

November 2019

Keywords: equity, educational opportunities, educational challenges, inequalities

Educational opportunities for children and adolescents: reports for informed debates and public policies based on evidence

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The paper evidences existing deficiencies in the information and data available on the reality of educational opportunities in Barcelona city, first in the non-universal, non-compulsory infant stage, second in the range from P3 (pre-school) to 4th of ESO (final year of compulsory secondary education - age 16), third in the post-compulsory stage, and last in education beyond school hours developed doing after school activities, be they sporting, artistic, in scout groups or youth clubs, in socio-educational environments or during the summer holidays. The paper shows how the two reports on educational opportunities compiled by Barcelona City Council at the request of the Barcelona Institute of Childhood and Adolescence (IERMB) have helped to fill this public information gap, thus placing the city in a better position to open debate, share challenges, and deploy more robust and well-informed educational policies.

Until recently, Barcelona had no tools at its disposal to provide periodic overviews of the educational situation in the city that were useful to systematise and rigorously analyse available data, monitor it, and identify challenges and important experiences. The health service, however, has a long and robust tradition of producing reports about the health situation in the city. Every year since 1983, the Barcelona Public Health Agency drafts and publishes the report 'Health in Barcelona', which describes the state of affairs and monitors the main health indicators in the city within the framework of socio-economic and physical determinants. Faced with this gap, in 2016 Barcelona City Council's Area of Social Rights appointed the Barcelona Institute of Childhood and Adolescence (IIAB-IERMB), a public body committed to knowledge to improve policies that affect childhood, as responsible for this area.

As director of the ILAB, I oversaw the first 'Educational Opportunities in Barcelona' report in 2016, compiled by a research team made up of Elena Sintes, Sheila González and Albert Sánchez-Gelabert, and the second report 'Educational opportunities for children and

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adolescents in Barcelona 2018-2019' with Alba Castejón and Adrián Zancajo². An advisory committee made up of experts in the area of research that ensures quality in its approach and analyses also took part. We are, therefore, in the initial phase of producing a series of reports that we hope will have a long-term trajectory and become consolidated like the ones in the area of health.

The data and analyses contained in the two reports on educational opportunities in Barcelona must serve to provide an overview of education for children and adolescents (0-17 years) based on indicators, and to identify and outline the main challenges for educational policies in Barcelona city. Moreover, beyond generating information, these reports must be useful to make changes and improvements and, therefore, they should enrich informed debate and enable public policy decisions directed at the main objective of educational equity to be made based on evidence.

Education is not just another public policy issue. It is a fundamental policy area in a society that needs capacities of all types to solve problems and improve people's lives. Its potential to pre-distribute and improve equity and social cohesion is unquestionable, which is why this is the focal point of interest. At the same time, education has a huge effect on the well-being and lives of children and adolescents, since they all spend a lot of time in nursery school, primary school and secondary school at a key life stage, and it is where they have some very important life experiences that also condition their life paths. To this effect, education should not only be of interest to those who have children and grandchildren, but it should be a central political theme for all city residents, given its innate capacity to emancipate and transform society.

Beyond the purpose of analysing the state of affairs regarding educational opportunities for children and adolescents in Barcelona city with a special focus on educational equity, four other important features of these reports must be highlighted: first, they cover educational opportunities in a broad sense, from young infancy through the universal, compulsory stage from P3 (pre-school) to 4th ESO (final year of compulsory secondary education - age 16), and on to post-compulsory secondary education and educational opportunities out of school hours. Second, they analyse the situation both on a city level and broken down into the ten districts to capture territorial disparities and similarities. Third, they provide both a static picture of the main indicators and their evolution over time. And last, these reports combine the analysis of the latest consolidated statistical data (with limitations linked to scarcity and the desire to work together to improve knowledge management) with a qualitative analysis of important experiences that focus on meeting the identified challenges.

1. Main challenges for the city's educational policies

1.1 Early infancy: to reinforce and diversify the offer of state schooling and young infant care, and to mobilise the least represented social profiles

We have enough evidence to know that the first cycle of infant education should be recognised as a strategic educational stage, and as such the state must increase its offer to achieve the objective of universal and diverse schooling for this age group, taking into account the different levels of public administration. However, the reality in Barcelona is far off this target: 44.3% of infants between aged from 0 and 2 years are schooled in municipal

2. The 2016-2017 report can be downloaded using the following link: <http://institutinfancia.cat/mediateca/informe-opunitats-educatives-barcelona-2016/>. and the 2018-2019 report can be downloaded at this link: <http://institutinfancia.cat/mediateca/informe-opunitats-educatives-de-la-infancia-i-ladollescencia-a-barcelona-2018-2019/>.

nursery schools (EBM) or private kindergartens, and this index evidences a growing trend in Barcelona, which is higher than the average for Catalonia (38.2%). Moreover, large territorial disparities persist and in the lowest income districts, this age group is schooled significantly less than the percentage given above: in Les Corts and Sarrià - Sant Gervasi the schooling index for 0-2-year-olds is double that of Ciutat Vella.

Graph 1. Schooling index for children aged 0-2 by territory (%). Barcelona from the 2017-2018 school year



Source: Barcelona Education Consortium (CEB).

Regarding this inequality, if we look specifically at the public offer in the EBM network, we see that this caters for just 20% of infants under 3 years old in the city (while private kindergartens cater for 24%). In this scenario, as a scarce (it only absorbs 54% of demand), costly (and pending co-funding from the Government of Catalonia) and very socially valuable public service, its key role in reducing educational inequalities (beyond being conceived as a tool for achieving a work-life balance) must be reinforced. To this effect, it is important to take into account the increasing public offer within the EBM network in districts where socio-economic needs are greatest and schooling indexes lowest, and to effectively manage the mix of social profiles in the centres.

One of the main challenges, then, is to reach out to the social groups that are traditionally absent in the first cycle of infant education, because it is precisely in these social sectors where its positive impacts on children’s educational pathways and, therefore, on social cohesion is most evident. Hence, the introduction of social fees in EBMs (since the 2017-2018 school year), as an economic accessibility measure, aimed to reduce the financial obstacles to accessing this educational service posed by fixed public prices as a way to

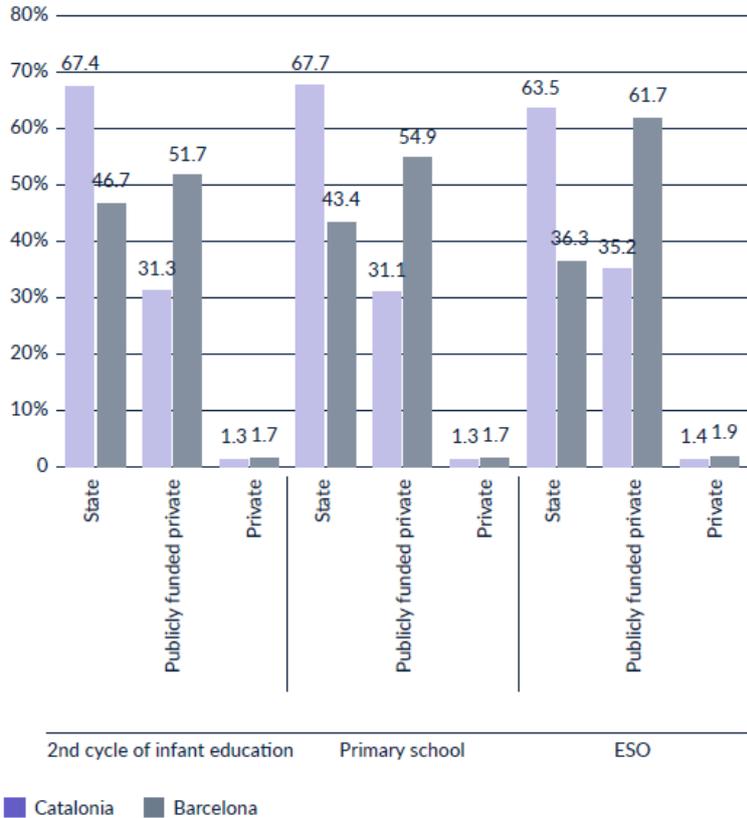
increase the schooling indexes of infants from the most disadvantaged and least present families. To this effect, an illustrative piece of data is that infants of foreign origin in the city are schooled 3.5 times less in the 0-2 stage than native infants.

1.2 From P3 to 4th ESO: increased offer and demand in state schools and school segregation

Almost 180,000 children and adolescents aged between 3 and 16 years in the city are schooled in these universal, compulsory educational stages. The latest data confirm the change in trend in the last years, with a sustained increase in both the demand for public places for year P3 and in enrolments at all levels of the state school system. A surplus in the offer of publicly funded private places for year P3 is also identified, since for every five places one is not filled.

Nonetheless, the structural weight of the publicly funded private sector is still much greater in the city compared with Catalonia as a whole: the number of pupils enrolled in state schools in the three educational stages is below the 47% for Barcelona and above the 63% for Catalonia. One of the main educational challenges for the city is to at least equalise the situations in Barcelona and Catalonia, reversing the historical deficit of state schools in the universal, compulsory stages.

Graph 2. Percentage of pupils in the 2nd cycle of infant education, primary education and secondary education, according to type of school. Year 2017-2018



Source: Department of Education of the Government of Catalonia.

The data analysed also confirm the unequal distribution of more socially complex and, therefore, more educationally complex pupils: Barcelona’s state schools cater for twice as many children with special education needs (NESE), three times more children of foreign

origin and four times more pupils with food subsidies than the publicly funded private schools. Since the school year 2019-2020, we have had a tool to reverse this extremely unequal situation among publicly funded schools in the city: the Plan against segregation, and in favour of equal opportunities and educational success. This pioneering plan, promoted by Barcelona City Council within the framework of the Barcelona Education Consortium, is an attempt to start to address this structural problem in the education system in Barcelona in line with the Pact against School Segregation promoted by the Ombudsman's Office. The plan must be fully developed and evaluated to ensure that it is advancing towards achieving the objective of a more balanced and local neighbourhood schooling based on shared responsibility among publicly funded schools to cater for pupils with specific educational needs.

Regarding the graduation index in 4th ESO, there has been an upward trend in Barcelona to the current 91%, four points above the average for Catalonia (86.7%). Regarding basic skill acquisition, disparity between districts has reduced by 25% based on improved results in Ciutat Vella (in two school years, the percentage dropped from 35.5% to 29%), while in Sarrià-Sant Gervasi the percentage remains the same at 5%. While the consolidation and scope of these indicators must be corroborated in the coming years, they look hopeful in terms of one of the city's key challenges as stated in the Strategy for Social Inclusion and Reducing Inequalities in Barcelona 2017-2027: closing the territorial disparity gap in pupils' educational success.

Despite the positive trend in these data, excessive contrasts remain: the percentage of pupils who do not acquire the required level of basic skills when they finish ESO in Ciutat Vella is still six times higher than in Sarrià-Sant Gervasi. A huge effort is therefore required on a territorial scale, among others, to reduce these inequalities in school results based on prioritising resources according to the profile of the pupils that attend each school, in addition to addressing the previously mentioned school segregation.

1.3 Post-compulsory secondary education: drop-out and educational pathways

In the post-compulsory stage in Barcelona, baccaureate is still the option chosen by six out of every 10 pupils, while only four out of every 10 choose intermediate level vocational training (CFGM). However, the sustained growth in the number of pupils enrolled on CFGM is notable, with the current percentage 43% higher than in 2006-2007. The increased offer of state schools must also be highlighted: in the 2019-2020 school year, there is just one district without a vocational training school (Sarrià-Sant Gervasi). Despite these improvements, the number of state schools and places for the post-compulsory stage needs to increase, especially in CFGM.

Again, a differential feature of post-compulsory secondary education in Barcelona compared with Catalonia is the enormous weight of the private sector: enrolment in state schools in Barcelona is 30 points below that of Catalonia. Regarding baccaureate, state school enrolment is higher than private school enrolment in just three districts: Sant Martí, Nou Barris and Sants-Montjuïc.

Table 1. Baccalaureate and Intermediate vocational training schools (CFGM) (%), according to the type of school and by district, Barcelona 2017-2018

	School Leaving Certificate - Baccalaureate (%)			CFGM (%)		
	State	Private	Publicly funded private	State	Private	Publicly funded private
Catalonia	66.7	23.0	10.3	65.1	15.9	19.0
Barcelona	39.5	38.2	22.3	31.5	31.5	37.0
Ciutat Vella	60.0	0.0	40.0	44.4	0.0	55.6
Eixample	26.1	56.5	17.4	21.4	57.1	21.4
Sants-Montjuïc	66.7	8.3	25.0	30.0	50.0	20.0
Les Corts	27.3	54.5	18.2	20.0	40.0	40.0
Sarrià-Sant Gervasi	12.5	78.1	9.4	0.0	50.0	50.0
Gràcia	33.3	44.4	22.2	0.0	33.3	66.7
Horta-Guinardó	41.2	41.2	17.6	66.7	16.7	16.7
Nou Barris	66.7	6.7	26.7	42.9	0.0	57.1
Sant Andreu	33.3	8.3	58.3	0.0	40.0	60.0
Sant Martí	68.8	12.5	18.8	62.5	12.5	25.0

Source: Department of Education of the Government of Catalonia.

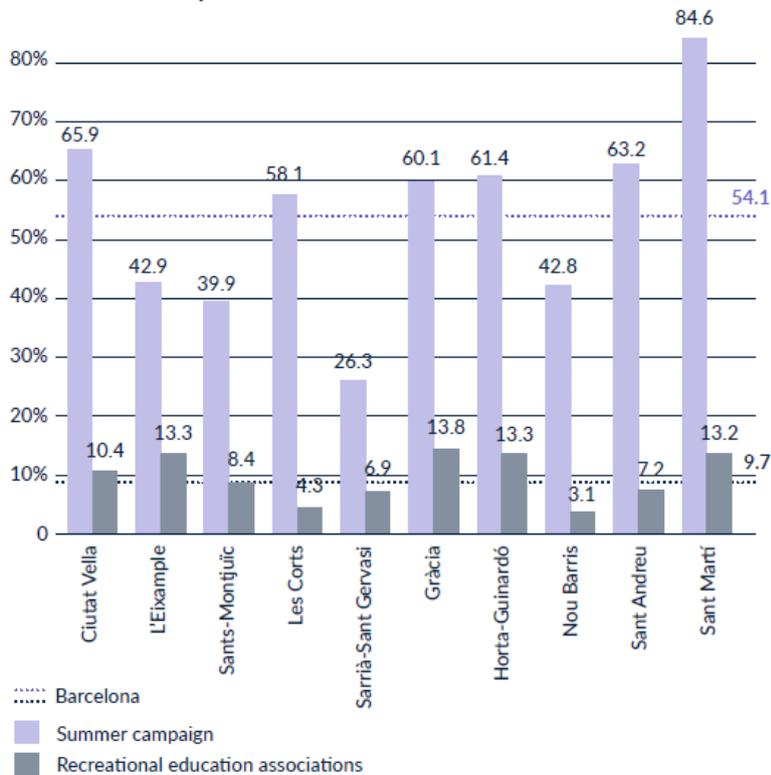
Preventing drop-out using education-oriented tools and a more accessible offer is a challenge not only in Barcelona but in all of Europe, since this is line with European Strategy challenge 2020 Resources for new opportunities for those (especially boys) who drop out of the education system must continue to be provided to bring these pupils back into education, such as the municipal socio-educational service being piloted in the city, known as the Second Opportunities School and opened in 2019. Inequalities and exclusions persist in the education system, which is why the organisational structure, tools and supports to lengthen educational pathways must be improved, promoting more participation among girls in CFGM and achieving a greater presence of pupils of foreign origin in post-compulsory education in general.

2. Educational opportunities beyond school hours: diversity of stakeholders, disparity and the lack of a structured offer, and inequalities in access depending on social profiles

This is undoubtedly the area where it is most difficult to make an accurate diagnosis, evidenced by the long way still to go in recognising educational opportunities and learning environments beyond school as a fundamental aspect of educational and recreational rights. The data available up to now clearly indicate that the offer of educational activities outside school is very disperse depending on the area: less than 10% of school children take part in recreational education during the school year, 54% in summer activities and 70% in weekly recreational sporting activities.

Regarding grants to access these activities, we know that 8.4% of children and adolescents receive grants to do sport outside school hours and that the number of these grants multiplied by four between 2014 and 2017. The number of children taking part in summer campaign recreational activities has doubled, and municipal grants to access them has tripled since 2013. Furthermore, 30% of participants in a third of the 131 scout groups and youth clubs in the city receive grants.

Graph 3. Participation Indexes in the summer campaign and in recreational education associations by district. Barcelona from the 2016-2017 school year



Source: Barcelona City Council's Department for the Promotion of Children and the municipal register

Despite all the resources invested in recent years, improving equality of access to the diverse range of activities and learning environments outside school time continues to be one of the most important challenges, involving not only economic factors, but also territorial deficits in the offer available and the socio-cultural barriers that keep these highly valuable educational opportunities out of the reach of certain profiles of children and young people. Two important initiatives analysed in the last report are rising to these challenges: the Baobab recreational education programme, aimed at activating scout groups and youth clubs in neighbourhoods where previously there were none (around twenty in the city), and the Full Time Institutes, which facilitate access to lunchtime and after-school activities for ESO pupils in more socially complex contexts.

Last, there is still much room for improvement to consolidate the essential task of collecting and analysing enough quantitative, qualitative and territorial data to be useful for better understanding the specific problems inherent in the diverse and unequal educational realities in the city to be able to direct public policies so that they have positive impacts. And what is as important, if not more, is collectively recognising and placing at the centre of city policies what research has already evidenced: that improving quality in education systems can only be achieved through reducing levels of inequality. Educational opportunities: more, better and better distributed.