Description of the local area

The “Cova da Moura” neighbourhood is situated in the western part of Amadora, a large peripheral suburb on the outskirts of Lisbon. It covers an area of approximately 16.5 ha. and is hemmed in by three of the main motorways (IC19, CREL, CRIL) which link the suburbs to the city. This makes for separateness and constriction and has influenced the layout of the neighbourhood, which roughly resembles the shape of a heart, with a few wider arteries branching out from a core area in the centre and allowing for reasonable circulation within the neighbourhood, alongside other extremely narrow streets. This complex structure of narrow streets and pathways criss-crossing the neighbourhood has helped to build up strategic meeting points (a few small squares, cafés, local associations and clubs) which are important spots in the everyday life and social organization of the inhabitants.

Cova da Moura started out in the 1970s as a shanty town built by impoverished and socially marginalized labour migrants and returnees, mostly of African origin. After the 1974 Revolution there was an influx of people returning from the Portuguese ex-colonies who were called *retornados*, or returnees. During the 1970s and early 80s there was also an increase in the flows of labour immigrants, mainly from Cape Verde, but also from other parts of Portuguese-speaking former African colonies. Many of these families settled down in the outskirts of Lisbon, usually building their own wooden shacks and make-shift houses, and gradually creating a large urban ghetto. Although wood has been substituted by brick and mortar, this has done little to improve segregation and social exclusion.

In 1981, there were about 1,000 inhabitants; by 2000, there was an estimated population of 5,000 people (according to a local survey), and recent estimates (2006) point to 7,000 people, most of them of Cape Verdean origin. The population is very young - 25% are under 24 – and the birth rate is still comparatively high, even if it has been declining in the younger generations. From the point of view of family structure, there are high proportions of lone mothers (both single and separated) and of extended families with three living-in generations.

Educational qualifications are still extremely low (in spite of a gradual increase in the educational levels of the younger generations), and there are high rates of school drop-out.

Economic activity rates are high, both for women and men, with most of the active population employed in low-skilled, badly paid jobs (mostly in the cleaning, catering and building sectors) with long and often atypical working hours; jobs are often temporary and sometimes seasonal, lasting only a few months. There is also some self-employment, mostly linked to cafés, car repairs, childcare services and hairdressing.

In terms of services for the population, there is a public Health Centre, capable of handling primary health care problems, a home for the elderly, two primary schools, a kindergarten, a well-designed network of Neighbourhood Childminders (home-based crèche), as well as several leisure-time spaces for children and adolescents. Some of the existing social services were set up by the inhabitants themselves on the basis of local initiatives.

Background and description of the project

This is a project called “Associação Cultural Moinho da Juventude” (‘Windmill of Youth’ Cultural Association).

The Association started up as an informal grass-roots project in the early 80s (and was only officially set up as an IPSS - a Social Solidarity Private Institution - in 1987). Initially, the idea was to bring together the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in an informal structure of discussion, so that they could acknowledge and look for solutions to the various problems of the community and the neighbourhood. In the beginning, most of the issues discussed related to the need for better sanitation (including the need for a sewer system), the need for a public library, and the understanding of legislation regarding women’s work and employment. Today, the project maintains its communitarian nature, strongly focusing on the idea of *empowerment*, and very much dependent on the gathering, debate and cooperation of the inhabitants, in an effort to build up and maintain awareness of the needs of the community and the neighbourhood.

The Association is an important actor within the community, carrying out significant social, cultural, and economic projects and activities. This active role includes the following:

- **A Group of Support for Residents** (“Núcleo de Apoio aos Moradores”), which fights for improved housing and the cleaning of the neighbourhood. It also helps immigrants to deal with legalization processes, encourages debate on local problems and supports projects related to health care (such as the prevention of HIV).
- **A Women’s support group**, born out of an informal meeting that brought women together to discuss their insecure and badly paid jobs.
- **A project called “Sabura”**, which is a Creole expression for “tasting, appreciating what is good”. Similar to actions carried out in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in other parts of the world, such as in Johannesburg, South Africa, the main aim of the project was to open up the neighbourhood to the outside world. This involves visits to the neighbourhood and the promotion of all projects built up within the community. The idea is to show outsiders (from schools, public service departments and associations, etc.) the reality of the neighbourhood, in order to deconstruct all the negative stereotypes associated with the neighbourhood and its inhabitants.
- **Literacy courses** (for adults).
- **Parental training projects**, such as the project called “O Pulo” (this is a project for parental education based on a methodology drawn up by the University of Utrecht and applied in this neighbourhood). Experts work with families, going to the children’s houses and helping to improve parental skills inside the home. The project was set up as a partnership between the Association, the Ministry of Solidarity and Social Security, the Amadora Council, and the 6 May Neighbourhood Social Centre (another disadvantaged neighbourhood in Amadora).
- **A project for the prevention of violence** called “Interconnect” (“Interligar”).
- **Initiatives to promote Cape Verdean culture**, including a percussion group called “Grupo de Batuque Finka Pé” and a dance group called “Grupo Kola San Jon”; the Association also promotes the sale of Cape Verdean books and writers.
- **A library**.
- **The “Tomkiewickz” Documentation Centre** was set up on by a local university student studying Architecture, and includes information and literature concerning social inclusion; the Centre also organizes courses on professional training and development.
- **A computer room**, where access to the Internet is available, as well as computer classes.

- **Occupational training courses**, especially for women and young people at risk, with the support of the Employment Centre and the European Social Fund. The association has also invested in the neighbourhood economy, by developing new methodologies for intervention and adopting other initiatives such as the “Planning for Real” (an approach intended to stimulate the active participation of the inhabitants themselves in the resolution of their specific employment problems and needs).
- **Activities/support for older children/adolescents** include exchanges between students from Portugal and Belgium, leisure time activities (dance classes, football, etc.), a **support group for adolescent mothers** and a place to watch TV or to organize snooker tournaments, dancing matinees, or dinner-debates. There are also occasional presentations of shows from a project called “The Magical Bag” (a cultural project for the social (re)integration of young people, set up by a team of cultural workers from Chapitô⁴).
- **A counselling office**, run by a psychologist and a social worker
- A project subsidized by the **Programme Escolhas** was approved in November 2006, for a period of three years, and will include the setting up of a recording studio, a partnership with the Alcantara festival (a festival in Lisbon which includes worldwide theatre, dance and performance shows) which will offer courses in theatre and dancing, and the development of a micro-credit office.

It is important to emphasize that the ‘Windmill of Youth’ association has been establishing close partnerships with other agencies and institutions: the Regional Centre for Social Security, the Employment Centre, the Amadora City Council (the city in which the neighbourhood is located), local authorities, the Ministry of Education, ACIME - the High Commission for Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities, the Portuguese Institute for Youth, the Public Security Police Department, local Sports Clubs, local Health Centres, a psychiatric team from the local hospital (Amadora-Sintra) and several other socially-oriented institutions.

There has also been close cooperation with several universities, including the University of Leuven in Belgium, with whom they keep up a significant exchange programme for occupational skills and shared methodologies, GIEPP from Lille (France), the Dutch Ministry of Education, and the NOW project (New Opportunities for Women).

⁴ Chapitô is a project with a strong emphasis on artistic and circus training and also on the importance of the arts to integrate children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The “Magical Bag” project works with children aged 12 to 20, interns from two different establishments of the Institute of Social Reintegration (Ministry of Justice); the idea of the project is for these children to put up shows (mainly small circus shows) in different communities on the outskirts of Lisbon (especially in disadvantaged areas) in public places like schools, kindergarten and community centres, such as the Cultural Association of the Cova da Moura neighbourhood. The social department of Chapitô also comprises a childcare centre, a project called “Education in Action” to stimulate the cultural interests of young people supervised by the Ministry of Justice, and the project “Open House” (“Residência Aberta”), the aim of which is to oversee the integration of young people in society. The childcare centre is a space for children between 8 months and 12 years old, open from 10 am to 7 pm. There are specific workshops for children aged 6 to 12, in the attempt to develop self-initiative, creativity, etc. The team works in close cooperation with parents. The “Open House” project is targeted at young people at risk, trying to make it easier for these young people to integrate socially, by offering personal guidance and temporary accommodation. The idea is to provide these young people with the tools needed for building a life project, as well as the reinforcement of the bonds with their biological families, or in the absence of the family, to provide for a good environment where trusting relationships can develop. There is also a team of technicians (psychologists, social workers, etc) who try to provide them with the support they need. Chapitô has been working with the Institute of Social reintegration (Ministry of Justice) since 1987.

The Association has a wide range of activities for children, which include:

- **A crèche** called “Tree” (“Árvore”), attended by 60 children aged between 5 months and 3 years. The children are divided into four different rooms, and looked after by three kindergarten teachers (‘educadores de infância’) and 12 helpers, between 6 am and 8 pm.
- **A home based crèche**, which includes 12 childminders who live in the neighbourhood and look after 48 children (four per childminder). These childminders care for the children from 8 am to 5 pm; parents can pay a monthly fee for extended hours (6 am to 8 am, or 5 pm to 8 pm), if needed.
- **A kindergarten**, where 64 children aged three to five are looked after by a team of three teachers, three helpers, and one volunteer.
- **Holiday camps**
- **An OSC service for children between age six and eighteen**, attended by approximately 180 children.

OSC services provided by the Association are attended by approximately 80 children aged 6 to 10, half of which come in the morning, half in the afternoon (one of the local schools is divided into two shifts, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, so children who attend school in the morning will go to OSC services in the afternoon, and vice-versa; the other school has managed to introduce one shift – 8.30 am to 3.30 pm – for children in grade one).

There is a small group of children with learning disabilities and special needs which is taught separately so that they can be given extra support. These children are separated from the others during homework/study support time. During the rest of the time the children are together and divided into four groups, with 10 to 12 children in each group; each group is looked after by one monitor and has its own room.

There are 2 or 3 physically handicapped children, but since their disability is very slight the teachers have felt no need for special treatment or to provide different facilities for these children. There is one teacher for handicapped children in the kindergarten, paid for by the Ministry of Education, but OSC services are financed by the Ministry of Social Security, which does not finance this type of specialized professional support.

There is also a group of approximately 100 children, aged 10 to 18, that do not attend the above-mentioned formal OSC activities, but come instead to participate in other activities provided by the association: dance classes, basketball, table football, etc., as well as homework support (open from 6.30 pm to 9 pm). These activities have more flexible timetables and are usually organized in the evenings and at weekends. The association thought it was important to continue to follow up and provide activities for these children, even though they are older.

The OSC centre for children aged 6 to 10 is open from 8 am to 7 pm. The Amadora City Council, who is now formally responsible for organizing OSC services for primary school children, is allowing the out of school care to continue to take place at the Association instead of inside the primary schools. One of the primary schools has a normal timetable (8.30 am to 3.30 pm) for children in Grade 1, so some children from this school go to OSC services at 3.30 pm when school finishes. All the other children go either in the morning or in the afternoon. The first shift goes from 8 am to 1 pm (breakfast being served at 9 am, and lunch from 12 pm to 1 pm); the second shift goes from 1 pm to 7 pm (lunch is served from 1 pm to 2 pm, and a snack is provided at 4 pm). The Centre is not open at weekends; otherwise it is open throughout the whole year, even during school holidays, from 8 am to 7 pm, only closing in August – however, there are always activities that take place during this month, usually involving going to the beach or to special holiday camps.

Activities for children aged 6 to 10 include homework support, English classes twice a week, computer classes and music classes once a week, theatre, mathematics classes (on the basis of a project called “Playing with numbers”, in which children deal with several mathematical issues without realizing they are doing so, i.e. a more creative way to learn mathematics, a subject which has high levels of failure), gym classes, and several thematic workshops (painting, crafts). Furthermore, field trips are organized (to museums and exhibits, to the theatre, to the home for the elderly and to parks outside the City Council area).

A close relationship has been established with local schools, so that coordinators of OSC services are always aware of how children are doing in school. There is also a close relationship with other OSC services in nearby areas, with the Association for the Physically Handicapped of Amadora, with the Health Centre, with a group of elderly persons from the home (Lar da Santa Casa da Misericórdia) and with the local Police Department. Activities organized by the local Police department for OSC services are considered to be very important because they seek to bring the children and the police together, and this is expected to help prevent juvenile delinquency. There is also a group of older children (from the neighbourhood) called “experience experts” (“peritos de experiência”) who have experienced risk situations and now talk to younger children to try to prevent them from going in the same direction. In fact, there is a strong emphasis on the use of young people from the neighbourhood as mediators, in an effort to employ their skills and knowledge in the mediation between children and families, between the neighbourhood and the surrounding community.

The high proportion of lone mothers in the neighbourhood led the Association to set up special support services for these families. The above-mentioned support group for adolescent mothers provides social and psychological support (one psychologist and one social worker) and information on family planning. It also endeavours to bring these mothers into parental training courses. The Association also set up a special project, between 2004 and 2006, with occupational training courses and special support for the integration of lone mothers in the labour market; this project also provided grants for lone adolescent mothers who wanted to stay on in school. Unfortunately, this project only lasted for two years. The Association is looking for new ways to continue giving adolescent single mothers the same type of support.

The OSC centre is subsidized by the Social Security Centre. Parents of children aged 6 to 10 pay a fee of 30 euros per month, a payment which includes breakfast and lunch or lunch and tea; however, since there are some families with very low incomes, who cannot afford these amounts, the centre allows them to pay less (a maximum of 5 euros) but in exchange they have to participate in what is called the “Time Bank” (“Banco do Tempo”), which is a way (other than financial) of contributing to the operation of the centre. Parents sign up to perform tasks for 2 hours a day – these tasks may range from helping in the kitchen to helping in the coordination and monitoring of out-of-doors activities. These specific families are followed closely by a Social Worker because it is stressed that this is a transitional, not a permanent situation, and there is an attempt to work with these families in order to look for and provide a better integration in the labour market.

It is also important to underline the existence of the counselling office, where a social assistant and a psychologist not only provide support to all the community (be it to children or to families) but also work closely with the remainder of the services provided by the association, making it possible to identify problems and take quick action whenever they arise.

Impact of the project and evidence of good practice

The work carried out by the 'Windmill of Youth' Association is having a positive impact not only on children and young people but also on the community as a whole.

With a strong emphasis on the idea of empowerment, this association tries to ensure the healthy development and a good social integration of children, by providing services and activities that help children and young people to stay in school, learn new skills, understand their own culture (Cape Verde), develop varied interests and activities, get to know the outside world, obtain occupational training and stay out of trouble. In order to do this, the association also seeks to involve and support the parents of the children, not only through the "time bank", but also by providing support through the counselling office, setting up mediators and support groups, and organizing different types of courses (on parental skills, for example). Since this association deals closely with the families themselves, whenever help is needed – in understanding a legal document, helping with difficulties in paying the rent or in legalization, dealing with problems with children or domestic violence – most of the inhabitants ask for help from the institution; as a result there is a strong sense of trust in the people working there, and problems with children and in families are more easily detected and tackled.

More than involving the parents, the whole work of this association is done in connection with the community, with many different "sectors" of the neighbourhood being encouraged to help wherever needed (maybe because the very idea of this association arose within the neighbourhood, and was built up around the principle that that no-one could solve their problems better than themselves). So there is a very strong "know yourself" spirit inherent in this association, and although there is also a strong emphasis on community integration, tools are also provided for children to be able to recognise their individual needs and follow their aspirations. Furthermore, because of the important work done with the help of the local Police department, and also because of the several initiatives that bring together young people with a criminal background and children, there is a new sense of awareness of the pathways 'not to follow' (related to juvenile delinquency and drugs issues).

Regarding the social integration of children aged 6 to 18, the coordinators and the staff of OSC underline the following **positive aspects**: the school drop out rate has decreased, parents feel their children are being cared for and safe before and after school finishes, homework gets done more easily, children are being stimulated and motivated through a large variety of activities (computers, performing arts, crafts, holiday camps, field trips, etc.) and contact with people from many different settings. Children and young people of all ages feel they have a place of their own (outside school, off the streets, outside the family) and find people in whom they can confide, children have information on different types of risks and the implications of deviant behaviour, young people are encouraged to take up occupational training courses and are given alternatives when there are problems with schooling.

In the context of this association, **evidence of good practice** is related to the following main aspects:

- a) the characteristics of OSC services: long opening hours and all-year-round operation; large variety of activities; timetables and activities adapted to different age groups; low cost for families; some support for children with special needs that have to have extra tutoring or counselling.
- b) close relationships/partnerships established between OSC services and families, between OSC services and schools, between the Association and other agencies and institutions working inside and outside the neighbourhood;
- c) the embeddedness of OSC services in a community-based perspective encouraging self-support groups and strong involvement/participation of the community.

Key findings and lessons learnt

The key findings of this case study are related to the evidence of good practice which we identified above.

First, it is important to emphasize that OSC services for children in the ‘Windmill for Youth’ are based on **four main features: variety, flexibility, inclusiveness, and multifunctionality**. Activities for children are not only extremely varied, including homework support, gym and English classes as well as art and crafts workshops, debates, field trips and holiday camps, but they are also extremely flexible regarding their opening hours/duration and their adaptability to different age groups (6 to 18). In fact, it is interesting to see that OSC services are part of a larger plan to provide care and support for children from the age of 5 months until age 18; in other words, it is highly inclusive in terms of age groups and also makes an effort to support children with special needs (counselling, smaller working groups within OSC). Lastly, OSC services are multifunctional, since they try to provide answers to a plurality of needs and problems: the need for children to be safely cared for after school, the need to improve attainment levels and to prevent school drop-out, the need for children to understand and value their own culture, the need to prevent violence, drug-taking and deviant behaviour, the need for children to improve their social skills and express themselves through art, music and collective performance; the need for children to get to know the world beyond the peripheral suburb; the need to improve the health of children in socially disadvantaged areas (through sport, counselling or simply by going to the beach). In socially disadvantaged areas, the ‘multifunctional’ feature of OSC services is considered by all those working with these children to be fundamental for the promotion of social inclusion.

Secondly, it is essential to stress the importance of an organization where the whole community is actively involved in identifying, discussing and solving problems. The participation of the local population is crucial: on the one hand, it is seen as being more capable of deciding which problems should be addressed; on the other hand, acting to improve their situation provides them with a sense of *empowerment* which will develop their feelings of self-esteem.

The activities organized by the ‘Windmill of Youth’ translate this general feeling of *empowerment*, since most of the lines of work carried out by this association include the setting-up of groups to answer specific needs of the population:

- *the need for a support group for the inhabitants*, which includes activities related not only to the solving of practical problems concerning the neighbourhood (such as better living conditions) but also to a series of initiatives regarding different spheres/problems of community life: debates with the local Health Centre, joint actions with the local Police Department to prevent juvenile delinquency, organized actions to assist recent migrants with their legalization, literacy and training courses for women and young people at risk, etc. The existence of activities which establish links between different spheres of community life and problems underline the importance of a **network approach** in this type of organization. Also very important is the role of **personal experience** and learning which may be passed on to others: for example, parental education courses include the training of “neighbourhood parents” (local experts who will then work inside families, in order to develop parental skills), and young people who have experienced difficulties are used as “experience experts” who talk to younger children about their problems.
- *the need for a women’s support group*. Initially, this group sprang up as a place for informal discussion of the rights of working women. More recently, other issues, such as the problem of reconciling work and family life, have been in debate. This led to many discussions on the need to have good OSC services for older children, but also on the need for crèches and the training and expansion of childminders. Today there is a well-organized network of childminders, and the association provides training courses for women who want to become home-based childminders (in fact, this ‘good practice’ could be profitably transferred to rural areas, such as Ourique – see case study n° 2 - where there are not enough children to open a crèche or day centre). On the other hand, there is a strong emphasis on support for adolescent mothers on the basis of occupational training courses, parental education, and face-to-face counselling and interaction (again, this is an important aspect of the community-based approach, which underlines the importance of personal experience and **face-to-face interaction**. This interaction strongly values the contribution of **all people**, since everyone may be seen as contributing to the general production of knowledge).

- *the need to be integrated within the broader society and also to keep in touch with their roots, especially in the case of ethnic minorities or immigrant groups.* When there is a relatively large community of immigrants or of a minority group it is important not only to promote **the integration of** the population into the institutions/spaces of the host country (in order to prevent segregation, whether linguistic, spatial, or other) but also to **promote the culture of origin** so it does not end up being associated with negative feelings. This is why some NGOs think it is important to promote lunches, dancing and musical gatherings in order to highlight the specificities of the culture, as well as to set up a good library, etc..
- *the need for activities/working groups that try to build up a more positive identity of the neighbourhood and of those who live there.* As in other peripheral suburbs with high proportions of African immigrants, the Cova da Moura neighbourhood is associated with ideas of crime, violence, poverty and juvenile delinquency. This reinforces the ghetto: on the one hand, people outside the *ghetto* get used to looking at these areas and populations with a general feeling of suspicion, because they associate them with the aspects stated above; on the other hand, the population from these areas ends up by creating cultural and socially isolated enclaves. Children in these areas are often brought up within those imaginary spatial boundaries, so that **the neighbourhood becomes their world**, and everything outside the neighbourhood is seen apprehensively, generating feelings of **us versus them**. This in turn contributes to the maintenance of feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem, as well as a distrustful way of interacting with others outside the neighbourhood. This is why the ‘Windmill of Youth’ thinks it is so important to open up the neighbourhood (with initiatives such as the “Sabura” project) to prevent this mutual feeling of suspicion and closure.

In summary, if we want to emphasize the main features of this community-based approach, it is important to remember the following key elements: the importance of **empowerment** (strongly connected to group discussion and interaction, to the role of personal experience in the reproduction of knowledge and to linkages with the outside world); and the importance of a **network approach** which brings together actors and agencies working at different levels, both inside and outside the neighbourhood.

Comments on opportunity for transfer

At first sight, the opportunity for transfer in the case of a grass roots community-based project seems to be low. It is obviously complicated to reproduce the social movements and dynamics which brought people together and gave rise to support groups which gradually branched out into other activities and support groups.

Nevertheless, the key findings of the case study certainly point to some good practices which might help to implement, if not the whole experience of the ‘Windmill of Youth’, at least some of the basic features which make it into a particularly interesting case of OSC services in an extremely disadvantaged urban area.

The structure and organization of OSC services are a first element which could be transferred. As we mentioned above, the key findings indicate that it is important to take into account five main characteristics of the ‘Windmill of Youth’ project: the variety of activities, the flexibility of opening hours/periods, inclusiveness (across age groups and handicaps), a multifunctional approach, and the low cost for families.

With regard to the embeddedness of OSC services in a community-based approach, two key elements were identified. Empowerment is probably the most difficult element to transfer, but it can be encouraged through group discussion and interaction, the promotion of new and positive meanings for local culture/identities and emphasis on personal experience. Networking, by weaving together different actors and agencies working/interested in the field, seems to be a fairly straightforward feature which may be developed and transferred.

Case Study 3: OSC services of Ourique

Ourique - Alentejo

Description of the local area

Ourique is situated in rural Alentejo, in the South of the country, and is one of the 14 districts of Beja, an economically depressed region with high rates of unemployment and an ageing population. The district of Ourique has an area of 664.5 square km, 6,199 inhabitants (2001 Census), a population density of only 9 inhabitants per sq. km. and a natural growth index which is negative (-7.8%). As in the other parts of rural Alentejo, elderly people predominate (30% of the population is over 65, and only 10% below age 15).

Ourique is divided into six parishes, one urban parish situated in the small town of Ourique, with a high concentration of economic activity, employment and services, and five rural parishes (mostly linked to pig and sheep farming, cork and olive groves). The tertiary sector (with the council as a major employer) employs 58% of the active population, the primary sector 20% and the secondary sector only 22%. The latter is highly dependent on the construction sector, even if there have been recent efforts to build up other activities (a pig-processing industry was set up; the Job Centre offered occupational training, and this factory in Ourique now employs about 30 adults).

The unemployment rate is high (10.5%⁵), and tends to affect more women than men (in 2005, 257 women and 128 men, mostly between age 25 and 44, were on unemployment benefit). Low qualifications and low educational levels make it difficult to combat unemployment: 29% of the population has no level of schooling (illiterates/ primary education incomplete), 58% have primary or compulsory schooling (9 years), 9.6% have secondary school qualifications and only 3.4% have a medium or higher educational level. The Job Centre has been offering occupational training courses linked to care services (educational helpers and home-help workers), the construction sector and meat processing.

Since the late nineties, social exclusion and the expansion of child care and elder care services have been high on the policy agenda of the Ourique city council. This has led to a strong increase in services: home-help services for the elderly are available in five parishes, four of the parishes have a home and a day care centre and a new home is being built in one other parish (the coverage rate for home-help services is estimated at 87%). With regard to schools and services for children, five of the parishes have pre-schools and primary schools (the primary school closed down in Conceição because there were only three children) but all the children have to come in to Ourique for the last five years of compulsory schooling and for secondary schooling. This is often a problem for the “children of the hill farms”, as they are called, who have to be fetched by the council transport as early as 6 am in order to get to school on time. School drop-out and low school attainment levels continue to be serious problems. 5% of children drop out of compulsory schooling and low attainment affects 12% of children in compulsory schooling and 18% in secondary school. Alternative curricula are now being introduced to try and prevent school drop out.

Care services for children and the elderly have been built up both by the public sector (Ourique council) and the private non-profit sector (Misericórdia, plus 2 IPSSs -Social Solidarity Institutions). The latter has invested more in services for elder care (homes, day centres, home help) and formal day car (crèche and nursery) for children aged 0 to 6, in Ourique (subsidized by social security). The council has invested strongly in OSC services as well as in pre-schools (3 to 6 year olds) and services inside primary schools, such as canteens, for which city councils assume responsibility.

⁵ According to the 2001 Census carried out by the National Institute of Statistics.

Background and description of the project

OSC services in Ourique are provided by the Council. Originally a small project (one leisure time activity centre set up in Ourique in the late nineties), OSC services were improved and expanded over the last decade by the Council, mainly because many families needed out of school care services for young children in the afternoon and during the holidays. As this is a small community, social workers and council staff find it easy to identify the needs of the population as well as to identify and follow up on situations of poverty, social exclusion, negligence or domestic violence. Social services belonging to the Council (social workers, one psychologist who is also the coordinator of OSC services, one representative of the Commission for the Protection of Minors) all work in the same building, so that information on needs and problematic situations circulates rapidly.

OSC services for children were set up in the small town of Ourique. According to the Council, this is where the majority of the school-attending population is concentrated, as well as most working parents. OSC services were set up in a house next door to the primary school, so that the children only had to cross the backyard when they left school at 3.30 pm to go to the OSC services (open from 3.30 pm to 6.30 pm). During the holidays, however, the OSC centre is always open from 9 am to 6.30 pm (closing for lunch) and receives children from all six parishes (with transport organized by the Council). Children who cannot go home for lunch are taken to the canteen belonging to a non-profit organization (Misericórdia) which is within walking distance of the OSC centre (families have to pay a small fee for lunch).

Parents pay no fees for OSC. OSC services are fully subsidized by the Council (there is a specific annual budget for OSC, managed by the OSC coordinator). The facilities were also provided by the Council, who is also responsible for the payment of the workforce.

The situation of OSC services changed during the last year when the Ministry of Education introduced compulsory OSC in primary schools between 3.30 and 5.30 pm. OSC services were therefore put into place by the Council in all the primary schools, and not just in the town of Ourique. The Council decided to keep the same timetable (6.30 pm, as this is what they say families need) but had to set up a more complex organization involving more teachers (for gym, music, English, and homework support). Families continue to pay no fees even though children stay until 6.30 pm. (as OSC is only compulsory until 5.30 pm, families in many schools are asked to pay a small fee when children stay later).

As for the OSC centre, it is for the moment in a transitory situation. OSC services were also set up in the primary school in town. However, many families declared initially that their children would prefer to go on jumping through the backyard into the OSC centre. In practice, however, this has not happened. A few children sometimes come to the OSC centre after going to the classes that are obligatory (English and homework support) but overall they have tended to stay on together with the rest of the children attending the “extended timetable” activities inside school. This is also due to the fact that this primary school has an excellent library which can be used by the children for different types of out of school activities such as painting, theatre or working on computers. However, during school breaks and during the holidays, the former OSC centre is filled with children. The Council has not decided what to do yet (even if it is already thinking of building a nursery into the basement of the OSC centre). The OSC centre is now needed by families during the school holidays, but it does not seem to be needed as a “support” OSC service during the school term.

The number of children attending OSC services has therefore changed. Before there were about 20 to 30 children aged 6 to 12 attending OSC services during school time, and about 60 to 70 children attending OSC services during the school holidays, between age 6 and 18 (during the holidays the OSC centre organizes activities for two different age groups: 6-12 and 13-18). Today there are about 6 to 10 children sometimes attending the OSC centre during term time and an ever-increasing number of children aged 6 to 18 attending the centre during the school holidays (especially during the summer holidays, from mid-June to September). In 2006-2007, the OSC centre has been opening during term time from 10 to 12.30 am, and from 2 pm to 6.30 pm; during the holidays it opens from 9 am to 12.30 pm and from 2 pm to 6.30 pm.

The number of people working in the centre varies according to the time of year. In the past, during term-time, there was a full-time school helper and a primary school teacher working part-time from 4 pm to 6.30 pm. Today, there is only a full-time school helper who cleans in the morning and is there to receive any children that still want to come to the centre in the afternoon. During school breaks there are three full-time school helpers, two full-time primary teachers, as well as one gym teacher, one psychologist (also the coordinator of the OSC activities), and other staff employed by the Council who occasionally take part in OS activities: two 'cyberspace for young people' instructors from the Council, one instructor from the Council swimming pool, and one instructor for environmental education; trainees on secondment to the Council also help.

OSC services organized by the Council in primary schools also rely on some of the above-mentioned staff. For example, one computer/Internet instructor and the environmental instructor go out to the various primary schools on different days. The Council has also had to employ teachers for Music and English classes. And once a week, the children from all the primary schools are brought in to the town of Ourique for swimming lessons in the Council swimming pool (instructor paid by the Council). All in all, there are about ten teachers/instructors involved in OSC in the primary schools, supported by teachers and school helpers already working in the primary schools and often helped out by council trainees and the OSC coordinator, who sometimes participates in 'homework support' activities. The teachers who are already at school during the day are responsible for homework support (two 45-minute periods of support during the week) but one teacher in one of the primary schools also offered to do "story-telling" for 45 minutes to fill in a gap in OSC activities.

During school breaks and holidays, the OSC Centre organizes a large variety of activities, namely:

- sports activities, which include BTT (cycling), gymnastics, water polo, rappel, football, paintball;
- social and cultural activities, which include the staging of theatre plays (with the support of a theatre group from another town), visits to museums in Lisbon, going to the cinema, art classes, visits to homes for the elderly and the promotion of activities involving children and elderly persons;
- educational activities, such as visits to farms, surfing the Internet, sessions related to development of social skills, story-telling;
- environmental activities, which include activities concerning the "Safe Forest" or the cleaning of the dam, visits to parks;
- holiday camps, going to the beach and play activities, such as treasure hunts and traditional games.

Many of these activities rely on the setting up of close partnerships with local institutions from Ourique - the Health Centre, the homes for the elderly, the local firemen, the Police department, schools, local authorities, NGOs - as well as institutions working further afield, in other parts of the Alentejo. These institutions provide different answers to different needs: they supply material, help to transport the children, supply human resources, lend rooms and spaces where the activities can take place, set up activities (play), etc. All these activities are subsidized by the Council, which also pays insurance for each child when they go on field trips. The Council team is responsible for the careful planning of these activities. Interestingly, the OSC coordinator and the social services staff working in the Council are young people (average age of 27) who left to do their university training and returned to Ourique with projects to improve and change things in their home region; they also feel they are bringing new insights and know-how into their work and that it helps to have good outside contacts and information on programs, projects and activities.

Although more and more families are putting their children in OSC during the holidays, they are not very involved in the organization of activities. They sometimes provide support for certain activities (such as dressing up the children)

and also participate intensively in the organization of the “final show”, when children present some of the activities they have been doing during the summer.

Children from disadvantaged families are often encouraged to attend OSC services. This does not mean that there is a special programme to include these children or to bring, for example, the “children of the hill farms” into the OSC Centre. It usually means that the families and children who go through the Council’s social services are given information on existing services for children. The Council has a social services department as well as a counselling office which is open and free for the whole population. Children have their counselling time in the afternoon, but anyone can knock on the door in the morning. The psychologist strongly encourages these children to participate in OSC activities.

Most of the children attending this office are from lone parent families (there is a high proportion of divorced/separated lone mothers, as well as some single lone mothers) and from families with reported cases of abuse (negligence, domestic violence, alcoholism). There is no special support for lone parents but, according to the psychologist, parents from these families often knock on the door to talk about their children as well as their own problems. On the other hand, the social services department and the Child Protection Committee organize ‘parental education’ courses which lone parents are encouraged to follow. “Disadvantage” related to lone parenthood, troubled families and emotional damage is seen to be more difficult to handle in this setting than disadvantage linked to poverty. According to social services, extreme or persistent poverty is relatively easy to overcome in a rural area where ‘everyone knows everyone’ and where it is relatively easy to join efforts (public and private) to relieve need. Children from troubled families, on the other hand, need to be monitored closely, to develop their social skills and inter-personal relationships and to be encouraged to participate in different activities, beyond school and the family. In this context, OSC services are considered to be a fundamental element of therapy.

Evidence of good practice

Good practice underpinning this OSC project is related to the following elements:

- a) OSC services imply **no costs** for families (they are totally subsidized by the local authorities)
- b) OSC services were built up by the Ourique Council with **flexible timetables**, adapted to families’ and schools’ timetables/holidays in order to provide maximum coverage for children who needed care while parents are working. At present, in the context of the new law on OSC services in primary school, this flexibility is leading to a reorganization of services, inside and outside primary schools;
- c) OSC services were expanded to **include** children from age 6 to age 18 and transport facilities were put into place, during the holiday periods, to bring in some of the children from outlying villages; children with problems (school drop-out, troubled families, etc.) identified by the social services department have been encouraged to participate in OSC services.
- d) the objectives and aims of OSC services are **multiple**: they want to help families reconcile work and family life, they seek to promote the healthy development of all children, by diversifying their interactions, their skills, and their contacts with the outside world; they want to improve school attainment levels and prevent school drop-out;
- e) the **management of human resources**, based on teamwork carried out by a young and dynamic group of workers in the social services department, is creative and flexible – existing human resources are given many opportunities for transfer (between council services and schools, between schools, etc.);
- g) the organization of OSC services is embedded in a **network** of support provided by local institutions which are called upon to provide material or other types of support; it also seeks to create **bridges between children and other sectors of society** (elderly persons, firemen, the police, etc.).

Impact of the project

The most significant impact of this project is provide to child care, homework support and new leisure time activities for young children whose parents are working. However, in a region which is economically depressed and has an ageing and very unskilled population, setting up OSC services is also extremely important to promote the social integration of children. Through OSC, especially during the holidays, children from isolated rural areas and relatively ‘disadvantaged’ families are brought into contact with different types of activities and actors, with new social settings and realities, and with collective field trips, such as holiday camps, which families and schools do not provide.

On the other hand, because we are talking about a rural area with specific problems, one of them being the ageing of the population, it is important to provide children with an after-school space that will help them develop their social skills, by interacting with other children the same age (instead of going home to watch TV or to be supervised by a relative who is, most of the time, much older, such as a grandparent, or not be supervised at all). Also, it is important that children have access to activities which would otherwise not be available for them and which will enhance their learning abilities and social integration. Lastly, since this is a population with high illiteracy rates, it is important that these children have the necessary help in activities such as doing their homework and study-group support, because sometimes their parents do not have the necessary tools to help them.

Key findings and lessons learned

It is important to emphasize three key findings. First, the Ourique project shows that OSC services in a disadvantaged rural area may be built up quickly and creatively, with low costs for families, when local authorities decide to put the expansion of child care services high on the policy agenda.

Secondly, OSC services which emerge in this policy context and in a setting of geographical dispersion (as opposed to a neighbourhood) do not promote the strong and intricate involvement of families and communities which we observed in grass roots community-based projects (see case 2 – the ‘Windmill of Youth’ project). However, they can and do promote a network approach which encourages the cooperation and participation of different agencies, institutions and social actors at a local level. Collaboration between the local authorities and third sector local NGOs seems to be crucial in this context.

Thirdly, it is important to underline that OSC services have come to be seen, by all those involved in the education and protection of children - parents, teachers, social services, counsellors, child protection committee - as an essential tool for the healthy development and social integration of children.

Comments on the opportunity for transfer

Opportunity for transfer would seem to be high in this case. The development and expansion of OSC services would depend, first, on the importance given to social policy objectives by the local Council. In order to reproduce good practices, it would also have to take into account the main characteristics of the project: the low cost for families, the variety of activities offered to children, the flexibility and adaptability of services (flexible timetables, OSC during the whole holidays, different age groups, different spaces), the need to organize and spend money on the transport of children (an extra cost which urban neighbourhoods do not have to consider), the complex and careful management of resources, and the cooperation and bridges established with other actors and agencies belonging to local society. Perhaps the most difficult element, in this context, is the complex overall management of resources, as it implies a high degree of flexibility, both in the use of human resources and of space, as well as a large amount of negotiation and planning (who is going where and when, which spaces may be used during the holidays for the different age groups, how many

children need lunch and which NGO is going to provide it, etc.). There is a close relationship between the different local entities, and an effort has to be made in order to build up partnerships that take into account not only the needs of the children but also the needs of the community (for instance, contacts with elderly people). Overall, then, transfer would have to take special notice of:

- flexibility – of space and of staff;
- careful planning of activities;
- a team that establishes linkages and mediates between local institutions in order to maximize resources.

Key findings and conclusions

1. The development of OSC services has been an **important policy issue** in Portugal since the 1980s. Over the last ten years, however, it has become a major policy issue, both at a national level and at the level of services targeted to disadvantaged areas.
2. OSC services emerge as an important element of family policy (to improve family/work balance), of educational policy (to improve school achievement and the integration of all children in the education system, to reduce school drop-out) and of social policy (providing affordable, low cost OSC services for low income families and promoting the social inclusion of children in disadvantaged families/areas).
3. Policy measures at a **national level**, seeking to provide OSC services to all children, are important to make OSC available universally to all children. However, in order to reach out to children in more vulnerable families/areas, it is fundamental to introduce **complementary policy measures and programmes** that focus specifically on OSC services in disadvantaged areas (the *Escolhas* programme in Portugal is a good example of the importance of programmes targeting OSC services in disadvantaged areas).
4. School-based OSC activities are important but not always the most interesting ones from the point of view of supporting children in disadvantaged areas (as some interviewees point out, OSC activities inside school tend to promote “more of the same” and **children in disadvantaged areas need to diversify their activities and outlooks**). From this point of view, NGOs and grass-roots associations, strongly embedded in the local community but supported by external voluntary/non-profit or governmental agencies and programmes, seem to have a more positive and broader impact on the well-being and social inclusion of children. They provide linkages to schools and the improvement of school achievement but they also introduce children to new skills and give them tools for social integration. They also ensure that children are followed up when they are no longer in OSC services for young children (older children have other activities in the institution and have premises and services we they can use whenever they want).
5. The tendency for universal governmental provision to displace previous longstanding OSC services organized by NGOs and parents’ associations must be carefully examined by governmental agencies. This is particularly important in disadvantaged areas. Families with medium or higher incomes may be disappointed to find their children in OSC activities that are less diversified or interesting, but they usually find new ways and have resources to compensate for this in other ways. However, children in disadvantaged areas badly need OSC services with “multiple” aims, diversification of activities and of staffing, open during the holidays, and embedded in a network of partnerships and a more community-based approach. Special attention must therefore be given to **ensuring linkages between existing NGOs and governmental provision in disadvantaged areas**. The good practice of some city councils in this field, such as Amadora, may provide a good example.

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Appendix

Three other short case studies:

OSC services of Flamenga

Flamenga – Chelas - Lisbon

Socio-economic context

The Bairro da Flamenga is situated in the Chelas area, in the Lisbon district.

In the past this was a working-class area, with families mostly employed in local industries. In the 80s and 90s, social housing began to occupy large areas, leading to the building up of neighbourhoods with low-income, poorly qualified and also many unemployed families. Most of the families in this neighbourhood are Portuguese low-income families.

There is a majority of Portuguese inhabitants - mostly from Lisbon, followed by a group of people from other places in Portugal (mainly people from the North who came to Lisbon in previous years in search of a better quality of life), and another group of people from the Portuguese-speaking African countries (immigration which took place mainly in the 70s and 80s).

Most of these people have low levels of educational attainment, and there is a high rate of unemployment (most of those currently employed are in insecure jobs in the cleaning and construction sectors).

Very few live on their own income. The majority of the population lives on subsidies such as Social Income Support.

Although there is a relatively stable balance between the numbers of single and married people, there are no severe isolation issues, since there is a strong sense of family. Although there is a tendency to live together from a very early age, these families are likely to stay together, maintaining dependency relationships (due to financial problems in particular). These are often blended families. Nevertheless, there are a few situations of dysfunctional households and domestic violence, as well as high rates of drug addiction/alcoholism, negligence and child abuse, school drop-out and teenage mothers.

Perhaps on account of social exclusion and financial deprivation, residents of this area tend to relate most to the social worker when seeking help to solve issues relating to health, employment and children's education.

Reconstruction of the project

AMI – Assistência Médica Internacional (International Medical Assistance) is a non-profit non-governmental organization, founded on December 5th, 1984, with the purpose of intervening in crisis and emergency situations, and with an emphasis on the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

In 1994, AMI set up a Social Services Department with the aim of creating and promoting the “Friendly Door” Centres (“Centros PORTA AMIGA”), night shelters for the homeless, home help services for the elderly, and a street team.

There are eight PORTA AMIGA Centres, which offer a variety of services to disadvantaged populations. One of these Centres is situated in Bairro da Flamenga, where several services are available for the more needy families:

- A workshop called “Friendly Art” (“ArtAmiga”), targeted at the elderly, takes place in the mornings;
- Monthly training events for the population;
- The distribution of food;
- Social and psychological support.

The Centre also arranges for the distribution of the *Cais* (Pier) magazine, a magazine edited by socially excluded people (homeless people, drug addicts, etc). The Centre also has an agreement with UNIVA, a unit whose aim is to integrate the unemployed by helping them to look for (and hopefully find) jobs.

Finally, one of the services provided by the Centre is a project called **EPES** – a space for the prevention of social exclusion (Espaço de Prevenção da Exclusão Social); basically this project is organized as an OSC service attended by children aged 6 to 12 in Bairro da Flamenga. Today this is the only AMI centre in the Lisbon area where this project is still available.

The Centre is 80% funded through agreements with other public and private entities, and 20% supported through projects carried out by AMI (mainly charity) - parents pay no fees.

This space is open daily from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm, except at weekends (the Centre closes at 5.30 pm because it is internal policy to close *all* the Centres at this hour).

There are approximately 15 children attending this OSC space, aged between 6 and 12 (priority is given to children who have no means of attending other OSC services, either because they have no money, or because there are no services or no openings in the services available).

Out of these 15 children, 10 to 12 are Indians, from a neighbourhood nearby called Bairro do Armador. These children started attending the Centre because the local school understood they needed earlier and stronger support – most of these children are very isolated within their family and community, and only have contact with other children outside the Indian community when they start going to school (at the age of 6), which sometimes makes it harder and more difficult for them to feel integrated. Furthermore, there are several issues arising from the fact that some of these children have little understanding of the Portuguese language, which in turn makes it harder for them to comprehend and learn the subject matter. The local school got in touch with the Centre because one of the monitors is Indian, thus it was easier for these parents to entrust their children to them. And so they did.

Children attending OSC services come from two different schools. In the past, one of them used to finish at 3.30 pm, and children would stay in the OSC services between 3.30 and 5.30; today, with the extension of school hours, children stay at school, attending the extra-curricular activities the school provides. The school, in agreement with parents and the OSC people in charge, has found it worthwhile to keep the children on in these OSC services at least once a week – this way, on Fridays, children are brought to the centre, and there are about four children from this school attending OSC services *only* on Fridays.

The other school has operated with two different shifts (morning and afternoon), and continues to do so. Children attending OSC services (who are the 10 to 12 Indian children mentioned above) have classes in the morning, go home

to have lunch and are brought to the centre by their parents at 3.30 pm (although it is compulsory for school to be open until 5.30 pm, a lot of schools still work within the two-shift framework, which is the case of this particular school, and so there have not been any significant changes with regard to the past situation); these Indian children attend the OSC services on a daily basis.

The centre is open throughout the whole year, including school breaks (from 2.30 pm to 5.30 pm), and during the summer holidays, in August, because there are a lot of children in this (and in other nearby) areas with nothing to do in the summer.

The facilities used were given by the local authorities who recognized the needs of the community, especially when it came to (the lack of) childcare services. These include one office for the coordinator, one office for social support, one room for the activities, one office for psychological support, and one office that works as an infirmary (that is also used to hold the meetings with the people in charge of selling the *Cais* magazine).

The staff includes one coordinator, one social worker, one psychology teacher and a psychologist (part-time), and a security guard, two monitors, and a general services worker. Both the latter and the psychology teacher are paid by the Job Centre, whereas all the others are paid by AMI.

A wide range of activities is undertaken within this project: on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays they have study sessions (homework, etc); on Wednesdays they have artistic development (painting, theatre) and on Fridays they have sessions to promote group dynamics (with a range of activities that go from self-knowledge to self-esteem).

There is also a project called “To Grow, Playing” (“Crescer a Brincar”) with the aim of providing children with the tools needed for a healthy development. Three main activities were developed within this project: a space for expression, a space for group dynamics, and study support. Expression covered art classes (painting, drawing, among others) as well as drama, through the reading and staging some plays. Group dynamics explored emotional, social, and related areas. Study support covered homework and organization of study groups, the focus being on overcoming the children’s learning difficulties.

Throughout the year other activities take place, focusing on social integration issues, as well as the consolidation of strategies for providing the children with the tools needed for a healthy development (emphasis on the building up of a strong, good self-esteem).

As stated above, these families have low rates of formal education, and have unskilled jobs in the building and cleaning sectors. Most of them receive income support. They have low expectations regarding their children because they have a low level of education themselves. They became parents very early, and most of the children come from blended families (the situation is slightly different regarding the Indian children – the income of these families is usually higher, and these children attend the Centre more for cultural than economic needs). This is also why it is so important to improve the children’s abilities and their self-esteem (for instance, each birthday is celebrated with a small party, cake, and a gift).

Although parents are included in several activities developed within the centre, parents have never been responsible for developing one specific activity, since most of them do not have the skills to do so.

Impact of the project

The most important impact of this project has been providing childcare for very low-income families (especially before the extended hours school day, and nowadays on holidays and school breaks, when there are insufficient services available to children), and also to act as a mediator between the school and the local Indian community.

Indeed, the role of the centre as a cultural broker was of the highest importance, when called upon by one of the local schools which sought the help of a mediating element to provide the assistance needed for the Indian children. Had the centre not intervened and these children might have remained socially excluded in school (with severe consequences for their integration and good development) and from school (since they would probably not attend the extra-curricular activities provided by the school which in turn would compromise their learning abilities - as stated above these children need a stronger support mostly due to the deficient mastering of the Portuguese language).

With regard to the childcare provided to low income family children, this has been important for several reasons: to prevent young children from staying home alone or in the streets; to give them different types of support (with homework, counselling); to show them the outside world (through trips, outings); to introduce them to other activities; to help families with low educational levels to cope and to learn to cope with the education of young children.

Thus the purpose of the centre is to provide all children with the right tools for healthy development and good social integration. This includes, for instance, all the work done concerning the importance of taking these children to see “the world outside their window”, so that they realize there is a world outside the neighbourhood, outside the very city (when asked, several children answered that they lived in a country called Chelas, which is the Lisbon area where the neighbourhood of Flamenga is inserted in). It is also very important that these children are able to develop good self-esteem and good relationship skills – field trips are organized for better socialization of these children, who often grow up with the stigma of living in a disadvantaged area and thus with low self-esteem.

On the other hand, the Centre is open all year, and so the children are not left alone during summer holidays, when most of these OSC services are not open, thus leaving the children free to engage in more risky activities.

Apart from support for homework and the study groups, there are two days when parents are called in to participate more actively in their children’s education – children are left to do their homework at home, so parents have to be very attentive and have to follow them closely. This is supposed to make parents feel more participative and responsible for their children’s education.

There is also a close link between the Centre and the local school, and the Centre and the families of the children, so there is a constant awareness of how the children are doing.

These relations tend to get stronger, and here the role of the OSC people involved is very important, as they act as mediators not only in the development of initiatives such as the involvement of the parents in their children activities, but also at the monthly meetings to discuss their children’s situation at school, or even in helping parents clarify doubts (related to income support, payment of rents, unemployment subsidies, etc).

Because these relations are built upon trust, children commonly seek for help and advice from the people at the centre who, through guidance and support, also try to provide the children with a strong idea of autonomy (several cases were reported of children after the age 13, who no longer attend the centre, but continue to come whenever they feel they need it, that is, whenever help is needed).

ESCOLHAS Programme

Project Sementes – Seeds

Curraleira - Lisbon

Socio-economic context

The Curraleira neighbourhood is situated near Chelas, within the Lisbon district.

Many households are vulnerable. Most individuals have low levels of educational attainment and high levels of illiteracy.

There are many vulnerable families with low levels of education, and an incidence of problems related to drug abuse.

The population is predominantly Portuguese and Gypsy, with low levels of population of African origin.

Reconstruction of the project

The project began in the first stage of the Escolhas Programme, when the programme was still centrally organized and mediators were chosen by the administrative core of the programme. After three years of intervention, when the programme was renewed, the mediator of the team working in Curraleira decided to submit a project to continue the work done in the neighbourhood – thus giving rise to the project called SEEDS (“Sementes”). Its aims were to help children, giving them the tools required for social integration (and taking advantage of all the work previously done, especially of all the relationships previously established). This project was submitted in partnership with local authorities and the “Doctors of the World” institution.

As stated above, this project is sponsored by the Escolhas Programme, which allocated an amount of 150.0000 euros for its development (to be carried out over a period of three years).

The team began its work mostly in the streets, as mediators and problem-solvers for adolescents, but is now able to work through a Centre-based structure, since the local authority provided them with a building. This operates as a Community Centre attended mainly by children and adolescents from the community (the target group is children from 6 to 24 years old), although everyone in the community is welcome there. The staff today includes 3 monitors, one neighbourhood mediator, and one cleaning lady.

Since this is a project which will last for three years and bearing in mind the principles operating as guidelines for the project, it was always very clear that the development of the organization and of the Centre provided by the local authority had to be carried out in close connection with the children of the community (and the community themselves). Thus, the children always saw this as a space of their own, a space run by them which needed to be looked after and cared for by them.

The Centre is open from 2 pm to 9 pm, and sometimes opening hours are extended to 1 am, if there is a special activity taking place that day (for instance, they once held a Fado singing session – Fado is a typical Portuguese song, and there are a few Fado singers and a strong tradition of Fado singing in the neighbourhood).

The Centre has a common area where children can play or read when they are not attending any other workshops. There is the administrative office, where staff meetings are held, and where coordinators and monitors can plan their activities (they also use the room as an office to help the older children do their CVs and look for job opportunities).

There are three rooms where different activities are carried out: these activities include computer classes, and since there is an emphasis on self-learning, the children are allowed to use these facilities by themselves, learning how to use computers, the Internet, and create e-mail accounts, etc., on their own. There is also group study, and this includes doing the homework. There are specific workshops for sewing, painting, theatre, *capoeira* (a Brazilian fighting art). There are English lessons. There is also a space called “the Community Space” which has a café run by the older adolescents and young adults attending the Centre. It is open to adults in the community.

Another set of activities include what is called “Community Volunteering”, and this includes a set of actions developed within the community by these children to promote and to increase the quality of life of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, which in turn includes painting walls and buildings, cleaning the streets (since this neighbourhood is considered dangerous, Council cleaning teams won’t go there, so litter often piles up in the streets).

Mediators are very important in this project, and that is why it is always valuable to train young people from the neighbourhood as mediators between the community and the outside world.

In spite of lack of time and lack of qualifications, parents frequently engage in their children’s activities (sometimes they come and help their children doing their homework); this has to do with the fact that from the beginning parents were always allowed to come into the Centre to see what their children were doing there.

The coordinators of the project act as mediators between the community and broader society, especially when it comes to other institutions such as the banks, the courts, etc. People usually come in here in search of someone to help them understand a specific situation related to payment of rent, fine, or loans. The project managed to get a lawyer to work free of charge to help with these situations.

Because there is a partnership with Doctors of the World, they not only provide health service coverage (such as vaccines, medical appointments) but also help in the work of administration, working in the project for a couple of hours a week.

The Centre is open all year long, including August (in fact the only time of the year when no-one can go on vacation). They sometimes open at weekends if an activity is taking place.

Impact of the project

The impact of this project has to do with the idea that children are responsible for everything that happens in the Centre, and in the neighbourhood, and ultimately in their lives. The coordinators act as mere mediators and help if help is needed, but all the tools are provided for them to be able to look after themselves. Thus, this project also works as an informal educational space.

Answers are being provided to try to solve the high rates of school drop out, by creating new spaces and new study methods. This is particularly important in the case of the gypsy children, especially girls, who are sometimes forced to leave school at the age of 12 (when they have their first period).

An important aspect of work within the community, for children, is that this project aims to teach these children new education and employment skills, such as self-learning and self-employment. Examples of the latter are related, for instance, to the idea of having the older adolescents in charge of creating a small bar which is open a few nights a week – the local authorities have already promised them that if business goes well, they will give them a little shop near the Centre that they can run on their own. Examples of the former are: a group of gypsy girls have been improving their reading and writing by learning how to use the Internet on their own and how to create an e-mail account so that they

can send e-mails to their favourite football player, a gypsy young man by the name of Ricardo Quaresma (children are allowed to use the computer room on their own). Again, this was possible only because there is a special room for gypsy girls who cannot attend school nor be in the same space with other boys, from a certain age onwards.

In one of the many community meetings held, the project coordinators realized that some of the children were being taken out of school because their families (sometimes a single widowed grandmother or grandfather) could not afford to keep them in school; in such cases, the coordinators again worked as mediators, and showed these families several options, including helping them to apply for family benefits, a form of financial support given to children whilst attending school.

“Qualify to Include” Association (Associação Qualificar para Incluir)

Porto

Escolhas Programme – Project “Qualify” (Qualificar)

Socio-economic context

This association provides support and OSC services to children and families living in several disadvantaged (social housing) neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city of Porto.

These neighbourhoods (Pasteleira, Rainha D. Leanor, Lagarteiro, Contumil, Sé, Amial) have high levels of poverty, social exclusion, child neglect and school drop-out.

Reconstruction of the project

The Association is an NGO (ISSP) founded in 2001 and financially supported by the Ministry of Social Security, by specific programmes (Escolhas) and by families.

The main targets are young teenagers from disadvantaged areas within the city of Porto, who are exposed to a variety of social and economic problems which endanger their healthy development (families with severe cases of drug abuse or drug dealing, lone parents families, abuse, poverty, and harsh processes of stereotyping).

The purpose of this association is to create learning processes which prevent school drop-out, and to compensate for the lack of professional qualifications and the resulting financial dependence, as well as to prevent the social disruption which leads to delinquency and exclusion.

This association works directly within the community, trying to develop spaces where children and adolescents can take advantage of the educational opportunities needed to achieve a good job as well as good, healthy development.

The Escolhas project, QUALIFICAR (to qualify) emerged in this context from a survey carried out by social workers from the Higher Institute for Social Service in Porto (ISSSP) on children and adolescents from the most disadvantaged areas and local schools that identified high rates of school drop-out.

The headquarters of the project are in the centre of the city, allowing the association to support children from several disadvantaged areas nearby. The facilities belong to the charitable organization *Misericórdia* in Porto.

The staff of the project includes 25 technicians, as well as social workers, psychologists, teachers, sociologists, a cook, one helper and two drivers.

OSC services are open from 9 am to 7 pm. At weekends and on holidays the services are organized on the basis of a cultural activities timetable, as some of the children are taken home by foster families. These foster families (“familias de afecto”) are formed by people who belong to the staff, and who are mainly interns from the Higher Institute for Social Service in Porto (social workers, teachers, or psychologists). These children (above the age of 15) are taken home at weekends and on holidays not only to develop a wide range of cultural activities, but also to get to know other family and socio-economic contexts. (Currently efforts are being made to extend this project to children aged 6 to 11).

These OSC services are targeted at a group of 25 children aged 6 to 11, and a group of 45 older children aged 15 to 19. There is also a close relationship with the families of the children. Actions developed with children aged 11 to 15 take place within the school itself, in a close relationship with teachers, and also include activities outside school hours (taking place in and near Porto).

The activities developed in the OSC services include the creation of a study-motivation workshop, an English club and a reading club, as well as a cinema club, dance, theatre and percussion classes, the creation of a newspaper, field trips, as well as the organization of debates concerning different jobs, careers and the labour market; there is also an international student exchange programme.

For the group of children aged 6 to 12, activities are mainly focused on reading abilities and mathematical skills. Activities seek to stimulate the habit of reading as well as a good understanding of concepts and the construction of sentences. With regard to their mathematical skills, actions comprise the ability to form a logical thought, as well as good notions of time and space.

These children are closely monitored by the technicians, who organize and direct daily after-class study support activities, liaising closely with teachers from the local school. This close relationship also includes a thorough monitoring of children’s absences (from school) and their punctuality, as well as their school materials and the performance of the teacher-allocated tasks. Activities also take place during the weekend in order to consolidate matters learnt at school, but especially to avoid empty spaces when children are abandoned, left alone, or sometimes left under the bad influences of their peers. Within this framework, it is very important to introduce these children to activities like going to the cinema, museums or the beach, as well as to encourage social contacts with well-structured families, an important condition for the development of cognitive, affective and relatedness abilities.

The work undertaken has promoted close relationships with teachers from the local schools, as well as with parents and families. Parents and families are involved in their children’s activities whenever possible, with the aim of making their relationship stronger. Whenever parents are unemployed, internships and workshops are provided in order to improve their skills and professional curricula.

Also, whenever necessary, parents are called in to help in the resolution of conflicts or problems that might occur with their children in the family and in school. Family, school and OSC services work together in order to provide the best answers to solve problems that concern the entire household.

Within the association, there is also a group of adults who went back to school with the aim of investing in their formal education. This allows them, on the one hand, to be closer to their children’s schooling and, on the other hand, to apply for better, more highly qualified jobs.

Impact of the project

This association plays an important role within the context of the city, and is called upon by several educational institutions and by families themselves, who are aware of the results accomplished with other children and adolescents from the neighbourhoods. In fact, the increasing number of people trying to join this project is itself proof that it is well-designed.

The aim of the project is to provide care for low-income families, trying to prevent these children from being socially excluded and to provide them with a broader understanding of their surroundings.

In doing so, the institution (the emphasis is on the specific project participating in the Escolhas programme) carries out a set of activities to give these children healthy development opportunities. This includes study support groups and activities that stimulate the children's reading and study habits, and also activities which make it easier for children to study specific subjects which they normally find more difficult (such as mathematics). This has effects on the school drop-out levels, for instance, which have decreased (and will eventually decrease even more, since the earlier these initiatives take place, the stronger the impact).

Cultural activities are also of great importance, and children are often taken outside the neighbourhood in order to introduce them to a larger view of the world; furthermore, by being able to try out other family contexts (when taken home by foster families on holidays or at the weekend) children have contact with emotional realities and socialization processes otherwise out of their reach.

Results in terms of parental involvement are also very good: parents have undertaken several courses given within the Institution (literacy courses, life-long learning courses or occupational training) in attempts to improve their skills and their formal educational qualifications so as to obtain better jobs and also to provide better care and help to their children.

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