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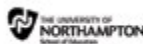**Cristina Devecchi (Ed.)**
on behalf of the **Success at School** team

VOLUNTEERING AS EMPOWERMENT FOR SUCCESS AT SCHOOL

VOLUNTEERING
AS EMPOWERMENT
FOR SUCCESS
AT SCHOOL

Lifelong Learning
Programme

CHAPTER 12:

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National case study – Portugal

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I - Introduction

This chapter shows how the Success at School (SAS) experimentation took place in Portugal. We will begin by analysing the issue of early school leaving (ESL) in the country as a whole and in the specific regions where the experimentation took place, as well as discussing the importance of some statistic indicators for the study of this issue. This more general outline will be followed by a description of the settings, institutions and young people and mentors who participated in the experimentation. A further section will explain the selection criteria used. A fourth section describes the mentoring and volunteering activities and further provides results from the internal evaluation. Finally, the last section provides a reflection on the lesson learnt by the Portuguese team, as well as suggestions and recommendations for future practice.

1. Early School Leaving (ESL) in Portugal: an outline

The topic of early school leaving in Portugal is a complex issue, due to the ambiguous nature of its statistical definition and to the political conditions permeating the process of collecting this sort of data. One of the reasons behind the political sensitivity of the ESL issue rests with the fact that school rankings are gaining relevance in shaping public

perception of educational quality. It appears that a high failure rate weighs less negatively than a high early school leaving rate in the context of schools' capacity to recruit the 'desired' type of students. For this reason, schools tend to conflate the numbers of absenteeism, continuous absenteeism, school leaving and early school leaving under the "umbrella" category of absenteeism, when reporting to the Portuguese Ministry of Education (Estevão & Álvares, 2013).

In this light, it is therefore important to read national statistics with a critical eye. The official numbers of ESL gathered by the national statistics institute (INE), for example, and recently reported in a European Commission report (2013) show a 20,8% ESL total rate in 2012, with boys being the most affected (27,1% against only 14,3% of girls), while there is little differences between native born students (20,9%) and foreign born students (20,3%).

An analysis of the school leaving rates in Portugal (Fig. 1) shows that the proportion of resident population between the ages of 10 and 15 years-old who left school without concluding the 9th grade is 1,58% in the country as a whole, and slightly more critical in the Lisbon region (1,6%). A focus on the three municipalities where the Portuguese Success at School (SAS) experimentation took place – Amadora, Loures and Odivelas, whose values are highlighted in the graphic – shows that they have the highest school leaving rates in Lisbon, and are also way above the regional and national average, with the most extreme case being that of Amadora with a 2,34% leaving rate, followed by Loures (with 1,72%) and Odivelas (with 1,59%). The selection of participating schools was based on this data.
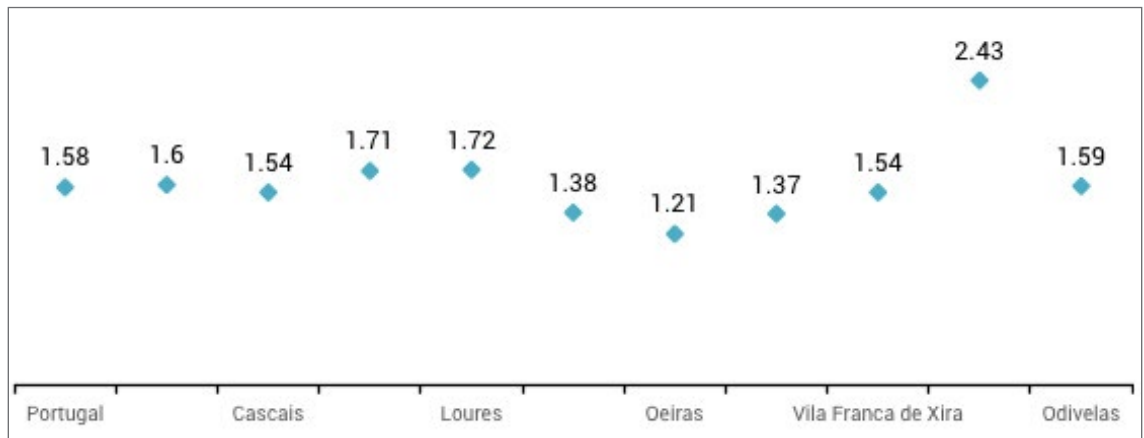
Fig. 1 – compared school leaving rates in lisbon's municipalities (total %) in 2011

Fig. 2 and 3 also show that the above mentioned regions also have the lowest retention rate, a measure considered as the best alternative, given that it is one of the few school failure

indicators retrieved consistently at both national and regional level. The experimentation regions appear once again with some of the highest rates. The data shows that the Amadora region is once again the least performing region, with 15,9% of its enrolled students not transitioning to the next school grade, followed by Loures with a 14,6% rate, and by Odivelas with 11,9%.
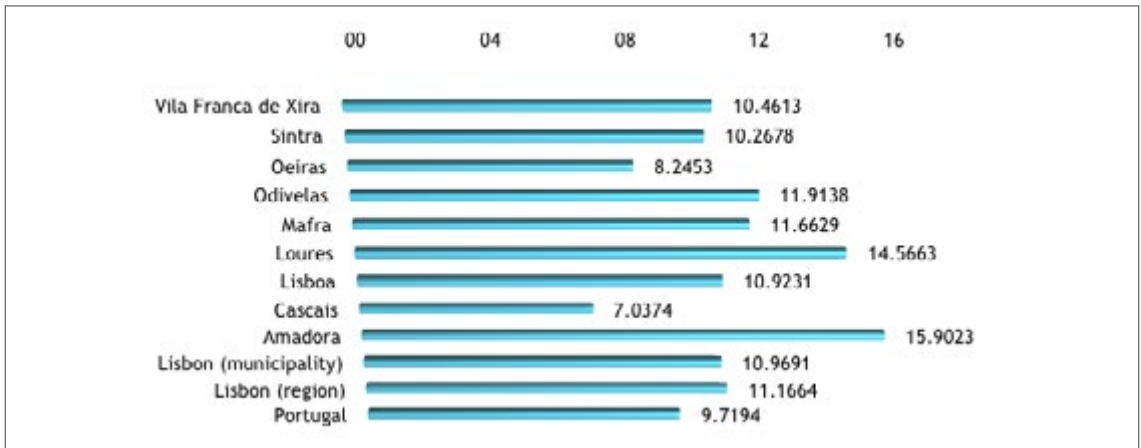
Fig. 2 – grade retention rates in lisbon's municipalities (total %) in 2012/2013

The same disproportion in relation to national retention rates happens at all educational levels, being more marked at primary II (including 5th and 6th grade) and lower secondary levels (from 7th to 9th grade).
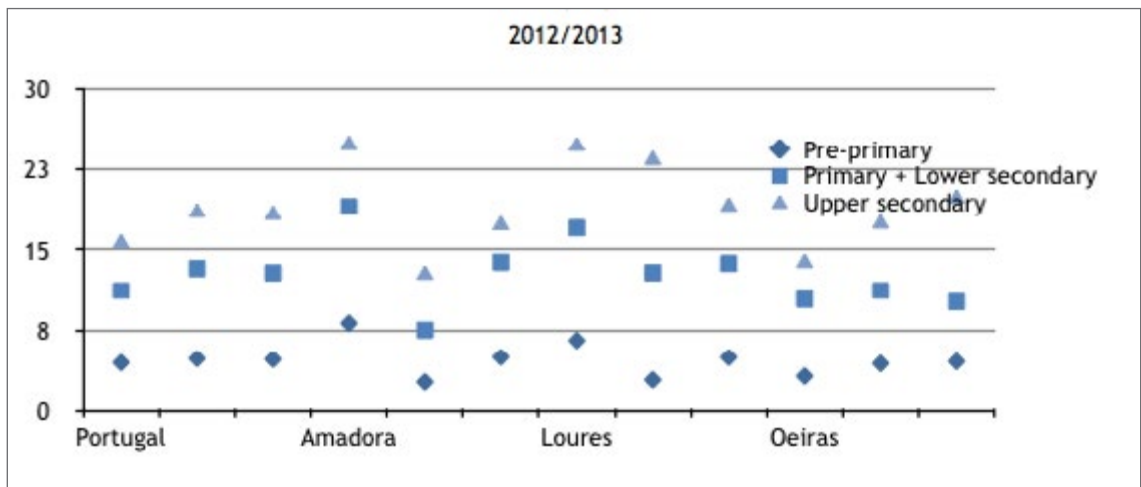
Fig. 3 – Grade Retention Rates In Lisbon's Municipalities (%) By Educational Level In 2012/2013

II – CONTEXT OF THE EXPERIMENTATION

2. Settings and institutions

All the four settings and institutions selected for the development of the experimentation are located in the periphery of Lisbon. They belong to the Lisbon Metropolitan Area, more precisely to the three municipalities of Amadora, Loures and Odivelas, already mentioned above. Despite the fact that these areas reflect, on many levels, the general features of Portuguese society as a whole – the accelerated rhythm of aging and the constant decrease in birth rates, for instance – they are also less marked in these locations, due to the affordability of house prices and the general cost of living which benefits young and middle-aged people more than that of central Lisbon.

That being said, the social and economic context in which the schools and associations are located is often acknowledged as being less privileged. The geographic isolation, almost ghettoization of some of the places is a defining characteristic of areas such as Alto da Cova da Moura, located in Amadora. Our local stakeholder for this territory is a non-profit organization and/or community project working for the human, social and cultural development of the suburb, called "Moinho da Juventude" (*Youth Mill*). It develops socio-cultural projects, job-searching activities and training for children, youngsters and adults residing in the neighbourhood (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4 - Alto Da Cova Da Moura: "Moinho Da Juventude" Association (In Damaia)

The primary school of Damaia (Fig. 5) is integrated in a T.E.I.P. project (*Educational Territories of Priority Intervention*), also in the Amadora region. This educational programme was an initiative of the 18th Portuguese government, and it has been running since 2010 with a significant amount of financial

and human resources focused on primary schools. Damaia's school fits the programme's profile since it is a public school with growing discipline problems and a disadvantaged student population. Since the beginning of the T.E.I.P. programme, the school community reckons there has been significant improvement on school results (Seabra, et. al., 2014).

Fig. 5 – Damaia's' School

In Odivelas, the municipality launched a programme in 2010 called "SEI!" – School Success and Integration, for children up to the last year of basic education at risk of school failure and/or leaving. This programme prioritises cultural-mediating activities and career advice in the schools that choose to implement it, namely, with awareness sessions together with teachers, school mediators and psychologists. One of the local schools (Fig. 6) was contacted by the municipality and showed interest in being part of the SAS experimentation, enrolling some of its school mediators and teachers in our mentoring training in addition to the "SEI!" project's team.

Fig. 6 – Odivelas' School

Fig. 7 - Apelação: "Ibisco" Theatre (In Loures)

Finally, the last selected settings were a school and a local theatre/cultural association in the Loures' municipality. The school was selected based on the fact that it is integrated in a T.E.I.P. project, like Damaia's school, and it faces a considerable high school failure and early school leaving rate.

Fig. 8 provides a summary of the stakeholders involved in the experimentation activities, as well as the extent to which they participated in the project. Most of them were involved throughout – that is, from the first contact with the Portuguese SAS team to the final steps of the activities. However, Apelação school and IBISCO theatre, both in the Loures region, dropped out of the experimentation after having participated in mentors' training and right before the start of the volunteering and mentoring stage. This was due to time constraints, despite having shown great interest for the project and having been a refreshing addition to the group of mentors during the training, since some of them were, at a time in their lives, school dropouts themselves, having, therefore, extremely personal motivation for being mentors to young people at risk, as well as having.

Region	Municipality	Name of Institution	Type of institution	Level of involvement
Amadora	Damaia	Damaia school	Primary level school	Total
	Damaia	"Moinho da Juventude" (Youth Mill)	Community association	Total

Region	Municipality	Name of Institution	Type of institution	Level of involvement
Odivelas	Odivelas	Project "SEI!" (School Success and Integration)	Municipality	Total
Loures	Apelação	Apelação school	Primary level school	Active in the first steps of the project's national implementation
	Apelação	IBISCO theatre	Cultural association	Active iproject's national Implementation

Fig. 8 – Summary Of Stakeholder Institutions And Respective Settings Involved in The Portuguese Sas Project

3. The young people

This section provides information about the young people, specifically about the selection process and their engagement.

3.1. Selection process: breaking stereotypes about school success and failure

The Portuguese SAS team thought it best to leave the selection of the young people to the local stakeholder institutions since they were closer to the realities of the young people who could benefit from the initiative. Each institution, from the schools to the local association to the municipality's project "SEI!", made it clear, since the first meetings, that they knew at least some specific students who could be reengaged in education through an initiative such as the SAS project.

This proximity to the young people's realities was of key importance for two reasons. First, in order to avoid aprioristic selection methods based on abstract and fallible assumptions about school failure and school success. Second, and closely related to the first, because, as mentioned already, statistics about ESL are far removed from the young people's lives and therefore they do little to empathise with young people's difficulties. Leaving this process in the hands of our stakeholders proved to be a positive decision since we managed to put together a group of young people very diverse in terms of age, gender, academic trajectory and psychological traits, as we will see below.

3.2. The young people: levels of engagement in the project and young people's background

In total, 20 young people out of 45 who were contacted and 22 who enrolled participated in at least one modality of the project (volunteering and/or mentoring). Due to the diversity of the settings and of the selection methods, this process was variable and so were its outcomes. For example, the "SEI!" project, in close partnership with Odivelas school, received a student who volunteered to participate after having heard about the project by one of their teachers. This also explains the higher number of young people enrolled (five) than contacted (four), in Fig. 9. The association "Moinho da Juventude" had the highest number of young people contacted (thirty) due to the large scale dissemination of an open session that reached over 40 young people, both by email and in person. Damaia school had a steady number of young people enrolled and participating in all the modalities of the project (six).
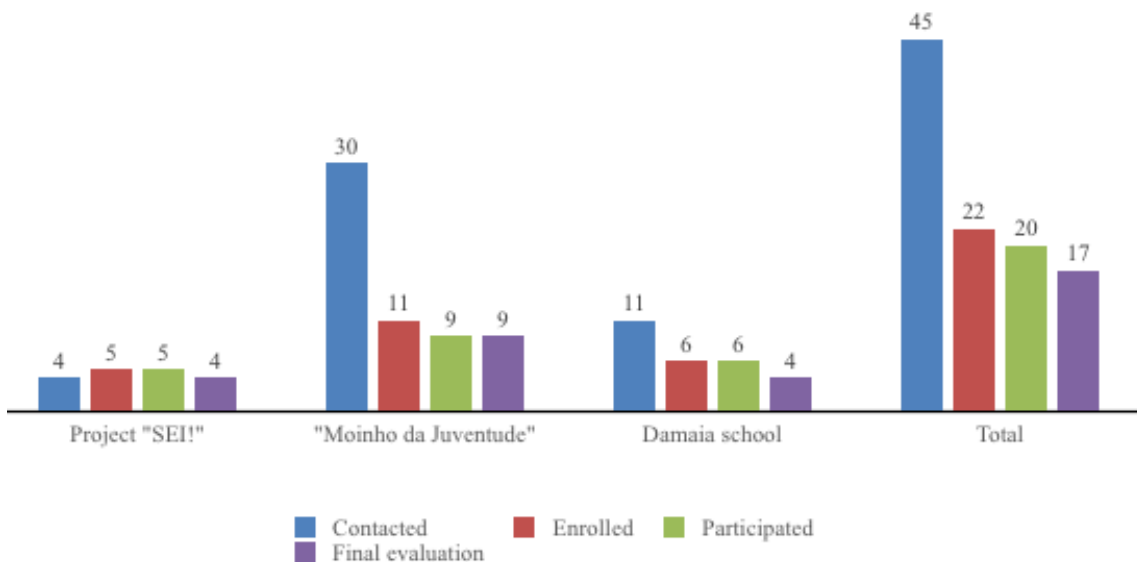
Fig. 9 - Enrollment And Participation Of Young People In Portugal by Setting

As can be seen, two young people withdrew after enrolling in the project. This was mainly due to geographic mobility difficulties associated with their locality outside of Lisbon, either permanently or during summer vacation.

The social profile of the young people participating in the project was quite balanced. The proportion of boys/girls was almost half-to-half, and most participants were under the age of fifteen as can be seen in Fig. 10.
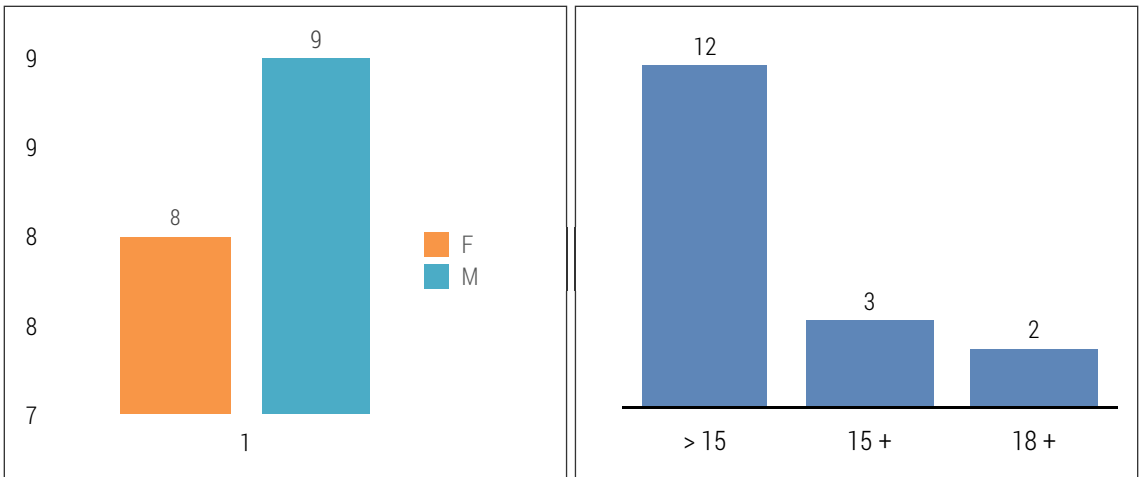
Fig. 10 – Young People's Gender And Age Distribution

The greatest diversity can be seen in terms of the young people's school situation. As we can see in Fig. 11, most young people who participated were either attending primary (5th to 6th grades) or lower secondary education (7th to 9th grades), while only two were in high school. Most young people were attending general/regular schooling, while only six were doing vocational/professional pathways (Fig. 12). Regarding their school trajectory in terms of success and failure, data in Fig. 13 shows that the vast majority had already repeated a grade at least once or twice.
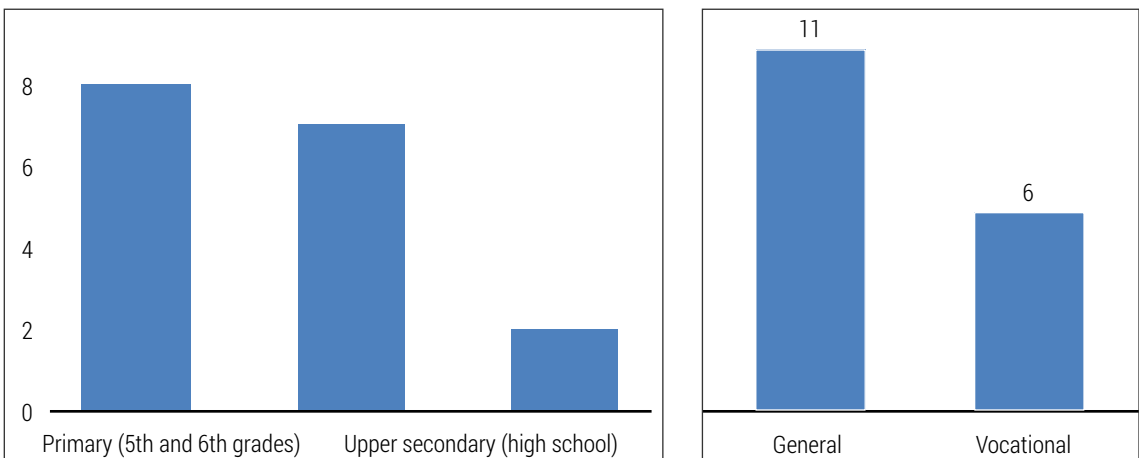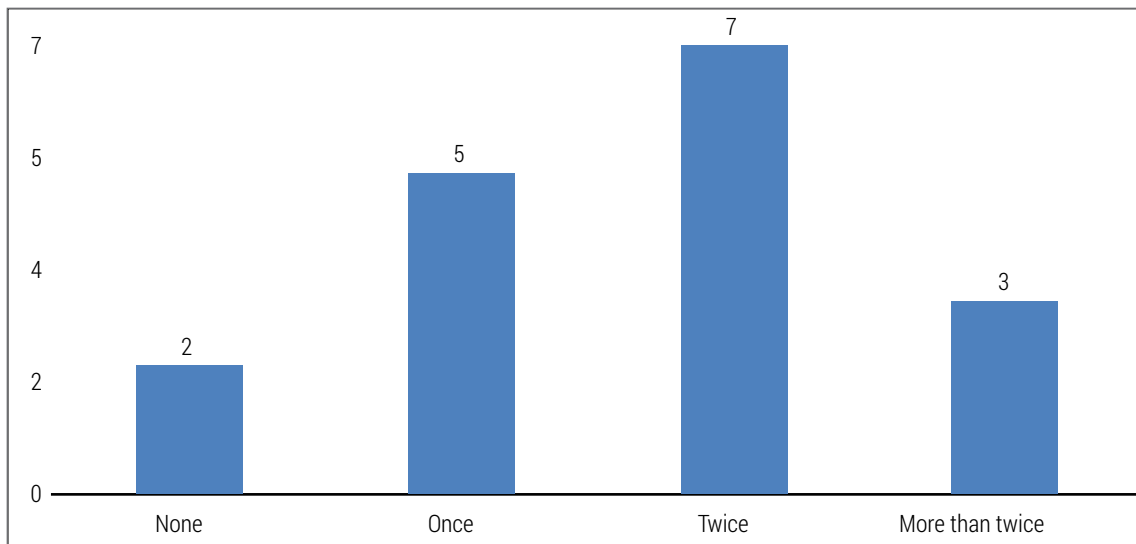
Figs. 11, 12 And 13 – Young People's Current School Grade, Type Of Schooling And Number Of Grade Retentions So Far

In conclusion, we were dealing with a school population which had been particularly vulnerable to negative school effects during their life in relation with education. However, when the young people were asked about how they described themselves as students and how they felt about school learning, most answers demystified commonly held assumptions that social analysts and teachers might have regarding students with low school achievements. During the first mentoring sessions, for example, most students said things like "I like learning", or "I'm interested in learning", but they also felt like they could not learn in their current situations. Most admitted to having difficulties or lacking the ability to stay focused in class, as well as having behaviour problems related to this. Despite this, all of them recognized the importance of learning and being in school. This is of extreme importance when reflecting upon the results of the experimentation in Portugal and the way the young people participated in the project, as will be seen further on in the chapter. As one of the mentors and stakeholder said to the SAS team at the end of the experimentation, "we already knew the kids, and although it was deeply satisfying to see them in a different light, *we already knew they had something in them*. It just needed to be worked on, and I think we did it".

4. Mentors

Overall, 31 mentors were involved in the project. All participated in the mentors' training offered by one of the national stakeholder institutions – a non-formal and informal education

Portuguese association. Out of these, only 13 ended up taking part in the mentoring activities. The three who did not conclude the training claimed that it was because of lack of time. As for the 15 who left after the conclusion of the mentors' training, it was because the number of mentors per young person was adjusted according to what each stakeholder thought was necessary, taking into account the young people's specificities and whether the volunteering activity was an individual or group one. This led to having a mentors/volunteers ratio of about 2 young people per mentor.
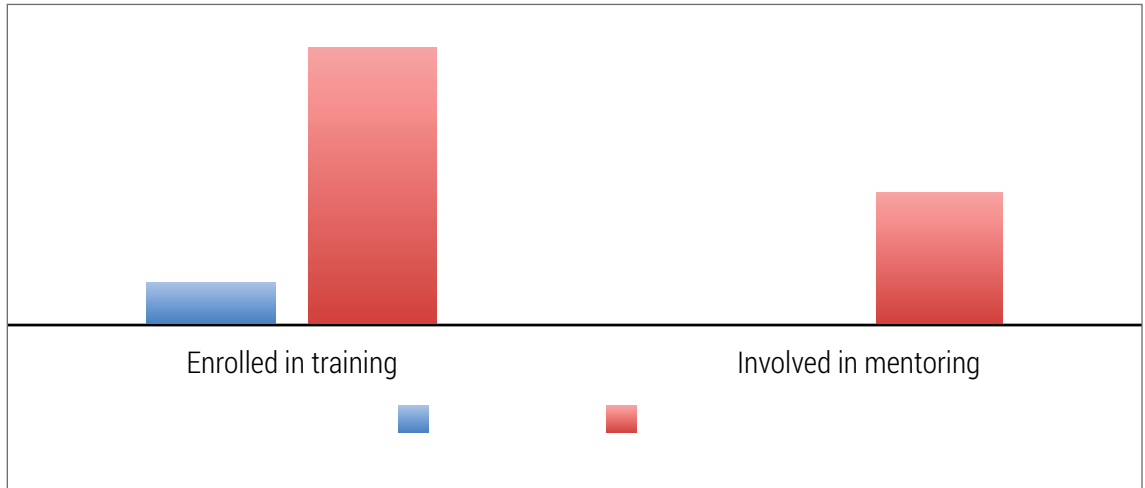
Fig. 14 – Ratio Of Enrollment And Participation Of Mentors In Portugal

With regard to mentors' gender, Fig. 14 shows that only four men took part in the training, but none took part in the actual mentoring during the experimentation. This is not peculiar of the situation in Portugal.

In terms of social profile, the mentors were educated at university level and worked in the educational field or developed intervention projects related to it. Their age varied. What is most important is that all the mentors participating in mentoring activities worked directly with or already knew their mentees from school or associative contexts. In the case of the IBISCO theatre (who later dropped out of the experimentation as was already mentioned) the mentors had been, at a time in their lives, school dropouts themselves. They had therefore a passionate motivation to be mentors to young people at risk, as well as having the capacity to empathise with the young people. The importance of involving this profile of mentors in the future will be further discussed in the last section of the chapter, "Lessons Learned".

III - PREPARING THE GROUND

5. Establishing contacts and building rapport

This section explains how the contacts with the stakeholders and young people were made and how they were maintained by building a rapport.

5.1. Local stakeholders

Personal contacts were made with the local associations and schools mentioned above, mostly due to previous academic research projects in the field. After local meetings and a national meeting, each stakeholder institution was assigned a coordinator who was in charge of the mentors' and young people's identification and initial approach. This relationship was strengthened during the mentors training which the coordinators from CIES attended.

5.2. Mentors recruitment and training

The initial 31 people enrolled in the mentors training were recruited by each stakeholder institution, which had their own selection criteria based on their particular social context, and what they thought were the needs of the young volunteers. In general, the attributes valued were:

- Being able to communicate and feel empathy towards the youngsters;

- Having a sense of responsibility;

- Being able to plan ahead and achieve goals;

- Ideally having previous experience in dealing with youngsters with this social and academic profile.

The Portuguese mentors' training was developed by the coordinating university-based team, ISCTE-IUL, and was delivered over two days for a total of 14 hours. The training was provided by the non-formal education organization Inducar, one of the national stakeholders. The training method favoured the mentors' own personal experiences with children and young people, as well as a resourceful combination of theoretical discussion, empirical data and ways of application of these sets of knowledge to the mentoring relationship. In total there were six sessions:

- Presentation of the participants

- School failure and dropout

- The learning process

- The mentoring process

- The practice of mentoring

- Next steps, evaluation and closing

5.3. Young people

The young people who participated in the experimentation were selected by our local stakeholders. They were selected mainly due to their learning difficulties and interest in being part of a volunteering experience. Around 45 young people were contacted: 30 through a group session and a chain email sent to several young people by "Moinho da Juventude", and the remaining 15 in individual contact/invitation. From the first 30 youngsters, only 9 accepted to participate in the project, and only 6 out of those took on the volunteering activities until the end. All the young people individually contacted agreed to participate in the project and remained in the experimentation until the end, with the exception of 2 young boys who went abroad.

IV - VOLUNTEERING AND MENTORING IN ACTION

6. Mentoring process

6.1. The meetings: contents and methodology

The mentoring strategies were, in all contexts, concerned primarily with the issue of school failure as a systemic reason for school dropouts. It was also of major importance that the youngsters did not feel as though these mentoring sessions were merely a reproduction of the teacher/student relationship. To avoid this, the mentors gave priority to establish a casual environment in the mentoring sessions so that the relationship with the mentees was as open and reflexive as possible.

This resulted in a flexible and personalized tailoring of the encounters, being simultaneously goal and process oriented: making sure to engage the young person in a step-by-step way of thinking without forgetting the global outcome of the activities, both for the institution

and for the volunteer. The criteria for choosing the issues to discuss in each encounter were the difficulties felt by the young people during the execution of the volunteering activities. Four general groups of issues tackled during mentoring were:

- Emotional

- Relational

- Instrumental

- School counselling

The emotional issues identified by the mentors concerned most of the youngsters, and consisted primarily on a sense of insecurity and lack of self-esteem. Many young people, for example, at the beginning of the volunteering experience saw themselves as being unable to move beyond a hardship and expressed several times their disappointment, wanting to give up the experimentation. The mentors had to find pedagogical and psychological tools for reducing their mentees stress and focus their energies on constructing alternatives. This was achieved mainly by helping the youngster build a solid sense of self-confidence that would last even in the absence of the mentor.

Since most of the volunteering activities were developed collectively, many youngsters also faced difficulties in dealing with group dynamics and solving conflicts, such as giving up their ideas in the face of disagreement and dealing calmly with mistakes from other young people. The mentors intervened by showing them possible negotiation strategies and exemplifying how important knowing how to work as a group is.

The technical problems related to the organization of the volunteering activities were obviously a major focus. Most of the preparations were made in the mentoring sessions – for instance, designing a Facebook page for the events, build the events' calendar and a personal agenda, etc. Many of the emotional and relational issues that troubled the young people manifested themselves through practical inabilities concerning the volunteering itself.

Finally, to make the necessary connection between the experimentation and the young person's relationship with school the mentors tried to direct their mentees enthusiasm and achievements towards their educational prospects. In the near future, namely next school year, what would they like to be doing? Would they rather strive to end high school in regular schooling and then go to college? Or do they think it makes more sense, given their areas of interest, to pursue a professional/vocational course and start working sooner? As

we will see further on, this counselling was successfully[1] achieved in more than one case.

The time distribution was approximately the following:

- Mentoring time: 13 hours

- Overall duration of the experimentation: 40 hours

- Number of mentoring sessions: 11

6.2. The relationship dynamics: challenges and mentoring strategies for overcoming the young people's insecurities

As was already mentioned, a fundamental strategy for the success of the mentoring activities was establishing mutual trust and respect as the basis for an egalitarian dynamic: the mentor could not be mistaken for a teacher. Instead, their role was to facilitate the young person's integration in the activities and serve as a facilitator for the youngster's expectations and achievements. The close and strong engagement of the young people in managing their volunteering experience autonomously was crucial. In doing so, the young people were engaged in choosing what was important to discuss with the mentor, acknowledging their biggest difficulties, assessing the immediate needs of the project they were developing. The mentors only guided and supported the reflecting process. What this does is that it empowers the young people by making them responsible for building their personal trajectory.

Nevertheless, mentors highlighted the initial absenteeism of some of the young people, their lack of motivation and scepticism about the relevance of the project for their school issues as the three biggest challenges in establishing a trusting and effective relationship with the young people. Additionally, they also identified the little amount of time dedicated to the mentoring in relation to the volunteering activities. This manifested itself mainly in the generalised indecision when choosing the volunteering activity. The mentors ended up having to suggest activities that were already occurring or scheduled to happen in the different settings of the experimentation, and it seems that as soon as this initial barrier was overcome the youth also overcame the confusion and the scepticism about the utility of the experimentation.

This is not to say the young people were suddenly self-confident and motivated, but they were receptive to give it a go in the majority of the cases. From this point on, the mentors began the psychological assessment of the young volunteers based on their performance

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1   The point of reference for evaluating the success of the experimentation was mainly the comparison between the young person's expectations and goals before and after the activities.

both during mentoring and the volunteer activities. These were the major problems faced by the mentors in their relationship with the mentees:

- Keeping the group motivated and cohesive

- Managing moments of tension between the volunteers

- Keeping the young person motivated and self-confident

It is not by chance that the major results achieved by the youth, according to the mentors, were relational and emotion-managing skills. In fact, the crises of lack of motivation were in many young people more frequent than not, as well as aggressive and individualistic reactions to unexpected problems that required a group effort and negotiation strategies. Some mentors dealt with this by increasing the number of individual meetings as opposed to group meetings, where the youth was encouraged to think more comfortably about what were the causes of their stress, and how to end it to complete a certain task: the mentors' strategies for managing emotional and relational problems focused therefore on presenting the young person's feelings to them on a new light, diverting the focus on negative feelings like anger towards constructive criticism of the sources of the stress and lack of motivation.

As for the young people, they all recognized some value for the encounters aside from the obvious role in preparing the volunteering activities. In describing the utility of the mentoring in their experience, they used expressions like "to help us", "they motivated me to learn and to participate in the volunteering activities", "sense of responsibility", "self-confidence and self-esteem", "to clear doubts and give ideas and opinions about the activities" and "to say how I was feeling".

7. Volunteering activities

7.1. Volunteering: youth in action

We have already began to see how demonstrative volunteering can impact on the young people's insecurities about themselves, when allied with a scrupulous mentoring, and how this self-doubt stems mostly from a negative school experience marked by failure and a lack of institutional recognition of their capabilities. In Portugal, eight different volunteering activities were developed in six different institutional contexts:

- Organizing and setting in motion a two-week holiday camp for other young people in Damaia's school;

- Organizing a talent show in Odivelas' school;

- Childcare support in the Odivelas Parish's nursery;

- Support in Odivelas' veterinarian clinic;

- Reception support in Alto da Cova da Moura's job seeking office;

- Stage maintenance and artist support in a youth dedicated four-day festival in Alto da Cova da Moura;

- Childcare support in Alto da Cova da Moura's association "Moinho da Juventude";

- Childcare support in a month-long holiday camp organized by Alto da Cova da Moura's association "Moinho da Juventude".

It is important to stress that the young people chose only four of these activities. The school activities, as well as childcare support in a holiday camp, and support in a job seeking office were suggested by the mentors in the absence of an enthusiastic attitude by their mentees at the beginning of the volunteering. Since the young people had no idea of what they would like to do, therefore the mentors suggested activities that were already predicted to happen and added a volunteering component to them. On the contrary, the contacts established with the parish nursery and the veterinarian clinic were completely new and chosen by the two volunteers, who took the initiative to suggest it to the mentors who then established contacts with the institutions. Similar was the case of the two young people who volunteered in a month-long holiday camp and in a four day youth festival: they did not directly choose those activities, but mentioned childcare and culture as their areas of interest for volunteering, so the mentors suggested those options due to geographic proximity to the youth's homes.

We identified four major groups of tasks performed and skills acquired by the young people during the volunteering activities:

- *Organizational and event management*: involved event scheduling, preparing materials, dividing and sharing tasks, and improvising alternative methods in the face of hardships.

- *Communication*: these were cross-cutting to all the other tasks and consisted of many platforms such as face-to-face (the day-to-day interactions) and virtual (creating and managing a Facebook page or event, for instance), but also raised the

problem of the clash between differentiated linguistic codes, which are different in professional contexts than in the contexts young people are used to.

- *Childcare*: either in the context of holiday camps or in the nursery, the young people whose main task consisted of watching and entertaining children and/or babies developed several important skills, being the most relevant ones a sense of responsibility towards another person's well-being, and an ability to appear as both an authority figure to the children, which they should respect, and as someone they could trust – interestingly enough, this was the same type of relationship intended between mentors and mentees in the SAS project.

- *User support*: this involved important communication and computer software skills, as well as an ability to redirect the service user or the person in need of help to the appropriate source.

7.2. Assessing the impact of volunteering on the young people: expectations, outcomes and satisfaction

In total, 20 young people participated in volunteering and mentoring activities in Portugal. In the table below, we can see in detail what were each young person's expectations and reflections about their volunteering experience.

	Activities developed	What they expected from the experience	Level of satisfaction	What was best	What was worst	Did they choose the activity they developed?
1		Having fun	Very satisfied	The games	Conflicts	No
2		Having fun	Very satisfied	The sports tournaments	Waking up early	No
3	Organizing a two-week holiday camp for other young people	Having fun	Very satisfied	Socializing	The traditional games	No
4		Gaining experience	Somewhat Satisfied	The sports tournaments	The traditional games	No
5		-	Very satisfied	The sports tournaments	Waking up early	No
6		-	Somewhat satisfied	All the activities	The children were disobedient towards the volunteers	No

	Activities developed	What they expected from the experience	Level of satisfaction	What was best	What was worst	Did they choose the activity they developed?
7		Being valued in school	Somewhat satisfied	Not going to the classes and being valued in school	The institution changed some rules without consulting the volunteers	No
8	Organizing a talent show	Being valued in school	Somewhat satisfied	Not going to the classes and being valued in school	Not having my ideas being respected all the time	No
9		Being valued in school	Somewhat satisfied	Not going to the classes and being valued in school	Having to give up some ideas for someone else's	No
10	Childcare support in a nursery	Contacting with children	Very satisfied	Meeting new people and helping with the babies	Having to work daily during vacation period	Yes
11	Support in a veterinarian clinic	-	Very satisfied	-	-	Yes
12	Stage maintenance and artist support at youth festival	Acquire useful knowledge about cultural events management	Very satisfied	Acquiring new knowledge in cultural events management	Some people's lack of commitment to deadlines	Yes
13	Stage maintenance at youth festival and animator at elders association	Developing good relationships with people	Very satisfied	Taking walks with the elders and gaining new musical knowledge	Delays in the schedule	Yes
14	School support to children in local association	To help others and learn what she wants to do in the future	Very satisfied	To confide with my mentor about how I was feeling	Nothing	No

	Activities developed	What they expected from the experience	Level of satis-faction	What was best	What was worst	Did they choose the activity they developed?
15	Childcare at local as-sociation's infantry	Learn to deal with people	Very satisfied	Playing games and learning new words in English	Nothing	No
16		To have fun	Very satisfied	Playing with children	Nothing	No
17		To have fun	Very satisfied	Helping with the children	Some ill-man-nered children	No
18	Client support in the local job seeking office	Learn to deal with people	Very satisfied	Being able to help finding jobs for people	Nothing	No
19		-	-	-	-	No
20		-	-	-	-	No

Table 1 – Expectations and outcomes of the experience for the young people

To conclude, we believe it is relevant to point out a few noteworthy outcomes:

- The variety of activities developed was great: nine different types of volunteering were done by the young people, which shows a real effort by both mentors and stakeholder institutions to adapt the activities to each young person's interest.

- The large majority of the young people (71%) felt "very satisfied" with the experience in the SAS project. The remaining (only five of the young people) felt "somewhat satisfied", due to issues of relational nature such as being unable to deal with interpersonal conflicts, perceived lack of organization by the stakeholder institutions and difficulties in relating to the volunteering beneficiaries (namely the children).

Choosing their volunteering activity does not seem to be a determining factor for the general level of satisfaction of the young people. What seemed to matter most was the content of the relationship mentor-mentee, particularly the perceived mutual respect between them. The mentor's continuing dialoguing and availability to support the young person, not as someone who "knows it all" but as a communicative partner working towards the same goals and suffering through the same hardships as the young person, was the determinant factor for the satisfaction with the experience, as well as the activities developed being in

their area of interest despite not having been chosen by them.

Fig. 15 shows that the activities were the most enjoyed aspect, followed by the social interactions in the context of volunteering. Some young people felt valued as people, especially the ones that developed the volunteering activities in their school context. Feeling like they were of help to other people was also a major reason for having enjoyed the experimentation. Learning new things was relevant for the young people who participated in the youth festival, since it is directly related to what they want to do professionally (working in cinema and multimedia). Finally, one young person talked about her mentor as being the best part of the experience, because they were able to talk openly.
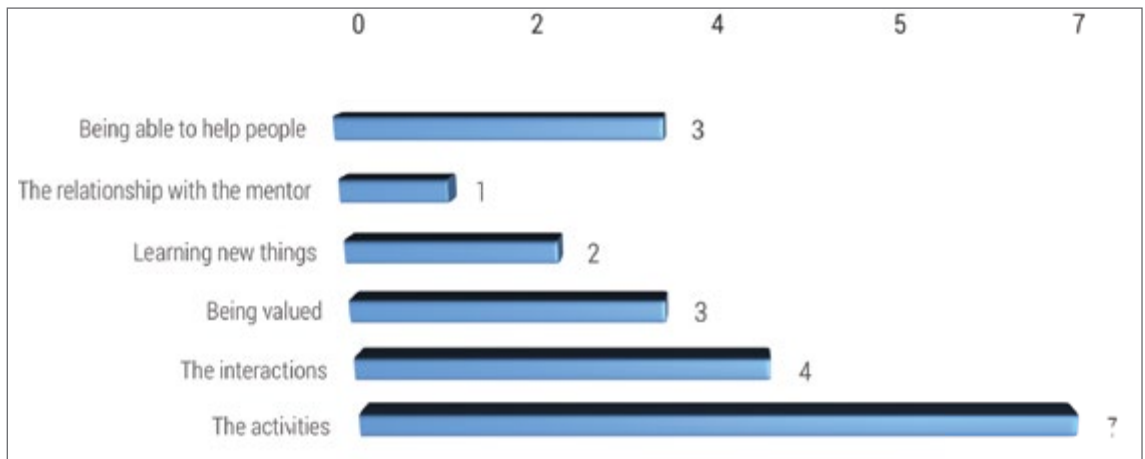

Fig. 15 - Most Enjoyed Aspects Of The Experimentation By The Young People

V - LESSONS LEARNT

8. Achievements

The impact of the experimentation was felt at two different levels: with the youngsters and with the stakeholder institutions. In the first case, although it was not possible to quantify the impact as attainment, there was a noticeable impact at four levels:

- i) Young people's ability to define the next steps of their school life and aspirations, such as enrolling in professional courses;

- ii) Professional skills – such as, event management, networking and communication skills, childcare and customer routing;

- iii) Personal and relational skills – such as, sense of responsibility, and self-management; and,

- iv) Study skills – such as, using dictionaries or online resources developed either through the volunteering or the homework support activities. As a result, their attitudes towards school have improved significantly.

The institutional impact of the project was also significant. It is relevant to stress the openness of schools, associations and the municipality involved in the project to volunteering and mentoring as a pedagogical approach to school success. Two aspects proved particularly impactful:

- The continuity of the project's methodologies in all major stakeholder contexts: Damaia's school will maintain volunteering activities as a practice in the current school year, and the association "Moinho da Juventude" will reinforce their volunteering modalities with mentoring.

- The mentors went through an effective role change: for teachers and association workers, this change was less disrupting with their day-to-day approach than it was for school cultural mediators, who felt like they had to return to a "one-to-one" relationship.

9. Challenges

Some difficulties were found along the way, namely, the lack of time of the people involved, the scepticism felt by the youngsters about the relevance of the project for their school issues, the difficulty felt by the youngsters in choosing the type of volunteering they would like to do, and also the coordinator team's dependency on the good will of the local stakeholders, sharing our authority as project coordinators in favour of the local network of voluntary participants.

10. Future practice

The three major lessons learnt through the project's application in Portugal were:

- *The importance of an already* existing relationship between mentors and the young people: the familiarity between mentors and mentees was crucial for developing a degree of mutual trust in such a short amount of time, and did not reinforce negative stereotypes in contrary to what could have been predicted. We have also found how

positive it was to be able to involve people in mentors' training with a past school trajectory similar to the young volunteers: having been through school failure and early school leaving, they brought a fresh look into the project and were able to empathize with the young people in ways other adults couldn't. They are a target group to look for in future applications of the project's methodology.

- The importance of allowing the young person as much autonomy in the choices made as possible: this applies not only to the choice of volunteering activities, but also to all the processes related to the organization and realization of these. The young people must be encouraged to think for themselves and make their own choices, in which the role of the mentor must be to facilitate reflection about the outcomes of different possibilities. Making mistakes and overcoming them is also a fundamental step in the young people's self-understanding and relation to school.

- The importance of connecting the volunteering activities with school learning: given some interesting results already discussed above where the young people who realised volunteering in their school felt like they were valued, it is our recommendation that in future practice at least one part of the activities is done in a school context (e.g.: the volunteering itself, an exhibition prepared by the young people about the volunteering they did, or even a ceremony for delivering diplomas of participation, etc.).

The project's prototype has potential to be replicated, if the role and the availability of the coordinating team is reinforced by increasing their direct participation in the project's experimentation, guaranteeing its sustainability. It is a priority to enforce the school leaderships' awareness for the importance of attributing official school benefits to the voluntary activities as a strategy for success.

It is also important to reflect on the reasons that conditioned the participation in the project, both of mentors, stakeholders and young people. Since most of the dropouts were due to lack of time, resources and mobility capability, it should be considered in future projects to have financial aid predicted to help those who can't reach the volunteering locations by their own means; young people in difficult socioeconomic situations who can't afford a transportation pass, for instance.

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ANNEXES

Since most literature on the subject of school failure and dropout mentions the parents socioeconomic background as one of the most determining factors for the student's relationship with school, we think it is relevant to portrait the social reality from which our young people come from. Indeed, the data collected shows that most of them come from families in which both parents have low educational resources, as well as low status and low income jobs (Figs. i and ii).
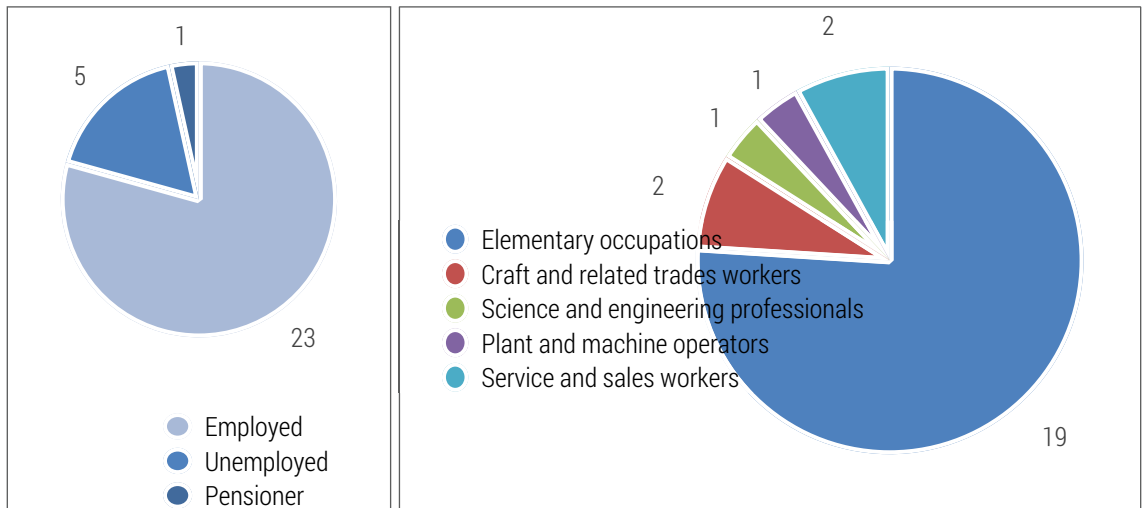

Fig. I - Young People's Parents' Professional Group (Isco)
Fig. Ii - Young People's Parents' Professional Situation

Despite only five parents being unemployed, nineteen out of twenty-five have elementary occupations – in which are included professions that require low skill sets and low income levels, such as stonemasons, construction workers, cleaning jobs, etc.
Regarding parents' educational levels, we can see a greater diversity (Fig. iii). Most have either pre-primary or primary level education