The Educating City: An intercultural approach through social-educational mediation processes

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Practical background. The growth of cities all over the world has contributed to an increasing concentration of poverty, social disruption and environmental damage; on the other hand, urban aglomerates offer the best oportunities for social-economical development, for both people and communities. Urban contexts appear to be challenging, yet privileged, platforms for intercultural dialogue, the understanding of the inherent developmental potential of conflict situations and the promotion of an inclusive, live-long education. This understanding of education as something that isn't limited to academic experiences is fundamental to our project, in which we see mediation as both a tool for rehabilitating informal institutions, the relationship between them and with the community (and thus informal educational opportunities), and a process that configures new social regulation devices.

Research background. Our work is rooted essentially in conflict mediation, because it is in this sphere that, in the field of social and human sciences, mediation is more substantially studied and, it is also there that its practice has achieved more visibility and repercussion (Mayer, 2004; Moore, 2003). Mediation is a confidential and non-adversarial process, guided by a third party, neutral and without power to decide on the source of the conflict. It is worth mentioning that mediation seeks to habilitate the parties towards the resolution of future conflicts (hence it may refer to a notion of *empowerment*). As the devices that used to ensure a relatively stable social integration (for example, consider the status traditionally associated with the place where a person worked/the type of work a person did, the role of elderly family members in raising young children, the importance of having a diploma when entering the work market, etc.) start to show signs of growing feebleness, proximal management of social tensions becomes increasingly relevant (Castel, 2005). A mediation service, while it aims to solve communitarian conflicts, helps make local institutions visible to one another, in an effort to optimize resources and social-educational opportunities.

Aims. Our main purposes are to, through the concept of Educating City (e.g. Bernet, 1990; Villar, 2001), identify a set of local institutions that, through their daily work, contribute to the social-educational development of their communities, and to improve the use of communicational resources between such institutions and the people that they aim to serve, through mediation processes. This is a type of research work that is also a work of constructing that which one is researching: given that this project was developed and is being put to practice by a social-educational mediator, we believe that the research work itself produces institutional interaction dynamics which are worth analyzing.

Main contribution. Given that we understand the work of mediation not simply as a task of working out or simplifying interpersonal processes, namely from conflict situations, we think that the idea of Educating City somehow frames the type of social and educational work that we defend. The model of local organization and intervention privileged in the context of the development of a Educating City has the following features: «an increase in the degree of complexity of the interrelations of organization; a step forward in the creation of interdisciplinary teams; an evolution in the benefits system to an intervention based in projects and programs; the population is no longer conceived as a consumer but as a producer of benefits; the professional is no longer a distributor of answers but a mediator» (Villar, 2007: 67). Our analysis of local social-educational dynamics, informed by the potentialities of mediation processes, is focused on the transformation of the city's "fabric" and the production of sociabilities, both referring to an "original" sense of belonging and a second sense of belonging, produced by the mediation processes. We have addressed public and private schools and other training facilities, local companies, citizens' associations and local government entities, in an effort to understand their organizational dynamics and their relationship with the local community, as well as their concern with education, not only in the traditional term, but also in a broader sense, i.e., the social, cultural, cognitive, psychological... development of people throughout their lives. Our findings so far suggest that, in urban contexts, non-formal and informal education has an increasingly important role in promoting intercultural dialogue and developing a sense of belonging, and that social-educational mediation professionals/instances may offer a valuable contribution in that matter.

Implications. This project may offer an alternative path to understand the social-educational-cultural consequences of urban growth and intercultural conflict. Validating and promoting non-formal and informal local educational platforms, aside from allowing people of all ages the access to a variety of cultural assets, also increases interaction opportunities and a more effective use of public resources (such as local infrastructures).

Introduction

The Project "Massarelos, Educating Civil Parish" began in January 2008, at the same time as my Doctoral Research, supported financially by the Portuguese Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia. I had been cooperating with the Massarelos Civil Parish (Porto, Portugal) since 2006, as a member of

the "+Emprego" Project ("emprego" means "employment" in Portuguese) team, in the context of which I developed my curricular probation year research (Licenciate Degree in Education Sciences). On my final report, I had encountered a set of data that pointed in the direction of the need for an inter-institutionally articulated social-educational development program.

Presenting this Project to the Massarelos Civil Parish Government came as an opportunity to deepen the knowledge about this local context's social-educational dynamics through contacting with its institutions and its people, while, at the same time, contributing to the ongoing discussion about the Education Sciences' graduates' skills as social-educational field workers.

This paper presents the analysis made to a set of data that was gathered at some of Massarelos' local institutions, such as citizen's associations and local companies (while schools and other formal education institutions have also been inquired, such data is not referred to or analyzed here), through the use of written and online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

We begin the approach to this data by outlining the concept of "Educating City" (from which the idea of "educating parish" derives) and its operationalization in an Integrated Training/ Educational System. We then analyze the roles that each type of local organization may have/has, giving special focus to citizen's associations and local companies. After presenting and discussing the gathered data, we shall focus on the relevance that mediation processes/professionals may have in contributing to the development of a Local Educative Project and to the emergence of an Educating City/Educating Civil Parish, as we were able to sense from our context analysis.

Theoretical-Epistemological Framework

Education and the City

Complexity is richness. According to Roig (2007), «ever since the greek polis (…) politics, city and education are concepts that go hand in hand. One would consider as citizens those who were allowed to participate in the city's affairs. The education that said citizens received was that which allowed them to face life in the city and to respond collectively to the challenges that were presented» (Roig, 2007: 173).

With the establishment of a separation between public and private, social gatherings around the occidental world began to question the validity of the assumption that one could learn by seeing or by doing, and thus determined that the working context and the learning context would be separated from

each other and from the familial context. The separation and specialization of spaces and purposes (with the industrial society being its pinnacle) lead to an increasing individualization of cultural-educational processes.

Since the beginning of the 20th Century, and particularly in the last four decades, there have been deep changes all over the world at so many levels: environmental, social, cultural, economical and educational (cf. Castells' trilogy dedicated to the information era: 2007, 2007a, 2007b). Industrial, urban and technological development has caused strong social and economical inequalities between populations. In some countries, and particularly in Portugal, the promises of the modern age have not been quite as fulfilled as in other countries located closer to the core of the world-system; thus, they remain regions where premodernity and postmodernity coexist (Santos, 1994).

In sight of the depletion of the Fordist development model, in addition to the exhaustion of a centralized system of administration (in terms of government, etched upon the idea of nation-state), and in face of the increasing menace of unemployment, climate changes, social exclusion and the marginalization of people and territories, there erupts a renewed interest for the "local", for singularities and for pluralism (Correia & Caramelo, 2003; Hamzaoui, 2005). According to Ferreira (2005), «the idea of modern society used to aim at describing a social reality that was sought to be unitary, substantive, but society as we know it today can only be thought in accordance to an interrogation about itself and a growing awareness about the impossibility of obtaining a conclusive answer» (2005: 46-47).

Nowadays, as we can see, it's not about constructing systems which are able to comprise and totalize, but rather about multiplying and diversifying the educational act. The idea of a system (such as the "educational system"), in its static, non evolutional sense, is becoming insufficient to comprise the dimensions of the educational process. Although the schools and the formal educational institutions have an irreplaceable place in the individuals' training (namely in what concerns technical and scientific contents, but also in terms of socialization opportunities), they are becoming increasingly unable to cover all aspects of a person's full development, as well as conferring them all the needed tools to enter the work market. Other organizations, in account of their history, degree of local deployment, dynamics and activities may have an important role in promoting the individual's integrated development, offering educational opportunities that are additional the academic ones, but can also be of a different nature.

According to Faure *et al* (1981), «it is the terms of the relationship between society and education themselves that change in nature. A social configuration that would give such a place to education, that would position it in such a place, would deserve a name of itself: Educating City» (Faure *et al*, 1981: 249). The "omen" of the Educating City seems to emerge in the context of two concurring tendencies: first, a diversification and multiplication of organizations with social-educational potential; and second, a "de-formalization" of traditional social-educational structures. According to Faure *et al* (1981), «the teaching circuits' extension can take place through the multiplication of scholar institutions of the existing type, as well as the creation of schools of a different type, part-time teaching and extra-scholar activities» (Faure *et al*, 1981: 277).

The type of education that we foresee here differs from that established by the "New School" Movement, given that these were based in the conviction that «if it is true that life (…) contains in itself experiences of all kinds, then the school should organize itself in a way in which such experiences can take place within its limits» (Alfieri, 1990: 166),transforming schools in «omnicomprehensive "reservatoires" that keep students occupied for the entire day through a series of teaching opportunities» (Alfieri, 1990: 167). What is sought after in the context of the Educating City is a balance between a totally school-centric vision of education and a violently de-schooled action: according to Alfieri (1990), in a more communitarian level, there should exist a commitment to allow the conquering, by the child, of a rich, integrated, authentic, differentiated and healthily conflictual experimental basis; in a more scholar level, there should be a commitment to the mission of transforming life experiences into cultural tools which are adequate to the social group(s) in which we live. From our point of view, and according to Sempere (1990), there should be an attempt to «break the classic rites of the spaces in which education and cultural acts can take place», in an effort of «democratization of culture and public appropriation of the territory» (Sempere, 1990: 284).

The educational role of local organizations. According to Batllori (1990), all the places used as *habitats* by human beings since the beginning of History were/are educating, «because in all ages social coexistence has generated processes of socialization of its members, as one of the basic elements of life itself» (Batllori, 1990: 41). However, it is important to stress out that the educational process, which necessarily involves a transmitting agent, a receptive subject, a communication code and the assertion of intentionality through the settlement of goals, does not come from spontaneous generation. To label a phenomenon as educational is

to say that it is also content, means and agent of education; to state that the city is educating is, therefore, to say that it is possible to learn *the* city, to learn *in* the city and to learn *from* the city (cf. Bernet, 1990). In short, we may say that an Educating City is the one that has, by its features, something that makes it educative, but also has a model of organization and management (involving all local entities) «that maximizes the resources, avoiding duplications and offering unified services to the citizen, so as not to bewilder him [sic] in the face of multiple institutional services» (Villar, 2007: 65). That introduces an educational intentionality in its performances in the multiple dimensions of urban life.

In the concept of Educating City which we aim for, there are five types of organizations that are called to assume a role in the contexts' social-educational development: the local administration (which, in the Project "Massarelos, Educating Civil Parish", is the Civil Parish Government), the training/educational institutions, the productive system, the associative movement and the families (cf. Villar, 2007). The type of relationship that should be able to emerge between these organizations is close to the idea of a "network", given that, firstly, none of them has a specially preponderant role, and secondly, the action of a certain organization is not, in itself, sufficient to fulfill the person's and the community's social-educational needs. Our belief is that the educational process is too complex, and, wishfully, too rich, to be contained and dominated by a single organization: the action of citizen's associations and local companies, for example, introduces a change in the school's internal relational dynamics, in allowing the entry of a new type of knowledge and new ways of sharing it. According to Villar (2007), «The need for cultural development and participation require the presence of different agents who participate in a territorial policy determined to therefore build a broad social fabric, which can be consolidated as a factor of cultural and educational development» (Villar, 2007: 39). What our research has shown us is that, although an inter-institutional articulation regarding the community's social-educational development is wanted, it is not yet established which we will discuss later.

According to Villar (2007), «the Educating City is configured in a way in which all of the city's spaces and activities acquire an educational meaning» (Villar, 2007: 39). The Project "Massarelos, Educating Civil Parish" is strongly based on this principle, which, for me, began as a personal belief and a professional purpose, but became a need expressed by some of the Civil Parish's most preeminent social actors in the interviews that I began making in 2007. In one of them, with a basic school teacher, it was stated that the action of the Civil Parish's associative movement could «*in a way*

[suppress] *some of the families' flaws, that which the families don't know how to offer, and even cultural* [opportunities]». This person thought it was clear that «*one of the biggest difficulties that we feel a lot of the time is (...) the lack of that "social broth" in which the children should grow, (...)* [because] *the family life is malnourished, it lacks room for a cultural life (...), that "cultural broth" is very much needed (...), and it could come through the associative movement*» (excerpts from an interview).

Method

The access to the institutional dispositions towards the educational problematic took place, throughout the 2006/2007 curricular year, in the form of semi-directed interviews to the Civil Parish Government of Massarelos' institutional representatives who had the area of Training under their responsibility. We then proceeded to list the Civil Parish's educational institutions and citizen's associations (with no restriction regarding their field of activity). Having contacted them and presented the Project to them, we proceeded to make the same time of interviews to other of the Parish's preeminent social actors: a basic school teacher with directive responsibilities, the president of one of the Inhabitants' Association, the educational coordinator of another Inhabitants' Association and the president of a cultural and recreational Association.

We chose this type of interview given that it gives the interviewee a degree of freedom that appeared adequate to the kind of discussion that we wanted to promote. Our goal was to, on one hand, allow «*that the interviewee him/herself structures its thoughts surrounding the foreseen object*» and, on the other hand, to eliminate «*from the field of interest several considerations towards which the interviewee is naturally dragged (…)* [demanding] *a deepening of subjects that he/she him/herself would* [probably] *not have approached*» (Ruquoy, 2005: 87). Considering that the purpose of such interviews was to explore, among other aspects, the local agents' perspective of their institutions' educational role and of the way in which they think it is possible for them to explicitly promote training and education, as well as their understanding about the possibility and potentiality of an inter-institutional articulation, we think that, according to Danielle Ruquoy (2005), «*the interview is the most adequate instrument in delimitating the individual's representation system, values and transmitted norms*» (Ruquoy, 2005: 89).

This took place through the publication of the Project's presentation text in the Civil Parish Government's tri-monthly informative bulletin, which is gratuitously distributed across the Civil Parish's homes and organizations. We also approached the Civil Parish's educational/training institutions and citizen's associations, by sending them personalized e-mails.

On February 2008, we organized, with the Civil Parish Government's support, a collective gathering with Massarelos' associations' directions, in which there was a presentation of the Project and a request for a set of data relating to the associations' functioning, through a written questionnaire. In what concerns the contact with the Civil Parish's training/educational institutions, it began at approximately the same time, through the scheduling of individual reunions (one in each institution), where we also presented the Project and requested a set of data concerning the institution's population and functioning. The option for the use of questionnaires (first written and, later, online) comes from the need to, in a brief contact, gather some information that allows us to draw a "panoramic" view of the institutions' characteristics, in terms of its origin, its functioning dynamics and its interaction with other local organizations.

Presently, we are organizing a set of focus-group discussions, with the purpose of understanding the perception that the Massarelos' inhabitants and users have of their Civil Parish's fragilities and potentialities as a public and educational space, while, at the same time, promoting a collective discussion of these issues. We are scheduling the following gatherings, to take place until the end of the first semester of 2010:

- A focus-group discussion involving the Civil Parish's associations' representatives.

- Several focus-group discussions (FGD) with the purpose of understanding the perceptions that the children and young people who live or study in Massarelos have about the educational potential of their context, its institutions and the inter-personal and institutional relationships that they establish there. Our request, directed to the School Group's Direction, and according to the Civil Parish's educational system organization, was the arrangement of: one FGD with children between the ages of 4-5; one FGD with children of the 1st and 2nd grades and one with children of the 3rd and 4th grades; one with children/young people of the 5th and 6th grades and one with children/young people of the 7th, 8th and 9th grades.

According to Richard Krueger and David Morgan, «from a practical point of view, the true question is not what focus-group discussions are but rather what we can do with them» (Morgan, 1998: 1-2). On the other hand, the choice for this method comes from the interest in creating an environment which favors the expression of individual opinions, but also the confrontation and debate of ideas, which we think is a stimulus to the emergence of attitudes and behaviors which favor the development of a civic

consciousness and a collective interest concerning the Civil Parish's educational development.

Results and Discussion

Massarelos' Local Associations and the Civil Parish's Social-Educational Development

Through the use of written and online questionnaires, we were able to gather a set of relevant information concerning the local citizen's associations' potential and effective role on the civil parish's social-educational development. Using several 7-points Likert scale and yes/no answers, we were able to determine:

- In terms of where they come from, the preferential users of the Massarelos' citizen's associations' activities/initiatives are Massarelos' own inhabitants (5,83/7), closely followed by people living in other of Porto's Civil Parishes (5,50/7).

- In what specifically concerns their training/educational activities, their main users are people belonging to the local community (5,00/7), with associates being the second most common users (4,40/7).

- When we asked what type of training/educational activities they held, we realized that these play a rather small part on the associations' lives. The most common type of training/educational activities are workshops (2,00/7), with the second most common being, *ex aequo*, training courses (1,40/7) and debates/seminars/conferences (1,40/7).

- Most of these organizations have partnerships with the Municipal Government (Porto City Hall) and the Civil Parish Government of Massarelos.

- In what concerns formal or informal partnerships with training/educational institutions, 83,3% of them say there is none, which is the same percentage that states the inexistence of partnerships with local companies. Only 33,3% of these organizations state that they have any type of formal or informal partnership with other local associations.

These results seem to point out that these associations' action is very oriented towards the proximal community, which is probably related to the fact that these organizations are seldom founded and coordinated by community members, who have friendship and/or family bonds between them. On the other hand, these are rather small organizations, some of them on the verge of disappearing from lack of associates and/or users, which is a problem that afflicts a large number of Portugal's citizen's associations. This may also have in impact on the organizations' effective range across the community.

We can also see that, despite being a relatively feeble part of these organizations' lives, training/ educational activities are also mostly oriented to community members and of a more "practical" nature, as opposed to a more formal/structured type of activity.

Finally, these results very obviously state the absence of inter-institutional articulation, rather it being between similar organizations (citizen's associations between themselves) or between organizations of different types. Despite these quantitative results, the answers to our questionnaire's open questions and the data gathered through the use of interviews makes us think that there is a common, perhaps institutional, desire for associations and their directions to have a closer and more complementary relationship, between themselves and with the population of which they are a part. Most of these organizations offer important alternative educational activities, directed towards children, young people, adults and even seniors, either it being of a learning type (e.g. learning how to play an instrument), a performing type (e.g. producing and playing a role on a theatrical play) or a communicational type (e.g. the team work involved in team sports or the issues of an habitational cooperative).

Despite the obvious importance of an articulate work between these organizations and a more proactive attitude towards their place in the community, we are aware that some of the issues surrounding the associations' lack of participation in the communitarian life are of a political nature. According to Alfieri (1990), «associations would have, very simply, to, (…) rather than being continuously blocked in their exercise of functions that aren't exclusively directed towards those who belong to those same groups and associations (…), [be aided] to "set home", in exchange of their availability to open these new structures to the neighborhood and city children» (Alfieri, 1990: 171).

Our expectation is that an ensemble discussion about the questionnaires' results and the data gathered with the interviews, at the associations' directions focus-group discussion, as well as the creation of the Civil Parish's new mediation office (which we will later discuss), can shed some light over the communicational difficulties that seem apparent. Our stance on the issue of the role of citizen's associations on the community's social-educational development is that, according to Bartolone (1999), «[Associations] (…) are the runways that favor the school-family-city interactions which are essential to the country's democratic life. [They] (…) are the main actors on the local educational contract. The

latter gathers educational actors and reunites them around common purposes in accompanying the children's pathways after school» (Bartolone, 1999: 115).

Massarelos' Companies and the Civil Parish's Social-Educational Development

Using exclusively e-mail contact and online questionnaires, we contacted Massarelos' companies (based or working at the Civil Parish), and, similarly to what happened with local associations, we were able to gather a set of relevant information concerning the local companies' potential and effective role on the civil parish's social-educational development. Using several 7-points Likert scale and yes/no answers, we were able to determine:

- Considering the initiative surrounding the companies' creation, we were able to determine that 50% of these organizations had their origin in the initiative of a person, or group of people, exterior to the local community.

- In terms of where their preferential users, they most frequently come from other of the city's Civil Parishes (5,56/7), and secondly from other cities in Porto district.

- In what concerns these organizations' interaction with educational/training institutions, they appear to foster relatively frequent relationships with Higher Education institutions (4,25/7), and secondly with Professional Training institutions (3,83/7). When we asked them about their interaction with local citizen's associations, we were able to determine that there is not much of a concern in fomenting close relationships with these kinds of organizations (2,70/7).

- Although existent, the importance given to where these organizations are implemented (this being the Civil Parish of Massarelos) appears to be almost residual nature (4,60/7). Similarly, the degree to which they feel to be a part of this community is feeble (4,20/7).

- All (100%) of the inquired local companies refer they do not have formal or informal partnerships with training/educational institutions, as well as with citizen's associations. The majority of them (70%) also state that they do not have any type of partnerships with other companies.

At this point, we would like to point out that these companies were selected from the Civil Parish Government's "+Empresas" Project's data base ("empresas" means "companies" in Portuguese). This Project, part of the Civil Parish Government's program to fight unemployment and promote Massarelos' economical development, has been articulating some of the inhabitants' employment and training needs with the corporate offer. These are

companies with which the Massarelos' Civil Parish Government has been promoting frequent contact, and they were selected to be a part of this study in account of the type of activity they develop: we tried to select companies from each field of work, considering their representation in the original data base.

Our stance on the issue of the local companies' role in the community's social-educational development is that it should not be limited to sponsoring other organizations' activities (although this is clearly an important aspect in lessening the communitarian development's dependence of the central/national government). They should foment a close relationship with training/educational institutions, especially in what concerns promoting the type of training that is relevant/needed in the work market. Also, according to Faure et al (1981), «it is important to fill the gap that often persists between schools and companies, both public and private, which are a primordial element of the global educational system; their role shouldn't be limited to the training of workers, but be broadened, as much as possible, to the training of technicians and to research» (Faure et al, 1981: 294).

Closing Remarks

According to the International Association of Educating Cities' Charter of Educating Cities (2004), «the city will encourage the formation of associations as a form of participation and civic co-responsibility, in order to channel action that provides service to the community and to obtain and divulge information, material and ideas as to promote the social, moral and cultural development of the individual» (International Association of Educating Cities, 2004: 7). Our belief is that, in a local context, such as a city or, in our Project's case, a Civil Parish, associations may have (and, in some cases, have or have had) a major role in promoting the community's social-educational development, often through alternative contents and routes, such as inter-generational conviviality, the development of artistic abilities and the promotion of a sense of belonging (either to a place or a group).

In what concerns local companies, the Charter (2004) states that the city «shall provide [its inhabitants] (…) with the necessary counseling for personal and vocational orientation and make it possible for them to participate in social activities. In the specific area of education-work, we should underline the close relationship that should exist between educational planning and the needs of the labor market». Complementarily, «the city shall define training strategies that take into account social demand and shall collaborate with trade union and employers' organizations in job creation and in formal and non-formal lifelong training»

(International Association of Educating Cities, 2004: 7).

The results we gathered from our interviews and questionnaires, as well as our more informal institutional contacts, have led us to understand that the type of social-educational intervention that would be relevant in this context would be mediation. We can see that, in Massarelos, there already are a set of local organizations that, because of their history and dynamics, have (or have had) an important role in the community's development, providing people with important educational opportunities which can, ultimately, promote the community's social-cultural development. This means that our role, as experts, would not be as much as of creating spaces and/or structures, but more of promoting «an alternative conflict management culture and promoting concrete communication management methodologies, in pursuit of a fundamental purpose: to provide a peaceful recomposition of human relationships» (Luison & Valastro, 2004: 4).

Despite the importance of conflict management, our point of view is a bit more proactive, given that we do not wait for explicit conflict situations to arise: our stance is more that «mediation is a process (…) [that grants] granting recognition and genuine social citizenship to the multiplicity of values and social practices operating within our societies, reintroducing the subject and experience, contributing to support a return of sensibility to the social and scientific spaces» (Luison & Valastro, 2004: 5).

Besides promoting inter-institutional articulation and communication, the creation of a mediation service, from our point of view, serves «the project of proposing intermediaries with the purpose of eliminating a growing gap between "disaffiliated" local populations and local institutions» (Barthelemy, 2004: 61). This is, as we see it, the main aspect of the Educating City (and the Educating Civil Parish) project: allowing people and institutions to become more aware of each other, and each other's duties and rights, and, together, to set what is it that each one feels necessary, and what each one is willing to do, to promote the community's development. This is why we feel that, in such a context, social-educational mediation would be an important catalyst in promoting an integrated and consensual territorial development project.

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Biography

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