

Cross-perspectives of social actors on failure and drop-out of Gypsies/Roma: focus groups in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto, Portugal

Título

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Abstract

In Portugal, schooling is a universal constitutional right for all, but in the case of the Gypsies, high rates of illiteracy and school drop-out continue to occur, despite the educational and social policies introduced after the implementation of the democratic system in Portugal (1974) and, most recently, the national strategy for the integration of Roma (2013).

The fact is that the conclusion of compulsory schooling is still rare among Roma people, even among the new generations, and there is a huge gap between schooling by Gypsies and non-Gypsies, revealing inequalities in access to this constitutional right.

The purpose of this communication is to present a multidimensional analysis of the perspectives of several social actors involved in the educational process in vulnerable urban spaces, based on results gathered through nine focus groups held in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon (four) and Porto (five) with the participation of teachers, technicians and Gypsies, which allow us to know and present various perspectives on schooling. These results are part of a larger qualitative study that took place between 2013 and 2015 and whose main objective was to identify and understand some of the key factors for the continuity (or drop-out) of school and the success (or failure) of the Gypsies.

The confrontation of different perspectives permitted identify obstacles that favors early school leaving or the failure of Gypsy children and young people, but also allows us to see new social outlines in tackling this issue and new challenges to social integration.

Keywords: Gypsies; schooling; social differences; inequalities

Introduction

In Portugal, schooling is a universal constitutional right for all, but in the case of the Gypsies, high rates of illiteracy and school drop-out continue to occur, despite the educational and social policies introduced after the implementation of the democratic system in Portugal (1974) and, most recently, the national strategy for the integration of Roma people (2013).



The fact is that the conclusion of compulsory schooling is still rare among Roma people, even among the new generations, and there is a huge gap between schooling by Gypsies and non-Gypsies, revealing inequalities in access to this constitutional right.

This paper presents some results obtained in the metropolitan area of Lisbon and Porto between 2013-2015 through a qualitative methodology, concerning the perception by different social actors (gypsy people, teachers, technicians and mediators) about the factors underlying early school drop out of the Roma population and difficulties in fulfilling compulsory schooling.

Social and Theoretical context

In Portugal the conclusion of compulsory schooling is still rare among Roma people, even among the new generations, and there is a huge gap between schooling by Gypsies and non-Gypsies, revealing inequalities in access to this constitutional right.

Despite the social and economic transformations in the Portuguese society the Ciganos/Gypsies continue having problems of exclusion and poverty, which is the poorest ethnic group, with poorer housing conditions, less educated and the main target of racism and discrimination in European societies. In Portugal, despite some social and educational policies the majority of Gypsies continue to have low levels of education, high rates of school failure, dropout and illiteracy and low rates of graduates with higher education, compared to non-Ciganos. In relation of this aspect recent data of national sample survey carried out in 1599 Gypsies indicate that 27.1% can not read or write; 4.8% can read and write but did not complete grade school, 19.2% attended the 1st cycle but not completed; 22.5% had 1 cycle. Only 13.7% completed the 2nd cycle, 7.2% the 3rd cycle, 2.3% secondary education, 0.4% average / vocational education and 0.1% higher education (Mendes, Magano and Candeias, 2014).

Since 2009 in Portugal de compulsory schooling are 12 years, organized in 3 Cycles since of 6 years old until the 15 years old, and de high school between the 15 -18 years old. The change of 9 years of mandatory schooling to 12 years complicated the gap between Gypsies and non-Gypsies.

According the survey of Ministry of Education (DGEEC, 2018) exist High retention rates. In the universe of 10349 in academic year of 2016/2017, 48% of Gypsy students have one or more retentions. and the high number of school drop-outs is very visible: the total number in the 1st cycle is 5,9% ; 11,3% in the 2^o cycle and 8,8%, in the 3^o cycle of EB with non-conclusion of the mandatory schooling in the case of the girls (Mendes, 2007; Casa-Nova, 2009; Parliamentary Committee on Etnics, Society and Culture, 2009; Vicente, 2009; Magano, 2010, Nicolau, 2010, Mendes, Magano e Candeias, 2014, Silva, 2014, etc.).

Methodology

The results presented in this paper are part of a larger qualitative study carried out simultaneously in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto. Several qualitative techniques were used, such as the collection and analysis of national and international bibliography on Gypsies and Education, interviews were conducted with institutional actors, ethnographies were carried out in selected territories (in three neighbourhoods in each metropolitan area), school ethnographies, in-depth interviews with Gypsies and focus groups with various actors in the educational processes (Gypsy people, teachers, technicians and mediators). In a first stage of the research were made 36 interviews (18 in each metropolitan area - Lisbon and Porto). After the delimitation of the principal



territories were living Gypsy people in the two metropolitan areas were made 87 interviews with Gypsy persons.

In this paper we will focus our analysis on the results obtained through 9 focal groups (4 in the MLA and 5 in the MPA) in which they participated teachers mediators and local technicians.

According the ministry of education in academic year 2016/2017 were registered 10762 gypsy students in the Basic School: 1945 in pre-school; 5879 in the 1st cycle, 3078 in the 2nd cycle; 1805 in the 3rd cycle. In the secondary we have 256 students. The total of Gypsies students identified were 12963. However we need to read this results with attention because is not a census but a free survey to the schools, not a mandatory process of response.

Results

Through the opinions of the participants in the several focus group it is possible to verify that in the contemporary societies the Gypsies have a lot of opportunities fort to do the integration in relation to the school. To do that are available an ensemble of public policies in the education area and social protection (PIEF, TEIP, EFA, Choices Program, etc.).

In relation to the Gypsies we have today more knowledge with the production of doctoral thesis, master dissertations, research project, etc. But we have too the differential perception on groups and Gypsies families, i.e., perception of differences about groups and gypsies families and several ways of life of Gypsies peoples. Despite the constraints and difficulties more Gypsy people have the mandatory school and the frequency of High school.

In the last years the state assumes the “Gypsy question” specially with the national strategy to integration of Gypsies Communities, since 2013 and the support to shorts projects and (FAPE - National Strategy Support Fund, 2015, 2016) and too the Opré Chavalé (with scholarships to university Gypsies).

With the results of focus group is possible to have an overview of different kinds of participants and to have devolution and discussion of results in the territories studied. The aim was to collect the opinion of the participants and to promote ideas about related topics with schooling of Gypsy people living in referred neighbour having as support results obtained through collect information instruments before applied (interviews with technicians and coordinators, interviews with Gypsies and ethnographic work in neighbourhoods and schools).

The fieldwork took place between November 2014 and February 2015 with the realization of nine focal groups in the two metropolitan areas (5 in the Metropolitan Porto Area and 4 in the Metropolitan Lisbon Area) were participated in the 9 focus groups 71 persons (33 MLA and 28 in MPA – people with whom we had previous contact), teachers, technicians and Gypsies that allow us to present several perspectives on the issue of schooling. In MLA, the focus group it was conducted in Union of Parishes of Camarate, Unhos and Apelação (Quinta da Fonte neighbour), Ajuda (Bairro 2 de Maio, Escola Francisco Arruda), Falagueira-Venda Nova (Casal do Silva neighbour). In the case of MPA the focus group it was conducted in Matosinhos city (Biquinha neighbour), Porto city (Aldoar neighbour and Campanhã – Lagarteiro neighbour and Cerco do Porto neighbour).

In terms of the structure and organization of focus groups 1st were made an characterization of the groups and participants (aimed at having representatives of schools, project technicians, technicians



of public bodies, mediators, Gypsies; in a 2nd Approach to public policies created in response to factors of exclusion, namely of children, young people and Roma families. This approach is carried out considering a segmentation: the perceptions of gypsy families and intervention technicians, whose results we had already analyzed and adapted to each of the territories.

In a third moment was done introduction of more generic topics, such as the implementation of domestic and distance education, prejudice issues, among others.

In general, from a technical and teaching point of view argue that gypsy pupils, in order to cope with difficulties, need very individual and technical support for each of them, and resources and the establishment of relationships of trust are necessary. Due to the constraints faced by teachers (many students, reduction of teachers and lack of technical support) it is very difficult to move towards the development of alternative curricula.

However, from the point of view of a Gypsy mother sometimes the drop-out of school is seen as a “natural” event, sometimes due to an early marriage with the acceptance and agreement of the parents. But also, we can see that it is becoming frequent to argue that young people should continue their studies longer to access a better life.

Final notes: What are the key factors for success and continuity in school?

Comparing perspectives of different stakeholders in focus groups exist great difficulties to stay in the school system especially from the 4th year and in the transition from 2nd to 3rd cycles of Basic Education. In general, the participants have no idea how to ensure the school continuing to complete the mandatory school until the 12^o year. This is not very understood by young people, parents, teachers and technicians.

Through the strong difficulties we can see some positive aspects as the more kindergarten attendance; almost total integration of Gypsy children in the first cycle (regular education); the Reduction of absenteeism and drop out in the first cycle perhaps due to impact of compensatory measures; greater openness towards school and continuity of schooling when one of the parents is not a Gypsy.

In general terms, new opportunities are referred to by all, for example, the identification of reference situations for Gypsies at the level of education, training, activism and association and employment; empowerment of women (new generation of young and young adults); new perspectives about school and social opportunities that lead to forms of social change; the recognition of the need to promote dialogue between all those involved in the educational process; from the point of view of contents and pedagogical practices it is important to differentiate according to the origins and culture of the children.

Finally, the presence of a Gypsy mediator in schools is highly appreciated by the technicians, teachers and parents but his/her job has to be much more than to address emergency situations; he or she has to have conditions to develop an effective work in social and cultural mediation. Other proposals are: to have a greater involvement of families in school/participation in school activities, participation in meetings; inclusion of children and youths in ‘mixed’ classes (avoid concentration of Gypsy students in the same classes, continuous training of teachers - use of certified Gypsy mediators, stability of the teachers (greater residence time in the territories and greater knowledge of the families), continuity of interventions (continuity of projects, implementations of good practice and working in partnership).





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