

**SAVED BY THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY STRATEGY:  
SCHOOL-COMMUNITY ALLIANCES FOR PROMOTING SCHOOL SUCCESS IN DISADVANTAGED  
NEIGHBOURHOODS DURING TIMES OF AUSTERITY**

**Abstract**

Whilst there are many advocates of a fluid school-neighbourhood relationship in favour of equity and social justice, there are gaps in the conceptual and empirical study of school and community governance models. This article analyses the characteristics of school-community relations in two socially disadvantaged contexts, in order to promote the educational success of all students. The results make visible the origin and organizational dynamics of the school-community alliances in each community. These findings can help to mitigate some of the difficulties related to the growing increase in social inequalities and the risk of social exclusion of young people. The main contribution is a strong introduction that addresses the urgency and need for communities to work together with schools in developing a citizenry that can address present and future challenges.

*Keywords:* School-community relationship, school success, young people, disadvantaged neighbourhoods, governance, austerity

**Introduction**

European cities have traditionally been characterized by less segregation and less social and spatial polarization compared, for instance, US cities. This has been especially true for cities in countries with the strong welfare systems. However, there are many signs that polarization and segregation are increasing (European Commission, 2011: 22; Kazepov, 2005; Cucca and Ranci, 2017). The globalization and financialization of the economy largely driven by a neo-liberal approach that has led to a strong rhetoric relative to the role of cities as economic actors in the global area and where cities have to compete among themselves, forgetting to preserve social integration (Taylor, 2003).

According to Castells (1996) and Sassen (1991, 2000), the rise of global financial markets and the introduction of IC technologies has given rise to increase social inequalities as a consequence of the

parallel growth of low-paid, low-qualified service industry, attracting masses of immigrant workers as well as high-skilled works. Increasing social inequalities have spatial impacts as well, which are expressed through residential segregation dynamics (Musterd, 2005). Furthermore, spatial segregation is not only a mirror of the social structure, it may itself act as a driver of social inequalities. The consequences of the concentration of disadvantaged people or homogeneous ethnic communities in places not supported by adequate social and physical infrastructures (Arbaci and Malherios, 2009, Cattacin, 2006) are related with the disconnection between these segregated areas from places where there are social resources and opportunities.

In the global economy, in the knowledge society, education is seen from two points of view, on the one hand, as a new market (Noblit and Pink, 2007) and as an institution of social reproduction and, on the other hand, as a driver of social transformation. Urban areas, schools and teachers are key actors in adjudicating who can have access to and use which symbols in schools and thus who can potentially transform such symbols into economic capital (Bowers, 1984; Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Education is arguably the major arena where social, economic and symbolic capital may be parlayed into economic capital. Schools are often regarded as mechanisms of social mobility but cultural capital is a currency of such mobility. The most important issue still confronting urban schools is how they might function more effectively to raise the social, symbolic, cultural and economic capital of students who are other than white and middle- and upper class. While arguing that schools must be seen as capable making a difference in disrupting the movement of students from social class origins to social class destinations, she notes how they certainly cannot do it alone (Noblit and Pink, 2007).

There is a certain social consensus that quality education for all people is the cornerstone for building a better world. This challenge and at the same time, commitment is reflected in the European and international agendas, such as the Lisbon Strategy 2000-2010, the European Strategy 2020 and the 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development, the priority of which has been to reduce school failure and the Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) since the late 1990s. Despite some criticisms of the SDGs, mainly focused on being inconsistent, difficult to quantify, implement and monitor (Bali, 2017; Cummings, Regeer, de Haan Marjolein Zweekhorst, Bunders, 2017), they also highlight as positive aspects of such agendas that the drafting of ambitious goals, favour creativity and human innovation to accelerate socially just progress beyond what is imaginable (UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2018). And, to lead this complex process of "Transforming our world," it requires highly-skilled professionals who are also capable of engaging in the construction of more inclusive and equitable environments. To this end, there is evidently a need to build spaces of citizenship and to tackle present and future challenges in a creative and responsible manner ([Anonymised-author], 2020).

It is evident that urban education has become increasing central focus of educators and policy makers at the present time in a global context of growing social inequalities, precariousness, labour market insecurity and intensification of territorial inequalities and social exclusion. Urban areas are full of both poverty and wealth and the educational system reflects both of these. Urban schools are often segregated by class, caste, and race since public policy allows this to be true. Policy creates the schools that serve young people who are marginalized and for whom life is difficult and unforgiving.

The field of urban education emerged precisely to highlight the above and to argue that such students and families, and the schools that serve them, deserve better. The field itself has led to many new understandings about how to improve schools and how to better serve such students and their families. Following Noblit and Pink (2007) thesis, the challenge for urban schools is to increase the social, symbolic, cultural, and economic capital of students that belong to lower income social classes. This also involves understanding how public systems of education

provision have promoted an education market that transforms public funding into private capital in all contexts with neoliberal public policies. Traditionally, the literature of urban education at the U. S is focused on schools as urban more on the basis of the attributes of the students and less on the basis of the socioeconomic characteristics of their geographic context (Milner 2012). The research was based mainly on how race and socioeconomic status and poverty affect school outcomes, without exploring the urban characteristics of the context. The main challenges were related to educating an ethnically diverse population (Rury, 2005).

While educational problems in socioeconomically disadvantaged contexts are a common subject of analysis, in the European literature on urban education is focused on the importance of social class and cultural capital as categories of analysis of school segregation, at the expense of the influence of the ethnicity variable (Öhrn and Weiner, 2007); the concern with how the school and the socioeconomic mixing of students can influence the promotion of democratic values in a sense that goes beyond individual freedom of choice, fostering justice, equity, and social transformation (Öhrn (2012). Also in Europe, each country has particularities in terms of the ethnic minorities it receives or in terms of the cultural identity of the local population, and this gives rise to specific studies on the treatment of cultural differences in classrooms and on the educational outcomes of ethnic minorities. In this regard, key ideas have increasingly been restated: one, that education transcends the walls of the school to permeate all the spaces and times of the person; two, school success is closely linked to the conditions of educability (Bonal & Tarabini, 2016; Siljander, 2012) and the path dependency (Cano-Hila, Pradel-Miquel and García, 2017; Pradel-Miquel, Cano-Hila and García, 2020), therefore it is essential to understand the urban contexts and to provide continuity and educational coherence between contexts; three, the notion that an entire tribe is necessary to raise a child; and four, that school success has more to do with the continuity and coherence between the various actions that take place during childhood, adolescence and youth than the sum of uncoordinated actions.

According to the 2<sup>n</sup> Edition of Urban Education Handbook (XXX) there are some lines of research in which is important to work: understanding to work to improve urban schools is the insight that there is no one-size-fits-all panacea; we gain deeper insight into the complexity of the multidisciplinary field of urban education, going beyond race; providing an evidence-base for advancing and re-imagining research, policy, and practice in urban education; understanding that the universality of the problematics with urban education, together with the importance of understanding the local, or situated, context of improvement creative interventions; to interrogate both the social and political factors, from intersectional approach, that lead to different problem posing and subsequent solutions within each region. An important question to be answered, for example, is what it takes in terms of resources, political will and policy actions to improve urban education.

Despite the involvement and efforts of education professionals, it is evident that schools cannot be agents of social transformation in isolation. In line with the rise of this perspective, a growing body of literature has emerged on the increasing need for collaboration and joint efforts between neighbourhood and institutions (Nast & Blokland, 2013) and between neighbourhood and school (Epstein et al., 2011; Tate, 2012; Valli et al., 2016, 2018). However, whilst many authors agree that there is a need for a fluid, constant and cohesive school-neighbourhood (community) relationship in favour of equity, well-being, social cohesion, resilience and social justice, relatively few studies have explored the form that this relationship should take, the values that should underpin it, or what types of leadership and collaborations should sustain such a relationship.

These gaps become even more relevant if we consider the current political, social and economic context, which is strongly characterized by four issues. First, the social and economic crisis that has arisen from austerity measures implemented during the 2008 crisis, now exacerbated by the effects of the syndemic generated by COVID-19, has intensified social inequalities and an increase in new urban

poverty in contemporary cities, particularly in multicultural neighbourhoods and vulnerable urban areas (Benassi & Morlicchio, 2019; Lagrange & Oberti, 2006; Wacquant, 2008). Second, strong tensions between neoliberalism and democracy are evident, which are, on the one hand, questioning the pillars of representative democracy (Todorov, 2014) and, on the other hand, colonizing education from a lens of instrumental rationality, based in economic parameters including the obsession with adapting schools to indicators and rankings such as PISA and productivity or labour market needs (Wenman, 2013). Third, the city and the neighbourhood have re-emerged as crucial places and actors in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as providers of well-being and opportunities (Andreotti et al., 2012); as essential axes for inclusive quality education (IAEC, 2021); and, as protagonists of innovative solidarity experiences, inclusion and empowerment projects, and community alliances ([Anonymised-author], 2020; Kneebone & Reeves, 2016; Massey, 2005; [Anonymised-author], 2020;). Fourth, some of the challenges set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development include goals 4 (quality education), 10 (reduced inequalities) and 11 (sustainable cities and communities), which have the ultimate aim of defining a new global social contract that leaves no one behind (United Nations, 2020).

These significant gaps exist in the empirical study of urban education in general, and specially, on school and community governance models. In line with the above-mentioned gaps and with the intention of advancing in the lines of research on urban education collected by the 2<sup>n</sup> Edition of Urban Education Handbook, this article has two main objectives: one, to provide an empirical analysis, located in two local contexts of Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (Spain) to analyse how communities are organized in order to promote the improvement of local school systems and to evidence how creative interventions of improvement they develop and what are their strong points to improve

urban education, especially regarding to leaderships, relations, purpose of partnerships and political and policy actions. And, two, to develop this analysis focused on understanding both the local urban context and the scholar context, from path dependency approach, on the assumption that local actors, schools and institutions have relatively autonomy to implement programs and creative actions that can contribute to improve urban education while faced with global competition and the increasing urban and social inequalities.

This paper analyses the characteristics of local context, school context and school-community relationships in socially disadvantaged contexts aimed at promoting school success, understood as academic persistence (Bereményi, 2018; [Anonymised-author], 2016).

### **School-Community Relations in Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods**

Throughout the OECD countries, the poorest school outcomes and the highest ELET rates are spatially concentrated in disadvantaged and low-income neighbourhoods in large cities (Kerr et al., 2016). Faced with this problem, neighbourhood-school alliances have been integrated from different perspectives, as "privileged" mechanisms for addressing the disadvantaged status of the neighbourhood and for combating social and educational inequalities.

Some argue that *the school as a resource broker* must lead the fight against these inequalities — the roots of which are clearly socioeconomic — by innovating in its pedagogy, rethinking its organization, leadership and methodologies, and developing social compensation measures such as scholarship systems and school support classes in order to promote the transformation of these communities (Kerr et al., 2016). The school is therefore conceived as a place in the community where people — particularly those who are most vulnerable — can empower themselves and lead socially innovative experiences in terms of community development and the strengthening of democratic processes (Foot & Hopkins, 2010; Glickman & Scally, 2008; Gold et al., 2002; Richardson, 2009).

Other authors have emphasized the role of *community development in neighbourhoods* (particularly those that are most disadvantaged) in addressing the root of educational inequalities found in families and neighbourhoods. They understand the school as an agent that must address the shortfalls of weakened communities, which must be led by professionals, even if this diverts their attention from the needs and interests of the community (Crowson & Boyd, 2001; Ranson & Crouch, 2009). From this perspective, attention is focused *on engaging schools in community-oriented strategies*, promoting the educational participation of the latter (Cummings et al., 2011; Green, 2018; McKoy et al., 2011; Patterson & Silverman, 2013); as in the case of learning communities (Puigdemívol et al., 2017) or accelerated schools (Levin, 1998).

In accord with this latter perspective, but providing important nuances with respect to leadership and types of collaboration, are the mixed approaches such as the *community development model* (Bowen et al., 2003; Sampson et al., 2002), which argue that the school is a neighbourhood and the neighbourhood is a school. These models are based on the premise of a strong interrelationship between neighbourhood and school, and argue that improvement is achieved through the community development of these entities, but at the same time, they highlight the importance of the school as a key protagonist in such a process (Anyon, 2014; Berliner, 2009; Miller et al., 2011). For this perspective, the social transformation of the neighbourhood and the school arises through community development, an educational impulse of the city, and the active role of the social actors involved (e.g., schools and social organizations) along with civil society. It is agreed that networking between neighbourhood and school has great potential to be of use in the fight against processes of social segregation and educational disadvantage, and to instead favour those of equity and social justice. In this regard, projects of particular note are those such as "Educating City, Educating Neighbourhoods", which are based on the idea that the city and neighbourhood constitute a complex system and at the same time a

permanent, plural and polyedric educational agent capable of counteracting the factors of social inequality (IAEC, 2021).

However, despite the theoretical typologies that describe these alliances, there are few empirical analyses that explain the nature of the collaboration between the actors involved or the ways in which these collaborations take place including the tensions generated, the principles that guide them, and the effects of such alliances. Likewise, Kerr et al. (2016) emphasize the need to delve into how professional and community perspectives could strengthen school-community relationships and thus promote social transformation and well-being in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Kerr et al., 2016). In short, there is a lack of empirical evidence detailing models of school and community governance and their effects.

## **Method**

Given these gaps in the literature, this article analyses how the schools and social actors that comprise two socially disadvantaged contexts relate, collaborate, and convey various forms of support to encourage school success. This article is linked to several research studies conducted between 2011 and 2017 ([Anonymised details for peer review] and a doctoral thesis [Anonymised-author], 2016)<sup>1</sup> in which the authors have participated as researchers, and in which the contexts and collective study are shared. Based on a longitudinal sequential mixed-method research (quan → QUAL) design, a second-phase in-depth qualitative case study was carried out (Yin, 2014). We bounded the study by time (2011-2017) and by several cases which allowed us to carry out a multisite study. The study incorporated the assumptions of context-dependent research, inductive data analysis, and a theory driven approach (Sandín, 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> This article emerged as the result of several investigations, specifically, a doctoral thesis, [details removed for peer review], and two research projects I+D+i [details removed for peer review] and [details removed for peer review].

## **Data Collection Instruments**

In order to analyse school-community relationships, written documents from contexts, neighbourhoods and high schools were taken as primary sources of information. Official internal documents such as the School's Educational Project and the Diversity Care Plans were consulted and analysed. In addition, secondary data analysis was carried out, based on statistical yearbooks and official reports. Further, interviews were conducted with 35 educational and community agents from high schools and their surrounding neighbourhoods. Various techniques were employed, including semi-structured, individual, and development interviews (Sandín, 2003), as well as participatory techniques (group workshops, participatory sessions and focus groups) ([Anonymised-author], 2019). The protocol for the formal interviews and conversations with teachers and social actors was driven by the following questions: Which school-community relationships are the most favourable for the school success of teenagers living in socially disadvantaged settings? What alliances do they establish with their closest environment? What form do these alliances take? Observational methodology was also invaluable for analysing the information gathered from teachers, whilst documentary analysis was used to gain a more nuanced understanding of the school strategies and interventions used to encourage school success and to reflect upon why things were done in a specific way.

## **Research Sites, Schools and Participants**

### ***Sites***

The context of this study is located in two peripheric neighbourhoods of two cities in the Barcelona province. These study sites were selected because they are both considered to be urban areas with a high spatial concentration of social vulnerability (Wacquant, 2008), and a large part of their residents are at high risk of social exclusion, including, by extension, students in their high schools. For

both types of citizens, the implementation of austerity policies has further accentuated their vulnerability, particularly since 2012.

The Lucan neighbourhood<sup>2</sup>, where High School 1 is located, is a working-class neighbourhood with significant urban and service deficits, which developed in parallel with migratory flows from southern Spain during the 1960s, even though it was projected as a garden city for the bourgeoisie. During the 1970s, neighbourhood mobilizations claimed basic services such as schools and health centres, and although living conditions improved in the early 1990s, this level of citizen mobilization was experiencing a significant decline in its activity and a progressive dismemberment. With the arrival of the 2000s, the most settled working class left the neighbourhood and foreign families with low-income levels began to settle. Even during the period of economic boom in Spain, this neighbourhood had higher social vulnerability indicators than the rest of the city. Currently, the foreign population accounts for 16.8% of the neighbourhood (11.2% in the city as a whole). Residents in the neighbourhood perceive a sense of neglect on the part of local government and show feelings of internal and external stigmatization. The neighbourhood has a relatively poor social fabric, particularly for children and youths, as well as for migrant families. It is also disjointed and weak, with an almost non-existent relationship between school and community actors, despite the existence of locally led public policies such as Community Education Plans. Whilst such *bottom-up governance* implies a strong degree of institutionalization and financing of educational and social actions, in many cases, and as shown in the neighbourhood, it does not connect with the social actors of the territory or with their needs or interests, all of which weakens their involvement, participation and leadership, and ultimately reduces their impact and scope in terms of social transformation.

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<sup>2</sup> To guarantee the confidentiality of the analysed neighbourhoods, the schools, as well as the informants participating in the investigation, have been anonymized and the names that appear in the text are pseudonyms.

High school 2 is located in the Rodia neighbourhood. This is the most densely populated neighbourhood in southern Europe (30,000 people inhabiting a space of 0.38 km<sup>2</sup>) and is characterised by a vertical shack model without urban planning, with small, low-quality flats. Between 2000-2005, it experienced rapid population growth (44.5%), of which 47% were migrants with a low socioeconomic status. In fact, this neighbourhood already presented indicators of social fragility in times of economic boom in Spain, having social indicators more unfavourable than the rest of the city such as a household income of 8510 euros compared with 15085 euros in 2008. In the period of crisis and austerity, this trend has become even more prominent. In 2020, the foreign population rate was 35.7% in the neighbourhood, and 24.2% for the rest of the city. These data show how the neighbourhood is disadvantaged and has a high concentration of dynamics of significant vulnerability and social exclusion that impair the educational and social opportunities of its inhabitants and, in particular, of its young people, both now and in the future (Buck, 2001; Skifter, 2008). The Rodia neighbourhood is associated with dynamics of illegal economy, drug use, crime and problems of coexistence.

Despite showing greater signs of social vulnerability than the Lucan neighbourhood, it has a rich social fabric that is particularly aimed at the child and youth population, with a moderate degree of coordination and a clear goal of establishing synergies and collaborations to address the complexity and difficulties faced by its residents, particularly children and youths. Likewise, the municipality in which it is located has an established record of implementing community development projects, whilst there is a growing interest on the part of the local administration in consolidating a civic network that promotes collaboration between schools and civil society. The municipality received the "Educating Cities for Good Coexistence Practices" Award in 2016. This neighbourhood can be understood as an example of collaboration between local administration and the social fabric, or a *bottom-link* approach (García & Pradel, 2019). This type of relationship — in which proposals from below form a link with the administration, maintaining its leadership, and transforming into policies themselves — manage to

strengthen collaboration between actors and institutions and result in a greater impact and sustainability of social initiatives and projects ([Anonymised-author], 2020).

### **Schools**

The high schools where the study was carried out are publicly owned and offer both compulsory studies (known as ESO in its Spanish acronym) and various modalities of the post-compulsory stage (Baccalaureates, Intermediate and Advanced Vocational Training Programmes) (PC). Due to their size, the schools also present a diverse range of human contexts. High School 1 is a macro centre of approximately one thousand students and four educational areas with 18% children from migrant families, whilst High School 2 is a two-area centre with half the number of students, of which more than half are the children of migrant families. In the case of the macro-centre, the faculty consists of more than fifty people, whilst the other institution includes just over half this number. The latter centre has a social educator. The economic and human resources of both centres were particularly affected by the austerity policies of 2012, in which the GDP dedicated to education in Catalonia fell from 4.3% in 2010 to 3.6% in 2014. These cuts focused essentially on the social and community dimension of education.

During the period 2011-2015, students from both centres advanced mainly by following different educational paths with diverse interests along with unique family, school, social and personal experiences, which translate into different motivations for pursuing post-compulsory secondary education. In both centres, the monitoring of their trajectories shows the fluctuations that occurred for all youngsters, including itinerary changes, progressive dropouts, the incorporation of new staff into the schools. And, although, these behaviours are similar in both centres, students from migrant families managed to overcome ESO-PC in greater percentages at High School 2 (80.5%) than in High School 1 (52.2%). However, in both high schools more than half did not manage to reach the second term of PC, and of those who did so, only a minority completed their studies and entered higher education. It should be noted, however, that in the case of High School 2 students, the school's own policy fostered higher

levels of continuing trajectories for migrant students, so that those who failed, for example, in Baccalaureates, were redirected and oriented towards other vocational programs developed by the school.

### ***Participants***

The participants were recruited via intentional sampling, with access to the sample coming mainly through immersion in the centres and neighbourhoods, contact with the participants and recruitment during the course of the research itself. With regard to educational agents, the following criteria were applied: their role in the operation and organization of the school, their knowledge of school-community educational programs, their responsibility for promoting academic trajectories and transitions, particular regarding the children of migrants. In total, we interviewed 14 educational agents of different positions, such as heads of studies or pedagogical coordinators, educational stage coordinators, group tutors, teachers, social integrators, school psychologists and school counsellors. In relation to community entities and services, 21 agents were interviewed whose positions included local administration technicians, along with members of certain neighbourhood organisations and associations working specifically with youth populations.

### **Data Analysis**

Content analysis was conducted according to the following steps: a) creation of an archiving system of information from the documentary analysis, the transcribed interviews and any other supplementary observation records; b) codification of the hermeneutical unit; and, c) creation of a synthesis model based on the discovery, coding and interpretation of data (de la Cuesta, 2014). The content analysis began during the creation of the synthesis model (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which allowed us to identify emerging patterns and categories from the reiteration of the review of the dataset. Most categories emerged as the result of theoretical construction and the inductive process

followed, which was essentially based on the constant comparative method. We used the CADQAS software Dedoose v6.2.21 to streamline activities such as segmenting text into citations, encoding, and writing memos. To ensure the reliability of information, qualitative analysis followed the principles of credibility, reliability, confirmability and transferability. The research process complied with the code of good research practices of the University of Barcelona (2010). Participation was voluntary and informed, and pseudonyms were used for all informants, schools, and neighbourhoods.

## **Findings**

The results presented here show the categories that emerged at the intersection between school-community relationships and the promotion of school success, particularly for the children of migrants.

### **Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

Qualitative analysis of the origin of school-community relationships revealed that the deployment of educational measures and actions is first associated with the school's leadership style and the way in which the promotion of school success is understood and incorporated into the objectives for everyone at the high school.

First, both centres emphasize that inclusive education and attention to diversity are part of their mission and institutional vision. High School 1 defines *"its educational action with special sensitivity to the problems of the most vulnerable and the most impoverished classes and groups"* (SEP1: 6). On this basis, teachers understand the actions undertaken as "paths" that allow all students to develop their skills to the maximum: *"we envisage measures that favour the maximum inclusiveness of all students and avoid segregation, trying to help each student to learn in a way that is appropriate for their prior knowledge and learning abilities"* (PAD1: 2). The school's style of leadership is characterized by a strong

desire to create a reliable, transparent and supportive school environment, and to favour a greater involvement of the school's families. The high school remains open to the community with the intention of making everyone feel welcome to be involved in the academic and educational activity that takes place, particularly within the campus. However, as we will see later, this centre has coordinated very few school-community measures. In addition, it is clear from the discourse of educational agents that expectations of the students are low and school success is often thought to be an individual matter.

In principle all [resources] are interesting, but if you have a very complicated group of students, no matter how much you spend... It depends on each case, if you have any other community resource, this is very interesting, right? At some point you can support someone who doesn't follow you or things like that. [...] Look, Farjat is one of the good students; I mean, he has nothing to do. There are people who make an effort regardless of being an immigrant, even if they have it very difficult, and overcome it, and others who relax, right? (T13\_LUC, 1127-4791)

High School 2, in contrast, states that given the idiosyncrasies of its students and teachers, it is necessary to “achieve a quality education for all, regardless of the general conditions, gender, social origin or abilities of each person” (SEP2: 4). And among the objectives set by the high school, it wants “to achieve a progressive improvement of educational results, greater continuity of students in post-compulsory education and, a clear link with the neighbourhood and surrounding organizations to enable the development of a joint community and social project”. (SEP3: 5). Therefore, for more than 10 years, this centre has developed its own model for the social inclusion of young people, coordinating services with and for the community. In its educational and training plan, it highlights the importance of students analysing their social reality as students from the neighbourhood and, specifically, from Rodia as a municipality affected by mobility and demographic changes that have taken place over the years. Further, the active component of involving students in community actions and cultural events is added, and, although not all are always required to participate, the centre promotes the idea that each student

can benefit from one or other resource based on their interests and needs. This analysis takes place, above all, through methodologies such as Service-Learning. Other educational agents of the centre say they also work on this idea in subjects such as history and geography, art or citizenship, or by taking advantage of any other community initiative that adjusts to the needs of each student and the community itself.

Opening ourselves to the outside: visiting libraries, doing work outside; all services in their community go well because they see the needs that exist, the possibilities they have, the work they can do, such as visits to centres, workshops, trying to involve them in science programs for example. We're trying to do these things for them to see... For example, when they are in Baccalaureate programmes, they visit research institutes, they meet college students, they can be involved in research projects assessed by the university... (T2\_ROD, 15279-16196)

Among other issues, these initiatives ensure that the most disengaged students regain their interest in learning and want to continue studying. Through the school-community relationship, an educational action is promoted aimed at minimizing the educational and social exclusion of young people who do not have a positive relationship with learning:

We have found students who, through a Service-Learning collaboration, with leisure centres, for example, have continued to be engaged in study... [...] have discovered their vocation. They find they can do much more than they think. And from that moment on, when you believe more in yourself, you also have a positive response to further training. And sometimes it's a matter of selflessness that becomes an interest. Or low self-esteem that transforms into high self-esteem. And all of this helps later. (T6\_ROD, 3652-5456)

In this centre, what we understand by culturally sensitive leadership is that its principles, practices and political leadership actions promote the creation of inclusive learning environments for

the entire educational community, particularly for the real inclusion of students and families of diverse ethnic and cultural origins.

### **School-Community Relations: Between Institutionalization and Sustainability**

Both centres have resources and plans designed to establish collaborations with the social and educational agents of the area, as well as with the local administration, to achieve the objectives set out in their educational projects and to provide an educational response adapted to the characteristics of their students in compulsory and post-compulsory secondary education.

A priori, both show an explicit willingness to open up to the neighbourhood and the educational community and have a similar deployment of school-community projects and programs (Table 1). In all of them, the clear desire to open to and to relate to the environment is mentioned more or less explicitly.

Table 1. Institutional measures and resources for educational action and attention to diversity in the two centres

However, the analysis of measures in general and of school-community alliances in particular, shows, first, that only High School 2 has coordinated projects and programmes with an explicit link to the community (Table 2), and this is expressed as follows:

Networking is essential for us. We collect everything that is good for the kids, but we do not access the quantity of resources there are! [...] For example, now we are conducting interviews so that they can be leisure monitors with the Esplai Foundation. We take advantage of everything; some projects are done by us and everything from outside is welcome. (T3\_ROD, 749-1771)

This link is built from the idea of collaboration, of co-responsibility between actors, and is far from being a dynamic of occasional participation that is born out of a sense of “commitment” or “obligation”.

We are well coordinated. The truth is that in addition to the teachers that are part of the different projects, we talk a lot, we work a lot as a team, we are very well coordinated, because if one fails, the others can do the tasks, right? The goal is very clear. And it is true that with the kids we also try to convey that it is not only a school project, that it is done and that's it, but that it is also stepping out of the school, getting to know the community, interacting with other cultures, and to see that there are more options. (T5\_ROD, 1949-3217)

In contrast, the analysis of High school 2 confirms that joint work through projects related to other social organizations in the neighbourhood and the local administration takes place in the form of specific collaborative actions coordinated either by the management team or by an organized group of teachers. In most cases these are not part of a joint community and social project and do not have clear educational objectives. Whilst the centre has a family association with the aim of carrying out all kinds of activities, its participation in environmental projects is anecdotal and one-way. For example, they have a Service Learning (SL) Project to design experiments to assess the impact of pollution and, year after year, visits and outings are made to organizations such as the Data Processing Centre of the Polytechnic University of Catalonia. However, it is thought that it should be the environment that reaches the centre and in this sense, the centre disengages from its institutional responsibility in terms of promoting school success for all, stating that there is a lack of external resources to be able to respond to all students.

Given the socioeconomic profile of the neighbourhood, I think that the city council should pour more resources in this municipality. I guess now it's also because of the cuts; [...] programs help them to have better educational inclusion, both in the centre and with the municipality. [...] but 20-25% of these students have some measure of adaptation, either they are in medium-low-level groups, either they are in the Reception Classroom or ... well, for different stories, if it's not

one cultural pattern it's another and it's very difficult to place them somewhere. (T9\_LUC, 964-337)

In contrast, High School 2, in addition to the usual development of plans and programs (Table 1), also coordinates other projects involving community actors and local administration and these are referred to in a more explicit and stable way (Table 2), demonstrating the clear-cut link between the school and the surrounding neighbourhood and organizations.

Table 2. Description of the school-community projects of High-school 2

In High School 2, the professionals interviewed from both the public administration and the socio-educational field point out that the main actions in terms of care for the young population are the set of measures taken under the so-called “Youth Axis or Commission”. This strategy encompasses all community agents who work with youths in the neighbourhood and is based on proposals that are linked to improving the living conditions of citizens, as well as establishing connections between the general population and young people with shared interests and needs: “In 2009 a complete diagnosis was made, particularly with regard to the youth population and its situation in the neighbourhood. And from this moment, three lines of work have been established: accompanying, referential spaces and leisure” (ROD5\_Community Plan Technician).

The idea of this Youth Commission is to get closer to the youth population, and to offer stimulating proposals. The goal of providing meaningful participation opportunities for young people is the driving force behind this exercise, giving them spaces for companionship, advice, and support.

During 2011-2012, the creation of dialogue and mediation spaces was prioritized as a result of several previous conflicts. The construction of these spaces was achieved through activities such as painting walls of the squares and the Festa Major. It also focused on the issue of early school leaving, which is very worrying in this area. (ROD12\_Former Community Plan Technician)

Consolidating this commission involves being part of the various institutional organizational cultures, contributing to the development of participatory practices in educational institutions with appropriate structures. This creates spaces for collaboration, cooperation and networking, as required by successful experiences such as the Community Educational Plans.

The Community Plan continues to work and network with both publicly funded and partially funded schools and high schools in the city. It is important to reinforce the idea that we educate ourselves in both the school and the neighbourhood. (ROD4\_Community Education Plan Technician).

Unfortunately, all efforts made in line with the Community Educational Plan since the early 2000s — which sought to consolidate collaborations and synergies between the school, community and local administration — have been weakened by the implementation of austerity policies in 2012, essentially in the community dimension of education.

With the crisis and subsequent austerity, the Community Educational Plan is at a minimum. The same is true of the Neighbourhood Law 2/2004, plans for social cohesion. All projects that had a community dimension have been severely cut, as have the professionals involved in them: social educators, integrators... (ROD4\_Community Education Plan Technician)

In High School 1, the actions are less coordinated and connected to each other, which has a clear impact on the sustainability of school-community actions.

### **Purpose of School-Community Partnerships**

The aims pursued in school-community partnerships are concerned with how the trajectories of the two centres are conceived. Although in both it is assumed that, given the diversity of the students, the pedagogical and educational action of the school must also be plural, they conceive educational strategies differently and, therefore, the two centres differ with regard to how the strategies are instrumentalized, which, in turn also affects the establishment of community relations.

At High School 1, school-community measures for promoting school success are practically non-existent. Moreover, the deployment of the measures is mainly designed to provide a tailored educational response to students in the compulsory education stage. When routine measures (reinforcement groups, flexible groupings) are ineffective, they opt for alternative paths of a more specific and/or extraordinary nature (e.g., individual plans or educational compensation programs). As an example, in the School's Attention to Diversity Plan, the strategies and resources implemented (Table 1) are divided and specified according to levels (from 1st to 4th of ESO) based on the number of enrolments per course and the number of students with specific educational support needs including new students, students supervised by the educational psychology teams, and/or students with a profile report from social services. All these actions are designed with the aim of customizing the educational action of all students to acquire the necessary skills at each stage, which are no longer deemed to be necessary in the Post-Compulsory stage:

Typically, these measures are aimed at students with more difficulties, those who are struggling, and who can barely pass the ESO. Those who go through all these mechanisms of individual attention, low heterogeneous groups -we would say-, etc. [...] I don't find them any more in PC education. (T18\_LUC, 496-1936)

Similarly, the measures specifically activated in the post-compulsory stage are not coordinated by taking advantage of community resources. At High School 2, three main measures are institutionalized to promote the continuous development of all students after secondary education: (1) they offer the option of studying for the baccalaureate in 3 years instead of 2; (2) they continue to organize flexible groupings in vocational training programmes; and (3) they highlight the importance of educational guidance, tutorial action, and the transfer of information as necessary mechanisms for supporting the students in this stage and favouring their future academic and work transitions.

There is a big difference between vocational course and the Baccalaureates. In this last option, this whole thing isn't done, because, of course, post-compulsory studies are already another world; so to speak, right? In the ESO the student is supported and helped very much during the 4 years to try to get him/her to graduate. In contrast, in post-compulsory stages, the mentality is no longer exactly the same, but it depends more on guidance [...]. For us it's not a failure, for example, a kid who at first [of PC] doesn't succeed but then discovers by himself that what he likes is wood, right? (T15\_LUC, 981-2434)

High School 2 is instead an organization that is notable for its school-community relationship, being a reference centre and source of inspiration for the neighbourhood. A distinctive feature of the school is that the management understands the need to deploy measures such as the mechanisms necessary to respond to the characteristics of its students, not only for promoting higher graduation rates at the end of the ESO, but also to ensure that young people receive the support that they need for continuing to study in the post-compulsory stage. A holistic approach is taken to the actions implemented, regardless of the course in which the students are enrolled (ESO and/or PC). Teachers understand the centre to be a socio-community service that is open to and feeds on the environment, and one that promotes multiple learning opportunities that expand its institutional role beyond the time and space of the school. Their school-community programs constitute a dual-purpose tool that guides and supports the students; the programs allow them to make contact and connect with the community whilst providing spaces for the students to, for example, reflect on the training and professional options that are available to them.

Projects are super important to the reality we have at school, aren't they? They help them know the environment, to participate and see that what they do is useful and important, which is basic, right? Many times, by doing these things outside of school, seeing that there is another reality makes them reflect, think, and continue, or at least finish compulsory studies, and

sometimes even go on to enrol in a vocational program. I consider that the existence of all these plans and measures is very important for involving both students and families. (T6\_ROD, 1222-1948)

Based on this mission, they state that “the educational and human success of their students depends on networking” (PEC2: 5), which is why years ago they set up what they call the social commission. Once a week they bring together various professionals, including the management team, counsellor, social integrators, and the educational psychology team, which, together creates an educational response adapted to the characteristics and needs of the students. In addition, they establish as a *principle* “the maintenance of ties and relationships between the centre and its environment” (PEC2: 8), from which they coordinate periodic links with organizations such as the City Council. They were therefore included in the European Social Fund's PROA (Reinforcement, Guidance and Support Plan) project, which enabled them to consolidate their educational program through a strategic plan that has since promoted “the improvement of educational outcomes, social cohesion, and the continuity of students in PC education” (PEC2: 11).

### **Discussion and Implications**

We now turn to the questions posed at the beginning of this article regarding school and community governance models in socially vulnerable contexts (which present particularly complex situations following times of economic crisis and austerity) and their impact on promoting the academic success of young people.

Whilst a review of the literature on school-community relationships reveals a distinction between three main perspectives, which we can understand as ‘school-centred’ (Kerr et al., 2016), ‘neighbourhood-centred’ (Green, 2018), or hybridized ‘school-community’ alliances (Sampson et al., 2002), the findings of this study can essentially be placed in this last perspective. The results indicate that the dynamics that

become visible in schools and their impact on young people's trajectories are clearly interconnected with social processes that take place in the neighbourhood and in the city.

In this regard, the curriculum and pedagogical practices that operate in the centres do not always promote inclusive teaching-learning processes that favour greater social justice and equity for all (Tarozzi, 2015). Although school-community relationships exist in all kinds of environments, the characteristics that motivate them, their institutionalization and sustainability, and the leadership that promotes them can be translated, as we have seen, to either "compensatory or assistance" measures or "transformative" measures for young people.

Taking as a reference the school and community governance models of Valli et al. (2016), we can see how High School 1 in the Lucan neighbourhood is more closely in line with the school and interagency collaboration model, while High School 2 in the Rodia neighbourhood responds to the community development model. It is interesting to note how High School 2 — despite being located in a more socially disadvantaged context than High School 1, with significantly higher indicators of social vulnerability — achieves higher percentages of continuity between stages, and greater educational adherence of teenagers despite the fluctuations that occur throughout their trajectories. Analysis of the school-community collaboration between actors in both schools indicates that High School 2 has become a local and socio-educational welfare system, resulting in the application of more transformative measures and dynamics.

The literature emphasises the challenges that schools and community groups face in maintaining viable partnership, indicating the importance of practitioners and policy makers in creating the conditions for success. The results of this research show how a clear and stable partnership between school, community and local administration has significant transformative potential in terms of school success, social cohesion and equity, provided that various conditions are met.

The first condition is concerned with the development of governance models known as *bottom-linked* models (García & Pradel, 2019). These refer to institutional adjustments between social actors based on collaboration, horizontality, prioritization of the creativity of the social and educational fabric, recognition of the other as a partner with capacity for action; learning between social actors; support from local administration for bottom-up initiatives and maintaining leadership by promoting stakeholders.

The second condition is to be part of a community development strategy co-designed between socio-educational actors and the local administration. The role of the neighbourhood as a privileged context and actor, particularly in the European context, makes it possible to develop innovative forms of citizen participation ([Anonymised-author], 2020; Musterd et al., 2006). In this regard, the need to strengthen the links between the proposals of the socio-educational community and the interests of adolescents and their families becomes important (Caspe et al., 2007). Moreover, and particularly within this framework, we have found that schools are key to facilitating and encouraging community youth participation. To do so effectively, it is essential to move forward with systemic models that include the relationship between school, community and families (Epstein et al., 2011). This finding is in accord with the suggestions of others who have pointed out that the isolation of the teacher in contexts such as the classroom or the school where everything seems to be "for yesterday", and absorbed with such issues as bureaucracy runs the risk of making them poorer teachers and agents with lower educational outcomes (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012).

The third condition is that the partnership becomes increasingly stronger when projects are built on an existing neighbourhood-level social fabric, which is moderately coordinated and active. Therefore, the community efforts already initiated can be understood as contexts that are conducive to promoting the benefits of school-community alliances.

Fourth, the school is also a *sine qua non* condition for the coordination of the partnership. This further highlights the importance of culturally sensitive leadership, identified from the three principles defined by Johnson (2007): fostering new definitions of diversity; promoting inclusive instructional practices within schools by supporting, facilitating, or being a catalyst for change to challenge inequalities in society at large and at the school and district level; and building connections between schools and communities. In High School 2 these principles translate into: the high expectations of teachers regarding their students, the explicit belief that they can improve their starting conditions and succeed beyond the scope of their neighbourhood, the care ethic nurtured by valuing the culture of the youth, and a responsible commitment to the wider community and the educability of children, particularly migrants, for developing critical awareness. In this regard, the school is presented as a reference for the social and community fabric, and, at the same time, facilitates the link between social entities, educational resources, and local administration. Examples of this are learning-service programs developed at the school that connect with the social fabric of the neighbourhood and that have inspired public education policies at the city level.

Finally, and continuing with the school, another condition of the partnership is concerned with the degree of coherence that exists between the organizational culture and the socio-educational action of teachers. Although both centres are concerned — at the institutional level — with promoting educational continuity, the pedagogical measures applied in High school 1 are not achieving this goal. This centre is less able to claim that all its students are accessing the resources they need to improve at an educational level. In contrast, High School 2 has also highlighted the trajectory of their work with migrant students, which is notable for its greater consensus and clear definition of the educational objectives pursued according to a notion of school success in terms of equity.

In short, the main effects of both types of school-community partnerships are that the school and interagency collaboration model employed focuses on specific, occasional, and disconnected

collaborations between particular individuals that do not respond to a consensual strategic approach. Consequently, their impact is also limited, barely empowering the agents involved whilst fostering very little co-responsibility. In contrast, the Community Development Model enables the progression of more stable and consolidated strategies, with greater sustainability and therefore greater capacity for impact and change. As reflected in the case of the Rodia neighbourhood and High School 2, the local administration extends to public policy and extrapolates to other parts of the city's projects and experiences that are promoted and led by schools, which have first-hand knowledge of the needs and interests of their students and families.

From a methodological standpoint, this work provides empirical evidence regarding models of school and community governance, highlighting those aspects that positively affect the promotion of school success, which is characterized not only by academic results or school persistence, but also by the increased civic engagement and community participation of young people ([Anonymised-author], 2019). In sum, school-community-local administration partnership models, based on a bottom-linked governance system at the school and community level, are presented as a strategic approach that favours school success, equity and social justice, which has significant transformative potential for both the educational and social spheres. This is an approach that empowers young people, families and education professionals, placing them as protagonists of change, both in terms of quality of life in their neighbourhoods and their educational opportunities and experiences.

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