



# Differences, inequalities and sociological imagination

## Social crisis drawn by children: imagination and social knowledge

Manuel Jacinto Sarmiento & Gabriela Trevisan (CIEC-UMINHO, Braga, Portugal)



## Differences, inequalities and sociological imagination

- Promote a critical analysis on the effects of economic crisis in children's representations
- Understand children's drawings as graphic narratives (Sarmiento, 2014) that provide complementary and deepen elements alongside discursive reports
- Understand visual expression as deriving from children's ways of imaginative interpretation and transfiguration of social reality.



# Children's representation on the economic crisis

- austerity plans have direct and indirect effects on children's lives and wellbeing. Well-being needs to be defined in order to understand how different structural factors and/or public policies impact children's lives.
- Unicef (2010) has defined major aspects of child wellbeing: material well-being, health and safety, educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behaviors and risks, and subjective well-being (i.e. how children feel about themselves).



## Hence different consequences can be found for children:

- Not having enough to eat or a healthy diet;
- not being able to afford new clothes;
- not having the equipment that other children take for granted in their country such as books;
- living in poor or overcrowded housing; living with inadequate heating and in a home suffering from damp;
- lacking a quiet place with enough room and light to do homework; not being able to afford proper health care or high-quality child care or to go to a good school;
- having little chance to play in decent non-vandalized playgrounds; having little say in the decisions that affect daily life (EAPN, Eurochild 2013, p. 11)



Two very recent reports on children and childhood – from Unicef’s Portuguese Committee and the Observatory of Families and Family Policies show:

- Between 2010 and 2014 - a significant reduction in the economic support provided to families. From 2010 on, access to social benefits that depend directly on families income – eg, child support benefits, social action in schools, parental benefits, Social Income, and social unemployment benefits – were restricted not only in the amount of families that benefit from them but also from the value of the benefits. The situation is even more serious when considering salary cuts and tax raise.



- children are, since 2008, the generational group with a higher risk of poverty; one in each 4 children lives in severe material deprivation; the risk of poverty is higher in bigger families (41%), in single parents families (31%) and in unemployed people; single parents families with an unemployed parent present an almost absolute risk of poverty (90%); 30% of Portuguese children have lost their children's benefits in three years (2009 to 2012); public policies drawn for families are clearly insufficient, non-integrated and inadequate regarding the severity of the situation.
- Regression on children's citizenship rights, namely on participation issues regarding children



## Children's representations on the crisis

As argued in other publications (Sarmiento, Fernandes, Trevisan, 2015, forthcoming) and by different reports (Martorano, Unicef working paper, 2014):

- Children are able to understand micro and macro effects of economic crisis in family life
- Are capable of formulating different explanations and solutions for the crisis
- Place themselves as subjects in solving family difficulties due to economic crisis
- Replicate and recreate adult interpretations into their own explanations of the crisis
- Understand their own participation as legitimate and adequate



# Methodological design

- Multiple voices – as they express themselves in multiple senses, including drawings and graphic representations of social reality
- Authors have been working in different methodologies adequate to interpret these multiple voices (Sarmiento, 2011, 2014; Trevisan, 2014)
- In children's drawings the proposal is set in analysing them as graphic narratives (Sarmiento, 2014) – structured contents within a time sequence that enables children's interpretations, in a continuous relation between realistic approaches and imaginary projections of social reality



# Methodological design

- Children's drawings are a part of a set of different research data collected within the Carta da Cidadania InfantoJuvenil, conducted in Northern Region of Portugal, Guimarães.
- It also aims addressing the fragmentary and episodic nature of children's political participation as we have argued elsewhere (Trevisan, 2014) alongside children's invisibility in participation projects (Sarmiento, 2012)
- It also takes into account ideas of the need to construct mediated spaces of children's political participation in order to make them effective



## An analysis on children's narratives

On different focus groups conducted with children and YP on the crisis and on poverty and exclusion main aspects can be found:

1. Children have a clear consciousness on the social and economic effects of the crisis

“If there is a crisis there are no jobs and no money, so you can't afford food or clothes” (Luis, 16)

2. The crisis is particularly referenced to its impact on people's rights, particularly families

“Not everyone has the same due to the crisis and to the lack of solidarity” (Iaraa, 13)

“The right to an education is at risk when parents can't afford meals, clothes and the costs of keeping children in school” (Ruben, 14)

3. It is rarely referred in a personal tone: children refer particularly to the effects on others (eg, adults)

“The crisis is like a river that goes everywhere”(Iara, 13)

“If a county is not ok children are not ok” (Luis, 16)



## An analysis on children's narratives

4. Social inequalities are particularly noted by children

“There is discrimination in society and in shcool” (Sofia, 12)

“Some people think they are better than others because of what they have”

5. Children are aware of political decisions

“Justice system needs to act on corruption” (Ruben, 14)

“Social security systems should be fairer in money distribution”

6. Children are solution-oriented when thinking about the crisis, especially emergency support to those in greater need adn on family decisions to cut back in particular goods

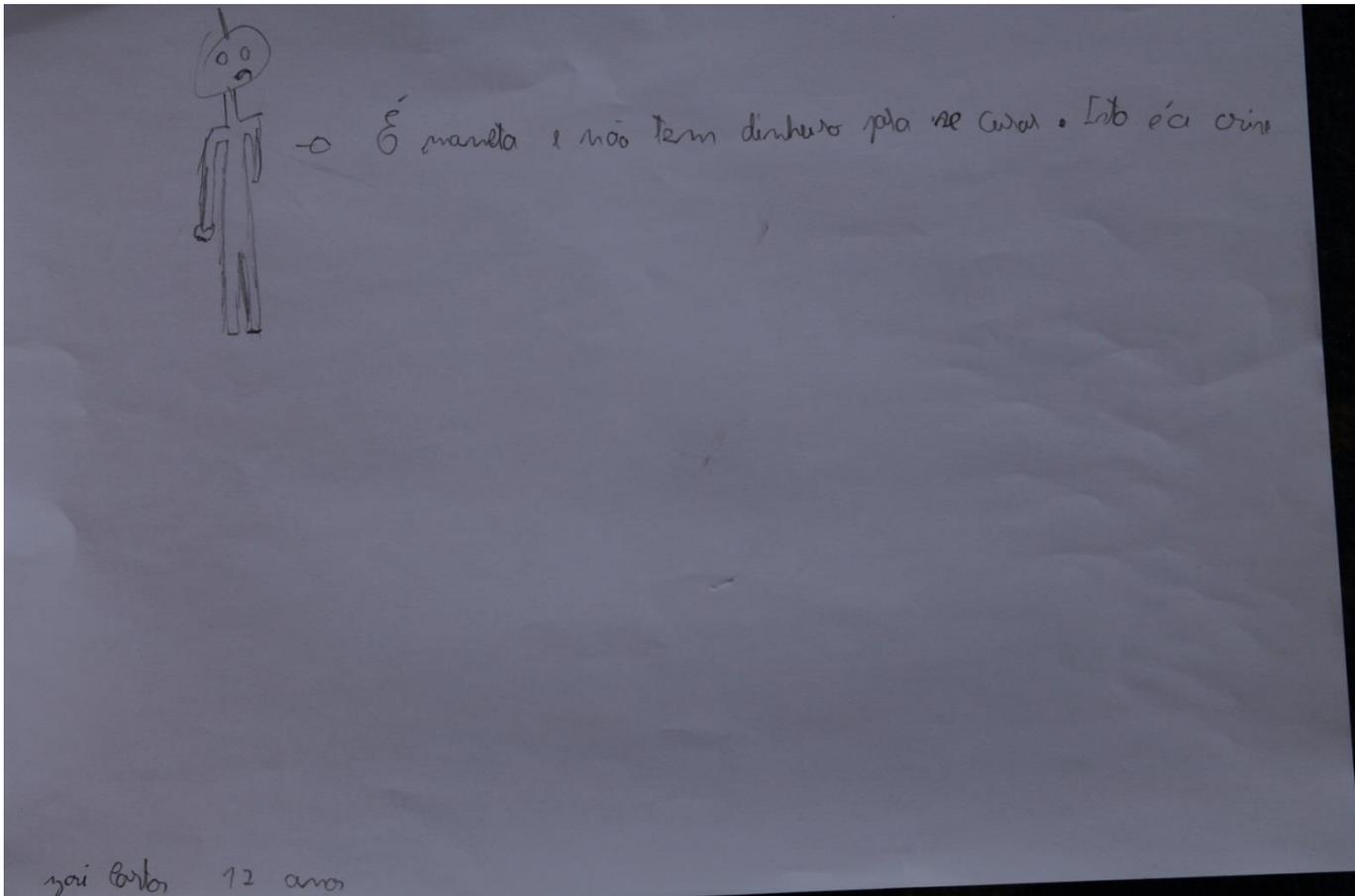
- Cutting in material goods such as toys in order to help parents, buying local products to help the economy, turn the project nationwide in order to be able to apply YP ideas, etc...



# Children's drawings on the crisis

On their graphic narratives, children represent these same elements:

## 1. Impacts of the crisis in health and well being

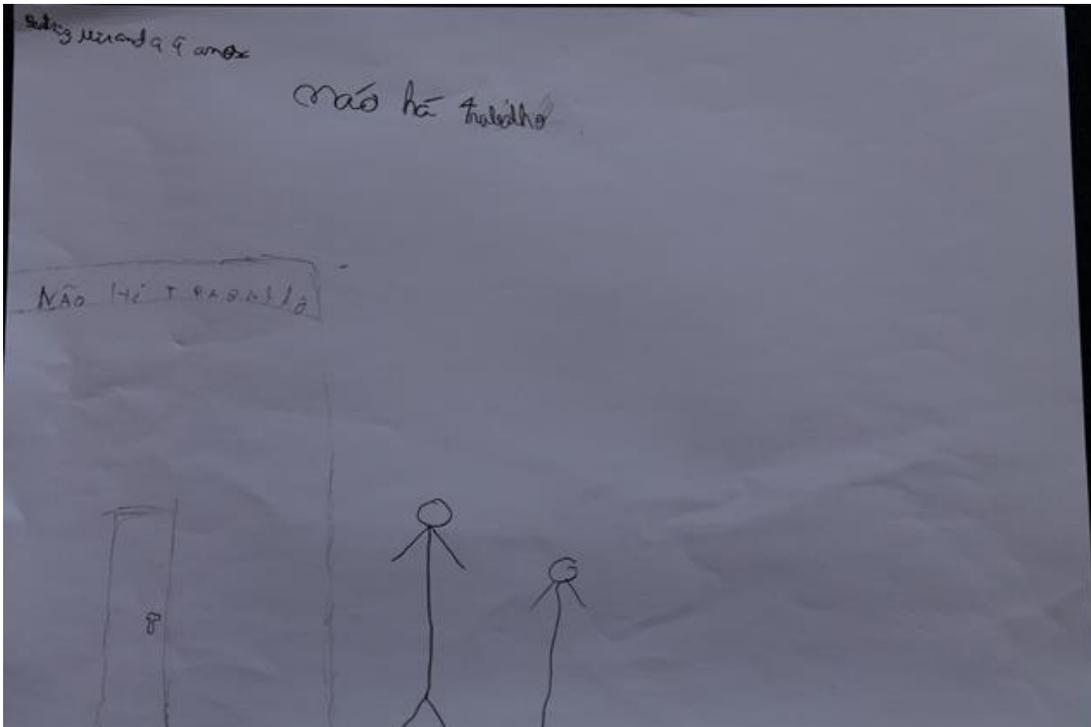




# Children's drawings on the crisis

On their graphic narratives, children represent these same elements:

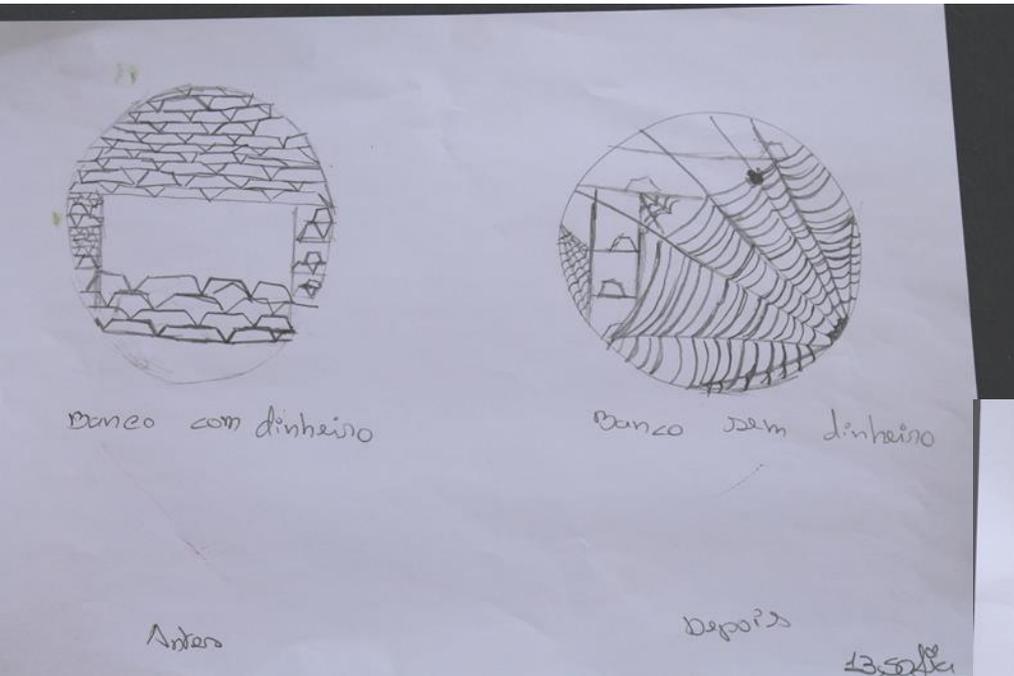
## 2. A reference to the family setting





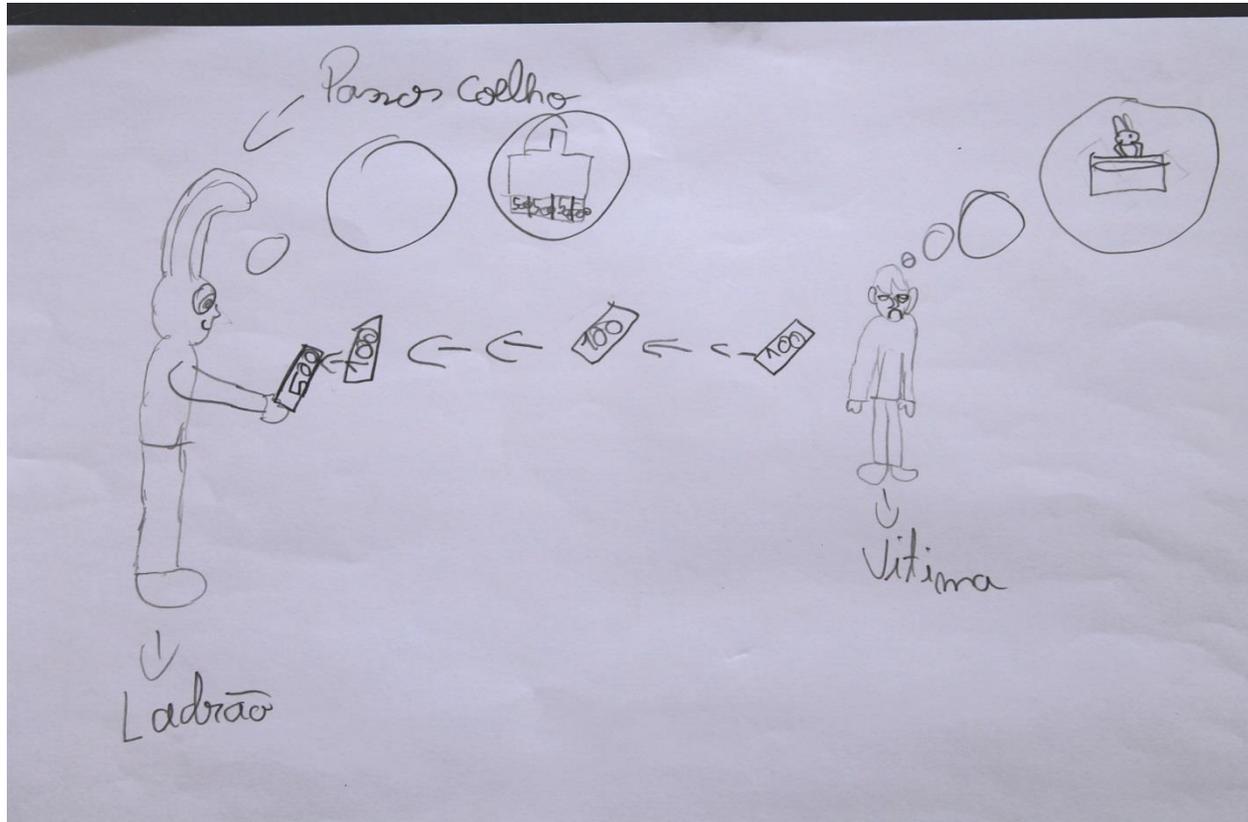
# Children's drawings on the crisis

## 3. Reference to poverty and the poor



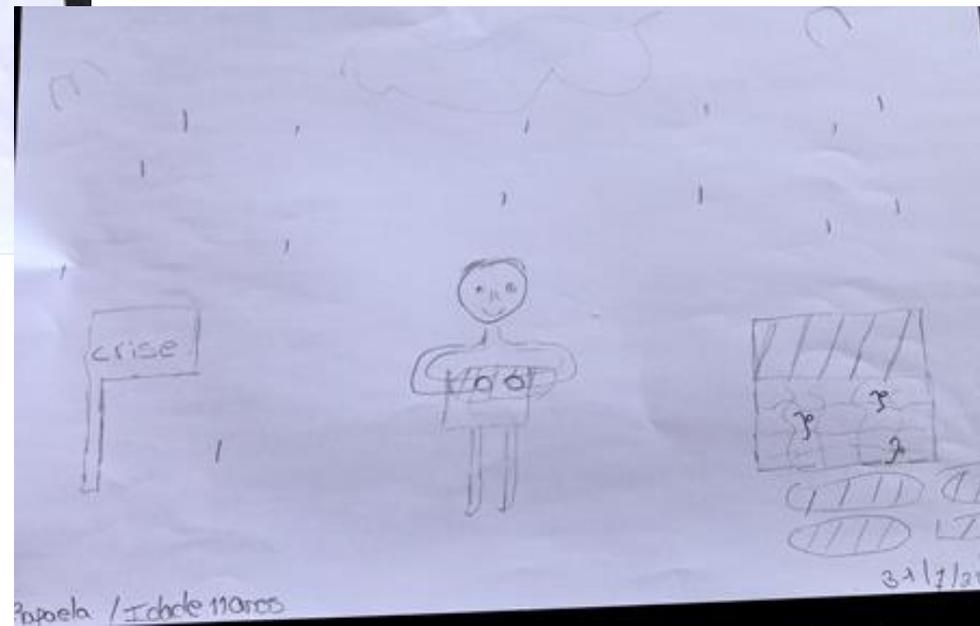


## 5. Politics: the prime-minister



# Children's drawings on the crisis

## 6. The solutions: the tree, the oven





# New aspects on children's graphic narratives

- 1. Humour and caricature** – imagination is used to transform reality, using humour as a powerful tool to create distances from reality and subvert power – the exemple of the rabbit
- 2. Metaphorisation of the real** – the use of elements that represent reality in a softer way – money and emptiness are represented as water or a spider web, that could imply the idea of void
- 3. Expressionism** – the use of feelings which are represented for instance in the empty house, the mutilated poor or the skinny body
- 4. Individualisation** – the human figure is represented in an individual way, where objective representations of the crisis are made: richness, poverty, disease, etc...



- The interpretation of these graphic narratives should also considerer the emergency context, the explicit senses, the elements and children's grammars and the access to different and constant information on structural analysis of the country crisis



# Final reflections

- Children transfigure reality through imagination, as this ability is not only human as it also represents a central element in children's cultures
- The child is confronted with the hardship of the crisis through interpretative processes where the imaginative transfiguration of reality is a key element in making sense of it and adjusting attitudes and behaviors
- these expressions of interpretation through imagination are particularly visible in children's drawings, turning them into indispensable methodological resources
- The crisis has obvious impacts on children as represented in oral discourses and graphic narratives



# Final reflections

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- The vision expressed by children using imagination as a resource to understand reality can be seen as a coping strategy as well as a way of amplifying their perceptions and collective representations towards the crisis
- Children's projection for the future – “the right to a future”
- Children's imagination, hence, is seen as functional and expressive facing social reality and children's experiences of it