

PROMISE: Promoting Youth Involvement and Social Engagement: Opportunities and challenges for conflicted young people across Europe.

WP6: From Conflict to Innovation: Ethnographic Case Studies

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Young people with paths of psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour

PORTUGAL

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Executive summary:

In the scope of Work Package 6 of the PROMISE project, the Portuguese research team carried out an ethnographic case study on young people who presented life paths with psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour. This particular group of young people presented long paths of conflict with major normative social institutions like school, the law or the family, frequently leading to delinquent behaviour and/or school dropout.

The case study involved 26 participants aged 15 to 24 (9 girls) who were recruited among youngsters serving non-custodial youth measures and youngsters enrolled in two second chance education (SCE) projects. Data were collected over a period of 7 months using semi-structured, voice-recorded interviews, group discussions and participant observation.

This report presents the key findings of the case study emerging from the narratives of the participants. These address the major sites and agents of conflict experienced by young people with paths of psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour, with special relevance to school, family and the justice and protection systems; the ways by which these young people try to respond to and overcome their conflicts; the personal and social changes they recognise as resulting from these responses to conflict and the factors, mostly relational, that supported these changes; and, finally, how could these be transferred to other young people experiencing similar conflicts.

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1. Introduction

In the scope of Work Package 6 of the PROMISE project, the Portuguese research team carried out an ethnographic case study on young people aged 15 to 24 who presented life paths with psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour. This particular group of young people was considered to contribute to the general aim of the PROMISE project as several dimensions of these young people's life paths tend not to conform to social norms or laws and/or differ from general social expectations regarding youth roles, social trajectories and behaviours. The research under this case study – designated as RISK case study – focused particularly on youngsters who presented long paths of conflict with major normative social institutions like the school, the law or the family, frequently leading to delinquent behaviour and/or academic failure and school dropout, which often overlap.

In Portugal, over the last decades, along with the growing urbanisation, the insecurity felt by those who live in the city increased significantly (Fernandes, 2008). This phenomenon can be partially explained by the expansion of social housing neighbourhoods and their association with drug trafficking, as well as with the growing visibility of social actors that prompted insecurity rumours (e.g., prostitutes, junkies, beggars) (Carvalho, 2013). Moreover, the growth of urban juvenile marginal subcultures has contributed to the association between youth and social disorder (cf. Fernandes and Pinto, 2008). Despite the lack of evidence from official figures, which revealed variations in juvenile delinquency until 2008 and a decrease since then (Carvalho, 2013), according to the European Social Survey 2008-2009, in a representative sample, 50% of the respondents in Portugal reported to be afraid of the crimes committed by young people (Marques, 2011). In fact, despite the decrease of juvenile delinquency in the country in recent years, representations of deviance, rebellion and attraction to risk tend to persist as distinctive images of young people (Lerner et al., 2010), leading to the idea that juvenile delinquency is a growing and increasingly serious phenomenon.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was ratified by the Portuguese State in 1990. This led to a broader evaluation and deep critical reflection on the efficacy and limits of the children and youth justice welfare model, and in 1999, two new laws were approved regarding children and youth: the Promotion and Protection Law for Children and Young People in Danger (LPCJP); and the Youth Justice Act (LTE). These two laws distinguish the situation of children and youth in danger, that legitimises a State's intervention of protection (LPCJP), from the needs and situation of child, between 12 and 16 years old, who commit an offence qualified by the penal law as a crime and, as a result, justify another kind of intervention, an educational one (LTE). The set of educational measures established by the LTE, ranging from admonition to custody in an educational centre, aims at the offender's socialisation and rehabilitation, "based on the core principle of education in the law" (Rodrigues and Fonseca, 2010, p. 1035). According to official data, non-custodial measures represent 83.4% of the total number of juvenile justice measures being implemented in the country by the end of 2014. Youth justice measures are selected in accordance with a minor's autonomy and best interest, as well as parents or legal representatives' involvement. When several offences have been perpetrated, different measures can likewise be enacted. The youngsters can serve a measure until they are 21 years old. According to the last official report, in 2016 the most applied measures were educational monitoring (34.1%), imposition of obligations (24.4%), and community work (22.5%). Most of the youngsters with educational measures were Portuguese (93%), in the age group between 14 and 16 years old (63%). There was a predominance of males (82%) in all the age ranges. Most of these youth were serving measures for offences against the person (49%) and property offences (41%) (DGRSP, 2016).

In the trajectories of young people with State measures, especially those under the Youth Justice Act, academic failure and early school leaving are frequent (Cunha, Soares, Veríssimo, and Matos, 2015). In fact, early school leaving tends to be linked with different psychosocial, institutional and structural risk factors encompassing individual (e.g., gender, learning difficulties), family (e.g., low mother qualifications, low educational expectations), school (e.g., absence of positive relationships) and social aspects (e.g., reduced community involvement and support) (Cefai, Downes, and Cavioni, 2016; Prata, Barbosa-Ducharne, Gonçalves, and Cruz, 2013). Moreover, social research has shown that early school leaving is usually the culmination of a long process of cumulative social and individual disadvantages and vulnerabilities, as early school leavers tend to come from deprived and often stigmatised family and community backgrounds, from schools with low socio-economic status intakes, from workless households, and from vulnerable groups, such as the disabled, those with special educational needs, teenage mothers, minority or migrant backgrounds and those with physical and mental health problems (Dale, 2010). Consequently, school dropout is rarely a discrete and isolated event in a youngster's life course. On the contrary, in many cases it tends to concur and reinforce other deviant and risk behaviours, like drug use or drug dealing, violence within peers, in the family or towards authorities (teachers, the police), and tends to be a relevant facilitator of youth criminal behaviour (McAra and McVie, 2010).

With regard to early school leaving in particular, according to official data in 2017, 12.6% of young Portuguese between 18 and 24 were out of school without completing compulsory education (which in Portugal constitutes 12 school years). Nevertheless, this rate has decreased dramatically in the last years (it was 28.3% in 2010) mostly due to the growing intervention of the Child and Youth Protection Services in cases of school absence and dropout and to the increase of vocational training programmes offered to young people with unsuccessful and/or conflictual school trajectories. Early Leaving of Education and Training in Portugal has always been more frequent among males (32.4% in 2010 and 15.3% in 2017) than females (24.0% in 2010 and 9.7% in 2017).

Given the present social and political emphasis on educational qualifications as the main path to economic growth, employment and social inclusion, academic failure and early school leaving became major focuses of social concern throughout Europe, leading to moral judgements and demands towards youngsters and their families (Alves, 2007). However, the main focus of conflict of these youngsters is the formal education system and, more specifically, the school and its' professionals. Traditional perspectives tend to focus on youngsters' (and families') disabilities, non-normative beliefs and disruptive behaviours, as well on parents' poverty and low qualifications, in order to explain their academic failure and inability to conform to school norms and cultures, thus leading to school disaffection and, eventually, school dropout. Nevertheless, educational policies and school norms can also be questioned in terms of their ability to guarantee education as a basic right and a precondition to citizenship and social inclusion for all (Tilleczek et al, 2011).

Although early school leaving rates have been dropping in Portugal recently, and youth delinquency rates cannot be considered alarming, young people with diverse and un-linear trajectories of disengagement in education (Tomaszewska-Pękała, Marchlik and Wrona, 2017) and displaying deviant behaviours continue to be present in Portuguese society and tend to be seen – and often see themselves – as being on the margins of society. And these are precisely the young people 'in conflict' which are the focus of this case study. In fact, before reaching legal adulthood, some of these youngsters may be in conflict with the law, as they may not be attending compulsory education and/or may have committed acts that are defined as crimes by the Portuguese law. For those reasons, many of them are objects of state intervention within the national Child and Youth Protection System and/or the Youth Justice System. Institutionalisation in

a residential care facility or attendance of ‘alternative’ vocational or ‘second chance’ education programmes may, in some cases, be specific compulsory measures enforced to the youngsters under 18 years old. Over that age, however, many of them may no longer be in conflict with the law regarding compulsory education, but may remain in conflict with society, by not conforming to normative behaviours and expected life courses in terms of education and often also in terms of work, family and leisure. Thus, they become easily labelled and stigmatised as problematic, deviant or dangerous young people. This focus on risk and danger is also on the basis of state and institutional interventions, which tend to be more about risk management and individual responsabilisation of young people, rather than addressing their psychosocial and educational needs and promoting their rehabilitation and positive social involvement (Alves, Guimarães, Marques and Cavaco, 2014; Neves, 2013; for a parallel with the Welsh context, see Caise and Haines, 2015).

Second chance education (SCE) is one of the rare measures available to these young people, both under and over 18 years old. It is well established and recognised throughout Europe (Day et al, 2013), although still incipient in Portugal. The few second chance schools that exist in Portugal welcome youngsters that have had unsuccessful and often conflicting paths throughout mainstream school leading, most of the times, to prolonged school absences or to effective school dropout before finishing compulsory education. Among these, it’s not uncommon to find some youngsters who are serving, or who have served some kind of non-custodial youth justice measure. These schools aim to provide psychosocial support, academic qualifications and a positive educational experience to these youngsters, mainly using active and participatory methods and favouring vocational and artistic training. They usually develop a community-based approach, fostering young people’s social, cultural and economic inclusion and initiative.

1.1 Research questions

Pointing toward a deeper knowledge of the experiences of young people with life paths of psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour in Portugal, as well as to support new ways to promote their positive social involvement, the *RISK* case study aims to answer to the following research questions:

1. What are the sites, agents and forms of conflict encountered by Portuguese young people with paths of psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour?
2. What are the consequences of and constraints these youngsters face resulting from stigmatisation as problematic or conflict-prone?
3. What forms do their responses to conflict take? What meaning do they attach to these responses? Do young people with paths of psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour feel these responses can effect change? What is their innovative potential?
4. How effective these responses are in mobilising and implementing these youngsters’ drive for social change? In what cases do these responses constitute social innovation? How are they perceived as innovation by young people/ older generations/authorities?
5. What role do intergenerational relations play in both causing and overcoming conflict and producing social innovation and change?
6. How might the experience of young people with paths of psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour in finding creative responses and driving social change out of conflict be transferred to peers?

2. Methods

In order to address these research questions, data were collected over a period of 7 months using semi-structured, voice-recorded interviews, group discussions and participant observations. In addition, a photo-elicitation exercise was developed with some of the respondents and photos were used, when possible, to initiate individual interviews. Participant observations of daily activities and some key events took place before the interviews in order to gather information about the institutional context from where most respondents were recruited, as well as to create trustful relationships with the respondents. This also facilitated the refinement of the interview script and the reassessment of observation strategies when appropriate. Participant observations and group discussions were recorded in field notes and voice-recorded interviews were transcribed. Both sets of data were anonymised, coded (using Nvivo) and analysed thematically.

2.1 The case study settings and the respondents' recruitment

Participants in this case study were expected to be young people who presented long paths of conflict and non-conformity with normative social institutions like the school and/or the law. In order to recruit participants with this profile, the research team implemented two different approaches to the field. Initially, collaboration was fostered with a Youth Justice Team of the Ministry of Justice. This team was asked to present the project to all young people serving non-custodial youth justice measures at that time (September and October 2017) and invite them to voluntarily participate in individual interviews. Due to the limited number of youngsters serving non-custodial justice measures at the time of recruitment, as well as to the voluntary nature of the participation, only six (6) participants showed willingness to participate in the study and were interviewed as a result of this recruitment approach.

As an additional approach to accessing respondents we invited two different second chance education (SCE) projects in the north of Portugal to collaborate with the PROMISE project, as a way for the research team to gain access to specific institutional settings where young people with the expected profile would be engaged on a daily basis. Both projects were private civil society initiatives (although working in close collaboration with the public education system, including being placed in public facilities and having teachers from public schools) which offered a lower secondary education qualification to young people who have had problematic and/or unsuccessful school paths and that have dropped out regular school or vocational training. The two projects agreed to participate in the PROMISE research and respondents were recruited from both, allowing for a total of 20 individual interviews. However, to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' engagement and experiences, a more prolonged ethnographic approach (including group discussions, participant observations, photo-elicitation and most of the individual interviews - 16) was developed in only one of these projects, which became our main research setting for this case study.

2.2 The sample

In total, 26 young people were individually interviewed, 9 of them girls. This gender imbalance, however, was a direct reflection of the general gender imbalance among young people with life paths of psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour, especially if early school leaving and criminal offences are taken into consideration, as these behaviours tend to be more frequent among boys.

Respondents were aged between 15 and 24; 6 of them under 18 years old, the age of legal majority. These participants were the ones recruited through the Youth Justice Team (1 aged 15; 4 aged 16; and 1 aged 17). All the participants recruited at the SCE projects were 18 or older. Most of them were aged 18 (7), 4 were aged 19, 4 were aged 20, 1 was aged 21, 1 was aged 22 and 3 were aged 24. All respondents were single. Two of them (1 male and 1 female) had a small child. Approximately half of the respondents (10) lived at home with both parents and the other half lived at home with their mother (10). 1 respondent lived with his father, 1 lived with his grandparents and 1 lived alone. The remaining 3 lived in a residential care institution.

Almost all respondents were engaged in full-time education (24), whether at a SCE project (17), at vocational training (6) or at regular school (1). Most respondents (20) were enrolled at a lower secondary education level (corresponding to 7th, 8th and 9th grade) and 4 were enrolled in an upper secondary education level (corresponding to 10th, 11th and 12th grade). Only 2 participants were not formally engaged in any education, training or employment activity at the time of their interview, though they were former students of one of the SCE projects and they were still coming to the projects regularly to participate in vocational or artistic activities. Just 2 of the respondents were also part-time workers. Although only 13 participants (3 of whom were female) had actually left school or vocational training for a significant period of time (more than a school year), nearly all (23 respondents, 8 female) reported to have had a problematic trajectory at regular school, mainly related to conflicting behaviour, school absence and/or academic failure. (See information about individual respondents in Appendix 1)

2.3 The interviews

The interview schedule was closely based on the common ‘skeleton interview scenario’ of the ethnography work package (WP6) adopted by the PROMISE partnership, in order to allow cross case comparisons and analysis. It was designed to stimulate a structured yet adaptable conversation with respondents lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. A total of 1010 minutes of interviews were recorded and transcribed, with an average length of 39 minutes per interview; the longest interview took 64 minutes while the shortest lasted only 22 minutes. Interviews explored respondents’ general ideas about sites and effects of conflict/stigmatisation that young people face, as well as the respondents’ own conflict and stigmatisation experiences. It also explored the ways young people respond to conflicts and the participants’ personal responses to their own conflicts. Finally, it addressed the personal and social changes brought by these responses to conflict and the ways these could be transferred to other young people experiencing similar conflicts.

An initial set of 4 individual interviews was conducted in April 2017 at one of the SCE projects, allowing us to introduce minor refinements to the schedule that was later used in the interviews conducted at the main research setting in May and July 2017. The interview schedule had to be slightly adapted again when, in October and November 2017, the interviews with the young people serving youth justice measures were conducted.

The participants recruited through the Youth Justice Team were interviewed at different moments and in different public places of their own choosing (public parks, residential care institutions, cafés). All participants recruited at the SCE projects were interviewed in the projects’ facilities, always in a private room. All interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. The timing of the interviews was always defined by agreement between the researchers and the respondent. No individual files were accessed during the research and all information gathered about the participants was provided directly by themselves.

2.4 Participant observation

Due to the similarities between the two SCE projects and to better access conditions to one of them, participant observation was conducted only in one of these SCE projects, which became the main research setting of the case study. Participant observation was the first research technique to be used at this site and lasted for around 7 months (January to July 2017). One or two researchers observed project activities approximately once every two weeks (13 visits of approximately 3 hours each, although its duration would vary according to the activities observed) and participated side-by-side with the students in regular vocational activities (cooking, arts and crafts), weekly project assemblies and informal moments (lunches, recesses). Researchers also accompanied the students on two external visits. In addition to the data collection, this methodological approach allowed the researchers to build a close and trustful relationship with most of the project's students and staff, thus facilitating the adherence of participants to the individual interviews and the sharing of personal experiences and perspectives.

2.5 Group discussions and photo-elicitation

Two group discussions were organised with the students of the main research site. These were prepared and facilitated by the research team using participatory and creative techniques and students were invited to participate voluntarily. The first one, held in March 2017, addressed the two common themes of the PROMISE project – youth and conflict – and the participants (18 in total) were asked to share and discuss ideas about these two themes and the relations between them. The second group discussion, held in July 2017, was attended by 9 participants and focused on the youngsters' perspectives and past experiences in mainstream school and its comparison with their present experiences at the SCE project.

A photo-elicitation exercise was also done with the students. A short training session on photography was delivered by one of the researchers and a disposable camera was handed to every student who wanted to participate in the activity. Participants were asked to take pictures of places, persons or situations that were relevant to their life trajectories, whether as difficulties or conflicts, or as sources of support or change. A total of 10 participants took pictures and were asked to choose the 3 or 4 most important ones and write a title and subtitles to each of them with the help of the Portuguese teacher. These pictures were used, when possible, to start their individual interviews. At the end of the school year (July 2017) participants were asked to create (with the help of the Arts and the ICT teachers) an individual poster with their chosen pictures and the respective subtitles. These posters were displayed in a festive lunch at the school which gathered all the students, all the PROMISE researchers and school staff.

2.6 Ethics

Prior to the beginning of the research, all respondents were given an information sheet outlining the research and providing contact details of the researchers and were assured that they could choose not to participate or withdraw from the research at any point. Additionally, all participants were asked to sign a consent form before the interviews commenced. They were promised confidentiality and all field notes and interviews transcripts were anonymised to ensure that their identities were concealed.

In the case of the SCE project where participant observations were conducted, an information session about the PROMISE project was held before the beginning of the research and all students

were invited to freely participate in the research. The ones who agreed were asked to sign a consent form before their participant observation commenced. An additional consent form was signed by the students participating in the photo-elicitation exercise.

In the case of the respondents recruited through the Youth Justice Team, the project was presented by the youth justice officers to the youngsters, who invited them to participate voluntarily in an individual interview. To facilitate their participation, potential respondents were promised a 10€ shopping coupon for a media store after the interview. When young people consented to participate, their parents or legal guardians were also asked by youth justice officers to authorise the youth's participation. Only after this procedure, would researchers contact the youth's parents or legal guardians by telephone to ask them to meet and to sign the consent form. After that, the respondents were directly contacted by telephone by the researchers to arrange for the interview. Just before the beginning of the interview, researchers presented the project again to the respondent (including delivering another copy of the information sheet) and asked for a signed assent form.

2.7 Positionality

The positionality of the researchers was significant to this case study. Almost all the respondents were young people engaged in some kind of educational setting at a lower or upper secondary level, and the two researchers were university educated adults, in their 30's, and working fulltime in a university. This led most respondents to relate to the researchers as if they were teachers, and frequently addressed them as such. This positioning initially legitimated the presence of the researchers at the research sites and facilitated the respondents' interaction with them, as it gave them a 'familiar' code to communicate. Nevertheless, this representation of the researchers as teachers gave gradually place to more close and informal interactions, not only because through participant observations the researchers built close relationships with many young people, but also because the very role of the teachers in the SCE project proved to be much more informal and close to the students than the traditional teacher roles that are frequent in regular schools.

2.8 Data analysis

All interviews were anonymised and coded using Nvivo11 and all respondents were given pseudonyms. The interviews were coded into 26 level two nodes that were provided by the coordinating team of the PROMISE project and discussed within the whole consortium. Level two nodes were informed by theory in order to produce a number of main themes agreed by the researchers and used in the key findings section. The level one nodes were developed by means of an interactive process of coding interviews, discussing in team and getting final agreement. Nodes reflect the contents of the interviews rather than just being predetermined by the structure of the interview. At the start of coding, one interview was coded by all Portuguese team members and then coding was discussed. After that, though most interviews were coded by one single researcher, the one that did most of the interviews, the coding process was systematically discussed with other researchers.

3. Key findings

This section explores the key findings of our case study, organised by four main themes: major sites and agents of conflict experienced by young people with paths of psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour; the ways by which these young people try to respond to and overcome their conflicts; the personal and social changes they recognise as resulting from these responses to conflict and the factors that supported these changes; and, finally, how these could be transferred to other young people experiencing similar conflicts.

These themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the interviews and also included data from the group discussions and the field diaries. Throughout the text, we include quotes from the interviews, as well as indicate the number of sources (and occasionally the number of references) in order to illustrate the consistency and relevance of some results. Whenever included, the number of sources refers exclusively to the interviews. When results are supported on data collected from other sources (e.g., group discussions), this will be evidenced in the text.

3.1 A life of conflicts

The idea of conflict is a familiar one to young people who have life paths marked by psychosocial risk and deviant behaviours. Many of the case study participants related being young with having or being involved in conflicts (something made very clear in the first group discussion held at the SCE project). However, for these young people, conflict is mainly about interpersonal violence, whether physical or verbal, happening at specific moments and in places. Nevertheless, from the narratives of the respondents, it could be argued that other, more structural types of conflict are strongly present and determine their life opportunities and choices, such as socioeconomic or gender disadvantage, stigmatisation, and social and educational marginalisation. In fact, there are several sites where the youngsters participating in this case study refer to having, or to having had, conflicting or problematic experiences. These are particularly present in educational, neighbourhood, family, intimate relationship and justice/protection settings.

3.1.1 Conflicts at school

Mainstream schools are the sites where the youngsters participating in this case study refer to having the most conflict-based experiences (20 sources). These experiences, narrated both in individual interviews (17) and in the second group discussion, tend to be particularly related to deviant or undisciplined behaviours at school, as well as to the lack of interest or motivation to be in school: 'I didn't want to go inside the school, I didn't like school' (Óscar, SCE); 'At my old school, I beat the record of disciplinary offences, really, ... there wasn't a single class where I wasn't sent to the student's office with a disciplinary offence, because I was always getting into trouble' (Andreia, SCE).

Many respondents also made references to situations where school as a whole, and teachers in particular, stigmatised, did not care and didn't support students (16 sources), and some referred to school as having a distant relationship with the students (3 sources): 'School thinks we are not capable, doesn't insist [on working with us]. You don't come, you don't get. It's finished. Give up, go away. You're expelled' (Elsa, SCE).

In fact, when referring to school as a site of conflict, the youngsters mentioned the teachers as the main agents of the conflicts they experienced in this context. The quality of their relationship with

the teachers, who they tended to describe as being non-supportive, seemed to be the key point of this association: ‘Mainstream school teaches, but it doesn’t care about students, basically. ... many schools always want to check our records, our past, and don’t mind about our present or our future, they just want to know our past’ (Telma, SCE).

School peers were also described as important facilitators of conflict with/in school, both in 11 interviews and in the second group discussion, these being especially associated with the encouragement of indiscipline behaviour and school absence: ‘and also the company, a bit. I wanted to be on the street, hang out with my friends and stuff. And that was it’. (Edgar, SCE).

Some young people (8 respondents) described experiences of learning difficulties that were associated with school failure– ‘I always had trouble in school, even when I was younger... Some [kids] took the test in five minutes, while I left with only half the test done’ (Óscar, SCE). Others (7 respondents) described violent experiences (whether as victims or as agents of bullying or aggression to teachers or staff). These were mentioned in the interviews and in the second group discussion: ‘I had a hard time staying focused, ignoring what others were saying about me, not thinking about what would happen to me if I were out on the break. I often came out and there were already people there to pick me up’ (Lourenço, SCE). While not all conflict ended in school dropout, for many, these unsuccessful and/or conflicting paths favoured a progressive disengagement from school and education that, ultimately, led to moments of rupture with regular school (18 sources): ‘I left school at 13, 14; it was a decision of mine’ (Martim, SCE); ‘I wanted to do a vocational course and get out of regular school’ (Elsa, SCE).

3.1.2 Conflicts in the Family

Many respondents (13 sources) described experiences of conflict within the family, namely conflicts with parents, who seem to be the main agents of conflict in this domain. However, detailed descriptions of family conflicts were intentionally avoided by most participants and researchers responded accordingly by not exploring it further. Consequently, the references to conflicts at home tended to be vague, like ‘problems at home’, ‘I had conflicts with my father’ and ‘I have a bad relationship with my mom’. Some of the youngsters’ narratives nearly reveal violent familial dynamics, although never explicitly: ‘because I have been through too much’, ‘because things happened at home’, ‘trouble at home...’, and in some cases these experiences were associated to deviant behaviour or school dropout.

INT: And which of these behaviours led you to face a judge?

HÉLDER: I blew up a car.

INT: Wow. Why did you do that? What made you do that?

HÉLDER: I lost my head, I didn’t know what I was doing and, according to what I was told, I set a tire on fire and then the whole car set on fire.

INT: And you, at that moment, had you been using? Ok. So, it was during that more complicated phase?

HÉLDER: Yes, it was.

INT: Ok. And so ... so what led you to do that, to get to that state, so lost in your head?

HÉLDER: It was the problems I had at home. (Hélder, YJT)

3.1.3 Conflicts in intimate relationships

Intimate relationships were also described as sites of conflict by some youngsters (7 interviews, first group discussion). There were narratives about boys fighting because of girls, about having bad relationships and about how having a boyfriend or a girlfriend may enact problems with peers. This tended, however, to be “normalised” by the respondents, who considered these common “youth problems”. One of the participants described how being a victim of abuse by her boyfriend led her to drop out of school: ‘I had a lot of problems with him because he beat me up and everything, do you understand? And I ... I got to the point in my life when I said "No, that's enough, this is not what I want for myself" and I abandoned everything’ (Andreia, SCE).

3.1.4 Conflicts in the neighbourhood and peers’ influences

The experience of living in deprived neighbourhoods, or of coming from one, was also referred to by 8 respondents as a facilitator of conflicting experiences. Participants tended to refer to the neighbourhood as a context where conflicts are inevitable, and from which youngsters can't escape: ‘Getting out of the neighbourhood life and becoming a normal person, the neighbourhood problems follow behind. A person can never remain normal’ (Lourenço, SCE). This seems to be strongly related to the negative influence of peers from the neighbourhood, who were described as key agents leading to conflicting, deviant or even criminal behaviour.

I came from a troubled neighbourhood and have had many friends that are currently in prison. I have maybe only 2 or 3 of my circle of friends who are normal.... It's difficult because, I'm not saying that if you are from a neighbourhood you have to go to jail, but it's difficult when we have friends who are ready to go do this and that. One is younger and always follows behind and goes ... influenced and then ... we also have that sense of feeling safe and being surrounded by 20, 30 friends. (Edgar, SCE)

In fact, most respondents (18 sources) referred to the negative influence of peers and friendship as an important factor precipitating young people's, or their own conflicting or deviant behaviours, such as stealing, skipping classes, getting into fights, drug use, and, eventually, school dropout: ‘Society is upside down, there are friends who are not... If you are not with the right friends, you'll get into things that are unnecessary. And that's why one has to open their eyes.’ (Francisco, YJT)

3.1.5 Deviant behaviour

Hashish and alcohol use are behaviours the respondents referred to as usual among young people (15 sources). Although these behaviours are commonly seen by society as potentially deviant and anti-social, respondents showed a double standard in this regard. Some linked it with youthful non-problematic conviviality and identity, an even as something quite present and valued in their daily lives (principally hashish smoking). Others, or sometimes even the same respondents, would reproduce general negative social representations and refer to drugs and alcohol use as harmful and ‘irresponsible’ practices that could lead to problems and, in some cases, they would even assume individual responsibility for the problems that they thought drug use had brought to their own lives, such as drug addiction, conflicts in the family or at school, or the involvement in violent or criminal behaviours: ‘From the 6th grade onwards, it was at that time that I started smoking my first cigarettes ... and then I also started to use hashish and so, it was when ... I went down, I went all the way down. I began to destabilise my life a lot.’ (Júlia, SCE)

Regarding violent behaviour, four respondents made reference to violence as something that is quite present within youth groups or even as part of the way of being young, while four others

stated having been directly involved in violent conflicts with others (peers, teachers). Some of these behaviours constituted criminal offences, and 4 respondents affirmed to having been involved in criminal acts like stealing, destruction of private property and drug dealing: 'I'd rather sell drugs, and I'm as guilty as Mr. Jose over there, who has a grocery store and sells wine, and everybody can get it there, and it's not obligatory... selling drugs, why is it illegal? Because we are not paying the state?' (Marco, SCE). The association between crime and youth was also present in the discourses of some respondents (5 sources), but youth criminal activities were usually justified by poverty, family problems, living in deprived neighbourhoods or by the negative influence of peers: 'Yes, that comes also from the difficulties they face at home, do you see? Because they have to make a living, do you understand? Some begin to deal others begin to steal' (Andreia, SCE).

3.1.6 Conflicts with the justice and protection systems

All of these conflicting relationships with persons, institutions or the law, led many of the participants to have contacts with the youth justice system (when having committed an offence qualified by the penal law as a crime) and/or the youth protection system (when considered by the child protection services or by a court as being at risk or in a danger situation, such as parental neglect, maltreatment or school absence) (15 sources). Some of these contacts, however, were also experienced as conflicts by the respondents. For example, in regard to the courts, some respondents showed that they didn't agree with the easy way judges would decide on a custodial measure, like Manuel (SCE): 'One goes to court, and, like, they put him in a foster care facility. They don't think they have family. Because if it were his son, I think they... would think otherwise', or Francisco (YJT): 'They have to think about the "if" and they are not like that. They want, they can and they rule. But they also have to bear in mind that we too are human, we also have things we like to do'.

The idea of potentially being sent to a residential care institution, whether due to a justice measure or to a protection measure, was very much present within the participants' narratives, and the ones who have actually been sent to one tended to have difficulty in accepting the decision and preferred to stay with their family and, thus, frequently running away from these institutions.

'After 3 years and 3 months I fled from the institution right away. Then they picked me up again, like one month later, and then they took me back to the institution with a cop everything, and then ... well, as soon as the cops went away they told me to go to school and I said, "that's fine, I'm going to school". The hell I will, I'll go home again instead.' (Hugo, SCE)

Seven respondents made references to the police as an agent of conflict with young people, whether in general terms or linked to personal experiences of contact with the police. Many of these, however, stated that police officers tended to act with the pre-conception that young people are bad or always looking for trouble, and linked this to the dominant social discourse of youngsters as marginal or delinquent:

'Occasionally, people go on the street and start looking sideways and we, the youngsters, don't like it. And some start insulting us verbally and we cannot admit it and, hence, the conflicts ... between us and the police. (...) there are cops who can't understand our side, because they are not on our skin.' (Sérgio, SCE)

3.1.7 Gendered conflicts

When asked to relate gender with the conflicts and difficulties faced by young people, the respondents' narratives show interesting contradictions. Many participants, and proportionally more girls, stated that nowadays, boys and girls face the same problems and have access to the same opportunities (14 sources, 7 female), stressing, instead, that individual choices and personal maturity are the factors that make the difference in the lives of youth: '[Boys and girls] are alike; you only need to have maturity in your head' (Sérgio, SCE); 'No. Me, being a girl and looking at the boys, I think if I'll do the same things they do I'll have the same consequences, if I'll get into what they get into I'll do the same, if I steal, it's not because I'm a girl that I won't get arrested.' (Roberta, SCE)

On the other hand, 14 participants (6 female) also argued that girls face greater difficulties than boys. Interestingly, within these 14 respondents, 5 girls and 2 boys, in other moments of the interviews, had defended just the opposite, thus indicating the possibility that these youngsters (especially girls) acknowledge the contradiction between expected gender equality ideals and the persistent of objective gender inequalities base on unequal gender role and expectations. In fact, these respondents defended that girls face more difficulties whether due to intrinsic reasons (7 sources, 2 female) like the 'natural' vulnerability and emotional character of women, in need of greater protection: 'A girl is weaker, more delicate. It makes sense, my mother doesn't let my sister go out at night without me. (...) Doesn't let her go out because she's a girl, it is more difficulty, [she is] weaker.' (Óscar, SCE); or due to external factors (10 sources, 5 female) like exposure to sexual harassment or sexual abuse by males, being exposed to a harsher moral judgement: 'I speak for myself ... how can I tell you? It's like this, if a boy gets a chick ... he's the king, but she's a whore' (Andreia, SCE); or being discriminated against in the job market: 'A woman no, there is more... in certain jobs she is not accepted.' (Telma, SCE)

A few respondents, though, argued that boys face greater difficulties than girls (3 sources, 1 female) since they mature more slowly (1 source, male), have more difficulty concentrating in school (1 source, male) or don't follow advices from others and have a more negative image in society (1 source, female).

3.2 Stigmatisation

The young people in this case study identified different experiences of stigma, as well as different factors that they consider having led to their own experience of discrimination or to the general prejudices of society concerning youth in general.

3.2.1 Own experience of discrimination: factors identified

Respondents refer to being discriminated against by others mainly due to their past behaviour, e.g., problems in school or violent behaviour (14 sources), although these are vaguely described: 'We had school records, school failure and all those things, bad behaviours, disciplinary offences, and all that' (Sérgio, SCE). Seven participants shared experiences of discrimination due to being from a deprived neighbourhood: 'many people discriminate us because we are from the neighbourhood. What's the problem of being from the neighbourhood? We are like other people; many people discriminate against this...' (Manuel, SCE). Other participants mentioned having felt discriminated against because they were not attending school or because they had not completed school (6 sources): 'Maybe a lot of people looked down on me because they knew that I wasn't

doing anything with my life [because he dropped out of school], because I wasn't working, they thought maybe I was going back to what I was before, I wasn't going anywhere.' (Marco, SCE).

3.2.2 Society's prejudices about youth

The participants also made frequent references to society's general prejudices concerning young people. However, these were mentioned from two different stand points. On the one hand, youngsters endorsed these prejudices, by distancing themselves from this 'problematic youth' and, sometimes, from youth itself (12 sources): 'Being young nowadays is tricky. They only cause problems. I think that in my time, when I was younger it was nothing like this' (Elsa, SCE). On the other hand, respondents also referred to prejudices carried out by older generations that seemed to represent young people as 'marginal' who 'are not going anywhere' and as delinquents: 'Nowadays I think they see us as, most young people, I think they see us as delinquents or the like' (Xavier, YJT).

3.3 Overcoming conflict and stigmatisation

All the participants of this case study have gone through some kind of experience of conflict and have felt discrimination or stigma towards themselves or, at least, in relation to some other young people who were close to them. However, all participants were also engaged in some kind of change-seeking path that would help them to respond to, or to overcome these conflict-laden and stigmatising experiences, and for some, this really felt like their last chance to seek positive changes in their lives: 'It's an excellent opportunity. ... For example, I'm 24 years old, I'm young, but to finish my education I'm not that young anymore, right?' (Santiago, SCE).

3.3.1 Education is the way

All respondents were, or have recently been enrolled in some kind of educational context and this was the main activity they were engaged in. For many, however, this involvement in education was more than a daily activity. It was their concrete way of responding to the problems, conflicts and even stigma they have been experiencing. In fact, education was at the centre of the life of most participants of the case study, not only as a major site of conflict, but also as a major site of agency. Many respondents (14 sources) mentioned that they had recently made efforts to search for new education opportunities and/or they were striving to be successful at the educational paths they were in, and some clearly stated that going to school or the second chance project was their concrete way to tackle problems (5 sources). Among the respondents that were, or have been, enrolled in one of the SCE projects, five claimed to have arrived there via institutional indication and ten others at the suggestion of family or friends. However, twelve of them clearly stated that they came to the project because they wanted to, and not because they were told to.

What motivated me was my conscience, my conscience. Maturity increased, did it not? It got to a point that I had to say, "I have to go back to school and improve myself." The social worker got me this [the SCE project] and I came. I grabbed it, to make people happy and that was it... (Edgar, SCE)

For the participants who were serving youth justice measures, these were considered the main activity they were engaged in. Nevertheless, education played a central role in their current lives as well, not only because going to school was a central part of their court ordered measures, but also because they actually felt that it was a decisive means to change the course of their lives and,

objectively, reach greater job opportunities in the future: 'I'm really wanting to finish the 12th grade to go abroad. It is my main goal to finish the 12th grade, to have more opportunities, it is an added value' (Francisco, YJT).

When asked about the reasons for being in the educational activities they were engaged in, respondents tended to stress the new opportunity to reengage with school and continue or finish their education (12 sources), more opportunities to find work in the future (6 sources), the possibility to 'be someone in life' and have a better future (6 sources) and, finally, the willingness to meet their own or others' (family, teachers) expectations regarding their future: 'My family and work, I have to be someone. If I were alone I wouldn't mind being a bandit, my friends were in jail. But no, I have a sister, I have a mother, I have a grandmother' (Marco, SCE). These findings also emerged clearly in the second group discussion.

This new engagement in education tended to be experienced by the participants as an opportunity to set a new course for their lives and, consequently, as a source of pride in themselves, whether because of their renewed commitment in school activities (7 sources), because of the positive way they were seen by others for reengaging in education (5 sources), or because of their own sense of self-improvement (14 sources) in aspects like maturity, responsibility, adjusted behaviour, effort and self-reliance: 'Yes [it changed the way I saw myself]. I gained more self-esteem and confidence in myself' (Elsa, SCE).

3.3.2 Individual efforts

In contrast with this prominent involvement in education, the youngsters participating in the case study showed to have a very low tendency to engage in other types of collective activities and very little interest in doing so. Besides school or vocational training, respondents reported very few other structured activities they were, or have been involved in, namely 'sports' (5 sources) and 'scouts' (2 sources). Other activities referred to by the respondents were of an informal and/or individual nature, like 'being with their girlfriend', 'being with friends', 'taking walks', 'listening to music', 'bike riding', 'writing a blog', or related to part-time or occasional work or volunteering, like 'being a fire-fighter', 'dancing in concerts at local festivities', 'working at a bike workshop' or 'doing volunteer work with animals'. When referring to ways of dealing with problems, individual perseverance and responsibility, as well as individual coping strategies were the ideas that stood out both in 17 interviews and in the second group discussion, namely ideas like 'school success depends only on us', 'we have to believe in ourselves', 'never give up', 'don't listen to what others say', 'think before you act', 'avoid stressful people and negative thoughts', 'let life go on', or 'go to some place quiet to relax or to think'.

3.4 From engagement to change

Change was a central issue for the participants of the case study, as all of them were, in one way or another, seeking to build new life paths that differ from their problematic or conflicting past experiences. As presented above, the ways they envision or engage in to reach this desired change oscillate between individualised efforts and formal institutional practices, the latter mainly of an educational nature, even for those participants who were serving youth justice measures. Especially when considering this kind of formal engagement, respondents were able to identify several resulting changes, both in themselves and in other young people, although these tended to be quite general and often nonspecific.

3.4.1 Strengths to move forward

When asked about the personal (felt or expected) changes resulting from being engaged in major institutional contexts like the SCE project or the youth justice measures, respondents were almost unanimous in stressing positive outcomes. In fact, they were all able to identify a wide diversity of personal dimensions that benefited from this experience, and only just a few respondents made reference to potentially negative impacts (2 sources). The most referred benefit was ‘personal growth and new ways of thinking’ (20 interviews, second group discussion), encompassing ideas like ‘growth’, ‘evolution’, ‘recognising past mistakes’, ‘willingness to change’, ‘new life goals’, ‘looking at life in a positive way’, and ‘dreaming higher’: ‘I was worn out, I was out of control and I did a lot of bad things ... I now regret that.’ (Xavier, YJT); ‘how am I going to explain? Now I dream bigger than I dreamed before’ (Raquel, SCE).

A second set of benefits highly referred by the respondents was related to a greater well-being and feelings of self-value, self-esteem and of ‘being capable’ (15 interviews, second group discussion).

They give me the strength to go forward, and to me, that raises my self-esteem, doesn’t it. And it makes me see myself in a better light. You are getting there, you have people who care about you, you already have something to hold on to and move forward’ (José, SCE).

Other benefits frequently cited were the ones related to finishing a school degree and getting better academic qualifications (13 interviews, second group discussion), as well as improving the opportunities to find better jobs and have a better future (13 interviews, second group discussion): ‘I finished this in an instant. The teachers thought that I was going to bail on this’ (Óscar, SCE); ‘It is knowing that I can have continuity in my future, to know that this can provide continuity’ (Martim, SCE).

One other relevant set of benefits recognised by the respondents was related to the improvement of personal characteristics (12 sources), the improvement and diversification of relationships (family, teachers, peers) (11 sources) and the decrease or adjustment of behaviours that they now consider to be problematic (7 sources): ‘My mother didn’t like it very much that I was getting home late, for example, and when I told her that I was struggling to find a training course, our relationship started to improve’ (Miguel, SCE); ‘Ahhh, like working in a team.... Knowing how to respect others... with everything’ (Manuel, SCE).

Finally, one last cluster of positive changes identified by the participants related to education and learning, namely building a better relationship with education and/or the school (9 interviews, second group discussion), improving or acquiring new skills or interests (8 interviews, second group discussion) and specific curricular learning (5 interviews, second group discussion): ‘Always being in school, always going to school. It’s one of the things that changed in me. There was no school that could hold me there for long’ [Hugo]; ‘I’m learning well. They teach you mathematics in a very different way from mainstream school, so that in a certain way you can understand things better’ (Edgar, SCE).

Many of the personal changes the young people identified because of their involvement in these educational contexts were also the ones they were able to recognise in their peers, or the ones that they believed could possibly happen to others like them if they had the possibility to engage in similar activities. When asked about the changes identified in others, respondents referred mainly to general benefits (8 sources) (‘positive changes’, ‘good things’ ‘the best thing that can

happen to us'), to better relationships with education and/or school (7 sources), to opportunities to find better jobs and have a better future (5 sources), to having the chance to finish a school degree and get better academic qualifications (3 sources), to promote greater well-being and feelings of self-value, self-esteem and of 'being capable' (3 sources), as well as personal growth and 'new ways of thinking' (2 sources).

3.4.2 Making change happen

In the face of such positive impacts identified by the participants, the key question, thus, became 'what made these changes happen'? The narratives about the ways participants experienced the activities they were engaged in were very telling in this regard. In line with the impacts they identified, their experiences were also typically positive. In fact, almost all respondents stated 'to like' or 'to feel good' in these activities (20 interviews, second group discussion), whether this was a SCE project or other new education settings associated to a youth justice measure. These positive feelings tended to be strongly associated with a sense of being welcomed, respected, not being judged, being valued and supported in this new context (22 interviews, second group discussion), especially by the adults present (teachers, staff).

Not here, here you have that help, even if you are having a bad day you always have that call from the other side, like, good mood, you know it's the best for you and we need you, like, no other school does that. It's like that. Ahh, in other schools if you don't want to go, do not go (Marco, SCE).

They help us a lot. If I have to talk, if I have to vent, you can go to them. They give advice; it's like a second mother and a second father, basically. I feel good, it's different. The warmth, the cosiness, the trust, is completely different. (Júlia, SCE)

So I consider the [project name] a good place to be. Teachers strive to help us, in whatever they can. They do not just teach us stuff here, do they? They help us with many other problems. Personal problems, just like anyone has. (Santiago, SCE)

No teacher ever spoke as well about me as these teachers. (Óscar, SCE)

The relationships established within these contexts were highly valued by many respondents (17 interviews, second group discussion), and particularly the relationships with the teachers in the SCE project (13 interviews, second group discussion). These relationships were described in a highly positive tone, invoking ideas of family, warmth, friendship, conviviality, closeness, trust, care, being heard, not giving up and being supported. These aspects could be confirmed through participant observations in the SCE project, where relationships between students and teachers were indeed witnessed as close, affective, supportive and frequently joyful. Moreover, many of these features were also referred to by respondents serving youth justice measures when referring to their relationships with their youth justice officers of the staff of the residential care institution.

Another aspect that was strongly valued by respondents, particularly the ones involved in a SCE project, were the teaching methods and the structuring of the daily activities (15 interviews, second group discussion), which tended to be described as flexible and adjustable to the students' individual needs, moods, preferences and learning paces. This was, in fact, something easily observed in the SCE project, as many students were frequently out of the classrooms, happily moving through the school and performing all kinds of practical activities or running errands for

the teachers inside or outside the school. The teaching methods were also praised by participants enrolled in SCE projects for their creativity and strong practical nature, thus, becoming more appealing and more 'productive' in terms of learning. Finally, the opportunities these students had to make suggestions and choices about their learning process as well as about the overall SCE project activities and rules (e.g., in weekly school assemblies, which could be observed as highly participatory, although often confusing moments) were also stressed as positive by some respondents.

Sometimes, with a game you'll understand better [maths] than working on equations the whole week, and in English as well. I really like English. Portuguese too. They do not massacre you with that boring subject, pum pum pum ... they find a way for you to understand things... with games, with books and with readings and poems, etc. It's pretty good stuff. (Edgar, SCE)

Maybe not doing everything the way the teachers would. We give some ideas and then we see if it's possible or not. I think this would be interesting because it also draws more from the student as well, motivates the student. That part also motivated me in the project, it was also getting away from the expected and choosing something else. (Rita, SCE)

One final aspect that the respondents said they appreciated in these educational settings, directly related to personal change, was the sense of commitment (11 interviews, second group discussion) that many identified in the adults leading these settings and in the ways these adults would relate to them. This could also be confirmed by the participant observations conducted at the SCE project in a wide variety of moments and practices (e.g., teachers calling students who were missing classes or who were going through a tough period, having long talks with students who were having personal problems or who misbehaved in some way, welcoming students back to the project after long periods of absence, working until late or on weekends, helping students find new training opportunities, internships or jobs, medical or legal consultations, going to court hearings, etc.). According to some respondents, this kind of commitment from the adults made them also commit to school work in a completely new manner.

I like to feel responsible, I like to feel that I have responsibilities with this [the SCE project]. I like ... before I would wake up and "Hey school! What is this! I go there and do what? Now I wake up and come straight away. This is not even school, it's the [name of project]. It's 10 o'clock, teacher Elisa must be there already, teacher Jorge must be there already. Let's go! We call each other "let's get up". It's this motivation, you know? A person feels the need to come here. It's not like "school." (Nelson, SCE)

Lastly, it is relevant to stress that most of these highly valued aspects – respectful, trustful and supporting relationships, adaptable and participatory activities, commitment – were precisely the ones respondents tended to stress as the most different from the experience they were used to in previous formal education contexts, particularly regular school (17 interviews, second discussion group): 'Because I think here teachers are different from regular school. Regular school teaches but doesn't want to know about students, basically. But not here, here you notice the affection that the teachers feel for us. They make us feel good, like we are at home' (Telma, SCE).

3.4.3 Supporting young people and their changes

According to the participants, change never relies on one single factor. Beside all factors associated with change resulting from their experience in these new settings and from the relationships established within them, respondents clearly showed the importance of other relevant figures and relationships as support agents throughout youth's life paths and to youth's significant changes. These were mostly linked to the family context, with participants making emphatic references to family relationships as actual or ideal sources of support (23 sources), but also referring to these same relationships with sorrow for not being as supportive as they should, or as they would have liked them to be (15 sources).

My parents. After all that I have done, they are with me, they are supporting me, they help me. If it were other parents, if they had not cared, they would have not come with me to court and to the police. Do you understand? (Silvio, YJT)

There it is, I think it's because I didn't have a father, my mother always wanted to play the role of the two, like "what would his father say" "how would a father react", you know? (Nelson, SCE)

Peers and friends were also mentioned frequently as sources of support (19 sources), especially as people who can be trusted, who are willing to help or protect in difficult times and who can become a positive influence in moments of change. On the other hand, peers and friends can also be seen as negative influences, leading to problematic or harmful behaviour (18 sources): 'I've had friends who helped me out and I've also had friends who helped me to get into trouble, to make me do more bad things' (Xavier, YJT).

Finally, alongside family and friends, respondents also referred to other particular persons, groups or institutional settings as actual or potential agents of support for young people: professionals from the justice and protection systems (9 sources); psychologists or psychiatrists (7 sources); residential care institutions and its professionals (6 sources); the girlfriend or the boyfriend (5 sources); teachers from mainstream school (not from SCE projects) (3 sources); and the police (2 sources).

3.5 Transferring experience

The idea of making the changes the participants have experienced accessible to other young people was something they could easily understand and connect with (23 sources), and for some, it was even something appealing and engaging. In fact, many respondents agree that their personal paths and that of others with similar trajectories could be inspiring examples to other young people and to society at large (18 sources): 'Maybe if we show what we are worth, it can change the minds of the older generation' (Raquel, SCE).

I would like that friends of mine, and I'm already convincing some, would put their hands on their conscience and see that that kind of life does not work. I would like them to say "I want to fight like you did." I wish they would say "you were right, that is very good." I wish more people would come here, people who wanted to change as I did' (Nelson, SCE).

When asked to think about the possibility of transferring their experience in the activities they were engaged in to others, many were quite sure about the importance of it, especially those enrolled in a SCE project, arguing that the project should be expanded to reach more young

people who need it (14 sources). But, for them, these young people in need of such help were not abstract individuals; they were actual friends, siblings or cousins, mates from their neighbourhood, colleagues from former schools, people they knew very well and that they described as the 'more problematic', 'those whom no one believes', the ones 'at home doing nothing', the ones marginalised by the school or family.

And if many primary and secondary schools don't want to know of these non-students who will want to? Are they going to stay on the streets? Are they going to become drug addicts? If not for [project name] nobody else will want to know about them. If not for schools like [name of project] they are refugees in the streets, they have nothing. (Roberta, SCE)

Although the respondents could identify diverse ways of disseminating these educational projects or initiatives (14 sources) (e.g., publicising it on the internet or social media, on TV or in magazines, directly at other schools), the dissemination and engagement strategy most often mentioned was to create opportunities of direct contact with the projects (visits, one day workshops) and, particularly, to establish contact with present or former participants that could share their own experience and persuade them to participate in the projects (9 sources), much like some of them were persuaded to come by other former students.

I think these people, the problematic ones, I think they should really come here to spend a day with us. In what school have you seen a teacher cooking with the students?! Nowhere ... right? And here it's wonderful, I like being here. I love it and I think these people would love it too. (Andreia, SCE)

You can, if I talk to them, they'll see that I like the school. So let's talk. Like, if I see a colleague of mine talking about school and stuff, I'll say, "Oh, come to my school. (Hugo, SCE)

4. Conclusions

Taking into account the key findings presented in the previous section, based on the analysis of the individual interviews, the group discussions and the participant observations carried out in this case study, this final section draws some conclusions.

To begin with, it could be argued that these young people with pathways of psychosocial risk and deviant behaviour experienced, and also enacted, a wide diversity of oppositions, resistances or nonconformities to social norms and/or to social institutions. Although these youngsters tended not to interpret conflict in such a broad way, it can be concluded that the conflicts they faced were closely related to structural contingencies and inequalities, such as socioeconomic, territorial or gender disadvantage, stigmatisation based on behaviour or place of origin, and social and educational marginalisation. These contingencies and inequalities strongly determined their life paths, which became defined – by others and even sometimes by themselves – as non-normative or as conflicting.

Many respondents made clear references to the fact that the ways they were treated by others ('society', older generations, and authority figures) were often based on prejudices related to poverty or to deprived neighbourhoods. This was particularly relevant in their relations with significant authority figures like teachers, judges or the police, relations which were built upon negative expectations, individual accountability for failures and mistakes, mutual distrust, conflict and, ultimately, marginalisation.

The participants' relations with regular school were particularly telling in this regard. Based on their narratives, we conclude that for them, school became a place of individual failure and interpersonal conflict, a distant context where they did not feel welcome and from which they stopped expecting positive outcomes. This favoured the emergence of a vicious circle of conflicting behaviours and conflicting institutional responses that eventually ended up in disengagement from education.

These non-normative and conflicting paths of young people, often seen by others and by themselves as a 'conflicting way of living', were not, however, recognised passively and uncritically, neither by institutional authorities, nor by the youngsters themselves. That is why the former devise specific institutional responses directed at these youngsters (e.g., youth justice measures, SCE projects, residential care), and that is why the latter actually engage in them, struggling to get back on the 'right track'.

This 'struggle' was often envisioned by the respondents as a path to be carried out individually, and out of each one's strength and will to change. Moreover, this individual accountability for success seemed to be congruent with the individual accountability for mistakes and failures promoted by the normative institutional interventions in education, justice and care experienced by many of these youngsters and frequently reproduced in their own biographical narratives. Interestingly, however, the respondents were also emphatic in identifying the support from others – family, peers, teachers and other professionals – as key facilitating elements of their 'struggle' towards change.

In fact, regarding the role of family and friendships, it is relevant to note that both groups were widely mentioned by respondents as contexts for relationships that could be either conflictive or supportive. In either way, these were recognised as having an important influence in their life paths, thus drawing attention to the relevance of close, convivial and interdependent relationships in the making of young people's social trajectories. This conclusion stresses the relevance of

acknowledging and addressing family and communal relationships and networks when supporting vulnerable young people to engage in positive personal changes (McNeill, Batchelor, Burnett, and Knox, 2005;).

The relationships established by the participants with significant adults (teachers, youth justice officers, psychologists) in the activities and institutional settings which they engaged in were also understood by most respondents as major facilitators of personal change, namely regarding self-value and self-esteem, moral and behavioural adjustment, commitment to school, work and/or family, and definition of long term life goals. But these were relationships quite different from the ones they referred to when talking about conflict. These intergenerational relationships, on the contrary, were mostly characterised by openness, respect, adaptability, listening, appreciation, support and orientation towards the future, commitment, participation, choice, and joy. For most participants these were highly valued relationships that were acknowledged as making all the difference in their lives. Although the role of supportive and individualized relationships has been stressed in the academic literature as a key success factor to promote both educational attainment (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, and McNeely, 2008; Johnstonbaugh, 2018) and desistance from crime and rehabilitation (Caise and Haines, 2015; McNeill, Farrall, Lightowler, and Maruna, 2012), this kind of relationships came as quite a new experience for the participants. Perhaps this is precisely where social innovation may reside, at least from their point of view as 'conflicted young people' under state/institutional intervention.

Lastly, it is pertinent to draw attention to the spaces for agency that most respondents made reference to regarding their involvement in the activities and relationships they are currently engaged in. Many, in effect, stressed the fact that this involvement was a result of their free will and of their commitment to change, and valued the opportunity to make choices and take action within the projects they are engaged in. All these aspects were referred to with a sense of pleasure and self-value, which in turn, showed to be particularly relevant in order to (re)engage in education, become open to new perspectives and build new goals. In fact, this respect and fostering of agency and self-determination is also a key aspect referred in academic research and recommendations about school engagement (Smyth, 2007) and about deviance desistance (McNeill, Farrall, Lightowler, and Maruna, 2012). Nevertheless, regarding this particular case study, the questions that emerge from this are: Will this level of agency be enough after these youngsters leave these projects or measures? Will they take from these experiences enough personal and social resources to face all adversities and build autonomous pathways?

5. Future analysis

Regarding future cluster analysis, it would be important to develop a comparative study about the experiences of conflict and stigmatisation referred to by youngsters with similar paths but in different countries and social contexts, as well as about the related factors, agents, and consequences. This could allow the establishment of different profiles of ‘conflicted youth’ and to understand their relations with different sets of social precipitants or protective factors.

It would also be relevant to understand, through a cross-cultural comparison, how – and why – these youngsters relate to formal authority institutions such as school or the justice and protection systems, particularly regarding the building of mutual (dis)trust and the barriers and facilitators for youth engagement in different kinds of institutional interventions.

The agency of young people with particularly rough and conflicting paths would be a relevant topic for cross-case comparisons as well, namely analysing what types of agency these youngsters display, in what contexts and for what reasons; what opportunities for agency do they have or are they given; what resources and competencies do these youngsters think they need to enhance their autonomy; and, lastly, how could their agency be further promoted.

Finally, a cross-case comparison would be particularly useful to identify socially innovative actions promoted by or directed to young people in conflict with the law or other formal institutions. Possibly, a comparative analysis of the standpoints of different youngsters in conflict might evidence ‘innovative perspectives’ that go beyond simplistic associations between youth, deviance and danger, take a critical stance over youth behaviour, shake normative social assumptions, and imagine new ways of being and relating to young people.

The data gathered in this case study could also be further explored if analysed in articulation with WP4 and WP5 data. This would include data related to experiences and attitudes of stigmatisation and to experiences and attitudes of social participation. Such an analysis would allow for a comparison between the experiences and attitudes reported by the ethnographic case study participants and major national and international tendencies identified in WP4 and WP5, thus, identifying personal or contextual variables (e.g., gender, class, education, family background, territorial background) with potential impact on the emergence of stigmatising experiences, or in the emergence of social participatory dispositions and behaviours.

6. References

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Appendix 1- Information about individual respondents

Research setting	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Education	Employment	Residential status	Family status
SCEP1	Rita	20	Female	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with parents	Single, no children
SCEP1	Raquel	19	Female	Complete lower secondary	NEET	Home with parents	Single, no children
SCEP1	Marco	24	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with parents	Single, no children
SCEP1	Paulo	22	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with father	Single, no children
SCEP2	Nelson	18	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with mother	Single, no children
SCEP2	Lourenço	24	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education / part-time employed	Alone	Single, no children
SCEP2	Roberta	18	Female	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Residential care	Single, no children
SCEP2	Edgar	21	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with mother	Single, no children
SCEP2	Elsa	20	Female	In upper secondary	In fulltime education	Home with mother	Single, 1 child
SCEP2	José	19	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with parents	Single, no children
SCEP2	Júlia	18	Female	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with mother	Single, no children
SCEP2	Manuel	18	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with parents	Single, no children
SCEP2	Miguel	20	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with parents	Single, no children
SCEP2	Sérgio	18	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education / part-time employed	Home with parents	Single, no children

SCEP2	Santiago	24	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with mother	Single, no children
SCEP2	Telma	19	Female	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with mother	Single, no children
SCEP2	Hugo	19	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with mother	Single, no children
SCEP2	Andreia	18	Female	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with parents	Single, no children
SCEP2	Martim	20	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with mother	Single, no children
SCEP2	Óscar	18	Male	Complete lower secondary	NEET	Home with parents	Single, no children
YJT	Francisco	17	Male	In upper secondary	In fulltime education	Home with grandparents	Single, 1 child
YJT	Hélder	16	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Residential care	Single, no children
YJT	Helena	16	Female	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Residential care	Single, no children
YJT	Luísa	15	Female	In upper secondary	In fulltime education	Home with mother	Single, no children
YJT	Sílvio	16	Male	In upper secondary	In fulltime education	Home with parents	Single, no children
YJT	Xavier	16	Male	In lower secondary	In fulltime education	Home with mother	Single, no children

SCEP1 – Second Chance Education Project 1

SCEP2 – Second Chance Education Project 2 (main research site)

YJT – Youth Justice Team

NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training