Outsourcing State's responsibilities? Third Sector Organisations supporting migrant families' participation in schools in Catalonia and London.

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Based on two case studies of Third Sector Organizations (TSOs) working with schools and parents in Catalonia and London, this paper aims to discuss some of the implications of 'participative' programs aimed at involving those migrant families seen by schools as 'hard to reach'. Firstly, we describe how an ambiguous notion of participation can shift responsibilities to families and leave internal school practices free from critical gaze. Secondly, we focus on the complexities and tensions involved in the process of partnering TSOs with schools, because of the bureaucratic nature of educational institutions and unresolved conflicts of interests and responsibilities. Finally, we argue that the potential of these initiatives were limited and diluted by being stand-alone and time-limited. Our analysis suggests that, in spite of their apparent success, they ended up being part of powerful authorizing narratives that justify the outsourcing of public services and the abdication of State's responsibilities.

Keywords: participation, migrant families, Third Sector Organizations, school-family partnerships.

Challenging the promises and premises of parents' participation

Schools are institutions facing problems that originate well beyond the walls where most educational action occurs. As stated by Ogbu thirty years ago, 'classrooms are the battleground, but the origins of the battle can be in another place' (1981, 157). In particular, the role and participation of families continues to be one of the most salient issues and a topic gaining more and more attention in public debates on education across Europe (Paniagua 2015).

This is not something new. Starting from the publication of the Coleman report (Coleman et al. 1966) in the USA and the Plowden report (Plowden 1967) in the UK, a growing wave of evidence has shown how the education level of parents, their financial resources and attitudes and the overall influence of the home environment are the best predictors of young people's academic achievement (Symeou 2005). Besides, there is evidence on the positive impact of specific forms of parental involvement programmes (see for example Boethel 2003; Poomerantz et al. 2007; Ladky and Peterson 2010; Jeynes 2012). However, while 'natural' participation seems to work well for those families that can already -or know how to- 'work and navigate' the system, it is much more difficult to 'induce' participation among those who have a limited amount of this specific form of social and cultural capital (Doucet 2011; Desforges and Abouchaar 2003). In fact, there is an increasing body of research that critically discusses the scope and impact of programmes

targeting those families which are seen as not participating enough(Gordon and Cui 2014; Nawrotzki 2012; Corter and Pelletier 2005; Mattingly et al. 2002). Within these criticisms, some scholars have described the notion of participation as an 'empty signifier' (Franklin, Bloch, and Popkewitz 2003) to emphasize the attractiveness and flexibility of this term to accommodate a wide range of functions for differing purposes, ideologies and political projects (Corter and Pelletier 2005). Given the pervasive nature of parental participation and the many forms it can take (see, for example, the 16 types of involvemenet proposed by Poomerantz et al. 2007) it is important to analyse how this notion is mobilized and related to particular objectives to understand how different initiatives work in practice.

If the definition of family participation in education continues to be an issue of much debate, other research has argued that this 'ideology of participation' is either incapable of disrupting the embedded logic of home-school relations inscribed in teachers' culture (Abrams and Gibbs 2002) or, even worse, it further stigmatises those parents who fail to align to the participation template and particular parenting style promoted by schools (Cuero and Valdez 2012; Crozier and Davies 2007).

In describing the organizational culture of schools as largely auto-affirmative and inherently non-adaptable, Skrtic (1991) argues that teachers tend to implement new reforms –such as those promoting the participation of parents- through 'symbols and ceremonies of change that are largely decoupled from meaningful practice' (Skrtic 2005, 150). In this sense, school bureaucracy imposes a form of professional habitus (Diamond et al. 2004) which works as a subtle transmission belt, making teachers assume the logics of the institution, thus reaffirming the traditional power of the school over families. This analysis may explain why some authors have highlighted either the ritualistic and symbolic character of the idea of parental involvement (Doucet, 2011) or how some teachers, when problems arise, tend to refer to 'family failures' rather than to look for 'institutional failures' (Harry, Klingner and Hart 2005). Discussing the case of parents of children with special needs, Lazarevic and Kopas-Vukasinovic argue that the participation offered by schools tends to revolve around 'subsidiary activities' and that teachers' requests for participation end mostly on the 'declarative level', fuelling a cycle of 'optimistic rhetoric' (2013: 75). Carrasco, Pàmies and Beltran (2009) also highlights how schools are rather inflexible with the different realities of families, failing to recognize the diverse ways in which families engage with and make sense of the school. It is precisely this lack of accommodation and welcoming practices of schools that is said to explain the limit success of parental engagement (Garreta 2009; López, Scribner and Mahitivanichacha 2001). In this regard, Vincent and Tomlinson (1997) argue that any participative initiative that fails to approach the bureaucracy and rigidness of schools organization and values can hardly be transformative, thus becoming a pervasive mechanism to control parents and shift educational responsibilities upon them.

The specific case of the participation of migrant families adds even more complexity, for they –along with working class and gypsy families- ultimately fall in what Río (2010) describes as 'families farther from the school norm'. As many migrant communities suffer from higher poverty rates, segregation, racism and other related cultural prejudices (Suarez-Orozco et al. 2011), their children are more likely to be identified as problematic or having special education needs. This has a significant impact on how their parents are approached under a deficit view and therefore explains the pressures they receive to participate more effectively and develop an 'appropriate' parenting practice (Theodorou 2007; Carrasco, Pàmies and Beltran 2009; Río 2010). Moreover, relations between these families and teachers may become what Carrasco (2001) describes as a 'mutual delegation'. On the one hand schools are organized upon the belief that families must make an important contribution to ensure the success of students; on the other, migrant families are often truly confident of the authority of schools and teachers, respect their

autonomy and can be reluctant to take the initiative in making contacts to raise concerns or ask for information, which in turn is interpreted by teachers as apathy and lack of interest. By and large, research suggests that teachers construct migrant families as one of the most salient problems, for they perceive their ethnicity –or more specifically, the defence and reproduction of their ethnicity- as a barrier and a defensive attitude toward schools, rather than understanding this a source for social networks, support, positive identities and high expectations (Carrasco, Pàmies and Beltran 2009).

In the past the emphasis around the importance of families in education was backed by one fundamental argument: that schools must become an avenue for social mobility and integration, thus ensuring that the children of immigrants do not become a permanent underclass (Roosens 1988; cited in Suarez-Orozco 1991). In a new context characterized by economic crisis and important cuts in public funding, many European States no longer take active responsibility for reducing inequality through redistributive policies (Franklin, Bloch, and Popkewitz 2003) and the spread of a neoliberal rationale has marginalized the analysis of power, class inequality and race (Navarro 2003). This logic has colonized the context of education, where all parents are now expected to act as responsible consumers (Crozier 1998; Dahlstedt 2009). As a consequence, middle-class parenting emerges as the ideal template, a form of valuable symbolic and cultural capital for taking advantage of the education system, whereas other, culturally different ways to interact with schools are seen as invaluable and problematic (Nawrotzki 2012).

Dahlstedt and Tesfalhuney (2010) argue that initiatives aiming to promote middle-class-style participation are a form of 'speculative' practice inscribed in the wider neoliberal logics that have penetrated public policies. They go on to discuss how these initiatives recast ethnic minorities and working class groups in terms of 'threatening Others, against which specific and concerted actions need to be taken in order to transform Them into well-adapted, flexible and entrepreneurial citizens' (Dahsltedt and Tesfalhuney 2010: 252). The goal is no longer to make schools more inclusive and equitable but to maximize returns from schooling and learning. In the realm of parental participation, this is translated into ways of capitalizing on parents according to an ideal-type of risk-taking, rationale citizen. In a similar vein, Olmedo and Wilkins (2014) take a step further and criticize how parents are constructed as 'neoliberal subjects', expected –and requested- to self-regulate and exercise a conscious and strategic control over schooling in a context characterized by an apparent withdrawal of traditional forms of State governance.

Understanding the role and challenges of TSOs working with schools in two different settings

Considering how attempts to change the power balance between teachers and parents have failed so routinely, this paper raises one fundamental question: can Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) make a difference and contribute to the enhancement of the participation of migrant families as a way to improve the schooling for their children? For some, TSOs - as not-for-profit organizations that operate on the margins of the public sector - may open up a 'window of opportunity' and bridge schools and families successfully (López, Kredier, and Coffman 2005). TSOs, sometimes referred as community or intermediary organizations, may disrupt institutionalized patterns of parent-teachers dynamics. Firstly, in terms of sustainability, Mitra (2009) shows that TSOs working in partnership with schools may foster a long-term vision and provide more stability in balancing the distribution of power between schools and families. Secondly, in relation to capacity building, these organizations can become agents that improve the competences of both parents and teachers. They can provide parents with specialised services and practical information to overcome institutional barriers (Dywer and Modood 2006) and help schools develop a more welcoming climate or address deficit views towards poor and culturally diverse families (López, Kredier, and

Coffman 2005). Finally, in terms of engagement, TSOs can bring to schools a better understanding of the culture of families and build the basis for active participation through the improvement of relationships among parents and between parents and teachers (Warren et al. 2009). In order words, these organizations can increase the participation of parents in embedded networks of social relations that can become venues for nurturing children's positive sense of his ethnicity (Pàmies 2006) and even for reworking dominant discursive notions of otherness and schooling (Mirza and Reay 2000).

However, the relation of TSOs with the public sector is not without its challenges. The process of assuming part of the state's social functions may transform TSOs into agents of institutionalisation and de-politicise their functions. Sinha argues that 'the revival of "civil society" has occurred at the same time as the neoliberal ascendance' (2005, 163) and has been central in its legitimation. As TSOs seeks to gain more professional expertise and accountability within new public management reforms where States appear as regulators rather than direct providers of services (Verger and Curran 2014), TSOs are in danger of losing their collective orientation and emphasize service delivery over advocacy (Kless 2008).

Given the existing gap in the European literature looking at the participation of migrant communities in schools with the help of TSOs, this study aims to contribute with an analysis of two participatory initiatives in two European regions significantly different in terms of immigration and education policy trends. The first project was led by a federation of Parents Associations in Catalonia, and aimed to use Parents Associations to enhance the participation of migrant families in schools. The second initiative was promoted by an independent education agency in a North London local authority (borough) and involved funding a local Turkish-Kurdish community organization to support schools and parents and raise the achievement of Turkish-Kurdish students.

We explicitly state that the purpose of the analysis that guides this paper arose after the end of the two projects - which have been described independently elsewhere (see D'Angelo, Paniagua and Ozdemir 2011; Paniagua 2013). Here we use them as case studies to further reflect about their outcomes and impact and to discuss more broadly the role of TSOs in fostering the participation of parents in the school. As recently discussed by Crozier, the importance of analysing different initiatives across diverse countries lies in finding similarities to describe "the pattern of inequalities, differential power relations… between home and school" and to what extent these initiatives are "sufficient to challenge the status quo" (2014, 282). In this regard, rather than trying to engage in an holistic comparison between the educational systems of Catalonia and London, we limit our discussion around 'functional equivalences' (Lauterbach and Mitter 1998) identified in the micro-level to sustain our arguments about the potentials and challenges of TSOs working with parents and schools. In particular, we deal with the notion of parents' participation regarding migrant families as a powerful and global narrative that permeates education systems internationally (Franklin, Bloch, and Popkewitz 2003; Corter and Pelletier 2005). Likewise, the nature of schools as 'bureaucratic machines' (Skrtic 1991) and the increasing withdraw of the role of the State across the EU, are structural features that help us frame our response to the 'problematics that lie within these ideas around parent involvement and social inequality' (Crozier 2014, 282).

Finally, our case study approach entailed the necessary degree of flexibility inherent in the analysis of educational contexts as different as the two under discussion (Campbell 2009) but also provided us with fruitful qualitative sources of data to support our argument of the 'convergent trends' (Teichler 2013) underpinning this paper. The strong similarities emerging from the field include the ambiguous and

problematic notion of participation embedded in both projects and the institutional tensions in the process of partnering TSOs with schools.

Enhancing the inclusion of migrant families in Catalan Parents' Associations

The first case study is a 9-month project undertaken by a Federation of Parents Associations in Catalonia in order to better assist local Parents Associations (PAs) in the inclusion of migrant families. The initiative saw the first author involved as a researcher. Parents Associations originated and quickly spread in Spain by the end of the 1970s as political and civic associations working to improve public education during the political transition from the dictatorship. Over the years, with the development of a public education system and the implementation of participatory structures inside schools –e.g. school councils- PAs increasingly lost their political aims and became a kind of voluntary organizations to help schools in those areas not directly supported by the administration, such as lunch time, afterschool activities and small educational programmes.

Catalonia, without any previous history as a country of immigration, witnessed a rise in the proportion of children from migrant families enrolled in compulsory education from 1% in 2000 to 10% in 2010. To date, Moroccan students represent the oldest and largest migrant population in Catalan schools (as well as the most socio-economically deprived), followed by sub-Saharan Africa and Latin American students – mainly from Ecuador, Bolivia and Colombia (Gibson and Carrasco 2009). In contrast with other increasingly large migrant communities –such as Romanians or Chinese students– sub-Saharan Africa and Latin American families have historically been the target of great concerns and prejudices on the part of the education establishment (Harry et al. 2008).

Discussing the school-choice strategies displayed by middle-class parents in Spain, Olmedo (2008) described the Spanish education system as a 'quasi market' in terms of the intensification of competition, decentralization, differentiation of schools, and the creation of families as 'consumers of education' rather than 'active participants'. Similar to the case of the UK, in Catalonia new public management policies were adopted by a social democratic government in order to innovate public education and make it more effective. This approach also involved the need to make the state apparatuses slimmer and more oriented toward results, introducing market logics associated to business management (Verger and Curran 2014).

In 2009, the leaders of the Catalan federation launched a dedicated 'action research' project to address the lack of involvement of migrant families in PAs. Although this objective was backed by some research (Garreta 2008), it was mainly fuelled by concerns raised by PAs volunteers. This project was funded by the Secretary of Immigration, through an open tender aimed to support initiatives targeting newly arrived migrant families. The project was not an actual and direct TSO-School partnership, but a partnership between the federation and local PAs at primary schools across Catalonia. The main purpose was to analyse the patterns of parental engagement with PAs operating within schools with high proportions of migrant families. Following a qualitative approach of case study research to map the situation of individual PAs and identify commonalities and differences between them, during the first stages the project found a number of PAs that had started different small projects in collaboration with schools (e.g. Catalan language classes, family outings and picnics) in order to enhance the integration of migrant families. Some of these initiatives were evaluated to establish whether there was enough evidence about their impact to justifying their scaling up. A total of 21 PAs, 7 TSO workers from the federation, 5

head-teachers and 9 institutional representatives were interviewed. A focus group with a PA city coalition and a meeting with PA members and migrant associations were also part of the fieldwork.

Supporting Turkish-Kurdish student's achievement in London schools

The second case study is the partnership work undertaken by a local Turkish-Kurdish community centre with several North-London schools to develop a range of educational projects. The two authors worked in an evaluation research coordinated by the Social Policy Research Centre at Middlesex University (D'Angelo, Paniagua and Ozdemir 2011). For this article, we drew specifically on two of the projects which were part of a broader programme of activities. The 'Parental Involvement' (PI) project ran from 2007 to 2011 with the introduction of dedicated Parental Involvement Officers - appointed by the TSO - to help Kurdish/Turkish parents enhance their confidence and involvement in schools. The 'Co-educators' project – also known as 'role models' – was not focused primarily on families but on providing in-school and classroom support to over 100 target students each academic year from 2002 to 2010. However, as Turkish-Kurdish co-educators were constantly in contact with parents, arranging meetings and home visits and promoting their involvement on educational issues, we include this in our discussion as well. The evaluation of these projects used a survey and a focus group with parents benefiting from one or more of the educational projects and in-depth interviews with practitioners, educators, TSO's staff and local stakeholders.

The UK has a long tradition of community organizations led by migrants and providing direct support to their communities (Craig 2011; D'Angelo 2015). To an extent this is a reflection of the country's long history of immigration. According to the latest Census data, in 2011 12.3% of the UK population was foreign-born, rising to 42% in Inner London (Rienzo and Vargas-Silva 2012). While Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean pupils have been repeatedly considered as 'permanent underachievers' among migrant pupils (Gillborn 2008), in recent years, Somali and Turkish pupils have also been identified as performing less well than their 'White British' peers (Strand et al., 2010).

In the UK, the emphasis on the contribution of parents to children's academic success originated in the early 1980s (Corter and Pelletier 2005) but saw an increasing attention over the following two decades. This process was accompanied by the progressive reduction of the role of Local Authorities in overseeing education and the expanding role of actors from the private and third sector. This was part of a wider process of reforms driven by market principles and leading to an increasingly complex and fragmented education system (Benn 2011). The 'respectable' face of this process is the idea of 'Big Society' - promoted by Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron - which claims to counterbalance the rolling back of the state with a stronger role for civil society and voluntary groups (Graig 2012).

The Turkish-Kurdish education projects presented here were funded by one of the first private 'social enterprises' appointed to take over a local authority's education powers following years of low performance of most local schools. Because of severe decline in secondary school achievement, particularly among Afro-Caribbean and Turkish-speaking students (D'Angelo, Paniagua and Ozdemir 2011), it was decided to directly fund a number of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community organisations. Although the education agency played a role in putting in contact individual schools with the organisations, provided some guidance and set overall targets and deliverables, individual TSOs were directly responsible for the management and delivery of their projects, including the recruitment of appropriate community workers and internal monitoring of their activities and the project outcomes.

Differences and similarities

When comparing between the two cases, four main differences arise. Firstly, whilst in the case of London schools were explicitly and directly involved, in the case of Catalonia the intervention took place within the Parents Associations. Secondly, the partnership in London introduced Turkish-speaking community workers inside schools whereas in Catalonia the federation of PAs worked with external specialized workers – hired and coordinated to support PA volunteers. Thirdly, in the case of London, the agency funding the programme was much more involved in the partnership than in the case of Catalonia, and even more, provided the framework for the project. Finally, the project in London was focused explicitly on students from Turkish-Kurdish heritage; in contrast, the project in Catalonia targeted all sorts of migrant families from the largest groups mentioned earlier on.

In spite of these differences, the projects shared at least three fundamental similarities. Both were focusing on migrant groups identified as 'at risk' and specifically with potentially high rates of underachievement. Also, in both cases TSOs were deemed by stakeholders and funders as innovative and strategic agents to implement the projects, thus potentially playing a valuable 'supplementary' role to that of the schools and the teachers. Furthermore, both initiatives were meant to be 'one-off', aiming to enable the TSOs to gather evidence and develop skills in order to apply for further funding from other sources and thus sustain their activities in the longer term. As described in detail elsewhere (D'Angelo, Paniagua and Ozdemir 2011; Paniagua 2013), both projects produced promising outputs. However, when the support from their institutional funders came to an end, it was not possible to secure additional resources, thus compromising the impact of the projects in the mid and long term.

Advocating participation: notions and contradictions

Different settings…

To an extent, the justification for such a project arose naturally from the educational context in Catalonia, where several national laws, programs and plans had placed into the mainstream the importance of 'civic participation' in relation to the management of the growing number of newly arrived families and the central role of TSOs and local stakeholders in pursuing that goal (see, for example, the Reception Plan for Immigrant People, 2009, a broad initiative aiming at coordinating all existing local initiatives for newly arrived migrants). Within this framework, schools were seen as a place where migrant children and families could get in contact with Catalan culture and people, a place where 'migrant parents should develop a 'school' culture, an interest for school-issues and all such things their children do' (institutional representative). In relation to PAs, there was an emphasis on the lack of participation of migrant families and the need to connect them to the 'existing channels of communication among teachers and parents through Parents Associations' (Department of Education 2014: 8). This approach assumed that family participation could potentially benefit the achievement of migrant children as their parents would eventually become more interested in education and more able to help them.

In the London project, community workers were working directly with parents, pupils and teachers and the project's rationale was built upon two axes: firstly, the need of the education agency to improve the academic achievement of migrant groups through innovative programmes; and secondly, the recognition of the value of the existing networks of ethnic community organizations and their ability to provide specific educational services. Overall, there was an assumption that

> "Parents need to see themselves reflected in the services they are taking, so they actually feel that people know where they are coming from (…) these (community) workers can really challenge the parents because they understand how the community work". (stakeholder)

Thus, while in Catalonia the notion of PAs as 'privileged spaces' was stressed, in London the emphasis was much more located on the idea of involving TSOs as an innovative and holistic approach to the needs of minority ethnic pupils, enhancing connections between the formal education environment and the broader community setting.

...and similar contradictions

The differences in local context and declared rationales hide some important ideological similarities. Both projects were funded and promoted around the assumption that educational problems, and their solutions, were located outside the schools and their practices, and specifically were due to the inadequate involvement and participation of migrant parents. Of course some of the volunteers and community workers involved in the delivering the project had a much more critical and analytical understanding of this matter, but in practice the projects allowed schools to further externalize the issues faced by migrant students and their families.

Indeed, both programmes did not aim to work directly with teachers in order to change their practices, but to assist families or children and enable them to benefit from the schools more effectively. In other words, both the Catalan federation and the education agency in London supported these partnerships as innovative practices, but these were not able to challenge school processes in any significant way; rather, they aimed to transform existing patterns of relations between migrant families and teachers through an ambiguous idea of participation.

In the case of Catalonia, the issue of participation was at the centre of all interviews, although none of the respondents seemed able to define what participation exactly meant. For example, in a meeting with PAs and Migrant Associations there was an intense debate about how participation could be useful for migrant families. When interrogating several stakeholders about how to enhance participation, their arguments revolved around abstract issues such as 'the need to reflect upon the existing levels of participation' or 'the common views of all families', which were in line with the ambiguities present in policy documents: '(families) must be involved in this project of cooperation and develop their awareness and training to foster attitudes of participation, openness and fairness' (Education Area Plans: 6). These views were challenged by experienced specialized workers who were aware of the difficulties of engaging parents. For example, one mentioned the importance to understand participation beyond 'the initial introductory meeting, mostly depersonalized, and reach (the interests and concerns) of every individual'.

In the case of London, although the main aim of the programme was to improve the achievement of pupils, the role of parental participation was presented as a key factor, since differences in terms of behaviour were related to the 'kind of expectations at home' (school teacher). There appeared to be a general perception among schools and other stakeholders that Turkish-Kurdish parents needed to be taught how to support their children or understand the UK Education System. In addition, it was generally assumed that there was a 'culture' problem that only skilled 'insiders' – community workers – were able to unravel, thus reinforcing identity assumptions that constructed migrant pupils by cultural and ethnic attributes. In the words of a stakeholder, the co-educators project "*was so powerful because they show to*

schools some of the cultural (background) and the contradictions these children have". Apparently, as far as the students are concerned, these projects worked very well because proved that students "*need someone who can understand and engage them and become a reference in their lives"* (stakeholder). As a migrant-led organisation, the Turkish-Kurdish TSO appeared as the ideal support for schools because of their experience working with these communities for decades.

In spite of the efforts placed to boost the involvement of these families, it became apparent throughout our research that the lack of participation of migrant parents was not derived from a lack of will to participate as there were other important difficulties that explained the problems of involving families in schools. For example, in the case of Catalonia the link between participating in PAs and in Schools was taken for granted. However, the research showed that most PAs had problems with teachers when aiming to participate in curricular or school organization issues. As discussed elsewhere (Paniagua 2013), PAs were required to perform in a 'traditional' way – securing after school activities – and stay out of 'teacher's issues'. Therefore, the project indicated that, in its current form, participation in PAs should not be considered as participating in schools but in a clearly delimited school-related space. During the same group interview, specialized workers highlighted some common problems of PAs:

> The resistance of headmasters is the key (…) There are strong forces in place shaping PAs dynamics, not only schools interested in PAs services, but the Department (of education) as well (…) there are some (outsourced) services that are intended to please teachers and parents and avoid structural problems.

In focusing the attention on the needs of Turkish-Kurdish parents and children, the London projects identified other important barriers, such as parents' perception of school practices as discriminatory.

> School always thinks because English is the second language perhaps that is why the child is struggling, then they don't look into it further. (Focus group with parents)

Although some community officers made efforts to feed concerns back to the teachers, this role was not recognised by most schools. Again, the institutional aim of the project was to 'change' migrant families, not to promote reflexivity on the school practices.

Partnerships between TSOs and Schools: conflicts of interests and strategies

Pragmatic participation in Catalonia

We noted earlier on that one of the initial findings emerging from the project in Catalonia was the need to re-think the role of PAs working in multicultural schools. In a sense, central to a project aiming to involve families seen as lacking interest or skills to participate was the issue of whether PAs had the capacity and motivation to promote such a process. In fact, during the implementation of the project, there was evidence that the main representatives of the TSO had not reflected about this, and this was not perceived as one of the priorities. In this regard, other workers who had previously been volunteers in a PA claimed: 'it is nonsense, it is evident that PAs cannot develop a project to include migrant families... it can surely sound coherent but it isn't at all" (TSO worker). This strong assertion reveals both the discomfort of many workers for not having being consulted before the project started and their awareness about the difficulties of implementing such project considering the limitations of PAs. Drawing from the first interviews with specialized workers there was a strong feeling that, in the current conditions, it would be really difficult for

PAs to try to develop a project of that kind:

> We need spaces where families can talk about education with other stakeholders, to recognize families as educational agents (...) to work with PA leaving behind bureaucracy bumf. Sometimes it is better to let PAs disappear and start over again. (Group interview with TSO workers)

The implementation of the project also generated some tension, especially when the research discussed the need to engage in a larger project and rethink the current role of PAs in schools, since the leaders of the federation favoured a more unproblematic notion of participation and reduced the participation of migrant families within PAs to a matter of practical prescriptions. Not surprisingly, existing literature about parental participation in schools is largely based on easy-to-read handbooks filled with 'good practices' apparently ready for a direct implementation; something that Vincent & Tomlinson (1997) consider very problematic for it helps visualize participation as

> Superficial and one-dimensional models for developing home-school relationships, and encourages a similar sort of practice: simplistic, apparently linear in development and adhering to the rhetoric of partnership. (1997, 368)

These tensions were also related to the fact that the Catalan federation had not developed a coherent discourse about migrant families. During the interviews, most PAs members saw migrant families as 'problematic' and it was 'common sense' to see that schools with large proportions of migrant children had more problems. These concerns were echoed at the federation, which in turn support them in press releases. This in part undermined the project, for one of its aims was in fact to try to challenge the views PAs had about migrant families. The development of the project also showed the difficulties to intersect the federation's and PAs' priorities. The complex reality of PAs, navigating between teachers and families' demands, was quite different from that of the larger federation, to whom this project was part of a wider strategy to gain credibility. In fact, some PAs were reluctant to engage with the project, arguing that 'This is a task more suitable for schools to do (...) at the end, this inclusion is another work imposed on PAs but that should be done by the administration' (parent).

London TSOs and teachers: problems of recognition

In the case of London we did not have the opportunity to follow the initial process of partnering between schools and the TSO. However, interviews with community workers let us investigate their relations with school staff. In this respect, issues of 'lack of understanding' were always presented as one of the main problems for teachers in their relations with migrant parents, so both PI Officers and Co-educators tried to engage parents with schools in several ways: face-to-face meetings, workshops or translating documents. Nonetheless, according to some community workers, there appeared to be a lack of understanding about their role:

> I had many discussions with the school in terms of the work I did (…) because it was seen as unfair to other students (who were not from the Kurdish community). (community worker)

Sometimes these divergences limited the range of actions community workers could take:

> I saw these students need more time of special attention… and the school didn't agree. (community worker)

The education agency recognized that the partnership between schools and TSOs was not something free of challenges, arguing that it was a question of finding a balance between the needs of the school in relation to the achievement of Turkish-Kurdish students and the possibilities for these organizations to make a difference in this complex issue. In this respect, collaboration between TSOs and schools should be understood as a way to build up new resources and methodologies for teachers and therefore it was important not to read the work of the TSO as if it was 'a Turkish issue that Turkish community workers should address' (stakeholder). For community workers inside schools, things were more complicated, in part because of their external role:

> You come, give your time and go and you don't know what is going on beyond these moments (…) but when you are a member of the school you know, because you can communicate with other teachers, ask… Otherwise, you are an outsider. (Community worker)

Although co-educators were requested to be responsible for the students, their status was clearly different from that of teachers: 'co-educators weren't expected to prepare teaching resources… it is something I would do' (school teacher).

Perhaps to some extent these tensions were to be expected, as the role of TSOs may be seen by schools as a kind of reminder of their own failure. What we want to highlight here is the contradiction of putting the main pressure to build new capacities and skills on the TSO, especially if, as the data gathered through the evaluation of the projects suggested, co-educators and PI officers worked much more like an external service. If one main objective was to 'let schools think community' (stakeholder) it is reasonable to think that schools should have been made more responsible to follow this new approach.

The absence of a more explicit commitment on the part of the school staff does not mean, of course, that during the project community workers were not successful in their role, as some workers and teachers mentioned. For example, one school was so impress with their co-educator that they tried to hire him as a full member of the staff. Still, in not making the need for this collaboration truly mandatory, projects were somehow dependent on the will of each individual. As a teacher said: 'this variable impact is related to the specific person working on that and not to the service itself'. Hence, because of being more an external service than a way to transform school practices, the conclusion of these projects meant also the end of the specialized support offered. In fact one of the teachers interviewed was well aware of this when he stated that some of the parents will go 'off the radar' again without the help of the PI officer.

The paradoxical 'legacy' of these projects: promising outputs and lack of hard data

As shown by studies on family involvement (Gordon and Cui 2014; Nawrotzki 2012; Corter and Pelletier 2005; Mattingly et al. 2002), a significant problem with the issue of participation is the existing limited data supporting the multiple benefits and potentials that initiatives like those discussed in this article claim to produce. In fact, our own research seems to corroborate this trend, for we were able to describe some promising outcomes while pointing to the lack of strong internal evaluation practices that produced hard evidence on their mid- and long-term impact. Nonetheless, we argue that these programmes and organizations can potentially play a substantial role as 'institutional brokers', fostering collaboration for change.

In the case of Catalonia, it is important to stress the interest the project generated among most workers: it became an opportunity to analyse their practices and to discuss more broadly about the role of PAs. In particular, the PAs initiatives identified showed interesting short-term improvements in the involvement of migrant families and allowed these PAs to reframe their role in relation to schools. However, the impact of the project was inherently linked with the capacity to produce guidelines and collect promising cases. As long as this objective was accomplished the project was considered successful, but the mid- and long-impact of these PAs projects –along with their tensions with schools- was never considered.

As for the Turkish-Kurdish organisation in London, thanks to their long experience working with the local community, they could become 'an interface to understand different communities and an 'early warning' system when a problem arise' (stakeholder). This was exemplified in the way TSO officers managed to establish relationships with both families and teachers beyond the scope and duration of the programme. As pointed out in the evaluation report (D'Angelo, Paniagua and Ozdemir 2011), the partnership did allow schools to approach children from Turkish-Kurdish families in a more holistic way. At the same time, the process of delivering the agreed services on the part of the TSO received much more attention and - despite the burdensome requirements to use a large number of forms to evaluate the project – 'no overall evaluation report was produced' (op. cit.: 45). Consequently, in contrast with what were overwhelmingly positive views from all the informants, the evaluation was not able to discuss the extent of success in terms of hard data.

Discussion and conclusion: a progressive force or a neoliberal tool? TSOs at the crossroads.

The scope of our paper - centred on the analysis of two specific, small-scale case studies - requires us to be cautious about making any generalisation. Initiatives like the two presented here did not expect to transform patterns of participation in schools all of a sudden, and the contextual differences surrounding each initiative challenge the terms of any direct comparison. However -when analysing the processes at the micro-level- important convergent trends emerged. It is precisely the identification of similar features in these diverse settings that supports our analysis of two structural processes that we believe can shed more light on the difficulties in trying to improve the involvement of families seen as 'at risk' or 'hard to reach'.

Firstly, in promoting an idea of participation as a simple, unidirectional process, both projects uncritically approached the issue of family participation without addressing school bureaucracy and teachers' habitus. As a consequence, they ended up using theories and conjectures about participation as an 'advocacy narrative' (Corter and Pelletier 2005) and locating the responsibility of migrant parents at the forefront. In effect, parents were expected to develop a particular school ethos using TSOs as a transmission belt of schools' culture and demands. What we also learned from these projects was that the idea of 'integration' promoted and discussed in EU policy reports and recommendations as a 'two-way' process (Justice and Home Affairs Council 2004), was not easily translated into parental engagement practices in these schools. Instead, schools remained unchallenged and somehow expected migrant parents – with the help of TSOs - to meet their demands, thus favouring a 'one-way' approach. This echoed the concern raised by Jopke and Morawska (2003:1) when discussing how the scope of official integration policies and programmes in the EU 'have been exaggerated in public and academic perception', concluding that most of the time the word 'integration' is an euphemism of the less politically correct term 'assimilation'.

Secondly, we described the conflict of interest between schools' bureaucray and TSOs and the way internal tensions within the partnership projects added important constraints for their success. As discussed earlier in the case of Catalonia, the complex relations between the federation and PAs, on the one hand, and between PAs and Schools, on the other, would have required to explicitly address their divergent priorities. After all, the main representatives of the federation favoured and demanded the action-research project to find practical guidelines that could be easily transferred to PAs, thus reinforcing the traditional role of PAs rather than transforming it. In the case London, we saw that the relations among workers coordinated by the TSO and teachers were not free from tensions. Both PI Officers and Co-Educators, not being fully integrated within the schools' dynamics, did not have the possibility nor the capacity to disrupt school-family relations.

In conclusion, we argue that these projects were not problematic per se, but were inherently unable to meet what we acknowledge as an incompatible demand: to change education outcomes without changing school practices. As the case of London shows, compared to that of Catalonia, even a committed and experienced community organization working in partnership with the local authority and diverse schools in a well-planned project failed to re-balance the power relations between schools and migrant families. In assuming the notion of participation and the rationale of schools, these TSO-led projects worked as means of 'compensatory legitimation' (Weiler 1983). As the onus of helping parents participate was put into TSOs, these initiatives fuelled the idea that the problem lied outside the schools, with families seen as a problem (Dahsltedt and Tesfalhuney 2010). Moreover, in focusing on the issue of participation, schools not only were unchallenged but also diverted the attention from other approaches to improve the achievement of migrant children, thus also setting the limits for change. In a time of intensification of market forces in education policies (Dias 2005), these TSOs remained at the margins of schools, with their potential as progressive forces limited to the delivery of specialized services, which had a positive impact only as long as they were active.

Overall, the initiatives led by these TSOs appeared to show the willingness of the state education system to offer opportunities for participation, but ultimately did not help create a level playing field for migrant families, who remained unable to compete and excel as responsible and strategic consumers (Franklin, Bloch, and Popkewitz 2003). Consequently, we argue it is critical to challenge the narratives surrounding parental participation and the dynamics shaping the interaction of teachers with migrant parents (Abrams and Gibbs 2002). Only focusing our attention on how discourses and practices of parental participation are put into practice at the micro-level, we can start to understand to what extent TSOs may become valuable means to improve the relations between migrant families and schools, or, rather, their role in legitimating the current status quo.

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