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Children, citizenship and crisis: towards a participatory agenda

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INTRODUCTION

Children's citizenship has become a major theme in contemporary social policy and science debates, and children's rights have gradually emerged as benchmarks for many national, regional or local policy narratives, consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989). Indeed, the UNCRC concept of citizenship encompasses, for the first time, participation, provision but also participation rights. The attention has focused not only on children's "superior interest" but also on their agency capacities and their participatory rights, considering them active and competent actors in social relationships, who have a voice, irrespective of those of adults. Crises, caused by disasters, economic and social adversities are moments of disruption where the pre-existing unequal social ties between individuals or groups in society become more visible, evidencing different access to citizenship status. Children have very often been portrayed as passive and helpless victims or as vulnerable recipients of aid in crisis situations, with little attention given to their ability to perceive and interpret these phenomena, or what they can contribute to public policies that address these issues.

The chapter discusses the relation between children, citizenship and crisis, based on two research projects focussing on the perspectives and roles of children in crises, either of an economic nature ("Portuguese Children and the Crisis") or climate change related disasters ("CUIDAR: Cultures of Disaster Resilience among Children and Young People"). It addresses the importance of including children's perspectives in crisis narratives (the right to be heard) and advocates a participatory agenda recognising children's agency and competence to be active participants in policy processes that concern not only their present, but also their future (the right to participate). It ultimately supports the importance of engaging children from an early age in citizenship practices that benefit society as a whole not only in the present, but also in the future.

CHILDREN AND CITIZENSHIP

In contemporary Western societies, "children have an unsettled relationship with the status of citizenship" (Larkins 2014, 7). Although they are given provision, protection and some participation rights (UNCRC 1989), their full legal or political citizenship is not recognised. Children (as once women or

blacks) do not accede to some exclusive adult privileges or obligations in the public sphere: they are denied the right to vote or to be elected; they cannot make contracts; they do not have financial or economic responsibilities. The word “minor”, designating individuals under 18 years old, illustrates their “lower”, “inferior” position in this domain. In the aftermath of World War II, T. Marshall (1950) proposed citizenship as a complex multidimensional concept, involving three dimensions depicting historical stages, but naturally designed for adults: civic, political and social rights. If children, as individuals, are implicitly embraced by civic and social forms of citizenship, they are certainly excluded from its political dimensions. This is not an accidental or natural eviction, instead it is based on cultural conceptions.

Liberal and formal perspectives on citizenship, on the one hand, and traditional representations of childhood, on the other, underlie this citizenship divide between generations.

First, citizenship conceived as an abstract, legal or social status conveyed by nation-states to rational autonomous individuals excludes children on the basis of their vulnerability and dependence: their “unreadiness”, as Cockburn (2012, 3) remarks. In contrast to adults, children would not have “come of age” or lack “the competences associated with citizenship, such as rationality and independence” (Larkins 2014, 8). They are “in need” of being prepared and trained as future citizens.

One might ask, however, if this is a clear-cut distinction. In “risk societies” (Beck 1992) or in “liquid modernity” scenarios (Bauman 2000), adulthood has become a never-ending, unpredictable changing process of searching for fulfilment in relational settings. Adults, like children, very often seem “in the making”, unready, unprepared or vulnerable to face varied social injunctions. This can be acknowledged for individuals facing the impact of an economic crisis, where evidence of vulnerable and dependent adult groups in need of protection (not to mention the provision of basic material goods and services) is strong. Adulthood is very often an open, incomplete and unfinished experience of relational or institutional dependences. In addition, the abstract notion of “citizen” hides the fact that adults (just like children), depending on their social position and power, have unequal competences to use rights and face duties. Even in this traditional framework, some groups of children are not more vulnerable than some groups of adults.

Second, the association of liberal citizenship with the public sphere reinforced children exclusion, as home was the right place for them to be.

However, when child labour became a major issue in industrial Europe, and schooling appeared later as the predominant form of socialisation, the indoor-outdoor border became more unclear. Adults work in the labour market, but don't children work at schools as well? (Qvortrup 2001). Also, feminists brought citizenship issues into the private realm, rehabilitating the home as a place of production and gender domination; and claimed body, sexual, reproductive rights as crucial dimensions of citizenship. More recently, minority sexual groups coming out from a long standing social quarantine, claiming their right to visibility, have reinforced the extension of citizenship rights from the public to the private sphere. Borders between adults and children have thus been blurred in some times and spaces, and hybrid generational categories reveal the limitations of a traditional concept of liberal citizenship conveyed, in abstract, to (all) adults and denied to (all) children.

Furthermore, hegemonic social representations of children and childhood, very often supported on scientific or philosophical lines of thought, have contributed to reinforce adult-centric views on citizenship. As regards social sciences, during the 1980s a new paradigm emerged advocating childhood as a social construction and a contingent product of time and space, contrasting with biological or psychological views considering it a universal or abstract condition (Almeida 2009; Prout 2005; Jenks 1992). Consequently, childhood is a heterogeneous condition, where gender, social class, ethnicity and age groups introduce difference and diversity. Furthermore, conceptual autonomy of children in research (and society) is defended, and so children's relationships are worthy of study on their own, irrespective of adults' perspectives. Importantly, children are considered as "beings in the present" and not just "adults in the making" (Harden et al. 2000) or "human becomings" (Soares 1998). In the same vein, Sirota (1998) refused to reduce childhood to a "forerunner moment" or a transitional stage to adulthood, in a continuum from an unachieved, immature or uncompleted being to an immutable and completed adult. Also, children agency is put forward: instead of *tabula rasa* or passive recipients of social norms and practices, they are competent and active in the construction of their lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live.

Hence, giving voice to children in science has become a major challenge for researchers, ultimately contributing to methodological innovations in the field. Participatory methodologies enhancing child agency in all research stages has gained increased importance. This turn cannot be dissociated from

contemporary political and children/adult rights movements demanding more inclusive and participatory forms of “active citizenship” (Trevisan 2014).

A major milestone was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN 1989), where child citizenship was, for the first time, conceived as not just a matter of holding individual rights to protection, provision, but also to participation (Beazley et al. 2009). UNCRC announces the “superior interest of the child” as the primary consideration in making decisions that may affect them. It mentions that children’s opinions should be taken into consideration in decisions taken on their behalf. It assigns the child the “freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kind” and the freedom of thought, conscience and religion. International binding citizenship standards are now established concerning children’s status and participation in contemporary societies. Not surprisingly, commentators highlight the gap between “the rhetoric and ideals of the UNCRC and the reality on the ground” (Cockburn 2012, 169). This is particularly evident during historical times of crisis, where extreme events or situations disrupt the daily order. The topic is discussed in the following section.

CITIZENSHIP AT STAKE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Large scale and recent political, economic and environmental global turbulence has made living through critical events more frequently experienced or perceived, both at the local and global levels, in “developed” countries. They are less and less seen as unusual, isolated or unique situations typical of distant societies, but have all fuelled a growing sense of vulnerability and insecurity among citizens who tend to represent the world as an increasingly vulnerable and not-taken-for-granted place (Furedi 2007). Moreover, predatory media coverage (Kleist and Jansen 2016; Lewis 2010) amplifies their importance, omnipresence and familiarity. In this respect, children are typical instruments to announce and report social or natural crises with devastating impact; in contrast to normal periods where their visibility is rather hidden or discrete, children (or certain groups of children) acquire an unprecedented prominence in images of victimised or at-risk population in critical scenarios.

Seen as ruptures in the social fabric of everyday life (Nolas 2015), crises appear as revelatory moments (Solway 1994). Before-after ruptures can reveal, on a brutal scale, the pre-existing unequal social ties between individuals and groups (Vaughn 2012). Divides between privileged vs. deprived, dominant vs. dominated, protected vs. vulnerable groups emerge in their full strength. An illustration of these cleavages lies in the generational order that is often pulled inside out through the lens of a crisis. Indeed, statistical data uncovers the fact that children – compared to adults – are very often the most vulnerable part of a population affected by a natural or social crisis, and its impact can lead to dramatic violations of fundamental protection and provision rights (Peek 2008; Morrow 2009).

So crises are associated either with occasional or breakdown events or they can emerge throughout historical lengthy processes embracing time, their impact affecting the present, but also the future (Baez Ullberg 2017; Hay 1996). Interestingly, the relation to a coming time is the key factor founding children's presence in rescue or emergency public policies: they are envisaged as "future citizens", requiring protection here and now, so that later adulthoods are not compromised. They are perceived as the "inheritors", in the long term, of the major problems created by adults today (Morrow 2009). Along top-down hierarchical programmes and initiatives designed by adults, children either appear as the object of measures taken to mitigate the negative impact of a crisis; or "they are targeted as an audience for education" (Johnson et al. 2014), to be trained in order to learn basic prevention and emergency rules. On the other hand, children can also be used as vessels to accede adults and encourage behavioural change (Schmidt e Guerra 2013). They are anyway excluded from decision-making processes where strategies are discussed and planned. Rather than partners in crime, children are systematically depicted as recipients of aid, helpless victims of external adverse conditions, which they would passively go through under the guidance of adults (Gibbs et al. 2013).

When it comes to children's citizenship, crises open windows revealing the fact that they are in the front line regarding harm and negative impact, which can severely compromise provision and protection rights. Second, they very clearly unveil the prevalence of "children at risk" and "unreadiness" paradigms, which ignore or belittle their agency, competences and participatory rights.

TOWARDS CHILDREN'S CITIZENSHIP: GIVING A VOICE, INVOLVING THEM IN DECISION-MAKING

We present and discuss in this chapter results of two research projects recently carried out at the ICS, regarding two types of critical disruption: a social, economic crisis (Portugal, 2008-2012); and climate change related disasters. We bring both together into discussion as examples of distinct methodological experiences dealing with children's citizenship. The first illustrates the importance of giving children a voice, capturing their narratives about concrete daily experiences and introducing their perspectives (irrespective of those of adults) on social discourses. "But voice is not enough" (Lundy 2007). Departing from a participatory framework, the second was expressly designed to work in the field with children, involving them as partners in collective discussions and actions, in order to produce recommendations to decision-makers on disaster risk reduction policies.

Commissioned by UNICEF Portugal, "The Impact of the Crisis on Portuguese Children" intended to listen to children¹ and report practices and perceptions about how their everyday life experiences had been affected by the drop of family income and rising levels of unemployment. Face to face interviews were carried out at home with 77 children, 39 boys/38 girls of two age groups (8-12 and 14-17 years old) during March-May 2013 (Wall et al. 2015). The qualitative sample ensured diversity of childhood conditions: it involved boys and girls, living in urban, suburban and rural areas of North/Centre/South, living in different family forms (biparental, reconstituted and monoparental families) of higher, middle and working classes.

The latter, "CUIDAR – Cultures of Disaster Resilience among Children and Young People" (2015-2018) is a European project aiming to enhance the resilience of children in urban communities to disasters, and to enable disaster respondents to meet their needs more effectively (Delicado et al. 2017). Albufeira and Loures were the two cities involved in the consultation process. In each location, we worked with two different age groups: 4th graders and 9th graders. In Albufeira, a Y4 class of 24 children aged between 9 and 12 years old participated in the workshops. It was gender balanced (13 girls, 11 boys), and very diverse: 16 pupils were Portuguese, while the remaining had other nationalities (Ukraine, Moldavia, India and Equator). The volunteer

1 Following the CRC, a child is here considered an individual under the age of 18.

group of 9th graders was composed of 10 14 year old students (8 girls, 2 boys), from quite a homogenous background. In Loures, we worked with a 4th grade class of 26 children (11 girls and 15 boys), with most children coming from a low to middle socioeconomic background. The 9th grade group was composed of 3 boys and 8 girls aged between 14 and 15 years old. Five had a foreign background - either family origin or experience of living abroad (South Africa, Luxemburg, Cape Verde, Brazil and Bulgaria).

THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD

“The Impact of the Crisis on Portuguese Children: voices of children, public policy and social indicators”, carried out at the ICS in 2013, aimed to provide a thorough and updated picture of childhood in Portugal in times of crisis (Wall et al. 2015).² Two types of analysis were undertaken. Based on available statistics and studies, the evolution of material conditions of children and their families in Portuguese society was depicted based on key indicators over the time period 2005-2012. Public policies impacting on their lives and launched to face the economic crisis and austerity measures were also contemplated. Complementary to this extensive approach, a qualitative one was developed, in order to capture the experiences and the perceptions ordinary children had with the crisis, giving them a voice. The aim was to understand – from their own perspective – what the crisis meant for them and how it had affected their everyday lives.

Indicators and studies shared evidence: Portuguese children had been dramatically affected by the crisis. Poverty and inequalities were on the rise all over Europe (Caritas Europe 2015), but their intensity and devastating effects were particularly serious in Southern countries like Portugal. In households suffering from severe material deprivation and poverty, unemployment, underemployment, unprecedented cuts in salaries and in social benefits, and tax increases, children were disproportionately affected, jeopardising or even compromising their fundamental provision and protection rights (Sarmiento et al. 2014).

In 2013, 439 000 children in Portugal were at risk of poverty after social transferences, and since 2008 they were the age group most affected by poverty risk after social transferences (22.4%) and by material deprivation (24.4%),

2 We would like to thank all our Project colleagues for their contribution to our work.

compared to older age groups (+65 or 18-64) (Wall et al. 2015). Available data also indicated that risk of poverty rate in families with children (20.1%) was higher than in families without children (15.6%); among households with dependent children, large families (a couple with 3 or more children) or single-parent ones stood out from the other arrangements (Sarmiento et al. 2014).

Reports in 2013 by the Children and Youth Protection National Committee registered growing numbers and changing patterns of “cases”: higher numbers of children exposed to “deviant behaviour of adult family members” (alcohol or other addictions, domestic violence), a higher proportion of children under 5 signalled by the system (victims of several forms of negligence), increase of school dropout (CPCJ 2014). Material poverty emerged as an experience for many children: for example, following school directors’ accusations of hungry children, the Government launched a special programme to mitigate this problem: “Breakfast at school”. Many schools in deprived areas of the country started, in 2011, to open canteens during holidays to provide meals to children in need (Sarmiento et al. 2014).

Against this background, how did ordinary children perceive the crisis affecting the country or their families? How did they speak about it? How did they describe the impact, if any, on their own lives and those of their friends?

All children interviewed were aware of the “crisis” affecting the country. It was a meaningful word and a known, very problematic reality for them, even though they revealed that the subject had not been directly raised or discussed with them by their own parents (“they want to protect us”) or teachers in schools. They were concerned about it, either because their family was going through a delicate situation, or because their friends were experiencing hard times. Who told them about the crisis? There were no specific informants. They heard and observed people around them; they picked up clues here and there; they saw the news on TV or the Internet. “By chance”, as Nuno (9y) remarked. Daniel (10y) said the same: “In the streets, on TV, on the computer news and my parents debating with my brother as well”. Or Carolina (11y): “I listen to conversations when the family is together”.

The impact of the crisis was “everywhere” but their parents’ work load, unemployment, underemployment, salary cuts and lower family incomes were the most influential factors in shaping new “austerity” routines. Parents seemed always “worried”, “stressed”, “tired”, “working more and more”, “unmotivated”; sometimes they had to migrate, leaving children behind. Concerns were shown that relational family environments, affective ties were or could be

undermined by parents' troubles to earn a living. Crisis was perceived, mainly, as having impact on adults (more than children). As Inês (12y) mentioned: "We don't have to pay, it's our parents. So, they are ultimately the ones who suffer most". Or Rodrigo (16y): "Because they have to pay all the bills and if anyone becomes unemployed, it's them not us. They earn the money and they take care of the family. Young people do not have the same notions: they only think of themselves". Curiously, children themselves reproduce the traditional divide between adults (perceived as beings in the present) and children (adults in the making, frameworked by the future). Sara (15y) summarised this quite expressively: "we study and are preparing our future...but it's our parents who carry the burden, they are always thinking I have to work, I have to do this and that so that food is not missing at home".

Children were terrified of "getting poor". Vanessa (11y, working class) asserted: "If they take our house from us, I'll be forced onto the streets". Joana (9y, working class) expressed her fears: "if there is no money in my family, I'm very afraid...because they're always saying that there is less money, and I'm afraid it will end and then I won't eat. It's terrible!". Inês (12y, upper class) was concerned about "being forced to leave school, about not being able to attend". So, children were able to explain, detail and exemplify the impact of the crisis: on food consumption, for example.

For the working class, there were clear signals of drastic cuts in certain types of food ("meat", "fish", "yoghurts" and "fruit"). The word "sacrifice" often appeared in testimonies. Carlos, aged 10, exemplified: "Mum can't cook our favourite meals anymore...because she has no money to buy...steaks and that kind of stuff". The same with Bernardo (12y): "no more biscuits at home... just water...we don't go out to lunch anymore". Or Fernando (14y): "when there is no food, my parents do this: they don't eat and the food is for us". For the higher classes, the strategy would be rationalisation, savings and avoiding waste. Inês (12y) explained: "before, we had those cereals we loved and now we have to buy those white label ones...we don't like them so much". Rita (16y) noticed: "before, almost every week we had fish, at least twice a week. Not now. Not even once".

Another very important domain affected by the crisis is education. Middle and upper class children mentioned examples, such as being forced to move from one (private) school to another (state school); having to use recycled or low cost school materials, and having to cut back on extra-curricular activities. The following excerpts highlight such cases:

My cousin was at a private school...her parents couldn't pay and she was sent to this school. (Jorge, 12y)

I wanted to buy those pens, but they said: 'Oh...you have so many pens...' but we always want to buy a new thing, don't we? To show our friends. (Rita, 16y)

My mother wanted me to buy folders and not notebooks...because it would just be to fill in with sheets, and much cheaper! (Leonor, 15y)

My mum lost her job...she decided to pull me out of music, gymnastics and English lessons. (Maria, 8y)

Attending free state schools in the present, working class children however share middle and upper class fears for their future education. Would the crisis compromise their expectations? Two examples. Tiago, 14y, upper class: "I'm afraid of my mother and my father being unemployed...and of not being able to continue to study". Joana, 17y, working class, both parents unemployed: "If things go wrong, if my parents do not receive their subsidy next year... because if all goes well, I'll be at university. Otherwise, it will be more difficult for them to support us both, my sister and me". Education is quite a pillar for children and they significantly claim it as a right.

Access to clothes and shoes appeared as a problematic domain as well. Upper class children referred to parental restrictions in order to "avoid buying so much", "buying the minimum and cheaper" and taking advantage of "inheriting clothes". The following excerpts illustrate this new behaviour:

I think that, before, my mum almost every week or every month ...well, whenever she came from shopping, she would bring me a jumper, a hair band, something. Now she does not bring things so often. Because she doesn't go shopping so often. (Carolina, 12y)

We try to buy much less...and I inherit from my eldest cousin...I have lots of cousins from whom I inherit cute clothes. (Inês, 12y)

For working classes, the situation is more serious. Cuts were drastic for some children, as Isabel, Carolina and Rui assert:

My mum stopped buying new clothes for us...We wear the ones we have. Shoes also became rare. Only when we need them. (Isabel, 14y)

My mum buys me clothes...but it is when others don't fit me anymore or they begin to get faded. (Carolina, 11y)

We cannot buy you the tennis shoes you want, because there is the crisis! (Rui, 12y)

Interestingly, some children introduced other dimensions of the crisis related to poverty. Not material ones, but the risk that poverty would bring ravages to their happiness and emotional well-being. Francisco (9y, upper class), related poverty with “no food” but also to being “alone”. Maria (10y, middle class) emphasised that “a poor child is a child who doesn't have the essential things in life... No food and... perhaps not as much love and affection as I do (..) and she hasn't got such a warm place to live as I have at home”. Inês (12y, upper class) mentioned poverty as a synonym of “lack of food, of a comfortable place to sleep and to be, lack of clothes and of heating... lack of happiness. And Gonçalo (15y, working class) explicitly depicted a “poor child” in the following terms: “They have no love, no affection... not enough cuddling”.

To sum up this brief overview, we can conclude that the critical economic macro scenario of the country found a significant place in common children narratives. They were able to recognise the gravity of the economic crisis in their everyday lives and were competent to elaborate coherent discourses on its more serious dimensions and impact. Family budget and family consumption were the most signalled affected domains, but the overall picture included references to threats to children's relational well-being and future expectations. Even if they reported the lack of adult interlocutors (either parents or teachers) on the crisis, children gathered dispersed information on their own about its seriousness and multidimensional nature. And they clearly illustrated how basic protection and provision rights were put at stake by the austerity agenda. The following example is mostly focussed on participation.

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE

Disasters are becoming more frequent and intense round the world, worsened by climate change effects and urbanisation trends. Children, because of their physical vulnerability and their position in society are one of the groups

that suffer most dramatic consequences in these events. In Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policies, they are however often only seen as victims or passive recipients of aid requiring protection (Tanner 2010), or as targets for disaster education (Jonhson et al. 2014). Their needs and experiences, before, during and after disasters are seldom considered, and their competences in terms of responding, recovering and promoting resilience tend to be ignored. This dominant narrative meets traditional views of children as “unready” to accede full participatory rights and, due to this bias, leaves them out of policy decision-making processes.

It is in this context that the United Nations has been working progressively on the inclusion of children’s necessities and perspectives in DRR. As children and young people’s participation in public debates has been increasingly enhanced, following the adoption of Art.12 of the UNCRC (stating the right to be heard in matters that concern them), the UN has been highlighting the importance of including them as active participants in these subjects. This has been reflected in the Sendai framework (UNISDR 2015), by the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), where they are explicitly included as stakeholders, and are seen not only as victims of disasters but as agents of change who must be given the opportunity participate in DRR programmes “in accordance with legislation, national practice and educational curricula” (UNISDR 2015, Ref. 2, 20)

In Portugal, although children are often considered targets of DRR programmes and risk education initiatives, “civil protection and risk education culture still tends to see them mainly as a passive and vulnerable group, to be safeguarded and educated, rather than listened to and engaged in the protection of their community” (Delicado et al. 2017, 225). Exposure to the UNISDR initiatives and international best practices is slowly changing this attitude, but a lack of participatory culture and of deprioritisation of this issue has so far hampered the process of children’s effective DRR participation in the country.

CUIDAR – Cultures of Disaster Resilience among Children and Young People is a European research and intervention project (2015-2018)³ that aims to strengthen the resilience of children in DRR processes, namely by fostering the inclusion of their voices and needs in the local emergency plans and

3 The CUIDAR project—CUIDAR Cultures of Disaster Resilience among Children and Young People—has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 653753. We would like to thank our Portuguese coordinator, Ana Delicado and our CUIDAR colleagues in the UK, Greece, Italy, and Spain for their contribution to our work.

strategies. Coordinated by the University of Lancaster, it has five institutional partners, including a team from the ICS-ULisboa. After a scoping analysis that enabled the mapping of children's participation in these matters across Europe, each country undertook participatory workshops with children and youth in several locations in order to listen to their ideas and capacitate them to later interact with decision makers, in mutual learning events.

The Portuguese team chose to focus on climate change related disasters. The project goals were: to better understand the risk perception, disaster needs and capacities of children and young people in urban societies; to strengthen children's understanding of emergencies and the actions they can take to prepare themselves, their families and their communities in urban contexts; and to improve communication, awareness and understanding amongst disaster responders and policy makers about children and young people's needs in disasters.

During four workshop sessions, groups were introduced to the issues of climate change related disasters. The main risks in their community, schools and family homes were identified; one risk was selected for further exploration, producing messages addressing its prevention, response and recovery. While the workshops obeyed a common framework at the European level, the activities proposed in Portugal were designed by the national team, considering the need to make the "capacitation" process as participatory as possible. As Rashid, Ronan and Towers (2015) recall, DRR is an action oriented field, therefore active and student-centred learning strategies are key to making the capacitation process more effective. In the CUIDAR case, and relying on teacher support, the pedagogical tools employed to elicit children's thoughts on the subject were inquiry and interactive learning strategies requiring research in the community and debates and interviews in class, along with art based methodologies that included drawing, poster designs and video making.

In both localities, children and young people deemed floods as their main concern, considering their research upon recent disasters in the area. While the risk was the same, the appropriation of the topic and the messages proposed varied, according not only to local contexts but also to their experiences or specific capacities. For instance, in Albufeira we worked with an extremely diverse recently formed 4th grade class, with some facing language barriers and other special educational needs. This required some adaptation of the planned activities, namely recurring mostly to drawing rather than written forms of communication, and the class illustrated basic prevention, response and

recovery measures. The 4th grade class in Loures was more homogenous and with the teachers' help created a video and a flyer about flood prevention using child friendly language. The 9th grade youngsters were more autonomous in choosing their own messages. If one group chose also to focus on DDR measures and proposed the creation of civil protection youth clubs; in another case, the youngsters went far further in their appropriation of the topic, relating it to the bad quality of their own school infrastructure, which was not well equipped to face heavy rain or harsh weather conditions.

The capacitation phase was followed by a dialogical one, with the creation of “mutual learning events”. Similar to the “structured dialogues” framework promoted by the European Union⁴, these events consisted of a peer learning exchange where several stakeholders of a given community (e.g. local mayors and council members, education and civil protection officers, school heads, teachers and parents) met children that participated in the workshops. The latter presented their ideas and proposals, got feedback, asked questions and debated recommendations or the feasibility of some proposals. These events are used to foster children's negotiation and expression competences, and also require stakeholder sensitisation for hearing young people, through mutual questioning and exposure to different viewpoints and expectations. If some stakeholders were used to interact with children, others had to make an effort to embrace different communication codes. While mutual learning events ultimately aimed to find solutions, and bring change to communities, it was not possible for all proposals to be realised, due to limitations in resources and divergent political priorities. As in many other participatory processes, change is incremental and requires more time to be effectively implemented. Nevertheless, in both mutual learning events, children's ideas were greeted with enthusiasm, and the civil protection clubs' proposal was welcomed. Elsewhere, the 4th grade flyer was adopted by all the schools of the municipality. Regarding the requested school infrastructure renewal, although those in power recognised this need, they also highlighted the dependence on national public funds.

The engagement process culminated with a national dissemination event where, once again, young people had the opportunity to interact with invited stakeholders, through roundtables on three topics: participatory risk education; children and youth as active participants in disaster risk management in the communities; children and youth as active participants in school safety. The

4 For further information: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/dialogue_en.

groups debated barriers and protective factors in all 3 areas, and suggested solutions. Lack of time was identified by all groups as a major factor impeding not only the participation of young people in the volunteer DDR activities in their community, but also the implementation of more participatory pedagogies in risk education. In fact, the overwhelming school schedules pointed out by youngsters once again reflected the need to tame and surveille children, that are then deprived of the autonomy to freely determine how to use their own time. On the other hand, the need for greater information about DDR achieved through contact with others with experience on the subject was also suggested, with the youngsters recognising that the project provided them with a critical knowledge on the topic that they would not otherwise gain.

Hence, this engagement process raised awareness in children and young people on the topic of disasters, with conceptual maps showing an increase of vocabulary and with children themselves recognising that “We learned that floods aren’t fun” (Pedro, 4th grade) or that “I learned that we shouldn’t think about natural disasters only when they occur” (Vanda, 9th grade).

However, the main goal of this process was not educational but participatory, that is, to create an opportunity for the participation of children in a matter that concerned their present and future, and from which they tend to be excluded: climate change related disasters, an issue that sets itself up as a matter of intergenerational justice⁵. By thinking and debating the reality they lived in, and by conceiving actions or proposals that improve both their wellbeing of that of their communities, they have internalised a civic conscience and gathered skills that will allow them to motivate their peers to participate in similar projects, thus becoming empowered agents of their communities. In fact, along with the sharing of their ideas with others, children stressed the importance of group work as an opportunity to get relational skills:

In the beginning, I only wanted to skip classes, and disasters was a boring Geography topic for me, but then I got interested because I felt like I was helping people. (Maria, 9th grade)

I felt that the workshops were very good not only because we could express our opinions but also because they taught us how to relate to each other. (Magda, 9th grade)

5 See for instance the children of Pedrógão Grande aiming to sue 47 European States: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/25/portuguese-children-crowdfund-european-climate-change-case-sue-47-countries>.

This confirms that besides being heard, effective participation also requires co-production of knowledge, shared decision making and idea exchange (Day et al. 2015; Lundy 2007). It is then in their interaction with their peers that children are exposed to other points of view and experiences, thus gaining the critical thinking skills and commitment values necessary to make informed collective decisions and perform meaningful citizenship acts.

It is worth recalling here that the chief argument for not allowing children to participate in formal political processes and full citizenship is their lack of competence. In an interesting discussion on “the health of a democracy” (Wagner et al. 2012), the lowering of the voting age and the pros and cons of youngsters’ electoral participation, political science has challenged the taken for granted assumptions on their “unreadiness”. Research has brought relevant clues to the debate on whether or not young people (at 16 or 17 years old) have the maturity, the interest or the knowledge to vote, and if the quality of their choices is similar to older first time voters. Now, there is little empirical evidence that they are less able or less motivated to participate in elections; their turn out is even higher than the older ones’ (18-25 y). This is perhaps because they vote in a more sheltered environment – still living at home and attending school (Zeglovits 2013, 253). Moreover, their views are based on “reasoned arguments” (Wagner et al. 2012, 373). After all, an earlier experience leaves “a footprint on one’s voting biography” (Zeglovits 2013, 252), which can encourage future political pro-activity.

For its part, CUIDAR demonstrated that although children required assistance in developing their ideas, they are fully capable of reflecting upon their experiences, cooperating in solving problems and proposing solutions that can be adopted and debated by those in power. On the other hand, while it provided an opportunity for these children to rehearse their further participation, its development faced several challenges, namely the resistance of some adults in regarding these topics as not being just a children’s affair, or the amount of time and willingness these engagement processes require in order to be effective and engaging for children. There is some reluctance from both sides that can be overcome with more dialogical moments. Regarding the CUIDAR national event, one youngster stated: “During the meeting, I became aware that there are adults who still care about what teenagers say.” Stakeholders themselves recognised that the CUIDAR’s work made them realise “the urgency of ensuring the empowerment of children and young people in information and awareness-raising programmes”. Thus, more work needs

to be done in sensitising both stakeholders and children of their rights and duties, and to the active role they can play in these processes, in order to foster their growing inclusion in policy processes adjusted to their needs in Portugal.

DISCUSSION AND CLOSURE

To challenge dominant conceptions of citizenship, bringing children into the discussion reveals its reductive scope in contemporary societies. Pertained to an individual status held by adults in the public sphere, it keeps children at a distance. However, from this formal perspective, generational cleavages do not lead to sharp dichotomies: in risk or reflexive societies, adults seem to share attributes of “unreadiness”, “immaturity” and “vulnerability” with children. Both are simultaneously “beings in the present” and citizens “in the making”, and this double time affiliation runs throughout their life course. Now, it is consensually accepted that both are due provision and protection rights. But the same cannot be said about participatory rights: despite the mandatory UNCRC or similar international directives, children are still very rarely engaged in decision making processes, even for domains that particularly affect them.

On the other hand, crises are revelatory moments. Under their ravages, societies can be exhibited on their reverse side, namely as regards social inequalities or vulnerable ties. The example of children – portrayed as innocent or helpless victims in media “tragedy” coverages, objectively the more affected by the harm and negative impact of critical events or processes – is relevant. The predominance of a children at risk discourse in critical scenarios ignores or wastes their agency and competence to work together with adults in preparing, responding and recovering from their negative impact.

First, crises very often worsen their living conditions (for a longer or shorter period of time) and compromise their protection and provision rights. The research project on the Portuguese economic crisis uncovered alarming indicators concerning poverty and deprivation rates and the ways real anonymous children perceived it. The word “crisis” had a meaning for them and they were able to apply it to real situations of their daily lives (family budget, food, clothing or schooling). From their perspective, children’s rights were far beyond the access to material goods or social services: they very firmly extended them to a relational well-being (in the family) and to their future expectations (in education, for example). Interestingly, the crisis was not an explicit theme

of conversation with their significant adults, either parents or teachers. Dispersed information was caught informally here and there, through media coverage, social networks or listening to adult conversations. The right to receive and impart information (art 13, UNCRC), parallel to the right to freedom of expression, was not guaranteed, leaving children on their own in a no man's land where insecurity or fears cannot be expressed or softened.

On the other hand, the CUIDAR project illustrated methodological approaches to put participatory experiences with children into practice. Based on their daily experiences and from an interaction with local stakeholders, children were able to envisage an active role in their communities in disaster risk management. Also, they were able to step up to a macro level and tackle global climate change issues. CUIDAR drew attention to the often ignored environmental dimension of citizenship. The right to live safely in, and preserve, the blue planet (our common home) implies the knowledge of threats affecting it, a consciousness of human predatory behaviour and its consequences, and information on good practices to protect it. This was also an innovative contribution from CUIDAR.

As mentioned above, to be heard, as in the first project, is not enough: citizenship is ultimately built upon children's engagement in daily decision making processes, participatory acts or real experiences. Based on perceived critical scenarios on climate change related disasters, CUIDAR involved children in gathering information, enabling them to identify and choose priority topics to be collectively dealt with. It also engaged them in knowledge co-production and dissemination among peers and adults, encouraging them to advocate recommendations to policymakers in face to face workshops. In contrast to consultative processes, where adults obtain information from children and use it to protect them during critical events, in top-down initiatives reinforcing representations of children as passive aid recipients and their dominated position in the generational order, here children were recognised as active citizens capable of being involved in the development of policies for self-advocacy prevention, preparedness and response projects.

In contrast to formal learning-teaching hierarchical procedures prevalent in Portuguese schools, these hands on child-centred activities (using visual methodologies), inspired by a participatory agenda, were not only feasible but also successful and very positively evaluated by participant children. They give powerful arguments to those who claim children should be considered citizens in their own right, which obviously implies a careful consideration

of their internal diversity, their real insertion in particular social contexts or interactional settings.

In other respects, a participatory agenda for children offers an opportunity to seize and enhance their provision and protection rights. To capture children's voices on these topics, irrespective of adult ones, while creating the proper settings for them to be heard, can highlight dimensions or clues that are significant (from children's perspective) and permit the choice of an understandable and appealing language to enunciate them.

Interestingly, opening up the participatory issue, via children's exclusion from a full citizen status, is also a way to denounce quite similar situations concerning adults. It can legitimately be claimed that expressive social fringes of adults (particularly the economically deprived and those with little education) are not heard or included in decision making processes affecting them. But on a larger scale, contemporary representative democracies have been challenged by citizens' social movements concerned about the distance between the people's voices, their expression or influence and the elected political rulers.

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CITE THIS CHAPTER AS:

ALMEIDA, A. N. de, A. S. Ribeiro, and J. Rowland. 2018. "Children, citizenship and crisis: towards a participatory agenda". In *Changing Societies: Legacies and Challenges*. Vol. II. *Citizenship in Crisis*, eds. M. C. Lobo, F. C. da Silva and J. P. Zúquete. Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 113-134.
<https://doi.org/10.31447/ICS9789726715047.05>