

## Chapter 8

# The Study of Educative Network Organizations in the City of Barcelona: The Nou Barris District

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper describes the inside organization of Educative Networks (ENs) and the aspects that allowed their growth and success in the city of Barcelona, Spain. ENs emerged over the past ten years in Catalonia, Spain, as a way to incorporate social and educative challenges in the territory. These educative proposals are based on the connection between the different educative institutions in the community to tackle social and education challenges in cooperation through transversality and a common project. The intent of ENs is to create synergies between cooperating organizations and coordinate community action to avoid overlap and redundant work. This study shows how these educative structures use context possibilities to improve educative impact and develop a new vision of organizing and conceiving education.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The general investigation is developed by the PSITIC<sup>1</sup> research group, and funded by the Municipal Education Institute of Barcelona (IMEB). The Barcelona city government is especially interested in the EN's emergent importance in the social and

educational affairs of the city. This article shows the first results and the future research outlets of the initial stage of a research-in-progress.

The academic curriculum of school and the values education of the family have heretofore represented a fractured education, with a shared responsibility between the two institutions. As a matter of fact, today's changing society has

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brought a collapse of this educational model, setting out the need of rebuilding the construct.

In the actual Spanish context, we find new spaces and actors with a high educative influence. Some of these actors belong to the academic education, integrated in the formal educational system as: Social Services, supporting socially neglected students and families, and advising teachers; pedagogical advising community teams, supporting students with special educative needs, and advising their teachers; linguistic and social cohesion teams, supporting immigrant students with language acquisition; and educational community services, giving educative resources to all the schools in the community.

But other actors are part of the informal education, such as: the media, with several restrictions in children's hours of programming; informal extracurricular activities that reinforce academic and artistic learning; sport clubs, with their educational sports programs; churches' educational projects; libraries, with lecture and scripture programs; families' associations, promoting the relations between families and schools; ludothèques, children's playing centers that provide toys and games to stimulate creative thinking; medical programs, such as drug prevention, sexual health or dental health; the police department, with such educational projects as road safety and surfing the Internet safely; and others.

The coexistence and multiplicity of educational actors in the territory have entailed a diversity of parallel actions, where each institution has developed its project in isolation with minimal interaction. Some consequences of the parallel work are resources overlaps and gaps derived from the lack of coordination. Society faces today the challenge of construction of a global education response. It's necessary to act from a different view, exceeding the individualized action, the sectorization and the mechanism from the educational system.

Educational networking (EN) is shown as an adequate methodological response to attempt

such complex educational challenges as school success, school absenteeism, equity, excellence, school-to-work transition, life-long learning, citizen education, and others. We see EN as an alternative organizational model to hierarchical organization charts, capable of equity in institutional integration, and united by a common objective; first, to share needs analysis and projects; second, to coordinate action in a comprehensive way (Longás, Civís & Riera, 2008). Thus, Educative Networks (ENs) are formal associations that have EN as an action method.

EN has become a relevant practice in the development of education in the city of Barcelona. This fact creates a political debate over which is the role of education and social policies organizations, and which is the role of administration. Far away from the improvements in educational results, EN is contributing as well to the strength of citizen participation and educative institutions' cooperation and coexistence, by generating social capital in the city. Halpern (2005) locates institutional cooperation, citizen participation, and social networks as social capital indicators. As well, he establishes education as a clue in the social capital construction, and points out the importance of cooperation between families, school and communities.

Nevertheless, EN is in a praxis construction process, and it becomes necessary to clarify the clue components that characterize its organization. By now, ENs are conceived as complex practices, with some organizational fragilities, and some questions arise over consequences provoked by: the coexistence of different ENs in a territory; their informal and spontaneous characters; their resource overlaps; effects in public education policies; outcomes deriving from different professionals; and the real impact of common actions in the territory.

This article is focused on the approach of the EN organization in the Nou Barris district of Barcelona, going deep into the weaknesses and strengths of its development, and in the principles

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