THE ROLE OF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SCHOOL IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION EXPECTATIONS IN SECONDARY STUDENTS OF ODEMIRA

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Abstract

Odemira is the most extensive municipality in Portugal (1721Km2) and is seen as a low density region because of its territorial dispersion and low population density (15.10 inhab/km2 | 26036 inhab. total). In the area of Education, despite the improvements in recent years, Odemira still presents indicators below the regional and national averages, such as the illiteracy rate (15.6% in 2011, when the national average was 5.2%), population with higher education (7%, against a national average of 15.1%), and "young population" (i.e. 30-34 years) with higher education (13.1%, when the national average is 28.6%).

This context brings particularities and challenges to how the county regards, thinks about and manages the "Education" and is "Educational Territory". Also influences the Local Education Plan (PEL) and his role, in parallel with the Observatory of Educational Policies of the Region of Odemira, in the research, planning and implementation of the educational policy in Odemira.

One of PEL's objective is to support and promote the integration of young population from Odemira in the higher education trough activities (i.e. study visits and summer camps in Universities) and scholarships. To go further in this objective we have study 285 students from secondary schools of Odemira, and crossed their levels of engagement with the school (measured with the "Questionnaire of Student Engagement with the School") with their expectations of higher education (measured with the trial version of the "Expectations of Higher Education Scale").

This paper seek to present and discuss the results of this study, and also their impacts in the definition and implementation of informed, concerted and coherent responses and educational policies, aiming to improve the rate of young population with higher education and other indicators on education/training of the population of Odemira.

Keywords: Student Engagement with the School, High Education Expectations, Educational Policies, Observatory of Educational Policies of the Region of Odemira.

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1 CONTEXTUALIZATION

Located in the southwest coast of Portugal, Odemira is one of the 58 municipalities in Alentejo, the biggest region in Portugal (near 33%) and one of the regions with low population density (according to the 2011 Census [1], only 757190 [7.2%] inhabitants) and large dispersion. Odemira is one of the counties who contributes more to this statistics because is the most extensive municipality in Portugal (1721km2) and have only 26106 inhabitants (15.1 people per km2, one of the Portuguese municipalities with lower value). His "territorial isolation" [2] is product of the big dispersion between villages and the significant distances to other urban centers, as well as some health and higher education services.

This, and some socio-economic data (high unemployment rate, high aging index, high loss of young population to the urban centers and inexistence of many services – universities, hospital, !) contributes to the weak educational indicators of the population. In this field we have to underline an expressive illiteracy rate (15.6% in 2011 [1]; one of the biggest in Portugal) and the small rate of population with higher education. These indicator, one of the most important regarding the future socio-economic development (e.g [3]), growth and jobs creation (e.g. [4]) in the county, is still very above the national average on the population (7% in Odemira; 15.1% in Portugal) and particularly...