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Including children in the governance of urban risks

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Abstract: Although children are often taken as a target group in urban disaster prevention and management, they are seldom considered in terms of active participation in preparedness and response to emergencies. However, it is crucial to hear their voices in order to address their specific needs and vulnerabilities and harness their capabilities in terms of building community resilience.

CUIDAR Cultures of Disaster Resilience amongst Children and Young People is a European project (funded by the Horizon 2020) that aims: (1) to understand children's experiences of disasters; the impact on their lives, their resilience and the longer-term recovery process; (2) to discover how children can best be supported in disasters and how to enhance their resilience to future emergencies; (3) to influence emergency policy and practice to better meet the needs and build the resilience of children and young people. This project is led by the University of Lancaster (UK) and has the participation of a Portuguese team from the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon.

This presentation aims to present some preliminary findings of this project, in particular of the Portuguese case study. More specifically, this presentation will first give an overview of the discourses on the roles ascribed to children in urban disaster risk reduction, based on content analysis of prevention programs and disaster response policies and exploratory interviews with national and local stakeholders and policy makers in this field (civil protection at the national and local level, Ministry of Education).

Keywords: Children; Disasters; Workshops; Risk.

1. Introduction: participation of children in disaster risk reduction

According to Fothergill and Peek (2006), 'Social science research on disasters has largely overlooked children'. The impact of hazards and disasters on children is still understudied in European societies (while being a more visible theme in developing societies), even if children constitute a significant part of the population who suffer more dramatically their devastating consequences. As 'the frequency and intensity of disaster events increase around the globe' (Peek, 2008) – tsunamis, storms, earthquakes, terrorism, floods, wildfires, pandemics, industrial accidents, etc. - they have been very often portrayed as passive and helpless victims, as vulnerable recipients of aid, a representation which is amplified by the media (Tanner 2010). Moreover, very little attention is paid to their particular experience and needs in disasters, their competence to participate in disaster preparedness and emergency plans, in disaster management, in the recovery of their families or communities, their contribution to disaster risk reduction and resilience building.

Much like in other arenas of sociotechnical nature, disaster risk reduction has taken a 'participatory turn' in recent years. The Hyogo Framework (2005-2015) and now the Sendai Framework (2015-2030) of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) emphasise community participation as a cross-cutting issue in its priorities for action. And multiple studies have shown (for instance, Tanner 2010, Lopez et al 2012, Towers et al. 2014) that engaging children both in the prevention and mitigation stages of potential disasters and in the rescue, relief and rehabilitation phases of a disaster has positive impacts over risk and impact reduction.

This paper aims to provide a preliminary overview of the inclusion/exclusion of children in disaster risk reduction (DDR) in Portugal. In particular, it will examine the place of children in DDR policy, in disaster education programmes and as active participants in DDR.

3. Methodology

This paper is based on a project funded by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 programme. *CUIDAR Cultures of Disaster Resilience amongst Children and Young People* aims 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; to increase awareness and understanding amongst disaster responders and policy makers of children and young people's needs in disasters; to generate more effective communication between disaster responders and children and young people in urban contexts; to contribute to improve disaster management framework, policies and practices that take into account the particular needs of children and young people in urban disasters. This project is led by the University of Lancaster (UK, coordinator Maggie Mort) and has the participation of five other institutions across Europe, including in Portugal the Instituto de Ciências Sociais of the Universidade de Lisboa (<http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/cuidar>).

Since the project is still at its early stages, this paper will present the results of the scoping exercise of existing disaster policy, practice and programmes relating to children in Portugal. Scoping is an approach to reviewing literature or data that consists of "'mapping", a process of summarizing a range of evidence in order to convey the breadth and depth of a field' (Levac et al. 2010; see also Arksey and O'Malley 2005). Based on internet searches, 215 documents (legislation, newsletters, programmes, emergency plans, manuals, leaflets, among others) were identified and uploaded to the software Evernote. Each document has been tagged according to a list defined by the team of UOC Universitat Oberta de Catalunya who is leading the respective work package: type of item, organisation, type of disaster, stages, target, age group of children, type of document, geographical scale and type of participation awarded to children. Additionally, the documents underwent exploratory content analysis with the purpose of ascertaining the conceptualisation and the roles ascribed to children in disaster risk reduction.

In order to supplement the information provided by the documents, interviews were conducted with six key informants, identified via the scoping exercise, from the Civil Protection Authority (national, regional and municipal level) and the Ministry of Education. The interviews were fully transcribed and subjected to content analysis.

4. Children in disaster risk reduction policy in Portugal

The analysis of policy documents and legislation pertaining disaster management in Portugal has shown that children and young people are seldom considered as active subjects in this matter. There are no specific guidelines or plans aimed at them (other than of an educational nature) and they are referred to in this type of document solely as a 'vulnerable group', with 'special needs', alongside the elderly and disabled persons. No specific references to age groups are made, even though the label 'children' encompasses from newly born to 17 year-olds.

For instance, in the Technical Notebooks (a collection of manuals that contain technical information on emergency planning) published by the National Authority of Civil Protection (NACP), children are only mentioned as potential victims – 'Nitrates in water are not a health hazard below 50mg/l, except for young children, in which case n-NO₂ should not go above 10mg/l' (Technical Notebook n. 15, Coastal risks) – or as targets for special measures - 'Focusing on the element to be protected, the population, we distinguish specific vulnerabilities, such as those caused by difficulty in walking, hearing or seeing, children, elderly people, foreigners, among others, in order to prepare in a suitable manner the protection measures' (Technical Notebook n. 7, Information Guide for Designing External Emergency Plans); 'Step 2: To keep

families together and to ask adults to help children and others in need of assistance' (Technical Notebook n. 8, Intervention Manual for Radiological Emergencies).

The National Civil Protection Emergency Plan only mentions children when it describes the actions to be taken in the emergency stage, once again describing them as a vulnerable (therefore problematic) category: 'Evacuation of at risk population, with a special focus on the sick, bedridden, elderly, children, disable and others in at risk situations' (ANPC, 2013, p. 37).

No specific plans or training of civil protection personnel on how to deal with children during emergencies were found and the interviews confirmed that they do not exist.

However, in the event of a disaster, recent cases have shown that authorities devise and implement specific measures for children, even if they are not foreseen in manuals and plans. For instance, in Madeira, in the aftermath of the 2010 flash flood that killed dozens of people and displaced several hundred others, the army (Silva 2010) and social services (Erra and Mouro 2012) implemented specific support services for children affected by the disaster.

The civil protection domain where children are addressed as the main target is school safety. There is legislation on self-protection measures in schools, including a mandatory rule for the creation of emergency plans. The Ministry of Education published a Safety Manual for Schools in 1999, updated in 2003 (ME, 2003) that establishes a set of rules for safety against risks in the regular operation of schools, health and hygiene, fires and earthquakes. Students are here again defined solely as targets for prevention measures. In the chapter about earthquakes, their vulnerability is highlighted: 'Earthquakes cause fear and unsafety, especially among young pupils who have a tendency for panicking, so before an earthquake happens it is important to ensure that students as well as teachers are perfectly aware of the procedures to be followed, in order to naturally apply the basic safety principles' (ME, 2003, p. 70). The document then sets a list of measures to attain the objective of raising knowledge on what to do in an emergency situation: awareness campaigns, training sessions for teachers and protection and evacuation exercises. The following pages make perfectly clear that the agency lies exclusively with teachers, who are tasked with instructing and steering the behaviours of students during an emergency.

In 2005 the NACP and the municipal authority of Lisbon published an updated version of the 1999 manual for designing Prevention and Emergency Plans for Schools (Lencastre and Pimentel 2005). As well as establishing a set requirements that prevention and emergency plans should include, it contained a video on 'Evacuation of a school in Emergencies that aimed 'to raise awareness of the whole school community, teachers, staff and especially students. In addition to being the duty of all to contribute to avoid accidents, everyone should know exactly what to do in an emergency situation and understand the fundamental usefulness of their actions. Thus we will be training discerning adults with a new safety attitude' (CML/ANPC 2005, p. 7). Therefore children are seen as 'adults in the making' (Almeida 2009) and not 'beings in the present', actors on their own right.

5. Children in disaster education programmes

Conversely, there is a great emphasis on the issue of risk education for children. Children and young people of school age are considered a prime target for public programs aimed at raising awareness on matters of prevention and mitigation of major accidents and disasters.

This concern is also present at the legislative level. At the national level, the Article 7 of the basic law on civil protection (Law number 80/2015, published on the 3rd of August 2015) states that: 'Education programs, at their different levels, must include civic training, civil protection and self-protection matters, in order to disseminate practical knowledge and rules of behaviour to adopt in the case of severe accident or disaster'. At the local level, the law that defines the institutional and operational framework of civil protection states that municipalities are responsible for 'Information and training of the population of the municipality, seeking to promote their awareness on self-protection and cooperation with the authorities' (Law 65/2007, article 4) and should 'promote information campaigns on preventive measures, aimed at specific segments of the target population, or about specific risks in previously defined likely scenarios' (Law 65/2007, article 10).

The NACP has a wide array of initiatives aimed at promoting information and education about risk among children. For instance, it promotes regular training courses for teachers and educators on Civil Protection and publishes books, leaflets and videos aimed at children, parents and teachers, which are then disseminated through session in schools and public libraries (Figure 1).



Figure 1 - Civil protection leaflets aimed at children

Source: Prociv, Bulletin of the NACP, n. 83, 2015

In 2006 the NACP launched the Civil Protection Clubs programme (Figure 2). It aimed to stimulate the creation of such clubs in schools (from the 5th to the 12th grade), by providing information and training resources for acquiring specific skills and developing actions. Its core document (ANPC 2006) included the definitions of main concepts and risks, the purposes and rules for creating a civil protection club and a list of indoor and outdoor activities, as well as suggestions for practical actions. The objectives of civil protection clubs are defined as ‘to raise awareness of children for civil protection; to know stakeholders and actors; to identify natural and technological risks; to acquire safety habits; to develop skills in terms of civil protection; and to promote suitable attitudes and behaviours in case of emergencies’ (ANPC 2006, p. 27). These clubs are led by a teacher and should include between 15 and 20 students. Their activities ought to at least span an hour and a half per week. Once the school approves the creation of the club, cooperation agreements must be established with local civil protection services. Accordingly, the Order No. 13993/2009 defines that ‘institutions with fire brigades may enter into agreements with schools with the purpose of contributing to the strengthening of the relationship between the school and its environment and to the development of children and young people’s skills in the areas of protection and rescue, volunteering and community spirit training’. Furthermore, ‘these agreements, framed by educational projects and the activity plans of schools, may concern: a) activities to be undertaken in the subject area of civic education; b) implementation of joint actions for the prevention and awareness of existing risks; c) participation in exercises and drills; d) conducting diversified practical activities that motivate students to safety issues; e) the creation of civil protection clubs’.

Hundreds of civil protection clubs were thus created across the country, though the actual number is not known (Inácio 2010, p. 15). Their effectiveness in terms of knowledge acquired by children was assessed in a Master thesis (Pestana 2014), which concluded that these clubs bring an added value in terms of raising awareness, though not in all subject matters of civil protection. However, civil protection clubs were dependent on the schools and teachers’ engagement with the project. According to the interviews with the NACP officers, teacher turnover in schools and recent changes in education policy that reduced the number of hours allotted to extra-curricular activities and terminated some school disciplines (Project Area, Civic Education and Citizenship) in which these contents were included had an impact on the sustainability of the programme and, as a result, many clubs ceased to exist.



Figure 2 - Poster for the Civil Protection Clubs

Source: <http://www.prociv.pt/clube/>

In 2015 the NACP and the Ministry of Education published the Reference Frame for Education on Risk, which aimed to provide guidelines for inclusion in the school curricula of issues pertaining civil protection and risk reduction. The creation of this Reference Frame had already been suggested in a recommendation of the National Education Council (n. /2011) in 2011, that stated ‘to know and to act in this paradigm of “risk society” requires new personal skills, basis for a more active, participatory and informed citizenship’ (Recommendation n. 5/2011, *Diário da República*, 20th October 2011). The Reference Frame’s aims are: ‘to raise awareness among the school community for the issue of civil protection; to identify risks; to acquire safety habits and to develop skills in civil protection; to promote suitable attitudes and behaviours in case of emergencies; to promote internal risk safety plans; to promote personal safety’ (Saúde et al., 2015, p. 6). Within the Reference Frame, children and young people are conceptualised as potential ‘agents for change, not just by acquiring knowledge, but also as conveyors of a prevention culture to their families, thus being powerful partners of the institutional agents of civil protection’ (Saúde et al., 2015, p. 7). The Reference Frame encompasses a wide array of risks and its contents are differentiated according to educational grade, from kindergarten to the final year of secondary education. However, it is not mandatory that this Reference Frame is used in schools, so its efficacy is curtailed.

At the local level, municipal services develop their own educational programmes aimed at children and schools but noticeable variations can be found between municipalities. For instance, Lisbon is among the most active. Its ‘Growing up in safety’ programme has been in existence since 1992. It comprises several publications (books, leaflets, videos, board games), a website with information aimed at children and parents and interactive games and a house (Tinoni) open for school visits (Figure 3), where children learn fundamental concepts about safety at home and on the street, how to act in case of earthquake, fire, and other seasonal themes that are addressed throughout the year (for instance, security on the beach or forest fire prevention in Summer) (Oliveira 2014). Public demonstrations of civil protection services often include activities aimed at children, such as the event ‘Security and Aid in Lisbon’, in July 2015 (Figure 4).



Figure 3 - Fire room at the Tinoni House, Lisbon

Source: photo by the authors



Figure 4 - Child visiting a fire truck during a demonstration of civil protection in Lisbon, July 2015

Source: photo by the authors

6. Children as active participants in disaster risk reduction

The document analysis also has shown that little consideration is yet given to public participation in disaster prevention and management. According to the Basic Law on Civil Protection (Law number 80/2015), populations are to be ‘informed and trained, in order to raise awareness regarding self-protection and collaboration with the authorities’ (Article number 4). Citizens have the right to be informed on risks and public information seeks to ‘enlighten populations on the nature and aims of civil protection, to make them aware of the responsibilities of each institution and raise awareness on self-protection’ (Article 7). No mention is made to the contribution citizens can give or the need to consult them in defining and assessing risks, vulnerabilities or prevention, mitigation and preparation measures.

According to the Resolution n. 25/2008 (Diário da República, 18th July 2008), all civil protection emergency plans (the non-confidential parts) have to undergo public consultation procedures. The PROCIV Technical Notebooks n. 3 and n. 7 also mention public consultation as mandatory for emergency plans, but do not go into details on how to conduct it, other than setting a minimum period of 30 days. The National Civil Protection Emergency Plan underwent public consultation in June 2012 and it is mentioned that several contributions were received and integrated in the final version of the plan. Several municipal emergency plans give similar information. However, citizen participation in this kind of processes is usually low (see, for instance the case of Environmental Impact Assessments – Chito and Caixinha 1993) and no specific actions for children are included.

The above mentioned Reference Frame for Education on Risk also underwent public consultation, but again children were not specifically targeted in the consultation process, although it acknowledges the importance of public engagement in risk reduction: ‘For an effective safety culture to exist, it is necessary that individuals are encouraged to participate actively in the construction of solutions for problems, by

discussing them, intervening, demanding, cooperating with public services and other organisations' (Saúde et al., 2015, p. 7).

An assessment of local level engagement in Disaster Risk Reduction based on the case study of Amadora (Burnside-Lawry and Carvalho 2015), one of the few Portuguese cities (alongside Lisbon and a handful of others) that integrate the Resilient Cities Programme (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction), has shown that children are already included in public communication and public consultation events, but the level of public participation is yet to be achieved. The civil protection team conducts workshops in schools as part of their awareness and training programs, based on the principle 'that the children are at the centre of the neighbourhood network, able to disseminate information to their families' (Carvalho and Leitão 2015, p. 18). The interview with the civil protection officer revealed that there are no formal mechanisms of consultation with children. Nevertheless, the workshops include participative, hands-on activities, where children sometimes give novel contributions and recommendations that are then included in the reports the facilitators send to their superiors.

Therefore, disaster risk reduction in Portugal is still a long way from achieving the aim of engaging children as active members of their communities, with valuable knowledge and skills that can be mobilised towards risk prevention and impact mitigation.

The next stage of the CUIDAR project aims to address this gap, by organising consultation workshops with children, structured into three steps: (1) To create enthusiasm for the topic and build a knowledge base for children to focus and prioritize their research; (2) To assist children in identifying and investigating prioritised risk in their communities, and taking action to reduce it (3) To co-design with children communication and advocacy strategies to convey to policy makers and stakeholders the key ideas and actions resulting from the workshops.

7. Conclusions

International frameworks and scholarship in DRR have elected community participation as one of its priorities and children are recognised as a key part of their communities, with an important role to play in risk prevention and mitigation. Citizens are more likely to abide by plans and rules they have helped build and that can be an important element for building resilience.

In Portugal, civil protection culture still tends to see children mainly as a passive and vulnerable group, to be safeguarded and educated, rather than listened to and engaged in the protection of their community. Exposure to international best practices may be slowly changing this situation, but there is still a lot of work to be done. The CUIDAR project aims to help contribute to this paradigm shift.

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