

School Cluster policy in Portugal: elements of the sociology of organizations for the study of a new normative model of school organization

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Abstract: This article presents results of a doctoral thesis framed in the Portuguese educational policy of School Clusters (SC). Since 2010, the SC represents a new regulatory model of school organization that brings together multiple schools, at all levels of compulsory education and located in geographic proximity. Specifically, this research approaches this policy enactment in an SC located in Lisbon. The theoretical and methodological approach of the study is based on the contributions that Erhard Friedberg developed within the framework of the sociology of organizations. The publication is divided in two sections. First, the article introduces the SC policy and research carried out for this article. Then, the second section addresses Friedberg's core conceptual categories. His concept of Concrete Action System allows analyzing through which actors and how the action is organized in the fictitiously named SC Margin. It is intended to show the potential that the sociology of organizations has for research in education policy, particularly in the study of complex regulatory processes of educational policies that occur in educational institutions.

Keywords: Sociology of organizations. Educational policy. School Clusters.

Política de Agrupamiento Escolar en Portugal: elementos de la sociología de las organizaciones para investigar un nuevo modelo normativo de organización escolar

Resumen: Este artículo recoge resultados de una tesis doctoral que se enmarca en la política educativa portuguesa de Agrupamiento Escolar (AE). Desde el año 2010 el AE constituye un nuevo modelo normativo de organización escolar que nuclea a múltiples escuelas, de todos los niveles de enseñanza obligatoria, localizadas en relativa proximidad geográfica. Concretamente, en la investigación desarrollada se aborda la “puesta en acto” o *enactment* de esta política en un AE localizado en Lisboa. El enfoque teórico-metodológico del estudio se basa en los aportes que Erhard Friedberg desarrolla en el marco de la sociología de las organizaciones. La publicación se estructura a partir de una introducción a la política de AE y a la investigación desarrollada. Seguidamente, se abordan algunas de las principales categorías conceptuales de Friedberg, cuyo concepto de Sistema de Acción Concreto posibilita analizar cómo, y a través de qué actores, se organiza la acción en el ficticiamente denominado AE Margen. Se pretende mostrar las potencialidades que la sociología de las organizaciones posee para la investigación en política educativa, concretamente para el estudio de los complejos procesos de regulación de las políticas que acontecen en las instituciones educativas.

Palabras clave: Sociología de las organizaciones. Política educativa. Agrupamiento Escolar.

Política de Agrupamento Escolar em Portugal: elementos da sociologia das organizações para investigar um novo modelo normativo de organização escolar

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta resultados de uma tese de doutoramento que se enquadra na política educativa portuguesa de Agrupamento Escolar (AE). Desde 2010 o AE representa um novo modelo normativo de organização escolar que reúne várias escolas de todos os níveis de escolaridade obrigatória, e têm relativa proximidade geográfica. Nesta pesquisa trabalha-se, especificamente, a atuação (*enactment*) desta política em um AE de Lisboa. A abordagem teórica e metodológica do estudo recolhe as contribuições que Erhard Friedberg desenvolve no âmbito da sociologia das organizações. Em primeiro lugar se introduz à política de AE e é descrita a investigação desenvolvida; em segundo lugar são apresentadas algumas das principais categorias conceituais de Friedberg, cujo conceito de Sistema de Acção Concreta permite analisar como e através de quais atores a ação é organizada no, ficticiamente nomeado, AE Margem. O objetivo do presente trabalho é analisar o potencial da sociologia das organizações para a investigação em política educativa, particularmente para o estudo dos complexos processos regulatórios das políticas que acontecem em instituições de ensino.

Palavras-chave: Sociologia das Organizações. Política Educativa. Agrupamento Escolar.

Brief introduction to the School Cluster Policy and to the study of the case under analysis

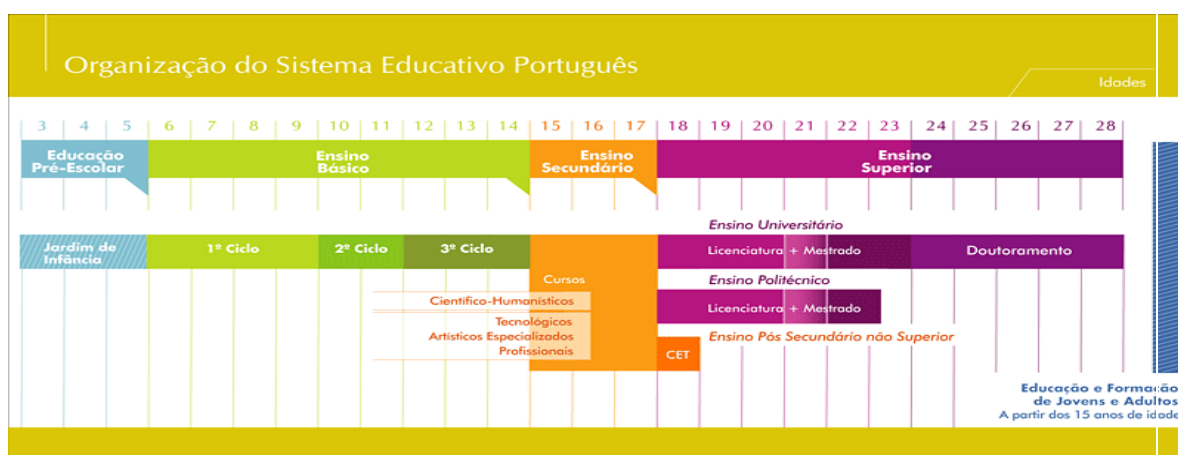
It is no longer the organization as a social object or device that is in the center of interest, but rather the organized action that involves the construction of a minimum of regulation. Therefore [organized action] becomes an essential tool for the empirical study of the conditions and concrete mechanisms of the (re) production of a local order, that is, of social regulation social (Reynaud, 1989, in Friedberg, 1995, p.168).

The current configuration of the Portuguese Educational System is the consequence of a complex process of transformations in its bureaucratic-administrative structure. The School Cluster (SC) Policy was born as an initiative to respond to the need of reordering the Portuguese School administration, marked by the existence of a great number of basic education schools with very low student registration (Afonso, 2009).

Attention to this situation becomes central to the educational agenda mainly through the *Decreto-Lei n.º 115-A/98, de 4 de Maio*, which regulates the configuration of the Horizontal Clusters integrated by kindergartens and first cycle schools (EB1)¹. In the *artigo 8 do Decreto-Lei n.º 115-A/98, de 4 de Maio*, SC is defined as an organizational unit provided with its own administrative and management organs, and integrated by preschool educational units and by one or more educational cycles and levels. Specifically, the goals formulated in the *Decreto-Lei n.º 115-A/98 (artigo 5, ponto 1)* are:

- a) To favor the sequential and articulated development of mandatory education in a particular geographical area;
- b) To overcome situations of isolation of establishments and prevent social exclusion;
- c) To reinforce the pedagogical capacity of the educational establishments and the rational use of resources;
- d) To guarantee the application of a regime of autonomy, administration and management;
- e) To give value to and to frame ongoing experiences.

¹See educational system organization in Portugal



Source: Gabinete de Estatística e Planeamento da Educação (GEPE)

Therefore, the *Decreto-Lei* mentioned above triggers, for the first time, the confrontation with other possibilities of school organization. As Barroso (2003) explains, around 2003, the access to power of the center-right increases, even more, the adoption of policies that imply the subordination of education to the logics of the market. The *Despacho n° 13313/2003, de 8 de Julho*, from the Secretary of State for Educational Administration reinforces the choices made in the *Decreto-Lei n° 115-A/98* and imposes the reordering of the school net under the model of the Vertical School Cluster. This includes from kindergarten to the third cycle of basic education (EB3).

The group of reforms in the configuration of the SC would be supplemented with two regulations:

1) The *Decreto-Lei n. ° 75/2008*, which promotes a new Administration and Management Model of Public Schools, and gets to define the Principal as a single person organ of management. Thus a strong change in the Portuguese school administration is established, whose new organs of direction, administration and management for SC and non-clustered schools are:

-**The General Council** as the organ responsible for the definition of guidelines for school activities. This organ is guarantor of the participation and representation of the educational community: teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, students, members of the City Hall, of the *Junta de Freguesía* and of the community, such as religious and neighborhood institutions, among others.

-**The Pedagogical Council** is the organ of coordination, pedagogical supervision and educational orientation, not only in the grounds of pedagogical-didactic orientations and student counseling, but also of initial and continuous training of teachers and non-teaching staff. It is presided over by the Principal and integrated by the coordinators of curricula departments, the structures of pedagogical coordination and supervision, and by representatives of the parents and tutors.

- **The Administrative Council** is the deliberative organ in administrative-financial matters of the SC or non-clustered schools. It is presided over by the Principal and integrated also by the Vice-Principal or one of the Deputy Principals and by the chief of school administration services or who represents him.

- **The Principal** is the organ of administration and management of the pedagogical, cultural, administrative, financial and patrimonial areas. Among the powers granted he/she holds the capacity to choose the Executive Team (Vice-Principal and Deputy Principals), the Coordinators of the main coordination and pedagogical supervision structures, and the School Coordinators. In the case of the Coordinators of Curricula Departments, he/she can suggest the three teachers he considers more suitable for such position.

2) The *Decreto-Lei n° 85/2009*, which regulates the amplification of mandatory school for children and youth among 5 and 18 years old, with the objective of achieving universal schooling until the completion of secondary education.

The aforementioned legislation paves the way for the integration of the secondary school level in the SC policy. In the following months, the *Resolução do Conselho de Ministros n° 44/2010* established that schools were legally obliged to either cluster or, in the case of already existing SC, to re-cluster and to produce together an institutional educational project. The clustered schools came to have a new administrative nucleus: the SC Headquarters located in the secondary school, where the SC Principal and the Executive Team reside. The group of clustered schools is coordinated from the Headquarter School, and in each school the highest authority is the School Coordinator, appointed by the SC Principal to undertake such role during the four years that his/her mandate lasts.

Lima (2011) claims that the publication of the *Decreto-Lei N° 75/2008*, which provides that the School Coordinator from each institution integrated in an SC is appointed by the SC Principal, allows them to operate as the Principal Representatives in their own establishments. The phenomenon of concentration of powers in the Principal corresponds itself with the transposition of business management to the school. Thus, the prerogative given to the Principal to select those in charge of the management of clustered schools mirrors a business like style, effective and efficient, whose immanent bureaucratic character would be capable of beating the resistance to change typical of the corporativism of its professionals. As a consequence, the Principal becomes again a single person management organ, as it was during the military dictatorship that ended in 1974.

Therefore, the origin of this research (Bocchio, 2013) is the consequence of a group of questions regarding the SC as a new normative model of school organization. Particularly, the “enigmas” were focused on how to coordinate action among twelve schools located within a ten kilometers radius, and on the implications of this policy for the work of the

“old” secondary school Principal, who, after being appointed by the SC General Council, becomes responsible for the executive management of all compulsory educational levels.

This research is contextualized in an SC belonging to the Regional Administration of *Lisboa y Valle del Tejo*. This SC was formed during the 2010-2011 school year and is integrated by twelve schools. The general objective guiding this study is to describe, analyze and interpret the Concrete Action System (CAS) (Friedberg, 1995) built in the interaction between the SC Principal and a set of school actors that will be presented in the following sections. I consider that the relevance, specificity and novelty of the research lies in the construction of knowledge about the enactment (Ball *et al.*, 2012) of the SC policy, in an organization whose internal processes of regulation, three years after the SC implementation, have reached a certain level of consolidation over time.

The research design is qualitative and responds to an intrinsic case study, a methodological option selected to address the specificities of the CAS. At an operational level, the fieldwork of this research was carried out during the 2012-2013 school year, a total of twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with school actors chosen for the relevance of the tasks they perform in the SC management, as well as in the promotion of articulation between the Headquarter School and the clustered schools. These interviews allowed the collection and subsequent analysis, through content analysis procedures, of the relevant data for the interpretation of CAS contextualized in the SC Margin.

In the theoretical and methodological choices of this study the interpretative registration is articulated with an inductive approach. As Friedberg (1995) explains, in order to reconstruct the deep structures of the field it is feasible to supplement an inductive approach with a deductive hypothesis, which may only be verifiable against the data provided by fieldwork in the SC Margin. Next I present the main contributions of this sociologist to the study of organized action in the SC policy context.

Erhard Friedberg: some of his theoretical and methodological contributions

Friedberg’s contributions, within the framework of the sociology of organizations, have a strong track record, and the work he develops together with Michel Crozier, *L’acteur et le*

système (1977), is foundational. In that work the authors establish a break with the classical model of organizational analysis, as they reveal the utopian character of the ancient dream of automatic regulation and of coordination of human action in organizations.

Specifically through his work *Power and Rules* (1996), Friedberg questions three of the principal premises of the classical perspective of organizations: (a) the clear and transparent rationality of organizational behavior; (b) the conception of the organization as a consistent and unified whole, structured according to pre-determined and fixed objectives; (c) the existence of clear organizational boundaries that allow to distinguish between the inner and the outer/environment of the organization.

Given the demystifications raised about the classical perspective of organizations, Friedberg (1996) postulates the birth of a new model of limited and relative rationality that substitutes the concept of organization as a fixed structure with the concept of “organized action”. Based on this concept, the author develops a theoretical model of the organization conceived as a process of a political nature by which the actors, through strategic dynamics, stabilize their relations and interdependence to build and organize spaces of action. In this context the “social action”, whatever its particular field, is seen as

a more or less stabilized and articulated group of games, whose rules and mechanisms structure interaction processes (exchange and negotiation) through which the actors create mutual dependencies. These games produce a local order, they are social constructions themselves, that is to say, unevenly stabilized products from individual or collective behaviors (Friedberg, 1995, p. 113).

Action spaces made effective are defined from a second central category, the Concrete Action System (CAS). Based on this concept, he refers to the actors’ strategic interaction as a factor that contributes to the process of regulation of the system. The author defines CAS as structures of collective action through which action spaces are organized, that is to say, through which local orders are built and perpetuated and allow actors to stabilize action (p. 11).

CAS is always contingent (regarding context characteristics), arbitrary and problematic. Therefore, we face a field of analysis that is part of a political conception of social action, because it is based in power relations founded on games of interest, conflict and negotiation. In this sense it poses questions about the nature of the mechanisms that stabilize the processes of negotiation that take place in a CAS, through which collective

action is built. These processes require three fundamental issues: (a) To trivialize organizations as action contexts, because they are no more than one action context among others; (b) To analyze the processes of organization by which actors' strategic interactions are determined; (c) To analyze the effects on the actors' empiric behaviors from the mechanisms, artifacts and social devices, i.e. making organized action concrete, and turning its effects apt for empirical analysis.

Therefore, the organization-phenomenon is the result of the temporary construction of a local order whose features, relatively autonomous, determine the capacity of human action. Such order defines a situational regulation, where imposed policies –policies that actors locally regulate through the cooperation they build-- come into play.

In the sociology of action, power involves the actor's ability to structure more or less durable exchange processes in its favor. Power relations are understood as a negotiated and conflicted exchange, as each player, to improve his/her own position in the negotiation, will try to reduce his/her peer's alternatives of choice. Thus a field of organized action is structured, based on a set of power relations, in a precarious balance, which management imposes its own logic to exchange processes, a logic of political nature.

It is through this autonomization (that is, through the politization of exchange processes) that a field structure is built. It should be noted that political exchange incorporates and transcends economic exchange, since the exchange must be accompanied by an advantageous manipulation of the terms of negotiation (Friedberg, 1995, p.135).

Reality is defined as a *continuum* of endogenous dynamics of interaction processes that serve to the stabilization of negotiation and power processes between the actors. Friedberg (1995) identifies, at least, four factors that need to be taken into account to study the dynamic and the extension of the dynamics of autonomization in exchange processes:

- a) the existence of a minimum of resources for everyone;
- b) the lack of any kind of barriers (technical, legal, economic) that may determine the exchange field between the actors;
- c) the use of evaluation techniques accepted and mastered by all the actors that allow to measure the quality of the performance of the different parts interested;
- d) the ease with which interested parts can transfer the costs to third actors, not included in their exchanges, as a sign of control (p. 135).

In an extreme of the imaginary *continuum*, power strategies are subject to a rational evaluation and to the autonomy of the “game” in connection with the instrumental

rationality of the transaction process. On the other extreme of the *continuum* there would be, on the contrary, a field of action where the objectives are ambiguous, what turns all participants unable to evaluate satisfaction, as they do not have information about the performance level of the rest. Thus, the autonomy of the game as a political construction is ruled by extortion and negotiation relations between the actors that have reciprocity in relations, but never by balance.

Regarding the above referred matter, the CAS concept reveals, in the first place, the “mixed regulation” of the actors’ contexts of action, where a formal structure meets with another informal structure that defines the possibilities of action of each of the participants. In the second place, freedom or autonomy area (of each part) is delimited in their dealings with others. Therefore, the interpretation of an “organizational phenomenon” demands to make evident the relatively autonomous characteristics that structure the ability to act of the actors in order to, finally, be able to show its effects, which are defined as the new structure that actors introduce in a specific context of action, and that constitutes one of the many impositions for the respective actors (Friedberg, 1995, p. 12).

Up to here I have introduced some of the main contributions by the author for the analysis of the practices of the actors involved in regulation processes of organized action. The convergence of numerous regulations as well as complex and sometimes contradictory dynamics of autonomization, whose effects demand to be interpreted in the context of organized action, becomes evident.

The conceptual net that supports theoretically and methodologically this investigation is established in the articulation of the three processes that oriented the recollection of data in the SC Margin: description, analysis and interpretation, such net being fundamental for establishing the central concepts that guided the interviews conducted with the different school actors.

The operationalization of Friedberg’s theoretical and methodological contributions and of the collected data is organized in three dimensions of analysis that articulate with the specific objectives of this study. As was already introduced, the general objective that guides this study is to analyze, describe and interpret the Concrete Actions System (CAS) that is contextualized in the School Cluster (SC) Margin.

The first dimension of analysis (1) serves the first specific research objective: to describe, analyze and interpret the internal organizational processes of the Concrete Action System, (re)created by the school actors of the SC Margin. These processes are consequence of the SC Principal's responsibility and need to make up a local structure, capable of managing the new normative model of school organization in SC. There are three conceptual categories that allow addressing the SC internal organizational processes, referred to as (1.1) selection of "school actors"; (1.2) distribution of functions; and (1.3) production of regulatory texts.

The second dimension of analysis (2) addresses the second specific research objective: to describe, analyze and interpret the logics of regulatory action legitimated in the CAS by the school actors of the SC Margin. Three analytic categories are proposed: (2.1) meanings attributed to the SC Margin; (2.2) building of the SC identity; and (2.3) management dynamics of the SC. These categories contribute to the interpretation of the logics of action promoted by the SC Principal, the Executive Team and the Intermediate Management Structures for the regulation of practices in clustered schools.

The third dimension of analysis (3) refers to the third specific objective of the investigation: to describe, analyze and interpret the effects of the CAS on the school actors of the SC Margin. Three spheres of influence are distinguished (Hanson, 1981), which operate in an articulated manner to respond to the demands of the SC management, and that contribute to the analysis of the CAS effects in the school actors of the SC Margin. Three areas of primary influence for the management of SC are differentiated: administrative sphere, pedagogic sphere, and school-environment relation sphere.

The three aforementioned dimensions of analysis operate in an articulated manner to interpret and denaturalize the CAS built by the school actors of the SC Margin: the SC Principal, the Executive Team, Coordinators of the Internal Evaluation Office, of the Citizen Inclusion Office and of the Curricular EB1 Department, School Coordinators and Interlocutors. Consequently, in the first dimension of analysis, the three internal organizational processes that are presented serve for the definition of the SC as a structure designed for organized action, delimiting rules, functions, hierarchies, responsibilities, power and trust relations between the school actors. In the second dimension, the explicitness of regulatory action logics of organized action demand to recover the internal organizational processes of the SC, stressing the power held by the Principal and her

“trusted team” in the building and legitimation of action logics agreed among school actors. Finally, the third dimension of analysis is intended to account for the effects that the school actors, vested with different levels of autonomy, experience in the SC management spheres. Such effects are recognized as the structuring that, in the context of practice, the internal organizational processes and the logics of action regulating the action in the SC Margin assume.

Following, Friedberg’s contributions are unfold to characterize the CAS contextualized in the SC Margin. Due to extension considerations, I mainly focus in the first dimension of analysis presented herein.

Organized action in the context of the School Cluster Policy

The legislative constitution of the SC allows recovering a conceptual and educational ideology path linked to public policies that discursively intend to promote the decentralization and modernization of public administration in Portugal. Under the slogan “territorialize education policies” the figure of the Principal, legally designated as a single person organ of school management, acquires a central role in the local SC management. He/she is expected to lead multiple school organizations, now clustered, that must share the same educational project.

In this study the School Cluster Principal is defined as an actor regulated by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and, in turn, as a local regulator of educational policies and practices. As a consequence, I recognize that the SC constitutes a new normative model of school organization designed for the operationalization of several policies (of assistance, of evaluation of students and teachers) that get to be managed from the school where the SC Headquarters are located. In this way, the organization structure that contributes to the transformation in the mechanisms of regulation of the MES regarding the clustered schools and the Principal’s work is redesigned.

Bellow, I characterize the CAS under study by making explicit the organizational internal processes of the Concrete Action System (re)created by the school actors of the SC Margin. The purpose is to account for the bureaucratic and pedagogical structure necessary to lead the SC.

Notes about the Concrete Action System under study

As has been already mentioned, the development of this study is contextualized in a Vertical Cluster. The SC is formed by twelve schools, and it is specifically the result of the merger of two Horizontal Clusters and three non-clustered schools, the Secondary School acting as Headquarter School.

The CAS under analysis is made up by the Principal and a specific group of actors that contribute to the SC management by decision and direct choice of the Principal; these are: the Executive Team: a Vice-Principal and three Deputy Principals; three Intermediate Coordination Structures and Pedagogical Supervision Coordinators, named by the same school actors as “Intermediate Management Structures”: the Coordinator of the Citizen Inclusion Office, the Coordinator of the Internal Evaluation Office, and the Coordinator of the Basic Education Curricular Department. The seven School Coordinators and four Interacting Participants that work in the eleven SC clustered schools are also included.

According to the distribution of tasks made by the Principal, the Vice-Principal and one of the Deputy Principals concentrate the responsibilities for pedagogical and administrative management of the Basic Schools of Second Cycle, of the Basic Schools of Third Cycle and of the Secondary School. Meanwhile, the other two Deputy Principals are responsible for the pedagogical and administrative management of the Kindergarten (K) and of the Basic Schools of First Cycle (BS1). The interpretation of the interviews allows recognizing two main criteria for the distribution of tasks. The first one accounts for a pedagogical type of distribution, that responds to the cycles in which mandatory school is organized, from Kindergarten to Secondary School. The level of education in which each member of the Executive Team worked as a teacher before the conformation of the SC Margin is respected in the assignment of tasks. The second criterion that prevails responds to a distribution of bureaucratic-administrative tasks among the members of the Executive Team and the Intermediate Management Structures of each level of education. These encompass: financial matters, services sales, hiring of cleaning personnel, and administrative platform management of the Ministry of Education and Science, among others.

Regarding the Intermediate Management Structures, the Coordinator of the BS1 Curricular Department is responsible for the execution of the *Alicerces* Project (meaning

“foundations” in English) for the BS1 level of education. In the set of activities that she carries out, the prevailing actions are related to the supervision and evaluation of students, counseling for School Coordinators and Interacting Participants, and the development of the documents in which the policies of the education level are adapted for the teachers.

The Coordinator of the Internal Evaluation Office is responsible for the working team that designed the SC Education Project. She was directly involved in the selection of the members of the SC Internal Evaluation Office, from where the evaluation of the schools is carried out, and documents and instruments necessary for internal and external SC evaluation are developed.

The Coordinator of the Citizen Inclusion Office takes on the monitoring and implementation of a group of SC projects linked to addressing student disciplinary issues, the management of programs and projects associated to the care of students in a socio-educational vulnerable condition, and the development of joint activities between the clustered schools, which aim to support the teaching-learning process. The relevance assigned to the Citizen Inclusion Office, since the SC constitution, implied that it stops being an education project, to transform itself into an intermediate management structure. The Office allows the Principal to decentralize the treatment of problems related to students' behavior to the Coordinator and the Vice-Principal, and her participation is requested in case of registering extremely complex situations.

The School Coordinators and the Interlocutors are the highest authorities in each clustered school. In the fieldwork it was possible to recognize the figure of the Interlocutor. It is a “school actor” created by the SC Principal to address the legal impossibility to appoint school coordinators in institutions with less than three teachers in effective exercise of the teaching function. The Interlocutor is the representative of the Principal in these small BS1 o K schools. The allocation of this charge is a result of a positive and symbolic evaluation of the work of teachers that does not entail a salary raise and, of course, is not addressed in any regulation. Participation in pedagogical leadership issues, even though is not a minor matter for these actors, does not appear in most interviews. This is how two of them refer to it:

I coordinate everything and try to work in groups, I supervise everything, I mark the limits and see that everyone becomes responsible for his or her own functions (I11, p. 1); Although my functions are more related to

management issues, I believe that my work lies in the pedagogical, I cannot get to separate them, and my colleagues need me to organize the Annual Plan of Activities (I9, p. 1).

Only the Coordinator of the School 9 made an explicit reference to the pedagogical work performed at the expense of the organizational dimension. In most of the stories about the specificity of the work of the School Coordinator, “pedagogy” is placed at the same level of relevance that the list of bureaucratic issues that they respond to daily. This is how the “school actors” in question refer to the type of relations that they establish in the schools where they work: “With my colleagues I am an extension of the Direction” (E1, p.1); “We are a bridge, a Direction’s arm in parents’ and teachers’ terrain” (E3. p. 1).

What was just mentioned enables to assimilate School Coordinators and Interlocutors as actors involved in the “chain of distribution of tasks”, as operative agents that transmit guidelines defined at the Headquarter School. In other words, the School Coordinators and Interlocutors, in the context of a dependence relationship towards who selected them, would be translating, once again, the Principal’s message, working as “official translators” that contribute to the representation of the SC Principal in the clustered schools.

Regulation of the CAS ends of the SC Margin: new responsibilities for new school actors?

The SC Principal, whose position came from the managerial contest in the context of the conformation of the SC, is placed at one end of the CAS under study. On June 30th 2011 she was elected in the SC General Council, for unanimity (19 votes), to exercise for a term of four years. The proximity of the link built between the Principal and what we call the “trusted team”, formed by the Executive Team and the Intermediate Management Structures Coordinators, stands out. The trajectory of joint work between these actors and the physical proximity promoted by the work in the Headquarter School are key elements that differentiate the relations established with the School Coordinators and the Interlocutors. The labor commitment assumed by the school actors who worked together with the Principal in the process of conformation of the SC, defines an emotional bond that lead them to accept the “mandatory invitations” to perform the tasks the SC Principal assigned to them.

The School Coordinators and the Interlocutors, appointed by the SC Principal, are placed at the other end. The fact that few critical management records regarding the Principal existed and the way she exercises her tasks and powers demonstrate a certain level of legitimacy of principal's management. It also evidences the dependence of these actors regarding the decisions that the Principal implements. Thus, a general agreement on the "rules of the game" defined at the Headquarter School is underlying. At this instance of the school management, some School Coordinators assume that the Headquarter School is considered synonymous of the SC that regulates the clustered schools. Overall, the confidence delegated by the SC Principal in the selected school actors is apparently a key component to the administration and management of the educational and administrative structure of the SC.

As I have already stated, the SC Principal and the School Coordinators and Interlocutors operate in each end of the CAS. It is now necessary to focus, once more, in the work performed by both.

The School Coordinators and Interlocutors of the SC Margin belong, mostly, to the first cycle of education (BS1) and to kindergartens, and they are mostly inexperienced in performing tasks related to executive management. These actors are the representatives of the Principal in the clustered schools, i.e., they are translators, transmitters and executors of the guidelines defined in the Headquarter School. They can be referred to, metaphorically, as "satellites" that detect conflicts and act to solve them with the support of the Deputy Principals 1 and 2.

It is worth asking for the meaning or the purpose of the School Coordinators and Interlocutors in the SC. It is relevant to make clear that most of them recognize their own lack of autonomy when exercising their duties. Among the matters recorded during the interviews it was even possible to appreciate the "non-desire for autonomy" and, therefore, of responsibility for the actions they perform. These actors are considered to bare responsibilities that make them guarantors of order and school performance, becoming also transmitters of an authority figure for teachers, parents, students, and administrative staff.

As most of the clustered schools belong to the first cycle of education and to kindergarten, it is timely to recover the contributions of the research by Dias (2006) regarding the work

carried out by the Principals of the primary level. The author notes the contributions of studies that had already referred to the small margins of decision and the multiple hierarchical dependencies that the management of this level had in the context in which the studies were developed. Dias explains that, in the period previous to the implementation of the *Decreto- Lei n. º 115-A/98*, the differentiation between the work of Principals and teachers was not perceived by the latter as a difference in standings or authority, but as a convenient way that allowed teachers not to do unwanted tasks, like administrative ones.

Without trying to compare the role of the School Coordinator with the “old” school Principal, the contrast with the studies mentioned before makes it possible to deduce that this teaching level has a history under a state management model, mainly bureaucratic-administrative. It is necessary to make clear that the Vertical Schools Cluster could represent a new dependence of the first cycle of education (BS1) and of the kindergarten to the management logics of the Secondary School, now SC Headquarters.

The lack of expertise of School Coordinators and Interlocutors in management positions represents an issue that promotes that the dynamics of re-centralization of control over clustered schools are accepted and naturalized by these actors. Therefore, these new school actors (in some cases former teachers, without courses under their charge), out of the support they receive from the Executive Team to manage clustered schools, they also build their legitimacy and a new identity associated to the responsibilities that were delegated on them: that of the representatives of the SC Principal.

In the analyzed *continuum*, the SC Principal’s work is characterized by the confluence of three tasks: the first one, associated to the supervision and accompanying of the Executive Team work, as that of the Intermediate Management Structures. The second one, centralized in the bureaucratic work by which she accounts to multiple instances of the MES evaluators. And the third one, related to the promotion and planning of the interinstitutional relations that are managed from the Citizen Inclusion Office. During the interviews and informal chats, references to the second and third tasks were recurring:

What is most important is the planning of the SC life, the relations with other organizations. The problems are related to the lack of motivation and getting people to work more and better, which is difficult today. We have many teachers whose couples are unemployed, this has changed a lot (...) I would like to have less bureaucracy, the Ministry seeks to control everything, and we spend a life completing useless forms, and I

cannot work with the students, with my colleagues, and what I do is give answers to everything (E2 DAE, p. 6).

As already discussed, the management of the relations with organizations, business and different state institutions is up to the Principal. These are actions related to strengthening the commitment and the SC “logic of action for the socio-educational inclusion”, by which different programs, projects and activities are implemented, most of them articulated to the enactment of policies aimed at school and social inclusion of students.²

In the CAS contextualized in the SC Margin the presence of new school actors becomes evident, among them the coordinators of the Citizen Inclusion and Internal Evaluation Offices. Both structures of intermediate management are key in the context of the practice for the management of a group of socio-educational policies (compensatory policies, food, health, student assessment) and for the coordination of the action in a new regulatory model of school organization, in SC. Likewise, it is possible to recognize the absence of a “school actor”: the School Principal. In his place a new actor emerges: the SC Principal.

Features of the tasks performed by the Principal in the SC Margin turn her into a “territorial regulator” of a group of clustered schools. It is her who must face, in the words of Dutercq (2006), new challenges and roles that arise from the need to reconcile “management by results” with the meaning of “public service”, defining in this way a new “civic logic” that represents new relationships between the school and the community in the context of economic structural adjustment policies.

Conclusive notes: recapitulating the contributions of the concept of Concrete Action System to this study

Friedberg’s contributions to the research under analysis allow to recognize that the school actors that translate the policy of School Cluster constitute by themselves a “new scenario” of school administration and management of the Portuguese Education System organized mainly in SC, scenario that is reshaping, as it was shown, the work of the Principal and of the school actors in general. As a consequence, the organizational profile of the research

² The emergence of a logic of action for the socio-educational inclusion in the SC Margin is explained thoroughly in Bocchio (2015).

had the purpose of understanding the relations built between the school actors to enact the SC policy.

Among the main interpretative lines that emerge from the analysis, I may point out the relevance of the internal organizational processes that lay the groundwork for the operation of the CAS. Different levels of distribution of tasks underlie, which structure organized action and define action logics governing the ends of the *continuum* (Friedberg, 1995) under study: the SC Principal and the School Coordinators and Interlocutors.

In the process of building the link between these actors, the work performed by the Executive Team and the Intermediate Management Structures, called the Principal's "trusted team", is essential. It is them who interact with the clustered schools and operate as managers of a "strategic consensus", providing ongoing support to the clustered schools in the resolution of emerging problems.

The centrality of the figure of the SC Margin Principal is permanent in the analysis of the CAS. This is reflected both in the strengthening of her capacity as a single person organ of school management for the internal regulation of the SC Margin; and in the processes of regulation that the Ministry of Education and Science exerts on the work that must be performed by a Principal who "will never again manage only one school".

Lima (2011) argues that before the emergence of new school and education organizational forms, the category of school becomes more complex, and sometimes more problematic, in terms of research. However, in the SC policy the school as educational organization continues to be in the center of attention, because the SC is only a new form of school organization, and also because it represents a form or organization of the Portuguese School System. Therefore, the study of the SC policy and its practice demands from the researcher to define clearly which is the unit of organizational analysis to be studied, to make it possible to sustain epistemological surveillance on the object under analysis.

The study of the contextualized CAS and the SC Margin has intended to provide knowledge about the importance of denaturalizing school organizations as well as educational policies. It aims at giving back to school actors the centrality they have in the design of organized action that every educational institution needs and where policies effectively become alive. It aims at posing questions about the undeclared objectives that

the SC policy proposes, beyond the massive retirement of directives and the budget cuts in the context of neoliberal educational policies.

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