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## The Baobab programme: promoting community recreation

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**In 2016, the Barcelona Municipal Institute of Education (IMEB) launched the Baobab programme, an initiative to promote the growth and consolidation of grassroots educational recreation experiences in neighbourhoods where children and youth have few opportunities to take part in this type of recreation. In this paper, we examine the purpose of the programme and its characteristics, in addition to the results of the evaluation of its implementation drafted by the Catalan Institute of Public Policy Evaluation (Ivàlua) in 2017 and 2018 at the request of Foment de Ciutat, and in conjunction with the IMEB. The aim of this report was to describe the task carried out within the framework of the Baobab programme in nine neighbourhoods of the city belonging to the districts of Sant Andreu, Nou Barris, Sant Martí and Sants-Montjuïc between 2016 and 2018.**

### 1. Community-based educational recreation and social inequalities

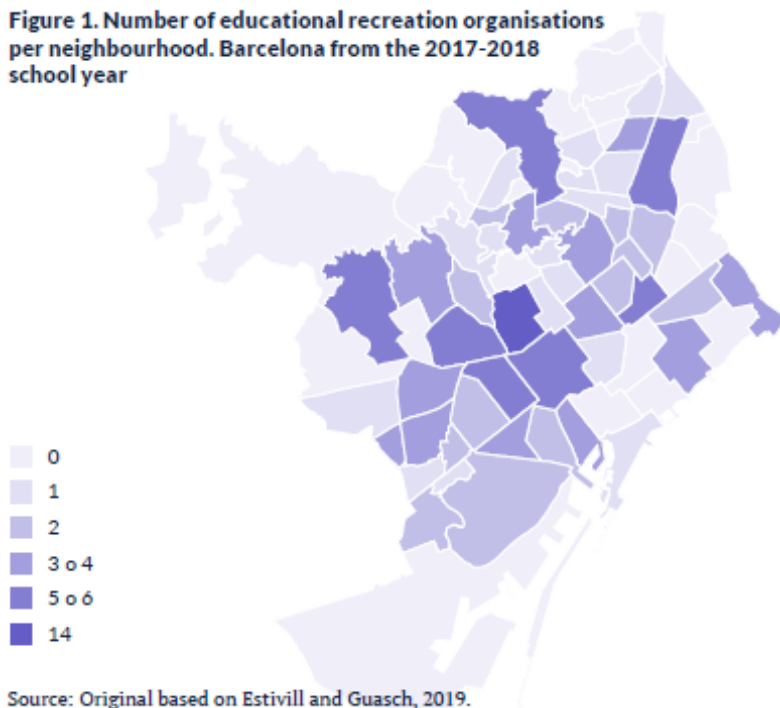
Educational recreation has been identified by organisations such as UNESCO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as a positive element that equalises social and educational opportunities among children and youth. This definition has been ratified by many evaluations and meta-analyses on the subject. Altogether, they draw the conclusion that educational recreation actions can have positive effects on participants' academic performance, motivation, expectations, behaviour and socio-emotional skills (improved self-concept, self-esteem, critical capacity, fewer risk-taking practices etc.) Furthermore, research results also show that some benefits are especially marked among the most disadvantaged children and youth (González, 2016).

Nonetheless, access to educational recreation has often been shown to be unequally distributed among the different population groups. While the link can vary depending on the type of recreation activity under consideration, a clear association can usually be made between the socio-economic and cultural level of families and participation in educational recreation activities (Catalan Ombudsman's Office, 2014). The factors that can intervene in these differences in levels of participation in educational recreation activities are various. The Catalan Ombudsman's Office (*Síndic de Greuges*) points to differences in how the use of recreation time is evaluated by families depending on their educational capital and the costs (direct and opportunity) of accessing recreation activities as especially influential variables, denouncing existing territorial inequalities in the availability of the offer.

Among the different educational recreation opportunities, the one that take place as a community practice (also called educational associationism), developed in the scout and guide movements and voluntary youth clubs, is usually related to beneficial effects not only for the children and youth participants, but also for the community. The link with volunteerism and the promotion of critical spirit, active citizenship and values such as inclusion and respect for the environment make educational recreation activities potential opportunities for transformation and community reinforcement (Educational Alliance 360, 2019).

Having said this, these types of educational recreation activities are not devoid of the social inequality we mentioned earlier. Recently available data demonstrates that there is a major territorial inequality in access to these types of recreation activities in Barcelona city. According to a report compiled by the PRISMA - Youth Observatory analysis unit of Barcelona City Council (Estivill and Guasch, 2018), in the 2016-2017 school year there were 131 educational recreation organisations in the city, in which a total of 2,880 young people (supervisors, leaders and federation representatives) and 17,147 children and adolescents were involved. However, their distribution in the territory is quite unequal, as shown in Figure 1. While some neighbourhoods have several organisations, in 23 of them there are none. These neighbourhoods are some of the areas with the lowest disposable family income, although in others disposable income is higher.

**Figure 1. Number of educational recreation organisations per neighbourhood. Barcelona from the 2017-2018 school year**



## 2. The theory of the Baobab programme: what does it hope to achieve and how?

### 2.1 What problem or unsatisfactory situation does the Baobab programme address?

In 2016, and as part of the Neighbourhood Plan, the Barcelona Municipal Institute of Education launched the Baobab programme with the aim of addressing the situation of social and territorial inequality in access and participation in community-based recreation organisations. This is, therefore, the programme's reason for being. To address this situation of inequality, the Baobab programme focuses its action in Barcelona's priority neighbourhoods, identified in a diagnosis made in 2016. Its target population is specifically the young children and youth living in these neighbourhoods, who lack community educational recreation opportunities. Some of the main

causes of this problem are considered to be the weak social fabric of these neighbourhoods, the lack of social recognition of educational recreation and the low number of young children and youth involved in participatory spaces. Hence, the strategy will mainly focus on addressing these matters.

## **2.2 Which strategic objectives or impacts does this programme hope to achieve?**

First, the programme aims to intervene in the volume and quality of the educational recreation offer through (1) introducing new community recreation options in neighbourhoods where there are none or where the options are considered as insufficient; and (2) reinforcing and helping existing organisations to grow. A second aim is to intervene in the demand for educational recreation. To this effect, the programme is designed to (3) raise the profile and social recognition of community educational recreation activities, which must not only encourage new links between children and youth and recreation options, but must also guarantee a sustainable future for educational recreation organisations and their associated fabric.

In line with the theory of the programme, fulfilling these three objectives must guarantee children and youth access to community recreation, which will ultimately mean improving their educational opportunities.

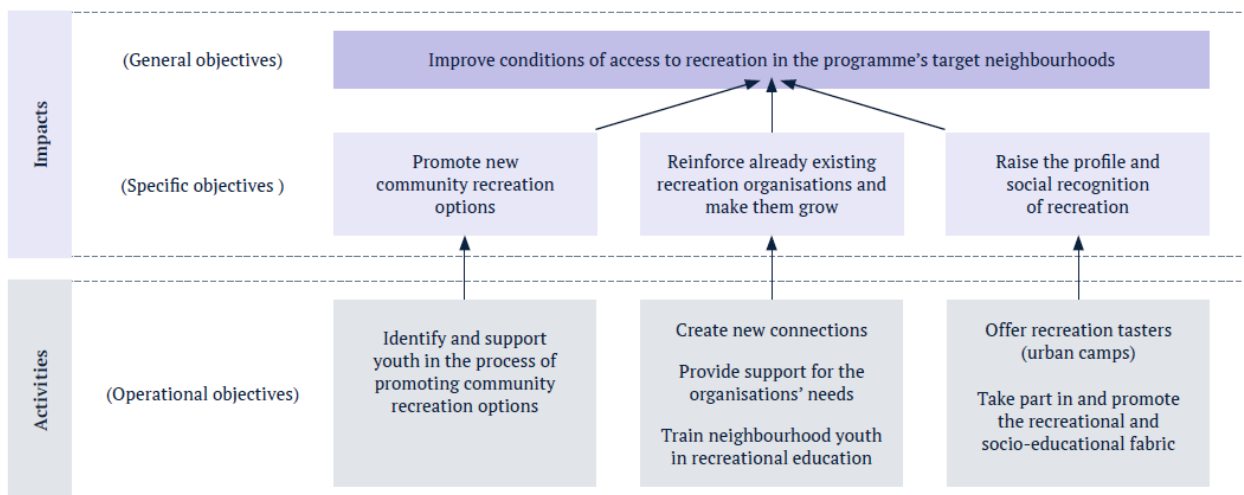
## **2.3 What activities are developed in the programme?**

In order to achieve these objectives, the main strategies of the Baobab programme are to encourage and support youth in the target neighbourhoods in the process of creating and consolidating new recreation options, and to help already existing recreation organisations in the territory to grow and become consolidated. These strategies include activities such as doing public presentations in primary and secondary schools to explain what community recreation is; identifying the young people interested in promoting recreation options or generally getting involved; offering guidance services for creating youth clubs and scout groups; providing and subsidising training in recreation; supporting existing recreation organisations; and activating the socio-educational and recreation fabric. In parallel, the programme aims to raise awareness of recreation through promoting the socio-educational and recreation fabric of the neighbourhood, and offering taster sessions so that children, youth, families and the community can have a first experience of the methodology of community-based educational recreation. The main action of this type are the urban camps, a free recreation experience directed at children aged 4 to 12 years old, which take place in August.

This set of activities and strategies is implemented by a technical team made up of four neighbourhood coordinators (each of them covering two or three neighbourhoods), and two professionals whose task is to ensure that the project develops consistently across all the territories. It must be noted that while the objectives are quite clear and common among the different people responsible for the programme, the way they are transformed into activities varies significantly depending on the characteristics of the neighbourhood and the direction the project takes. To this effect, it must be remembered that the Baobab programme is designed to progress through networking with the stakeholders present in each neighbourhood. Hence, in the initial phase of deployment in each neighbourhood, many of the activities included in the programme are directed at making the programme known and creating consensuses from which shared action proposals are formed. The premise is that this work enables the target population to be reached through the stakeholders and resources that are already linked to it. However, it is true that this aspect of the programme makes evaluation based on a single model that has clearly limited activity categories and unambiguous links between these and the objectives difficult and all the more complex.

The described proposal emerged from discussion and consensus among those responsible for the programme, and is an approach from which information was obtained and the deployment of the programme evaluated. The main elements are described below in diagram form:

Diagram 1. Theory of the Baobab programme



Once the theory of the change of the programme was clarified, the objectives of the implementation evaluation carried out by Ivàlua were to provide feedback on the activities developed and the resulting products, and to identify enabling and limiting factors to achieving the programme's intended impact. The results of this analysis are given in the following section:

### 3 The implementation of the Baobab programme

The Baobab programme has been implemented gradually; in 2016, it started its activity in the neighbourhoods of Trinitat Nova, Baró de Viver and Besòs i el Maresme; in 2017, the neighbourhoods of Trinitat Vella, Marina de Port and Marina del Prat Vermell, and Verneda i la Pau were added; and in 2018, Sant Genís dels Agudells, La Teixonera and Bon Pastor. In this section, the general situation of the programme in the set of the nine target neighbourhoods is described, in line with the theory outlined in the previous section. The data provided shows the status of the programme and the state of health of associative recreation as of December 2018, and combines quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Given that a more extensive qualitative analysis was made of three of the neighbourhoods where the Baobab programme has been implemented (La Trinitat Nova, La Verneda i La Pau and Sant Genís dels Agudells), some of the results and conclusions identified will be exemplified with cases relating to this neighbourhood.

#### 3.1 Presence of recreation organisations in the target neighbourhoods

The data available on the presence of scout groups and youth clubs in the neighbourhoods where the Baobab programme is implemented only provide us with a static indicator of the characteristics of associative recreation in these neighbourhoods, since we do not have any data on the evolution of the number of entities or the level of participation among children and youth during the period the programme has been in operation. Of note is the fact that figures for the neighbourhoods where the Baobab programme is implemented are far below the average for Barcelona. A total of 11 consolidated recreation organisations and three in the gestation process were identified, which together involve 151 young people and 433 children and adolescents. The total number of participants represents 2.8% of children and adolescents registered as living in these neighbourhoods, and 1.6% of young people. This proportion is far from figures for the city in general. The report entitled *Diagnosi de les entitats de lleure educatiu a la ciutat* [Diagnosis of the

educational recreation organisations of the city] (Estivill and Guasch, 2018) includes the same estimate for the whole city and for its 10 districts based on data for the academic year 2016-2017, establishing that the total number of young people and adolescents taking part in a youth club or scout group in Barcelona represents 9.5% of the youth and adolescent population.

**Table 1. Presence of educational and recreation organisations and coverage**

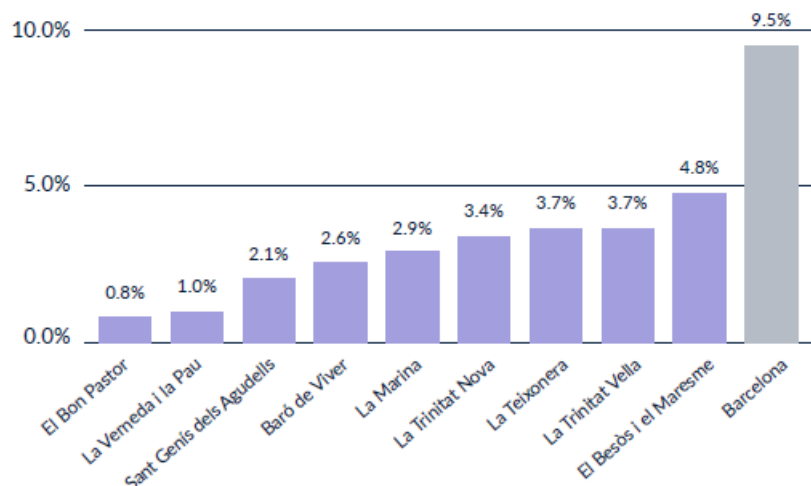
	Baobab neighbourhoods	Barcelona*
Number of educational recreation organisations	11	131
Children participants in educational recreation organisations as a proportion of the child population	2.8%	9.5%
Youth participants as a proportion of the youth population	1.6%	--

Source: Original based on data gathered by those responsible for the Baobab programme, or from the report Diagnosis of the educational recreation organisations of the city (Estivill and Guasch, 2018).

\*The data for Barcelona is for the school year 2016-2017.

The presence of organisations and participation in educational recreation vary significantly among the different neighbourhoods where the programme is implemented. In this sense, while the neighbourhood Besòs i el Maresme has three recreation organisations in which 4.8% of the child and adolescent population registered as living in the neighbourhood take part, Bon Pastor has just one small organisation, which is only loosely linked with the territory, in which 15 children take part, the equivalent to just 0.8% of the child and adolescent population. Below is a graph showing this indicator for each of the target neighbourhoods.

**Graph 1. Number of young children and adolescents that take part in educational recreation organisations with respect to the neighbourhood population**



Source: Original based on data gathered by those responsible for the Baobab programme, or from the report Diagnosis of the educational recreation organisations of the city (Estivill and Guasch, 2018).

Regarding the number of participants per organisation, the lowest is 15 children in the smallest organisation and the highest is 50 in the largest one. According to those responsible for the programme, these figures show that the organisations still have a large margin for growth without compromising either the individualised attention received or educational quality.

### 3.2 Boosting new community recreation proposals

Boosting new community recreation proposals is one of the Baobab programmes' objectives, both in the neighbourhoods that have no recreation organisations (Sant Genís dels Agudells and Baró de Viver) and the neighbourhoods where it is considered that creating a new organisation would be the most effective way of increasing the educational recreation offer. In 2018, the Baobab programme was involved in implementing three recreation proposals in the neighbourhoods of La Verneda and La Pau, Baró de Viver and Sant Genís dels Agudells, and it has continued to provide support in creating the Trini Nova Scout Group which, at the end of the year, was already registered with the federation.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 2. Projects promoted with the support of the Baobab programme and the number of participants**

	Number of projects	Young people	Children
In the gestation stage	3	17	24
Promoted and consolidated	1	10	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>54</b>

Source: Original using data gathered by those responsible for the programme.  
Data for December 2018.

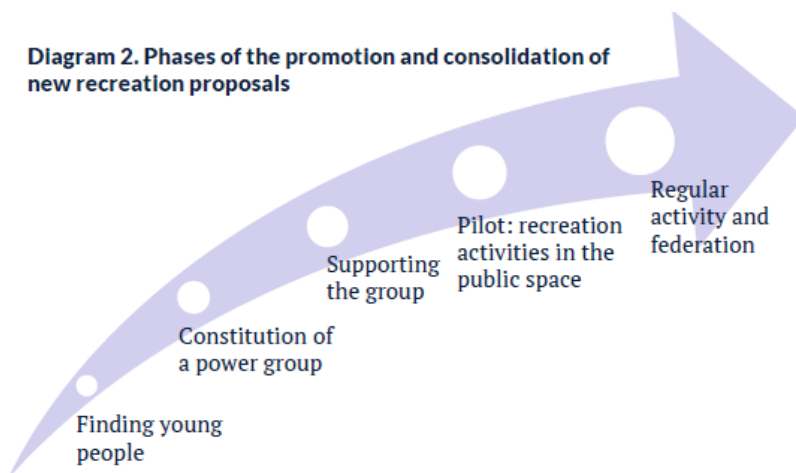
As mentioned previously, the specific strategies the programme's technical team have followed to achieve this objective have been different in each of the neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, a series of stages can be identified through which all new initiatives should pass. The process begins with finding the young people who may be interested in promoting recreation activities, followed by their organisation into a driving group that begins to work on formulating a recreation proposal with the support of those responsible for the Baobab programme. The educational recreation activities proposed are piloted in the public space, and they must be a way to raise the profile of the activity and involve children in the neighbourhood. The activities must take place regularly and be integrated into a recreation federation. The projects that are in the phase between constituting the power group and consolidating a regular recreation activity are called *projects in gestation*.

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1. The recreation project that began in Sant Genís dels Agudells also joined the Catalan Scout Federation in 2019.



**Diagram 2. Phases of the promotion and consolidation of new recreation proposals**



Source: Original.

The evaluation of the programme has enabled us to explore the factors that may have contributed to the successful gestation of new recreation initiatives, and in particular those to do with the involvement of young people. In the case of Sant Genís dels Agudells, different professionals in the neighbourhood identify as decisive elements the presence of a person specifically committed to activating the youth population with whom they have contact, and the fact that the young people have premises where they can meet. In the case of La Trinitat Nova, the commitment of a local school, Institut Escola, has facilitated the start of new activities:

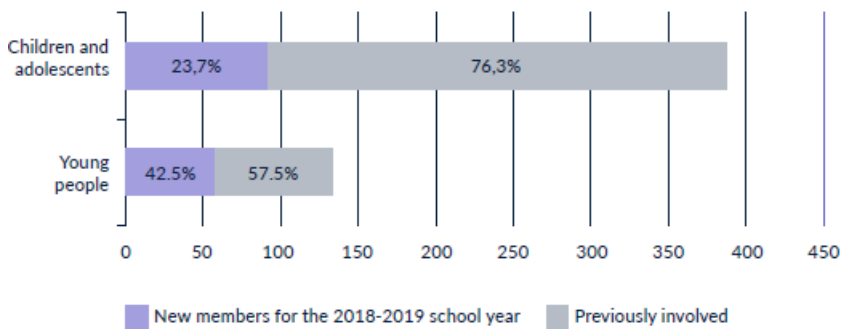
‘The school offered me an open playground, the keys, insurance cover for the children. [Name of the community animator of Institut Escola] said to me that if anything happened the school, [insurance] would cover it, which was when I really threw myself into it. After that, I had more contact with Baobab, which is when [name of the Baobab representative] talked to me directly and started to really go all out, talking to me every day saying we’re going to do this and that, let’s meet up, and so on’. (Supervisor)

### **3.3 Reinforcing recreation options**

As we have already seen, participation in recreation organisations in the target neighbourhoods is lower than the city average. In this context, involving new children and youth in already consolidated organisations is the most direct way to reverse this situation. According to the programme’s technical group, the incorporation of new children must be paralleled with the construction of more diverse and inclusive scout groups and youth clubs, given that one of the conclusions of the diagnosis made when the programme first started operating was that the existing scout groups and youth clubs in the target neighbourhoods did not cater for the child population in their territories from a socio-economic perspective or in terms of the schools they attended.

A total of 134 young people and 389 children and adolescents took part in the 11 organisations consolidated in the Baobab programme’s target territories in 2018, among which 57 young people and 92 children became members for the first time in the 2018-2019 school year, representing 42.5% and 23.7% of participants, respectively. No data for the previous years are available and, therefore, the evolution over time of the number of participants is unknown. From now on, however, this evolution will be monitored thanks to data collected in 2018.

**Graph 2. Young people and children involved in the 11 consolidated organisations of the Baobab programme's target neighbourhoods**



Source: Original based on data gathered by those responsible for the Baobab programme.

Regarding children's involvement, the school emerges as the main route of entry to the programme. To this effect, the coordinators of the Baobab programme have held meetings with educators and social integration technicians (TIS) in schools in most of the target neighbourhoods (Trinitat Vella, Baró de Viver, La Verneda and La Pau, Besòs i el Maresme, La Marina), and in some cases presentations have been made or access to recreation organisations has been granted in order to organise one-off activities. Different collaborations have also been explored involving both social services and schools, such as the 'vincular per educar' ['get involved to educate'] project. This initiative has been implemented in the neighbourhoods of La Marina, and the local school (El Polvorí), social services, the Baobab technical team, and the Young children, Adolescent and Families Table (TIAF) are all involved. The role of the coordinators of the Baobab programme is to bridge the gap between neighbourhood families and recreation organisations with the aim of getting children involved.

In parallel, the Baobab programme has also ensured that existing recreation organisations carry out actions that encourage new members to join. To give an example, fun activities in busy public spaces have been promoted, and initiatives such as 'The friend day' have been set in motion, where child participants are asked to bring a friend to the youth club or the scout group.

Last, the urban camps, which we will talk about later in greater depth, are an activity whose main aim is to raise the profile of recreation in the neighbourhood, but which is hoped will also serve as a way of getting new children and supervisors involved. As part of this strategy, in the 2018 edition of the camps, some new activities were programmed to take place in the local premises of youth clubs and scout groups to give the supervisors of these organisations the chance to raise awareness about their activities and inform families. A list of the families interested in getting involved in a recreation organisation during the year was compiled, which was then made available to the corresponding scout groups in the neighbourhood. While several children have gone on to form part of scout groups and youth clubs thanks to this process, the perception among the programme's technical team is that the urban camp's involvement strategy was unequal among neighbourhoods, and that it was more successful where the supervisors of the youth clubs and scout groups themselves were able to carry out the task of monitoring and providing information to the families.

The evaluation has enabled us to identify an element that the stakeholders involved in the programme have linked to the success of scout groups, youth clubs and newly-created projects in attracting new children: visibility and the recognition gained by the young people involved in the



educational recreation activities. The paradigmatic case is the Trini Nova Scout Group, some of the supervisors of which are in positions that are visible to the children and families (in schools and other childhood services), and they have a close relationship with neighbourhood's education professionals.

'If a school knows about us, but considers that the young people are immature and they don't trust them... then this means that they don't refer the children to us, and so we are flogging a dead horse trying to get the school to give us spaces for these young people to go there on Saturdays [...] sometimes it is who we contract to work with us, I mean, contracting young people from the neighbourhood really helps with getting the neighbourhood's young people involved [...]' (Baobab programme technician)

'I've really noticed too that now that I'm working in the dining room [...], I always have a group of kids asking me things, they are always asking me this, that, and the other about the scout group [...] They tell me things, and they trust me because I'm young, and that's what's important, mobilising the young people' (supervisor)

Beyond the involvement of children and young people, the Baobab programme provides recreation organisations with the help and support that must guarantee their reinforcement and contribute to their sustainability. To this effect, the coordinator of the programme is responsible for detecting the needs of each organisation and formulating proposals based on them, providing support and monitoring progress. Among the issues addressed are guidance for managing the resources the organisation has at its disposal (for example, subsidies and the premises), group dynamics, educational strategies, and relations with the territory and the network. What came out in both the discussion groups in which the territorial stakeholders took part and the interviews conducted with the programme coordinators was the feeling that the most visible activities and those most highly rated by the recreation organisation were the ones to do with connecting these organisations with the territorial fabric. To this effect, those responsible for the programme work to put the recreation organisations in touch and involved with the different stakeholders, be they professional or associative, and with networking spaces such as recreation and socio-educational tables.

One of the programme's stated objectives is to ensure that it is the young people from the neighbourhood itself that lead the recreation activities. While this objective is shared by the different stakeholders in the territory, it is also understood as one of the main challenges.

'It would be great if the supervisors were from the neighbourhood [...] I think this is something that has to be achieved gradually [...] They have to do the training, they have to be old enough, they have to want to do it [...] but what happens is that it is very difficult to start off with a team of people from the neighbourhood [...] maybe the ones who come now are the ones who will form part [of it] later on, because they will have lived the experience themselves [...] I think that will come in later years' (school head teacher)

There is consensus that one of the first prerequisites for this to happen is that the young people in the territory receive adequate training to be able to carry out the recreation activities. To this effect, those responsible for the Baobab programme develop training interventions based on the needs they detect in the organisations, and they periodically subsidise courses. In 2018, Baobab directly provided training for groups of supervisors in the neighbourhoods of Trinitat Nova, La Marina and Sant Genís dels Agudells (44 participants in total), and it subsidised the training of five young people involved in organisations in La Verneda i La Pau, La Teixonera, and in the project in gestation in Sant Genís dels Agudells.

While the subsidised training enables them to obtain a qualification as a recreation supervisor or a recreation director, the training provided directly by Baobab's team of professionals is directed at groups of supervisors to improve group cohesion and operating dynamics.

Apart from the subsidised training and the training provided directly by those responsible for the programme, a third activity is identified which can be placed somewhere between training, group cohesion, and attracting and involving young people, these are the young people's days. They are usually organised in conjunction with the associative and recreation fabric of the territory and they combine training, participation and reflection, and fun activities all in one day.

### **3.4 Raising the profile of recreation in the neighbourhoods**

The profile of educational recreation in the target neighbourhoods is considered as a necessary prerequisite to achieving the previously mentioned goals, and also to ensure the sustainability of the recreation offer beyond the boost given by the Baobab programme and other actions within the framework of the Neighbourhoods Plan. The Baobab programme starts from the premise that there is no tradition of community recreation in many of its target neighbourhoods, and that in many cases neither is there the demand for offering recreation activities in the neighbourhood.

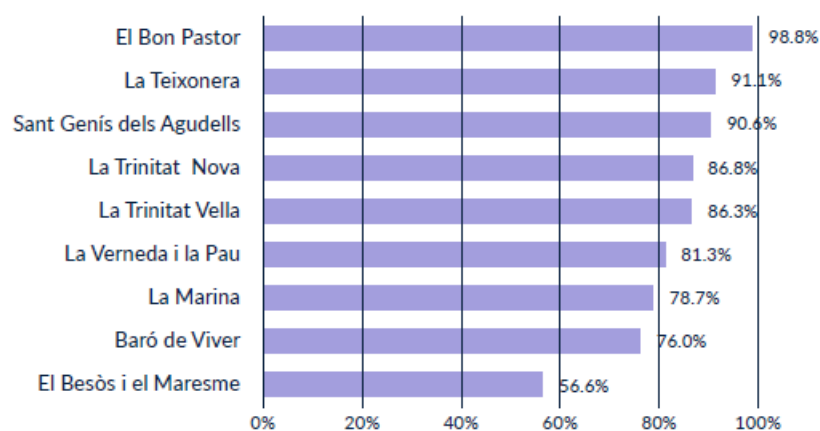
'Baobab is an exercise [...] of social engineering ... Nobody actually asks for the Baobab programme [...] because if there has never been a youth club there, or there hasn't been one there for twenty years, the people went to the square, or at most played football, and this wasn't a priority at all. This is a technical approach' (neighbourhood technician)

This is why awareness must be raised about what educational recreation is, and what it can bring to children, families and the neighbourhood in general, so that having a recreation offer becomes a shared goal. The way the profile of recreation is looked to be raised is through offering one-off activities or recreation tasters, on the one hand, and through participation and promotion of the recreation and socio-economic fabric on the other, to secure the commitment of all the stakeholders in fomenting community recreation.

The recreation tasters are designed to offer the target population a first experience of the methodology of community-based educational recreation, under the hypothesis that this experience will manage to awaken the children's, adolescents' and families' curiosity to take part in community education actions the rest of the school year. The urban camps are the main action of this type and are also the programme's most iconic one. In the 2018 edition, the urban camps were implemented in the nine target neighbourhoods previously mentioned, in two blocks of a fortnight each in August, and with the timetable Monday to Friday 10 am to 5 pm. A total of 666 children and 60 supervisors took part in them.

Regarding the focus on the target population, 81.8% of the children that took part in the camps did not take part in recreation activities during the year, an important piece of data given that the camps are mainly directed at this profile of children. This percentage is higher in the case of Bon Pastor (98.8%), a neighbourhood that has a recreation organisation in which just 15 children take part, and lower in the case of Besòs i el Maresme (56.6%), where there are three consolidated recreation organisations with over 40 children involved in each.

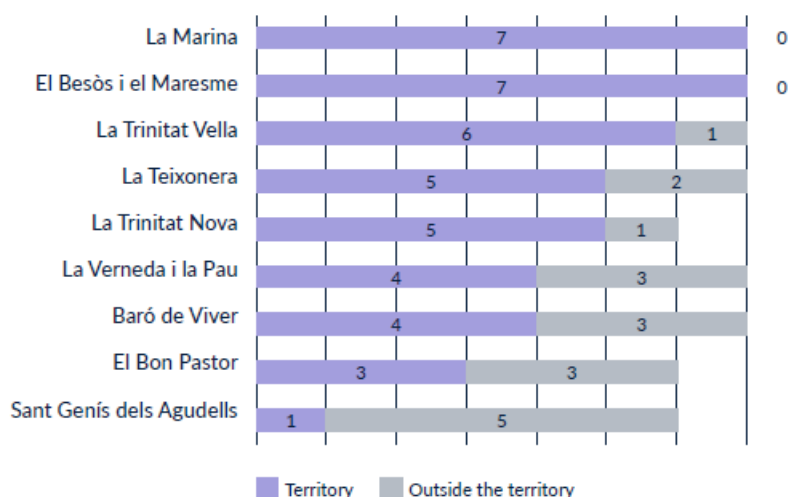
**Graph 3. Percentage of children that took part in the urban camps in 2018 that did not take part in recreation activities during the year**



Source: Original using data gathered by those responsible for the programme.

Last, with regards to the supervisors, 42 were young people from the territory where the urban camp took place, and 18 were not. This percentage is higher in La Marina and Besòs i el Maresme, where all the supervisors were from the neighbourhood, and lower in the case of Sant Genís dels Agudells, where there was just one supervisor from the neighbourhood. Compared with the previous year, there was an increase in the number of supervisors from the territory, rising from 59.2% to 68.3%.

**Graph 4. Number of urban camp supervisors depending on whether or not they are from the neighbourhood**



Source: Original using data gathered by those responsible for the programme.

#### 4 Conclusions and future challenges

In the three years the Baobab programme has been in operation, we have seen its evolution towards securing trusting relationships and alliances in the various neighbourhoods, which have enabled ambitious proposals to be launched. In 2018, the first recreation organisation to emerge with the support of the Baobab programme was formed, and three more proposals also arose, two of which started to pilot recreation activities on Saturdays. This year, one of them, in the neighbourhood of Sant Genís dels Agudells, has joined the federation of educational recreation

activities. The consolidation of the other projects, which are still in the gestation stage, could mean that the programme's nine target neighbourhoods will have at least one recreation organisation in operation. Nonetheless, as we have seen, participation in these recreation organisations is still way below the average for the city as a whole. Subsequently, the need that initially motivated the programme is still relevant.

The evaluation of the programme carried out by Ivàlua in 2017 and 2018 has helped to systematise strategies for formulating new educational recreation proposals and identifying possible success factors: the establishment of collaborative relationships with powerful stakeholders that share the diagnosis and main strategic lines of the programme, the follow-up of the families, and supervisors' visibility and recognition as a way of attracting new children. To this effect, we recommend strengthening alliances among stakeholders and educational resources that can raise the profile of the supervisors in their territories, conferring them recognition among the neighbourhood's other professionals and technicians, and seeking incentives that can contribute to motivating young people to commit to and remain involved in educational associationism.

Maintaining and reinforcing the actions designed to take advantage of the urban camps as a strategy to get children and young people involved in the educational recreation organisations in each neighbourhood is also recommended, taking into account the fact that this is one of their main objectives, and also as a way of raising the profile and reinforcing the organisations already present in the territory. Furthermore, regarding broadening and guaranteeing the sustainability of the task initiated by the Baobab programme, ways of intervening on a city level need to be found so that recreation federations and the resources designated to associationism incorporate the goal of reinforcing the recreation organisations in the programme's target neighbourhoods, where educational associationism is still weak.

Lastly, the importance of effectively monitoring and evaluating the programme must not be forgotten. The Baobab programme has been under constant evaluation since its early stages, providing a rich flow of information that has fed the design of the strategy and the programme's activities. This is one of the valuable elements evaluation has contributed to the ongoing improvement of the programme, especially in terms of the actions which, like the Baobab programme, are in the gestation stage of implementation and are subject to various and uncertain factors. Hence, it is recommended that this work be continued and further data collected to observe the evolution of the main indicators of the programme and be able, in parallel, to make a qualitative reflective evaluation. In short, the aim is to obtain all the data needed to be able to reflect on the programme's operation and results and implement actions to improve it.

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