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Roma inclusion in education: fostering constructive attitudes and good practices in the Barcelona area (Vakeripen)

Annex 7. WS 0, Output 1.

Internal project evaluation by GRITIM-UPF

Evaluation of the scientific part of the project (GRITIM-UPF)

The many encounters with the project participants (Roma families, school staff and intermediary actors) gave us as researchers a unique opportunity to collect a rich data material through participant observations (which were registered in writing through extensive field notes used for analysis) and in-depth interviews. Particularly for the interviews, it was necessary to establish a previous relationship built on trust and respect. Our personal relation with the project participants and our attitudes, showing that we are there to listen and learn from the participants, has been fundamental for getting access to all the information they have provided us with. It was also essential as we placed much emphasis on the project objective of “bringing the university closer” to the Roma families, and we believe that this is something that we achieved. The closing event on June 15 at the university venue played an important role here, and was very much appreciated by the attending Roma families, school staff and institutional actors.

The above-mentioned work format of continuous self-evaluation made us change the methodology at an early stage of the project. After an initial meeting where school staff and Roma families were brought together in the school of Bernat Boïl, in the Bon Pastor neighbourhood, with the objective to discuss education, we decided to entirely abandon the meeting format where families and school staff were present in the same space. The

dynamics during this meeting reflected the unequal relationship between the school staff (regardless of their apparent good intentions) and the families, as well as tensions generated by earlier misunderstandings and lacking communication. In order to foster more constructive spaces for dialogue, for which a relaxed atmosphere is essential, we decided to organize the rest of the meetings separately, until the final conference when all participants were brought together to share their points of view. We considered this format necessary for the project's viability and have learnt from this experience, which we will take into consideration in our future work. Contrastingly, several of the practical activities (football game, basketry workshops...) were carried out in the school and with participation by both teachers and parents. We found that these more practical activities were more constructive to bring everyone together, as emphasis lied on spending time together rather than discussing sensitive topics. Also at some of the activities, as the basketry or flamenco boxes workshops, the Roma participants would teach the rest how to do, which we considered symbolically important.

Reflecting upon the limitations of our project, we take into specific consideration the fact that establishing a close relationship with the Roma families – which was absolutely necessary for the project – has taken much time and efforts. As we conclude our work, we have established links with the families in the four target neighbourhoods that would allow us to continue working with them without intermediary actors. This situation was indeed very different 18 months ago. The fact that building relationships has been such a fundamental part of the project, together with the necessary methodological changes described above, in practice meant that our data collection was delayed several months. Therefore, given the limited availability of several participants, we were not able to conduct all the in-depth interviews that we had scheduled in the project description (altogether, we conducted 87 interviews instead of 108, as stated in the Grant Agreement). We do however not consider this a problem for the project neither from a scientific point of view (the information we collected was sufficient to support our conclusions) nor for the implementation of the project – we reached out to many more participants than those who were directly interviewed, through our numerous meetings and conversations.

Moreover, regarding the contact with the schools, we had varying experiences. While particularly the three schools that came to participate closely throughout the project (El Tll-ler (earlier Bernat de Boïl) in Bon Pastor, Institut-Escola de Sant Adrià in La Mina, and Escola Gornal) were very positive and open to the activities we implemented, and let us

enter the schools and arrange some of the workshops in the school venues, other schools were reluctant to participate or even refused to do so, or to let us enter the school. The reasons they gave us for this could be that they did not consider this kind of project useful, that they did not have the time, or – in one case, in the Sant Roc neighbourhood where the schools overall were more reluctant to participate) – even that they did not consider it meaningful with such a project as the Roma students “would not continue studying anyway.” These experiences were challenging for the project implementation, but at the level of data collection and analysis, they represented important contributions.

Feedback from our partners

Rromane Siklovne:

“This project gave us the opportunity to take the next step that we as association had wanted to take: to initiate more concrete interventions with mothers and fathers in order to accomplish that education would be given the importance it deserves within the Roma communities. We decided to conduct this new initiative towards the families and schools we already had been working with earlier, and focus on making the mothers and fathers participate in educational activities together with their children and sometimes also with the teachers.

Altogether this project has been a very positive experience and we are achieving results that we honestly could not imagine a year ago. During the first term of the project, we managed to make fathers who had previously never entered the school building to participate in workshops with their children. This has a strong impact on the school staff and on us as organization, but most particularly so on the children who for the first time saw their fathers participate in educational tasks together with them. During the later stage of the project, we have also focused on reflection with the families and discuss how to continue the work with them, planning new activities for the rest of 2018.”

Pedro Casermeiro, head of Rromane Siklovne

Feedback from our Associate Partner

Barcelona City Council

“I have participated in the project during the roundtable on November 29th, the workshop at the Office for Non-discrimination (Barcelona City Council) and the closing conference. My general evaluation of the project is that it stands out through defining the communication between families and the educational staff as central, and place the emphasis here in order to combat exclusion and school failure.

I found the roundtable including professionals and associations with expertise in the Roma and education very interesting, given its focus on the exchange of experiences and the possibility to learn different perspectives. The set questions to discuss helped stimulating the discussion and allowed to contrast different points of view.

I think that the area where we need to work the most is to make the families more active, which is difficult as there are few spaces where the Roma families can have a leading role and not always depend on being represented by associations. This project has represented an advancement in this line of work.”

Sílvia Serra Aranda

Secretary of the Municipal Council of the Roma people at the **Direction of services for citizenship rights and diversity, Barcelona City Council**

Office for non-discrimination, Barcelona (OND)

“I must say that as representative of the Office for non-discrimination, I and my staff have felt very well received by the people who attended the events where we participated, the workshop at OND and the final conference. The workshop was constructive and its dynamics good both in terms of learning from each other and active participation of all attendants. It was also positive that [the Roma participants] gave many examples of lived experiences of discrimination, though sometimes this may have generated a feeling of too much intensity and at times, chaos.

The closing session, the final conference, was for me a great moment of recognition and claims-making. It was very important that so many of the participating families were present, and also that the headmasters of the three main schools involved were there. Considering the reactions from the audience concerning some of the conclusions of the study, it was clear that there still is much work to be done in terms of building bridges, participation, implication and self-critique of all parties involved.

The results and conclusions of your work are still not published, but without having them at hand I am able to say that you are performing a very complex task that has much merit for the claims-making of Roma people in the educational sphere. The methodology that you have incorporated may help to construct patterns of participation and collaboration between all the parties involved, and serve to dismantle some of the stereotypes about the Roma and their view on education. Thank you!"

Albert Fages

Director of the Office for non-discrimination (OND), Barcelona

Feedback from the Roma families

As mentioned above, the evaluation of the families' participation in the project has been done verbally and continuously during the project's duration. We have maintained conversations with them throughout and asked them what they think about the project, what could improve, etc. Overall they have expressed that they much appreciate being asked for their opinion and actively included, instead of, as many of those who have been approached by other projects earlier expressed, merely feeling like a "study object." They however also expressed their (well-founded) skepticism concerning how much positive change can actually be achieved through a single project with a limited duration. Therefore, in our dialogues with the families we have emphasized that we are obviously aware of these limitations, but that we mainly aimed to stimulate dynamics in the relation between the families and the schools that the participants can continue after the project is concluded. According to our Roma participants in particularly some of the target neighbourhoods, they feel that this has been accomplished.

Below follows some specific comments regarding each of the participating neighbourhoods.

La Mina

In La Mina, due to availability only Roma mothers were able to participate in the project. This may partly represent a shortcoming as we lack the voice of the fathers in this neighbourhood, but also an advantage in the dynamics during the dialogue meetings we organized here, where the mothers felt completely at ease and expressed thoughts and concerns that they said they were not used to verbalizing. After the last meeting was concluded they explicitly thanked us for organizing this activity and asked if there would be a continuation. They all agreed that the format (several dialogue meetings combined with in-depth interviews with each of the participants) was very good as it allowed them to reflect upon their many concerns in relation to the schooling of their children in an atmosphere where they felt relaxed and not judged, which is not very common for them.

Our two local representatives, Nieves Heredia and Marta Bonet, who recruited the participants and set up the meetings, expressed that they have participated in several other European projects and both themselves and the mothers in La Mina considered this one to be different and more appealing for them as it actively includes the Roma parents, seeks to establish egalitarian and lasting relations with them, and is focused on their experiences and opinions, instead of studying them “from the outside.”

El Gornal

In El Gornal, besides the general positive dynamics that the families expressed that were generated through being given the chance to discuss their concerns in a relaxed atmosphere (the meetings with the Roma families took place in the venue of the local Roma association Lacho Bají Calí), our local Roma contact persons here emphasized how important our presence have been to empower them in their relation with the school. A concrete result of the changing dynamics during the project's presence in the neighbourhood is that the parents' association (AMPA) at the Gornal school has gained “new life”, becoming much more active. At present the parents involved in the association are mobilizing to apply for money from the local city council in order to take over the management of the school's lunch room and hire Roma staff to serve the food and monitor

the children. Several of the parents in El Gornal were worried about the chaotic and conflictive situations during the lunch hours and claimed that they needed presence of Roma staff who could communicate better with the children. They perceived that the children were being harassed by the present, non-Roma lunchroom monitors.

Bon Pastor

Our local Roma representatives in Bon Pastor, as well as the families themselves, have been unanimously positive towards the projects as it gave them the opportunity to meet and discuss topics related to education that they were concerned about but had not found a forum to express. The sense that the project helped them “put words on their concerns” has been shared by the families in all the neighbourhoods. Also the participating school (El Til-ler) was positive as families who would not normally attend school meetings entered the school in relation to the project activities, functioning thus as a bridge to establish a more fluid relationship between the school staff and these families.

Sant Roc

In Sant Roc, the local representatives also expressed that the project had benefitted the families in terms of their implication in education matters and general empowerment. When we talked with the families here, they emphasized how the project had helped them becoming more aware of their right to have expectations and demand the best for their children. One mistake that we committed here, and that we have evaluated internally and taken much into account, is that we were absent for a long period of time after the initially phase with many dialogue meetings during a short time period in the spring of 2017. This absence was due to intense work in the other neighbourhoods at this time, but not being simultaneously active in Sant Roc made the families disconnect from the project. We also understood from the reactions of the local representatives that they were disappointed with the lack of continuity, and when we wanted to reinitiate our activities here in the beginning of 2018, there was little responsiveness. We will however continue our contact with the Roma families in Sant Roc after the project is concluded, and have planned an activity here to mediate with the security staff in the local supermarket where most the families buy their daily goods. Feeling harassed at the supermarket was a common experience by this

families, and we have spoken to a representative of the security team at this supermarket to prepare for a meeting with the families.