



# **Proceedings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica**

**REINVENTING EDUCATION**

**2-5 June 2021**

**VOLUME I**

**Citizenship, Work and The Global Age**

**ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"**



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**Citizenship, Work and The Global Age**

**ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"**  
Via Francesco Satolli, 30 – 00165 - Rome, Italy

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***Title* Proceedings of the Second International Conference of the Journal “Scuola Democratica” – Reinventing Education VOLUME I Citizenship, Work and The Global Age**

This volume contains papers presented in the 2nd International Conference of the Journal “Scuola Democratica” which took place online on 2-5 June 2021. The Conference was devoted to the needs and prospects of Reinventing Education.

The challenges posed by the contemporary world have long required a rethinking of educational concepts, policies and practices. The question about education ‘for what’ as well as ‘how’ and ‘for whom’ has become unavoidable and yet it largely remained elusive due to a tenacious attachment to the ideas and routines of the past which are now far off the radical transformations required of educational systems. Scenarios, reflections and practices fostering the possibility of change towards the reinvention of the educational field as a driver of more general and global changes have been centerstage topics at the Conference. Multidisciplinary approach from experts from different disciplinary communities, including sociology, pedagogy, psychology, economics, architecture, political science has brought together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate constraints and opportunities for reinventing education.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and inter-disciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners’ mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 800 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on research, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

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## Citizenship, Work and The Global Age

### A Premise

What is education for? This philosophical question cannot be answered ignoring contributions from social and educational sciences. The growing focus on learning outcomes should have prompted discussion on the values and aims in defining policy objectives and developing accountability systems and evidence-based approaches. Whereas for years public discourse on education has most frequently been confined to a merely sector-based perspective, without addressing the relationship (i.e., interdependency and/or autonomy) with globalised societies or to face the new challenges of contemporary's world. The relationship between education and society and the issue of aims can be observed in a new context which has seen the weakening of the society-nation equation and the strengthening of global dimensions.

The crisis born of the pandemic is more and more global and multidimensional. It inevitably obliges to ask what the post-pandemic socio-economic scenarios could be and what challenges might emerge from the transformations of education and training systems and policies. Many researchers and observers think that the most relevant of these challenges is that of inequalities between and within countries. The medium-long term nature of many of these challenges poses a complex question: does the pandemic tend to widen or narrow the time-space horizons of people perceptions, rationalities, and decisions?

For decades, the field of education and training has witnessed continuous growth in globalization and internationalization: just think of the role of the large-scale assessment surveys and the increasing influence of international organisations. Phenomena and concepts such as policy mobility (lending and borrowing) or – within another field of research – policy learning, as well as global scaling up, global-local hybridization and policy assemblage might find a useful opportunity of debate and in-depth analysis in this stream. This might also be true of the related issue regarding how comparative research must be carried out and of the relationship between some government 'technologies' adopted in the latest cycle of policies – for example, quasi-market, evaluation, and autonomy of schools and universities – and the ever more criticized neo-liberal paradigm. In this framework, without any revival of the political or methodological nationalism, a critical rethinking of the national dimension, perhaps too hurriedly assumed to be 'obsolete', can be useful also for a comparative reflection. As to our continent we are in the presence not only of globalization of educational policies, but also of their Europeanisation, due to the extent of the European Commission's strategy and its Open Method of Coordination. Beyond the official distinction between formal, non-formal, and unformal learning, it seems European initiatives and programmes shape a new policy world preparing the future of education, particularly through different expert networks, new ways of conceptualizing knowledge, and disseminating standards. On these issues there is no lack of reflections and research, some of which very critical indeed, whose results deserve to be broadly shared and discussed, too.

The equipping of the new generations with the tools – knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values – to live in a plural and interconnected world is delicate matter indeed in Europe. It is the issue at stake for the encounters – and at times clashes – between old and new visions and

forms of pluralism and secularism. Around this theme are developed educational policies and strongly heterogeneous curricula. Such topic is linked also to the variability in young people's competences and attitudes towards 'cultural otherness'.

Life-long learning is another question of notable importance at international level as it implies both a diverse temporal horizon for education and its link to the dimensions of work. And a different approach to the relationship between school and extra-scholastic (life-wide) learning is also implied. From this stems the necessity of greater investment for example in both the early years (ECEC) and the adult education. We might ask, however, how much has been done to achieve this goal, and whether it risks remaining a fascinating but largely unfinished project for a long time.

Within a general rethinking of the aims and the means at the disposal of education systems, many papers ask whether until now enough has been done to educate towards citizenship and democracy and whether various national educational systems have adopted this issue as their core mission.

A second group of questions derives from some crucial challenges – such as the dramatic deterioration of the biosphere, the climate, and the health – which impose both the necessity of rethinking this mission in a planetary context and redefining the 'citizenship' as a concept not merely national, but multi-level, that is ranging from global to local; and in our continent European, too. How deeply are our nations presently involved in the task of educating their citizens in terms of knowledge of global and trans-national issues? And are they striving to build a collective common consciousness in Europe? What help is being given in this sense by proposals elaborated and experiences promoted by international organizations or the EU?

Finally, starting from infant and primary schools, what weight does citizenship education have in schools, what approaches are adopted and what have shown to be the most effective? What didactics are applied and what seem to be the most promising experiences? To what extent are teachers prepared and motivated and students interested in it? Universities and adult education should also play a role in citizenship education. What proposals and significant experiences can be described and examined?

The Volume also includes contributions on the relationship between education and economic systems which is a classic subject of social science. During the twentieth century, the functionalist perspective established a close link between 'school for the masses' and the construction of individuals personalities conforming to values and social objectives. Professions have then become more and more specialized and therefore requiring ever more targeted skills. Hence, the insistence on the need to train future workers in technical and technological skills, as well as more recently in the 'soft skills' climate, increasingly necessary in certain sectors of the economy (Industry 4.0). The alliance between the functionalist perspective and the neoliberal visions finds its conceptual and practical pivot in the employability conceptual frame. On the other hand, since the 1970s, critical research has highlighted that formal education system contributes to the reproduction of inequalities, confirming and strengthening hierarchies and power relations between different actors of the economic system. These lines of investigation have underlined the weight of cultural and social capital in determining school performance, but also the inflation of educational credentials as a combined effect of mass schooling and changes in the economic system. In more recent times, the fragmentation of the educational and training systems, because of the

multiplication of public and private agencies in charge of training citizens, in addition to the explosion of the non-formal and informal as learning places (e.g., on the Internet), challenges the school to maintain its primacy as a place responsible for training workers. Moreover, it questions its ability to continue to represent a social elevator and / or a place of social justice.

The issue of the reproduction of inequalities and differential returns of educational qualifications fuels lively and stimulating interdisciplinary debates: economic stagnation, mass unemployment and job instability affect the inclusion of young generations in the labour market. Recently, in the context of lifelong learning policies, the relationship between training and work has become increasingly central, but the definition of the goals of these policies is not neutral: in the neoliberal mantra it is a question of guaranteeing the adaptability, employability and autonomy of each individual, so that one can occupy a place in society according to the dominant values. There is no shortage of critical voices about this individualistic and functionalist interpretation of the Lifelong Learning vision. On the other hand, even the supporters of neoliberal-inspired policies want an inclusive training offer (from a meritocratic perspective), as it is essential for recruiting resources and supporting flexible production systems focused on knowledge.

The attention of scholars focuses on the effects of the 'knowledge society' in the educational system of European countries. In this perspective, several studies have focused attention on the orientation processes that contribute to the reproduction of inequalities as the students from the lower classes tend to orient themselves, and are oriented by their teachers, towards the vocational paths, stigmatized within the educational systems.

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# **Linguistic Pluralism and Minorities in a New Global Perspective. Education and Linguistic Policies**

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## Maintenance and Use of Heritage Languages and Italian *lingua filiale* by Second Generation Students with Migration Background

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**ABSTRACT:** *Impact FVG 2018-20 is a research project which involved more than 1,000 students with migration background attending primary and middle schools in Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, north-eastern Italy. During the field phase, in school year 2018-19, a sociolinguistic questionnaire was distributed between the students with at least one foreign parent attending G4 to G8, in order to collect data about language repertoires, uses in the family and with friends, maintenance or loss of the Heritage Languages, perceptions about Italy and plurilingualism. As already appeared in previous and similar studies in different environments, the results show a regression in the competence and uses of the language of origins to favour a parallel extension of the domains of Italian, a code that for these second-generation pupils cannot be considered a second language anymore. The reasons behind this shift might be different, and some between these factors are presented in these pages with the support of recent data. Notwithstanding the situation, the research subject affirms to share positive perceptions about the importance and usefulness of all the resources available to them, in their plurilingual repertoires. They also seem to be willing to study and improve their abilities in the languages inherited by their migrant parents.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Migration, Primary School, Heritage Languages, Shift, Influential Factors*

### Introduction

According to statistical data presented by ISMU foundation, in 2020 the foreign population of Italy stabilized around 6,190,000 units (Blangiardo, Ortensi, 2021, 73). Ministry of Instruction reports for the same year that 10,0% of the students in the national educational system have a migration background, which means that they are either born abroad or in a family where at least one parent is not an Italian native (Santagati, 2021,143-4). During the second semester of school year 2018-19 (s.y. from now on). the *Impact FVG 2018-20* project, under the direction of Professor Fabiana Fusco of University of Udine, studied this growing presence in primary and middle schools in Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, in the north-eastern corner of the country.

With a foreign population unevenly distributed on its territory, Friuli Venezia Giulia in s.y. 2018-19 ranks 8<sup>th</sup> between the other Italian Regions for the number of students with non-Italian citizenship (or Cni) (MIUR, 2020, 15). Significant differences, however, exist both between different school cycles and at a territorial level: the highest percentages are reached in preschools and primary schools (14.1% and 14.2% respectively). and in the Provinces of Pordenone and Gorizia (14.3% and 12.8%) (MIUR, 2019). Different factors have an influence on these percentages: on the one side students with a migration background seem still to make different choices for their future, therefore their number is lower at the higher levels of the educational system, on the other their presence on the territory follows the pattern of the settlement of the immigrant families in the area, and is therefore related to socio-economic factors like job availability, cost of living, access to affordable housing (Attanasio, 2020).

In this multifaceted environment, *Impact 2018-20* focuses on the linguistic aspects of the new plurilingualism of Italian schools. During s.y. 2018-19 two research fellows, Federico Salvaggio and the author of this contribution, visited 11 Comprehensive Institutes and 1 CPIA (Centre for Adult Education) in Friuli Venezia Giulia, for a total of 31 primary and 16 middle schools, located in different areas of the Region: part in the main cities, like Trieste, Udine or Pordenone, part in smaller towns and villages, from the northern mountains of Carnia to the coasts of the Adriatic Sea. The project objectives are to analyse the peculiarities and forms of the new plurilingualism in Italian schools, in order to achieve a better understanding of the perceptions, the choices and the future objectives of this growing component of the students' population<sup>1</sup>.

The specific aspects of bilingual and plurilingual behaviors which are dealt with in these pages have already been extensively discussed by Chini (2018). which focuses on the language repertoires and uses of students with a migration background in the Province of Pavia (Lombardy). After two surveys at a ten years distance, in 2002 and 2012, the research group directed by professor Chini registers a significant reduction in the use of the languages of origins in different domains, mainly in the family and with friends (Chini, 2004; Chini, Andorno, 2018). Chini (2018, 154-7) identifies a number of factors which might specifically favor this shift from the Heritage Languages to Italian: between them gender, parents' country of origins, generation, and place of residence. Evidence from the data collected by *Impact FVG 2018-20* is here presented, in order to find out whether these recent research results support these observations.

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<sup>1</sup> More details about *Impact FVG 2018-20* and about its results can be found in the first project monography (Fusco, 2021a) as well as on the project webpage, which is hosted by the Friuli Venezia Giulia official servers:  
<https://www.regione.fvg.it/rafvfg/cms/RAFVFG/cultura-sport/immigrazione/FOGLIA8/>



## 1. The Research and the Subjects

During the field phase, the researchers visited the schools and collected quantitative and qualitative data from the students, the main subjects of the study, but also from teachers, parents, school administration and direction. The sociolinguistic questionnaire used for the survey is an adaptation of the one designed by Chini for her 2002 research in the Province of Pavia (Chini, 2004). The same tool was used again, ten years later, by the group coordinated by Chini and Andorno (2018), extending the scope to the urban area of Turin, Piedmont. More recent and closer to Friuli Venezia Giulia applications are the 2008 to 2013 study on adult immigrants attending second language courses in former CTPs (now CPIAs) in the Province of Udine, directed by Fusco (2017), as well as the 2017 survey in primary, middle and high schools of Udine, still under the supervision of Fusco (2021b). Lastly, another project worth mentioning in this context, as it is similar in the use of an adaptation of the same questionnaire, is the s.y. 2018-19 research coordinated by Professor Chiara Gianollo in a number of primary schools of the city of Bologna, Emilia Romagna (Gianollo, Fiorentini, 2020).

The sociolinguistic questionnaire used by *Impact FVG 2018-20*, 67 questions long and divided into 8 sections, allowed to collect information about the subjects, their repertoires both in Italy and in the country of origins, language uses in various domains and with different interlocutors, proficiency, use of the Heritage Languages to study and at school, perceptions about Italy, about the country of origins, and about plurilingualism, perspectives and projects for the future (for more information see Fusco, 2021a; Baldo, 2021; Baldo and Salvaggio, in print). Since the beginning of the field phase in February and until its end in June 2019, 1,081 sociolinguistic questionnaires were collected: 280 in G4 and 231 in G5 of primary schools; 179 in G6, 191 in G7 and 200 in G8 of middle schools.

Most of the students who participated to the survey (817, equal to 67.7% of the total) declared they were born in Italy by foreign parents, therefore belonging to what is usually defined as second generation. This feeling of belonging and their perceptions about nationality revealed however to be somehow undefined, as the subjects choose to respond differently to two related questions of the questionnaire: the first asked the place of birth, while the second was more focused on the idea of 'where are you from?', 'where do you belong?'. According to the latter perspective, only 277 (26.0%) of these students born and raised in Italy affirmed to feel exclusively Italian, and some preferred to define themselves as Italo-Chinese, Italo-Rumanian, Italo-Moroccan or with another double attribution, showing that the self-perceptions about identity are somehow unclear yet (Fusco, 2021a; Baldo, 2021).

Referring to their parents' nationality, a third point of view adopted by Chini (2004). Chini and Andorno (2018) and Fusco (2021b) as well, the first five and most represented countries of origin are: Albanian (15.1%). Rumanian (14.6%). Moroccan (6.6%). Chinese (6.0%). and Serbian (5.6%). The shows to be representative both of the main migration flows that interested Italy in the last decades, and of the specific distribution of communities at a local level, in Friuli Venezia Giulia (IDOS; 2020; Attanasio, 2020). In line with this introduction, the most frequently used languages in the family are Italian, which is present in 781 of the 1,081 families reached by the researchers (72.2%). and a conspicuous number of immigrant languages or dialects (Vedovelli, Barni, 2014): Albanian (15.4%). Rumanian (14.8%). English (14.4%). Serbian (8.4%). and different varieties of Arabic (7.4%). only to quote the first. In all, 80 languages and 113 dialects are reported by the subject, this way exposing the extreme richness and diversity of the linguistic resources brought to the Italian schools by these emergent bilinguals with a migration background.

## 2. The Heritage Language and Italian

A group of questions of the questionnaire asks to the subjects to self-evaluate their proficiency in four linguistic skills – understanding, speaking, reading and listening – both in Italian and in the language of origins learnt from their parents. Students are asked to reflect upon the ways they use the linguistic resources in their repertoires and to assign themselves a mark, ranging from 1 to 10, where 1 represents the lower end of the scale and 10 a complete self-reliance on one's own proficiency. Data was subsequently recalculated defining as basic language users the subjects who self-assigned a mark between 1 and 4, intermediate those who declared abilities between 5 and 7, and as proficient only the pupils which affirmed a competence of 8 or more out of 10.

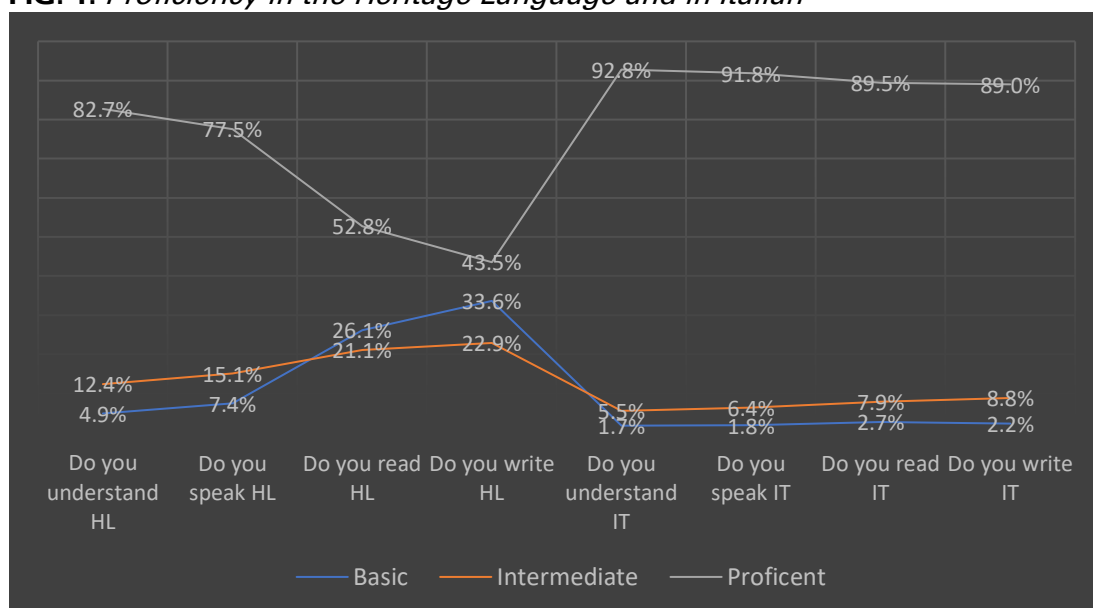
Italian, the code shared by the vast majority of the subjects, widely spread and spoken in 72.2% of their families, in the conceptual framework of this contribution appears to be closer to a *lingua filiale* than to a second language (L2): «con il tempo sarà il figlio, sempre più competente in L2 e orientato verso il bilinguismo, a esercitare un'influenza linguistica sull'ambiente familiare» (Favaro, 2020, 296)<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, the codes mostly learnt in spontaneous daily interactions with the parents, with other members of the family or people else way connected with the country of origins, can be intended as Heritage Languages, therefore minority and immigrant languages

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<sup>2</sup> In time it will be the sons and daughters, every day more skilled in Italian second language and more oriented towards bilingualism, to influence at a linguistic level the family domain (my translation).

learned at home, but not fully developed because of the insufficient input from the environment (Montrul, 2008, 216-33).

**FIG. 1.** *Proficiency in the Heritage Language and in Italian*



Source: *Impact FVG 2018-20*

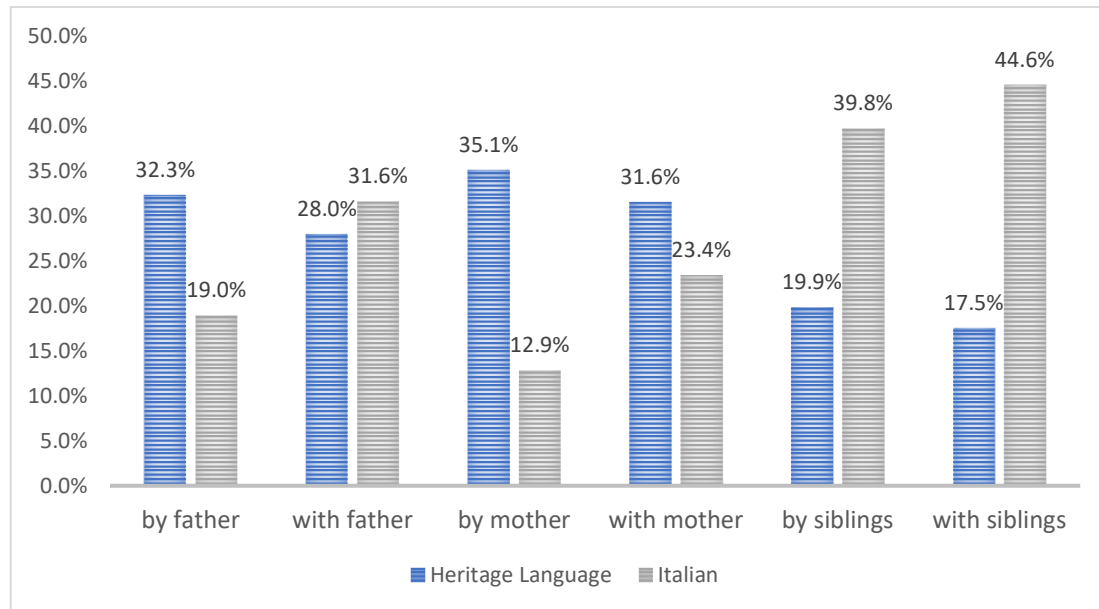
The evidence collected by *Impact FVG 2018-20* seem actually to enforce this point of observation, as:

- the highest levels of proficiency in the Heritage Language are achieved in spoken skills, while written abilities rank considerably lower;
- the competence in Heritage Language abilities is usually lower than in the corresponding skills in Italian (with a 10,1 percentage points gap in receptive oral comprehension, 14,3 in productive oral interaction, 36,7 in reading and a broad 45,5 in writing);
- the overall percentage of students with an insufficient perception of their communicative skill, the basic users, is considerably higher in the Heritage Language than it is in Italian.

In synthesis, the Heritage Language maintenance seems to be endangered, while a gradual process of erosion and shift towards Italian clearly appears, as already evidenced in a different environment by Chini (2018) and Chini, Andorno and Sordella (2018, 269-74). Italian is already the language these students seem to master at a higher level, a *lingua filiale* which they use, speak and write, better than their parents. Other sections in the questionnaire confirm that the subjects are used to helping out their parents, especially their mothers, with Italian and especially in dealing with the written forms of the language (Fusco, 2021a). A different group of questions was structured and used to study the language uses of the subject with different interlocutors and in various domains. The students were asked to list all the languages which they usually choose to speak to or which they are spoken by the other members of their families, friends from different countries of

origins, classmates and teachers, other adults in Italy or in the country of origins. With some approximation, it was this way possible to make a hypothesis on the strategies adopted by the speakers when they access to the rich resources in their repertoires.

**FIG. 2.** *Exclusive use of the Heritage Language and Italian by or with family members*



Source: *Impact FVG 2018-20*

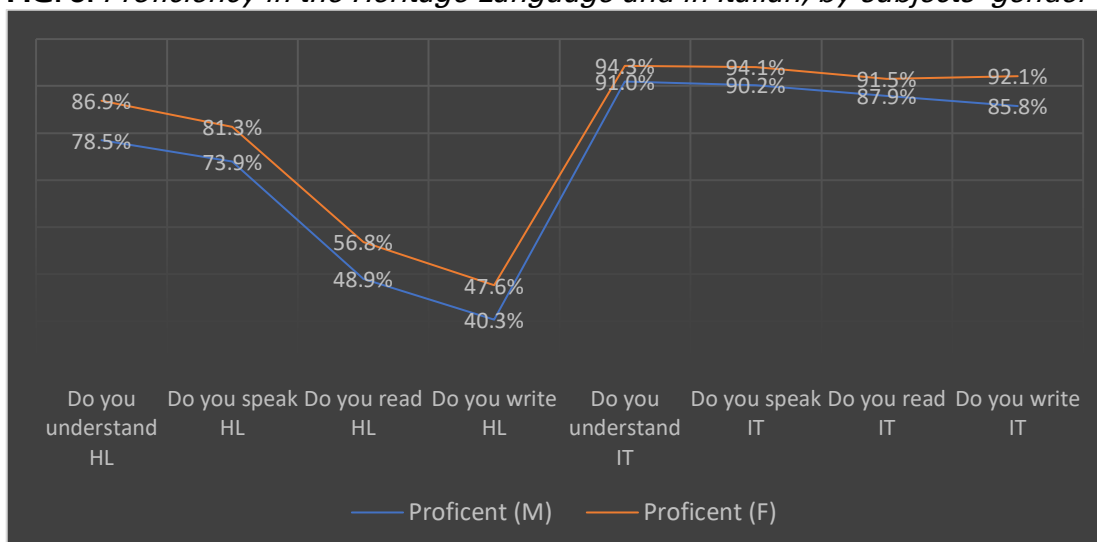
Following a trend already registered in chronological order by Chini (2004), Chini and Andorno (2018) and Fusco (2021b), the language uses in the family domain show in the new generations a progressive process of shift from the Heritage Language to Italian. The code connected to the origins appears to be a resource mostly registered in receptive uses, while the majority language of the country of residence seems to be preferred in the opposite direction of the interactions, in the productive uses (which might be seen as natural, as Italian is also the code these emergent bilingual speakers are more proficient with).

When talking with their parents, which represent the first generation of immigrants, the informants generally seem to get more opportunities to resort to the Heritage Languages (probably also because sometimes fathers, and more often mothers, do not dispose of a sufficient proficiency in Italian, see Fusco 2021a for more details about this aspect). On the other hand, with brothers or sisters, which may be considered as representatives of the new generations, an evident shift appears and the trend in the interactions is to prefer Italian over the Heritage Language. A very similar pattern is registered in the interaction with friends from the same country, where the gap between the use of the Heritage Language and Italian is even broader (from a gap of 19.9 percentage points in receptive uses in the family to a 28.0 one outside the family, and from a 27.1 to a 31.2 one in productive uses in the same domains).

### 3. Factors which influence the language shift

According to Chini (2018, 154-7) and Chini, Andorno and Sordella (2018, 274-8) there is a number of factors which are acknowledged to have an influence on the maintenance of the Heritage Languages by emergent bilingual speakers with a migration background. In a gender perspective, girls seem to be more likely to achieve higher levels of proficiency in the Heritage Languages than the boys, as it has already been exposed by earlier research (Chini, 2004, 318). The composition of the parental structure seems to have an influence as well, as the parents' ethnicity is related to their level of competence both in Italian and in the language of the country of origins. The generation of arrival, or the birth in Italy, can represent a decisive factor as students who directly experienced migration were exposed for a longer time to the language of origins and can actually consider Italian as an L2, while those who were born in Italy may have known the Heritage Language only through their parents' voices (for a more detailed framework about generation of migration see Rumbaut, 1997 and 2004, as well as Versino, 2018, 64-8). Two other influent factors are the country of origins of the migrant family, as some communities seem to be keener at maintaining alive their languages, cultural traditions and connection with the past, and the place of residence. According to Meluzzi, Chini, and Versino (2018, 227-37) the degree of urbanism of the place of residence showed to influence the data collected in north-western Italy, as living in big and more densely inhabited areas like the cities of Pavia (Lombardy). and Turin (Piedmont) seemed to favour the use and maintenance of the language of origins, while living in less populated centers seemed to promote the shift to Italian.

**FIG. 3.** Proficiency in the Heritage Language and in Italian, by subjects' gender

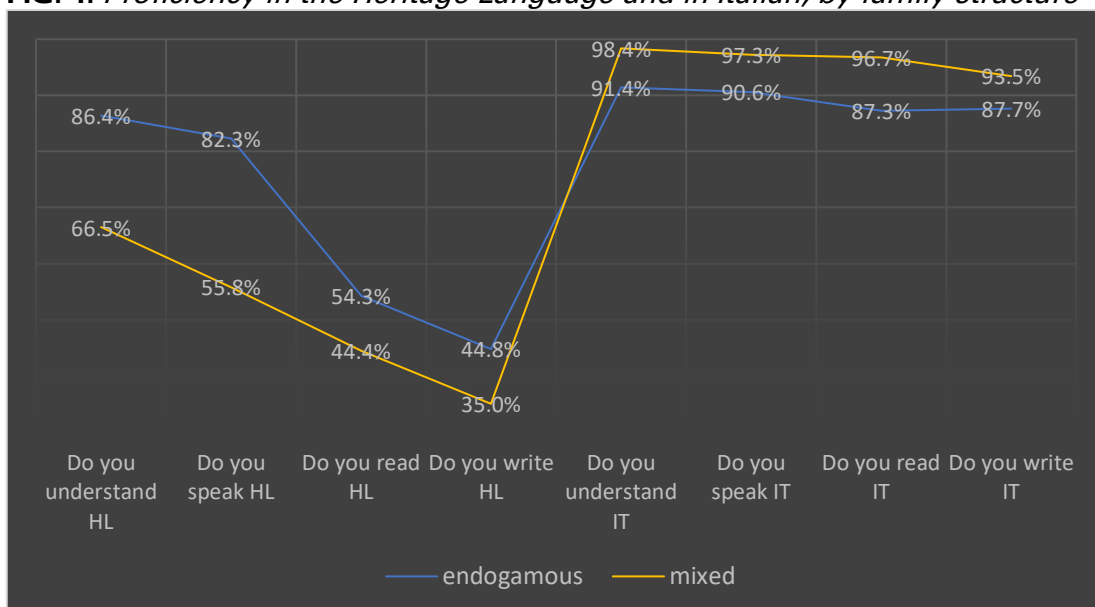


Source: *Impact FVG 2018-20*

The information collected by *Impact FVG 2018-20* in Friuli Venezia Giulia seem to be generically aligned and bring more evidence to support these observations. For what concerns gender, the sample group appears to be well balanced and it is composed by 49.1% of girls and 50.9% of boys. A strong correlation between a specific gender and a corresponding language seems not to be evident, but in practically all the situations and in all the language abilities girls more than boys affirm to dispose of a high level of proficiency (i.e., scoring a self-assigned mark of 8 to 10). This seems to be true both in the code connected with the country of origins, and in Italian.

Between the pupils with a migration background who participated to the Friulian survey, 794 belong to a family where both parents are foreigners and come from the same country of origins (endogamous couples). while 189 live in a family where only one parent is Italian and the second one has a different ethnicity (mixed marriages). This exerts an influence on the linguistic repertoire of the family and, subsequently, on the language uses of the subject. The evidence collected seems to support this perspective, as informants who live in endogamous families are considerably more often proficient in the Heritage Language (with a wider gap in oral abilities), while in Italian an opposite trend prevails (with a small yet stable gap around 7.2 percentage points in mean).

**FIG. 4.** *Proficiency in the Heritage Language and in Italian, by family structure*



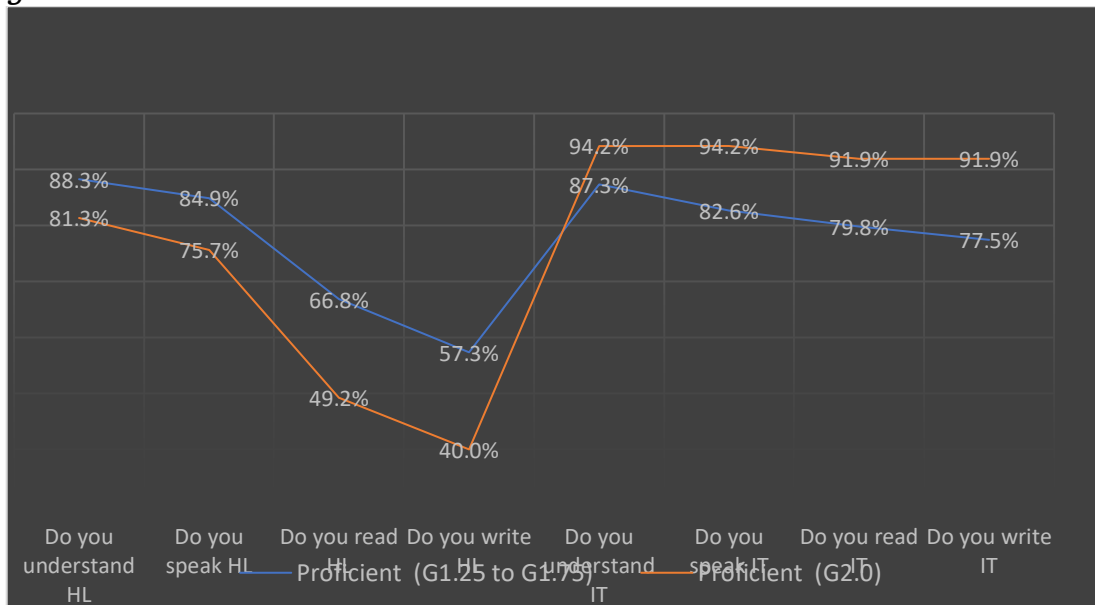
Source: *Impact FVG 2018-20*

As most of the subjects who participated to the survey in Friuli Venezia Giulia were born in Italy, it was neither possible nor representative comparing them with the other three generation groups described by Rumbaut (1997, 2004). The 851 second generation students with migration background (G2.0) were therefore generically considered side to side with those not born in Italy. In these latter mixed group, 82

subjects migrated to Italy before they were 6 (or generation G1.75). 116 arrived between 6 and 12 years of age (G1.50). and only 17 reached Italy when they were 13 or older, as a consequence sharing a considerably higher experience of life in the country of origins (G1.25). Evidence shows that the first group, as it is natural to expect, includes a significantly higher percentage of proficient Heritage Language users (again, especially in the oral abilities). while between the second generation subjects more informants feel to be better in Italian.

The 794 endogamous families count up to 83 different country of origins, where the most represented group is the Albanian, with 146 families, but many ethnicities which are referred by no more than one or two subjects are present too (Kazakhstan, Burkina Faso, Sudan, and Hungary to name some). Consequently, when searching for possible correlations between the parents' country of origins and the proficiency level achieved in the Heritage Languages or in Italian, it was decided to consider only the groups composed by at least 50 units. Data shows a high degree of variability and different patterns, but it is hard to say which correlations are really significant. The members of some communities (namely the Serbian, followed by the Chinese, and by the Romanian) seem to express a higher degree of proficiency in the Heritage Language, and they declare a lower gap between oral and written skills.

**FIG. 5.** *Proficiency in the Heritage Language and in Italian, by subjects' generation*



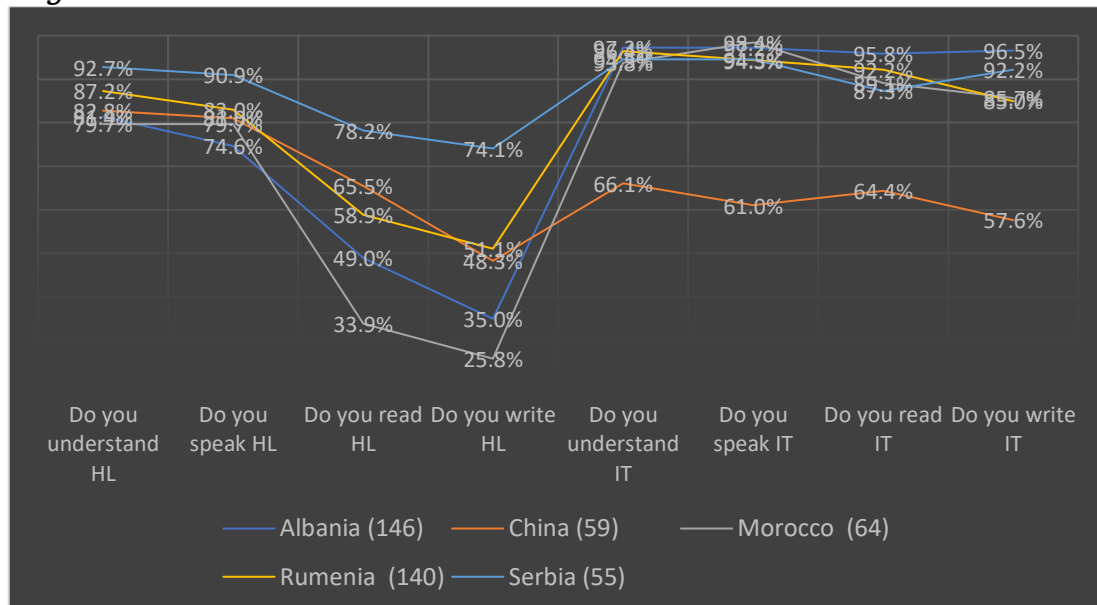
Source: *Impact FVG 2018-20*

The subjects representative of one nationality in all, the Chinese, seem to meet higher obstacles both in the code connected with their origins and with Italian. As a matter of facts, the 59 Chinese students with a migration background are also the only ones who more rarely affirm to dispose of a high proficiency in Italian, with an evident gap with the

other nationalities. In conclusion, significant differences seem to correlate the country of origins of subjects' families to the levels of proficiency achieved in the Heritage Language and in Italian, but more specific studies and with broader samples for each nationality might be needed in order to determine actual trends and peculiarities.

Roughly half of the sociolinguistic questionnaires collected by the researchers of *Impact FVG 2018-20* were distributed to pupils living in the main and more densely populated urban areas of the Region, like Udine, Pordenone, or the capital city of Trieste (502 subjects in all), while the other half came from smaller towns or even villages with less than 10,000 inhabitants in the mountains or in the countryside (467). The sample shows therefore to be well balanced and data analyses here seems to confirm the observations about language shift and degree of urbanism already presented in Meluzzi and colleagues (2018). Students living in smaller towns of Friuli Venezia Giulia declare considerably less often a high degree of proficiency in the language connected to the migratory past, while the situation about Italian appears to be almost unmodified by the place of residence. It is therefore possible to make the hypothesis that in bigger cities more opportunities to meet other members of one's own community arise, this way offering more chances to practice the Heritage Language than it happens in smaller towns.

**FIG. 6.** *Proficiency in the Heritage Language and in Italian, by country of origins*



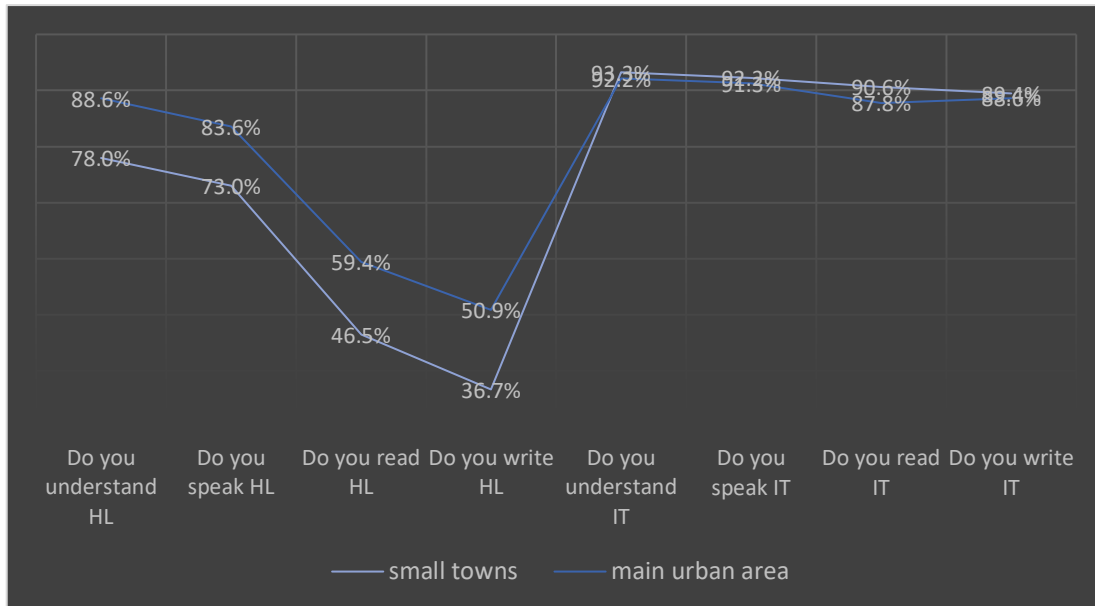
Source: *Impact FVG 2018-20*

In addition, in the cities it is easier to count on the support of the whole ethnic community, which might offer teachers or courses to those who want to study and improve their linguistic skills. Some of the questions of the research tool deal with this perspective as they ask to the informant whether or not they are studying the Heritage Language at



the moment, and if they would be willing to do it if given the opportunity.

**FIG. 7.** Proficiency in the Heritage Language and in Italian, by place of residence



Source: *Impact FVG 2018-20*

A relative high percentage of 38.0% of the emergent bilinguals affirmed they were studying their parents' language at the moment they were reached by the researchers. However, only 28.8% of them stated they were attending a school, while others more often declared to rely on the support from the community: a church or the mosque (18.6%), specialized teachers (9.0% for Arabic, 5.1% for Chinese), relatives (3.4%), or other and different sources. Nevertheless, most of the pupils expressed enthusiasm about the opportunity of keeping alive and strengthening this bond with their often-distant origins, as 57.7% of them declared to be willing to study the languages inherited by their parents and only 14.0% affirmed not to be interested in this possibility at all.

## Conclusion

As a conclusion, the evidence collected in Friuli Venezia Giulia Region during the second semester of s.y. 2018-19 by *Impact FVG 2018-20* aligns to the premises found in literature (Chini, 2018, 154-7; Chini *et al.*, 2018, 274-8). Data shows a process of language erosion which in time might lead to the loss of the Heritage Languages by second and subsequent generations of students with a migration background, and a shift to Italian in domains like the family, which in the past were mainly characterized by the use of the code connected to the country of origins. The process, already observed and studied in depth in other

environments (Cummins, 2001; Montrul, 2008). shows to be influenced by a number of significant factors. In a gender perspective, girls seem to share a higher perception of their own language skills, both in the Heritage Language and in Italian. As it is natural to expect, the composition of the parental couple can also offer significantly more opportunities to practice and use one or the other code, depending on the ethnicity of the parents and on their country of origins. Under this point of view, however, nationalities seem to show different patterns both in the motivation to maintaining the language connected to the home country, and in the acquisition of Italian, but more specifically aimed studies are needed in this direction, and with a broader sample. Generation of birth or arrival to Italy is another relevant factor, which seems to favor the use of Italian between pupils born in Italy from foreign parents, which at the moment are the vast majority of the sample met in the Friulian schools. Lastly, urbanism and the place of residence also confirmed their relevance in offering better opportunities of maintaining the Heritage Language to subjects living in more densely populated cities or, on the opposite, of practicing Italian to pupils resident of smaller towns and villages in the countryside and mountains.

In this environment, the perceptions and attitudes of these potentially emergent bilingual students towards plurilingualism are usually still positive. When directly asked in the questionnaire to associate a number of adjectives expressing feelings and attributes to the idea of speaking and being able to resort to different languages, most of the subjects defined it as useful (77.6%) and funny (55.0%). while only a minority considered it a possible source of problems (8.2%). Meanwhile, the Italian educational system seems to be struggling to keep the pace with the quick emergence of this new plurilingualism, with the risk of missing the opportunity offered by these emergent bilingual students, whose competences in languages might prove to be useful both to them and to their Italian classmates.

There are, however, both recent recommendations by the Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR, 2014). and a number of successful experiences which proved to be useful in similar contexts (Cummins, Early, 2011; Favaro, 2013; Prasad, 2014; Sordella, Andorno, 2017; and Cognigni, 2020 for a synthesis). If on the one hand Italian teachers seem to lack the resources and sometimes the theoretical formation to implement these strategies, yet on the other one elsewhere a number of highly motivated, skilled and self-trained teachers are already introducing these measures, in order both to support the maintenance of the Heritage Languages, and to protect the linguistic rights of their pupils with a migration background.

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# Newly Arrived Adult Migrants. Educational Challenges for Inclusion Policies

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**ABSTRACT:** *The migratory process has been significantly affecting Italy for more than 30 years, but still the policies coping with of the phenomenon appear problematic, not to say inconsistent. The normative regulations still result in a political debate stubbornly encrusted on the 'accepting versus rejecting' dilemma, as if such a pervasive macro sociological process might be managed simply relying on an 'on/off' entry mechanism. A presence so massive and so relevant deserves a different reflection and appropriate policies capable to actively value migrant's contribution to a pluralistic society. The lack of policies oriented for example to the enhancement of the native languages of migrants in conjunction with the learning of the Italian language has meant that integration has been declined, at best, in a very minimal and scattered inclusion, downplaying the educational resources of those who enter Italy with specific human capital coupled with specific training needs in relation to welfare services. I here intend to present and discuss preliminary outcomes from a local research on the living conditions of third countries adult nationals hosted at reception facilities in the province of Viterbo and surveyed by local authorities via a questionnaire. The questionnaire is part of the more complex research programme covering both the census of local social services, NGO and associations working in close touch with the migrant population and the mapping of native young people attitudes towards migrants. The hypothesis that has guided the research concerns the suspicion that foreigners constitute a human capital not fully recognized and appreciated especially in the primal steps after their arrival.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Migrants, Social inclusion, Minority language, Education*

## Introduction

It is well known that the migration process has also been affecting our country significantly for more than 30 years now, to the extent that it can be said that these flows have now assumed a structural and irreversible character at national and world level (the World Migration Report 2020, the International Organization for Migration estimates that in 2019 the number of international migrants has grown to around 272 million, or 3.5% of the world population). Despite this, so far the social policies aimed at managing the phenomenon in Italy have appeared to

have few incidents, not to mention inconsistent. Maurizio Ambrosini writes in this regard in the premise of his recent work: «The migratory phenomena are much discussed, but not as well known. They are on everyone's lips, but very few would be able to remember its consistency and trends. They occupy a very high rank in the political agenda, or more precisely in communication and political propaganda, but the solutions proposed are mostly reduced to catchy slogans and phrases» (Ambrosini, 2020, V).

Such a massive and incident presence, on the other hand, deserves a different reflection and adequate policies that are able to enhance its contribution in an active way.

From this perspective, the research of which the first results are presented here was born, conducted in the territory of Viterbo, as part of an action-research project, financed by the Asylum, Immigration, Integration Fund (FAMI). with the aim of promoting an integrated management of migratory flows, supporting all aspects of the phenomenon: asylum, integration and repatriation. The aim of the initiative, on the other hand, is to provide knowledge and intervention tools, with respect to the characteristics of the immigration phenomenon to the operators of the municipalities engaged in territorial social services.

The research concerns the existential conditions of non-EU foreigners in the area of Viterbo, detected through the administration of a questionnaire in the reception or reference structures of migrants. The survey with questionnaire is only part of the more complex research program that also concerns the census of social services activated in the area for the immigrant population and an analysis of the attitude of young people towards the phenomenon.

The hypothesis that guided the research concerns the suspicion that foreigners constitute human capital that is not fully valued and appreciated, so that, the country is in a position to 'waste and not fully exploit' the precious human resources which, if adequately addressed, could make a more significant contribution than they are currently able to do, to the economic and cultural enrichment of our country; with the added advantage that, in the face of a tendency of young people trained in Italy to look abroad, with heavy losses of 'investment' in human capital, part of the lost investments could be recovered.

Here we will present only the first data relating to the survey conducted. In the sample there are only 615 people due to the impediments caused by the Pandemic, which did not allow us to conduct the survey even in the premises of the Prefecture of Viterbo, as scheduled. The research will continue in September with a survey on knowledge and attitudes towards the phenomenon of 13-17 years old attending schools in the area, as well as with the survey of active social services for immigrants in the area.

## 1. Immigrants in the Viterbo area

We can begin by saying that the data on the presence of foreigners residing in the Viterbo area is close to the national value (8.7%, equal to just over 5 million people). In fact, in the area of Viterbo as of January 1, 2019, there were 30,552 foreigners and they represent 9.8% of the resident population.

The largest foreign community is from Romania with 44.2% of all foreigners present in the territory, followed by Albania (4.9%). Morocco (4.1%). Ukrainians (3.3 %) and Nigerians (2.8%). Also in this case, there is a similar situation with what happens at the national level, where the most present community is the Romanian one, followed by Albanians, Moroccans, Chinese and Ukrainians, although with different proportions. It can be noted that even in the Viterbo area, as in Italy, there has been a similar and progressive increase in attendance since the beginning of the new century. They were about 2.1% in 2001 (AA. VV. 2002). just as they were 2.8% in Italy (Caritas Italiana 2002).

This data refers us to the fact that, as mentioned, their presence is now a feature of our metropolises and our communities (Allievi, 2020; Ambrosini 2020). and this should push us to a different approach towards them, and this for various reasons, which we will try to illustrate below. Furthermore, this overlap may lead us to the hypothesis that, despite the diversity of needs and difficulties that immigrants encounter, depending on whether they are in a large metropolis or in a small town, certain initiatives could be transversal in the territory in light of the common characteristics of migrants. The sample is made up of 40% of women and 60% of men. About 30% is made up of young people and 41% of young adults.

**TAB. 1.** *Age of interviewers*

Age	Value	Percentage
Underage	11	1,9%
18-29 years old	173	29,3%
30-44 years old	243	41,1%
45-65 years old	159	26,9%
Over 65 years	5	0,8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>591</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

35% of the respondents are single and more than half, about 57%, are married.

**TAB. 2.** *Marital Status of interviewers*

Marital Status	Value	Percentage
Single	210	35,0%
Married or cohabiting	341	56,8%
Separated o Divorced	33	5,5%
Widowers	16	2,7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

Thus, from the first results of the survey (615 questionnaires) it emerges that from the training point of view, one third of foreigners have an average level of educational qualification from upper secondary school upwards, another third an intermediate level of educational qualification. A fair division emerges with regard to educational qualifications in the sample.

**TAB. 3.** *Educational qualification of interviewers*

<b>Educational qualification</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Illiterate	7	1,2%
I can read and write but I have no qualifications	81	13,5%
Primary School	84	14,0%
Secondary school (Scuola secondaria di primo grado)	176	29,2%
Professional qualification	54	9,0%
Secondary School (Scuola secondaria di secondo grado)	129	21,4%
First or Undergraduate Degree	44	7,3%
Postgraduate or Master Degree	27	4,5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>602</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

The main problem derives from the difficulties of recognition and equivalence of qualifications: more than 60% of respondents state that the qualification obtained is not recognized in Italy.

**TAB. 4.** *Where the interviewers obtain their educational qualification*

<b>Where he obtained his educational qualification</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
In Italy	77	15,6
Abroad, but is recognized in Italy	112	22,6
Abroad, but is not recognized in Italy	306	61,8
<b>Total</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>100,0</b>

The competence in the knowledge of the Italian language is not high, but it is not so low either. About 31% have a basic level, 39% an intermediate level of knowledge and 20% advanced.

**TAB. 5.** *Level of linguistic competence of interviewers*

<b>Level of linguistic competence</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Breakthrough A1	128	21,3%
Waystage A2	120	20,0%
Threshold B1	113	18,8%
Vantage B2	122	20,3%
Effective Operational Proficiency C1	56	9,3%
Mastery C2	62	10,3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>601</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

What is important, however, is that the linguistic competence, in the light of their testimonies, was acquired for almost 63% of them, above all, in an informal way, talking every day with other people or by themselves.



**TAB. 6.** *How the interviewers learned Italian*

You learn Italian...	Value	Percentage
Talking to people every day	205	34,1%
A school for foreigners held by Italians	177	29,5%
By myself	176	29,3%
At school in Italy	28	4,7%
A school for foreigners run by my compatriots	7	1,2%
By Tv or internet	4	0,7%
Studied Italian in my country	4	0,7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>601</b>	<b>100,00%</b>

Also in this case, training is not certified. In fact, 85% declare that they do not have a certificate confirming the acquisition.

**TAB. 7.** *Interviewees who have obtained a linguistic certificate*

Have you obtained a language certificate?	Value	Percentage
No	486	84,5%
Do not remember	1	0,2%
Yes	88	15,3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>575</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

This does not directly affect employability, to the point that there are no significant differences based on linguistic competence in Italian. And let's look at the data, the lack of employment is spread equally across the different levels, except in the case of basic skill.

**TAB. 8.** *Does language competence help you find work?*

Level of linguistic competence	Are you working now?			Total
	No	Yes, I only have one job	Yes, I do more jobs	
Breakthrough A1	45,6%	2,2%	52,2%	100,0%
Waystage A2	31,5%	12,4%	56,2%	100,0%
Threshold B1	31,3%	8,1%	60,6%	100,0%
Vantage B2	28,6%	6,7%	64,8%	100,0%
Effective Operational Proficiency C1	30,6%	4,1%	65,3%	100,0%
Mastery C2	37,3%	5,1%	57,6%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,7%</b>	<b>6,6%</b>	<b>58,7%</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

While it emerges that, again from the employment point of view, employment grows with the growth of the educational qualification.

It therefore seems that the absence of a program oriented, for example, to the enhancement of the skills of migrants in conjunction with the learning of the Italian language has meant that the phenomenon is declined, at best, in attempts of minimal integration, under-estimating resources education of those who are present in our country as a foreigner, the contribution that these could provide to the country.

**TAB. 9.** *Does educational qualification help you find work?*

Educational qualification	Are you working now?			Total
	No	Yes, I only have one job	Yes, I do more jobs	
Illiterate	57,1%	42,9%	0,0%	100,0%
I can read and write but I have no qualifications	35,9%	60,9%	3,1%	100,0%
Primary School	37,5%	54,7%	7,8%	100,0%
Secondary school (Scuola secondaria di primo grado)	34,3%	62,3%	3,4%	100,0%
Professional qualification	32,4%	56,2%	11,4%	100,0%
Secondary School (Scuola secondaria di secondo grado)	36,2%	53,2%	10,6%	100,0%
First or Undergraduate Degree	30,6%	61,1%	8,3%	100,0%
Postgraduate or Master Degree	28,0%	68,0%	4,0%	100,0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,7%</b>	<b>58,7%</b>	<b>6,6%</b>	<b>100,0%</b>

**TAB. 10.** *The relationship between educational qualifications and job skills*

Educational qualification	Job Skill			Total
	Low	Middle	High	
Illiterate	100,0	0,0	0,0	100,0
I can read and write but I have no qualifications	96,6	1,7	1,7	100,0
Primary School	91,1	8,9	0,0	100,0
Secondary school (Scuola secondaria di primo grado)	91,3	8,7	0,0	100,0
Professional qualification	82,3	11,5	6,3	100,0
Secondary School (Scuola secondaria di secondo grado)	86,4	6,8	6,8	100,0
First or Undergraduate Degree	75,0	12,5	12,5	100,0
Postgraduate or Master Degree	56,5	21,7	21,7	100,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>86,7</b>	<b>9,0</b>	<b>4,3</b>	<b>100,0</b>

In fact, if we go deeper and analyse the qualifications, we find that 2/3 of graduates are engaged in activities of low professional qualification. In other words, it seems that, in the territory, it is not possible to fully use the cognitive and cultural skills of which these people are carriers. If we then aggregate the qualifications into 3 levels, we obtain a clearer representation of this trend.

**TAB. 11.** *The relationship between educational qualifications (aggregate) and job skills*

Educational qualification	Job Skill			Total
	Low	Middle	High	
Primary School	92,7	6,9	0,4	100,0
Secondary School	83,6	10,0	6,4	100,0
Degree	67,3	16,4	16,4	100,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>86,7</b>	<b>9,0</b>	<b>4,3</b>	<b>100,0</b>

## Conclusion

We thus find ourselves faced with a situation of underestimation and consequent under-utilization of resources that could instead favor a more rapid integration into the labor market and therefore into the social fabric, if only the regional structures and services of the CPIA, education and vocational training, the Employment Centers were the recipients of integrated policies and specific resources aimed at recognizing and enhancing the educational skills of migrants, together with existing Italian language learning services.

If this is the case, and the doubt refers to the impossible to extent the data to the entire population, we would clearly find ourselves faced with an inefficient choice.

For example, in the Report of the Leone Moressa Foundation of 2015, *Stranieri in Italia. Attori dello sviluppo*, a clear contradiction was found: if at European level immigrant citizens record on average lower employment rates than natives, for Italy the process is the reverse. The explanations can be different, partly due to the historical traditions of the labor market in Italy, with the presence of a significant number of inactive persons, or the presence of immigrants - more consistent than in other European countries - of the first generation and without a family in the following. But above all, belonging to younger age groups than Italians seems to influence this inclination more than other elements (Fondazione Leone Moressa, 2015, 26).

What emerges from the analysis of migration policies in our country is that instead of analyzing, facing and trying to govern the process, we continue above all to try to contrast, limit, reject or, even worse, refuse to become aware of the characteristics deep of the phenomenon, thus losing sight of the opportunities that the presence of these people could provide to our country.

Why is this relevant? Let's start with a reflection on our Welfare system, this is configured as a hybrid with respect to the classic typology that distinguishes between Bismarkian and Beveridgian systems: it is Bismarkian from the point of view of social security and work, it is Beveridgian from the health and social welfare point of view. The financing of this system therefore takes place, respectively, through contributions paid by workers and/or employers and through general taxation.

This being the case, it is easy to understand that the demographic situation and the economic situation (in terms of created wealth) have a deep impact on the welfare system.

The first consideration from which to start is that, we owe foreigners a significant contribution to the demographic growth of our country, considering that since 1975 Italy has been below the demographic reconstitution parameter of the population and we have become, after Japan, the country where aging has the highest incidence.

As can be deduced from the ISTAT analysis compared to the 2019 demographic balance, once again there is a negative natural balance «this is the lowest level of natural turnover ever expressed by the

country since 1918» (2019, 2). In particular, the data relating to births is the new «negative record of births since the unification of Italy ... The deficit of births compared to deaths is entirely due to the Italian population (-270 thousand). while for the foreign population the natural balance remains largely positive (+55.510)» (Caritas, Migrantes 2020, 28).

For economists, it is an established fact that, the aging process of the population, tends to reduce the growth rate of the economy (Bini Smaghi 2013). As a result, pension spending becomes less sustainable with the contraction of economic growth. This gives rise to a vicious circle that puts the country's macroeconomic sustainability at great risk. In this scenario, the contribution of immigrants is essential.

For the former INPS President Tito Boeri, immigrants make 'a substantial gift to Italy as many pay social security contributions without receiving any pension'. In his 2016 report on the financial status of INPS, Boeri recalled that immigrants gave Italy a point of GDP, about 15 billion euros, in the form of contributions that will never be collected (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2017). On the basis of what is reported by the Leone Moressa Foundation, it has been calculated that the contributions paid by immigrants each year ensure the payment of over 600 thousand pensions to the elderly Italian population, thus allowing the overall retention of the social security system of our country (Fondazione Leone Moressa, 2016).

A second consideration, correlative to this, must be made with regard to their direct contribution to the country's economic growth. «It is estimated that immigrants in terms of GDP, in the decade 2001-2011 alone, contributed 2.3 points, without considering the 'delayed over time' contribution relating to births: immigrants have had more children than Italians, who can be considered potential workers if they have the opportunity to stay in Italy» (Dandolo, 2018, 169).

Their contribution from the point of view of self-employment and the ability to do business and boost the demand for work is also important. It is precisely in this context that the dynamism and initiative of immigrant work in Italy are clearly understood, showing a greater ability than Italians to take on the risk associated with similar initiatives. Sometimes it was the persistence of the economic crisis that led immigrants, expelled from subordinate work, to look for an alternative in their own business. This is a process inherent in other countries with a longer migration history: «In the United States, for example, the development of the most innovative companies in Silicon Valley was characterized precisely by the presence of Indian or Chinese engineers. The European Commission itself, in the 2020 Entrepreneurship Action Plan, has attributed an important role to migrant entrepreneurs for the relaunch of the Union and its economic-productive system, recognizing and underlining, for the first time, the importance of their contribution entrepreneurship» (Di Pasquale, 2015, 47). To achieve these goals, however, it would be necessary to set up social policies aimed at giving

more space both to the development of their human capital and to their use consistent with the training received, rather than in underestimated roles. Still today, however, we are embroiled in regulatory measures that are the consequence of a political debate still focused on the dilemma 'to accept or reject', as if a macro sociological process so invasive and pervasive from a socio-demographic and economic point of view, can be faced simply on the basis of on/off of revenue in the territory.

Even the latest legislative provision, the legislative decree 130/2020 then converted into law 173 on 18 December 2020, even if it introduced significant innovations (e.g. the new special protection permit or the permit for natural disasters) are destined to open up new scenarios and to considerably broaden the number of immigrants who will be able to stabilize in Italy, however, it insists above all on issues such as residence permits, methods of expulsion, transit through territorial waters, detention in centers for migrants, recognition of international protection.

In short, the phenomenon of immigration in our country has typically been dealt with in passive and defensive terms, rather than active and proactive, in the light of a representation of the phenomenon that has more the characteristics of the invasion (which does not exist: Impagliazzo 2015; Ambrosini 2020). and those of a «global dilemma» (Rampazi, 2020) as a result of unavoidable planetary sociological dynamics. Overall, therefore, it can be said that the phenomenon of immigration has touched the emotional chords rather than rational, imposing a fearful gaze, often fomented and exploited by a policy more interested in building consensus, than in dealing with the phenomenon through a reading, yes problematic, but also balanced and credible. There was no lack of co-responsibility even on the part of certain press, which was also more interested in chasing the mood of public opinion, rather than helping to reason objectively on the individual events reported (Pompei, 2007; Marini, Gerli 2017).

In conclusion, in which direction to go? We asked our interviewees and, although in the partiality of the data, it was an open question and we are still working on its closure, it emerges that we have divided the stimulus into 3 suggestions: 1) What does the foreigner who has just arrived in Italy need? 2) What it needs once it is stabilized; 3) What are the services they need. Unluckily we have not yet been able to reconstruct the data by reconnecting it to a number of easily manageable modes, we must limit ourselves to an initial evaluation produced by a quick and summary reading of the data. Compared to the first point, (the answers) indications are more frequently used, such as: hospitality, help with documents, language school, an accommodation a home. Compared to the second, however, the words that seem to recur the most are a job and citizenship. Finally, as regards the services to be activated, they are those that concern the orientation to job

opportunities and the orientation to extricate oneself from the maze of bureaucracy

We can speak of a sort of quadrilateral that has a fundamental role for the purposes of inclusion even if it does not solve it, due to the clear complexity of the phenomenon: home, work, citizenship and services for inclusion. But the need for a review of the welfare policies for immigrants clearly emerges (Campomori, Caponio 2015; Vitiello 2020; Accorinti 2021)

All this must also strongly engage the school sector, because it constitutes the nerve center of the system. In fact, as emerges from an interesting work by Giancola and Salmieri of 2018 «inclusion of students with migration background is strongly effective in primary education, rather than in further educational steps. At lower education levels, inequalities between 1st and 2nd generations have been decreasing over the last decades. But when considering higher levels of education attainment, intergenerational mobility has not yet been reached and inequalities between natives and non-natives are wider. Being Italy a new destination country and only lately a settlement country, integration policies in upper-secondary education have not been yet a priority of the political agenda. Once at upper secondary level, students with migratory background are almost systematically oriented towards 5-years long professional and technical or 3-year professional tracks (Azzolini, Barone, 2012) where they risk early drop-out and social segregation. Summing up, a segmented (and differentiated) approach prevails in the Italian secondary school system where no inclusion policy supports vertical continuity along school paths» (p. 330).

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## **‘But Where Did They Go?’ Immigrant Origin Students Connections and Disconnections from School during the Pandemic Emergency**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The fact that the school system, unfortunately, tends to reproduce social inequalities is a well-studied and established phenomenon. Bourdieu himself, author of *La reproduction*, however, ended up collaborating with the French state to create specific interventions capable of overturning this situation and ensuring that, on the contrary, the school could assume the role of educational inclusion and social promotion that belongs to it. Many efforts have been made in this sense, and interventions for the integration of minorities of immigrant origin have multiplied in Italy over the last 20 years, while maintaining a strong local component. But what happened during the pandemic? What happened to these pupils during the lockdown and school closures periods? How did their specific condition impact their school paths then and now, as a consequence? The paper is based on two ongoing projects (*Bella Presenza. Metodi, strategie e pratiche per il contrasto alla povertà educativa*, funded by *Fondazione Con i bambini* and *Apriti Sesamo. Lingue e linguaggi per l’inclusione*, funded by *FAMI*) that have made possible to closely observe what has happened at the level of primary and secondary schools with respect to immigrant origin pupils and the strategies adopted in school and at local level in order to face to the new pandemic scenario.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Inclusion Policies in School, Education, Immigrant Pupils, Minorities, Pandemic*

### **Introduction**

The paper is based on two ongoing projects (*Bella Presenza. Metodi, strategie e pratiche per il contrasto alla povertà educativa* funded by *Fondazione Con i bambini*, and *Apriti Sesamo. Lingue e linguaggi per l’inclusione*, funded by *FAMI*). Funds for the integration of migrants and refugees from the Italian Ministry of Interior. Both projects have made possible to closely observe what has happened at the level of primary and secondary schools during the COVID-19 lockdown with respect to immigrant origin pupils and the strategies adopted in school and at local level in order to face to the new pandemic scenario. The paper is based on an empirical observation carried out from March 2020 and May 2021 in 5 schools in the Florentine area and on focus groups, round

tables and interviews with teachers, educators, NGOs and experts on immigrant children's pedagogical issues. It is a qualitative survey that needs further investigation and, above all, to be monitored and analysed diachronically also through the comparison with the official statistics on the school results before, during and after the pandemic period – data not yet available to date. The obstacles encountered by migrant pupils and their families regarding school attendance and inclusion are analysed from the socio-pedagogical perspective taking into account that the linguistic dimension – in both the aspects of the language of instruction and of communication- has been the one that made the whole situation even more problematic.

### **1. School system, social reproduction and pandemic**

The fact that school system, unfortunately, tends to reproduce social inequalities is a well-studied and established phenomenon. Bourdieu himself, author of *La reproduction* (1970), however, ended up collaborating with the French state to create specific interventions capable of overturning this situation and ensuring that, on the contrary, the school could assume the role of educational inclusion and social promotion. Many efforts have been made in this sense in Italy too, and interventions for the integration of minorities of immigrant origin have multiplied over the last 20 years, while maintaining a strong local component.

Notwithstanding, the health emergency has highlighted that the socio-economic gap, the different linguistic and cultural background and the digital divide are very widespread obstacles, which do not exclusively concern students of immigrant origin, but which particularly affect them, at the intersection of multiple difficulties (linguistic, cultural, socio-economic etc.) and discriminations (UNICEF, 2020; Save the children, 2020) and who were already suffering for the ongoing economic crisis.

Deriving from multiple ecological-social causes, the novel Coronavirus and, subsequently, the COVID-19 pandemic, has affected all spheres of societies of the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered and amplified an economic crisis that existed before the health crisis. The combination of the two crises into a double 'ecological-healthcare' and 'socio-economic' crisis has had multiple consequences for everyone on the economic, social, political, and cultural level; however, it has affected social classes, workers, genders, and territories in different ways, deepening social inequalities and worsening the social conditions of disadvantaged social groups: among the most affected social groups, we find migrants. (Della Puppa, Perocco, 2021, p.7).

The sudden closure of schools forced the educational systems to steeply switch into forms of online teaching, giving an acceleration to

the use of IT at school without any previous experimentation or simulation having been done. As a result, all children living in poverty or, in any case, without proper IT devices or tools as well as informatic literacy, have been substantially excluded from the educational process during the COVID-19 lockdown. According to UNICEF (2020), during the first lockdown almost 463 million students worldwide have been unable to access online education due to lack of technology infrastructure or distance learning policies for online education. Save the children estimates that «over 1.6 billion learners were out of school. For the first time in human history an entire generation has their education disrupted» (Save the children, 2020). Taking into account this harsh global context, the reaction of the Italian school system has made it possible to keep the educational path alive, without, however, being able to avoid having a greater negative impact on students most in difficulty, those in the lowest socio-economic position, and in particular on those of immigrant origin. According to ISTAT (2021), in 2020 in Italy over two million families lived in absolute poverty with an incidence of 7.7% (from 6.4% in 2019) on the whole population. Among these households, the percentage incidence in the immigrant population is the 24,4% (ISTAT, 2021), in practice just under a quarter of the entire population of foreign origin while, as regards Italians, the percentage is 4.9%. Regarding minors, absolute poverty among them went from 3.7% in 2008 to 11.4% in 2019 (ISTAT, 2020) but the serious consequences of the COVID-19 emergency offer the «tangible prospect of a new spike in child poverty and 1 million more children who could slip into absolute poverty, without the essentials to lead a dignified life» (Milan, 2020). On the basis of the indicators that correlate the deprivation of material resources to educational difficulties, we can see how between low economic conditions and educational poverty there is a vicious circle, making the process of escape from poverty and social promotion through education very difficult. The pandemic emergency has highlighted since the very beginning the worsening of the dispersion phenomenon, the disappearance from school life of the weakest and most vulnerable subjects and, worst of all, the risk of education becoming a privilege again due to the new obstacles to successfully attend school (Ambrosini, 2021). As we know, in the Italian school, by government decree, all the students in 2020 were promoted to the next class, but the problem of non-acquired skills or protracted absences has reappeared drastically during the current scholastic year (2021). This argument, of course, applies not only to immigrant children but also to those more fragile students, those who, due to personal and – or social characteristics, found themselves not only socially distanced but also disconnected in the isolation of their homes, from the sense and significance of the learning processes.

At the same time, the emergency has also highlighted how the school, as educational system, has had to recognize the fundamental role of the wider educating community, asking for support from local

authorities and the private social sector of the territory precisely to reach the families of the students most in difficulty, for instance the ones who cannot speak Italian fluently, those who have never connected to video-lessons, who suddenly disappeared from online classrooms and who have been 'hung up' and brought back into formal educational paths only thanks to joint actions of the territorial networks. Nonetheless, the difficulties of a highly discontinuous attendance and the consequent lack of socialization among peers has had and is having very strong consequences on pupils of non-Italian origin, with evident results especially at the level of upper secondary schools.

## **2. 'What happened to them?', 'Where did they go?'**

The research has employed a qualitative methodology with a questionnaire, interviews, focus group and discussion groups with students, parents, experts, educators, teachers aimed to find solutions through a participative approach. The main research questions were: What's happening during the pandemic to the immigrant pupils or pupils with immigrant background? What happened to these pupils during the lockdown and school closures periods? How did their specific condition impact their school paths then and now, as a consequence? Speaking with teachers and schools' operators, the question, simply, was 'But where did they go?' since they were not attending on line classes. In fact, the absence of these students in both the first and second lockdown was immediately visible, but not all schools and territories took action to find solutions, to reach isolated families and students, to provide them with support. materials and information to allow them to follow the lessons at a distance. Assuming that our observations are based for more than 60% on a Chinese-speaking user (but also with Roma, Peruvian, Arabic-speaking students from various National backgrounds, on the provision of online courses to about 700 pupils from primary school to the secondary ones to an information observatory that has had over 1500 contacts since the beginning of the lock down, to a questionnaire via we-chat to which 200 families responded, to 6 highly attended meetings with Chinese-speaking families, and immigrant families in general as well as a conspicuous number of school principals, intercultural and inclusion referents, teachers, educators, teachers of Italian as L2.

In the questionnaires, families were asked what type and how many IT tools they had, if they had difficulty connecting, if they needed computer literacy, if their children would need more support from the school or for homework in the afternoon, if their children were encountering difficulties in attending online classes and, if yes, which ones. To teachers, educators, school principals and experts the questions were about the main difficulties of immigrant pupils and the possible strategies to overcome them. In particular, the interviewees

were asked to share their experience during the lockdown, the shift to online teaching during the pandemic and what happened to students of immigrant origin or, in general, Italian non-native speakers. In particular, we were interested to know how they managed to make them attend online classes and with which results. With the students – once they have been joined again, thanks to the strategies of the two projects (*Bella presenza* and *Apriti Sesamo*) – we conducted dialogues in the form of action-research, asking them how they felt, if they had difficulties with online teaching, what would be useful for them and to help them better attending the classes and school activities in general, which aspects of online teaching did they consider positive and which negative, etc. letting them express freely with respect to how they experienced the closure of the school, the isolation and subsequently the fact of having been contacted and re-involved in online teaching.

### **3. 'What happened to them?', 'Where did they go?'**

The first evidence that emerged from the research is that, with the closure of schools and the subsequent passage of online teaching, students of immigrant origin, especially those of recent immigration or with parents with low level of competence in Italian, have 'disappeared' from the classes, 'they did not simply connect' and, in many cases, all instructions, circulars, letters and indications published on the school electronic register remained unread. Schools, by themselves, have not been able to independently activate contact with families who have remained isolated. Only thanks to the intervention of the territory, including the projects that this article deals with, have those difficulties in communication been overcome that have allowed us to reach the students again and include them again in the educational path. In fact, the school has shown that it does not have adequate internal resources, neither economic nor personnel, to reach the neediest families, found closed and isolated in their homes during the lockdown. However, thanks to the projects in progress and the territorial network already established between the School, Associations, Local Authority, a series of linguistic mediators and social workers have been able to reach home the students who have 'disappeared' from the virtual school classrooms. Thanks to a more direct dialogue and not mediated by technologies, it was possible to detect the difficulties (for example, lack of computers or connections, lack of adequate instructions to access online lessons, etc.) and find solutions such as, for example: loan for use of tables; new telephone and internet contracts; support to parents and children for computer literacy; translation of circulars and letters from the school, etc. In addition, L2 Italian courses were immediately organized online and homework support activities aimed at non-Italian-speaking students were restored. In many cases, public and voluntary social services have been activated to provide food, clothing, medicines,

to organize accompaniments to medical visits and hospitals, and an helpdesk to support online procedures given the closure of the information desks to the public.

#### **4. The main difficulties emerged**

In general, access to online didactic is complex: most families do not have a PC or a tablet (high school kids are provided a little more often) and the online courses are therefore held on the smartphone (for primary schools, that of a parent), with problems of visibility on the screen, listening, possible interaction, shifts between siblings in case of more than one child per family etc. Many have poor wi-fi and do not turn on the camera, further diminishing the possibility of interaction. In particular, we detected:

1. Absence of adequate IT tools such as computers, tablets, smartphones and the impossibility of having them due to economic conditions;
2. Absence of contracts for internet connection or of an adequate number of gigabytes to be used for connections during school hours;
3. Inadequate digital skills pupils and families: for years the school has certified skills on which it has not systematically worked with pupils. Skills sometimes not even mastered by the teaching staff;
4. Difficult to access and use digital devices and e-learning platforms at home and at school and to access and understand the information published on the electronic school register. As a consequence, an inadequate or absent school-family communication;
5. Difficulty in accessing technology for distance learning particularly in the presence of unsuitable accommodation or houses considered as such by the students, who out of shame do not turn on the video in case of large families and more people sharing the same room;
6. For primary school children, where study autonomy is still reduced, the inability to attend post-school services which are largely suspended due to COVID is leading to difficulties in school learning and language enhancement Italian;
7. For secondary school pupils, in particular students who are attending the second year of the high school (aged more than 16 years old, out of the mandatory education), have not been able to benefit from accompaniment to the course of study a higher risk to not to pass the class and a higher risk of school dropout;
8. The linguistic difficulties of families have led to difficulties in understanding also the health and bureaucratic aspects associated with the health emergency; in particular, in the event of a positive family member and/or quarantine, this also created

difficulties in returning 'back to school' and attending the classes on line or in presence. The use of cultural mediators has had a major positive impact to overcome these kinds of difficulties.

The emergency also highlighted how belonging to specific communities became a reference point for families and students with respect to the strategies to be adopted in relation to school attendance during the period of alternation between face-to-face school and online teaching.

- Families who live in housing or work situations that cannot guarantee distances (therefore the economically poorer strata of workers who work in artisan-industrial activities or work in agriculture or services) fear that if their children were to go into quarantine for cases of positivity in the classes attended, to having to isolate themselves would then be the various families that share the same apartment and entire warehouses. In the case of some communities, such as the Chinese and the Peruvian ones, the students were not sent to school for fear of the contagion of entire groups of co-workers and/or co-inhabitants.
- Many schools and local institutions have pushed families to withdraw children and young people of compulsory age and to go to parental schools: many families, worried about the arrival at home of the social services and of the letters that threatened the reporting to the local authorities. From our observation, Parental schools present three main risks: in private examinations it is not certain that pupils will be promoted, since it may be difficult to value improvement trends - something that curricular teachers usually do; at the end of the year it could be difficult for schools to calculate how many pupils will return, thus risking that entire sections will be closed, compromising the educational offer for all; there are families who could definitively choose to have their children attend private 'community' schools, 'in which no racism occurs', as a few parents told us.
- A factor of great difficulty has also been the transposition by many teachers of frontal teaching in online classes. The absence of eye contact, face to face interaction, the lack of direct communication between students and students and teachers, added to hours of frontal explanations has become the greatest obstacle for all students, but in particular for non-native Italian speakers with low language competences.

## **Conclusions**

The pandemic showed that the Italian school was not prepared to strongly support students living in conditions of socio-economic hardship, and in particular those of non-Italian origin. The health emergency has also highlighted how the socio-economic gap and

digital divide are very common obstacles in Italy, which particularly concern students of immigrant origin. The need to suddenly switch to online forms of education, if on the one hand has exacerbated these weak aspects and emphasized the processes of exclusion of the most fragile students, at the same time it has given an important impetus to the use of technologies and has highlighted the need to adopt new and more effective teaching strategies. From the point of view of the inclusion of students of foreign origin, it has also highlighted how essential it is to maintain a strong communicative contact with families and that the school alone, at present, is unable to do so. Through the joint intervention of school and territory, it was highlighted that positive results can be achieved where the network of the educating community is activated, asking for the support of local authorities and the private social sector precisely to reach the families of the pupils most in difficulty. Thanks to the two projects *Bella Presenza* and *Apriti Sesamo*, over 500 students have been reached in their homes, supported to reconnect to lessons at school, to attend online Italian L2 courses or to support homework. However, the difficulties of a highly discontinuous attendance and the consequent lack of socialization among peers has had and is having very strong consequences on pupils of non-Italian origin, with evident results especially at the level of upper secondary schools.

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# The Role of the Italian Public School on the Social and Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper concentrates on the linguistic and educational policies aimed to foster the social and linguistic integration of foreign people and in particular of the ones which arrived with the most recent migratory flow. Focusing on the key role played by public actors, the paper analyses the support offered by the Provincial Centre for Adult Education, commonly called CPIA (Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti), in particular thanks to its Italian language courses for foreigners (Percorsi di alfabetizzazione e apprendimento della lingua italiana or Percorsi AALI). Starting from the analysis of the educational policies for the linguistics integration of foreigners and the results of the experiences developed in the adult educational field, we try to understand the quality of Percorsi AALI, to identify their critical aspects and to understand their causes. Thanks to the results of a survey administrated to a sample of CPIA's teachers in 2020, we tried to evaluate if Percorsi AALI can be said to be part of a systematic action plan and a structured approach or if the Italian government still seems to be uninterested in this.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Linguistic Policies, Educational Policies, Adult Migrant Learners, Italian Public School, Italian as a Second Language*

## Introduction

Italy is a valid example of how old and new minorities share territories and community spaces. As it has been underlined on several occasions (Bagna, Barni, 2005; Barni, Vedovelli, 2009; Maturi, 2016; Marra, Del Nigro, 2020), this contact brings about to interesting and complex multilingual realities. On this basis, it is easy to understand the importance of language competence since it provides the necessary basis for social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and democratic citizenship. Consequently, it cannot be denied that this has a strong impact on schools and on the development of plurilingual and intercultural education.

Focusing on a specific aspect of this multidimensional phenomenon, this paper concentrates on the linguistic and educational policies aimed at fostering the social and linguistic integration of foreign people and in particular of the ones who arrived with the most recent migratory flow.

The main topic of this paper are the courses of Italian as a second language offered by the Italian public school for adults: the *Percorsi di alfabetizzazione e apprendimento della lingua italiana (Percorsi AALI)*. The following reflections are based on the data provided by studies conducted by the Ministry of Education (MIUR, 2003), the *Istituto per lo sviluppo della formazione professionale dei lavoratori (ISFOL)* (Governatori, Montedoro, 2006), INDIRE (Pappalardo, Rangoni, 2013; INDIRE, 2018), and INVALSI (Poliandri, Epifani, 2020), and on a survey submitted to 131 CPIAs during the school year 2019/2020. Called *Indagine Percorsi AALI*, this survey consisted in a self-administered online questionnaire submitted from March to June 2020 and involving 239 teachers who teach in the *Percorsi AALI*.

Having briefly described the Provincial Centre for Adult Education, commonly known as CPIA (*Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti*), we will address our attention to the CPIA central role in migrants' lives. After this introductory comment, we will analyse two critical issues of the courses of Italian as a second language offered by CPIA. Firstly, the paper concentrates on some specific problems of the curricula of *Percorsi AALI*. In the second part, based on the findings of the survey submitted to CPIA's teachers in 2020, the paper addresses the exploration of CPIA teacher's training. Drawing on the data obtained, it will be possible to highlight some weaknesses that can have a strong impact on the quality of *Percorsi AALI*. The last section contains some final reflections and conclusions.

## 1. Adult education in Italy: CTP and CPIA

CPIAs are a network of public schools responsible for the adult population education and they started working in the school year 2015/2016. In addition to its curricula courses: Italian language courses for foreigners (*Percorsi AALI*), the lower secondary school courses (*Percorsi di istruzione di primo livello*), and the upper secondary school courses (*Percorsi di istruzione di secondo livello*), the CPIA includes also extra curricula courses (computer courses and language courses), and it coordinates a research centre (Pitzalis, 2019). It is important to remember that before the CPIA, since the school year 1998/1999, the *Centri Territoriali Permanenti per l'educazione degli adulti (CTPs)* were set up to provide continuing education to adults (Colosio, 2015).

## 2. Adult education and teaching Italian as a second language

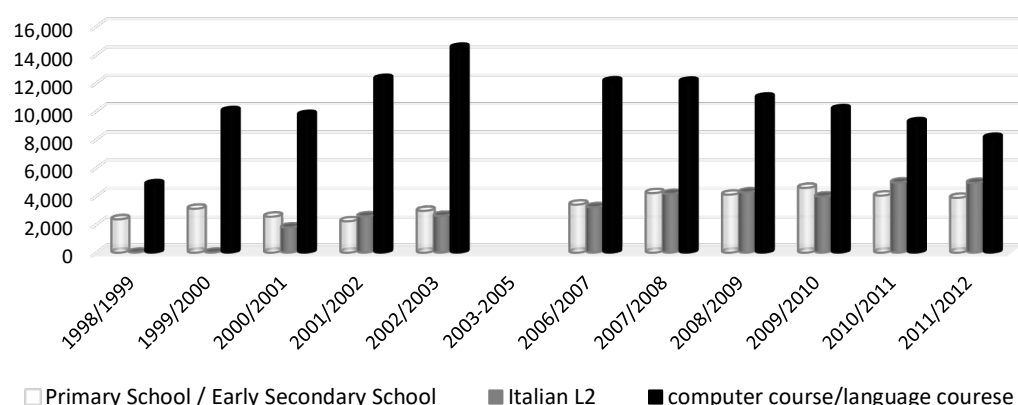
At first the CTP and later the CPIA have tried to promote the development of language skills of foreign people. On the one hand, because the development of linguistic, cultural, and social skills facilitates the integration into the host society, in the early 2000s the

CTP had been doing numerous efforts to provide language tuition for immigrants.

Observing Figure 1, it is possible to appreciate how gradually the number of courses of Italian as a second language offered by CTP increased. Nevertheless, as it was underlined by Giuseppe Sergio (2011), the CTP showed to be unprepared to manage relatively large number of immigrants who are very different in terms of culture, traditions, and language. For this reason, it cannot be denied that a central role for the social and linguistic integration of adult migrants had been played by private schools, non-profit associations, and volunteers.

On the other hand, it cannot be forgotten that migrants are required to acquire linguistic abilities for the purposes of residence and citizenship. It is against that background that CTPs and later CPIAs have been charged with the assessment of some language requirements and for providing some specific official courses.

**FIG. 1.** *CPIA courses of Italian for foreigners*



Source: MIUR (2003); Governatori and Montedoro (2006); Pappalardo and Rangoni (2013).

**FIG. 2.** *Migration policies and language testing in Italy: the role of CPIA*

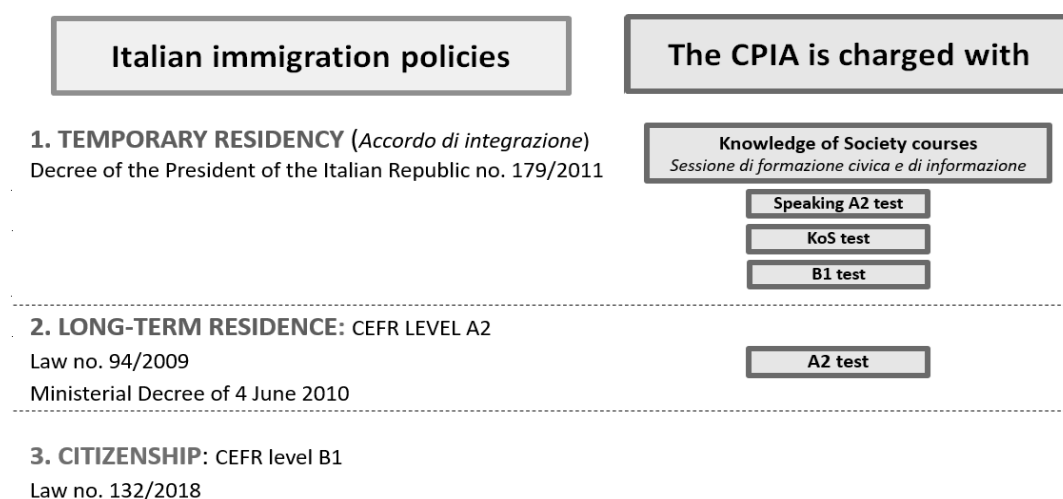


Figure 2 shows that CPIA has a key role in particular for the temporary and the long-term residence permit (Deiana, Spina, 2020; Deiana, 2021a). It is quite clear that the policies implemented by the

Government to control and limit the number of migrants entering the country has had a strong impact on both the linguistic and the educational policies.

Taking in consideration what it has just been underlined, it is clear that the CPIA plays a central role in the lives of migrants. In fact, it helps to promote the development of language skills for social inclusion, education, employment, and for the achievement of requirements for residency.

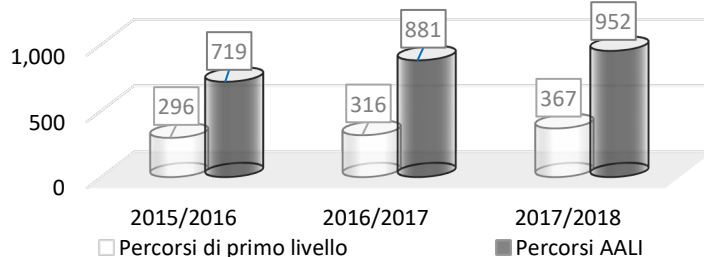
### **3. Some critical issues**

This paper focuses on the central role played by the CPIA as a public actor and it analyses the support given to foreign people. Starting from the analysis of the educational policies for the linguistics integration of foreigners, we try to understand and identify the critical issues of *Percorsi* AALI and to understand their causes. Focusing on these aspects, we analyse if there have been any improvements on understanding the students learning process, their difficulties, and their needs in educational terms. Thanks to these reflections, our aim is to point out if *Percorsi* AALI can be said to be part of a systematic and structured action plan or if the Italian government still seems to be uninterested in this.

#### *3.1. The Percorsi AALI*

*Percorsi* AALI are the Italian language courses for foreigners of the CPIA's curricula. They were established by the Decree of the President of the Italian Republic No. 263 in October 2012 and better regulated thanks to the Ministerial Decree of 12th March 2015 (*Linee guida per il passaggio al nuovo ordinamento a sostegno dell'autonomia organizzativa e didattica dei Centri provinciali per l'istruzione degli adulti*). In contrast to the CTP, where Italian language courses for foreigners had been taught as an extra or additional course, thanks to the establishment of *Percorsi* AALI for the first time this subject has been officially included in the curriculum of the Italian public school (Emilio Porcaro, 2019). Figure 3 shows *Percorsi* AALI are the most activated courses of the CPIA curriculum.

In accordance with the legislation, *Percorsi* AALI offer only the levels A1 and A2. Consequently, it is easy to understand the reason why Italian language courses for foreigners are offered also by the CPIA *extra curricula courses* (Table 1). Since everything that comes before A1 (pre-Alfa, Alfa, pre-A1) and upper A2 is not covered by *Percorsi* AALI, Table 2 shows how CPIA *extra curricula courses* also offer these levels.

**FIG. 3.** Average number of students attending CPIA curricula courses

Source: INDIRE (2018), Poliandri, Epifani (2020)

**TAB. 1.** CPIA extra curricula courses

Extra curricula courses	2015/2016				2016/2017			
	courses		students		courses		students	
Italian language for foreigners	690	54,3%	11.330	59,2%	1.401	71,5%	22.454	75%
Computer courses	202	15,8%	2.753	14,4%	179	9,1%	2.195	7,3%
Language courses	382	29,9%	5.035	26,3%	371	18,9%	5.181	17,2%
Financial education courses	3	0,2%	17	0,1%	10	0,5%	152	0,5%

Source: INDIRE 2018

The fact that *Percorsi AALI* cover just A1 and A2 levels has different negative consequences both in didactical and administrative terms. The first ones are strongly evident when the extra curricula courses are not activated. In fact, in this case pre-Alfa, Alfa and pre-A1 student attend courses that keep very different levels together or even end up directly in A1 level. On the other hand, it must be underline that this lack of *Percorsi AALI* has also an impact on the composition of the CPIA teacher's staff. In fact, every year the teacher staff is assigned according to the number of curricula courses activated. Consequently, since the highlighted criticism of *Percorsi AALI*, only a little part of the Italian language courses for foreigners activated can be used by the CPIA for having assigned teachers.

**TAB. 2.** CPIA extra curricula courses: Italian language courses for foreigners

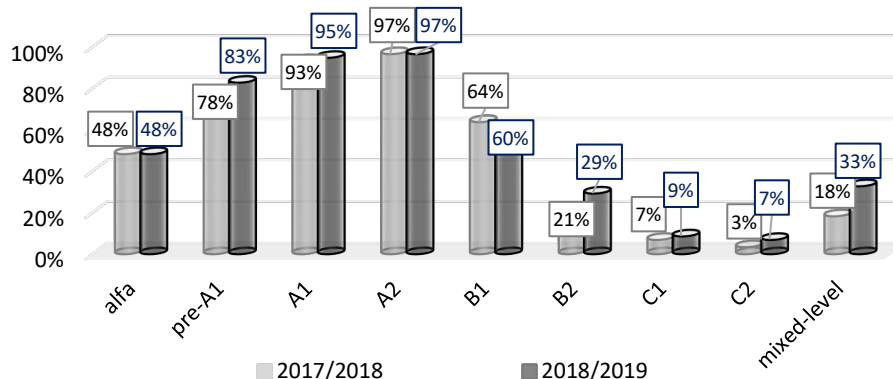
	2015/2016		2016/2017	
	courses	students	courses	students
pre-A1	371	5.961	643	10.493
UPPER A2	279	4.582	355	5.299
Corsi FAMI ( <i>Fondo asilo migrazione e integrazione</i> )	40	787	412	6.662

Source: INDIRE 2018

Figure 4 helps to understand how criticisms of *Percorsi AALI* does not facilitate CPIA to foster language skills of foreigner people. On the one hand the absence of specific courses that cover levels that comes before A1 is a strong weakness. In fact, as it has been underlined on different occasions (Borri *et al.*, 2014; Bricchese, Caon, 2019; Deiana, Spina, 2020a), given that many CPIA students are illiterate and have little formal education, it is evident that the CPIA curricula does not ensure

them the specific linguistic classes. On the other hand, particularly after that B1 has been required for the acquisition of the Italian citizenship, the fact that the CPIA curricula courses does not cover levels which enable to express more complex needs in a wider range of situations is another critical issue.

**FIG. 4.** *Italian language courses for foreigners activated by CPIA*



Source: Deiana (2019)

In addition, it cannot be denied that these issues point out some weaknesses of language and educational policies. In fact, since data of the CTP Italian language courses for foreigners was available (Pappalardo, Rangoni, 2013), it seems that they had been ignored. Because during the long and complex reform that resulted in the establishment of the CPIA this evidence had not been taken into consideration, the fact that the CPIA curricula does not cover some of the levels that were offered during the CTP period seems to be a serious error. This fact is even more serious, if we consider that also in Italy people are asked to certify their language knowledge to obtain the temporary and the long-term residency and the citizenship.

Despite the fact that for the first time Italian language courses for foreigners have been officially included in the curriculum of the Italian public school, the organization of *Percorsi AALI* shows the carelessness that characterised the Italian educational policy. In fact, the critical points just listed underlined that *Percorsi AALI* cannot be considered as part of a valid, systematic, and well-structured approach.

### 3.2. Teachers' training

CPIA teachers' staff consists of primary school teachers, secondary school teachers (Italian, English, Mathematics and Science, Technologies and sometimes also Music or Art's teachers) and A23 teachers (Deiana, 2020, 2021b; Deiana, Spina 2020). As it has been highlighted by Borri and Calzone (2019), it cannot be ignored that there is a general lack of specific training in teaching to adult students.

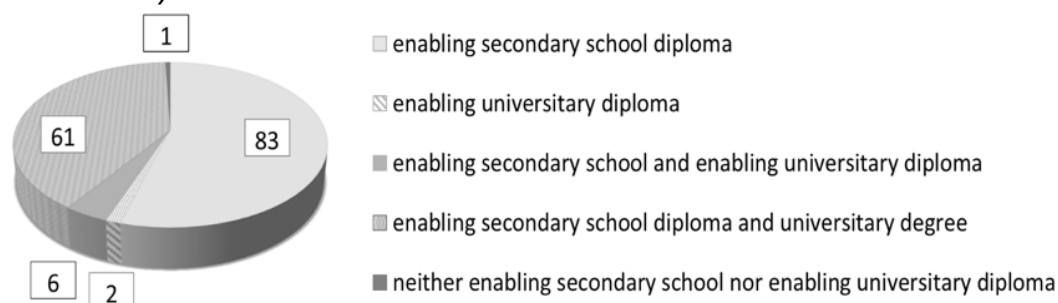
Focusing on *Percorsi AALI*, it must be said that the decree of the President of the Italian Republic No. 263 in October 2012 did not set a specific and trained teachers' staff. Despite teaching Italian as a second



language, teachers do not have to be specialised or trained on this specific subject. In agreement with trends emerged from our survey, primary school teachers seem to be the majority (153 out of 239), while secondary school teachers are a little minority (49 out of 239). Despite having successfully completed a structured course in teaching Italian as a foreign or second language, also A23 teachers are a minority. In fact, A23 teachers are only a little part of the CPIAs' school staff: every year maximum 2 A23 teachers are assigned to the CPIA teachers' staff (Deiana, Spina, 2020b). Since teachers 'quality and professionalism have a direct effect on the learning outcomes, in relation to the above, focusing our attention on primary school teachers is very interesting.

According to the outcomes of *Indagine Percorsi AALI* (Figure 5), it is possible to observe that as a general tendency, the majority of primary school teachers (144 out of 153) teach thanks to the enabling secondary school diploma (*Diploma magistrale*). Only 8 teachers declared to have an enabling university diploma (*Laurea in Scienze della formazione primaria*).

**FIG. 5.** *Primary school teachers: initial education*

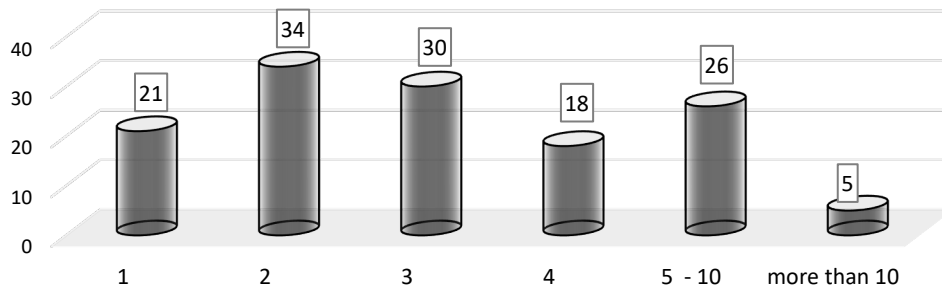


Source: *Indagine Percorsi AALI*

In addition to pointing out that 61 out of 153 also graduated (many of them in subject not strongly related with teaching), this data underlines how almost all of the teachers belong to the *scuola magistrale* generation. Despite having a long experience in teaching to pupils, it means that during their initial education they did not concentrate on specific subject such as linguistics, language teaching and didactics or teaching Italian as a foreign language.

The general lack of specific training in teaching Italian as a foreign language seems to be a serious criticism of primary school teachers 'professionalism. This is even more evident when we observe that only 20 out of 153 teachers obtained a formal qualification after having completed a structured course in teaching Italian as a foreign or second language. On the other hand, the vast majority (134 out of 153) declared to attend at least one training or refreshing course of teaching Italian as a second language, many of which are organised by the CPIA (Figure 6).

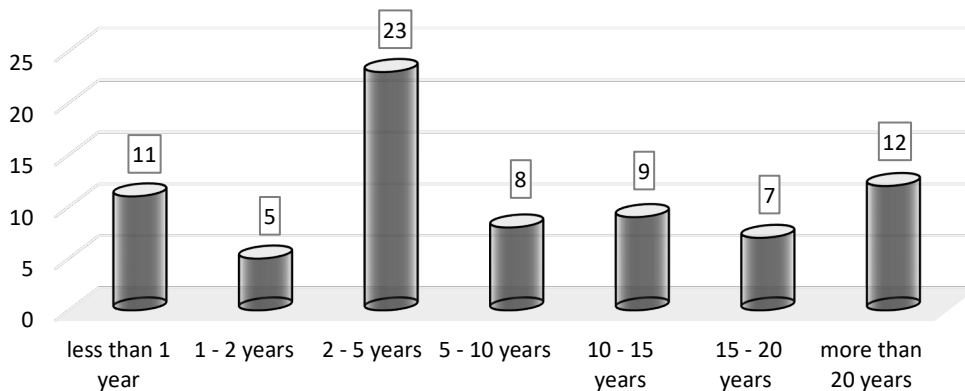
**FIG. 6.** *Primary school teachers: number of Italian L2 trainings and updating followed per year.*



Source: *Indagine Percorsi AALI*

Thanks to *Indagine Percorsi AALI* it has also been stressed that approximately half of the primary interviewed school teachers (75 out of 153) declared that they had not taught Italian as a second language before teaching on CPIA or even in CTP. Since it means that *Percorsi AALI* were their first experience as teachers of Italian as a second language, data presented in Figure 7, which focuses only on these 75 teachers, allow to reflect on several aspects.

**FIG. 7.** *Primary school teachers without previous experience on teaching Italian as a second language: CPIA experience in teaching Italian L2*



Source: *Indagine Percorsi AALI*

Generally, according to Borri and Calzone (2019), the CPIA teachers' staff is characterized by quite a strong turn-over. Furthermore, based on addition outcomes of the *Indagine Percorsi AALI*, taking into consideration the years of teaching experience in *Percorsi AALI* it is possible to observe two interesting critical aspects. Firstly, none of the 39 teachers that have less than 5 years of experiences declared to have a formal qualification in teaching Italian as a foreign or second language. Moreover, 8 out of these 39 said they do not attend any training or refreshing course. This data reveals a critical and alarming situation. In fact, the poor training amplified by the lacking experience seems to be a main characteristic of these teachers. Secondly, focusing on the 28 teachers that have more than 10 years of experiences (they had considered also the CTP years of experience), it is evident that once

again the majority (23 out of 28) did not obtain any formal qualification in teaching Italian as a foreign or second language. Since they have been teaching this subject for many years, the fact that only a little minority of teachers completed a structured course in teaching Italian as a foreign or second language is an unexpected trend.

Since teachers play a critical role in achieving high-quality education for all learners, our data has pointed out some fundamental weaknesses. In fact, the tendencies that came out about primary school teachers' training and teaching experience can have a strong impact on the quality of *Percorsi AALI*.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, it must be underlined that the two critical issues described has a strong negative effect on the quality of *Percorsi AALI*. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that *Percorsi AALI* have also some strong points. In fact, the responses received from the questionnaires have provided useful insights both into the strengths and the weaknesses. Compared to what had been done in the past, the creation of *Percorsi AALI* represents a key moment for the teaching of Italian as a foreign language in the Italian public school. Despite the critical issues highlighted by our data, it appears that *Percorsi AALI* have begun to be part of educational plan. Unfortunately, what has been done up to now is not enough. Taking into consideration the weaknesses underlined, it is evident that the Italian government still have to improve in order to facilitate the development of a systematic action plan and a structured approach. It is evident that many of the highlighted problems are linked to the lack of specific training in teaching to adult foreign students. Representing a critical long-term issue, it is clear that a decisive intervention is needed.

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## Democratic Language Education against Educational Failure and for Social Inclusion: The Perception of 'Democracy' in Learning/Teaching Processes

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**ABSTRACT:** *In the Italian context, the school has taken on an increasingly determining and incisive role in education over time. Questions arise on education and its purpose: as it is stated in the text Indicazioni Nazionali edited by MIUR (2012), to deal with teaching and learning processes means to strengthen competences and life skills. They represent the basis of the conscious use of knowledge, and they offer the opportunity to become involved in lifelong learning. Nowadays, there is a widespread awareness of teaching processes' complexity and difficulties. At a national level, several critical issues continue to hamper students' formative success (MIUR, 2018): inequality and gap of socio-economic conditions between northern and southern regions of the country, educational poverty (Nanni, Pellegrino, 2018), early school-leaving phenomenon, old and new forms of social exclusion and illiteracy (Save the Children, 2018). These issues are embedded in a national framework characterized by historical plurilingualism and the presence of new linguistic minorities. The present work aims to emphasize the role played by the educational model known as «democratic Language Education» (De Mauro 2018) in improving students' competences and their living conditions so as to perform an active citizenship in society. Starting from these assumptions, the research activity relies on questions which aim to discover how schools offer an equal, inclusive and democratic education to students; the extent to which the concept of 'Language Education' is known by teachers; how much 'democracy' is involved in teaching and learning processes according to the perception of teachers and 13° grade students in Sardinian high school. Specifically, the purpose of the research is to verify the presence of Giscel Ten Theses in daily didactic practice by means of structured questionnaires and focus group interviews addressed to students and teachers.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Language Education, Active Citizenship, Democracy, Social Inclusion, Lifelong Learning*

### Introduction: The theoretical framework

The purpose of this article is to examine and discuss some interesting issues raised by the survey I conducted in fifth-grade secondary schools, starting in the first instance from some considerations with respect to the theoretical framework within which this research falls. I

chose to carry out research involving schools after taking Educational Linguistics exam. The survey was implemented and conducted by me, as well as the statistical analysis of quantitative and qualitative data.

Among the different language sciences, one lays the foundations to investigate the phenomena which characterize Italian society and school, to examine old and new teaching models and to describe the importance of language in the educational context: it is the Educational Linguistics (term coined by Tullio De Mauro in 2003). Tullio De Mauro and Silvana Ferreri in 2005 introduced the Educational Linguistics as a field of language sciences whose object of investigation is the language, examined in relation to the learning process and the development of semiotic skills. As a science it aims to promote the enhancement of the language and the increase of the first linguistic heritage of the learner, to develop techniques, models, and tools capable of responding to the needs of speakers included in the social and in the educational dimension of the society to which they belong (Vedovelli, Casini, 2016).

To meet the challenges of a globalised world, it is necessary to have new resources and skills which go hand in hand with the evolution of technologies, codes and media, and which respond to the primary needs of individuals to ensure that they can orient themselves in their community and can exercise an active citizenship (MIUR - National Guidelines 2012, 2017; Council of Europe - CEFR 2001, 2018). If in the past the goal of literacy was instrumental, that is, the achievement of a minimum degree of competence in reading and writing, currently the needs coming from a complex society are very different, therefore reference is made to functional literacy which, in addition to the basic skills mentioned above, also includes a set of integrated skills such as the comprehension of a text, the ability to rework, to summarize, to take good notes, but also controlled writing, without forgetting sociolinguistic and socio-pragmatic skills. The goal of this type of literacy is to gain skills and knowledge to conduct most of the activities useful to increase the development of our community. These skills can be acquired thanks to a good teaching method which starts from the discovery of the learners' linguistic and cultural background, and which enhances every symbolic form intrinsic to the language. What Tullio De Mauro stressed is that the enhancement of the learner's native language or dialect represents the basis for future developments of other semiotic and linguistic skills. Moreover, it preserves the value of identity and culture, also helping to raise the level of motivation to learn and to open to new linguistic realities. Therefore, it would be good if in the school environment teachers kept in mind such assumptions. Most importantly, it would be proper if the teaching of Italian language was extended to all disciplinary subjects, since the language conveys the contents of the disciplines and without a good knowledge (and understanding) in our language, Italian, the risk of falling into functional illiteracy is remarkably high and its consequences are dramatic.

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In Italy, the educational path which pays attention to the learners' native background and semiotic universe is known as Language Education (De Mauro, 2018). Two texts of fundamental importance in this field of study have been promoting such educational models since the seventies: they are the *Ten Theses for Democratic Linguistic Education*, founding manifesto of GISCEL (De Mauro, Simone, 1975) and the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and its Companion Volume, drawn up by the Council of Europe (2001, 2018).

As Lombardo Radice has supported since 1913, what underlies language education is an education in originality and creativity to all the codes and varieties of language. Language issues are somehow democratic issues: indeed, they concern the raising of the cultural levels of an entire society and seek convergence towards the same national language, considering the existence of dialects and other language varieties. This fact could explain the presence of the adjective 'democratic' alongside the expression 'Democratic Language Education'. But acting in a democratic way also suggests the need to involve the majority of the population, without excluding social classes or linguistic-cultural minorities (De Mauro, 2018). The democratic nature of language education also embraces the concept of communicative functionality, in so far as educating to every possible linguistic and semiotic form means provide the learners with the necessary skills to be able to move within the symbolic space and to make sure that they choose the expressive tools from time to time suitable for the type of communication in progress, in relation to contexts, purposes and interlocutors (Vedovelli, Casini, 2016). The development of skills and abilities aimed at the acquisition of a communicative functionality in writing and speech is essential to avoid social exclusion and «linguistic unease» (Iannàccaro, 2019), and above all to break the cycle of educational poverty which unfortunately, today more than ever, affects many young people and their families, both of Italian and foreign origins (to deepen these issues see Openpolis, 2018, 2019, 2020; Nanni, Pellegrino, 2018; Save the Children, 2018). On the basis of these considerations and on the basis of the results obtained, the research work aims to bring to light some aspects in relation to the democracy perceived by students and teachers in the school to provide food for thought on the subject and to promote an education that can be defined in terms of educational success (Lisimberti, Montalbetti, 2015) which is at the same time inclusive and democratic (De Mauro, 2018), and which can guarantee students the exercise of an active citizenship within society.

## 2. Language education and democracy: the role played by school

### 2.1. Research methodology

The research aims to verify the presence of 'democracy' in teaching and learning processes in the school context starting from the perception of teachers and students, with the aim to propose an index to be developed in further research through observation activities in the classes.

Data collection and analysis has been made using a mixed method approach, quantitative and qualitative. Indeed, the implementation of the research tools consisted in multiple-choice and Likert scale questionnaires, one addressed to 13<sup>o</sup> grade students and one to teachers, in order to obtain quantitative data, and in Focus Group interviews which provide qualitative data through the analysis of major themes and issues. The tools of the survey are closely related to its objectives and contribute to create the methodological framework: the questionnaires offer the possibility to collect and analyse data in closed form and to calculate their relevance also on statistical bases; semi-structured interviews, carried out by means of guiding questions, provide information of fundamental importance on the situation analysed, represent a means of cross-checking with questionnaires and allow to detect variables not circumscribed in numbers and predetermined formulas (Benucci, Grosso, 2015).

The research questions have been constructed starting from the theoretical framework of Educational Linguistics and the guiding principles of the Gisel Ten Theses concerning Democratic Language Education: in this sense, the questions proposed aim to investigate the level of 'democracy' in the classroom according to the point of view of students and teachers. Therefore, the questionnaires are based on self-declarations. The guiding questions for semi-structured interviews were formulated partly following the questions of structured questionnaires to deepen and focus attention on relevant aspects and actively engage teachers and students. More precisely, the Gisel Ten Theses principles have been 'operationalized' and segmented into observable traits and translated into closed-ended questions. This process enabled to check the presence of the principles enunciated in the Theses in the daily didactic practices. The concept of 'democracy', which is the main subject of the research, is referred to the degree of equity and inclusion on the social and linguistic processes present within the classes and, more generally, within the school environment. It concerns the degree of involvement, active participation, and collaborative attitude during the lessons as well. It is fundamental to elicit motivation and interest from each student so that no one is excluded from the learning path. The idea of 'democracy' can also be found in a proper language education: an education in all the forms a language can offer, also approaching what in the Theses is called «communicative functionality». The school must provide its students with a democratic



education in terms of language, showing them that they need to communicate according to the purpose and the target of communication; the school must provide their students with tools and skills to face life in society, showing them the forms and the various use of language (both oral and written) to be active and responsible citizens, avoiding functional illiteracy and early school leaving phenomena.

The survey, carried out between January and February 2020, involved 11 secondary schools of II grade out of 24<sup>1</sup>, located in the cities of Cagliari, Carbonia and Iglesias. The collected data formed a corpus of 527 questionnaires (469 for students, 58 for teachers) and 6 Focus group interviews (4 for students, 2 for teachers) in which 31 interviewees had been involved.

## *2.2. Questionnaires and Focus Group*

The questionnaires mainly included structured closed questions based on Likert scale<sup>2</sup> from 1 to 4, with only one answer option. Other questions provided different options though predefined items and, in some cases, a blank space for a free specification, and finally questions with Yes/No answers.

The structured questionnaire for students consisted of 42 questions divided into specific sections: the Socio-demographic section; School and services offered; Didactics and involvement; Test and Assessment; Context outside school. The structured questionnaire for teachers presented a total of 33 questions organized into four sections: Socio-demographic section; Didactic and Glottodidactic issues; Assessment; Knowledge related to language education.

The questions of semi-structured interviews followed the contents of the two Questionnaires and have been carried out through the focus group approach, a qualitative data collection method based on discussion between a group of people (Oprandi, 2000; Cataldi, 2009). Small groups of 5/6 students and teachers took an active part in the focus group. The guiding questions for both teachers and students' interviews are 11. In the following section of this article the most significant data and aspects emerged from the analysis of the questionnaires and of the interviews will be discussed.

## **3. Data and outcomes**

### *3.1. An overview of students' socio-personal data*

This paragraph will briefly introduce student's socio-personal data related to type of school, city, gender, age, mother language and plurilingual repertoires. Of the 469 students, 61% attends a Lyceum,

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<sup>1</sup> The remaining institutes did not give the availability to participate.

<sup>2</sup> The batteries of items are: 'Not at all, Little, Enough, Much' and 'Totally Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Totally Agree'.

19.8% a Technical Institute and 19.2% a Professional/Vocational Institute: 42% of students attend school in the city of Cagliari, 35.8% in Carbonia and 22.2% in Iglesias. Comparing gender variable there is no gap, indeed 45.4% declares to be male, 54% female and 0.6% prefers not to declare it, while about the age 90.8% fits in 17-19 years age group, this means that the majority have a regular school career, against a 9.2% of students who declare to be 20 years old or even older (the highest age recorded is 25 years).

Investigating the linguistic repertoires, it emerges that 90.2% of students declare Italian as their L1, 7.5% declares to be native Sardinian language speakers, 0.2% claims to possess a double linguistic identity (Italian-Sardinian), while 2.1% of students have foreign or Italian-foreign origin: in particular, 1.5% only foreign mother tongue, 0.4% Italian-foreign mother tongue and 0.2% Sardinian-foreign mother tongue. Among the languages of origin of the students' families are included English, Russian-Ukrainian, Portuguese, German, Polish, Serbian-Romanian, Russian as well as mixed repertoires such as Sardinian-New Zealand, German-Italian, Arabic-Italian. Regarding the languages known by the students, 4.5% declares to know only Italian, 11.7% knows Italian and Sardinian, 26.4% knows Italian and other foreign languages and finally the majority, 57.4%, know Italian, Sardinian, and other foreign languages: this data shows the presence of plurilingual repertoires within the context investigated. Foreign languages known by students include English, Spanish, French, German, Arabic, Chinese, Polish, Japanese, Hungarian, Dutch, Russian-Ukrainian, Serbian-Romanian, Uzbek-Russian, Argentinian, as well as other Italian dialect/varieties from Brescia and Genoa. Therefore, from the perspective of a democratic school, it is necessary to pay attention to the variety of multilingual repertoires in the school environment and to make considered choices on the linguistic level which must have an inclusive role toward such diversity.

### *3.2. How much democracy? The point of view of students and teachers*

In the following section, the most significant data collected through questionnaires will be discussed. To better expose the quantitative analysis, the questions have been organized into six thematic areas which are Democracy and active citizenship: school and educational issues; Understanding process (lessons, texts, evaluation criteria); Family background and habits and students' motivation; Impact of socio-economic level and family education; Use of Language; Knowledge of Language Education.

The first data set concerns school and educational issues related to democracy and active citizenship in which a series of questions addressed to students and teachers have been compared. Such issues refer to students' opinion on school as a place where they meet to socialize (Q1), to acquire knowledge (Q2), to receive an inclusive education (Q3); on the quality of teaching (Q4) and the usefulness of

subject content (Q5); questions addressed to teachers concern the degree of satisfaction, relationship with students, inductive and interdisciplinary approaches, students' active participation, lessons and homework adjustment, time spent in exercise revision, communicative functionality (written and oral use of language), clarification of evaluation criteria, students' self-assessment skills, analysis of students' difficulties.

According to a large part of students, the school is characterized as a welcoming place in which they gain knowledge and useful tools to face reality. This picture appears more clearly for the data concerning Vocational and partly Technical School, while students of Science and Humanities high schools show a more critical attitude toward these issues. Regarding Q4 of Students' Questionnaire, which detects the effectiveness and the quality of teaching, students do not provide positive answers (only 30.9% of positive responses) and this aspect also recurs in the analysis of interviews.

Teachers' answers are quite positive as well. Nevertheless, it appears that 33% organizes 'little or not at all' activities which require active participation of students (Q9); 38% gives negative answers on the diversification of teaching (Q12); 45% of teachers declare that they raise 'little or not at all' awareness among students on the use of controlled writing (Q14); finally, 38% gives negative answers about students' self-assessment skills (Q18).

**TAB. 1.** *Democracy and active citizenship: school and educational issues: a comparison between students' and teachers' data*

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5
% Tot. students (469)	76,3% +	94,7% +	65,1% +	30,9% +	51,8% +
% Applied Science (151)	74,2% +	92,7% +	68,9% +	21,2% +	41,1% +
% Humanities School (135)	71,1% +	94,8% +	53,3% +	18,5% +	44,4% +
% Technical School (93)	80,6% +	96,8% +	59,1% +	35,5% +	57% +
% Vocational School (90)	83,3% +	95,6% +	82,2% +	61,1% +	75,6% +

Tot. teachers (58)	% +	% -
Q1_satisf	98,3%	1,7%
Q2_relationship_stud	100%	-
Q3_inductive_appr	91,4%	8,6%
Q4_lesson_setting	89,7%	10,3%
Q5_interdisc_appr	77,6%	22,4%
Q6_stud_active_particip	94,8%	5,2%
Q9_lab_proj_particip	67,2%	32,8%
Q10_teach_adapt	94,8%	5,2%
Q11_time_revision	96,6%	3,4%
Q12_teach_adjust	62,1%	37,9%
Q14_com_function_writt	55,2%	44,8%
Q15_com_function_oral	69%	31%
Q17_assessm_criteria	94,8%	5,2%
Q18_stud_selfassess	62,1%	37,9%
Q19_diff_analysis	93,1%	6,9%

Data concerning the second group of questions – understanding process (lessons, texts, evaluation criteria) – show that students claim to better understand the texts and school material (Q11 - 85%) than the lesson set by the teachers (Q10 -75%): there may seem to be a greater focus from the authors of textbooks in the presentation of topics and contents, opposed to a lack of planning in the lessons set by teachers. A considerable proportion of students (42,8%) say that they do not understand the evaluation criteria adopted by teachers (Q23): this implies low involvement and poor participation of students in their learning process.

In the third data set, which includes questions related to Family background, habits, and students' motivation, it appears that reading habits (Q27) are more prevalent in the families of students in Science and Humanities high schools. The families of students' Vocational School find it more difficult to buy school supplies (Q29). The motivation to continue the course of study (Q30) is higher among students at Science High School (62.9%), extremely low among students at Vocational School (42.2%).

**TAB. 2.** *Understanding process, Students Questionnaire*

	Q10	Q11	Q23
% Tot. students (469)	75,1% +	84,9% +	57,2% +
% Applied Science (151)	76,2% +	90,1% +	60,3% +
% Humanities School (135)	74,8% +	80% +	40,7% +
% Technical School (93)	75,3% +	79,6% +	54,8% +
% Vocational School (90)	73,3% +	88,9% +	78,9% +

**TAB. 3.** *Family background, habits, and students' motivation*

	Q27	Q28	Q29	Q30
% Tot. students (469)	52,9% +	80,6% +	20,5% +	62,9% +
% Applied Science (151)	66,2% +	80,1% +	13,2% +	87,4% +
% Humanities School (135)	57% +	76,3% +	24,4% +	52,6% +
% Technical School (93)	36,6% +	87,1% +	20,4% +	58,1% +
% Vocational School (90)	41,1% +	81,1% +	26,7% +	42,2% +

For the purpose of this research, it has been worth analyzing how the socio-economic and cultural background of students' families affects some aspects. In families with higher education, reading habits (Q27) are more common, and within this context people are used to comment on and have conversations about current issues (Q28). Students from lower-level education show a more positive attitude toward the quality of teaching (Q4), the usefulness of the contents of the school subjects (Q5) and make greater use of the 'educational desk'<sup>3</sup> (Q7): they find greater incitement in school and benefit from a completely free service

<sup>3</sup> The educational desk is support provided by the school to its students with the aim of improving disciplinary knowledge and the method of study by means of short recoveries or clarifications on a specific topic. It can be activated by request of the students, the teachers, as well as the family.

for study recovery. Therefore, where school offers opportunities to make up for any gaps or opportunities to deepen knowledge, these chances are exploited by the weaker population group which benefits of this type of support tools, thus demonstrating its usefulness.

In families with lower education, difficulties in purchasing school supplies (Q29) are greater (29%). Students coming from a higher educational background are more motivated to pursue studies (Q30).

**TABLE 4.** *Impact of socio-economic level and family education*

	Q4	Q5	Q7	Q27	Q28	Q29	Q30
High Education (167)	29% +	49% +	10% +	71% +	84% +	11% +	70% +
Low Education (154)	34% +	56% +	22% +	36% +	75% +	29% +	51% +

Resuming the discourse on multilingual repertoires and the use of language, students declare to use foreign languages (together with Italian and Sardinian) in school peer interactions, in students-to-teacher interactions and in their family context.

If we compare the use of Italian and Sardinian language, we can see that Sardinian is more used in peer interaction and in family context by Vocational School students and by students from lower cultural background in their family environment; instead, Italian is mostly used in school peer interactions as well as in family context by students in Science and Humanities high school and by students from higher educational family; finally, Trade and Technical school students and lower educational family students make greater use of both Italian and Sardinian not only in peer and family interactions, but also in student to teacher interactions during lessons (to deepen issues related to the use of language see also Lavinio, Lanero, 2008). Finally, the last part of quantitative analysis concerns questions addressed to teachers, related to their *Knowledge of Language Education*.

Overall, the 'Common European Framework of Reference' (Q22) is known more than the 'Giscel Ten Theses' (Q23) (65.5% vs 43.1%); the concept of Language Education (Q24) is little known as well as the existence of the Giscel group (Q25). Disaggregating the data by subject taught, it emerges that the teachers of humanities subjects are more familiar with the two texts than their colleagues of technical/scientific subjects: this fact this fact does not allow to apply the principle of transversality of language education which is a key assumption.

**TAB. 5.** *Knowledge of Language Education, Teachers Questionnaire*

	Q22	Q23	Q24	Q25
% + Tot. teachers (58)	65,5%	43,1%	39,7%	37,9%
Humanity subjects (21)	71,4%	52,4%		
Technical/scientific subject (34)	64,7%	38,3%		

Having so far considered and discussed the quantitative results, we will now move on to a brief content analysis of qualitative data emerged from focus group interviews. It is worth mentioning some negative

aspects emerged from students' interviews about 'Overall school experience': for instance, the uneasy relationship with teachers, the quality of teaching, a lack of basic competences and skills in school subjects, teachers' approach to the subject/discipline. More specifically, according to student's point of view, teachers are not always able to stimulate interest or to supply good basis. Thus, what appears from students' instances is the need for a greater psychological and relational preparation of teachers as well as the necessity of making school a place capable of forming responsible citizens who are able of living in a complex society, of accepting and managing diversity.

Concerning the qualitative analysis of teachers' focus group about the 'Use of language', all the teachers interviewed declare that they mainly use Italian to interact with students and to carry out the lesson, except for someone who claims to use Sardinian to meet the linguistic needs of students coming from dialect contexts; other Italian dialects or varieties of the origin area of the teachers are used as well, and in some cases English or Latin are used by teachers to deepen certain topics during lessons.

Finally, as regards opinions on the INVALSI tests<sup>4</sup>, teachers are not particularly optimistic because of lack of validity, since multiple choice mode is not suitable for testing real skills; evaluating students means evaluating teachers; it is counterproductive asking the students to answer a battery of questions for which no one prepared them. While students declare that INVALSI tests are useless because of lack of adequate preparation; lack of final evaluation.

Referring to the first point, students claim to have difficulty in dealing with the tests because they have never faced in their curricula what INVALSI assesses in Italian, Maths, and English; concerning the second one, students claim not to receive final feedback, although since 2019 tests are conducted on the computer and each student is provided with an access code to view the result obtained at the end of the test. Indeed, for the purpose of learning, the meaning of the results should be commented on and explained by the teachers.

## **Conclusions and further research perspectives**

In conclusion, considering that a Likert scale had been chosen as answers possibility, if we calculate an average value of answers, what appears is that, on a scale of 1 to 4, democracy is 2.6 for students and 2.7 for teachers. By comparing types of school, it appears that the perception of democracy is higher for students in Vocational Schools

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<sup>4</sup> The INVALSI survey, conducted annually in Italy by the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Educational System of Education and Training, measures the knowledge of Italian students at all school orders in the fields of Italian, Mathematics and English. The aim of the survey is to identify the characteristics of students, schools and educational systems to suggest possible improvements.

and lower for students in Humanity Schools. However, the democratic nature of the school does not seem to be enough to stimulate motivation in students at Vocational Schools (2.4) to pursue studies. On the contrary, we find students in Science High Schools with higher level of motivation (3.3). While comparing students' cultural background, it appears that the average of the degree of democracy is the same in both cases (low and high level of education) (2.6), while the motivation to pursue studies is greater for students coming from a higher educational background (2.9). Furthermore, in teachers' opinion the degree of students' literacy and self-assessment is rather low (2.3). In this sense, the impact of family's socio-economic and cultural background could be a relevant variable and plays a key role in providing impulses and triggering motivation to young students. For this reason, it is extremely important to ensure that the school becomes a place where educational poverty could be prevented thanks to a good and effective language education.

**TAB. 6.** *Average value of answers*

		Democracy in didactic	Motivation	Students' literacy and self-assessment
<b>Students Q.</b>	Students Tot.	2,6	2,8	-
	Applied Science	2,6	3,3	-
	Humanities School	2,4	2,6	-
	Technical School	2,6	2,6	-
	Vocational School	2,8	2,4	-
	Fam. Low Education	2,6	2,6	-
	Fam. High Education	2,6	2,9	-
<b>Teachers Q.</b>	Teachers Tot.	2,7	-	2,3

The results of the survey conducted are not intended to be exhaustive but could open prospects for further research in the overall field of school and language education. The research could continue in several directions, for instance developing an index of democracy, extending the analysis to other local realities and involving other social actors (e.g., school managers, students' parents) and finally including the adult educational context (CPIA).

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# Implementing Heritage Language Education in Migrant Hosting Countries: Lessons from the Austrian Case

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper explores the policy challenges and best practices related to the introduction of migrant languages into national school curricula. It is based on the assumption that languages can be considered economic assets and that an individual who masters a plurality of such assets can therefore be regarded as a resource to society. At present, however, language education in Europe is predominantly based on an assimilationist interpretation of migrant integration. The paper represents an early milestone of a research endeavor that investigates the features of heritage language education in Austria as an advanced experience of multilingual education (European Commission, 2019), with a view to inspiring further research and policy reflection.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Public policy; Education policy; Migration; Language; Integration*

## Introduction

In contexts characterized by immigration flows and super-diversity in terms of cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Wiley, 2014), heritage language learning opportunities can represent a resource to both migrants and the host society. However, as will be seen in this paper, practical obstacles can lessen their feasibility. In order to understand and overcome these obstacles, the article analyses the Austrian case to learn from it as one of the most developed experiences in this regard, and one in which migrants' home languages are «considered as the basis of the whole education process in school» (European Commission, 2019). This analytical goal will be pursued by means of an examination of the measures supporting heritage language learning, based on the assumption that «in policy analysis, the most creative calculations concern finding problems for which solutions might be attempted» (Wildavsky, 1979, 3).

The scope of the analysis spans language education policies at all education levels up to secondary education, with particular regard to heritage language support measures, to which insufficient attention has been paid so far. The analyzed sources include policy documents,

literature, and interviews with key informants, i.e., teachers at all school levels as education policy deliverers.

The first section presents the rationale for heritage language education, the second sketches an overview of migrant language education policies in Europe, and the third provides some preliminary findings from ongoing research on the Austrian experience. Finally, the conclusion outlines some strengths and limitations of this study.

## **1. The Rationale of Heritage Language Education**

The starting point of the study is the assumption that languages can be considered as assets and that an individual who masters a plurality of those assets can therefore be regarded as a resource (rather than a problem) to society; at the same time, migrants' social position and economic opportunities can be enhanced by the possession of multiple linguistic assets (Clyne, 2000).

In a view to enhancing language skills, migrant language education can leverage native linguistic backgrounds to favor an increase in the number of bilingual workers and thus represent an important factor of economic and productive growth for the host country (Ruiz, 1988; Vedovelli, 2014). A possible objection to this approach consists in the disparities between languages in terms of usefulness. However, the history of the world economy has shown that the economic position of a single country – and therefore the economic value of the language spoken therein – can substantially vary over time, thus making this kind of concern inconsistent. On the other hand, the importance of migrants' first languages has been the subject of copious studies (e.g., Benson, Kosonen, 2013 or Eurydice, 2009), showing that mastery of one's own first language is desirable for a number of reasons. These reasons (non-exhaustively) range from the facilitated acquisition of a second language (Cummins, 1979) to the avoidance of phenomena like Heritage Language Anxiety (HLA), which arises when heritage language mastery is absent (Sevinç, Backus, 2019) and can in turn give rise to social distress.

It is in the interest of migrant hosting countries as well as of migrants, therefore, to provide equal opportunities to all the ethnolinguistic components that coexist within the national context, which makes the case for powerful support for a multilingual education policy in a multilingual country (Schmidt, 2009). In order to achieve successful integration, education systems can act as key socialization mechanisms, both for migrants and host communities, to promote mutual knowledge and respect, including in linguistic terms. However, in many cases, language education measures targeting migrants have proven to be inadequate, as far as either the host country language(s) or migrant languages are concerned (OECD, 2015).

However, some countries have already understood the inherent value of this kind of policy, as is the case with Austria, which considers home language learning «as the basis of the whole education process in school» (European Commission, 2019, 19). With advanced experiences in this regard, one can envisage policy learning phenomena that draw upon the lessons learned from countries that have already tested educational practices within their own school systems.

Language education policies involve the management of diversity generated firstly by historical configurations and subsequently by more recent immigration (Zolberg, 2001), which has increased the degree of linguistic diversification (Deumert, 2006). From a socio-economic perspective, language policy can be referred to as a

systematic, rational, theory-based effort at the societal level to modify the linguistic environment with a view to increasing aggregate welfare [which is] typically conducted by official bodies or their surrogates and aimed at part or all of the population living under their jurisdiction (Grin, 2003, 30).

According to recent studies, immigrants want and need to learn the language spoken in their host community, as they perceive it as useful to learn and increase employability, but at the same time they fear weakening their proficiency in the heritage language, which is an identity element as well as a means to access formal and informal help from migrant networks (OECD, 2015). In this context, education can play a key role to promote intercultural dialogue between immigrant and non-immigrant students. Promoting knowledge of migrant languages as a key component of intercultural education can give migrant students a perception that their cultural and language background is valued as much as that of the majority (Brind *et al.*, 2007), while at the same time it can favor comprehension of and respect for migrant students' cultural background in non-migrant students. However, very few countries have decided to pursue a bilingual approach to education, also due to practical and financial obstacles, such as the difficulties implied in finding qualified teachers and the cost of implementing immigrant language activities (OECD, 2015).

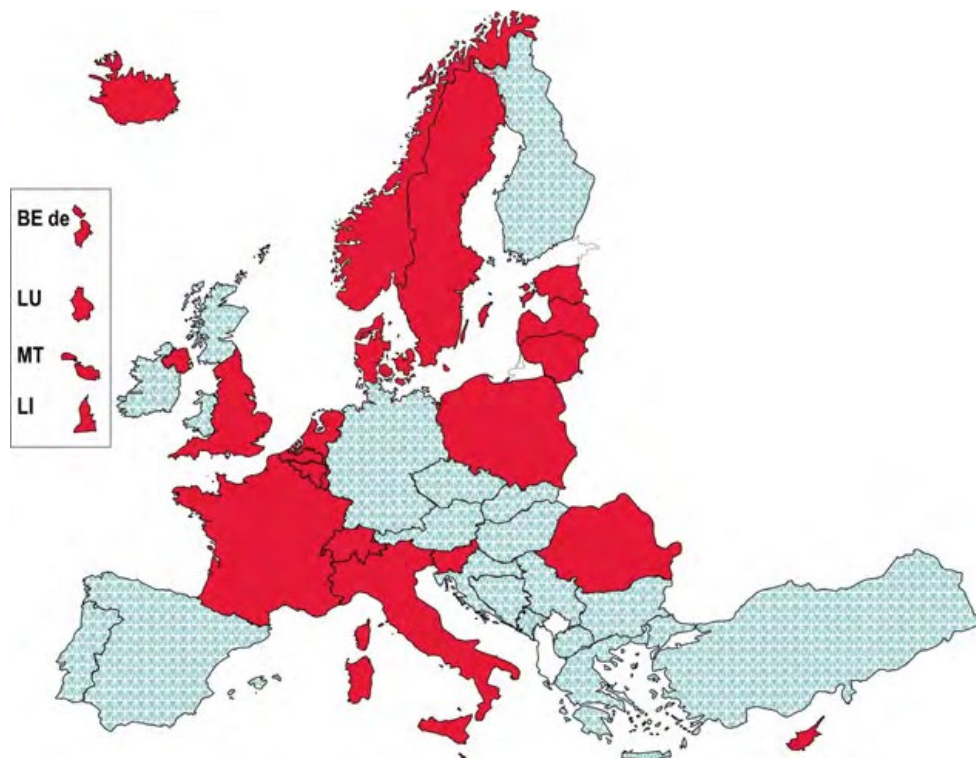
## **2. Migrant Language Education Policies in Europe**

### *2.1. Language and integration*

Migration is a widespread phenomenon throughout Europe. Migration flows often involve children, who most often follow the migratory trajectories of their families. These children are integrated into the school system of the new country hosting them, but not all European countries recognize them as a specific category requiring special

training and support. Figure 1 illustrates a map of the countries recognizing migrant students as a specific category.

**FIG. 1.** *Newly arrived migrant students identified as a specific category in 2017/18.*



Source: European Commission (2019, 54).

Only a few education systems provide heritage language support and/or the opportunity to learn migrant languages as foreign idioms (Extra, Yağmur, 2012), and even fewer provide these as migrants' rights since heritage language is often seen as merely instrumental to having migrants learn and switch to the host country language of instruction (European Commission, 2019).

This policy approach has some deep roots. The use and promotion of languages imply adherence to theories of political systems, always have social implications and are linked to identity and power issues in a particular society. This relationship between language and politics also develops in the opposite direction: political rhetoric and theories often imply consequences on the linguistic level, usually in the sense of affirming the superiority of the dominant language and standard varieties over minority languages and varieties different from the standard ones (Blackledge, 2009).

Historically, European countries have interpreted the relationship between language and nation in an identificatory way, building their own identity on the traditional connection between language and nation unity (Wright, 2016). However, the European landscape is *de facto*

largely determined by its cultural and linguistic diversity (Extra *et al.*, 2009), not only on a continental level but also within each country. This diversity has been accentuated by the more recent migratory waves, to the point of configuring what has been called super-diversity (Wiley, 2014) or hyper-diversity (Suárez-Orozco *et al.*, 2011), caused by a kind of migration that materializes on several levels. Indeed, migration flows can be exogenous, i.e., coming from other countries, or endogenous, i.e. materializing within the same country (for instance from Southern to Northern areas). To this increased complexity, nation-states have reacted mainly by reinforcing entry barriers and by implementing policies to regulate this new type of immigration, not least in an attempt to control multiculturalism and plurilingualism (Hogan-Brun *et al.*, 2009).

The term «integration» is often used to refer to the need to incorporate immigrant minorities into the socio-economic fabric of European nation-states. In theory, integration would imply an adaptation effort on the part of both migrants and the host society (Eisikovits, Beck, 1990). In practice, the adoption of integration policies translates into the implementation of cultural assimilation policies. Assimilation can be defined as a process through which migrants adopt the habits, language, customs, culture, and values of the host society. In most cases, integration policies force migrants to choose between the imitation of the dominant culture and the acceptance of a lower social and political status (Cainkar, 2013). Furthermore, the public opinion in favor of multiculturalism becomes subject to severe criticisms after the occurrence of violent episodes, which leads to the adoption of less tolerant policies (Rutter, 2013) in a declared attempt to satisfy bottom-up requests.

The idea is also widespread that if migrants learn the local language, this will instill a sense of security and confidence in the population (Van Avermaet, 2009). Moreover, as far as employment and gender are concerned, host country language learning brings about better job opportunities for migrants and more participation of women in the labor market (Villareal, 2009), although it has also been pointed out that it is access to better jobs, better education and ultimately social mobility that led to greater language knowledge, rather than the other way round (Van Avermaet, 2009).

According to the prevalent orientation of integration policies, migrants are considered a resource as long as they conform to the native community's language and customs (Ros i Sole, 2014). The tendency to evaluate the use of the dominant language as more desirable than the use of the language of origin is determined by extralinguistic factors that refer to theories of the social good, including the minimum criteria to facilitate equality and justice from a socio-economic point of view (Ricento, 2009).

Several scholars (Extra *et al.*, 2009; Hogan-Brun *et al.*, 2009) agree that in most European countries the prevailing policy orientation is

increasingly assimilationist, focusing on the requirements that immigrants should fulfil to participate in the host country life, for instance in order to obtain a residence permit. This orientation often translates into a type of integration obtained, language-wise, through measures for learning the language of the host country rather than through the promotion of multilingualism and intercultural dialogue (Extra, Yağmur, 2012).

### *2.2. The provision of migrant language education*

The provision of education services by public schools is highly dependent on exogenous factors, which include local and state elections, national education policies, budget changes, as well as the financial and human capital available (Melton, 2017). In particular, bilingual approaches in education are not widespread mainly due to practical barriers in terms of costs and complexity of implementation, with this latter being linked also to the difficulty in finding a sufficient number of qualified teachers and in producing high-quality guidelines and materials connecting mother tongue education to the mainstream curriculum (Nusche, 2009).

Although education policy is now designed and implemented in many sites and the education policy community is increasingly diverse and changeable (Ball, Junemann, 2011), national and sub-national public actors still remain the most important providers of (school) education services. In some countries, the education sector has been subjected to decentralization while in others the delivery of services is under the central education authority's control. The administrative decisions concerning the provision of education services include curriculum-related activities, human resource decisions, and allocation of funds through the budget, with some countries providing subnational autonomy with respect to all those activities and other countries retaining centralized control over one or more of them (Aoki, Schroeder, 2014).

The European scenario is extremely varied in terms of migrant language education. According to Extra and Yağmur (2012), some countries, such as Denmark, finance the related educational initiatives through national, regional, or local funds, while others, such as Spain and Switzerland, employ funds from migrants' countries of origin with which international agreements have been signed to partially cover costs; moreover, in France and Switzerland, migrant language classes are open to all students, while in Denmark and Spain they are reserved for native speakers of those languages; Spain and Switzerland offer classes partly during regular school hours, while in other countries they are offered as extracurricular activities; finally, the results in migrant language learning are generally not linked to any obligation or standard to be observed in terms of required competence level, although the development of language skills is generally monitored by schools.

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The following extract from a recent study published by the European Commission (2019) seems to well represent the educational situation in the three countries that present the most advanced policies in terms of heritage language education, including Austria:

In Austria and Sweden, the learning of home languages is [...] considered as the basis of the whole education process in school. In other words, it is seen as contributing to migrant students' achievement and well-being. In Sweden, where top-level education authorities have defined a very comprehensive assessment procedure, migrant students' competences in their home language are also assessed. [In] Finland [...] the teaching of home languages is seen as a contribution to fostering bilingualism and plurilingualism for all learners. In this country, top-level education authorities draw on the linguistically and culturally diverse environment in which schools operate. All languages present in the school are consequently valued and used; they all pertain to the school culture. The curriculum promotes plurilingualism and aims to develop students' linguistic awareness. [In] Austria, Sweden and Finland, [...] top-level education authorities have designed a curriculum specifically for the teaching of home languages.

One of these advanced experiences, i.e., the Austrian one, is the subject of the next section.

### **3. Problematic Aspects and Good Practices from the Austrian Case Study**

Thus, in Austria, the learning of heritage languages is considered as the basis of the whole education process and is seen as contributing to migrant students' achievement and well-being. As such, it is one of the three European countries – together with Sweden and Finland – where top-level education authorities have designed a curriculum specifically for the teaching of migrant languages (European Commission, 2019).

#### *3.1. Context*

In Austria, the Federal Ministry of Education has legislative and implementation responsibility for primary and secondary education as well as school-based vocational education and training, while the nine provinces (*Länder*) are in charge of school maintenance and recruitment matters in compulsory education institutions, as well as pre-primary education (OECD, 2017). Expenditure per student is higher than the OECD average, but expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP is below average with a greater portion coming from public sources than the average in the remaining OECD countries. Investments in primary and secondary education are relatively high, with funding for educational institutions being provided at both the

federal and the provincial levels. The education system includes both public schools, free of charge at all levels of education, and private schools, which usually charge fees (OECD, 2017). In the Austrian education system, key stakeholders are teachers, school leaders and school inspectors, i.e., civil servants of the school supervision service and teachers who are assigned supervision functions (Altrichter, 2017).

### *3.2. The promotion of inclusive plurilingualism at school*

Within this context, plurilingualism in Austria tends to be highly valued, especially among educators. The reasons for this can be identified in high consideration for plurilingual and reflective intercultural personality as an ideal of European language education, seen as a civic virtue and as a means to facilitate later job mobility (Council of Europe *et al.*, 2008). Languages, including migrant ones, are generally seen as a national resource and as part of Austria's linguistic capital, which – it has been argued – should nonetheless be more fully exploited through an approach that sees mother tongue instruction not only as a means to facilitate instruction in German but as an end in itself (Council of Europe *et al.*, 2008). Representatives of parent groups affirm the importance for migrant children to be competent, first of all, in their family language, considering also that the availability of a sufficient number of teachers who are able to teach languages such as Croatian, Serbian or Turkish (Council of Europe *et al.*, 2008) makes heritage language education feasible.

In Austria, considering the features of migrant presence in the country, teaching students with a migrant background is an important aspect that education providers must consider in their everyday work, rather than being an issue referred to certain schools or specialists only. With this situation at play, Austria is one of the countries that recognized the importance of providing linguistic support to immigrant students in the form of both German and heritage language support (OECD, 2010). On the other hand, it has been acknowledged that the effectiveness of heritage language support should be enhanced and made uniform across instruction levels (Nusche *et al.*, 2010). The language education system still faces challenges such as variations in language education services' quantity and quality across regions and schools, as well as a deficit-oriented approach to language development which sees students with insufficient knowledge of German as non-regular students. Migrant language support is provided in twenty different languages, and idioms such as Turkish and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian can also be chosen as foreign languages in secondary school. However, these languages are only rarely opted for. In addition to this, according to some key informants already interviewed, the effectiveness of support given to migrant students seems to be closely linked to teachers' sensibilities and ideas: «the people [teachers] I've come to know are very liberal and very



progressive» (interview with secondary school teacher based in Vienna, speaking about her colleagues' attitudes towards migrant students).

In Austria, heritage language teachers can have different profiles in terms of qualifications and origins. They might come from abroad or be first- or second-generation migrants who received education and training in Europe (European Commission, 2019). There is no pre-service training for migrant language teachers and foreign qualifications are not fully recognized, which contributes to low-level working conditions for those teachers and consequently to poor-quality instruction in migrant languages (Nusche *et al.*, 2010). However, efforts have been made in this regard, since a guide has been provided to enable those holding foreign qualifications to find the right contact person to start the recognition process<sup>1</sup>.

### *3.3. Good practices and challenges from the Austrian experience*

Some preliminary lessons can be drawn from the Austrian case for sounder regulation and implementation of a form of plurilingualism that includes migrant languages as assets. The preliminary findings of this research, from both previous thematic studies and the interviews that have been carried out so far, show that while governmental support is of course an important element for heritage language education, what is especially significant is the sensibility of teachers vis-à-vis intercultural education. Moreover, in a view to improving bidirectional integration, the opportunity to choose migrant languages as foreign languages to learn at school seems to be crucial, although this significance seems to be lessened by the actual decisions made by families in terms of language choice, which in Austria indicate a low number of people opting for the inclusion of these languages in students' curricula. On the education provider side, another element that stands out as crucial is the recognition of the availability of individuals equipped with migrant language skills, which also implies the recognition of their possibly foreign qualifications.

Barriers to an adequate development of heritage language education, instead, consist in the variation across geographical areas and schools in terms of language education service quality and quantity, which can also create segregation side-effects (Nusche, 2009). This variation can also be observed in the non-uniformity of heritage language support across instruction levels. A segregation effect can moreover be triggered also by deficit-oriented approaches to language development, which see migrant students as irregular ones, rather than consider migrant languages as resources for all students and, more generally, for the enrichment of an otherwise uniform linguistic landscape *latu sensu* (Landry, Bourhis, 1997). Furthermore, the beneficial effects of the provision of opportunities for migrant language learning and

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<sup>1</sup> More information about the measure is available at <https://www.berufsanerkennung.at/en/>

intercultural education can be lessened by an insufficient degree of promotion, especially among families, of language learning as a resource. Finally, on a policy-deliverer level, the lack of pre-service training for migrant language teachers as well as of full recognition of foreign qualifications can have detrimental effects on both the quality and quantity of migrant language education.

## **Conclusion**

This paper preliminarily illuminates some aspects related to the formulation and implementation phases of migrant language education. It shows some of the good practices and challenges that need to be addressed by policy actors in the field while at the same time keeping in mind that policy learning and transfer imply adaptation to the specific context in which the policy is to be adopted (McCann, Ward, 2012). Therefore, the applicability of lessons in specific national systems remains to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, for instance through piloting. The main strength of this study consists in the introduction of the heritage language learning issue into the policy implementation debate, which has so far largely neglected it. Open questions still remain. For instance, the issue of how to collect the resources to finance immigrant language education, which draws upon more general theories on the financing of language policy (Grin, Vaillancourt, 2000), would deserve to be dealt with. Moreover, one limitation of the preliminary findings presented here is that they are a product of still-in-progress research, while another drawback consists in the absence of evidence regarding the selection of home languages to be taught, which is a crucial issue for decision-makers.

Overall, the approach adopted in this research, trying to explore the multifacetedness of migrant language education practice, is important to acknowledge the complexity of providing migrant language education in schools. If governments opt for multilingual policies in education, this implies a need for wise management of bilingualism with cooperation between multiple actors. While the absence of policies that recognize and protect bilingualism can have disastrous effects on mental health and consequently on the social integration of migrants, decisions about the promotion of bilingualism in migrant hosting countries should consider the personal and family circumstances of the child and must imply, *inter alia*, both educational and family efforts (Toppelberg, Collins, 2010).

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## Specificity of the Linguistic Landscape of Detainees. A Studio Between Slang and Graffiti in Prison

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**ABSTRACT:** *This research aims to collect and analyze the prison jargon, expressive codes with which foreign prisoners come into contact. The prison context, characterized by plurilingualism, pluriculturalism and defined as a space of linguistic-cultural contact, the presence of signs and graffiti on the walls and code mixing. In light of these peculiarities belonging to the linguistic panorama of prisons the first results of research, are presented through the collection of a corpus, which will then be classified and finally described in the uses and lexical functions. The research involves the involvement of some sectors of interest such as Linguistic Landscape, Sociolinguistics, Semiotics, and Foreign Language Didactics. A first collection of the corpus was produced from existing projects in the sector and from the study of the literature of reference. Through research tools, which are specially designed and elaborated according to the specific methods it was possible to carry out a first administration. From an initial analysis of the data collected up to now, this referred us to some reflections.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Sociolinguistics, Italian L2, Plurilingualism, Pluriculturalism, Superdiversity*

### Introduction

This work has as its object the analysis of the expressive resources and dialogic practices found within prisons. First of all, we intend to review the specificities that are found on the communicative level between disjointed realities, the intra and extra-masonry world, to then focus on the use of subcodes specific to the reference context. Of particular interest to the writer was investigating the existence of a prison we-code to be understood, using Ferrero's definition, as a widespread, 'sufficiently homogeneous' metalanguage in which the speaker recognizes himself «by finding a decisive identification» (Ferrero, 1972: 10), and who, to some extent, are excluded from the more extensive 'jargon of the underworld', widely observed by the same author.

Given the scarcity and spontaneity of previous research on the subject, and in order to add a further piece to the analysis of the codes and variables inherent in the context under consideration, it was

decided to conduct a survey by subjecting prisoners, operators and teachers of some prisons to fill in a questionnaire.

Starting from an analysis relating to the recent changes in the socio-demographic and sociolinguistic structures that have involved our country, which are also reflected in the context in which we are concerned, in the first chapter of the paper we primarily intend to focus on the factors of an exogenous and endogenous nature that affect communication in a prison environment. Together, the characteristics of convergence and divergence of the intramural linguistic reality are identified in relation to the communicative uses of the external world, analyzing them in relation to the different dimensions of linguistic variability.

The second chapter is dedicated to the exposure and analysis of the data collected in the proposed survey. The aim is to reflect on the linguistic uses - including the use of slang voices - of restricted speakers at the facility in relation to variables such as the context, the repertoires they have, the social actors with whom they interact, their past within and outside the prison walls.

During the last chapter, a reflection is proposed on the application implications, on the level of educational linguistics, that arise from the analysis conducted. The latter is configured as the result of the acquisition of an ever-greater awareness of the linguistic peculiarities of the intra-masonry world and of the public of learners with whom we interface as teachers of Italian as L2 in the context of internment.

## **1. Prison as a linguistic-cultural contact space**

The prison context is configured as a multiform universe whose complexity, even linguistic, is ascribable both to exogenous pressures and to endogenous characteristics. Before proceeding with the analysis of the international codes and practices that unfold within the penitentiary world, and to contextualize the data collected in the context of this survey, it is therefore considered useful to propose a summary review of the elements that affect the dynamics. Therefore, the external factors that influence the context of reference on the idiomatic level will be first outlined, to then dwell on what is linguistically inherent to its very nature.

This research aims to collect and analyze the prison slang, main object of interaction, and graffiti or signs of different nature which are present within the prison walls. Means to convey messages of all kinds, are identifiable as a multitude of expressive code with each foreigners' detainees come into contact.

The prison context, characterized by plurilingualism, pluriculturalism and defined as a space of linguistic-cultural contact and superdiversity (Vertovec, 2007; Barni, Vedovelli, 2011), hosts a slang language that



reflects on customs, ideologies, attitudes, and the beliefs of those who use it intertwining with different expressive codes.

On the basis of what has been said so far, below is an illustrative outline of some Italian prisons. The aim is to make people think about the high rate of presence of foreign prisoners in Italian prisons, confirming what was previously stated. Among the numbers and percentages reported below, we noticed the presence of more relevant data relating to the most presence of some foreign communities: Albanians 11,6%, Moroccans 18,5%, Nigerians 8,5%, Romanians 12,1% and Tunisians 10,1%.

Some reflections are now proposed about the results of this conformation and, not least, about the consequences that arise from the coexistence of different languages, cultures and identities. First, Benucci and Grosso propose a reading of the dialogic practices that take shape inside the prison referring to the theory of 'linguistic socialization' (Ochs, Schieffelin, 2012). In the context of detention, the dynamics of socialization see both inmates (native and non-native) and prison workers as protagonists, therefore: the processes of socialization involve, a profound work of negotiating meanings and contribute to the creation of new identities of individuals, identities that are also shaped through linguistic uses; prisoners use the many languages that make up their repertoire according to the different dimensions of communication and the self-identifications they wish to attribute to themselves in the different communicative situations. The reference to the theory of language socialization, together with the idea of the prison as a 'community of practice', instead of numerous communities in their own right, are of fundamental importance for our purposes and will later be resumed in relation to the use of subcodes. Without any doubt, the condition of plurality described above, together with generalized lack of linguistic skills, entails the use of conversations in several languages or varieties, or abundant code mixing (mixed-language utterance)<sup>1</sup> and code-switching operations also in the context of the discursive practices of native speakers (Italian-dialect alternation). Furthermore, in the presence of scarcely shared semiotic universes, we are witnessing the election of one or more of these languages with a vehicular expressive code, used by speakers not united by the same L1 (mother tongues). The languages called to assume this role certainly are certainly Italian, the language of the host country, and English and French with the status of exolingue or LS.

The specificity of communication in the penitentiary is due to the integration of expressive codes:

- the use of slang;
- the presence of signs and graffiti on the walls;
- and code mixing.

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on the phenomena of «code switching» and «code mixing» in relation to the functions they perform (Grassi *et al.*, 1997).

To outline the exact context of the research, the study of the reference literature, such as the studies conducted by Cosentino (2013), Coveri, Benucci and Diadori (1998), D'Agostino (2007). Furthermore, the projects, research activities and related results carried out in this area also played an important role. Among these some of the best known and most important are:

- Enhancement of communication between foreign prisoners and prison workers and the acquisition of Italian L2 and communication between foreign prisoners and staff working in prison facilities (Benucci, 2007);
- IDRIP - Immigration, deviance, reintegration and profession. Linguistic-cultural aspects and criticalities in the access of detained immigrants to the world of work (Benucci, 2010; Carmignani, 2012);
- DEPORT - Beyond the confines of the prison: linguistic - professional portfolio for prisoners (Benucci, Grosso, 2015; Carmignani, Sciuti Russi, 2015);
- RiUscire - SocioCultural University Network for Education and Prison Recovery (Benucci, Grosso, 2017).

The investigations conducted in the context of the DEPORT and RiUscire projects have highlighted how the majority of the languages of the countries of arrival are to fulfill the function of lingua franca in Italian and European detention contexts: this practice, however, highlights a situation of asymmetry to the detriment of the foreign prisoner, who, in order to understand and be understood by the figures with whom he relates, must show himself in some way competent in these languages from the moment of his entry into prison (Benucci, Grosso, 2015). The previous acquisition of an adequate level of linguistic competence, especially in relation to the dialogic interactions typical of the place, however, proves for some prisoners (especially for those who experience the failure of the migration project prematurely) not only a rather unusual condition in the very early stages of entry and reception in the structure, but also subsequently. In this regard, already on the occasion of the first sociolinguistic mappings carried out within the context, Benucci had found that: «one would expect that after the first contact with the prison, foreign inmates spontaneously begin to learn Italian as a second language [...], however, despite a four/six month stay in the institution, [...] a production and understanding limited to a few words, insufficient for even a simple interaction» (Benucci, 2007: 26).

Especially in the initial stages of acquisition, the varieties that the learner develops are strictly dependent on the context in which he is located and closely linked to the willingness to listen to the interlocutors. The latter, in many cases native speakers, play a crucial role for the success of communication, being able to facilitate the exchange through discursive practices that enable non-native speakers to organize their speech by placing it in space and time (Giancalone,

Ramat, 1993, 347). In the case of the context referred to, the factors that disadvantage development interlingua are to be ascribed to various elements of a psycho-social nature that refer to the complexity of the intramural world itself, to the quality and quantity of communicative exchanges that take shape in it, to the disparity of situational domains in relation to the external world, to the perception that the individual has a target language. In relation to the nature of the communicative exchanges, it was found that the inmate-prison worker interactions are minimal and characterized by a lack of willingness to listen and to facilitate first attempts at oral production in L2 by non-natives; interactions between peers, on the other hand, are relegated to a few moments of sociability or occur mainly with inmates sharing the same prison room. However, the cellmate is often a fellow countryman or a non-Italian-speaking inmate, which is why the foreign inmate can potentially be subject to poor exposure to L2 inputs. The diatopic varieties and the register varieties (often overlooked popular), linked respectively to the disparate origins of both operators and prisoners and to the medium-low level of education that especially characterizes the imprisoned population, contribute to exacerbate the difficulties in decoding events communicative (Benucci, 2007). No less impacting among the causes that amplify the learning difficulties is also the high rate of illiteracy that characterizes the foreign imprisoned population to a considerable extent, «a fact that is understandably serious in light of the need to master the skills of understanding and written production in order to exercise their rights within this context» (Benucci, Grosso, 2015, 60).

The linguistic tools of penitentiary operators in terms of knowledge of other languages in addition to their mother tongue are still insufficient, as is the presence within the context of cultural mediators (provided for by the penitentiary regulation<sup>2</sup> but still little valued), indispensable figures for the purpose to facilitate and promote intercomprehension and interculturality.

If linguistic differences, and at the same time levels of linguistic competence pragmatically inadequate for the purposes, can in fact be factors triggering feelings of conflict between prisoners and operators and between prisoners themselves as a consequence of the lack of sharing of meanings, the situation is no less complex. It concerns cultural plurality. The coexistence of different cultures, in fact, easily underlies situations of equivocity strictly dependent on the lack of communion and (often unconscious) interpretation of values, spaces, concepts and habits. Also, from this point of view there is a lack of awareness on the part of prison workers in relation to the cultures of origin of the prisoners, their respective worship practices, eating habits,

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<sup>2</sup> See article 35 «Foreign prisoners and inmates» of the «Regulations containing rules on the penitentiary system and on the deprivative and limiting measures of liberty», Decree of the President of the Republic, 30 June 2000, n. 230.

ways of perceiving and expressing their state of health, their way of expressing themselves through gestures, also culturally connoted (Benucci, Grosso, 2015; Cosentino, 2013). According to Sciuti Russi «we can define current Italian prisons as a sort of multicultural collage, [...] as the product of a forced set of separate worlds, which, driven by a centrifugal force, tend to disorientation, exclusion and loneliness» (Carmignani, Sciuti Russi, 2015: 15). In this regard, especially in a peculiar and complex place such as the intramural one, the lack of sharing of senses, as well as the impossibility of expressing oneself and manifesting oneself through one's own identity, even cultural, can have serious repercussions on an already existing condition. In itself psychologically vulnerable which is that of the interned subject. To date, however, a growing sensitivity to these issues, up to a decade ago still scarcely the subject of debate, has matured not only in the academic field (we refer in particular to the aforementioned projects) but also within the Administration itself. Penitentiary, institutions that sometimes operate in synergy. Two entire volumes of the Series *Quaderni ISSP - Higher Institute of Penitentiary Studies*<sup>3</sup> have been dedicated to the figure of the foreign prisoner, in which reflections are proposed about the new structure of the institutions, the condition of treatment disparity experienced by the foreigner, the need for continuous training of prison staff to cope with the changing structures of the reality in which they work in order to best fulfill their role in respecting and enhancing the otherness that characterizes it.

## 2. The investigation

After having clarified the research context and having deepened the studies on literature and having analyzed good practices in the field of linguistic, sociolinguistic, ethnographic and teaching research in prison, some considerations were formulated that led to research questions: Is there a prison slang? How do foreign detainees come in contact with this slang? How does it influence and find space within the prison walls, and how does it reflect on the uses, ideologies, attitudes and beliefs of those who use it? Could this slang represent a first approach to the Italian Language of many foreign detainees?.

Furthermore, specific objectives were defined for the continuation and the very end of the research project:

- exploring the existence of a prison we-code (Ferrero, 1972);
- check for the presence of signs and graffiti on the walls;
- possible application proposal for a didactic course of Italian L2/LS in prison.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. ISSP (2013 o.l.), *Lo straniero in carcere*, in «Quaderni ISSP», 2; ISSP (2013 o.l.), *Essere stranieri in carcere*, in «Quaderni ISSP», 12.

In light of these peculiarities belonging to the linguistic panorama of prisons, below the first results of research concerning the existence of a prison we-code (Ferrero, 1972) are presented through the collection of a corpus, which will then be classified and finally described in the uses and lexical functions.

In particular, the research involves the involvement of some sectors of interest such as Linguistic Landscape, it saw its first expansion in 1997 with the opera *Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality* di Landry and Bourhis, «the study of the language present in written form in the public space» (Gorter, 2006: 2), Sociolinguistics, Semiotics, and Teaching of Italian Languages to Foreigners. A first collection of the corpus was produced from existing projects in the sector (Benucci, 2007, 2009; Benucci, Grosso, 2015, 2017) and from the study of the literature of reference (Ferrero, 1972, 1991; Mathew, 2013).

Data collection was conducted through research tools, which are specially designed and elaborated according to the *Mixed Methods*, in particular the *Explanatory Design* (Heigham, Croker, 2009), which is based on quantitative surveys on groups of foreign detainees and its subsequent descriptive/inferential statistical analysis. The next step is to connect, the selection of a group of participants for the qualitative follow-up. This is then used for data collection and thematic qualitative analysis of the interviews. Finally, the interpretation of the data based on the intersection of quantitative and qualitative data.

At the moment, it was possible to carry out a first administration in 4 Italian prisons located in Tuscany, for a total of 19 questionnaires submitted to the prison population and 15 to prison staff and teachers/tutors included in the educational courses in prison.

The questionnaires used as a survey tool were structured in two sessions: the first, designed to investigate the personal and linguistic biography of the interviewees; the second, aimed at deepening the question concerning communicative exchanges and the use of slang uses. As a starting point for reflecting on the variability of sociolinguistic practices implemented within the context, therefore, the study conducted was primarily aimed at probing the current composition of those who live and work there; first outlining the biographical and sociocultural profiles of the speakers - in this case prisoners, operators, and teachers - was fundamental in order to correlate the extra-linguistic variables with the linguistic facts under investigation. Subsequently, with regard to the use of subcodes, it was considered appropriate to subject informants to the recognition of some defined 'slang' items, collected in a corpus. The choice of the source on which to base the contrastive analysis of the items was dictated by the scarcity of specific material available; the aim was, on the other hand, to probe any correspondences between the already existing expressions and the linguistic uses of foreign detainees.

The selected starting corpus was built on the basis of the one already existing in Ferrero (1972; 1991), Mathew (2013) and from the website of

*Ristretti Orizzonti* of the *Due Palazzi* prison in Padova, with the aim of making a comparison with the newly collected one. Here is an extract from the selected source corpus: *accavallato* = 'armato'; *cannone, ferro, tamburo* = 'pistola'; *bevuto* = 'arrestato'; *braccialetti* = 'manette'; *capei* (from the venetian dialect 'cappelli') e *cavalli* = 'carabinieri'; *celestina* = 'sigaretta'; *corvo* = 'ufficiale giudiziario'; *erbivoro* = 'ergastolano'.

## Conclusion

The prison is configured as a space with an extremely diversified and composite linguistic and identity conformation, a complex environment that presents within it several communities and a very wide variety of repertoires. This leads us to rightly consider it one of the contexts of linguistic and cultural super-diversity of the Italian and European panorama, in which coexistence has a coercive character and in which the differences are exasperated and overlap with the problems of the context. There is therefore a need for increasing attention and awareness of intercultural issues, and on the part of all those who work and reside in the prison.

Using the data collected as part of the survey conducted, the aim was to highlight the role of jargon, in order to provide a personal contribution to the analysis of the codes present within the context in question, a place of marginality for excellence.

It has a profound identity value and can therefore be configured as a strong means of communication even between speakers of different languages, due to the sense of belonging to a community that it conveys.

Finally, from an initial analysis of the data collected up to now, the presence of 152 items of variety of jargon, and this referred us to some reflections: how does the expansion and contagion of these codes between distant institutions take place? Do diatopic variants and dialects influence jargon with alloglot terms? Finally, a first mapping of the linguistic space was carried out, considering the resident/working population and the relative linguistic biography, in such a way as to be able to correlate the extra-linguistic variables for possible application in terms of Didactics of the Italian Language to Foreigners, for the acquisition of a pragmatic competence that can be spent outside the prison.

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**Education in a Multi Religious Scenario. A  
Critical Discussion on the Aims and  
Outcomes of Teaching Religion(s) in Public  
Schools**

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## Religious Diversity and School: An Impossible Combination? (Re)interpreting Islam in the School Scenario

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**ABSTRACT:** *In Italy the rapid and continuous growth of the migration phenomenon has also impacted on the school system over the years. According to the data provided by the Ministry of Education, the number of students with non-Italian citizenship (NIC) has changed from the number of 37,478 (1993/1994) to 857,729 (10% of the total school population) in the school year 2018/2019. Considering origin of countries, it has grown over the years up to reach a variety of more than 200 countries, that is almost the whole world, even though the most numerous communities of students NIC are from Romania, Albania and Morocco. As an institution devoted to reception, the school has played a fundamental role towards immigration, by progressively adopting solutions which, from initial emergency stage, have developed with the purpose of ensuring the minors' right to education in view of increasing presence of immigrants' children, but also of the constant growth of students NIC born in Italy from migrant parents: 'second generations' (64,5% of 857,729). Italian school, through the growing presence of students NIC, has been becoming increasingly a multicultural and multireligious school, a field of encounter between different cultures. For this reason, it needs, more and more, intercultural and interreligious education in order both to sow the seeds of innovative pedagogical and didactic actions and prevent and tackle violent radicalization and extremism. Since textbooks, along with pedagogical materials, do not simply pass on knowledge, but mirror the values of the society in which they are produced and used, a critical review of textbooks content should be constantly conducted by teachers, understanding pedagogic content knowledge. Indeed, textbooks still show, in some cases, a stereotyped and ethnocentric vision of the world, following a mere monocultural approach. In particular, as far as the conception/perception of Islam and Muslims coming out from textbooks is concerned, it turns out that too many textbooks still tend to be Eurocentric, so they are inadequate in terms of providing students with a balanced understanding of Islam and Islamic societies. Consequently, without forgetting the issue of religious illiteracy and its effects on the social and political milieu and by drawing attention to the importance of textbooks in good quality education policy, the first results of an analysis on the image of Muslims and Islam that emerges from the most popular and modern Italian religion textbooks for upper secondary school will be presented.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Italian school, Intercultural education, Textbooks, Islam*

## Introduction

In Italy the rapid and continuous growth of the migration phenomenon has also impacted on the school system over the years. According to the data provided by the Ministry of Education, the number of students with non-Italian citizenship (NIC) has changed from the number of 37,478 (1993/1994) to 857,729 (10% of the total school population) in the school year 2018/2019. Considering origin of countries, it has grown over the years up to reach a variety of more than 200 countries, that is almost the whole world, even though the most numerous communities of students NIC are from Romania, Albania and Morocco. As a matter of fact, this situation is also associated with cultural, linguistic and religious differences which are present in the school-training system; in fact, Italy is experiencing an increase in religious diversity.

As an institution devoted to reception, the school has played a fundamental role towards immigration, by progressively adopting solutions which, from initial emergency stage, have developed with the purpose of ensuring the minors' right to education in view of increasing presence of immigrants' children, but also of the constant growth of students NIC born in Italy from migrant parents: 'second generations' (64,5% of 857,729). Italian school, through the growing presence of students NIC, has been becoming increasingly a multicultural and multireligious school, a field of encounter between different cultures. For this reason, it needs, more and more, intercultural and interreligious education in order both to sow the seeds of innovative pedagogical and didactic actions, and prevent and tackle violent radicalization and extremism.

Since textbooks, along with pedagogical materials, do not simply pass on knowledge, but mirror the values of the society in which they are produced and used, a critical review of textbooks content should be constantly conducted by teachers, having an understanding of pedagogic content knowledge. Indeed, textbooks still show, in some cases, a stereotyped and ethnocentric vision of the world, following a mere monocultural approach. In particular, as far as the conception/perception of Islam and Muslims coming out from textbooks is concerned, it turns out that too many textbooks still tend to be Eurocentric, so they are inadequate in terms of providing students with a balanced understanding of Islam and Islamic societies. Consequently, without forgetting the issue of religious illiteracy and its effects on the social and political milieu and by drawing attention to the importance of textbooks in good quality education policy, the first results of an analysis on the image of Muslims and Islam that emerges from the most popular and modern Italian religion textbooks for upper secondary school will be presented.

## 1. The Challenge of Intercultural Education

Italian schools, through the presence of NIC students, has been becoming increasingly a multicultural school. Their presence has created a process of demographic transformation. It involves new didactic and above all pedagogical challenges regarding the testing of new possible ways of intercultural coexistence, whose main difficulties consist in discovering an essential stability between diversity and integration (Pattaro, 2014).

Therefore, the concept of intercultural education and dialogue, strongly promoted by the EU with the proclamation of the *European Year of Intercultural Dialogue* in 2008 as a key competence for teachers working in changing and diverse classrooms (Skrefsrud, 2016; Holmes *et al.*, 2016), was (since the 1990s) a positive response to this new situation and is now common in the area of school legislation. In particular, the *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, by providing various orientations for the promotion of intercultural dialogue, mutual respect and understanding, states the following: «Promoting intercultural dialogue contributes to the core objective of the Council of Europe, namely preserving and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law» (Council of Europe, 2008, p.8).

In 1990 the Italian Ministry of Public Education defined through the Ministerial Circular 205, *La scuola dell'obbligo e gli alunni stranieri. L'educazione interculturale (Compulsory Schooling and Foreign Students: Intercultural Education)*, the role of intercultural education as the fostering of positive coexistence, preventing the creation of stereotypes and prejudices towards other peoples and cultures and overcoming any form of ethnocentrism. Later, in 1994, the Ministerial Circular 73, *Dialogo interculturale e convivenza democratica: l'impegno progettuale della scuola (Intercultural Dialogue and Democratic Coexistence: The Planning Commitment of the Schools)*, represented the first systematic effort to shape what would later become the Italian approach to interculturalism. Indeed, intercultural education is defined not merely as a response to the issues raised by the presence of NIC students but, as one of the most important strategies to combat racism, also includes the complex issues deriving from the contact between different cultures. Furthermore, interculturalism includes the possibility of reciprocal discoveries, while respecting individual and collective identities, in a climate of dialogue and solidarity. Finally, Intercultural education implies that some measures should be adopted, such as: investments in intercultural training of teachers; reinterpretation of knowledge taught at school with an intercultural emphasis; critical analysis of textbooks. In addition, the multicultural configuration of today's society raises deep questions about the education and training systems. From such a point of view, intercultural training of teachers occupies a very important position. It is only by starting from a correct

formulation of educational work that one can hope to promote a necessary education for a culture of peace and co-existence (Alma, Ter Avest, 2019).

All these reflections lead to affirm that school needs more and more intercultural education. It represents, in fact, a sort of framework for integration, so as to sow the seeds of innovative pedagogical and didactic actions. Moreover, didactic materials, in general, and textbooks, in particular, should propose different perspectives on given subjects and their content should be based on scientific findings (UNESCO, 1995), given that, as UNESCO stated: «intercultural education cannot be just a simple 'add on' to the regular curriculum. It needs to concern the learning environment as a whole, as well as other dimensions of educational processes, such as school life and decision making, teacher education and training, curricula, languages of instruction, teaching methods and student interactions, and learning materials» (UNESCO, 2006: 19).

Last but not least, in response to extremist violence and terrorist attacks in Europe, the EU Education Ministers adopted in 2015 the Paris Declaration on *Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education* since «the primary purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes and to embed fundamental values, but also to help young people – in close cooperation with parents and families – to become active, responsible, open-minded members of society» (EU Ministers of Education, 2015, 2).

## **2. Adaptation of teaching materials and resources**

In 1995 UNESCO stated that «all people engaged in educational action must have adequate teaching materials and resources at their disposal. In this connection, it is necessary to make the necessary revisions to textbooks to get rid of negative stereotypes and distorted views of 'the other' (UNESCO, 1995, 11). In fact, in everyday practice teachers, beyond supplementary resources, often use textbooks to broaden student horizons or teach more substantial lessons. Notwithstanding, within education systems the issue of textbooks, along with other learning materials, has recently become a subject of concern, given that in some cases they still show a stereotyped and ethnocentric vision of the world, following a mere monocultural approach.

Textbooks do not simply pass on knowledge but mirror the values of the society in which they are produced and used (Farrell, Heyneman, 1989; UNESCO, 2005). Therefore, a critical review of textbooks content should be constantly conducted by teachers, having an understanding of pedagogic content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). Furthermore, it is becoming ever more urgent to develop intercultural skills and dialogue, critical understanding and appreciation of different religions in order «to

prevent ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural divides [...] to move forward together, to deal with our different identities constructively and democratically on the basis of shared universal values» (Council of Europe, 2008, 3), without forgetting the issue of religious illiteracy and its effects on the social and political milieu (Melloni, Cadeddu, 2019).

Hence, in an era of growing regional, ethnic and religious tension, it becomes obvious that learning materials are not totally free of bias and value judgements. Whilst this is most recognizable in history texts (Pingel, 2000; Araújo, Maeso, 2012; Padgett, 2015), it is not limited to them. In fact, textbooks on geography, social sciences and humanities may also contain partial or biased information. Thus, it becomes more and more necessary to have a perception of textbooks as a means of promoting peace and mutual understanding among all nations, since «whenever new teaching materials, textbooks and the like are to be produced, they should be designed with due consideration of new situations [...]. Distance education technologies and all modern communication tools must be placed at the service of education for peace, human rights and democracy» (UNESCO, 1995, 11).

Lastly, specifically for the teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools, in 2007 the *Toledo Guiding Principles* were developed, aimed at both legislators and schools, in order to contribute to an improved understanding of the world's increasing religious diversity and the growing presence of religion in the public sphere. As far as the preparation of curricula, textbooks and educational materials are concerned, it is declared that OSCE participating States, whenever they choose to promote the study and knowledge about religions and beliefs in schools, they «should take into account religious and non-religious views in a way that is inclusive, fair, and respectful. Care should be taken to avoid inaccurate or prejudicial material, particularly when this reinforces negative stereotypes» (OSCE/ODIHR, 2007, 17).

### **3. Islam in some Italian textbooks of Catholic Religion**

Council of Europe policies emphasize the study of religions and beliefs as a means to counter extremism, promoting human rights education, education for democratic citizenship and intercultural education (Aslan, Rausch, 2018). Since 2002, by regarding this educational activity as highly desirable within schools in democratic societies, it has been giving attention to education about religions in public schools across Europe. In addition, after the events of September 11, 2001, the previous view of excluding the study of religions in public education was re-evaluated, in order to build an approach to intercultural learning to promote dialogue, mutual understanding and living together. Indeed, the learning approaches, methods and experiences, as promoted by the Council of Europe, should be based on three principles: religion is an important cultural fact; beliefs about the world and values must be

developed gradually, based on real personal and social learning experiences; an integrated approach to spiritual, religious, moral and civic values must be encouraged (Keast, 2007).

By drawing attention to the importance of textbooks in good quality education policy, together with their various implications for education for all (Aman, 2015), in this paragraph the first results of a research about Islam (as religion and culture) and Muslims in the most popular and modern Italian textbooks of Catholic Religion for upper secondary school<sup>1</sup> have been described<sup>2</sup>. The general aim is not to judge the analyzed textbooks, but to draw attention to a possible risk they might provoke. Some examples of correct knowledge, for this reason, have been presented as well.

Given that «the overwhelming majority of history textbooks tend to be Eurocentric and are inadequate in terms of providing students with a balanced knowledge of Islam and Islamic societies» (Bayrakli, Hafez, 2016: 234; Jonker, Thobani, 2010; Kamp, *et al.*, 2012; Jackson, 2014), the analysis aimed mainly at understanding if in Islam and Muslims are presented in an objective way or receive negative connotations, by confirming the most widespread preconceptions. At the same time, the analysis aimed at stimulating reflections on the adequacy of the proposed contents and understanding how islamophobic contents, through fear, hatred or prejudice against Islam and Muslims, can become part of textbooks, or any other education materials, when not supporting correct knowledge, mutual understanding and not correcting common public misperceptions and stereotypes. Discrimination has a serious impact on individuals and on their communities. In fact, students subject to discrimination in schools have been reported as developing a number of negative effects, including low self-esteem, self-segregation and attraction to violent extremist ideologies (Dei, *et al.*, 1997).

In the textbooks analyzed Islam and Muslims do not account for lots of space, it is usually between 4 and 10 pages. Only in one case there are 23 pages (Manganotti, Incampo, 2017). Accordingly, it has been noticed that the representation of Islam is often reduced to essentials and this creates a spiral of a lack of appropriate knowledge, an absence of the complex history of Islam. Finally, it may cause students to falsely

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<sup>1</sup> These textbooks have been all approved by the Italian Episcopal Conference (*Conferenza Episcopale Italiana* or CEI) and published between 2014 to 2017. Studies aiming at investigating the image of Islam and Muslim culture in schoolbooks and school curricula exist to a certain extent. This is especially true for schoolbook research. Most of the studies were done in the area of history didactics or in the didactics of religion; yet there are only a few investigations in the field of didactics of geography (Császár, 2012; Zecha *et al.*, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Data were collected through the help of a grid. The qualitative analysis has investigated different descriptors mainly grouped in three categories: text(s) and source(s), images and source(s), and didactic tools/teaching aids. A detailed analysis was carried out through reading of titles (chapters and paragraphs), contents, images and captions.

assume that Islam is a homogeneous religion. Its presence can be framed into several chronological categories (e.g., the early years of Islam; the Crusades; the newest history). One can conclude that Islam and Muslims depiction is not totally accurate, so students are provided with minor information, since the topic is not always analysed deeply. The omission of deep information on the culture and history of Muslims certainly poses a problem. It is important providing teachers with information regarding pedagogical and curricular issues related to teaching about Islam: it can also help establish positive relationships with Muslim students and families, by understanding the requirements and core beliefs of Islam. Textbooks, therefore, should pay more attention to the connection of Islam with global, local and national cultures and histories and the historical and contemporary developments of Islam.

Consequently, an appropriate way of introducing Islam, and its foundations, including cross-cultural differences, could lead at least to a modification of stereotypes about this religion and its believers. Furthermore, this could also avoid a widespread phenomenon, that is the 'Arabisation' of Islam, namely it is quite often presented as a predominantly Arab religion, despite the fact that today, though the Arab world is often regarded as the historical heartland of Islam, Arabs comprise only about 20 percent of the world's Muslim population. Consequently, the words 'Arabic' and 'Islamic' are often wrongly used as synonymous and textbooks do not convey a sufficient information about religious (e.g., different Islamic denominations) and cultural distinctiveness of the Islamic world. The students can get the impression that Islam is a homogenous religion. Finally, the exclusive relation of Islam with the Middle East, with rare references to other parts of the world, can provoke misconceptions in different ways. For instance, it could easily generate the idea that there is no other religious group in this area, to the detriment of other religious minorities (e.g., Christians and Jews).

As far as the titles of chapters and paragraphs are concerned, it has been noted that they generally introduce information essentially related to: the origin of Islam, the role of Muhammad, as religious and political leader (Trenti *et al.*, 2014), the first century of Islam – connected to the separation between Sunni and Shia – (Solinas, 2014; Bocchini, 2015; Pesci, Bennardo, 2016), the concept of faith, the sources (Koran, Sunna), the pillars of Islam (Trenti *et al.*, 2014: 367), the concept of *Jihad*, status of women – generally connected to veil, marriage and polygamy – (Bocchini, 2015; Pesci, Bennardo, 2016; Porcarelli, Tibaldi, 2017; Maglioli, 2017), daily life and main Islamic festivals (Solinas, 2014; Bocchini, 2015).

There is a clear lack of a diachronic approach considering, for example, the development of the different Islamic legal and theological schools. On the other hand, when it comes to modernity interreligious dialogue and fundamentalism (not only Islamic, but mostly connected

to Islam) prevail (Trenti *et al.*, 2014; Bocchini, 2015; Pesci, Bennardo, 2016; Cristiani, 2017; Cristiani, Motto, 2017; Manganotti, Incampo, 2017). Compressing and simplifying complicated contents for students and teachers is a challenge: textbooks cannot convey, for instance, the question of women or fundamentalism in Islam in a few sentences, since the student audience does not always have the background or maturity to grasp its significance and evolution. In a case there is an effort to adopt an autobiographical approach (Bocchini, 2015). It could be a different way of presenting Islam, by taking the 'other' point of view and deepening everyday issues, such as religions and food choices, as well as afterlife (Solinas, 2014; Bocchini, 2015; Pesci, Bennardo, 2016).

Attention has also been put on the translation and interpretation of some Islamic keywords. It has been found that there is still a confusion between Islam, as a religion, and Islamism, as a political ideology (Manganotti, Incampo, 2017). The terms are used as synonymous. The same can be said of Muslim and Islamic (Solinas, 2015). The latter used as a noun and not as an adjective. In most cases the word Allah is not translated as 'God' (Solinas, 2015), except in one case (Porcarelli, Tibaldi, 2017), with the possibility to represent Allah as the 'personal god' of Muslims. It would be, indeed, nothing but a wasted opportunity for students to understand that Abrahamic religions have the same roots. Sometimes, in the same text there are God and Allah, but without an explanation (Pesci, Bennardo, 2016). Both Muhammad and Maometto (the Italian word for 'Muhammad') are still used. Indeed, it is not generally known that the Italian Maometto dates back to the Middle Ages Malc(h)ometto, used by Rustichello in his transcription of Marco Polo's travel report at the end of the thirteenth century and has a sort of negative meaning: the idea of Muhammad as a false prophet. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that in different non-Arab Islamic countries the name has understandably been adapted to the specific local linguistic realities. For instance, since the Ottoman age, in the Turkic world, the name Mehmet has never raised doubts among the Muslim scholars of that and other parts of the Islamic world.

In relation to the role of Muhammad in a textbook it is explicitly said that «*non è l'autore del Libro sacro*» (He is not the author of the Holy Book [i.e. Qur'an]) (Pesci, Bennardo, 2016; Trenti *et al.*, 2014), since in previous researches, in some textbooks, it was found the opposite.

With regard to the role of the *Imam*, it is clearly said that «non appartiene a una classe sacerdotale» (he does not belong to a sacerdotal class) (Pesci, Bennardo, 2016: 31), while in previous research it was also translated in a textbook for primary school as 'priest': there was obvious confusion between roles.

Finally, the same can be said as regards the important concept of *Jihad* is concerned. Defining jihad is admittedly difficult, as definitions in circulation vary radically. There is greater precision of its definition, namely the difference between 'big Jihad' and 'small Jihad', and to its



translation, not simply 'holy war' (Maglioli, 2017; Porcarelli, Tibaldi, 2017; Trenti *et al.*, 2014).

As regards linguistic aspects, specifically there is more attention given to the translation of Arabic-Islamic expressions, while some transliteration mistakes still persist, such as: 'Ramadhan' (Pisci, Bennardo, 2016: 206) or 'Ramadam' (Porcarelli, Tibaldi, 2017) *vs.* *Ramadan*, «Zakkat» (Solinas, 2015) *vs.* *Zakat*, 'Isafri' (Solinas, 2015) *vs.* Israfil, 'Zul Heggia' (Porcarelli, Tibaldi, 2017) *vs.* *Dhū l-hijja*; 'azàn' (Solinas, 2014: 39) *vs.* *adhan*.

As to content mistakes, errors about Islam that occurred in older textbooks, in some case, have not been corrected but reiterated. It has been found, for example, a bad interpretation of Sunna, considered as holy as the Koran (Solinas, 2014; Id., 2015) or the following utterance: «[The Koran] cannot be subjected to any interpretation or translation» (Porcarelli, Tibaldi, 2017, 83). Furthermore, without any chronological reference, it is stated that «the external wall [of mosques] is sometimes fortified for the defence of Muslims in case of enemy attack» (Solinas, 2015, 334) and that when Muslim make the pilgrimage to Ka'ba they «worship the black stone» (Trenti *et al.*, 2014, 367).

As far as sources are concerned, it is well known that they must be mentioned for further investigation and primary sources, in particular, expose students to multiple perspectives. In the present investigation, in each textbook analysed the reference to the Italian translation of the Koran has never been found. Indeed, there are different Italian translation of this text: the first appeared in 1547 in Venice. This means that students cannot have access to the entire translation and cannot, for example, check the notes to the verses they will read (Solinas, 2015; Cristiani, 2017; Maglioli, 2017; Porcarelli, Tibaldi, 2017; Manganotti, Incampo, 2017).

The presence of a whole variety of images in textbooks, each with their own particular form, function and relationship to the text, all pose potential challenges for analysis. Pictures have an important function in the learning/teaching process, by influencing it. They support this process and serve as an intermediary by visualizing knowledge. Thus, students often see images before reading texts and these images can improve (or decrease) the power of students' imagination. Surely, they can have a positive effect when they are related to the text. The relationship between the illustration and the text is, thus, a crucial aspect, as students' knowledge about Islam is often very low. So, it might be very difficult for them to understand the deeper sense of the illustrations without further information. Besides, as eye-tracking studies have shown, also the position of the illustrations is important: the ones that are placed before important text areas can have the effect of activating previous knowledge of the learner. In the textbooks analysed it has been noted that in different cases images can be out of the context and some of them do not include captions, attributions or citations (Trenti *et al.*, 2014; Solinas, 2014; Pisci, Bennardo, 2016: 206,

253; Porcarelli, Tibaldi, 2017: 84; Maglioli, 2017: 269). Moreover, they are usually reinforcing images and not always integrate the contents: this could lead to wrong interpretations of the illustrations or give the impression of being useless. They can be stereotypical images (Trenti *et al.*, 2014: 334; Pesci, Bennardo, 2016; Maglioli, 2017), but in different cases they represent also the cultural diversities within the same society (Trenti *et al.*, 2014; Pesci, Bennardo, 2016; Porcarelli, Tibaldi, 2017). Finally, images are very rarely provided with reading activities: for meaningful learning students need to make connection between visual and verbal representations. This can be one main problem since, it is important to underline, especially in the field of Islam and Muslim culture, that the way the meanings of images are interpreted depends on the cultural background and on direct experiences, as well as on personal interests. In any case, illustrations should always have at least a relation to the text, or even better, to a task.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, although there is a clear improvement towards a more intercultural approach, the image of Islam remains quite limited and the Italian curricula are not always able to respond to the changing features of Italian society. Thus, even though the new textbooks for religious education have included more information about other faiths, they still do not convey sufficient information concerning pluralism and diversity. This is an incomplete view of religious cultures and traditions, with the risk of misrepresenting their foundations. Yet, thanks to a more widespread and shared intercultural approach, as a positive fact, unlike past research, it should be appreciated that the analyzed textbooks do not communicate rude and offensive clichés, even though certain stereotypes and manifestations of Eurocentric perspective are still present. In fact, in most cases Islam is presented essentially as an oriental phenomenon and only rarely as a European one. It means that students can be led to wrongly falsely assume that Muslims, many of whom are living in Italy in the second generation (in some cases in the third), are still not really part of Italian society. The risk is that Muslims may be considered as 'othered' and disconnected from the West and from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, despite common Abrahamic roots and intercultural connections throughout the ages. On the contrary, textbooks can certainly enrich the dialogue between Europe and the Muslim world, for example, showing also positive examples of the influence and impact of Islam on Europe, without hiding the critical issues associated.

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## Religious Education and East Asian Religions. Insights for Rethinking Epistemological and Pedagogical Approaches

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper explores the relevance of east Asian religions for the field of Religious Education (RE). Critical studies of extra-European, particularly east Asian religions, contributed to the rethinking of the study of religions. Similarly, I argue that this topic helps individuating biases and implicit modernist and orientalist discourses also in RE. I focus on two 'challenges' as critical lenses. The first is the inadequacy of the Christian-Protestant paradigm of religion, centred on the inner world of the practitioner and its exclusive religious belonging. The second is the influence of the historical and cultural entanglements between East Asia and the Euro-American regions. Some examples from RE in England and Sweden, two renowned instances of non-confessional RE, are discussed. The last part argues that such challenges can turn into pedagogical opportunities in terms of 'competences for democratic culture'.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Religious Education, East Asian Religions, Postcolonial Critique, Competences for Democratic Culture*

### Introduction

This contribution provides a theoretical and critical reflection on the topic of east Asian religions within the context of Religious Education (RE), together with some indications on how and why such topic can be fruitfully engaged. I argue that it helps highlighting blind spots, biases and implicit modernist and orientalist discourses that can be found in both RE's theory and practice. However, since 'RE' refers to a wide spectrum of phenomena, a preliminary discussion of some theoretical frameworks of reference will clarify the typology of RE I am referring to. Afterwards I present what I consider the main challenges/opportunities of the topic of East Asian Religions, discussing them as two intertwined epistemological issues: 1) the influence of Christianity and Protestantism in the construction of a – supposedly – neutral idea of religion; 2) the influences of the historical, cultural and political entanglements between East Asia and the Euro-American regions on the issue of religion. Next, I analyze some examples of provisions,

theories and practices from two of the most acknowledged instances of non-confessional RE: those of England and of Sweden. Notwithstanding their allegedly neutral character, I argue that, once observed through the topic of east Asian religions, critical points come to the fore. Finally, drawing from the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (Council of Europe, 2018), I argue that the challenges thus highlighted can be fruitfully exploited as pedagogical opportunities.

### **1. Which RE? Theoretical frameworks of reference**

RE as term refers to variously differentiated ideas, practices and institutions. Since the relationship between school and religion runs parallel to the state-religion(s) relationship in each country, we may say that there is a unique RE for each national state. Moreover, there is the pedagogical-political question of how the aims of RE are implicitly or explicitly conceived (Parker, 2019).

RE may be confessionally oriented or not, compulsory or not, addressed to all or only to certain pupils, strictly focused on its theological base, confessional but also including elements of other religions (nonetheless engaged from the point of view of the tradition of reference), strictly non-confessional but interested in the 'inner life-worlds' of the pupils, strongly inspired by academic disciplines related to religions, and so on (Davis, Miroshnikova, 2013; Jensen, 2017; Pajer, 2014; Willaime, 2007). Concerning this paper, if the presupposition is that RE should primarily foster knowledge on religion from a cultural and as-neutral-as-possible perspective, and prepare new generations to respectfully interact in culturally plural societies, then I argue that such teaching should be primarily based on the academic study of religion.

The reasons are twofold. First, this field of study presently adopts (at least officially) an a-religious stance, i.e., being not pro- nor anti-religions. This means also that any type of audience, irrespectively of their religious belonging, anti-religious attitude or indifference, is addressed. Secondly, such strive towards neutrality is backed, notably in recent times, by an increasingly problematic approach to the concept of religion in itself, in order to constantly review its epistemological potentials and limits. Fundamentally, it is a matter of reducing the influence of the modern, European and Christianocentric origins of the concept of 'religion' and of the discipline itself (Fitzgerald, 2000; Masuzawa, 2005; Nongbri, 2013; Smith, 1998). This endeavor resulted in two main approaches of the field (Schilbrack, 2018). One focused on critically examining the conditions, genealogies and power-related motivations for the very concept of religion to evolve from a local Latin term to a world-wide, taken-for-granted idea (cf. King, 2017). The other still relies on this concept while being mindful of it as a theoretical tool, historically and culturally laden, and thus subject to constant rethinking (Stausberg, 2009; Stausberg, Engler, 2016).

This paper adopts mainly the first approach. However, the two approaches can be fruitfully combined, especially in educational contexts. Indeed, I argue that the two aspects of critical self-reflection and inclusivity (this latter in the sense of adopting the most neutral approach possible towards the plurality of religious and non-religious positions) are highly relevant to the above presupposed aims of RE. More in detail, topic of East Asian in RE can enhance these aspects and contribute to a pedagogy characterized by inclusion and plurality, interculturality, critical thinking and self-reflection. I find such elements aptly operationalized in competences by the above cited *Reference Framework* of CoE.

## 2. The Challenges of east Asian traditions

It is recognized that a more critical study of extra-European, particularly east Asian religions (not exclusively, see the case of South Africa in Chidester, 2014), informed by postcolonial/postmodern critiques typical of the critical approach to the study of religions above hinted, helped rethinking the history, theories and methods of the field. Case studies from East Asia showed how a modern, commonsensical idea of 'religion' does not fully apply in these regions (Chau, 2011; Lopez, 1998; Turner, Sa-lemink, 2015). Also, they illustrated how present-day, commonsensical understanding of east Asian traditions is influenced by the historical, cultural and political entanglements with the Euro-American worlds on the very issue of 'religion' (see e.g., App, 2010; Josephson, 2015). In other words, the topic of east Asian religions features two intertwined epistemological challenges to be reckoned with. The first is the 'hidden presence' of Christianity and Protestantism in the application of a - supposedly - neutral idea of religion, the second is the historical impact of the colonial presence and influence in east Asian regions over the issue of religion.

Concerning the first challenge, there is no space to review the genealogy of the modern idea of religion (see e.g., Nongbri, 2013). It will suffice to outline what, roughly from the nineteenth century onwards, was conceived as the core characteristic of the *genus* of religion, which then differentiates in various *species* of *religions*. Any religion was supposed to have the following traits: 1) universality and distinctiveness: all societies have one or more 'religions' that can be clearly distinguished by other cultural phenomena such as 'science', 'politics', 'economics', and so on; 2) creedal emphasis: all religions are to be understood primarily as a set of well-defined beliefs or propositions, expressing truth claims, towards which members are expected to 'have faith in'; 3) scripturalism: these sets of beliefs are supposed to be inscribed in a closed canon of sacred texts which are considered primarily for their cognitive value (instead of being treated as ritual artifacts), and are considered the authoritative, orthodox

reference; 4) discreteness: religions are discrete entities with clear borders between each other. Any 'mixture' between religions is seen as a contamination of their «pure essences» (King, 2011, 49). It is easy to recognize Christianity, especially Protestantism, as the prototype of this definition. Religions other than Christianity were ranked as less or more 'evolved' accordingly to this scheme (Smith, 1998). This was a critical issue for the processes of hetero- and self-representations of the native traditions in east Asia, subjected to colonial control or influence, which lead us to the second challenge.

The colonial impact of the modern idea of 'religion' in the politics of religion in all Asian regions was profound and with lasting effect. Let us see some examples. Concerning India, early scholars, colonial administrators and missionaries, in their attempt to understand the religions of India, relied on the Christianity-inspired notion of religion so they looked for Brahmins and Muslim law-doctors. That is, conservative religious specialists dealing with elites-written texts (*Veda* and *Qur'an*), who fitted their preconceived idea of locating the 'essence' of religion in ancient texts and of drawing a distinct separation between Islam and the 'religion' of India. This came at the expenses of other texts such as the *Purāṇa*, of religious expressions such as rituals or dance, not to mention mutual borrowings between Islamic and Hindu traditions. At the same time, modern ideas about religion started spreading, such as the universality of religion and of religious experience, the rejection of external dimensions such as ritual and the emphasis on creedal belief and/or rational interpretation of doctrines. Out of these processes the term and the idea of 'Hinduism' gradually grew up and entered the public sphere (Bloch *et al.*, 2010).

A pivotal role was played by local religious élite, educated in modern European standards, sensitive and perceptive towards these ideas about religions, especially in nationalistic terms. The foremost example was Svami Vivekananda (1863-1902), who spoke as a representative of the whole Hindu tradition at the Parliament of the World's Religions of 1893 in Chicago, and presented it as a tradition based on sacred texts (*Veda*), preaching a fundamental unity between the Absolute and the believer, a unity that can be experienced within the inner sphere, through practices such as meditation. Furthermore, such monism encompassed all other religions (Christianity included) with the inner religious experience being the unifying dimension. His words had a great impact in the US and reinforced the positive, romantic, orientalist idea of India as the cradle of a universal 'spirituality' forgotten by the 'West' (Jackson, 1994; Rigopoulos, 2019).

In the case of China or Japan too we see similar processes: the concept of religion, so pivotal in the modern Euro-American regions as the counterpart of the 'secular' (i.e., modern politics) had to be translated with neologisms: *zongjiao* (Ch.) and *shūkyō* (Jp.) which highlight the idea of a teaching (*jiao*, *kyō*) belonging to a 'sect' or lineage (*zong*, *shu*). In Republican and Communist China this brought to



the recognition of five religions (Daoism, Buddhism, Islam Catholicism and Protestantism) codified along a modern concept of religion, while all the other religious expressions (the so-called 'Chinese folk religion') have been (and in some ways they still are) banned as superstitions (*mixin*) (Goossaert, Palmer, 2011; Tarocco, 2008).

The same occurred in Japan, with *shūkyō* opposed to *meishin* ('superstitions'). Here the idea of religion as private matter concerned with morals, emotional or philosophical issues strongly influenced Buddhist schools, which reorganized themselves under the banner of *Shinbukkyō* ('New Buddhism'). Their agenda was to go beyond sectarian divisions, to emphasize common elements and articulated them in accord to modern sensibility: rationalism, rejection of ritualism, emphasis on morality and inner experience, convergence with science and so on. The overall perspective was to contribute to the creation of a strong modern Japanese nation (Isomae, 2012; Josephson, 2012). A Japanese *Shinbukkyō* delegation attended the Chicago Parliament but, differently from Vivekananda, they were coldly received. The reason lies in the hegemonic view of those times, according to which only the Buddhism preached by the historical Buddha Siddharta Gautama (5<sup>th</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE), was worth of attention, for its rational outlook and because it sounded as an intriguing 'atheist religion.' However, after the WWII and thanks also to a growing skepticism towards both religious traditions *and* rational thinking, a *zen*-scholar, Daisetsu Suzuki (1870-1966), was extremely effective in disseminating a peculiar idea of *zen*: the only Buddhist tradition that permits, through meditation, the access to the authentic, a-rational human experience at the base of all religions and philosophies. If *zen* is so popular, and often defined as neither religion nor philosophy, in large part it is because of his work (Sharf, 1993; Snodgrass, 2003).

In sum, the impact of the modern idea of religion urged east Asian religious leaders to promote their traditions to western audience through two strategies of self-orientalism: on one hand, eastern traditions were represented as the 'other' in terms of non-rationality and of being beyond words (note the emphasis on meditation). On the other, the emphasis on the universality of inner dimension, the experience of the individual and the ideal of self-realization resounded positively with both the Christian prototype of religion and modern subjectivity.

### 3. What Implications for RE?

The two challenges above described may result in two pitfalls in RE theory and practice. Being unaware of the Christian prototype of religion may involve failing to provide a balanced treatment of east Asian religions, while their uncritical depiction may run the risk of reproducing the biased representations born out of the modern

encounter between east Asia and the Euro-American world. I propose a few examples from RE in England and Sweden, two of the most long-standing tradition of non-confessional RE, addressed to all pupils and (allegedly) based on an academic approach to religion (cf. Alberts, 2007).

In England, RE is managed mostly on a local basis, with non-compulsory central pro-visions interpreted locally. Therefore, there are lively debates among different RE approaches developed by scholars and practitioners. Concerning the central level, the Review of Religious Education in England (RE Council, 2013, 14) by the RE Council of England and Wales presently provides a non-statutory national curriculum framework. According to it, RE contributes to education by «... provoking challenging questions about meaning and purpose in life, beliefs about God, ultimate reality, is-sues of right and wrong and what it means to be human» and pupils are expected «...to discover, explore and consider different answers to these questions». The problem is the supposed universality of such questions, which have a narrow focus on religion as featuring only lofty and existential topics, or euro-centric theologies. In East Asian religions we often encounter religious practices that we would define 'superstitious', i.e., centered on mundane benefits such as health, fortune, success in exam, or exorcising malicious influences. Moreover, apart from 'God' or 'ultimate reality', various other types of supernatural entities are common, such as ancestors, ghosts and the like (see e.g., Chau, 2005; Reader, Tanabe, 1998).

Another problem is the importance given to what are called 'sources of wisdom', which include «... key texts such as the Bible, the Torah and the Bhagavad Gita, and the teachings of key leaders and key thinkers [...] such as the Buddha, Jesus Christ, the Prophet Muhammad, Guru Nanak» (RE Council, 2013, 43,). Again, I see misplaced interpretations in Abrahamitic terms: the *Bhagavadgītā* is just one, albeit important, text in Hinduism, but is not comparable to the centrality of the Bible or the Qur'an. Why is it singled out instead of many other texts? Similar discourse applies for the figure of Buddha. In many Buddhist traditions he is conceived as an historical incarnation of higher Buddhas, with his teachings considered merely preparatory to more 'advanced' ones.

Shifting to examples of individual RE approaches, in *Critical Religious Education in Practice* (Easton *et al.*, 2019, 10) we found reiterated the idea that «many religious believers do hold their beliefs as propositional beliefs [...] they are beliefs about the way things actually are in the world». Here RE is mainly about a rational assessment and comparison of doctrines from different religions conceived as truth-claims. In their treatment of Buddhism, they offer a fairly detailed doctrinal overview, touching topics such as the Four Noble Truths, the five aggregates and the notion of conditioned arising. The focus on doctrinal contents and their philosophical analysis is further highlighted by the questions: 'Is Buddhism a religion or a philosophy?'. 'Why value human life if it is

illusory?'. 'Does belief in rebirth fuel self-interest?'. 'Are the three marks of existence self-evidently true?'. Here again we see the centrality and distinctiveness of religious beliefs. Such projection of Protestant Christianity hardly applies in many east Asian traditions, in which the differentiating factor is, mostly, the modality of practice (Chau, 2011). Not infrequently lay practitioners address or practice more religious traditions i.e., Buddhism, Daoism, Shintoism, local traditions (even Christianity), without worrying about issues of exclusive belonging or incompatibility of beliefs (cf. statics for e.g., China in Yang, 2018 and for Japan in Roemer, 2012). Moreover, Buddhism is explored with a limited focus on doctrinal/philosophical positions belonging mostly to the early Pali texts. Developments from other texts in other languages (Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese) are minimized or excluded. Such approaches recall those of the first Buddhologists of the 19th century who deemed worthy of consideration only the early texts which seemed forming a coherent philosophical system, while all subsequent developments were labelled as superstitious decay (see Lopez, 2008).

As second example I take *Religious Education and the Public Sphere* (Hannam, 2019). She argues that religions can be conceptualized in three ways: as belief, as practice and through an existential perspective, this latter being considered as the most desirable. By drawing from authors such as Simone Weil, Thomas Merton and Kierkegaard, she characterizes this existential perspective as «a kind of progressive attentiveness. [...] (which) transforms all things and in particular the subject [...] is not bound by a particular formula of words or actions and is both in and beyond time» (Hannam, 2019, 99). Interestingly enough, such perspective is deemed «particularly close to what it means to live a religious life in the Dharmic traditions» (Hannam, 2019, 87), so that «the best entry point into Buddhism [...] may well be through an existential conceptualization of religion» (Hannam, 2019, 120). In the local syllabus *Living Difference III* (Hampshire, Portsmouth Southampton & Isle of Wight Councils, 2016, 49) in which Hannam actively cooperated, it is suggested, when teaching Buddhism, to start from the question: «Can meditation help people over-come suffering?». Topics are mainly doctrinal, such as the concept of dukkha ('suffering') or centered on Gautama's biography. The only practice discussed is meditation and its different types among various Buddhist groups. Interestingly, meditation is also addressed as a contemporary method of relief from post-traumatic stress disorders in war veterans (Hampshire, Portsmouth Southampton & Isle of Wight Councils, 2016). We see again a stress on the inner/experiential dimension of the individual. We note also an odd move: while she draws on a specific type of authors, i.e., modern and Christian, not only she argues that this is the best way to conceptualize the supposedly universal phenomenon of religion, but also that it is the best way to approach Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and so on. Her argument strongly resembles the romantic representations of 'mystical East' and the strategic self-orientalist positioning of modern east Asian

religious élites: oriental religions are fundamentally based on an experience 'beyond words and time'. But this is a mere projection of modern, west-ern, late romantic ideals. The Buddhism represented in the Syllabus just cited is a classic example of Buddhist Modernism (McMahan, 2008), i.e., a modern tendency of both practitioners and outsiders to understand and represent Buddhism as a sort of psychological-philosophical tradition, exclusively focused on meditation, on self-improvement or mental healing of the individual.

Lastly, let us briefly touch RE in Sweden. Differently from England, it is centrally managed through a compulsory national syllabus which stress neutrality, objectivity and reference to the academic study of religions (Alberts, 2007). However, it also proposes the so-called pedagogy of «life-questions» (*livsfrågor*). That is, learning about religions should go through questions which are: 1) conceived as universally human; 2) to be used to gain understanding of various religious traditions; and 3) to be used to foster self-understanding in pupils, e.g., «What is the meaning of life? What happens after death? Who are you and how would you like to be as a person? What is morally right?» (Berglund, 2013, 178).

The problem concerns the presupposed universality of these life-questions, which cannot be taken for granted. Even if such questions may apply among many religions, the weight which they are given often differs, also within a single tradition. Using life questions to study religions could – unintentionally – give the impression that there is only one answer to the questions within each religion, which can easily lead to stereotypes. Indeed, an ethnographic study on Swedish RE pupils showed how the life-question pedagogy often trigger what the researcher calls a 'spiritualist discourse'. That is, a discourse that privilege religiosity in terms of private experience, of personal choices, of finding an authentic self or something divine inside oneself. In this sense such discourse is compatible with the individualism of the secularist discourse, which is the hegemonic discourse among students. Not surprisingly, when the spiritualist discourse is enacted, Buddhism is indicated as the tradition much more in line with spirituality (Flensner, 2017). In other words, also in Swedish RE a treatment of religion informed by modern biases runs the risk of reproducing orientalist representations.

#### **4. Conclusion: Turning Challenges into Pedagogical Opportunities**

Drawing from the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (Council of Europe, 2018), various competences discussed in this document can help us into seeing educational potentialities when dealing with the challenges above outlined. Let us examine some examples.

«Openness to cultural otherness» (Council of Europe, 2018, 41-2). This competence is understood also as the capability of questioning the 'naturalness' or 'normality' of our notions. In our case, it is the conception of religion (centrality of belief, exclusive belonging, centrality of the idea of God).

«Tolerance of ambiguity» and «respect» (Council of Europe, 2018, 42-3, 45). I hope I have shown how the issue of religion/s is complex and cannot rely on easy formulas, and how the topic of East Asian religion may foreground this. The self-reflective approach of the study of religion implies an awareness of the empirical complexities of cultural realities and of the necessity to tolerate degrees of ambiguity. Also, to acknowledge the possibility of different frames of reference, in this case concerning what counts as 'religion', may be conducive to be 'respectful' without ignoring differences, nor being necessarily in agreement, and explaining disagreement on the base of the difference between frames of reference.

«Knowledge and critical understanding of the world (including [...] culture, cultures, religions, history...» (Council of Europe, 2018, 53-6). The fact that notion of exclusive religious belonging is misleading may help enhancing the consciousness of a key notion of the *Framework*, i.e., the complexity of cultural phenomena. In other words, multiple affiliations are possible, and individuals may have multiple cultural/religious identities. Also, to look at how east Asian traditions had to cope with the concept of religion shows that ideas such as 'religion' or 'secularity' have evolved in different ways in different cultures, thus also implying the necessity of considering other historical narratives, in which entangled histories and issues of power have a great relevance.

«Knowledge and critical understanding of the self» (Council of Europe, 2018, 52-3). Engaging the cultural and historical reason why we 'normally' conceive religion in certain terms – or why we 'normally' see east Asian religions in a stereotypical manner – shows how our perspective is contingent and dependent on our cultural affiliations and historical backgrounds. Furthermore, dealing with 'strange aspects' in 'other' traditions may be a chance to look also in 'our religions' for similar aspects that may look 'exotic or 'unusual', such as religious interest for practical benefits. Should puzzlement arise concerning aspects that one may instinctively label as 'superstitious', this would be an occasion to critically and genealogically ask why we tend to give such judgments.

«Civic mindedness and Responsibility» (Council of Europe, 2018, 43-4). These competences entail also making decisions in front of the community and being accountable for them. To do this, I think that it is necessary to be aware of one's own values of reference, the values of reference of one's society, and the degree of negotiability of these. Engaging, as we have seen above, with cultural complexities, historical entanglements, ambiguity of concepts and the impossibility of

completely neutral stance, may represent a contribution towards a critical global mindedness and a self-transparent decision-making.

In conclusion, to critically engage east Asian religions within a framework of RE informed by the academic study of religion can be a way to discover that the supposed universality of certain notions – such as ‘religion’, which we usually do not bother questioning – is not to be taken for granted. This discovery may contribute, among other things, to a call for a responsible, collective reconstruction not of new universals, but concepts and practices in order to cope as much as possible with the complexity and differences of the world, and with our individually and collectively formed values of reference.

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## The Community of Philosophical Inquiry and Religious Education: A Pragmatist Perspective

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**ABSTRACT:** *In the present paper, I will address the question of religious education in a multi-religious but also, in other respects, post-religious society through a philosophical-educational lens and, more specifically, in reference to the tradition of educational pragmatism. I will first show how far the issue of religious education disappears in the reflections of John Dewey or, rather, it is transmogrified into the endeavor to think of forms of a deeper and fuller religion adequate for the modern age. In this horizon, classic religious education is replaced by education for a recognition of the spiritual import of science and democracy. Against this backdrop, a specific contemporary inflection of Dewey's pedagogy is investigated, namely the community of philosophical inquiry elaborated by Matthew Lipman and Ann Sharp, and its value as an educational setting for a kind of religious education living up to present-day demands will be explored. In particular, I will focus on Sharp's creative recontextualization of Dewey's tenets in philosophy of religion and on her ambitious argumentation in favor of the 'sacred' character of the community of philosophical inquiry and of its significance as a pedagogical approach that may be conducive to the invention of new metaphors to make sense of the spiritual experience also in the formative years of children.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Religious Education, Philosophy for Children, John Dewey, Ann M. Sharp, Democratic Community.*

### Introduction

In this paper, I will engage with the theme of education in a multi-religious (but also somewhat post-religious) society from a philosophical-educational viewpoint and, more specifically, in reference to a pragmatist theoretical framework. The argumentation will culminate in a reflection on whether the community of philosophical inquiry (henceforth CPI) approach may represent an educational setting in which religious education can be administered by deploying the method of inquiry.

The notion of CPI consciously builds on Peirce's and Dewey's tenets and has been formulated as a pedagogical procedure by Matthew Lipman (1988, 2003) and Ann Sharp (Splitter, Sharp, 1995) within the framework of their project of Philosophy for Children, that is, the idea

that the 'classic' pragmatist endeavour to cultivate habits of reflective thinking (Dewey, 1986a) could be better realized by referring to philosophical inquiry understood as the undertaking of «thinking well about things that matter» (Lipman *et al.*, 1980,25 ff.). While a typical session of CPI is structured around the model of Deweyan inquiry (see Oliverio, 2020), it dovetails with this pragmatist matrix a Socratic element (see Oliverio, 2017), viz. the idea that the inquiry concerns the sphere of meaning and of the conceptual fabric which sustains our engagements with the world.

The CPI approach is aligned with Dewey and Mead and with their notion that «[t]he thought process *is dependent on intercourse*. This is very important in education. [...] What we are insisting is that the intellectual processes are not already going on [...] The social relationship comes before thought [...]» (Mead, 2008, 85). Accordingly, we have to think of CPI as coalescing two dimensions: the epistemic and the social. Indeed, CPI «engages young people in important cognitive moves such as creating hypotheses, clarifying their terms, asking for or giving good reasons, offering examples, questioning each other's assumptions, drawing inferences and following the inquiry where it leads» (Gregory, 2008, 10). Moreover, understood as «a social enterprise, [CPI] requires students to share their own perspectives, listen to one another, read faces, challenge and build on one another's thinking, look for missing perspectives and reconstruct their own ideas» (ibid.).

This entwining of an epistemic and a social dimension in CPI resonates with the typical Deweyan-Meadean theme that there is an intimate bond between education for inquiry and education inspired by the democratic ideal, insofar as the latter represents the social dynamics brought to its fullest fruition (although there is no end point and the process of growth of democracy goes on indefinitely, sustained by an inquiring tension). In this respect, the CPI approach is a recontextualization of the pivotal principles of the tradition of educational pragmatism through the mobilization of a Socratic moment.

As aforementioned, in the second section of this paper I will address the question of the potential of CPI as a way of fostering religious education in contemporary scenarios, focusing especially on the work of Ann Sharp. However, this reflection will be situated against the backdrop of a reconstruction of Dewey's engagement with the issue of religious education. This argumentative move is explained not only by the fact that the Dewey (1986b) of *A Common Faith* is a key source for Ann Sharp but more importantly by Dewey's ambivalent treatment of the issue. I will insinuate that this ambivalence echoes – in completely different guises – also in Sharp's endeavors, despite the latter being more open to the question of 'the religious' than Dewey sometimes seems to be.

Thus, after outlining in § 1, the Deweyan background of a pragmatist view of the question of religious education, in § 2 I will zoom in on

Sharp's understanding of CPI, not only analyzing her ambition to provide an updated response to the need for forms of religious education adequate for contemporary times but also indicating some weaknesses of this approach.

### 1. From religious education to education *as* religion

In his monumental biography, Steven Rockefeller (1991) has highlighted that in the decade from 1884 to 1894 Dewey undertook an intense teaching activity, in the form of classes, lectures and talks, on religious matters. It is, therefore, fairly odd that, despite this first-hand experience, as a theoretician of education Dewey granted only scant and occasional attention to the topic of religious education. To mention only one instance, in the grand undertaking of *Democracy and Education*, where he seems to touch on the whole gamut of educational and pedagogical issues, no single chapter, or even section, is dedicated to this theme.

In the interpretation here advanced, we can speculate about the reasons for this neglect by focusing on the change of tone that can be discerned between the only two essays – both appearing in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – explicitly dealing with the topic.

In *Religious Education as Conditioned by Modern Psychology and Pedagogy* (1903) Dewey insists on the need for religious education to overhaul its pedagogy in the light of the notion of growth, by recognizing the specific features of the child in terms of her/his psychological, intellectual and spiritual profile:

Unless the world is out of gear, the child must have the same kind of power to do what, as a child, he really needs to do, that the mature person has in his sphere of life. In a word, it is a question of bringing the child to appreciate the truly religious aspects of his own growing life, not one of inoculating him externally with beliefs and emotions which adults happen to have found serviceable to themselves (Dewey, 1977a, 211).

It is noteworthy that, despite the vindication of the role of a science-oriented psycho-pedagogical approach, Dewey presents his thesis as a «a return to the ideas of the New Testament» (ibid., 212), by referring both to the First Letter to the Corinthians and to the image of the grain of wheat in the Gospel, which he reappropriates from a developmental perspective. Through a small hermeneutical twist, we can say that in this article the question still revolves around the 'how' of religious education, viz. the ways through which it should be performed if it is to take advantage of the most advanced discoveries of psychology and pedagogy.

A marked change of tone, instead, can be perceived just five years later in an article on *Religion and Our Schools* (1908). The focus on the school may give a specific spin to his argument but it is remarkable that an idea is clearly introduced that resonates with the later reflection in *A Common Faith* (Dewey, 1986b). Indeed, in his 1908 essay a complete revamp of the educational settings is invoked: «[A]gencies like the church and the school must not be thoroughly reconstructed before they can be «fit organs for nurturing types of religious feeling and thought which are consistent with modern democracy and modern science» (Dewey, 1977c, 167. Emphasis added).

Without lingering over the whole argumentation, at least one point is worth mentioning: there is a strong objection against the proposition that each religious confession must be separately taught within the school, with two reasons being advanced for this rejection, one explicitly thematized, the other only implicit in the argument and thus needing to be extricated through interpretation. As to the former, Dewey highlights that, if we accepted confessional teaching within the school, we would operate in a most detrimental manner:

But we do not find it feasible or desirable to put upon the regular teachers the burden of teaching a subject which has the nature of religion. The alternative plan of parcelling out pupils among religious teachers drawn from their respective churches and denominations brings us up against exactly the matter which has done most to discredit the churches, and to discredit the cause, not perhaps of religion, but of organized and institutional religion: the multiplication of rival and competing religious bodies, each with its private inspiration and outlook (ibid., 174-5).

However, it is the implicit reason that – at least in the interpretation here proposed – is the most interesting. In *Democracy and Education* one of the tasks that Dewey assigns to the school as a special social environment (Dewey, 1980, 22 ff.) is that of «balance[ing] the various elements in the social environment, and [...] see[ing] to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment» (ibid., 24-5). In this perspective, the teaching of religion as differentiated in confessional terms risks betraying the specific mission of the school, by creating private and restricted enclaves, which undermine the flourishing of democratic communication.

In the 1908 article the argument against this possible short-circuit – impacting on the public function of the school – results in a sort of outlining of a new vision of «the religious» (as Dewey will call this dimension in *A Common Faith*):

Our schools, in bringing together those of different nationalities, languages, traditions, and creeds, in assimilating them together upon

the basis of what is common and public in endeavor and achievement, are *performing an infinitely significant religious work. They are promoting the social unity out of which in the end genuine religious unity must grow* (Dewey, 1977c, 175, Emphasis added).

Thereby – we can venture to state – the question is no longer that of religious education but rather of education as promoting and instantiating new forms of ‘the religious’ and as a condition of possibility for the emergence of religious manifestations that live up to the spiritual demands of modern life. Indeed, «schools serve best the cause of religion in serving the cause of social unification» (ibid.) and thus the question of the relationship between education and religion is intrinsically connected with, if not reducible to, that of fostering «an explicit and articulated consciousness of the religious significance of democracy in education, and of education in democracy» (ibid.).

In the light of these remarks, it becomes understandable why in the great synthesis of *Democracy and Education* no single section is dedicated to religious education: in a sense, to the extent that it engages with the intimate bond of education and the democratic ideal, the whole book is a reflection about what is genuinely religious in the era of science and of its spiritual manifestation, which democracy is<sup>1</sup>.

To those who decry the irreligiosity of contemporary scientific and democratic tendencies, insofar as these take leave of any supernatural views, Dewey objects that, in furthering a new «natural piety» (Dewey, 1977c, 176)<sup>2</sup>, these tendencies actually cooperate in the growth of ‘the religious’:

But it may be that [the] decadence [of religious organized bodies] is the fruit of a broader and more catholic principle of human intercourse and association which is too religious to tolerate these pretensions to monopolize truth and to make private possessions of spiritual insight and aspiration. It may be so; it may be that the symptoms of religious ebb as conventionally interpreted are symptoms of the coming of a fuller and deeper religion (ibid.).

In this horizon, working in an educational key for the «recognition of the spiritual import of science and of democracy» means operating for the emergence «of that type of religion which will be the fine flower of the modern spirit’s achievement» (ibid.: 177).

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<sup>1</sup> «Democracy, the crucial expression of modern life, is not so much an addition to the scientific and industrial tendencies as it is the perception of their social or spiritual meaning» (Dewey, 1977b, 39).

<sup>2</sup> On the theme of ‘piety’ in the age of science see also *The Quest for Certainty* (Dewey, 1984, 244).

## 2. The community of philosophical inquiry and education for spirituality

Does the trajectory here outlined – from religious education to education as religion – represent a cancellation of the religious experience? Rosa Calcaterra (2011), in her reading of *A Common Faith*, has argued that Dewey's endeavor to deconstruct the concept of 'religion' is unpersuasive and that his vocabulary to make sense of that kind of experience risks reducing it to a merely private, irrational and ultimately illusionary phenomenon. In this sense, her interpretation seems to point to a positive answer to the question at the beginning of this section.

From another vantage point, the educationalist Paul Fairfield valorises, instead, the pluses of Dewey's stance and fully endorses what he sees as a pragmatist-instrumentalist dismissal of the very legitimacy of any religious education:

The grounds that Dewey provided for opposition to religious education are unmistakable and several: religious instruction at an early age severely weakens the capacity for independent thought, creates an often insurmountable prejudice that distorts future inquiry into theological, philosophical, ethical, and related questions, creates deplorable intellectual habits of docility and deference to authority, promotes dogmatism and parochialism rather than their opposites, and in general furthers the cause of illiberal education. [...] My Deweyan argument is that teaching religion in any manner to the intellectually immature is mis-educative and that what passes for spiritual training in countless institutions of learning today can be nothing other than indoctrination and a distortion of education's true purpose (Fairfield, 2009, 183-4).

Thus, while Calcaterra takes seriously Dewey's efforts to recognize the domain of 'the religious' but deems his attempts at a reconstruction of that experience as ultimately fruitless and even distorting an important dimension of human existence, Fairfield seems to detect a gulf between, on the one hand, the emphasis on science and democracy and, on the other, the value of religious education: indeed, the latter does not operate in favor of «openness and inquisitiveness, [...] hospitality to new ideas and a flexibility that does not equate with indecisiveness or lack of conviction» (ibid., 193), viz. the traits which are typical of the logic and ethos of inquiry.

The characteristic ambivalence of Dewey's positions must be spotlighted: while Fairfield drives a good point home in making a Deweyan case against traditional religious education (or sheer indoctrination?), he seems to underrate the conviction of the US American philosopher that educating for and through inquiry is not simply a way of toppling religion but also of reconstructing 'the religious' in forms that are adequate for our modern condition. In her turn, although Calcaterra is right in pinpointing the shortcomings of

Dewey's epistemology in making sense of what most people take as religious (I will come back to this theme later), she risks being unresponsive to his endeavor to find new vocabularies to spell out the religious experience in an age that has abandoned idols but still needs ideals.

Against this backdrop, I would like to suggest that Ann Sharp<sup>3</sup> offers not only a creative recontextualization of Dewey's stance but also a radicalization of it in the direction of a more marked valorisation of spirituality. It would be far-fetched to consider Sharp only as a Deweyan in the light of the broadness of her readings and philosophical sources but undoubtedly, especially in education, the Deweyan heritage is a primary ingredient of her pedagogical project.

Before tackling the specific inflection that Sharp has given to the CPI approach in reference to religious education and education for spirituality, I want to briefly highlight that this issue has been always present in the debates about Philosophy for Children<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, as early as in 1977, Lipman and his collaborators, while distinguishing between philosophical and religious questions, pointed out that «[p]hilosophical discussions need not just take up where science and religion leave off [...] [but] can frequently become involved in questions of science and questions of religion» (Lipman *et al.*, 1977, 88). Additionally, in response to the mounting critiques, on the part of conservative groups, to Philosophy for Children as a kind of program that threatened religious education and the recognition of values rooted in a confessional tradition, a standard tenet in the literature on Philosophy for Children and religious education has been that there is no inevitable conflict between them, insofar as we do not think of the latter as a kind of indoctrination. Rather, the typical philosophical work of conceptual analysis, logical reflection on the assumptions of a discourse, clarification of meanings and invention of new ideas could even serve as a reinforcement of the religious experience, by making it more grounded and enriching it with a more conscious understanding. Through philosophical discussion in CPI, children have the opportunity to 'study' religious beliefs, values and practices and thereby to work out and better justify their own positions. Philosophical inquiry can help children to make more sense of their religious tradition, and even to acquire the tools to renew it, and the investigation into the meanings of canonical texts can afford a more conscious appropriation of their significance.

Ann Sharp has undoubtedly been the scholar who has explored this theme in the greatest detail and her argumentation has often harped on similar motifs. And, yet, she has added a personal take on the whole issue. Following Shea (2018), we can distinguish in Sharp three main positions on P4C and religion: 1) religious topics can reasonably be

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<sup>3</sup> On the educational thought of Ann Sharp see Gregory and Laverty (2018).

<sup>4</sup> In this short reconstruction I will build on Gregory and Oliverio (2018).

addressed in the community of inquiry; philosophy for children is a possible source of fresh religious thinking; 2) classroom dialogue manifests notions like hope, trust and love, that are important in religious contexts, without competing with, or replacing, religious practice; 3) classroom philosophical inquiry is itself religious – a kind of community that is a plausible unifying ideal for a democratic society.

The most thought-provoking move is the last. Indeed, by combining an intense reading of feminist theology and an interest in Eastern spirituality with a creative redescription of Dewey's (1986b) interpretation of God as the Ideal, Sharp (1994a, 1994b) suggests that God – in his traditional Western cloak – might be a dead metaphor and that we need new metaphors to express what was in previous times captured by the term God:

John Dewey made a very suggestive remark in his work, *A Common Faith*, something to the effect that each time a community gets together to engage in deliberation, active inquiry into matters of importance, they are engaging in a ritual, a ritual that celebrates the ideals of goodness, truth and beauty. These ideals don't exist somewhere in another world, but are human projections that regulate our inquiry and motivate us to move the actual (that which is) to what we think 'ought to be', a world in which the ideals are incarnate. This movement towards the ideal is God, or better yet, what Mary Daly calls 'goddling'. Rather than a noun, Dewey and Daly [...] suggested we think of God or the Divine as a verb, a verb that distinguishes us as the potentially creative and reasonable beings that we could be (Sharp, 1997, 9).

And this work of inventing new metaphors is not confined to professional thinkers but can be undertaken also by children in their formative years within CPI (Sharp, 1994a, 6 ff.). In other words, the exploration of religious experience through philosophical inquiry may result not only in a clarification of given traditions but also in the creation of new ways of thinking and speaking of God. An example is provided by Eva, a Brazilian child, who in a session of Philosophy for Children based on the curriculum of Lipman and Sharp came out with the following statement: «Couldn't God also be a relationship? I mean perhaps it is like friendship. Once you have a friendship you act very differently and the world even looks different» (quoted in Sharp, 1997, 10).

Sharp goes as far as to say that, if we think of the sacred as an eminent kind of relationality, CPI is itself sacred to the extent that it is not merely a setting to 'train' abilities of critical thinking but – by radicalizing the pragmatist view of the connection of thinking and social intercourse – it is committed to cultivating compassion and connectedness, relational ethics and a vigorous sense of community, in which inquiry itself is not just a logical procedure but a way of participating in the elaboration of new and shared values:



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The community of inquiry is a process of liberation to the extent that it refuses to let private good and interests eclipse social good and interests. Private goods continue to exist and to permeate the lives of the inquirers, but they are dependent and redirected to serve the larger goods of the community. Thus the quest for personal autonomy is transformed into a quest for a transpersonal good. The community of inquiry is and must be democratic. Such a community becomes capable of open communication only insofar as the inquiry is free from constraints while at the same time committed to the principle of fallibilism and self-correction. Such a community of inquiry encourages diverse points of views. Genuine puzzlement becomes sustained over time and makes further points of views possible. A community that refuses to acknowledge its own limits becomes inflated and dangerous (ibid., 13).

This upshot has a distinct Deweyan tone, insofar as it is the democratic community itself to become sacred. In this sense, Sharp does not sidestep this dimension of Dewey's conceptual device as Fairfield tends to do, when valorizing a view of inquiry as that which debunks religious experience as a whole. However, in comparison with Dewey, Sharp seems to have a keener appreciation of people's hunger for spirituality and for the quest for meanings which exceed the natural domain. Her attempts to graft motifs from Eastern spirituality or other religious experiences onto the Deweyan model may sometimes appear erratic but they could be charitably read as the generous endeavor to make the most of the Deweyan heritage by creatively complementing it with a dimension that, while not ignored by Dewey, may have been insufficiently addressed by him, especially at the educational level.

And, yet is this Sharpian redescription of Dewey's tenets really adequate to make sense of religious experience and to offer educational hospitality, so to speak, to the human search for spirituality? Peter Shea (2018) has raised misgivings about the plausibility of Sharp's conversion of CPI into a 'sacred' space and a domain where genuinely to engage with religious experience. I will quote him at some length:

The problem is not that philosophy is a competing religion. It might be that, for some people, but it need not be. The problem is that basic features of philosophic practice may leave too little space for some serious religious talk. [...] What about the situation in which a child's experience is far enough removed from that of others that the child has no way of sharing that experience briefly in a community of inquiry discussion? [...] The requirement of equal opportunity of participation imposes on philosophy for children discussions the constraint that contributions need to be brief. But if one knows that one's full reason for some conviction involves quite a long story containing features peculiar to one's own experience, one may not be helped to individuality by locating oneself within a community of inquiry. [...] The situation is worse for a child who believes that God

told her something. How should a child make other children understand that her world includes an extra 'person,' whose promptings she does not feel entitled to ignore? (Shea, 2018, 168-9).

I would put these remarks, which are typically pedagogical and focus closely on how actual discussions within CPI occur, in relation with a broader, philosophical objection raised by Calcaterra (2011): in the conceptual device of Dewey an epistemology of the first person is tendentially absent (or is underdeveloped) and this hinders a real understanding of religious experience which is intensely personal (although this does not mean that it is private or individualistic). In other words, as I read her, it is precisely the social view of the self – that underlies also CPI – that may represent an obstacle, welcome as it is in many other respects. In this horizon, also Sharp's endeavour could be doomed if not to failure at least to incomplete achievement and, while CPI may represent a setting where to explore and enrich our understanding of religious ideas and practices as well as to develop a 'religious' sense of democratic participation, it could be insufficient to respond to other aspects of the human quest for spirituality.

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## Secular Religion as a Tool for the Realization of Democratic Citizenship. The Thesis of John Dewey (1859-1952)

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**ABSTRACT:** *This contribution aims to propose a critical reflection on a particularly complex theme for international pedagogical literature: religion. This will be done through a constant dialogue with John Dewey, a philosopher and pedagogue of American origin who, in addition to having dedicated himself to philosophical, political and pedagogical issues, has had interesting reflections on the religious phenomenon. Therefore, attention will be turned to such of his writings as Moral Theory and Practice of 1891, in which Dewey treated the religious question implicitly, wondering about human conduct and the need for it to be oriented by a morality that directed the individual towards the exercise of the collective good. Subsequently, interest will shift to writings such as Democracy and Education of 1916 and Common Faith of 1934, two works in which Dewey presented his concept of secular religion, giving it a civil connotation, since it is to be understood as a set of values capable of orienting human behavior towards a democratic life consisting of peace, solidarity and mutual respect. Finally, through a comparison with the societies of our time, the present contribution will reflect on the topicality of Dewey's thought and on the urgency, which has now become universal, to educate towards an 'open religion' in order to avoid any social inequalities and any form of cultural tension, whilst promoting the creation of democratic and multi-ethnic citizenship.*

**KEYWORDS:** *John Dewey, Religion, Secular Religion, Citizenship, Democracy.*

### Introduction

John Dewey, an internationally renowned philosopher and pedagogue, has elaborated some interesting considerations regarding the religious phenomenon which represent stimulating ideas about the world of education. In this regard, I will point out how the author, as early as 1891 in a work entitled *Moral Theory and Practice*, first approached the religious question implicitly, analyzing man's conduct and reflecting on the need for human action to be oriented by a morality capable of giving direction towards the accomplishment of good; until, with the publication in 1916 of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey explicitly dealt with the theme of secular religion, giving it a civil connotation, to be

understood as a set of values that orient human behavior towards a democracy constituted by peace, solidarity and mutual respect (Rockefeller, 1991).

Finally, my attention will focus on a text that shows even more clearly the religious interest of Dewey: *A Common Faith* of 1934, in which the Burlington thinker, distinguishing the concept of religion from that of religiousness, clarified his idea of secular religion, whose values can belong to the conduct of each and every one, representing a fundamental resource for the democratic society not only of the past, but also of the present, consisting of multicultural scenarios in which it is necessary to educate not so much and only about religion, but also and above all about religious values, so that social peace is not a mere utopian slogan, but becomes a reality.

### **1. The first reflections on religion theme**

John Dewey's interest in the religious question gradually matured: at first, his attention was focused on the conduct of man in support of the idea that some aspects of morality can better promote it. In an 1891 paper entitled *Moral Theory and Practice*, in fact, Dewey, influenced by pragmatism, reasoned on the practical value of morality, interpreting it as an aim of human action, unlike all such definitions which designated it as a set of abstract rules with no concrete purpose.

In detail, Dewey theorized a connection between 'moral' values and individual actions through which to guide man towards the realization of good, since «it is only as our moral ideas, our conceptions of this and that thing which needs doing, are reinforced and reconstructed by larger inquiries into the reality of human relationships that they are preserved» (Dewey, 1891, 196). The basic idea, as I will point out more fully in the following pages, was to believe that morality is constituted by religious values and that it can affect and characterize the life of any man, beyond dogmas and religious faith.

Dewey had also expounded similar ideas in *Democracy and Education* of 1916, focusing on the theme of civil religion, that is a religion defined as a set of values, such as solidarity, brotherhood and charity fundamental for that democratic life for which he has been longing. It was therefore a religion that did not separate but unified and directed towards virtuous actions aimed at the good of all.

Furthermore, firmly convinced that human action could be concretely regulated by morality and by a secular religion that directed each man in his daily life, in 1922 Dewey published *Human Nature and Conduct*, in which he reiterated the possibility that there is a morality capable of directing man's work and his daily life:

Morals is the most humane of all subjects. It is that which is closest to human nature; it is ineradicably empirical, not theological nor

metaphysical nor mathematical. Since it directly concerns human nature, everything that can be known of the human mind and body in physiology, medicine, anthropology, and psychology is pertinent to moral inquiry. [...] Moral science is not something with a separate province. It is physical, biological and historic knowledge placed in a human context where it will illuminate and guide the activities of men (Dewey, 1922, 295-6).

For this reason, morality can be counted among the 'human' faculties, as it does not concern the transcendent, but the action of the individual (De Maria, 1990). Furthermore, within the book *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey argued that religion has been lost in dogmas, cults and myths and that, for this reason

Consequently the office of religion as a sense of community and one's place in it has been lost. In effect religion has been distorted in a possession – or burden – of a limited part of human nature. [...] Religion as the sense of the whole is the most individualized of all things, the most spontaneous, undefinable and varied. [...] Yet it has been perverted into something uniform and unchanging. It was formulated in fixed and definite beliefs expressed in required acts and ceremonies (Dewey, 1930, 330-1).

The true meaning of the religious should not therefore reside in cults and myths, but in the relationship between people, trying to contribute all for the common good, without personal interests or selfishness of any kind.

### *1.1. 'Religion' and 'the religious': much more than a terminological difference*

After reflecting on morality and on how man's conduct can be guided by it, Dewey, in 1934, finished writing *A Common Faith*, a book containing extremely interesting reflections on the subject of religion, in accordance with the writings previously published concerning the theme of morality.

*A Common Faith* was born from three lectures given by Dewey at Yale University in New Haven and, despite its small number of pages, it represents a very interesting and contemporary work with a strong pedagogical value. The book represents an attempt to reflect on the theme of secular religion, a topic that, as I previously pointed out, Dewey had already addressed in *Democracy and Education*, but which he decided to retract in the 1930s, a period in which new sciences spread, such as psychology, biology and geology, which have helped to inspire the human mind with doubts and questions, away from a passive and non-critical acceptance of myths, legends and religious confessions. Dewey, in fact, stated that the early years of the twentieth century were characterized by an intellectual revolution that awakened the mind of man.

The aim of the volume, however, was not to address the social and cultural situation of those years, but to offer the reader food for thought that could improve it. In order to pursue this aim, Dewey explained the meaning of secular religion through the distinction between the concept of 'religion' and that of 'religious'. Regarding the word 'religion' Dewey wrote that «religion always signifies a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization, loose or right» (Dewey, 1934, 9); while Dewey considered the term 'religious' as an adjective, that

Denotes nothing in the way of a specifiable entity, either institutional or as a system of beliefs. It does not denote anything to which one can specifically point as one can point to this and that historic religion or existing church. For it does not denote anything that can exist by itself or that can be organized into a particular and distinctive form of existence. It denotes attitudes that may be taken toward every object and every proposed end or ideal (Dewey, 1934, 9-10).

In other words, the term 'religious' is used to indicate a faith that is more moral than dogmatic, through which each individual can act towards a common good that has a religious value, albeit separate from a doctrine. The risk of failing to distinguish between these two terms is that of reducing religious values to a conceptual formalization that was destined to remain no more than that. In Dewey, therefore, the intention was clearly to promote a secular religion of a practical nature which, understood as a set of values and moral principles and beyond any religious dogma, concretely orientates man and his community life, so that religious «can and should be liberated from organized religion» (Baurain, 2011, 83). In doing this, no one was to be excluded, since it is a question of a religion that does not respond to an axiom, but only to the common good and that cancels out any form of selfishness.

Realizing the religion (or religious consciousness) promoted by Dewey would also mean constituting a democratic society not intended as a mere form of government, but as a way of life (Spadafora, 2015), that is a way of life that involves associationism and respect among citizens for the common good (Tröhler, 2000). A democracy of this type would need religion as it was defined by Dewey, that is, a way to get out of the trap of institutional religions that separate in favor of a religion that is a set of moral values capable of holding together without dividing ; a sort of 'moral faith', in short, which opposes the «intellectual assent to creeds and customs required by traditional religions» (Baurain, 2011:80). It seems clear, therefore, that in the Deweyan imagination religion must be more than a simple sum of beliefs, as it must rather be «a way of living», which means that «religious faith is therefore significant not because it is embedded in knowledge statements which are 'true' but rather they are personally important end-purposes which determine our conduct and way-of-being in all of



our experiences» (Webster, 2009, 624). In *A Common Faith*, therefore, Dewey

Recognizes that our religious experiences and the conduct that they inspire often have great value That they can also have negative aspects is something he is well aware of, from, for example, his struggle with the tortured feelings of guilt that he suffered in his youth [...], and from his disappointment at the fact that in his lifetime organized religions so often sided with the powers that be at times of social protest. Indeed, organized religion is not something Dewey ever came to favor. But in *A Common Faith* Dewey views God as a human protection that embodies our highest ideals (Nagl, 2011, 126).

It is evident, then, how he perceived religion as a set of values that go beyond the differences and facilitate the rapprochement between parties, contributing to the creation of a democratic society. This, however, only if «religion» transforms «into the religious, into a human quality that is able to accompany all our dedicated actions, be they in the sciences, in the arts, or in social life» (Nagl, 2011, 127).

## **2. War, corruption and brutality as examples of a lack of religiosity: the role of education**

As explained by Dewey, in the life of everyone there is often an absence of the religious, or a theorization of religious principles which, however, is destined to remain so, causing wars, corruption, racism and social tensions of various kinds. An example of this are current societies, in which cultural and religious affiliations are often a reason for conflict, determining real forms of hatred that flow into wars and social conflicts of various kinds. These episodes, still present all over the world today, demonstrate how the concept of the religious expounded by Dewey is not rooted in men and how fundamental it is to educate towards a religious awareness, or towards a common faith that determines «the unification of the self through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desired and choices» (Dewey, 1934, 33).

Although in *A Common Faith* Dewey did not address the issue of religious education explicitly, it can still be concluded that his concept of religion requires an educational intervention, since it would not be an innate attitude. However, religious education, far from being a mere notionistic transfer of principles, would represent the transmission – not dogmatic – of those values inherent in the various religions through, for example, laboratory activities, capable of giving each citizen of the future an experience of the importance of meeting others, cooperation, solidarity and mutual aid, thus contributing to the fulfilment of a peaceful solidarity and democratic reality. An education of this type

would allow each man to understand God not as the one who separates, who generates tensions, enmities and social injustices as a representative of a religious denomination, but as an entity capable of uniting, as a unification of shared values within everyone's reach (Bertin, 1989). Furthermore, Dewey's God is not an entity separate from the earthly world to which reference is made in dramatic or problematic situations and which, for the rest of the time, remains far from human and tangible affairs, but is a set of ideals that orient choices, thoughts, actions and daily life, giving them a moral meaning. The presence of the divine, then, would not reside in mystical and transcendental experiences, but in daily work based on cooperation between people and on the use of one's own intelligence (Colonello, Spadafora, 2002). This perception of the religious on closer inspection, would make man responsible and detach him from the belief that it is God who must solve a problem, give answers to certain questions and lead in difficult and complex circumstances; for Dewey the only architect of human actions is man, it is up to him to practice religious values contributing to the well-being of the community:

First, with regard to the orientation toward present social life, Dewey represents religious believers as putting their hope in a future heaven and being uncommitted to the present. They blame sin for the evils and sufferings of this life and wait for God to do something about it rather than engaging in the present struggle for human betterment. Such pie-in-the-sky charges of escapism are not new and unfortunately there are and have been Christians who match this description. Yet much of the tide of church doctrine and history runs in the opposite direction (Baurain, 2011, 85).

Religious education would need teachers and educators ready to bring their religion into their classes but «not in the sense of organized religion», but in a Deweyan sense, because «if one understands religion as it functions – as symbols, stories, institutions, ethics, values, and practices that make life meaningful – then any teacher [...] brings his or her religion into the classroom» (Baurain, 2011, 88). Indeed, that of the teacher would not be a work of transmitting dogmas, but a living testimony of the values inherent in the various religions which, if applied daily, can transform entire social communities (Block, 2007). In this regard, significant are the words that Dewey dedicated to a future educational student:

Your work as an educator is actually a religious vocation because it gives you a sense of transcendence. Your church is the university. And your prayer is teaching. Your community of saints is made up of your students. And your prayer is when you carry on intense, revitalizing, give-and-take conversations in the classroom (Nash, 2002, 5).

The teacher therefore becomes a prophet of God, a God who, however, is not that of a confessional religion, but an entity that testifies the values and principles of all religions toward which everyone can aspire. It then appears evident that Dewey wished for a school that prepares everyone to fulfil the law:

To exercise their intelligence in all of their activities through a new kind of faith which looked to experience rather than to institutional authorities as the assumed guardians of entry to another realm. This emancipation is to be fostered by teachers through a democratic approach to education (Nodding, 1993, 625).

The school, then, must not be extraneous to religious and spiritual issues, because it is important that schools do not become victims of confessionalism but offer to the new generations an overview of the various religions, their doctrines and their values, so that each student, in addition to internalizing religious principles from the point of view of a common faith, matures – if so desired – a faith of his/her own, free from any external imposition:

The point of raising religious or spiritual issues in schools is to promote reflection and inquiry on significant questions», the «students must get the message that spiritual ideals and values are important, and they must feel free and equipped to make informed choices concerning them (Baurian, 2011, 89).

The words of Dewey expounded in *A Common Faith*, therefore, represent an appeal addressed to all, that religious principles do not lose themselves in the reading of sacred texts or in rites, but find a practical fulfilment in ordinary actions.

However, many would argue that the American philosopher and pedagogist's ideas in matters of religion are utopian, as evidenced by the many cases in the world in which religion is one of the first causes of disunity and certainly not of harmony. The latter would certainly be a legitimate observation, but refutable if we consider how in Dewey the hope for a better world lies in the power of education, or in the work of schools and various educational institutes able

To exercise their own intelligence in all of their activities through a new kind of faith which looked to experience rather than institutional authorities as the assumed guardians of entry into another realm. This emancipation is to be fostered by teachers through a democratic approach to education (Webster, 2009, 89).

It is through educational work that the Deweyan concept of the religious can be internalized in everyone's life, guiding their thoughts and actions and contributing to the creation of a democratic society in which religious values are not simply theorized, but embodied by each person and brought to life (Pasca, 2021). Only in this way can we hope for the

decrease of the episodes of racism and discrimination that today, more than ever, characterize multicultural societies and hope for a democratic citizenship that considers differences a resource that opens up to a pluralist, planetary and intercultural community (Mortari, 2008).

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## **Re-inventing the relationship between school and families: constraints, inequalities and new opportunities**

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## Erasmus + project PARENTable. Communicating with Parents of Newly Migrated Children

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**ABSTRACT:** *The Erasmus Plus project PARENTable runs between 2019 and 2022 in Germany, Italy, Sweden and Turkey. It is about communicating with parents of newly migrated children in Europe and aims to build bridges between those children's families and schools. For this purpose, we propose to bring parents and teachers together in five workshops. In this work I would like to present the project, the training concept we will use in the workshops and above all show some partial results of our background research related to how school-family communication changes within pandemic situation and distance learning, comparing the different national contexts. Methodology bases on the analysis of semi-structured qualitative interviews carried out in the four above-mentioned locations in the pandemic period and consequently within the period in which schools provided distance learning. I intend to describe and analyse the experience of distance learning lived by pupils with a migrant background, seen through the eyes of parents who had to support them and to highlights if there is a technological gap between migrant pupils and their native peers.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Parents, School, Migrated children, Distance learning, COVID-19*

### Introduction

In this work I would like to present PARENTable Erasmus plus project, its structure and aims, the training concept we will use in the workshops and above all show some partial results of our background research also related to how school-family communication changes within pandemic situation and distance learning, comparing the different national contexts.

The methodology of this paper bases on the analysis of semi-structured qualitative interviews carried out in the four above-mentioned locations focusing on pandemic and distance learning. The period in which we worked at the interviews falls entirely within the pandemic period and consequently within the period in which schools provided distance learning. During the interviews, this theme emerged continually and spontaneously, thus offering sufficient material for a comparative analysis.

I intend to describe and analyze the experience of distance learning lived by pupils with a migrant background, seen through the eyes of parents who had to support them often without having the necessary skills and tools.

I will focus on how distance learning is more difficult for pupils whose mother tongue is not the language of learning and on how it is more difficult also for their family to communicate with school with digital tools. I would like to investigate if there is a technological gap between migrant pupils and their native peers, and if this gap is the same in the different geographical areas considered. The hypothesis is that the technological gap narrows in the most marginal areas of Italy, such as the villages of the Calabria hinterland, where the natives themselves do not have the necessary infrastructure to face distance learning satisfactorily and that the same occurs in Turkey, while this gap is deeper in more developed country like Germany and Sweden.

### **1. The *PARENTable* Erasmus + project's structure and contents**

The Erasmus Plus project *PARENTable* runs between 2019 and 2022. The project teams is composed by researchers of four university, the university of Education of Schwäbisch Gmünd (Germany), the University of Calabria (Italy), that of Gävle (Sweden) and Muğla University (Turkey) and by the Syrian activists of the Back on Track association based in Berlin (Germany). The project *PARENTable – communicating with parents of newly migrated children* – is a transnational project that addresses mediators/educators and parents in order to promote new forms of communication and training that increase mutual understanding and create new channels of communication between schools and families of newly migrant children in Europe. One aim of the project is to share best practice in communication between Germany, Sweden, Italy and Turkey, promoting the exchange of ideas and experiences between educators/mediators and parents in order to support migrant children more effectively in their new school environment. Parents will gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and difficulties their children face and will be able to let schools know their perspective and needs. *PARENTable* intends to support migrant children in a holistic approach that considers parents as one of the pillars of their educational success. The target groups of the project are educators/mediators and parents of newly migrant children between 9 and 15 years old. With newly migrated children, we mean children are arrived in the hosted European country in five years at most.

The main step of the project's implementation are:

- the background research carried out in the four countries by the local research teams in which we interview parents and teachers on school-parents communication.



- the collection of knowledge about interesting practice examples in parent-teacher communication in Europe that we will publish inside a best-practice handbook. It will first of all allow parents of migrant children to be heard across Europe and will focus on their perception of the school integration of children and their educational pathway, the problems they encounter in their relationship with schools, as well as possibilities for be better integrated.
- the developing of an inclusive training concept for parents and teachers based on ground-experience in our five workshops. We propose to bring parents and teachers together in five workshops, one in each country and two in Germany (one in Berlin and one in Schwäbisch Gmünd). After every workshop, according to the methodology of participatory community-based research, we will evaluate the results of the workshop and consequently re-elaborate the training concept until after the last workshop we work out the final one. It is the first European project that will provide educational training to educators and parents together, in order to favour confrontation and decrease misunderstandings
- the construction of a website ([www.parent-able.com](http://www.parent-able.com)) in which people can find a free e-learning course.

Both workshops and e-learning course base on the same training concept, constituted from six modules: 1) parent' attitudes and expectations between educators and parents; 2) identities and self-esteem in parenting; 3) transnational families and their impact on children; 4) multilingualism and schools; 5) successful communication between educators and newly migrated parents; 6) counselling with parents of newly migrated children – how to solve problems in precarious contexts.

### *2.1. Pandemic's impact on the project*

The pandemic situation forced us to change the planning of our project. The training modules were supposed to run from spring 2020 to spring 2022, with certain intervals between each one to process the results and improve the training model. The impossibility of holding face-to-face workshops and of moving between countries led us to postpone appointments from month to month in the hope that we would soon be able to realise them. Although we have the possibility to organise the workshops online, we have chosen not to do so, because of the value we believe physical presence has in the training model we propose, with group work, interactive activities and moments of sociality before and after the purely training activities. In addition, the project already envisaged the creation of an online course, where the methodologies used are, however, different. We have therefore postponed all in-person workshops to the period between September 2021 and August 2022, the project's end date, while concentrating on the background research.

## 2. The background research

The background research bases on interviews to teacher and parents of newly migrated children. They are semi-structured qualitative interviews carried out in the four above-mentioned locations. We have elaborated a guideline for the interviews in English, then each researcher accomplishes each interview in a common language with the interviewee, then we have interviews in Italian language, other in German, other in Swedish, other in Turkish, with teachers and with parents that have already learn the language of the host countries. In other cases, we have interviews in English and France with parents who do not know the local language, and some interviews in Arabic language with Arab parents who do not speak any other language, thanks to the researcher of our teams who know Arabic. In order to share interviews and compare them each research team have translated own interviews in English.

We chose to use qualitative interview because it allows greater freedom of expression to the interviewee, in such a way that interviews may also reveal themes not initially foreseen by the researcher and allows the possibility to the interviewer to deepen different relevant topic related to each national and local context. That make the research results richer and more significant and may even contradict or modify the initial research hypotheses. On the other hand, multiple-choice questionnaires have the great advantage of offering precisely comparable results, an important quality in the context of transnational research projects with a large number of interviews to be analysed and compare. In order to balance the freedom of expression of the interviewee and of deepening of the interviewer and the comparability of the results, we opted for the form of semi-structured interview, which also allows a common basic scheme that simplifies the analysis and the final comparison.

The deepening of themes not initially foreseen by the research team is exactly what happened with the pandemic and the consequent distance learning, which was not included into the topics of the research project, written before the pandemic, but independently dealt with by the interviewees. This would not have happened with a multiple-choice questionnaire.

### *2.1. Pandemic and distance learning inside interviews*

Theoretically, in societies that define themselves as developed distance learning prefigures itself as optimal, as we could assume that the necessary technological infrastructures exist. It seemed that the resources offered by technological development and its diffusion among the population were sufficient to guarantee the good functioning of an innovative practice such as distance learning. Has this really been the case in practice?

To try to answer to this question we are looking to what parents and teachers said spontaneously in our interviews about pandemic and distance learning. I have selected, between all the interviews of the four countries, only that in which the pandemic and distance learning topics arise, and then the most representative of them. We are starting from Italy, from where we have more quotes, and then compare with Germany and Turkey and Sweden. Divided by time, we have a first group collected between June and July 2020, so they refer to the first moment of the pandemic, when everyone was unprepared for pandemic and try out for the first-time distance learning. The second group are collected in the autumn of 2020, when people had become more accustomed to the situation and institutions had had more time to find solutions to the problems that had arisen.

### 3. Italian interviews

At the end of the year, I had the idea of making a video-fable [...]. She did not make the video for religious reasons; her family is closed. We also had difficulties in contacting her... If it was not for the fact that the school try to reach her, through the cultural mediator... At the beginning, we could not have a contact because her mother does not have a mobile phone. The only contact we were able to have then was the brother's mobile phone, so we contacted the brother of this little girl. (Summer, Educator 1)

[...]

When there is no direct contact, you cannot understand whether, or not, the child has understood. In doing their homework, foreign children found themselves disoriented, especially these two, the boy and the girl, because their parents could not understand the delivery and therefore could not help them in what they had to do. This has been a constant in all the months of closure we have had. A constant relationship. Then the cultural mediator made an effort to get them the tablet so that they could connect, because initially they, although we had sent via WhatsApp all the instructions on what they had to do, they did nothing at all. Then through the mediator, we were able to get them the tablet so that they could connect and do the video lessons like everyone else. (Summer, Educator 1)

But the mother of \*\* is more closed, evidently, she has a reality also within the family ... she is more reserved, she is very, very closed, also from the mobile phone point of view, like joining groups, making video calls, because their culture says that they cannot show ... they can't make video calls.

I: What nationality is this woman?

Moroccan, all of them, while her sister, the mother of \*\* is more open, she uses technology, she talks, she makes videos.

[...]

We do not have an interpreter. We are contacting the local authorities regarding the availability for the COVID, but zero! There is no help, we are working with our forces

[...]

All teachers were very close to these kids, to them like many others who unfortunately did not have a computer even though they were Italian, the less well-off families. (Educator 5, afterschool care).

Through our colleague and the groups of parents (who are very supportive), we were able to make them connect, to make video lessons, but it is clear that a child who already understands little in presence, in distance learning has become even more difficult, a bit for all foreigners has been so. [...] They did not even have an e-mail address, and now with the electronic register, unfortunately. How are we supposed to do that? We gave them the hard copy as long as it was possible, but with lockdown, they had to view the report card online, on the electronic register. So I, through the cultural mediator, who did me this big pleasure, explained to the father, rather than to the mother ... Moroccan families in important decisions you have to call in the evening and talk to the father [...] Difficulty in explaining how to connect to the videoconference, because if you do not have a mastery of the language I have difficulty. While in a fifth grade the child understands it, in a first or second grade, I need the parent, and so if the parent does not have this fluency with the Italian language, it is clear that the problem will arise (Educator 6).

Last year because of the pandemic, there was no contact with the teachers [...] Before the Corona, when I went to school to pick up my son, they would inform me about him, tell me if he had any weaknesses in some subject, and tell me how they wanted to help him. They gave me an idea of what needed to be done. However, you know that I have a sort of 'fear', 'agitation', with the Italian language, but the communication was good. Then, of course, there were people who helped me, the cultural mediator. Once there was a problem and I went with a translator who had provided the Kasbah<sup>1</sup>, for example. They always helped me if there was something important to communicate. Now with the Corona crisis, communication takes place through the internet, through the parents' group on WhatsApp. Whatever, whatever problem, we inform the parent class representative we elected, and she/he is responsible for informing the teachers of our communications (Winter, Parent 2, Syrian).

There have not been many meetings really. On two occasions, they asked me to go for an interview, once I went, but to nothing, they did not speak to me. You know, I do not speak Italian, they told me: why did you come? It was not necessary.

I: Does your wife speak good Italian?

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<sup>1</sup> Association working with asylum seekers and refugees

No, to tell the truth not much. I, with work, do not have time to learn the language...and then I did not study much in school... (Parent 3, Syrian).

As far as the teachers, honestly, they take very good care of my kids. Right now, since the pandemic started, they are taking classes online and then at 3/3:30 PM they do after-school care. They take care of our kids. A worker from the organization follows up with the kids; he makes sure they are getting after-school care. Then we have a good relationship with the teachers who are the same since the beginning. Thank God, we did not have any problems. In Libya, we did have problems...[...] Two weeks ago, Osama's teacher called me, wanted to talk to me, and said that Osama's situation has improved a lot, and that she would be happy if he could maintain this level. When they contacted me to tell me they wanted to talk to me, I thought 'mmm maybe there is a problem'! Instead, they had to tell me that he has improved a lot, despite this particular moment in which they do distance teaching. (Parent 4, Libyan).

#### 4. German interviews

There is a group for school. We have a WhatsApp group for the kids in the same class. If there is a class, if there is homework, if there is meetings, we look at the WhatsApp messages and if you do not understand, you can ask your questions. We also have a woman from Integration\*\*\*, a woman from Algeria I think, she's not far away and sometimes I go to her house to try to correct my children's homework because sometimes I don't understand [...] I live during the Corona virus, school told to each family that we can go and visit a family for the kids and then the kids can play together. I did not that because I do not have a contact like that, only on WhatsApp. I do not have a contact that I can contact and say 'ah my kids are going to go there' or that the kids are going to come to my house because I always have that problem, my kids are always here at home. (Summer, Parent 1, Gambia).

We have found that not much parental support is possible there. It is different with those who are in youth welfare. That is why we do as much teaching as possible; we also offer learning times and pupils do homework at school. We tried to support a lot from home. Our VABO teenagers, they were of course supplied with teaching material and tasks, just like everyone else, but you have already noticed that the limits are quickly reached if you cannot have personal contact. (Teacher 1<sup>2</sup>)

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<sup>2</sup> Teacher in vocational preparation course for the apprenticeship, with focus on the secondary modern school leaving certificate and integration. It begins with the training course VABO, in which, as the preparatory year, there is a focus on orientation and language acquisition. There are mainly migrants who have not yet mastered the language in order to enter a regular training course.

Now, during the lockdown because of Corona, I know the curriculum of my daughter. I know what she learns, what she does etc. Also at home, she learns alone. We also apply this self-learning. We manage things. We respond to them, if they need something or if they ask for an explanation, I can explain it to them. It is all self-learning [...] My elder daughter she explained to me what she learns at school. I enjoyed this lockdown. There was some stress, you are with the children all the time and the housework doubled, but at the same time, I felt, the relation with our children became stronger. [...] In Corona lockdown, I had my son take his toys to the balcony and play there. He would give signs to his classmate, and they would play together remotely. Whenever his parents saw that their son was playing with my son, they would call him inside, close the door and the stores. It's clear that they did not want their son to play with my son. (Winter, Parents 2, Syrian).

## 5. Turkish interviews

At the last semester at the last year, the teacher has changed, and we struggled with this teacher. We struggled because of his ideas against the Syrians unfortunately. I had to go to talk to the principle in the school. Before that, everything was really good and smooth. We did not have any problems but later, yeah. It is the last year in her primary school, she is in the fourth grade now, and because of the Corona, they stay at home so the problem solved [...] After Corona, we were really far from the school, so... Actually, I can talk about this. For example, teachers tried a lot to keep in touch with the children in Corona time, so we have a good experience. Teachers, they are always sending us some homework, and encourage children to work and study at home. All the teachers, they are doing this in an effective way I think. Even if it's not really effective like I mean in class lessons but still they keep in touch with the children which is really good (Summer, Parent 1, Syrian).

The Directorate of National Education enrolled all Syrian students in an exam to assess their levels of Turkish. They transferred all children below a certain level of Turkish in one school to teach them Turkish. To be honest I have not seen these students yet because they were supposed to come back to our school at the end of the process but, because of the pandemic, they have not returned. (School counsellor 1<sup>3</sup>)

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<sup>3</sup> In Turkish school system, there is one school counsellor in every school. They have a mediating role in the triangle of child, school management, and parents; convey to the administration, solve psychosocial problems of and work with school adaptation, motivation and so on.

For my elder son, we go and talk to his teacher approximately once in three months. We did this before the pandemic. We did not experience any problems we just went to ask about his progress. [...] Those parents do not speak Turkish very well, so especially after the pandemic, teachers always send to them messages about the distant learning courses but they are not very concerned with their children's education, so they do not follow those messages. Both because they do not speak Turkish and because they are not concerned enough. (Winter, Parent 4, Syrian)

There are no differences. In Syria, when my daughter needs help, I can use the language that I understand. Now she has online classes, and her older brothers help her. (Parent 7, Syrian)

In his new school now (the high school), he probably has a school counsellor but since it is always online education we never went to school and we do not know them. Usually, I go to his school and meet his teachers but as I said, I could not do it this year because of the pandemic. (Parent 8, Syrian)

When I first went to school, I visited the school principal. Vice principal and the school counsellor were there, I met them all. I told the counsellor about the girls' situation. Now, since they started middle school this year, I have not been able to find out who their responsible teacher is. I have been to the school a few times, but it is forbidden to enter the school due to the pandemic. I could not talk to anyone. We do not have any tablets or computers so we cannot login to the system. We do not have internet at home. These kids should be able to continue education. I do not know what to do right now. [...] In terms of online education, many people do not have electronic devices and internet at home, and we are one of those. Several students will drop out of education. I do not know how solve this. The courses on TV are just instruction. Then teachers connect to the students via synchronized online classes to talk about homework and answer the children's problems, which we cannot connect to. (Parent 9, Syrian).

We have not gone to school this year due to the pandemic [...] She is a successful student. Nevertheless, at that period, she did not want to go to school. She cannot attend the classes now, either. She does not have her password.

I – But she wants to continue her education now, right?

Yes, she does. She is really a successful student. Her teacher talks to her on the phone and says 'don't miss out on your classes, don't stop following the classes' (Parent10, Syrian).

I had many problems. When I went to the bank, to the bazaar, to the school, I had language problems. Now I am having problems with online education due to not knowing how to use them [...] We have only one smart phone and we give it to our youngest son because he needs it the most. The others are unable to attend online classes. I do not know how we can solve this. (Parent 12, Syrian).

## 6. Swedish interviews

In Swedish interviews the topic did not arise, in the opinion of our project researchers because the grade of safe internet connection is high in Sweden, in private homes and in schools and other official places, the infrastructure is better than in many other countries and people generally have computer, smartphone and tablet to connect. This is true also for foreign family and pupils.

## Conclusion

From these voices from the field, we can draw some provisional conclusions, relating exclusively to the people we interviewed and without claiming to be representative of the four countries under consideration. The limited number of interviews and the lack of sampling according to scientific criteria make the data non-generalizable. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that the interviews were carried out in specific local contexts, i.e., only in some cities, and may not reflect the realities of other cities and towns in the same country. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note what emerges as a constant in all four countries and what is peculiar.

In general, the quality of communication between schools and families of foreign students depends on many variables. The more important seem to be the parents' knowledge of the host country's language. When they do not know, schools can respond to this problem with various strategies. The more implemented and more useful seem to be the use of linguistic-cultural mediators. It is a good option also because language is only the first factor. There are cultural and psychological issues to take into account. Parents may not understand the rules of the new society in which they are living, the rules of the school and the dynamics related to multilingualism and identity formation of children in new migratory contexts. They may feel threatened in their cultural and/or religious identity and perceive discrimination or stereotypes in the new migratory context and they may be in a situation of psychological stress that does not allow them to play a positive role in supporting the integration of their children. For these reasons, the support of a professional cultural mediator appears to be the best choice.

We see the experience of distance learning lived by pupils with a migrant background, seen through the eyes of parents who had to support them often without having the necessary skills and tools. Distance learning is more difficult for pupils whose mother tongue is not the learning language, and it is more difficult for parents' who do not understand the language to support them from home, because them-self do not understand teachers. School-family communication has shifted to informal channels such as WhatsApp groups, whose



speed and confusion makes it even more difficult for those who do not understand the language well to understand the communication contents, given the near impossibility of continuous translation of all the chats. We see cultural and religious issues related with gender issues, like the problem for woman to shows themselves in video, with families in which only man have digital tools. We have seen that also in this particular situation of distance learning the help of a professional cultural mediator can give good results.

Despite the temporal distance between summer interviews and winter interviews, in which governments and school could have promoted measures to improve online teaching and communication, no substantial differences emerged between the two periods. Those who have implemented good practices have therefore done so from the outset, while the problems that have emerged have not been resolved in the transition from one school year to the next

We see the technological gap between migrant pupils and their native peers that takes on different dimensions depending on the geographical area considered. It narrows in the most marginal areas of Italy, such as the villages of the Calabria hinterland, where the natives themselves do not have the necessary infrastructure to face distance learning satisfactorily. The same we have in Turkey where in fact there are courses on TV for the big number of pupils cannot do distance learning with internet. This gap is deeper in more developed country like Germany, where there is strong difference between natives and foreigners, and more exclusion. We see more problem of relationship with teachers in Turkey, and with native parents in Germany and Turkey, a relationship that could help foreign parents to relate with school.

The emergence of the topic in many interviews with Italian teachers suggests that in this country the teaching staff has experienced the problems related to distance learning as central. We can say the same for migrant parents living in Turkey. In Germany, the problem seems to have been less central in its didactic aspect but for what concern people we have interviewed, more problematic in its social dimension. In Sweden, the topic does not arise. In addition to the aforementioned reasons, relating to equal technological means and possibilities for native and foreign pupils, we should also mention the systemic presence of cultural mediators in the school system ([skolverket.se](http://skolverket.se)) and, with regard to the specific issue of distance learning, their limited use in compulsory education, which remained mostly open ([Europa.eu](http://Europa.eu)).

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## Roma Students: The Forgotten Victims of the Coronavirus

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**ABSTRACT:** *The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected the daily life of everyone, but for some it has represented an even more considerable challenge. Roma families, particularly those living in socially excluded and marginalised settings, are a case in point. The situation of discrimination experienced for years by Roma families has worsened in times of pandemic, leaving families to feel even more vulnerable and deprived of correct health information. The biggest victims were probably Roma children, many of whom stopped relationships with teachers, school, and classmates and were unable to follow daily lessons through distance learning. The lack of data on the pandemic in relation to this specific target does not allow us to understand its real impact. The only data available for now are those related to single projects of local administrations, NGO and/or volunteer associations. However, it must be noted that the quality and quantity of Roma children's school attendance and performance are often influenced by the educational strategies and teaching models implemented in schools and by the kind of relationship between teachers and family. For this reason, in the post-pandemic school, it will be necessary to reconsider the issue of inclusion through new and improved forms of partnership between schools, teachers and families.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Roma Students, School, Families, COVID-19, Post-Pandemic School*

### Introduction

The social groups most exposed to the consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic and at risk of being forgotten victims of the coronavirus due to their marginalised situation and discrimination prior to the pandemic are the Roma and Sinti populations. The Roma makes up the largest historical-cultural minority in the EU, but also the group which is most subject to inequalities in access to work, education, housing and healthcare. Antigypsyism continuously produces and reproduces negative stereotypes and discriminatory practices that are often institutionally legitimised by policies that exclude or limit access to the rights of citizens (FRA, 2017; Piasere, 2015). Discrimination in relation to the Roma population is reflected and amplified among children and adolescents that grow up in particularly fragile social conditions and

with a very wide range of unmet rights. Among them, the right to education is still a challenge for many countries in Europe. Low education levels, widespread illiteracy among Roma communities together with racism in its various forms, in Italy as in the rest of Europe, are the main obstacles that impact access to the job market, the use of services and active participation in public life. The pre-pandemic data available indicate low rates of enrolment in schools of all levels, high truancy and early-leaver rates, and limited access to services and educational activities outside of school (FRA, 2014).

FRA's Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II) results, conducted in nine EU Member States in 2016<sup>1</sup>, show that Roma children lag behind their non-Roma peers on all education indicators. Only about half (53%) of Roma children between the age of four and the starting age of compulsory primary education participate in early childhood education. The proportion of Roma early school-leavers is disproportionately high compared with the general population. Among the young Roma aged 16–24 who are no longer in education, more than three quarters have completed at most only lower secondary education. Half of the Roma between 6 and 24 years of age do not attend school. Of those who do, only 1 % attend school at a higher level than the one corresponding to their age; 18% attend at an educational level lower than the one corresponding to their age, either because they repeated classes, started school later, or both. This share is highest (20%) among Roma of the age for upper secondary education. The same survey (EU-MIDIS II) shows that the percentage of NEETs, young people neither in employment nor in education or training, is high. Eurostat annually publishes figures on people 15 to 24 years old who are 'neither in employment, nor in education or training'. A similar indicator computed for Roma aged 16 to 24 years shows that the proportion of young Roma not in work or education or further training as their main activity is, on average, 63%. Using it as a crude approximation of the Eurostat NEET rate, the comparison with 12% of the general population of the same age group in the EU-28 illustrates the magnitude of the gap.

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (2017) has stressed that school segregation continues to impact Roma children in Europe. Remedial classes and special schools that provide low-profile lessons and curricula still exist, denying access to the knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> EU-MIDIS II – *Transition from education to employment of young Roma in nine EU Member States* (2018) collected information from over 25,500 respondents from different ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds in all 28 EU Member States. The findings summarized in this paper are based on 7,947 interviews with Roma respondents in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. The data are representative for Roma living in geographic or administrative units with density of Roma population higher than 10%, who self-identify as 'Roma' or as members of one of the other groups covered by this umbrella term.

usually gained at school and perpetuating educational and social disadvantages that feed into the vicious cycle of poverty and stigmatization. Channelling Roma children to so-called special education often means transforming cultural difference into disability (Casa-Nova, Tagliaventi, 2020).

## 1. Italian context

Gypsy communities actually living in Italy are characterized by the heterogeneity of groups, dialects and specific linguistic varieties and cultures<sup>2</sup>. There is no official census of the Roma population, and therefore it is very difficult to obtain precise data. The data we can refer to, are approximate estimates from both official sources (Ministry of the Interior), and third sector associations/non-profit organizations. According to Italian Senate (Senato della Repubblica, 2011), there should be approximately 140 000 Roma and Sinti; this figure was also confirmed by some NGOs. Roma, Sinti and Travelers populations represent around 0.2% of the population, one of the lowest in Europe. The Roma communities are characterized by a high percentage of children (60% of the Roma population is believed to be under 18). Overall, there is thought to be around 70 000 children, and if we consider the hypotheses of numerous NGOs, over 40 000 should be in compulsory education (Tagliaventi, 2020).

Having abandoned nomadic lifestyles years ago, Roma and Sinti communities live in many different settings. It is estimated that around 40 000 people currently live in highly precarious conditions in settlements in the outskirts of cities, sadly notorious as «camps». Roma legal settlements were created by local governments under the misconception that the Roma are nomadic people. In Italy, the Roma camps increased in the 1980s and 1990s to respond to the populations coming from former Yugoslavia before and after the war. Initially they were set up as temporary sites, but later became permanent (Bravi, 2020).

As regards legal status, Roma and Sinti with Italian nationality count for approximately half of those in the country. Of the foreign nationals, 50% are from former Yugoslavia and the remainder from Romania, with minority groups from Bulgaria and Poland. Among the Roma population in Italy, there are three categories of subjects with different rights: Italian citizens, European Union member state nationals and non-EU citizens. In addition to these, there are stateless persons and refugees. Although they have foreign nationality, many young people were born and raised in Italy.

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<sup>2</sup> In this text I will use Roma to mean all the communities.

## 2. Educational inequalities: the role of the school-family relationship

There is a lack of recent data regarding the attendance of Roma and Sinti children and adolescents in Italian schools. The most recent data set comes from 2015 and highlights the low attendance rate in relation to the estimated 40 000 school-age children and adolescents. According to the Report of MIUR and ISMU (2016), in the academic year 2014/15, the total number of Roma pupils was 12 437, with an increase of +780 pupils on the previous year. The Report highlights the increase in enrolments in kindergartens and secondary schools (the highest in the historical series of the last eight years) but also the sharp drop in enrolments recorded in the transition from primary to secondary school. It also confirms the low presence of pupils in secondary schools. In this case the total number of students registered in secondary schools is alarming: only 248 Roma adolescents in whole of Italy. This number does not include students enrolled in vocational training courses.

As it is clear, the gap between 12437 registered students and the 40000 (that should be in compulsory schooling) is so large that it is possible to think that a significant number of Roma children are not registered in schools. Moreover, from school year 2007/08 to 2012/13 the number of registrations at all school levels (preschool, primary school, middle and secondary school) fell progressively. The data available on the school enrolment of Roma children may be underestimated due to methodological problems connected to data collection techniques and the failure of families to declare that they belong to Roma communities in order to protect their children from prejudice and discrimination (MIUR-ISMU, 2016). Another problem to take into consideration is a potential discrepancy between students enrolled in school and those who actually attend school regularly. Generally, though the lack of data certainly doesn't help us understand the phenomenon of truancy, it is also true that the data we do have should be looked at in depth and analyzed.

The education of Roma children in Italy has a long history and this history still influences how Roma families make their children attend school.

It began in 1965 with the ghetto classes 'special classes for gypsies' promoted by the non-profit Organization Opera Nomadi based on an idea of inclusion completely different from the idea we have now. The educational and training proposals were made by the Centre for Gypsy Studies in Rome and in particular by Mirella Karpati who structured a first «gypsy pedagogy» (Bravi, 2013). The experience of the special classes continued officially until 1982 and informally in some schools until later years.

This gypsy pedagogy confirmed the diversity of one social group with respect to the others, and consisted in the exclusion of Roma children from the classroom in order to access a type of teaching of low profile and unable to fill any gap. Many anthropological studies (Piasere, 2010;

Saletti-Salsa, 2008) show that this kind of pedagogy is still applied in some Italian schools, in different ways and forms, but the same in substance. In any case, even though the situation has improved today, this vision of school, experienced by parents or grandparents of current students, which excludes rather than includes, still substrates and mediates the vision of school that many Roma families have today, especially those who have lived in our country for longer.

It is evident that early school leaving and the difficulties to attend the school are caused also by material poverty and housing conditions. Particularly difficult are the conditions of children living in irregular settlements (camps), often far from schools and without transport, place of segregation where there are no adequate spaces to study.

The difficulties increased by the prejudices against the Roma community and also by the lack of correspondence between the purpose of schooling and the expectations of the families. If the education is an investment and a fundamental resource both for the single subjects and for the whole society, it is true that all students (Roma and not Roma) develop diversified motivations and orientations towards the school according to their personal situation, their social, economic and cultural position, and exogenous conditions such as local environment, social opportunities.

As highlighted by Cerrocchi, D'Antone and Vecchia (2015), in Roma communities, educational paths are permanent, mediated by extended family, and take place within everyday experiences that take on greater importance than any other specific content. Childhood does not enter into educational contexts – physical and mental – isolated from the everyday life of adults in the community (all of whom are constantly responsible), which presents models to be imitated. Literacy practices can therefore be experienced as a purely instrumental process, useful for relating to the host community, but hardly conceived of as an educational tool capable of improving one's social status. Moreover, there are relatively few examples of people in the Roma community whose school attendance and educational success have led to social mobility, and school is still a place where children are the target of prejudice and rejection (Piasere, 2010; Saletti-Salsa, 2008). For Roma children this lack of correspondence between academic objectives and motivations, on one side, and individual and family expectations, on the other, makes the families not to encourage the school attendance of the children. It is often a lack of mutual familiarity between school and Roma community, and among teachers and parents, that doesn't support the understatement of the different perspectives.

However, the quality and quantity of Roma school attendance and performance are often influenced by the educational strategies and teaching models implemented in schools and by school organization: whether adopted deliberately or not, models and strategies and organization showed how they can either promote or discourage success and inclusion of Roma children in school. It is often also the

institutional racism that do not help the adequate inclusion of children that come from different contexts, causing disorientation, marginalization and discrimination (Casa-Nova, Tagliaventi 2020). At the same time the kind of relationship between teachers and family influences the reciprocal social representations and the student's school attendance. This is most true in times of pandemic.

### **3. Data on the COVID-19 pandemic**

The discrimination that has gone on for years now increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, making families (especially those still living in irregular settlements) even more vulnerable and lacking proper information on its management. Irregular settlements, which usually are characterized by a state of neglect and poor hygienic living conditions, were at risk of becoming COVID-19 hotspots, and the employment crisis, especially the informal labour market that generates a large part of the income of Roma and Sinti families, have increased the level of poverty and the inability of families to satisfy their primary needs, such as food, heating, medicine and disinfectants. Local administrations haven't always intervened to monitor the situation and provide support. In some cases, in order to protect the health of social work and to grapple with situations of uncertainty, they've instead chosen to suspend the services provided. At least during the first year of the pandemic, the situation was dealt with in some areas by volunteer organizations and third sector associations that enacted forms of charity aimed at satisfying primary needs, but in general many operators stressed the isolation of Roma families and their subsequent distress (Bravi, 2020).

Distance learning has profoundly altered the ability to provide educational continuity for many boys and girls, and has meant that some Roma and Sinti students, especially those living in irregular settlements, have been permanently removed from schooling. Many students were unable to connect to their online lessons due to a lack of digital tools, no internet connection, and also due to the absence of a suitable environment to learn in, having to share very close quarters with their family members. For others, it was impossible because their families, frightened of what was happening, left their usual homes to reach relatives in faraway cities or return to their country of origin.

According to Saraceno (2020), the prolonged closure of schools has highlighted the biggest weakness in the Italian school system: its reliance on families as the main entity responsible for the well-being of students. Families also have had to support the schooling of younger generations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, but said support is tied to differences in resources in terms of materials, relationships, housing, language and culture (Vaira, Romito 2020). Even before the pandemic, because some Roma communities mainly communicate via an



exclusively oral language (Romani), the difficulty of learning a language that has a written element has put families in the unfortunate position of not being able to provide the support necessary to their children's schooling, a problem accentuated also by the general absence of Roma children in optional preschool or extra-curricular services.

It will be difficult to obtain reliable data on the impact of the lockdown on the already-low school attendance of Roma and Sinti children. The only data available for now are those related to single projects. They include the National Project for the Inclusion and Integration of Roma, Sinti and Travellers Children, promoted by the Minister of Labour and Social Policies as part of the PON 'Inclusion' 2014-2020 actions, carried out in 14 metropolitan areas in Italy (Bari, Bologna, Catania, Florence, Genoa, Messina, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Reggio Calabria, Rome, Turin and Venice). This project involved 565 children and found that schools lost track of about one in five of them (19%) during the first lockdown (March-April 2020), most likely due to the family having moved. Of the other children, 5% were unable to participate in any form of distance learning, 41% had a very hard time, 28% had a somewhat hard time, and only 5% continued to attend classes remotely without any problems, in the various ways proposed by the teachers<sup>3</sup>. The data is of course partial, but it is nevertheless of some importance if we consider that it relates to students who are actively monitored by social services, and whose teachers have been trained to pay special attention to the inclusion of Roma children. We can assume that the situation was more problematic for students who aren't part of specific projects, who are not monitored and who don't have the direct support of operators.

A qualitative study conducted by Bravi (2020) on the experience of Roma students in some regular and irregular settlements in small and large cities after the first pandemic revealed a varied panorama. In large metropolises such as Milan and Rome, the lack of specific actions on an institutional level for remote learning was highlighted, partly compensated for by volunteers or third sector activities. Things are better in smaller settlements with fewer than 100 inhabitants and where the relationships between schools and Roma families are stronger because they have been solidified over time, as in Florence and Prato. According to the Kethane movement, which conducted a national survey<sup>4</sup>, the loss of contact with school during the closures of the first wave of the pandemic impacted 80% of students residing in cities with over 150 000 inhabitants and stood at 45% in smaller towns. On top of this very difficult situation, another aspect must be added: prejudice. In September 2020, FRA's Bulletin 5 examined the situation of Roma and Travellers during the first wave of the pandemic and underlined the

<sup>3</sup> See *Report di valutazione 2019/20 – fine triennalità. Progetto nazionale per l'inclusione e l'integrazione dei bambini rom, sinti e caminanti – PON Inclusion*. <https://www.progettonazionaleisc.it>

<sup>4</sup> The survey is available at: [https://b10a2541-efba-49cf-a116-8ae061a99526.filesusr.com/ugd/4b6dbc\\_89e68a23341047e8beaf716a62fc8f6f.pdf](https://b10a2541-efba-49cf-a116-8ae061a99526.filesusr.com/ugd/4b6dbc_89e68a23341047e8beaf716a62fc8f6f.pdf)

persistent scourge of antigypsyism remained ever present. Media and social networks especially portrayed Roma as a public health hazard and responsible for spreading the virus.

## **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has thus exacerbated discrimination and the generally precarious situation that the Roma population has experienced in Italy over the years, and it has also impacted the right to education of children and adolescents. Distance learning has caused a crisis in integration in schools, which was already unstable before the pandemic, and has further increased drop-out rates. The situation must now be addressed by paying more attention to the most fragile social groups and by strengthening relationships with families. The National Project for the Inclusion and Integration of Roma, Sinti and Travellers Children, promoted by the Minister of Labour and Social Policies (mentioned above), found that before the pandemic, the strengthening of school-family relationships through specific actions (such as the introduction of teachers before the start of school, or having a coffee at the regular or irregular settlements or near the housing units) and direct connections between teachers, ATA staff and parents, improved the attendance rate of Roma children and their knowledge retention and competences.

It is undeniable that there is a gap between schools and Roma families, which is increased by mutual distrust. One fundamental problem remains: all families are asked to enter into a co-responsibility pact, but Roma families are often not considered by the school as an educating family capable of supporting their children. Many relationships are still based on prejudice, and, during the pandemic, many teachers didn't even consider the idea of engaging Roma children with inclusive forms of distance learning also. We have long-term, demanding work to do which requires joint commitment in different areas (school, family, social services and local administrations), but which puts schools at the centre. Schools, in turn, will have to restore their focus on inclusion, which has been undermined by measures implemented to protect public health. Inclusion will accompany the debate on new post-pandemic emergencies, when the consistent in-classroom presence of students (for those who return) will shed light on a knowledge gaps and new forms of social inequality. Moreover, it will be necessary to repair broken relationships and recreate a positive classroom climate to combat disinterest, truancy and isolation.

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## What is the Aim of Education?

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# Gramsci, Vygotsky and the Construction of a General Anti-Systemic Social Knowledge

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper tries to investigate the school context and the contradictions that the neo-liberal economy has determined within it, and to analyze the spaces that still today pedagogies of a critical character can exercise to transform it in a progressive sense. Recovering some conceptual nodes of the thought of Gramsci and Vygotsky, starting from the original vision that distinguishes both of them on the level of the relationship that the world of education establishes with a historically and economically determined society, we will try to show a possible redefinition of the role of the intellectual, and within this category, that of a particular type of intellectual, the teacher. The definition of this role, as Giroux suggests, is fundamental in order to try to reason about the possibilities of its critical exercise and the obstacles that, within a capitalist framework, inhibit its transformative thrust, its ability to contribute to building collective paths of liberation and emancipation from the dominant thought. In an economic framework in which relational skills, the management of complexity and interaction with new technologies are essential, it is still possible to imagine forms of collaboration and cooperation that are not functional to the capitalist reproduction of exploitation, but which opens up paths to liberation. For this to happen, it is useful to recover the reflections that both Gramsci and Vygotsky had elaborated in different ways, and which are a very useful contribution to unveil the traps that capitalism can set for those who are not aware of its ability to overturn and turn to their advantage the critical spirit of those who would like to dispute it.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Hegemony, Subalternity, Emancipation, Radical Democracy*

## Introduction

While leaving functionalist schemes aside, is it possible to say that there is a model of schooling that is better suited to support the accumulation interests of cognitive capitalism, or even bio-cognitive according to Andrea Fumagalli's definition (Fumagalli, 2017)? What kind of teacher best fits this model? A teacher who is aligned, passive, willing to become a technician of pre-packaged knowledge, hostile to any process in which the educational relationship, between teaching and learning, is seen as a necessary element in the construction of critical thinking,

aware and necessary to identify and question the contradictions of society (Torres, 2014).

For this reason, it is still important to emphasise that constructing forms of liberation from the «cage of our present» is a task that only intellectuals capable of combining research and commitment, theory and praxis, can carry out, as both Gramsci and Vygotsky were able to do, questioning the predominant mechanistic and deterministic hegemonic readings even within the workers movement.

Today, at a time when we are experiencing the victory of *homo oeconomicus-democraticus*, we realise how useful their contribution is in reviewing the categories of democratic thought with a critical eye and imagining an alternative project, which is only possible if politics and education forge a relationship aimed at breaking the cultural hegemony of those who consider the management of what exists, with the aim of preserving it, to be 'political'.

But their legacy is also important to reversing the trend that sees the school incapable of training subalterns as future 'leaders', because it is still possible to create the conditions for an overall rethinking of social relations and thus lay the foundations for a redefinition of the role of education in contemporary or future society. A functional instrument for the reproduction of the *status quo*, or instead the motor for the affirmation of that critical spirit necessary to trigger that process of demercantilisation of representative democracies mentioned by Boaventura de Sousa (2017).

Many pedagogical scholars identify the liberating function of education as a fundamental aspect. Among them, Gramsci and Vygotsky argued that the emancipatory power of education could not avoid confronting the problem of the instruments that the ruling classes use to make it ineffective. The analysis, therefore, of the relationship between ideology and society, between education and politics, is fundamental in order to understand how the dominant classes manage, by means of a sophisticated process of constructing a discourse and a narrative aimed at obtaining a certain degree of consensus from the subalterns, to perpetuate their condition of subalternity.

## **1. Globalisation, education, politics and teachers**

We are in a very delicate historical moment for the fate of the planet in which (in different ways, for historical, cultural, political and geographical reasons) the rules that a long cycle of social transformations, largely sustained by the subaltern classes, in terms of trade union relations, gender equality, civil rights, are (as perhaps never before in recent history) threatened. As Andrea Porcarelli said

Certainly pedagogy will not be able to save the world, or at least it will not be able to do so on its own, but it could make its own contribution

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to making the reasons for education as such re-emerge, precisely at a time when the educational emergency makes this task on the one hand more difficult, but on the other hand more necessary. [...] (2012, 18).

Following the reflections of another important exponent of contemporary critical pedagogy, Henry Giroux, we could argue that the school has undergone a process of de-pedagogization. The 'typical' pseudo-values of contemporary extractive turbo-capitalism, which have severely damaged public schools, have at their base a deep anti-intellectual sentiment that despises the effort of research and legitimises a discrediting of teachers. As Giroux argues in his recent collection of essays, *Education and the Crisis of Public Values*, education is reduced to an «unjustified infatuation with measurement and the use of tests, the field of public education increasingly reinforces this anaesthetising experience with disciplinary measures» (2014, 25). In these authors, the problem of the role of intellectuals returns powerfully. What kind of intellectual do we need in contemporary society? What role should he play and what kind of person are we talking about? In order to answer these questions, we have chosen to follow the line of reasoning of two important authors, Gramsci and Vygotsky. Recovering their dialogical and inter-relational vision of thought, language, and therefore of learning, both with regard to theoretical aspects and practical experiences, we believe that it is possible to recreate a body of knowledge that is useful in bringing to light a theme that is often overlooked: the relationship between social change and social reproduction. Drawing on the contributions of these authors on the figure of the teacher, our aim is to understand how to promote genuine processes of democratic reform of schools and society. Both Gramsci and Vygotsky objected to his figure being broken down and to his functions as a technician of the transmission of knowledge being separated from the more general purposes of an educational nature from which he should not shirk (Meta, 2017; Vygotsky, 2006; Trimarchi, 2007). Both felt that schools should be a place where a 'disinterested' view of culture could be practised, not subject to the logic of the labour market, of a particular production cycle. Providing 'professional skills' should not mean inhibiting access to higher levels of knowledge that were instead intended for the ruling class so that it could continue to exercise its hegemonic role in society. Both would reject this turn of events and would try to respond to it by re-establishing an indissoluble link between theory and practice, between teaching and education, between education and politics (Mayo, 2015). Because for both, learning is a cooperative process, which is achieved by establishing circular and not unidirectional relationships, within which theoretical reflections are essential in order to produce applicative actions, which are in turn connected to the political orientations that the school must give itself: for both, a process of

progressive «conscientization», as Paulo Freire would later say, which would remove the working classes from their condition of cultural, political and social submission to the hegemonic thinking of a given society. A progressive political pedagogy that has the task of subverting the state of affairs, refuting the erroneous political assumption of those who consider the primordial division between leaders and direct would be unresolvable (De Smet, 2015). It would, in fact, be wrong to think that the process of hegemonization of consciences can be complete, even in a context such as the neo-liberal one in which one often has the impression of witnessing a process in this sense that is irreversible. As Massimo Baldacci says the topicality of Gramsci's thought lies precisely in identifying the capacity for expansion of this hegemonic thought, its ability to win the consent of vast popular strata, without having to resort to the instrument of coercion, but also in showing the cracks, the resistance and the forms of counterculture that can be achieved and from which to restart a process that is instead one of liberation (Baldacci, 2017).

## **2. Con-penetration and con-participation as a necessary task for intellectuals**

Gramsci and Vygotsky were the bearers of a vision in which the relationship between education and politics was very close. We could define as 'pedagogical' the training that both of them, many miles apart from each other, promoted and that resulted in a constant commitment not only of a theoretical and intellectual nature, linked to the journalistic production of Gramsci (through his journalistic work in the columns of the *Avanti!* and the *Grido del popolo*), of the collaborations with cultural journals, and Vygotsky, but of the constant intervention in the organisation of courses, seminars and lessons with workers and illiterate people that they carried out in those years (Goussot, Zucchi, 2015). This work of *con-penetration* and *con-participation* by intellectuals in the reality of the workers and exploited was an expression of a precise vision of the relationship between 'intellectuals' and 'masses'. A relationship whereby it is only by acquiring certain intellectual tools that it is possible to overcome the condition of subalternity that the workers' movement, the workers, are destined to occupy within the capitalist system. Intellectuals, political leaders, teachers, can only trigger a learning and educational process if they live with the subjects with whom they interact.

In a testimony, Vincenzo Bianco recounts an episode that is highly illustrative of Gramsci's idea of this relationship and of the intimate and concrete dimension it had to assume. Of the responsibility it implied. Bianco says that, in 1920, after reading one of his articles, *Uomini di carne e ossa*, he joined him at the editorial office of *Avanti!*:

In the evening I went to the newspaper to see Antonio. I told him about the article, I said I liked it, that it was fine, but also that I didn't understand what the phrase 'men of flesh and blood' meant. I asked him: 'Why only the workers and not you, who were always among us during the strike? You who wrote and theorised that when the workers go on strike you have to be with them, are you not flesh and blood? Is it possible that you don't feel as we do?'. Gramsci looked at me seriously, then put his hand on my shoulder and said: 'You're right, Bianco, I also am a man of flesh and blood, like you. We are as you, if it is true that we go with you to demonstrations and rallies and encourage you; we feel what you feel, otherwise we would not be your comrades'. [...] I understood even better that Gramsci was a completely different type from the others. He couldn't spend an evening without meeting with the workers. [...] Gramsci needed to talk a lot, he needed to feel connected to us, to live as we lived, to understand us so he could guide us (Quercioli, 1977, 51).

In a volume by Luis Moll that brings together several contributions, Guillermo Blanck analyses the relationship between political commitment, militancy and scientific research characteristic of Lev Vygotsky's profile. Like Gramsci, although he did not have a direct role in the party, Vygotsky was personally involved in the construction of socialism. In his contribution, Blanck argues that

He teaches a wide range of subjects: Russian language courses for adults, specialisation courses for teachers, workers and printers. At the same time, he taught logic and psychology at the Pedagogical Institute, aesthetics and history of art at the Conservatory and was involved in theatre and the visual arts. In 1919 he fell ill with tuberculosis, a disease that would torment him for the rest of his life and bring him to an early end. In spite of this, Vygotsky became the focal point of Gomel's intellectual life; he was a tireless organiser of cultural events and meetings dedicated to the most diverse disciplines. His Literary Mondays – in which he gave lectures on Shakespeare, Esenin, Majakovsky, Pushkin, Chekhov – were legendary. His activism and extraordinary erudition soon went beyond the city's borders. [...] He became the head of the city's cultural office at a time when the post-revolutionary Soviet Union was engaged in a massive reconstruction of the country on several fronts, one of which was mass education. On 26 December 1919, Lenin signed the decree *On the liquidation of illiteracy among the population of the federal socialist republic of the Soviet Union*, to which he gave top priority, mobilising all the intellectual forces of the country. More than 400.000 volunteers respond to the call, including Vygotsky (Blanck, 1992, 36).

These biographical profiles thus reveal a completely different approach from that of most of the intellectuals of their time. Unlike the socialist leadership, Turati, but also Bordiga, his companion in the founding of the Communist Party of Italy, Gramsci argued that it was essential to take care of the culture of the workers and to overcome the positivistic,

but also paternalistic, vision that both expressed towards them (Baratta, 2000) as Vygotsky was critic with the simplification of Plechanov and Bucharin (Zavershneva, 2018; Mecacci 2017; Hall, Mellino, 2015).

At the heart of the reflection that they inherited from Marx, both Gramsci and Vygotsky put the relationship between education and politics at the centre of their thinking, and they push themselves and push us to think about a question that will cross, as we have already said, the history of the workers movement, and that is that of the construction of 'consciousness', which cannot take place autonomously, each one for himself, but only collectively.

### **3. Consciousness, activity and liberation**

Today, what questions can these authors prompt us to ask ourselves in an unprecedented phase of the technological development of our society? In which we have reached an incredible level of automation of the production cycle?

For Vygotsky, the history of man, unlike that of other animals, is not one of passive adaptation to nature, but of a collective, social response, made up of cooperation and collaboration to the problems posed by this adaptation. It is precisely for this reason that Marx's *fragment on machines* still prompts questions about the fact that automation leads to a review of the role of the worker, who is destined to be transformed from that of a mere supplier of labour to that of a supervisor and regulator of the production process. With this turn of events, wealth will tend to depend not so much on the labour time provided as on the technical and scientific knowledge incorporated into production:

general social knowledge becomes a direct productive force, and the development of society comes under the control of the general intellect, and evolves in accordance with it. While the general intellect, the stage of scientific-technological advancement, constitutes the power capable of dominating productive development, for it to become an operative force, it needs to be incorporated in the form of knowledge, skills and mental habits. The training of the worker is therefore all the more prudent the more it is in conformity with the prevailing form of general intellect. In this respect, the transition to a general technological-scientific education seems undoubtedly necessary. But as we have seen, going beyond Marx, even this is not sufficient. When the development of the general intellect becomes rapid and diversified, it is not enough merely to form a general technical-scientific intelligence in the worker, but it is necessary to move on to a further level of abstraction: that of a flexible and protean intelligence, capable of modifying itself and assuming different morphologies in accordance with the development of the technological-scientific paradigms and with the movement of the forms of abstraction of labour (Baldacci, 2014, 88).

Today, however, this protean formation has not opened up scenarios of liberation. The relationship with historical reality seems to be broken, and the potential seems to be largely subsumed by the process of capital exploitation, through instruments of control unimaginable except in the most incredible narrative reconstructions from science fiction to dystopian literature, a point of quantitative and qualitative sophistication has arrived, which leaves us petrified for the ability to articulate that 'religion of everyday life' of which Marx (1993) spoke, from which it is difficult to imagine any kind of liberation.

As in the past, however, today, as we struggle to reorganize our thoughts, this theme returns overbearingly and urgently, namely that of the counter-formation of an individual and collective consciousness that knows how to 'extricate itself' from the subjectivity fetishistically shaped by capital, and build a new and different one (Lazzarato, 2020).

With regard to the relationship between politics and education, one notices the important work of uncovering the deepest elements of the thought of some authors, which although more used today than in the past (this is the case of Vygotsky). as the American scholar Wayne Au (2018) argues, have often been neglected.

Clarifying these intellectual relationships is therefore for us a necessary premise for a broader work that concerns the relationship that some authors of the Marxist tradition have established with the question of education and with the problem that it poses of analyzing the relationship between the subject, the individual and the perception that he slowly acquires of himself, through his conscience, not so that it is reduced to a sterile critical theory, but so that it becomes the premise of a virtuous circle between reflection and action. As Marx argues in his *Theses on Feurbach*, it is «in praxis [that] man must prove the truth, reality and power, the immanent character of his thought» (Marx, 1969, 82).

Studying the figure of Vygotsky means dealing with the profile of «a critical theorist engaged in a sharp and unyielding critique of virtually all existing traditions and approaches to human development» (Stetsenko, 2017, 2302). It is precisely in the concept of 'praxis', and for Vygotsky, of 'activity', that we find one of the keys to understanding the originality of Marxism and the originality of the reading that both Gramsci and Vygotsky contribute to proposing of their master, Marx. This originality lies in the fact that they do not imagine that they have founded the umpteenth philosophy, but that they have tried to propose a renewal 'from top to bottom' of the real 'way' «of conceiving philosophy» and knowledge, learning, the transformation that occurs on the subject starting from the realisation of these processes, material, concrete, which must lead to the «death of philosophy understood in the traditional way» because it is the «overturning of the traditional position of the philosophical problem» that is the problem to be solved (Gramsci, 1975).

#### 4. Promoting organised spontaneity

It is the intellectuals who have the responsibility to help trigger this process. But in order to do so, what kind of training must they have? They must have an omnilateral vision, hostile to any hierarchy of knowledge but also to the idea that a project of social transformation can be imposed from the top down. The process of *con-penetration* between intellectuals and the masses must be directed and led, because it does not naturally and spontaneously lead to real and profound sharing, and more often than not stops at the surface of the processes, changing only appearances. But it must not be unidirectional, it must allow the «directed» to become «leaders» (Gramsci, 1975, 1765).

But how? Certainly not if pedagogy continues to carry out work that is essentially ideological in nature, that is, if within the training process it continues to stimulate and manage processes of adaptation and indoctrination, of conditioning, and of integrating the individual into the economic, political and social context in which it lives. As Broccoli argued, all too often «the educational attitude is resolved in the transmission of the inauthentic, of false consciousness and therefore of ideology» (1974, 180).

In order to build a liberating *counter*-subjectivity, the relationship between intellectuals and the masses, the relationship between spontaneity and organization, the relationship between theory and praxis, must be completely re-thought (Frosini, 2009). For Santoni Rugiu, therefore, Marx develops the positions of his contemporaries, and once again unveils the masking operation of the transformative function of education, which is true education when it contributes to creating the capacity to change reality, which can only be formed by the 'critical-practical' activity, in the praxis, in other words, «returning man to his roots, returning him – as we have seen – to self-possession» (1976, 24-25). For Gramsci and Vygotsky, rediscovering oneself means laying the foundations for seeking a way forward that does not lead the subordinate classes to a dead end, but to a way beyond capital., road that can only be travelled by grasping as «Marxism, as a theory of human emancipation, has a pedagogical component, which is articulated in a philosophical critique of human nature and ends» (Manacorda, 1964, 77). is a toolbox that it is impossible to give up if we want to bring about a real and profound change in social relations towards greater equity and justice.

#### 5. Conscientizing and politicizing: contemporary educational priorities

For the educational relationship to be useful for transformation, it must lead to a process of politicization. According to Burgio, Gramsci's reflections, which are in turn the result of the reflections carried out before him by Labriola (2014). are very topical in order to frame the



work that critical intellectuals must carry out within educational agencies. As Gramsci writes in an article that is fundamental to clearly understanding this frame, *Socialismo e cultura*,

to know oneself means to be oneself, it means to be a master of oneself, to come out of chaos, to be an element of order, but of one's own order and discipline to an ideal (1980, 99).

Culture, therefore, is the acquisition of knowledge that enables man to become aware of his role in society and of the possibilities of changing his condition. But if the process of adherence to the values of contemporary capitalist society has increased, if the process of constructing class consciousness has broken down and regression has set in, it is possible that the instruments used to free class consciousness from the veil of oppression that capital had placed over reality, in order to prevent it from being grasped in its entirety, were inadequate (Burgio, 2000). Looking back on this problem, it is useful to try to grasp the problematic nodes that the elaboration of Gramsci and Vygotsky on the level of the educational principle, have proposed.

Antagonistic education implies the development of the idea of counter-education as an alternative to capitalist education, because capital is constantly striving to ensure that the values and principles that govern our society are hegemonic and considered naturally irreplaceable by society itself. Who has to exercise this function of «stripping consciences, conquering consciences» (Gramsci, 1980, 266)? Intellectuals, and among them also teachers. However, as Henry Giroux argues, they have been subjected to a phenomenon of 'proletarianization' of labour through:

the tendency to reduce teachers to the role of specialised technicians functional to the bureaucratisation of schools, whose role has increasingly become that of managing and implementing rigid curricular programmes rather than developing a critical vision of pedagogy (Giroux, 1988, 122).

According to the American scholar, there is a need to create a situation in which there are teachers in schools capable of promoting a critical view of democracy in order to «put it at the service of an education that produces reflective students and active citizens» (Giroux, 1988, 122). Following Gramsci's crucial analyses, according to Giroux, should lead to

to focus on the narratives and social processes that characterize a specific form of 'common sense', and in particular how it is produced and generalized through a range of socialization agencies such as schools, families, trade unions, workplaces, and other ideological apparatuses of the state (2020, pp. 21-22).

This does not mean that socialization <agencies, as Giroux (2020) calls them, are merely a mirror in which to look at the economic system at a given stage of development, but that there is an intimate relationship between these levels, of which to be aware.

## Conclusion

With Gramsci and Vygotsky we are therefore faced with two authors who think of Marxism as a method for investigating and understanding the workings of society in greater depth, and of socialism as a project for the reorganization and transformation of society that has to be invented every day, without thinking that there can be pre-constituted recipes that guarantee the liberation of bourgeois mental categories, as if the revolution could have swept away an old way of thinking once and for all. According to Vygotsky, inventing the present and building the future is the most consequent way to be a Marxist, that is, to reason and work so that Marx's work is not reduced to a doctrine to be repeated, but a method that helps contribute to the liberation of mankind (Sève, 2018). When, on the other hand, praxis and theory become separated again, and intellectuals return to simply playing the role of social normalization, which in turn leads to the reproduction of society as it is, with its injustices and inequalities. In the light of Gramsci's and Vygotsky's reflections on society, culture, transformation and change, we have tried to show how, today more than ever, it is necessary to break out of the dominion of the 'religion of everyday life', to nourish ourselves with an alternative vision of the present, to imagine another possible future and how only critical and committed intellectuals can help build it.

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## **Social and Emotional Skills in Sociological Perspective. A Fresh Look on Learning and Assessment**

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## Explicit and Implicit Effects of Socioemotional Skills. An Analysis of 2018 PISA Data

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**ABSTRACT:** *In international literature the Socio-Emotional Skills (SES) are considered to have an important role in giving to young people the right equipment to face present and future challenges, as well as contribute to the development of a sense of cohesion, greater equity and social justice. In this paper, starting with an analysis of OECD-PISA 2018 data, we sought to estimate the explanatory potential with respect to reading achievement of several measures attributable to the sphere of SES. A first result is that socio-economic and cultural conditions being equal (summarized in the ESCS measure, Index of Economic, Social and Cultural Status), socio-emotional skills have a small but significant own independent strength in terms of better results in standardized tests. A second result is that these competences have a benefit especially for students characterized by a low level of ESCS (to simplify, we could define them as students of low social class). The implications of these results are of particular interest for the purposes of policies for the social equality of opportunities, equity and system effectiveness.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Socio-Emotional Skills, Cognitive Skills, Equality of Opportunities, Social Inequalities, School Curriculum*

### Introduction

Contemporary society, characterized by continuous and rapid changes at global, social, economic and technological levels, entails the emergence of new challenges for young people and, consequently, for the educational system: inequalities, bullying and cyberbullying, family conflicts, consumerism, media development and technology dependence, academic stress and pressure, social isolation, migration, mobility, family and structural changes in communities (Cefai *et al.*, 2018). The main mechanisms underlying social complexity can be identified in an expansion of possibilities for action and experience, also due to the spread of technologies, an overall acceleration of social life and a saturation of social and symbolic space (Eriksen, 2016). All these elements determine a pressure on the Self of individuals (Maccarini,

2019). In order to cope with this complexity, it is necessary to develop an approach to education that focuses as much on cognitive skills as on socio-emotional skills. An education system that is able to include a socio-emotional education, and to find a balance between cognitive and non-cognitive skills curricula is key for a society that is capable of fighting socio-economic inequalities, unemployment, poverty, discrimination and social exclusion (OECD, 2015).

Research has amply demonstrated the positive developmental outcomes on different aspects of individuals' lives resulting from the possession of Social and Emotional Skills, both in the short and long term. Indeed, the latter are instrumental in reducing mental health problems in children and young people (Clarke *et al.*, 2015; Durlak *et al.*, 2011; OECD, 2015). In addition, social-emotional skills act on school performance by improving performance, increase self-esteem, foster cooperative relationships with peers, increase employment chances in later life (Clarke *et al.*, 2015) and, in addition, positively influence the chances of long tertiary education (Domitrovich *et al.*, 2017; Durlak *et al.*, 2011) and generally improve outcomes in adult life from an economic and relational perspective (Patera, 2019). We are aware that the delimitation of the socio-emotional dimension of learning to the sphere of skills and social and emotional skills appears problematic and blurring (Giancola, Viteritti, 2019). Competences appear in scientific and public debates as a boundary object, an information, a concept, used in different ways by different epistemic communities. They are as plastic and mobile objects, interpreted in different ways by the various communities of reference but with sufficiently homogeneous contents to allow a certain integrity of the concept and a certain mutual recognition of the communities using it to be maintained. They take the form of symbolic artefacts that are weakly structured in their common uses, that can be abstract or concrete, and that have different meanings in different parts of the world. Their basic structure remains common, recognizable and stable and, in more than one world, they become a vehicle of translation between various epistemic communities (academic, institutional, productive, training). As the authors who coined it state, the management and reworking of these boundary objects is fundamental to developing and maintaining the coherence. This happens also the case with skills, a theme, a concept, an object that unites but also distinguishes meanings and actors, a field of interest that creates understanding but also differentiation, a differentiation, a symbolic artefact that creates a field of inter-organisational meanings (Viteritti, 1999) not devoid of tensions and contrasts. Finally, it must be kept in mind that the field of non-cognitive and socio-emotional (and affective) competencies is crossed by various currents of thought, even in bitter contrast between them, with strong operational repercussions on the instrumentation used for quantification and measurement. Precisely these last two operational dimensions are then the subject of frequent technical revisions that still make the methodological

apparatus in use by the various supranational agencies working on the subject very unstable (Giancola, Lovecchio, 2018).

Moving beyond the debate around this boundary object, we want to focus on functional value of non-cognitive skills. The most recent studies in the field of education (Chiosso *et al.*, 2021) recognise that schools play a crucial role in both transmitting and building cognitive knowledge and in developing social-emotional skills. A school that is able to prepare students not only to pass tests but to overcome the obstacles that life poses on a daily basis will experience positive results in both areas: social-emotional and academic success. In this way, the school takes on a decisive role in promoting well-being of young people. So, our hypothesis is that non-cognitive skills have a functional value with respect to the growing up of the individual especially when individuals are embedded in a fragile background. Statistical analysis shows that non cognitive skills in students with the same background have a positive correlation more with low social class children than with high social class children. Therefore, even if we know that correlation is not causation, we can say that non cognitive skills can be an important picklock to unhinge the mechanisms of inequalities reproduction, especially in middle school and in the first years of high school.

## 2. Data and methods

Already from the first international test-based surveys conducted by the OECD, in addition to cognitive skills, an important space was reserved for non-cognitive dimensions. During the various waves of the OECD-PISA, the PIAAC survey and its follow-ups carried out in view of the new large-scale edition (see Di Francesco *et al.*, 2014), non-cognitive skills have been progressively re-conceptualized in terms of socio-emotional skills (Giancola, Lovecchio, 2018). The objective of this paper is to illustrate, using the OECD PISA 2018 wave data, how socio-emotional skills, in the operationalized and measured version within PISA, have a significant impact on cognitive skills (reading, math, science). The presented study shows two other interesting results. Using a set of OLS multiple regression models, it was possible to estimate the single effect, the additional effect and the combinatorial effect produced by socio-emotional skills.

**TAB. 1.** *Measures of Social and Emotional Skills*

Measures	Items and scaling
Adaptation of instruction	Four items, a four-point Likert
Competitiveness	Three items, a four-point Likert scale
Work mastery	Three items, a four-point Likert scale
General fear of failure	Five items, a four-point Likert scale
Mastery goal orientation	Three items, a four-point Likert
Resilience	Three items, a five-point Likert

Source: OECD, 2019

OECD PISA survey is thus composed not only measures of test, but also by student questionnaire, so this produced a large number of variables and synthetic measures, so we select (see Tab. 1) the following indices, which are referred to, among others, as dimensions of the overall construct that refers to the idea of Social and Emotional Skills. All indices are based on IRT scaling, validated on multiple international samples and tested over time.

The analyses presented are all based on multiple linear regression models (using the OLS, 'ordinary least squares' method). OLS chooses the parameters of a linear function of a set of explanatory variables according to the least squares principle: minimizing the sum of squares of the differences between the observed dependent variable (values of the observed variable) in the given dataset and those predicted by the linear function of the independent variable.

The dependent variable, for all models presented below, consists of individual scores on reading skills tests. In a first step (see par. 3), the objective was to estimate the individual linear effect of each measure of social-emotional competence on the aforementioned reading score (Table 3). This step allowed us to estimate the weights of individual proficiency measures in order to identify the areas of social-emotional competence with the greatest influence on learning outcomes represented by test-based measures.

Next, the net effects of the various measures of social-emotional competence were estimated in a model that simultaneously used all the indicators shown in Table 1. The following step is divided into two different analysis actions. Because the goal was to identify the relative benefit of possessing social-emotional skills for students from various social categories (in terms of socio-economic and cultural stratification), using the ESCS index provided by PISA, three groups of students were identified. In each of these groups, the effect of SES on test scores was then estimated (Table 4). The final step was to produce a saturated model that included variables related to social-emotional competence, those related to individual ascriptive factors, and those related to the educational pathway (defined as process variables).

Therefore, in order to identify the actual weight of SES in terms of reducing the inequalities produced by the ascriptive and process factors, we first produced a model with the variables that included the set of ascriptive and school career-related variables as independents (Table 5) and then replicated it by including the previously used social-emotional skills variables (Table 6).

### **3. The direct effects of SES on reading skills**

As just described, in the first step of the analysis, we used the individual measures of social-emotional skills in single regression models. We can



observe a range of low explained variance up to a slightly higher level of explained variance (but still small in magnitude).

The three measures with the highest explained the variance are in order: work mastery (3.92%), mastery goal orientation (3.07%) and resilience (2.50%). It is also important to point out that regressors such as competitiveness and general fear of failure not only show low variance explained but also that the value in terms of standard beta also decreases in statistical significance.

**TAB. 2.** *Effects of individual indices on reading proficiency (OLS regression models)*

	R <sup>2</sup>	Beta Standard
Adaptation of instruction	0,56%	0,08
Competitiveness	0,46%	0,07*
General fear of failure	0,33%	0,06*
Work mastery	3,92%	0,20
Mastery goal orientation	3,07%	0,18
Resilience	2,50%	0,16

All Beta are significant for 0,000, except for \* significant for 0,05

After this step we produced a new regression model where all index played at the same time. As previously said, the aim of this model is estimating the net effect in terms of strength of each variable on reading performance (Table 3). With this simultaneous model, we observed an explained overall variance of 8.74%. We still observed that the more influent regressors are: work mastery (0.171), resilience (0.146) and mastery goal orientation (0.123). Again, the competitiveness and general fear of failure indices show little effect bordering on significance. But the most interesting aspect is that the various measures of social-emotional competence taken into analysis produce a non-negligible amount of explained variance. Clearly, the construct of social-emotional competence is so abstract, operationally, that it implies the simultaneous use of various measures and thus a necessarily multidimensional and multifactorial approach.

**TAB. 3.** *Simultaneous effects of indices on reading skills (OLS regression model)*

	Beta <sup>1</sup>	Beta Standard
R <sup>2</sup> = 8,74%		
(Constant)	477,413	0,046
Adaptation of instruction	4,347	0,001*
Competitiveness	-2,084	-0,04*
General fear of failure	3,700	0,193
Work mastery	17,149	0,171
Mastery goal orientation	12,187	0,123
Resilience	16,552	0,146

1 Reading as PISA point. All Beta are significant for 0,000 except for \*

To conclude this first phase of analysis, we have chosen (in line with the cognitive objectives) to bring the issue of equity (Benadusi, Giancola, 2021) to the center of attention. For this reason, as made explicit in the methodology section, we have broken in three equal groups the population on the based on the index of social background (ESCS)<sup>1</sup>. So, we replicated the regression model with six regressors seen before. We can observe that the impact is more pronounced for lower class students (Tab. 4). This evidence tells us that upper-middle class students enjoy many tangible and intangible resources such as relational and family support (see Colarusso, Giancola, 2020) that make the effect of possessing social-emotional skills marginal (but not negligible). For students of low social class, on the other hand, this type of skills seems to play a much stronger role and, we can hypothesize (as we will see in the following analyses), of an almost compensatory type.

**TAB. 4.** *Who benefits most from SES? (OLS regression models)*

	Students with low ESCS	Students with average ESCS	Students with high ESCS
R <sup>2</sup>	9,4	8,4	5,1
	Beta Standard	Beta Standard	Beta Standard
Adaptation of instruction	0,029	0,050*	0,064
Competitiveness	-0,017	0,005*	0,002*
General fear of failure	-0,011*	0,082	0,056
Work mastery	0,242	0,197	0,160
Mastery goal orientation	0,142	0,127	0,070
Resilience	0,168	0,065	0,012

All Beta are significant for 0,000 except for \*

For this category of students, the possession of skills such as those captured by the work mastery, resilience, mastery goal orientation measures, have a positive and marked effect. This provides indirect clues on the skills to be strengthened in order to reduce the effects produced and induced on the one hand by the social origin (as we will see shortly) but also those of a structural type (the subdivision of the Italian education system into well-differentiated tracks) and experiential (such as grade repetition episodes during the school career)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) index of economic, social and cultural status is based on the following variables: the International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI); the highest level of education of the student's parents, converted into years of schooling; the PISA index of family wealth; the PISA index of home educational resources; and the PISA index of possessions related to 'classical' culture in the family home (for the operational and statistical details see Glossary in *Education at a Glance*, OECD, Paris, 2002,).

<sup>2</sup> Following Bourdieu's approach in the analysis of the reproduction of educational inequalities (Giancola, Salmieri, 2020a), the 'selection' phase corresponds to the selection / addressing phase of the students in the various school tracks, while the 'expulsion' phase is strictly recordable to the practice of the grade repetition (Ikeda,

#### 4. Effect of SES, ascriptive variables and school career variables

The literature on educational inequalities both at international and national level, on the base of robust empirical evidence (see Pensiero *et al.*, 2020; Argentin, Pavolini, 2020), shows that some variables have a very significant effect on cognitive outcomes on tests. Among these available in the OECD-PISA dataset, we consider here as individual variables: gender; socio-economic and cultural status of the family (ESCS Index); migration background.

As process variables (school career, variables) we consider instead: grade repetition; school track choice.

Obviously, the choice of these variables is not arbitrary, but is the result of a weighted choice on the basis of recent analysis on the Italian education system (Giancola, Salmieri, 2019; Bendausi, Giancola, 2021). Although in summary, it is worth remembering that most of the school inequalities in the Italian case pass through different interconnected mechanisms: *i)* in a first step through a direct effect of the socio-economic and cultural status of students on the results; *ii)* in a second step, the social origin of students has a strong impact on educational choices (in terms of both school track and choice of school), producing a dynamic of self-reinforcing differentiation; *iii)* in a third step, there is the combined effect of the school track, the social origin, and the average background at school level both on competences and on extra cognitive aspects such as educational expectations. Thus, a complex chains effect is configured in the (re)production of education inequalities in Italy, based on the interplays between ascriptive and school-tracks factors (Giancola, Salmieri, 2020b). Furthermore, as highlighted in Giancola and Colarusso (2020), there is also an important role played by the expectations and family motivations of students on the one hand in determining educational choices and expectations and on the other in providing motivational and orientation support.

For this series of reasons, we have developed a first model with only the ascriptive and path variables (Table 5), in order to observe the effect induced – in a subsequent model – by the inclusion of the variables relating to the sphere of socio-emotional skills. In line with the aforementioned analysis, it is evident that social extraction plays a role, once again, in a decisive manner. Again, we observe a very strong effect linked to the frequency of the ‘general track’ (in the Italian case the so-called *Liceo*). At the same time, there is a definite negative effect produced by the grade repetition experience. Finally, the strength, measured in terms of the overall explained variance (which reaches 28.3%), of the set of variables considered should be emphasized.

We then proceed with a model that includes both these variables and the indices pertaining to the area of socio-emotional skills (Table 6).

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García, 2014) to which students of low social class and technical/professional schools are subject with much higher frequency than others.

Inserting the SES as independent variables the added value in terms of overall explained variance is of moderate entity, with an increase of 4.2 percentage points reaching a share of 32.5% of explained variance. As far as the effects of the ascriptive and school path variables are concerned, there is no erosion of their explanatory power (and therefore of reproductive factors of inequalities).

Among the SES work mastery, mastery goal orientation and resilience, show still an independent explanatory potential (the full effect is partially absorbed by the background variables).

**TAB. 5.** *Ascriptive variables and Process variables (OLS regression models) – model 1*

	R <sup>2</sup> = 28,3%	
	Beta	Beta standard
Constant	443,157	
Female (ref. Male)	4,875	0,026
Index of economic, social and cultural status	13,906	0,136
Native (ref. Non-native)	9,782	0,031
<i>Liceil</i> /General (ref. <i>Tecn.Prof.</i> )	68,115	0,365
Grade Repetition (ref. Regular)	-54,462	-0,197

All Beta are full significant for 0,000

**TAB. 6.** *Ascriptive variables, Process variables and index of SES (OLS regression models) – model 2*

	R <sup>2</sup> = 32,5%	
	Beta	Beta standard
Constant	446,161	
Female (ref. Male)	1,826	0,010
Index of economic, social and cultural status	12,637	0,128
Native (ref. Non-native)	9,105	0,030
<i>Liceil</i> /General (ref. <i>Tecn.Prof.</i> )	63,736	0,357
Grade Repetition (ref. Regular)	-46,660	-0,171
Adaptation of instruction	4,732	0,051
Competitiveness	-2,905	-0,032
General fear of failure	1,404	0,015*
Work mastery	10,986	0,123
Mastery goal orientation	6,885	0,075
Resilience	12,134	0,250

All Beta are significant for 0,000 except for \*

## Conclusion

Overall, the OCED PISA proposed SES show moderate predictive power with respect to reading achievement. The SES with greater impact would appear to have a stronger effect for students of lower social class. By letting background and school path variables play simultaneously, the latter do not seem to reduce their effect in terms of inequality with respect to reading outcomes. The variables/indices

pertaining to the sphere of socio-emotional competence as proposed by OCED PISA show moderate predictive power with respect to reading results. Furthermore, letting the variables of background and scholastic path and those relating to the socio-emotional sphere play at the same time, the latter do not reduce the effect in terms of inequality of the former. At the same time, variables/indices of the sphere SES such as work mastery, mastery goal orientation and resilience show an independent effect of their own. The effect of possessing these types of skills, from the evidence presented, appears to be more consistent for lower class students than for upper-middle class students. Obviously, the results presented are limited to the conceptualization and operationalization carried out as part of the OECD-PISA survey. The methodological apparatus for measuring non-cognitive skills and all the many facets of the general construct of social-emotional competence are the subject of sociological, psychological and pedagogical research and debate (e.g., as in the case of the ongoing OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills). Starting with these necessary theoretical-methodological cautions, we can hypothesize that the enhancement of these competencies slightly triggers a form of compensatory action. These data suggest that in terms of equity and inclusion it would be useful to integrate teaching strategies SES-based in cognitive oriented teaching and for the support of the whole person, but above all as a support tool for socially disadvantaged students both in terms of results (even though it is undeniable that the focus for combating inequalities lies elsewhere) and in terms of motivation, creation of meaning with respect to the educational and scholastic experience, and self-confidence.

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## **Education Now: To Compare for Understanding the Unexpected**

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## The Unhappy Society. In Search of a New Paradigm to Face the Unexpected

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**ABSTRACT:** *Talking about an 'unhappy' society is provocative, as happiness is a complex concept made up of psychological, socio-economic and environmental factors, but it is necessary to grasp the multiple aspects of social unease, and the growing use of its medicalization, for a correct analysis of the condition of modern man. In a closed biological system, such as planet earth is, economic growth shows more than a few critical issues and the ideology of mass medicalized health systems also shows its limits. In light of these inadequacies, made even more evident by the pandemic, what educational paradigm can we hope to build to satisfy the search for meaning of the modern citizen, called to know and understand what is happening around him? The construction of a new paradigm could be knotted from the rediscovery of the body, both in its physiological and biological needs, and in its occupying a space that becomes territory 'hic et nunc'. The body, in fact, becomes the 'place' where they concentrate: 1) perceptive skills capable of experimenting with complex concepts through a multisensory approach that brings the lived experience back to concreteness. 2) dimensions of space-time that are humanly sustainable because they conform to rhythms and cycles that are marked by the body itself. Finally, as regards the contexts, the pedagogical intervention is aimed at the worlds of everyday life in the field of primary education and in lifelong learning.*

**KEYWORDS:** crisis, medicalization, happiness, socio-pedagogy, relationship

### Introduction

This article comes from observations and research carried out in different educational contexts, starting from the school one. The fundamental assumption of the survey is the analysis of the social reality in which the school is concretely inserted. While the concrete objective is the attempt to remodel the educational paradigm currently in use, both in primary and permanent education, to accompany adults and children towards the acceptance of the unexpected and the acquisition of skills. to transform uncertainties into resources for life.

## 1. The unhappy society

The unhappy society arises as a paradigm to unveiling the unsustainability of contemporary social, cultural, economic and environmental model, which is able to listen to the unexpected. It is good to clarify that the writer identifies how unhappiness factors increasing in psychological and psychiatric distress, which were already an emergency before the COVID-19 syndemic/pandemic and the consequent increasing in consumption of psychiatric drugs and benzodiazepines. The increasing in benzodiazepines consumption entries into everyday life through the prescription of family doctor (Santambrogio, 2016). that phenomenon represents a mass medicalization of distress not only psychological, but also social, to which it would be advisable to give different answers. For instance, enhancing community welfare services and with new educational and relational models, which will be explored in the following pages. The consumption reasons for benzodiazepines are many (Santambrogio, 2016): difficulties with the partner, problems at work, insomnia, anxious, evils in the life, whose response lies in one or more pills, small high-addiction artificial paradises.

The strong assumption, but supported by empirical evidence, it is rooted in statement: the contemporary mainstream model, which we could call 'Turbo Consumer Capitalism' produces unhappiness as specific element. To this unhappiness the model of turbo consumerist capitalism (or unhappy society) responds not criticizing itself, but somehow expanding in multiple and further consumption opportunities and therefore paradoxically empowering and upgrading itself. Paraphrasing a book of Luciano Gallino: *Se tre milioni vi sembrano pochi*, referring to unemployment in Italy, if depression as the first disabling disease in Western countries (more than cancer and Alzheimer) by 2030 there seems little. It seems that unhappiness is ignored or undervalued and relegated to the sphere of personal and often in a self-accusing key: the fault of your unhappiness is yours, you are not adequate, you are not fast enough, you do not earn enough, you do not consume enough, you are questioning problems that do not exists, what you are feeling is wrong. The unhappy society, that is to say: the unveiling from an emotional point of view of Turbo Consumer Capitalism intends to scratch this 'monolith' making visible the unhappiness generated by this socioeconomic model to directly attribute the responsibility of unhappiness. Hoping that the salt of tears will be able to scratch more than the logical arguments present in this essay, the challenge is to integrate the logical data and reflections with the experiences and emotions.

## 2. The monolith pillars

The unhappy society rests on pillars that make it solid, monolithic precisely, but probably unsuitable to capture the unexpected as I called the COVID-19 syndemic/pandemic, an unexpected revolution (ww.sixcs.org 2020). One pillar is the bureaucratic rationality (Weber, 1997) which by its nature tends to refuse any uncertainty considering it dysfunctional. Max Weber and Karl Marx see in modern organization the increase in efficacy and efficiency, but also the seed of a Leviathan that threatens its creators. A bureaucratic rationality society refuses the principle of uncertainty, which would instead seem necessary for the foundation of a new paradigm.

The pillars of the unhappy society are probably apparatus which justify its existence, the real power lies in effectiveness and mass fascination storytelling and the strength with which ideas and practices are widespread.

Another pillar is the infinite growth and development, as far as growth and development are not at all synonyms (Urbani, 2011). they are used by the journalistic and policy maker lexicons as such. The storytelling of infinite growth is precisely a fairy tale, which any geographer, biologist or climatologist could disassemble in a few minutes. The Earth is a closed biosystem there is therefore no rationality in the intensive exploitation of resources, but an ideological storytelling that insists on growth as equivalent to well-being has the best on the scientific community and on a large part of world citizenship. Unhappiness must never be registered with as a system generating psychological and psychiatric disorders but must be bound to the individual as personal fault: to personal failures, to personal incapacity, to personal slowness. Here is a new pillar appears, the acceleration that generates alienation (Rosa, 2015). speed becomes an absolute and indisputable value, what can be done faster is undoubtedly better, it cannot be disputed on pain to be relegated on ranks of anti-progressists. The acceleration processes lead to compression if not the annihilation of space (Harvey, 1993). the acceleration dynamics also involve spaces, territories and our visions. Late modernity is pushing more and more the accelerators creating de facto shapeless spaces (Augè, 1993).

Acceleration is a perfect pillar for unhappy society, because from a part it silences the voices of those who would like to open a dialogue to the complexity of the modern responding: there is no time. When a response is necessarily required: there is no time for in-depth. Regarding social changes Western companies live in the opinion of Hermann Lubbe, a continuous contraction of the present as a response to the ever-increasing rhythms of cultural and social innovation (Lubbe, 2009).

Another pillar is science raised to religion, technology as a miracle. The concealed technology paradox that should free up time and instead of starving people of time, technological innovations that should reduce

distances, simplify communications, alleviate fatigue, instead accompany at a perennial and ever-increasing perception of time famine. Empirical studies show that women and men in contemporary societies always feel under pressure by complaining scarcity of time (Rosa, 2015). Furthermore, technology would seem plausibly linked to the decline in well-being and the onset of depression in adolescents (Twenge, 2020).

Finally, the pillar of mass medicalization (Illich, 2013). in particular, the medicalization of discomfort, but in general a surplus of preventive medical services that have little to do with health, but which support a healthcare business, which in turn makes rise to the GDP, new aruspices divinatory art of happiness and wellness. Medicalization is of particular interest for this writing especially by benzodiazepines that are the best-selling drugs at the counter, seconds only to anti-inflammatory (Santambrogio, 2016). their consumption is further increased during the syndemic/pandemic COVID-19 phase. Benzodiazepines act on moods such as: anxiety, fear, insecurity, insomnia, agitation, block of thought and action, prevalent thoughts of an unpleasant nature. They are used to soothe states of fatigue, lack of lucidity, irritation, drop in performance. Benzodiazepines represent a form of legal doping to withstand increasingly pressing social and psychological pressures, which push on performance and acceleration, unhappy society denies sadness: there is no time, it is not adequate, you have to be happy, right here right now.

### **3. Emotional education, body rediscovery for a new humanism**

Humanity appears as a sort of deity on the contrary has built the machines in its image and likeness and is so in love with it to want to look like, considering machines best of themselves, imprisoned in the supremacy of the technique. Humanity forgets in a neo-animism those machines have been built from that humanity considered so miserable and fragile; In the technique is the flight of Prometheus, the promise for now always denied immortality. We certainly need a new humanism as Franco Ferrarotti (2020) wrote. we need to slow down the processes to deal with the meaning of the limit, but we also need to rediscover the human or maybe to find out, to continue this long adventure human's knowledge, we have to try moving eyes to the 'conquest' of an inner space, rather than worlds and outdoor spaces that are certainly important adventures for humanity. Educating emotions is therefore a necessity for a new paradigm that is able to let unexpectedly enter not as a trauma, but as a natural event. Education to emotions is a positive relationship model, which can on the one hand to bring out the emotional experienced giving a sense and meaning and on the other time knock and re-use positive relationships based on mutual recognition, based on active listening and conflict management.

Furthermore, an emotional educational model would raise the nodes of the unhappy society by revealing the systemic neuroses it instils.

From the rediscovery of the body, both in its physiological and biological needs and of its occupying a space that becomes a '*hic et nunc*' territory, we can announce a new paradigm capable of giving meaning and meaning for modern women and men. A criticism of the transhuman vision, which puts the body back to the centre, which today appears an appendix waiting for the right grafts.

#### **4. New didactic strategies in a new educational paradigm**

In light of the social inadequacies in dealing with the unexpected, made even more evident by the pandemic situation, the consideration of educational actions capable of responding to new and urgent training questions is required. The search for meaning of the modern citizen, called to know and understand an increasingly complex reality, makes it necessary to question what pedagogical knowledge should inform the action of education professionals.

The construction of a new educational paradigm represents, in fact, a social urgency that we can face by inserting the current transmission model on a cognitive-rational basis, within a broader pattern, of a socio-relational type, based on reflection around to the concept of happiness and the relationship between happiness and the unexpected. This intertwining could be knotted by the rediscovery of the body, regaining possession of the sense of limit.

In the knowledge economy, memorizing themes and procedures is not enough to trigger reflections on one's present and one's role in building a sustainable world, much less can it serve to achieve human progress. More complex, self-reflective, organic ways of thinking will be vital in re-shaping education so young people are better equipped for the complexity, paradox and unpredictability of life. It's important to integrate knowledge, to move beyond the fragmentation of knowledge associated with disciplinary specialization via inter-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary approaches. And it is not enough for educational futures to be primarily focused on external 'trends' such as globalization, economic and environmental crises, and so on, thus overlooking the 'megatrends of the mind' that are as important for higher education futures as the megatrends in the external world.

To reorganize teaching in a transdisciplinary way, it is essential that the educational action is oriented towards learning what it means to be human (Morin, 2001). that is to understand the complexity inside and outside the human, and the connection of humanity with the natural world, in the continuous confrontation with unexpected and with one's own limits. Morin argues that it is possible to recognize the unity and complexity of the human being by bringing together and reorganizing the knowledge dispersed in the natural sciences and in the human

sciences, or in the constant and widespread interdisciplinarity. However, interdisciplinarity alone cannot respond to the now pressing need to face the unexpected. It is necessary to build a teaching model capable of preparing the mind to expect the unexpected as a natural event, in order to face the risks that uncertainties entail.

The socio-relational approach can work in this sense precisely because it places the relationship with the other at the center of the educational action, a relationship that nourishes itself in order to exist. At the same time, the socio-relational model makes it possible to work in favour of acquiring a sense of community, which is indispensable for dealing with unforeseen social events.

An educational environment is needed in which the key role of the teacher is to present the subject as a source of knowledge for personal and social growth. In short, an idea of school aimed at acquiring self-awareness and of the relationship that binds each of us to all living beings.

The goal is to set in motion a communication process that builds an exchange between people, also through their diversity. The socio-relational educational approach is able to activate that training process for change that exploits the unexpected as information and not as a danger (Armellini, 2008). making it interesting.

Within a socio-relational paradigm, the teaching tools that have proved most effective in activating this process are literature and outdoor education. Although apparently distant and different, these tools have many elements in common. Both allow the teacher to take into account the emotional dimension of learning and the need of children and teenagers to conduct a *search for meaning*, essential elements in a path of education of the *human being* and fundamental for activating reflections on the relationship between happiness and unexpected.

If, through the study of individual disciplines, educational practices risk removing objects of knowledge, depriving them of humor and meaning, literature, on the contrary, brings us closer to the 'real' and the uncertainty that characterizes it. Literature guides both teachers and pupils through the involvement of emotions and allows them to open discussions on important issues such as relationships with others and respect for life, favoring the acquisition of an eco-identity. It is in literature that the unexpected becomes information and every type of question can find its place, especially in fairy-tale literature (Bruno, 2018). Furthermore, like any art, literary art also has a direct function of compensating for the anxiety that comes from helplessness and uncertainty about the threats that come from the environment (Cometa, 2017).

Within the cognitive-rational paradigm, widely diffused, especially in the Western world, literature is used as a study discipline linked to evaluation and judgment, not as a tool aimed at searching for meaning, contrary to what would happen within a socio-relational paradigm. This

also applies to motor activities, also linked to evaluation and judgment, and often carried out in closed places where it is impossible to relate to the natural elements, fully activate all the senses and experience the feeling of authentic well-being. Some common phenomena, including anxiety and insomnia, are, at least in part, attributable to the lack of contact with natural elements (Louv, 2005). Growing up in a regime of separation from nature, even if the emotional context is optimal, has serious consequences on psychophysical health because it frustrates a primary need.

It is of little use to resort to the hasty solution of psychotropic drugs. ADHD symptoms, for example, have been shown to be more manageable in natural settings (Taylor, 2001). Contact with natural elements teaches us to face the unexpected as a natural aspect of existence. So, if it is through the body that knowledge (Bourdieu, 1998) is triggered and one learns to manage the encounter with reality and its unforeseen events, the need for a rediscovery of the centrality of the body in education is evident, through authentic and effective teaching strategy.

Not the a priori determination of a sequence of actions in view of an objective (Morin, 1999). but a constant search for information, in the willingness to modify the actions based on the information collected. The main problem is how children see and learn from the world. When, for example, they build a hiding place together, they learn to work in groups, to discuss without the presence of adults, to mediate: it is with these simple activities that they learn to deal with conflicts and find solutions in the face of unforeseen events, important acquisitions in future personal relationships (Bruno, 2020). The urgent need is to be able to guarantee children and young people the possibility of learning to relate to natural and social reality in a balanced way, developing targeted educational strategies because the future will belong to [those who] develop a deep understanding of the (transformative) nourishment. the natural world and this will balance the virtual with the real (Louv, 2011).

An example of a strategy that effectively combines literature and physical activity in the open air is the *Fiabadiario* (Bruno, 2020). Successfully implemented in recent years, this strategy is part of a socio-relational paradigm, aiming at the formation of a community consciousness, that is the sense of belonging to the one community that includes all living beings. Through a combination of various activities such as reading fiction for children, autobiographical writing and contact with nature, students and teachers experience together an authentic education in listening and relating, learning to welcome the unexpected as an opportunity for reflection, towards the acquisition of an emotional stability and the development of a naturalistic intelligence that does not scare the unexpected because it is part of the flow of life.

## 5. Premises for a pedagogical sociology

### *5.1. Risk, limit, unforeseen, unexpected*

The pandemic events have highlighted the uncertainty of a culture based on measurability, predictability and control, to bring to light a reality made of complexity, unpredictability and indeterminacy. If this awareness was already present in the epistemological field since the mid-fifties, so much so as to speak of limited rationality (Simon, 1982). the particular historical conjuncture has penetrated the meshes of mass culture relativizing the myth of a science that has all the answers and highlighting the fact that scientific research is based above all on the 'correct questions'.

Observing the cultural contexts at the level of the world of life, in our opinion, this fact has created a dyscrasia and a rupture on the level of meaning: on the one hand, a strong medicalizing culture has generated the reassuring sensation of a powerful medical science capable of permeate every aspect of life by giving answers and solutions, on the other hand the evidence that every cognitive achievement is the result of accurate investigations, rigorous methodologies and experiments with relative temporal needs. This dyscrasia made clear the sense of the limit at different levels:

- cognitive, since gnoseological recursion presupposes that every time an understanding is actualized, it always opens up to new questions (Cipolla, 2000; Rossetti, 2001)
- physiological, since the organism is transient and characterized by finitude that can occur unexpectedly
- relational, since isolation has brought to light the understanding that man is social and needs community support, undermining the myth of self-centered individualism.
- This limit is cloaked in negative connotations related to:
- risk, understood as the possibility of a loss that breaks the apparent certainties of an experience based on predictability
- limit, understood, on the one hand, as an obstacle to the achievement of personal goals (professional, private and relational) and, on the other, as fragility and finitude (for example of health)
- unforeseen, understood as an event capable of breaking the continuum between knowledge of the premises and certainty of the results
- unexpected, understood as a fearful expectation that known and foreseeable events may be hindered by unknown and uncontrollable events

We believe that this negative connotation confuses and disorients peoples, for this reason we believe that sociology can provide answers acquiring a role of cultural mediation and education.



### *5.2. The pedagogical role of sociology and its objectives*

Since the second half of the twentieth century the social sciences have had to deal with the epistemological relativism, self-referential systems, the pluralism of theories and, in general, with the thought weak enough to identify this crucial passage as postmodernity.

Unlike mass culture, still linked to the paradigm of modernity, sociology has had to develop the self-observance and self-learning, to transforming categories such as: complexity, relativity, probability and chance, into opportunities for evolution towards concepts such as: methodological integration, cognitive circularity, relationality and multidimensionality (Cipolla, 2000). Therefore sociology can propose itself as a cultural mediator towards a new conception of the unexpected as a resource capable of:

- define reality according to new perspectives of observation
- motivate to problem solving by tapping innovative solutions
- stimulate creative perspectives and new solutions
- stimulate awareness that any choices can be changed

Educating the unexpected as a resource allows us to transform the concepts of:

- risk, passing from the concept of loss to that of possibilities.
- limit, passing from the concept of obstacle to that of foundation on which to build an eco-centric vision based on constructive relationships and solidarity (Rossetti, 2001)
- the unforeseen, moving from the concept of event that distracts from the prediction to that of opportunity to redefine new rules and new methods.

## **6. Features of pedagogical sociology**

Placing ourselves on the level of spendability, if we would concretely define the characteristics of a pedagogical sociology, we should take into account three aspects: contents, methods and contexts.

### *6.1. Contents*

As for the contents, the sociological contribution is useful for: *i*) propose new eco-centric cognitive structures that enable people to develop new representations of the world and to act consistently with them. An eco-centric perspective emphasizes the action responsibilities towards themselves, towards the environment and to the community. Finally, an eco-centric perspective shifts the focus from the individual to the community and promotes virtuous actions in the common interest; *ii*) transmit typical sociological concepts (empathy, sustainability, community, relationship, etc.) with appropriate methodologies.

Regarding to methodologies, a pivotal role may be played by the body, not only as a biological element, but, above all, as a symbolic element. The body, in fact, becomes the 'place' that concentrates: *ii*)

perceptual skills suited to experiment with complex sociological concepts, using a multisensory approach that enhances the experience; *ii*) dimensions of spacetime humanly sustainable, because based on biological scanned rhythms and cycles.

### *6.2. The body as an educational medium*

The pandemic events have highlighted the importance of re-establishing a virtuous relationship with nature, understood both as a complex ecosystem and as a symbolic universe.

The culture of modernity has attributed to the state of nature the value of primitive and scarcely evolved. This view has justified genocide and environmental disasters on a large scale in the name of progress. Terms such as balance, harmony, sense of the sacred, have been conceived as manifestations of a magical mentality based on superstition. Now that the need for a re-enchantment of the world emerges [Weber, 1997; 1998], this perspective offers us the possibility of reviewing these concepts in the light of contemporary culture.

In order to educate in ecology, it is necessary to acquire a re-encharmed perspective of nature, no longer understood as a resource to be exploited, but as a value towards which to go. The body represents the natural medium par excellence: it is nature, if we understand it as a complex of physiological functions that require constant homeostatic balance, but it is also a symbol, since its representations are influenced by personal and social experience. Here we also want to draw attention to a third function of the body: that of learning. All that we know of reality, all the images of the world that guide our experience, are elaborated by that complex perceptive and elaborative system which is expressed by the body in its entirety.

As confirmed by cognitive psychology (Gargione, 1998; 2000). Any concept or theory has its basis in sensoriality. In fact, it is the senses that provide basic data to the deeper structures of the brain on which complex information is subsequently processed by the neocortex.

These premises are necessary to understand that concepts such as empathy and relationship, necessary to redefine the eco-centric society, cannot simply be passed on the basis of an abstract description, but they must be deeply rooted in bodily experience. This centrality of the body is known in both pedagogical and ethnological fields.

In fact, in the first years of life, when the individual defines the basic cognitive structures, learning takes place through the use of the whole body. Just think of the child he knows by bringing objects to his mouth. This central role of the body is also found in the traditional cultures of many peoples, where the transmission of ancestral knowledge took place through a very powerful physical involvement (think, for example, of the yoga discipline in the Indian tradition, or to the sacred rites of the Native American tradition) (Eliade, 2007; 2008).

Regarding the techniques, the body could be involved in the learning process through different phases:

- First phase - setting creation: creation of a system of exercises that favors proprioception and stimulates sensory receptivity, in order to promote a conscious and non-evaluative listening.
- Second phase - transmission of the experience: conveying complex concepts and contents (e.g., empathy, relationship, cooperation, responsibility, etc.) through exercises that make it possible to understand concepts through bodily experience.
- Third phase - theoretical elaboration: phase that deepens the lived experience with more articulated theoretical reflections.

### 6.3. Contexts

Regarding to the contexts, the socio-pedagogical intervention is undoubtedly designed to address in the worlds of everyday life in different areas of experience:

- Institutional context
- School: especially in primary school in order to educate to community values and work on the system of representations
- Social: in community interventions and educational support
- Private area

Individual counseling: where the loss of sense of the individual is substantiated as discomfort and disorientation capable of also affecting the perception of health and well-being

Collective counseling: where the loss of meaning and disorientation of people compromises relationships. in this case, sociological counseling can be applied both in the family and in the organization to harmonize the system of relationships

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## University delays. The Italian Academic Gap as a Media Topic

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**ABSTRACT:** *The journalistic discourse on university reformism is increasingly inspired by a taxonomic anxiety aimed at emphasizing the gap between top ranking universities and the others. The results of some international academic reports highlight the delay of Italian universities, whose international gap is often framed as a media topic. Academic communication intermingles with institutional empowerment of higher education, whose comparative analysis provides an insight into the wider process of accreditation, evaluation and rationalization. Hence the communicative flair of some surveys concerning the Italian university system and journalistic juxtaposition of good and bad universities. Academic quality data on tuition, research, the right to learn, internationalization and the third mission have become fundamental evaluative criteria in a comparative perspective. Some European initiatives aimed at supporting inclusion and mobility can be seen as an important chance for Italian higher education to bridge the gap narrated by the media in line with the taxonomic haste to highlight academic winners and losers.*

**KEYWORDS:** *University, Information, Rankings, Sociology, Comparative Education*

### Introduction. Social complexity and academic communication

Media discourses on higher education usually overlook the sociological and educational complexity of academic innovation framed within the wider sociological reflection on the future of our universities. In his posthumous book, *The Metamorphosis of the World* (2016), Ulrich Beck provides an insight into the «politics of visibility» and the «failure of functioning institutions» of our risk society. His idea revolves around the impact of digitalization on informative strategies and educational patterns in line with a sociological effort to reveal the current transformation of the public sphere: «At the same time, the rapidly evolving, new technologies variants of digital communication are transforming the concept of the public. Consumers of news are becoming producers of news. National borders and topics are becoming less important. New communication landscapes are emerging – fragmented, individualized and simultaneously spreading out into

networks in which the power of the communication media is broken» (Beck, 2016, 133-4).

The relationship between institutionalized knowledge and digital public opinion affects the evolution of experiential paradigms of collective interactions. A digital construction of the world implies the sharing of complex forms of knowledge that newspapers and news networks try to decipher. The dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion is related to the mission of educational institutions that ought to fuel a high degree of cultural participation. This is one of the most pressing issues of our digitalized communities which Beck depicts in terms of communicative shifts: «In the process, key concepts such as 'participation', 'interest' and 'integration', which were assumed to be invariant within the perspective of social change, are changing» (Beck, 2016, 134). Participation, interest and integration can be considered as three relevant cornerstones of the educational endeavor, in light of the public 'bads' stemming from progress and risk publicness. Such a sociological target revolves around the education 'bads' highlighted by the media for the purpose of emphasizing the distance between excellent and not-so-excellent universities.

Beck's analysis of risk society is deeply embedded in the controversial dimension of the public sphere, whose construction increasingly depends on the intermingling of online and mainstream narrations. Jürgen Habermas cleverly analysed the pseudo-democratic nature of these systemic shifts within the infrastructure of the public sphere, insofar as «media-based communication consists mainly in a discourse initiated and conducted by elites» (Beck, 2016, 161). The sociological reflections developed in *Europe: The Faltering Project* (2009) unveil the ambiguities of media narrations, as Lee McIntyre (2018) recently did by focusing on the concept of «post-truth». Habermas (2009) dwells on the role played by some professional categories within the communicative processes producing those «reflected public opinions» inspired by accredited actors: lobbyists, advocates, experts, scientists, «moral entrepreneurs», intellectuals.

The quality press and authoritative opinions ought to inspire the public discourse on some pressing issues, as happened for the recent COVID-19 pandemic. «Politics of visibility» probed by Beck can be analysed from the media perspective adopted by Habermas and his observation of communicative lobbies: «The democratic state finds itself confronted with demands from both sides. In addition to rules and regulations, the state has to provide public goods and services for its citizens as well as subsidies and public infrastructure for various functional subsystems, such as industry and the labour market, health care, traffic, energy, research and development, education, etc.» (Habermas, 2009, 163). In case of emergency, university professors and researchers are called upon to provide the audience with reliable answers, especially in the field of health, economics, environment and technology. Thus, the consequences of modernity highlighted by

Anthony Giddens entail the urgent need to investigate our functional dependence on technological devices. By pointing out that «public opinions exert influence», Habermas (2009) focuses on the media networks and news agencies that try to shape public opinion, including intellectual and academic experts possessing the fundamental skills needed in «the forum of the public sphere». Conversely, intellectuals engaged in the media strategies may produce «an elite discourse which is fueled by the contributions of various actors» (Habermas, 2009, 165).

The journalistic attempt to draw on the 'goods and bads' of higher education is likely to be inclined to avoid elite discourses and stimulate a clearer narration, in a time marked by an arguably informative synchronicity. Such a cognitive aspect has been probed by Bauman in reference to postmodern higher education: «The permanent and continuing technological revolution transforms the acquired know-how and learned habits from assets into a handicap, and sharply shortens the lifespan of useful skills, which often lose their utility and 'enabling power' in less time than it takes to acquire them and certify them through a university diploma» (Bauman, 2001, 131). In *The Individualized Society*, Bauman (2001) cleverly investigates the social effects of our technologic shifts, insofar as they entail new professional skills and occupations. Universities have to comply with the new cognitive endeavor of the convergent society (Jenkins) featuring «fragmentation and episodicity». This is why it is important to communicate clearly the complexity of science and research, without indulging in those personal cults that Weber (2004) stigmatized a few months prior to the end of World War I.

Academic communication should be privy to self-reference, hence it should pursue collectively-shared information. In reference to the media discourse on the future of knowledge, Bauman dwells on the social impact of such intellectual endeavor involving academic actors and their communicative skills: «Whoever enters the game of notoriety must play by its rules. And the rules do not privilege the intellectual pursuits which once made academics famous and the universities imperious; the relentless, but slow and circumspect search for truth or justice is ill fitted for being conducted under the public gaze, unlikely to attract, let alone to hold, public attention and most certainly not calculated for instant applause» (Bauman, 2001, 133). Twenty years after Bauman's statements, Italian universities are trying to find their place within the globalized public debate, coping with the taxonomic simplifications and the structural delays from the past.

## **2. University rankings and journalistic evidence**

Italy hardly ever finds its place at the top of international university rankings, whose results are often framed as a journalistic topic. The annually Reports published by the most important academic rankings in

the world (Academic Ranking of World Universities, Times Higher Education World University Rankings and QS World University Rankings) follow several indicators of didactic and research performance, including highly-cited researchers and papers. These ratings shed light on Italian university slowness and delays, as the media emphasize – in a so-called comparison – whenever ratings are presented to the press. Hence follows the opportunity to focus on the Italian academic gap seen as a media topic, with emphasis on the delays of our universities in terms of functional efficiency and public financing.

The sociological analysis of the media rhetoric inspiring some journalistic reports emphasizes the narrative paradigms focused on the drawbacks of our universities, with particular regard to educational rights. Several articles point out that in Italy taxes are higher than in other European countries, loans and scholarships are rarely provided, male students graduate more than female and investments in higher education remain low. Moreover, the number of graduates is low and the dropout rate is high. This is what journalists, scholars and academics often denounce in newspapers and on television, referring not only to the international university ratings, but also to the Eurydice network, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Eurostat Reports. These documents confirm that the Italian academic gap is more than a mere journalistic issue and has to be considered as a consequence of structural and political delays.

Media analyses of Italian university delays fuel the public discourse on investments and innovations. The journalistic relevance of the academic gap concerns both the national context and international scenarios, as *la Repubblica* and *Il Sole 24 Ore* rankings highlight in reference to the gap between universities in the South and in the North of Italy. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have inverted this negative trend, since excellence may have a journalistic impact that makes it possible to gauge merit and research quality. Italy ranks fifth for COVID -19 research according to QS World University Rankings. This means that Italian research excellence can journalistically black out the chronic delays afflicting the higher education system at large, as periodically indicated both by national and international rankings and reports and newspapers.

The aforementioned journalistic dimension of the academic discourse can be observed in some recent articles highlighting Italian university delays. On March 23 and May 18, 2021, Milena Gabanelli and Francesco Tortora published two long reports in the *Corriere della Sera*, both focused on the juxtaposition between affluent and poor universities. The former is entitled *DAD, tasse (e tutto il resto): ecco perché l'università italiana è in coda all'Europa* (E-learning, fees – and everything else -: why the Italian university system comes last in Europe). The report draws attention to the high fees that Italian students have to cope with, despite the extension of the 'no tax area' (total



exemption) that the Italian government approved in 2020 through the so-called '*Decreto rilancio*': 165 million euros have been allocated in an effort to lower university taxes in conjunction with 40 million euros aimed at implementing the public supplementary fund for university scholarships (Lombardinilo, Canino, 2020).

Italian students pay high fees, as Gabanelli and Tortora (2021b) explain by quoting Eurydice Reports. Eurydice is a network of 40 national units based in 37 countries belonging to the Erasmus+ programme, whose task is to clarify how education systems are organized in Europe and how they work. According to the Eurydice Report titled *National Student Fee and Support Systems in European Higher Education 2020/2021*, Italian students pay on average 1,628 euros each year. In the first-degree courses, fees fluctuate between 200 euros and 2,721 euros depending on family income. In the second-degree courses fees can be as high as 2,906 euros. In the academic year 2018/2019, fees were paid by at least 72.5% of students who enrolled in the first-degree courses, whereas in the second-degree courses that rose to 74.6%. Others were exempted because of their family ISEE (Indicator of Equivalent Economic Situation) gave an income lower than 13,000 euros. In spite of the increase in funding for scholarships, Italy remains one of the few countries with the lowest availability of funds for scholarships. In the last three years an average of 7,000 students did not benefit from scholarship regardless of eligibility. A major distinguishing feature of Italy concerns the so-called 'honour loans'. In Germany 12% of students resort to public loans, while in the Netherlands and England the figures are 54% and 94% respectively. In Italy, students with scholarships are less than 1%.

One of the effects of the Italian situation is the low number of graduates and the high drop-out rate. According to Eurostat (*Europe 2020 education indicators in 2019*) only 27.6% of young Italians between 30 and 34 years of age have completed tertiary education. At the other end of the spectrum is Cyprus (58.8%), Lithuania (57.8%), Luxemburg (56.2%), Ireland (55.4%), Sweden (52.5%) and the Netherlands (51.4%). Only Romania ranks lower than Italy (25.8%). In almost all European countries female graduates are more than the male counterpart. The drop-out rate is highest in France (about 1,1 million in 2016), Italy (523,000), England (404,000), Poland (201,000), Spain (174,000) and Germany (165,000). These results show that in Italy investments are low and the distribution of earnings is unequal, as in 2019 Italian public expenditure on higher education was 0.4% of its GDP, far behind France (1.1%), Germany (1%), Spain (0.8%) and the EU average (0.9%) (Eurostat, 2020).

Gabanelli and Tortora's reports show that Italian low investments in higher education can be considered as a media topic featuring the criticalities of the academic sphere and the distribution of public funds. Sometimes international rankings shed light on our research excellence in some specific fields. A few days prior to the first lockdown (February

27, 2020), ANSA published an online Report titled *Italian universities top rankings. Sapienza ranks top in classical studies*, which claims that «the performance of Italian universities has improved in this year's newly released edition of the QS World University Rankings, which focuses on leading institutions by region and subject» (ANSA, 2019). In 2019 Italy came fourth in Europe – after Great Britain, Germany and France – and seventh in the world for the total number of universities included in the most-consulted global rankings worldwide.

Ben Sowter, responsible for research and analysis at QS, underlined that the Italian trend was «noteworthy», also in the light of the «fierce global competition» in the international academic world. Nonetheless, the positive result was reported as the OECD warned that Italy ranked eighth for the number of emigrants, including one-third who are university graduates. Sowter pointed out that «other countries are increasingly benefiting from this investment as Italy is struggling with a brain-drain phenomenon» (ANSA, 2019).

### **3. Eurostat, OECD and the Italian dropouts in higher education**

Italian university backwardness in higher education expenditure and dropouts are emphasized not only by OECD's reports *Education at a Glance*, but also by the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat). The news press released on *Europe 2020 education indicators* emphasizes that «the EU has reached its tertiary education target», namely 0.2 percentage points away from the target for early leavers. The Europe 2020 strategy's target is that at least 40% of 30 to 34-year-olds in the 27 Member States of the European Union (EU) should have completed tertiary education by 2020 and by reaching 40.3% in 2019, the EU crossed that threshold. In 2002, when the Report was first published, the percentage was 22.5%. There has been a steady increase ever since and more significantly for women (from 23.7% in 2002 to 45.6% in 2019) compared to men (from 21.4% to 35.1%). In 2019, at least half of the population aged 30 to 34 had completed tertiary education in Cyprus (58.8%), Lithuania (57.8%), Luxembourg (56.2%), Ireland (55.4%), Sweden (52.5%) and the Netherlands (51.4%). Conversely, the lowest percentage belonged to Romania (25.8%) and Italy (27.6%).

Higher education institutions have to cope with the distancing restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the dawn of the second lockdown in Italy in September 2020, OECD presented the *Education at a Glance 2020* Report, highlighting the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the inadequacies and inequalities in education systems around the world. The Report provides comparable national statistics measuring the state of education worldwide. Although there is uncertainty about the overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education expenditure, governments have to cope with the allocation of

public funds as tax incomes decline and healthcare and welfare costs rise.

This is a major concern, according to the Report, «as many of the professions that formed the backbone of economic and social life during the lockdown hinge on vocational qualifications» (OECD, 2020). According to the Report, young adults today are less likely to attain an upper secondary vocational path than their parents were and more likely to achieve an academic university degree. Unfortunately, earnings are also lower: adults with an upper secondary vocational qualification have similar earnings to those with an upper secondary general qualification, but they earn 34% less than tertiary-educated adults on average across OECD countries.

Governments should enhance their efforts to make vocational education and vocational qualifications more attractive to young people. «This should include enhancing work-based learning and strengthening ties with the private sector. Currently, only one third of upper secondary vocational students take part in combined school and work-based programmes on average across OECD countries» (OECD, 2020). Any decline in enrolment of international students for the next academic year will erode the core education services universities offer, but it will also indirectly undermine the financial support they provide to domestic students, as well as research and development activities.

OECD Reports highlight the functional complexity connected to the harmonization of higher education initiated by the Bologna Process. To the fore is the challenge of quality learning and teaching within the tertiary education system: «The Process also includes areas of broader societal relevance, such as the links between higher education, research and innovation; equitable participation and lifelong learning and links to higher education systems outside Europe» (Biggs, Tang 2014, 8). Such an ambitious structural improvement needs new and more effective evaluative strategies capable of assessing the efforts of higher education institutions from a qualitative perspective. Furthermore, internationalization implies communicative skills aimed at promoting a real comparative analysis without indulging in sterile taxonomic speculations (Cappa, 2019). This is why it is possible to mull over on the «controversies and negotiations» of Italian universities, by taking into account the growing importance of students' performance: «Thus, student performance indicators have created new areas of visibility in academic work and, consequently, new areas of attention, intervention and continuous improvement» (Romito, 2020, 512).

Communication and evaluation are the hallmarks of a wider reformist process involving universities at large. Academic resilience concerns both didactic and research activities, in spite of the new functional innovations that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought forth: «To remain relevant, universities will need to reinvent learning environments so that digitalization expands and complements, but does not replace, student-teacher and student-student relationships» (OECD, 2021). Italian

universities make no exception especially in light of their comparative backwardness, oftentimes highlighted by the media.

### **Conclusions. Towards a new dimension in European higher education**

The media attention to Italian academic criticalities sheds light on the informative impact of university rankings, whose taxonomic patterns feed the journalistic explanation of higher education challenges. The Italian academic gap concerning public expenditure, early dropouts and international mobility turn into a newsworthy topic also fuelled by the OECD and Eurostat reports that annually provide an insight into the comparative scenario of higher education. Hence follows the informative anxiety highlighting the gap between higher education institutions, as Gleick (2011, 403) points out: «another way to speak of the anxiety is in terms of the gap between information and knowledge. A barrage of data so often fails to tell us what we need to know».

University reformism has to be framed within the sociological debate, insofar as the COVID-19 pandemic has deeply changed the academic didactic strategies and, in the meantime, the public perception of risks within the digitalized public sphere (Turk, 2008). Universities need to provide students, staff and researchers with the skills needed in an ever-changing labour market – where the demand for highly skilled workforce – as well as navigating the green and digital transitions. In order to do so, cooperation across higher education institutions must be boosted (Willems, 2017; Palomba, 2008).

The challenge of inclusion and mobility is supported by the European Commission in order to stimulate systemic growth of the whole European higher education organization, as the recent initiative for a new dimension in European higher education shows. On 17 May 2021 the European Council adopted conclusions on the European Universities initiative, bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education. The initiative, launched by EU leaders in 2017, will be fully rolled out during the EU's 2021-2027 financing period, so as enable students, staff and researchers to move seamlessly between partner institutions to train, teach and do research.

With their conclusions, ministers encourage member states and the Commission «to make sure that the initiative remains central to building a European Education Area by 2025, inspiring the transformation of higher education in the EU and helping to achieve the ambitious vision of an innovative, globally competitive and attractive European Education Area and European Research Area» (EU Council, 2021). As a result, the Council invites member states to take advantage of all available funding possibilities, including the Recovery and Resilience Facility (the EU's post-crisis budgetary instrument), with the aim to develop «European Universities».

Ministers also recommend more cooperation between education authorities, higher education institutions and stakeholders. They therefore suggest exploring the need for, and viability of, joint European degrees within the alliance of «European Universities». A cautious approach to joint recruitment schemes for teachers and researchers should be promoted by «European Universities», aimed at effective «multidirectional» and «balanced» brain circulation across Europe, along with improved quality research and teaching careers, particularly for young researchers.

The Ministers also pointed out that the initiative is showing its first results as – according to a recent survey – members of the first 17 «European Universities» perceived that being in an alliance helped them to navigate the COVID-19 crisis and would allow them to recover faster by sharing resources and strengths. Such a political effort requires the full involvement of European higher education institutions which have to support a real functional harmonization and cope with the rapid transformation of the social sphere in the era of digital connectivity: «Thence the relevance of transversal competences and soft skills. But the need is ever stronger to form new generations for new and complex futures» (Moscati, 2021, 411).

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# **The America Syndrome: The Influence of The United States on European Educational Cultures and Policies, Between Myth and Reality**

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## Loris Malaguzzi, John Dewey and the Bauhaus: Similarities and Influences in Aesthetic Education in the Reggio Emilia Approach

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**ABSTRACT:** *The following essay aims to highlight some cultural references that have influenced the Reggio Emilia Approach and its aesthetic education practices. We will examine two of them specifically, which seem to play a substantial role. These are the cardinal principles of the Bauhaus and, above all, the theories of the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. A debt that is exposed, in a 1988 interview, by Loris Malaguzzi, the pedagogue and teacher who played the main guiding role in the educational experience of Reggio Emilia kindergartens. However, considering the complexity of the history of the Reggio schools, an in-depth examination is necessary. We must try to understand if there has been a tout-court application of the theories or, as we suggest, a more critical and analytical integration. The focus will be on two fundamental issues. The first is the relationship between art and everyday life. The second will be a discussion of the issues surrounding the idea of process and the value it takes on in the different phenomena studied. We will see how these questions, argued differently by Dewey and Bauhaus, will play a role in the schools of Reggio. In particular, in the design of spaces dedicated to education in visual languages – the ateliers – and in activities related to visual communication – documentation and exhibitions.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Malaguzzi; Dewey; Bauhaus; Aesthetic Education; Visual language.*

### Introduction

Loris Malaguzzi was one of the most interesting figures in Italian educational history. His greatest legacy lies in his contribution to the foundation of the Reggio Emilia Approach (Hereinafter referred to as REA). An educational philosophy outlined by him and the large community of educators, pedagogues and *atelieristi* who serve the cities kindergartens. Malaguzzi's role, more than that of theoretical guide or philosophical reference, it was that of creator of a circumstance in which this approach could be created collectively.

A context that is still alive and continues to grow even twenty-seven years after the death of its head.

Much more than many philosophers of education, he devoted his life to building and animating an educational community: a remarkable group of teachers of various types and specializations who worked together for years, even decades, together with parents, community members and thousands of children, to create a system that works (Gardner, 2017, 21).

The resulting philosophical approach began to be based on a certain image of a child with, one strong developmental potential, great expressive abilities and a bearer of rights.

A child already at birth so eager to feel part of the world, to actively use a complex (and not yet fully validated) network of skills and learning and to organize relationships and maps of personal, interpersonal, social, cognitive, affective and even symbolic orientation (Malaguzzi, in Gandini *et al.*, 2017, p.57).

Malaguzzi summarized this concept of children's expressive and thinking possibilities with the metaphor of 100 languages. Children, as human being, have a great potential for communication, which does not lie only in verbal language. As a result, REA has placed great emphasis on teaching other communication systems, since the 1960s. Among them, visual language education stands out. The practices that arose in dealing with such issues were extremely brilliant, and Malaguzzi and the teachers in Reggio proved to be very up-to-date with the latest developments in aesthetic education. Nevertheless, what are the main sources of inspiration for these experiences? And how were they 'used'?

Therefore, the aim of this article is to highlight some important cultural references in the REA in relation to aesthetic education practices. We would like to focus in particular on the relationship between Malaguzzi and two key figures in the latest history of art education. On the one hand, the German School of Bauhaus. It was best known for its role in avant-garde art, architecture and design, but it also played a crucial part in rethinking the practices of art education. On the other hand, the theories of the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, who was famous for pedagogical writings and essays on aesthetics.

What I propose is to compare the philosophical framework of these three subjects on the relationship between art and education. Then, try to see if there are any similarities that might suggest further influence.

However, this essay does not pretend to be a detailed philological reconstruction of the dependencies and influences present in Loris Malaguzzi's thought, nor in the practices of the schools of Reggio Emilia. Such an operation would certainly require more time and space than that provided by this paper. An operation that would try to highlight one source of inspiration over another runs the risk of giving a simplified view of these relationships of dependence.

However, we believe that knowledge of both Bauhaus and Dewey played an important role in shaping Reggio's practices. In order to discuss this, some important preliminary remarks must be made.

Firstly, we must express that Malaguzzi was immersed in a lively and practical environment, which included many individuals, teachers, *atelieristi* and pedagogists, with whom Malaguzzi discussed, analysed and applied ideas and theories.

This implies that, within an active multi-voice community, a reconstruction of the theoretical references may be particularly complex because: a) these are seen and perceived first and foremost as tools for solving living problems; b) their introduction and implementation may not come univocally from Malaguzzi and his personal experience.

It should be emphasized that in such a situation the theoretical source is actually practiced, not just followed blindly. Reflection on a text can be seen as a way of solving some practical problems in one's own context. It was felt that this freedom, true to such a pragmatic context, was also a particular vitalistic element of it. It goes without saying that this does not imply that these influences were not recognized or that no trace of such uses was kept. In fact, in the interviews and writings left by Malaguzzi, as in those of the pedagogues and *atelieristas* of Reggio, the recognition of these dependencies is not at all absent.

Moreover, it should be noted that aspects and practices of the Reggio Emilia schools may not have originated from the experience of its greatest exponent, but from someone who was part of this community. Especially in such a context where dialogue is given so much value. However, this does not exclude the fact that Malaguzzi did not cite them as sources when, assuming his role as representative, he spoke on behalf of the entire Reggio Emilia experience.

These premises are necessary in order to draw a methodological line in which to move for an examination of the sources of inspiration. Given the elements of complexity, we have tried to stay in the area of aesthetic education and what is related to the visual world. This implies, as far as Reggio Emilia's experiences are concerned, a primary focus on the spaces dedicated to this type of teaching and secondarily on all those activities linked to visual communication, such as exhibitions or documentation.

## **1. Art and everyday life**

We want to address the manifest element of influence. The one Loris Malaguzzi explicitly mentions. In an interview conducted in 1988 by Enzo Catini, Malaguzzi lists his main models for the atelier idea. The atelier is a space included in all nursery schools in the city of Reggio since the 1960s, with the aim of educating using non-verbal languages, especially visual ones. Therefore, this testimony is essential to

understand the influences that guided Malaguzzi's thinking and practices on the subject.

The models? A multiple inspiration from readings and experiences that, in short, comes from many sides. From Dewey, from the Bauhaus with its repudiation of the sublime myths of art and its separation from life experience, from Peirce, Wertheimer, Bruner, Piaget, Arnheim, Gombrich, Read, Lowenfeld, Klee, Mondrian, Magritte but also Luria, Vigotsky, Wallon, Freinet, and activism, Ada Gobetti, Mario Lodi, Gianni Rodari and from critical reflection on the lessons of Rousseau, Froebel, Montessori and Agazzi (Malaguzzi, 1988, 27)

As we can see, Malaguzzi mentions Dewey and the Bauhaus first in this dizzying list. Even just by mentioning them first, they seem to play a relevant role. As admitted, there is no doubt that they were a source of inspiration. What Malaguzzi does not explain are the references one owes to one or the other, probably because of the issues discussed in the introduction. Except for one point. Malaguzzi talks about the «repudiation of the sublime myths of art and its separation from life experience» (1988).

It is not clear, in the Italian original version, whether this passage refers exclusively to the Bauhaus or also to Dewey. However, it is a fact that this is the strongest common denominator between these two subjects. In fact, their respective researches are similar in trying to reconnect artistic practices to daily life. On Dewey's side, they are conducted through an aesthetic-philosophical study, while on the Bauhaus side through an educational-experimental action.

In both cases, it will take the form of an in-depth reflection on the aesthetic and educational processes and categories. We will see that based on this structural reasoning, Malaguzzi would create his own vision.

## **2. John Dewey – Art as Experience**

As is well known, Dewey systematically addresses the topic of aesthetics for the first time in 1934, with the publication of his thoughts in *Art as Experiences*. This was a new theme for the American philosopher, but one that ties in with his earlier reflections on human experience.

He manages to do this through an approach that is new for the history of aesthetics. In fact, Dewey does not start from works of art, investigating their essence or visitor enjoyment. He adopts instead a pragmatic and anthropological point of view. What differentiates it from previous reflections on aesthetics is that in Dewey's theory there are only contingent links to the phenomena of artistic production and fruition. Dewey's first proposal is to reconnect from below the aesthetic

with everyday life and everybody life. Dewey, in his theory of experience, identifies the aesthetic factor as part of human nature, independently of certain cultural artefacts, i.e. works of art. The initial act of Deweyan aesthetics is aimed at such a bottom-up reconnection of the aesthetic with the everyday life.

For Dewey, the task of the philosopher of art is in fact to «restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience» (Dewey, 1980, 3).

So, based on a radical critique of the oppositions inherited from modern philosophy – of I-world, sense-intellect and emotion-reason – Dewey identifies the aesthetic factor as the natural human need to enrich his own existence. An instinct that, according to him, is slightly less important than nourishment. Which, we will see, is also a fundamental stimulus for personal growth. From this derives a theory of experience, where Dewey classifies the possibility of relationship between each human being and his environment. In this arrangement, the aesthetic factor is an element of categorical distinction. These are: a) the ordinary flow; b) having an experience; c) and having a purely aesthetic experience. The distinction between the first form and the second is certainly the clearest, and perhaps more significant, than that between the second and the third. Ordinary flows are exclusively routine relationships with the world, in which there is no transition between them except mechanical. In addition, they lead to no vital growth. Whereas, having an experience means carrying out a well-defined action. This means that there is an emotional element that characterizes it and that, in the end, it is delimited by a self-contained act. This distinction from the ordinary flow constructs meaning and enriches the existence of the person who realizes it. It therefore has, according to Dewey, an aesthetic character. In the end, the difference between having an experience and having a purely aesthetic experience is more subtle. It is a matter of where the emphasis will fall in the process. In other words, an aesthetic experience, in the proper sense, will be enjoyed emotionally for its journey, and for its moment of consummation, rather than for its goals.

Such distinction between different types of experience leads to considerations about the art world that are quite innovative for an aesthetic theory. That is, that in Dewey's thought there is a surprising asynchrony between aesthetic experience and art. That is, on the one hand, having an experience – which has reached its perfection, which is enjoyed in itself, and which satisfies one's aesthetic needs – is not necessarily a realization or enjoyment of a work of art. According to Dewey's definition, a walk, a special dinner with some friends, a heated discussion or even writing an academic paper can provide an aesthetic experience. On the other hand, an object defined as artistic may have arisen from the author's work routine, the realization of which may not have brought any enrichment in the artist's life. Few people would deny

that Tiziano's Penitent Magdalene at the Hermitage is a work of art, but it is doubtful that the artist had a genuine aesthetic experience in painting it after having already made three or more very similar versions. Similarly, the viewing of the work may also be exclusively mechanical – and anyone who has been in the Louvre for more than two hours knows that – where the audience performs more of a recognition rather than a profound observation. Dewey's proposal for a reunion between art and life thus goes to the ethno-anthropological origins of art. He does not merely propose solutions that overlap two cultural categories, as if they had to be stitched together, but seeks to find the structures of artisticity in everyday experience as a new starting point.

This structural action leads Dewey to reason about the processes of experience. This makes it possible to identify in his works interesting analogies between what he called aesthetic experiences and formative experiences. We have seen that an experience is a becoming, in which there is a distinctive element and the perception of a conclusion. The American philosopher often emphasizes this aspect of experience as a fluid but finite element, distancing himself from much of the empirical philosophical tradition that identified experience with the generic flow of sensory relations between the self and the world.

We have an experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment. Then and then only is it integrated within and demarcated in the general stream of experience from other experiences. A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. Such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualizing quality and self-sufficiency. It is an experience (Dewey, 1980, 35)

Experience for Dewey is a continuous process, but marked by different constitutive phases. In his theory he focuses on the conclusive act that separates one experience from another. He calls it «consummation». This is not a mechanical conclusion – whereby one action ends and another consequently begins – but it is the refinement of a process of maturation, knowledge and emotional enjoyment. Therefore, consummation is not the result of such a journey, which can have a greater or lesser value, but which in itself does not characterize an experience. «The time of consummation is also one of beginning anew» (Dewey, 1980, 17).

Just as Dewey's theory of experience is the basis for his aesthetic thinking, so it is for his pedagogical one. Where, in experience and education of 1938, we can find similarities between an aesthetic experience and an educational experience. If the act of consummation took on a conclusive value for the aesthetic experience, in the case of

education, more emphasis is placed on how this passage can be generative for the experiences that follow it. Indeed, this becomes a measure of what is or is not formative. «Experience and education cannot be the same. In fact, there are some experiences that are diseducational. Every experience that has the aspect of stopping or misleading the development of further experience is diseducative» (Dewey, 2014, 11). In other words, we could say that a good educational experience is such if it provides a constructive basis for the experiences that come later. In conclusion, the act of consummation assumes an important role for both aesthetic and formative experience. Assuming the role of meta-reflection for what has been and starting point for what will be.

### 3. The Bauhaus - Teaching an attitude

In a parallel and autonomous way, the Bauhaus carried out a reflection on the same theme of the reconnection between art and everyday life. In this case, a similar structural action brings the discussion to the level of creative working.

The school's first manifestos, posed the problem in the term of reconnection between art, craft and industry. That's mean the three major categories of creative work at the beginning of the 20th century. Many in the same period had addressed the issue. However, usually in a superficial way. On the contrary, the Bauhaus stood out for a deep and structural intervention, in which the educational factor plays a crucial role. The Bauhaus would begin to address the problem without the concern to present a style, considered better or more appropriate to its time. On the contrary, he progressively proposed a teaching method, a way of making art, architecture or crafts that would not adhere to any formal style, but would start from the function of the object and the optimal use of the means used to make it. However, the school's initial objectives are strongly influenced by late 19th century ideas. Starting with the Wagnerian idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art. The school's first manifesto of 1919, accompanied by a famous woodcut by Lyonel Feininger of a Gothic cathedral – a metaphor for this idea of unitary art –, declaims:

The Bauhaus proposed to unite all forms of artistic creation, to reunite in a new architecture, as inseparable parts, all the practical-artistic disciplines: sculpture, painting, applied art and craftsmanship. The ultimate, albeit remote, aim of the Bauhaus is the unitary work of art – the great architecture – in which there is no dividing line between monumental and decorative art (Gropius, 2007, 64).

The Bauhaus was therefore born as a place of experiential learning where, as in a medieval building site, things are in progress, and one

learns through practice and observation of the work of the more experienced masters. What is avoided is the uncritical transmission of historical traditions. Expedients such as mimesis or allegorical constructions are considered relics of something that served a certain purpose at a certain time, but in modernity remain only as a perpetuation of a past tradition. Gropius, on the other hand, proposes a progressive school based on a new flexible attitude to any creative work. This would allow students to get to know their own means of working and to make the best possible use of them, regardless of their artistic, craft or industrial purpose.

I do not intend to offer a ready-made 'modern style', so to speak, but rather to suggest an approach that allows each problem to be tackled according to its specific factors. [...] I do not wish to teach dogma, but an open, original and flexible attitude towards the problems of our time. [...] My intention is to encourage young people to understand how inexhaustible the means of creation made available by the modern age are, and to encourage them to find their own personal expressive solutions (Gropius, 2007, 25).

This attitude will increasingly establish itself as a characteristic design methodology of the Bauhaus. A more pragmatic solution evolving from the utopian idea of the total work of art. We can describe this attitude as a transversal method that goes from an in-depth knowledge of the characteristics of materials to their efficient use. A method summarized from the famous formula of the school's last director, Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe: Less is more.

What can interest us in the history of the Bauhaus is the educational problem of how to teach students this working attitude. The school's preliminary course played a crucial role in that. Each student had to follow these lessons in the first semesters, before choosing a path linked to a specific work material. However, in addition to student orientation, the most important goal was to present and actively experience this method of working.

One of the most influential teachers who led him was the painter Josef Albers. Beside his artistic career, he was trained as a teacher and studied pedagogy. And in his life, he contributed a lot to the revitalization of the idea of art education, not only with the Bauhaus experience. For the preliminary course, he designed a series of active practices completely far from traditional art teaching. In these lessons, Albers asked his students not to create a surrogate work of art, but to work on certain specific tasks. He designed them to develop those skills and competences related to the attitude described above by Gropius (for an in-depth look at Albers' teaching practices see Horowitz *et al.*, 2006). An example was the so-called *Materialstudie* exercises. Where a common material, such as paper, was used efficiently and in an unusual way according to his structural characteristic. The focus for the students



was the research process of new and efficient solutions. Rather than applying a-critically some traditional rules or creating a surrogate of a work of art. This gave the opportunity to develop transversal skills, such as divergent and creative thinking, which Gropius was looking for.

#### 4. Art and everyday life in Reggio Children Approach

As we can see, both the Bauhaus and Dewey addressed the question of the separation between art and everyday life in a non-superficial way. In both cases, although in different ways, a radical approach was taken. On one hand, Dewey with his intention to rediscover the key element of aesthetics in the needs of the human being. In the other, the Bauhaus which dropped the categories of craft, art and industry to propose a method that can guide any creative work. Thanks to the attention to these profound reflections, Malaguzzi was able to address the problem of art and daily life. Therefore, he developed it in an autonomous way in relation to the issues closest to childhood education. This allowed him to think about the teaching of non-verbal languages outside the idealistic or romantic visions in which art education was taught. We can certainly see the greatest evidence of this influence in the *ateliers*. Since the late 1960s, schools in Reggio Emilia have all had a space in the school building for aesthetic education activities; managed by an educator with a strictly artistic background, called 'atelierista'.

From the outset, they presented themselves as the opposite of the traditional spaces linked to art education. The atelier is a space for stitching together all the dichotomies denounced by Dewey and Bauhaus. In fact, it is not intended to be an isolated environment for ancillary activities, but a place that is fully part of an elaborate educational project. Perfectly integrated with other school activities. «The atelier could only take shape as a subject-intermediary of a polyvalent practice, provocative of specific and interconnected events: transferring forms and contents into the daily educational proposal» (Malaguzzi, 1988, 27). So, the atelier is far from being a place for learning historical techniques, as the Bauhaus too, nor is it an escape from serious work. For Malaguzzi his goal was to:

sink and train the hand and the mind, refine the eye, the graphic and pictorial application, raise awareness of good taste and aesthetic sense, decentralize in joint projects with the disciplinary activities of the section, search for motivations and theories of children from doodle upwards, vary tools, techniques and working materials, encourage logical and creative plots, familiarize with the harmonies and discrepancies of verbal and non-verbal languages (Malaguzzi, 1988, 27).

One could venture to say that the atelier is a structurally conceived and designed environment for carrying out and perfecting aesthetic and formative experiences in the Deweyan sense. A space that permits the creation of formative experiences through the potential of non-verbal media. Their peculiarity, compared to the normal classroom environment, is that every means is available to allow the child to find the expressive medium most suited to him.

In this way, it is possible to give the child the chance to have experiences that can enrich his or her existence. The role of the 'atelierista' is also conceived in this sense. Just as the Bauhaus masters were not, the 'atelierista' is not a bearer of knowledge to be transmitted. He is, rather, a figure who is first and foremost able to listen to and understand non-verbal expressions and, consequently, to be able to guide the experience towards a satisfying and formative conclusion for the child.

However, the ateliers are not the only result of a profound reflection on the relationship between art and life inspired by Dewey and the Bauhaus. There are some further considerations on documentation and exhibitions in kindergartens. These have a contingent relationship with art education. However, they are bound to a conscious understanding of visual communication. In the REA, reflection on art and everyday life was in fact also useful in giving form to phenomena not directly related. Both belong to a long tradition of ordinary research in Reggio Emilia schools from the very beginning.

Alongside their more classical purposes (data collection and communication). we can also read them in the light of Dewey's aesthetic experience. In fact, in the peculiar use of the educational community of Reggio, they get some important characteristics. Which are, first, the capacity to make learning visible. That is, to follow and show the learning process. In other words, to indicate that constancy that should characterize an experience, according to Dewey. Thereafter, they use dialogue as metacognition. The discussion with the different members of the community plays a crucial role in the documentation and exhibitions. It works as a moment of meta-reflection about the path taken. A properly moment of consummation of the experience.

Finally, the capacity to trigger further experiences. In fact, neither documentation nor exhibitions are self-contained, they are able to stimulate and encourage new experiences. Focusing on action rather than results helps never to find a real stopping point, but only steps of meta-reflection.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is a clear and explicit reference to the Bauhaus and to John Dewey. However, not in a way of just re-proposing activities or putting theories into practice. In the REA, a philosophical reasoning on

the categories of art and education allowed the creation of strong and generative experiences. References were a key 'tool' in generating discussions and seeing everyday problems in a different aesthetic light.

It's believed that this essay can be useful first to get an idea of the possible, multifaceted and complex possibilities of exchange that may exist in a three-way relationship such as the one presented. Furthermore, we hope that it has been demonstrated that in the work of the schools of Reggio Emilia there has been, and still is, an attention to and critical use of this diversity of ideas coming from very different sources.

It was also made clear that these ideas were not used with a view to application *tout court*, but rather within an ongoing dialogue where one reflection led to another and another. In this way, a completely autonomous, self-sufficient and equally valuable thought was constructed – or rather co-constructed – in Reggio Emilia.

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## **The Competitive Humanism in the Ministerial Congress of Madrid (1999). For an Analysis on the Opus Dei Language and the Contemporary Relationship between Spain and the United States in Education**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The congress Compulsory Secondary Education under debate (1999) was very important in putting forward proposals and building consensus in the Spanish educational world for the reform of the national school system between the two millennia. Using the methodology of Thomas Popkewitz and Miguel Pereyra, inspired in some extent by a Foucauldian perspective, this study focuses on the Congress as an example of discursive construction, which can illuminate many aspects of contemporary Spanish education. It is characterized by a complex symbiosis between Opus Dei ethics and American neoliberal ideas. This intertwining suggests that the approval of the American model of curricular individualization and the defence of traditional values was not a simple case of American ideological transfer. Opus Dei ethics importantly fuse humanistic-religious values with the value of the enterprise and also suggest the strength of 'autochthonous' principles, which emerged under Franco (1939-1975). They raise the issue of the relationship with neoliberalism, not only as a question of 'theory', but sociologically, as an interaction of practices, relationships and ideas.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Education quality, Neoliberalism, Humanities disciplines, Opus Dei, Personalized Education.*

### **Introduction**

From 1996 to 2004 under the monarchy in Spain, centre right governments under José María Aznar, leader of the *Popular Party* mainly held power. Various historians and political analysts have suggested that these governments were biased towards the United States, the Atlantic alliance and Neoliberalism, and cite as evidence the alignment with Washington against Fidel Castro, participation in the bombing of ex-Yugoslavia, the application to become a full member of NATO in 1996, the new Southern region NATO subcamp near Madrid opened in 1999 and the privatization of the national economy (Elordi, 2003). Many of these actions were inspired by the ideology of the FAES

think tank, the *Foundation for Analysis and Social Studies*. The FAES was founded in 1989 by Aznar himself, who is still president, and its main aim was the «strengthening of the values of freedom, democracy and Western humanism» (Saura, 2015, 9). This was the context for the Congress *Compulsory Secondary Education under debate. Current Situation and Prospects*, organized by Education Minister Mariano Rajoy in Madrid, 9 -11 December 1999 (Ministerio de la Educación y Cultura, 2000). This study focuses on this Congress as an example of contemporary semantic–educational construction which can illuminate many aspects of contemporary Spanish education. This construction is based on a complex symbiosis with the ethics of Opus Dei and American neoliberal ideas. It follows the methodology of Thomas Popkewitz and Miguel Pereyra, who, inspired by a Foucauldian perspective, study political education as discursive practices, inextricably linked to social expectations and historical system of ideas (Popkewitz *et al.*, 1982; Pereyra and Barry Franklin, 2014). The conference was important for the education policy of the *Popular Party* and of Spain in general. It attracted participants and stirred opinions in the world of the school, all with the aim of delegitimizing the *Law of General Planning of the Education System* (LOGSE) promulgated in 1990 by the will of the socialist party (PSOE) and at that time still in force. The LOGSE had brought about changes with respect to the educational system formed through the 1970 reform in what was still Francoist Spain. The LOGSE extended compulsory schooling to the age of 16 and emphasized the comprehensive nature of schooling up to that age, and it ruled out channelling pupils into restricted curriculum (Jiménez-Ramírez *et al.*, 2020).

The Congress, however, was successful in awakening sensibilities and mobilizing opinion against the LOGSE and was a key step towards a new reform. And the *Popular Party* in fact brought in a reform of schools in 2002 (LOCE, 2002). The new law reformed the system of compulsory education and allowed individual, national and international competition through new curriculum and pathways linked to pupil performance in *Compulsory Secondary Education* (ESO). i.e., schooling for ages 14-16. LOCE was supported by some politicians, associations, intellectuals and some sections of the education world, but it was strongly criticized by others, particularly on the left, because it removed the comprehensive principle and perpetrated social inequality by segregating children at an early age (Gimeno Sacristán, 2002). ESO thus became a field of political struggle.

### **1. The United States model of individualization for personalised humanist education**

The 1999 Congress claimed to speak for a good part of Spanish schools. With the exception of a few academics who spoke at the beginning and

the end of the conference, the conference consisted almost entirely of speeches by people from the world of schools, including teachers and representatives of associations from all 17 regions of Spain. The speeches focused on the limitations and problems inherent in the ESO as it was at the time. The opening was attended by important politicians and speeches were given by two academics, José Luis García Garrido and Ramón Pérez Juste. García Garrido has a curriculum of international prestige, Pérez Juste became president of the *Spanish Society of Education* (2000-2008).

García Garrido in his lecture said that it was important to «examine [...] the institutions» of the USA given that the system exerted «constant pressure [...] in the context [of international politics]». The USA model gave great importance «to diversified and plural institutional service». In this it was similar to the British system and partly similar to the French and German systems (García Garrido, 2000, 27).

In a positive comment on the LOCE, García Garrido proposed the same reasoning, but explaining the history of the use of the concept of educational quality. For this value, which acts against the comprehensive principle, in turn responsible for massification, US policies have played the initial international guiding role: «concern about the efficacy of public education systems [...] appeared in the United States [...] from the beginning of the 1980s.» (García Garrido, 2002, 27)

He identified America policy clearly with policy under President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989). The philosophy underlying Reagan's policies, often referred to as neoliberal, was based on removal of state intervention and to give decision-making power over the educational life of individuals, to individuals themselves. This handing over of responsibility was linked to the idea of competition and the key role of the market in society governance. Under Reagan, US Education Secretaries, like other politicians, emphasized a cultural reform agenda of traditional values, religion and national heroes in relation to the economy (Apple, 2019). The American model of quality through individualization then spread to «Europe» where «its starting point was in 1988, with the enactment of the British Education Act» (p. 27). The trend spread across the West, «in the most influential countries in Europe (the UK, France, Germany, Holland, etc.) as in other enclaves (United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, etc.) » (p. 25). The policy of educational quality spread outwards from the United States «when recent research showed that school results left much to be desired in western countries» (p. 25). The policy found increasing fortune and the «fall of Communist regimes contributed in no small way to consolidating the trend» (Garrido, 2002, 27).

In opposition to this international line the LOGSE was already old when it was enacted in 1990, «favourable to a uniformist comprehensive approach» until the age of 16. The LOCE intervened to

fill this 'delay' emphasizing the «principle of diversity, and its concrete application to compulsory secondary education (ESO)» (p. 24). In his 1999 Congress speech, as in his later comments, García Garrido did not hide the fact that «this concept of efficacy has certainly deep roots in economics, or rather in the market, in its emphasis on competition (in and between centres of education) as a key element» (p. 27).

García Garrido believed that competition should take place in the framework of humanistic education. In this way it would fully bring about the cultural restoration in historic values and national religion of Reagan's model, and at the same time would not degenerate into an end in itself in purely material matters. In a context of humanism, competitiveness could legitimately be seen as moral and spiritual enhancement for the individual. And to underline this idea, the entire second part of his speech at the 1999 Congress focused on the importance of teaching humanistic subjects. Humanistic subjects were in fact to be taught in all curricula in all secondary school, including technical and vocational schools.

The second speaker at the 1999 Congress, Perez Juste, took up where García Garrido left off. He started by noting the quality and individualization which had started under Reagan and spread internationally, then went on to say that teaching humanistic disciplines was a valuable resource for individual and national competitiveness. The importance of humanism on the curriculum became an explicit argument for the exaltation of the theory of personalized education. He claimed it was the most important Spanish education theory of the second half of the 20th Century, the approach best able to incorporate the fundamental education aims of humankind, the approach which was best able to develop the human potential of each individual and the perspective which legitimately incorporated competition into the field of education (Pérez Juste, 2000).

Rather than citing his colleague García Garrido, who is an important source, Perez Juste based his arguments relating to personalized education on the work of his own doctorate supervisor, leading theorist Victor García Hoz (1911-1998). García Hoz had died the year before the Congress and was a key figure in education context in Francoist Spain from the 1940s until the end of the 20th Century. He was supernumerary member of Opus Dei, and a personal friend of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, who founded the religious order 2 October 1928 (Forment, 1999).

The closing speech of the Congress was given by Secretary of State, Jorge Fernández Díaz, the second most important figure after the Minister of Education. Fernández Díaz repeated the ideas of the two academics that humanist education could be used to combine educational quality with the exaltation of competitiveness (Fernández Díaz, 2002). For the Secretary of State the objective of quality was the development of human capital, one the most important terms in the



international politics and world culture, after the elaboration of Chicago economists in the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century (Bell, 2019).

For all three speakers, personalized humanism, which is the basis of the common quality scheme for competitiveness (Table 1). is implicitly understood in a religious sense. The system of spiritual and material values to be pursued has the Latin Christian world as its historical reference, not the classical pagan one (García Garrido, 1968; Fernández Díaz, 2019). This common reasoning is linked to sharing the ideals of the *Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei*, usually known as Opus Dei. This feature unites the speakers of Congress to García Hoz. Fernández Díaz has publicly stated that he is a member of Opus Dei (Fernández Díaz, 2019). while García Garrido and Ramón Pérez Juste are closely linked through their ideas and their professional activities.

**TAB. 1.** *Quality through personalized humanism for Opus Dei speakers at the Congress (1999)*

<b>García Garrido</b>	<b>Ramón Pérez Juste</b>	<b>Jorge Fernández Díaz</b>
US Model Individual curricular Competitiveness Humanism (religious)	Personalized education Humanism (religious)	Competitiveness Human capital Humanism (religious)

## 2. Opus Dei ethics

At this point it is interesting to relate the context of the Congress with the Opus Dei ministers, or technocrats responsible for the modernisation of Spain in the 1950s and 1960s which was under the Franco, dictatorship from 1939 to 1975. From 1957 onwards, at the height of the Cold War, minister of Treasury Mariano Navarro Rubio, minister of Trade Alberto Plasters, General Secretary of the Council, then Minister for Development Planning Laureano López Rodó ended the traditional autarchic economic regime, brought in privatisation and opened up society to competition and overseas capital, especially US. The resulting economic growth was so successful that Spain became one of the ten most industrialized countries in the world in the 1960s.

The question is whether there was affinity or ideological continuity between Franco's technocrat ministers and the speakers at the 1999 Congress in monarchic Spain in the new context of globalization. Were both linked to American neoliberalism?

Historians of Francoist Spain, especially Marxist historians, have found the neoliberalism of the Opus Dei to be a reflection of the dominant power in terms of the economic and cultural imperialism of the United States. From a different perspective, historians have also criticized Opus Dei as a sect of opportunists supporting the hegemony (Casanova, 1982; 1983).

Here, we ask whether this Marxist and anti-Opus Dei viewpoints are correct in seeing the 1999 Congress as an expression of submission and

made opportunistically by Opus Dei, to the neoliberalism power dominating the world. According to sociologist José Casanova, who criticized those positions in relation to the history of the Francoist ministers of Opus Dei, the examination of Congress papers shows us that there was more than deliberate or conditional adhesion, and more than aware or unaware acculturation, taking place.

Careful comparison of the ethical system of Opus Dei and the terminology and expressions used by education researchers, and the speech made by the Secretary of State, reveals a more complex situation than unconditional ideological transfer of American ideology. Quality through curricular individualization, personalization and humanism accompanied by competitiveness are all concepts widely used by Opus Dei education. This language is based on the ethic of the holiness of work and the fusion of humanist-religious education with company value and economic performance. Opus Dei actually means «the work of God», in other words, work in the service of God, offered up to God. Other key concepts in the writings of the holy founder which are hallmarks of Opus Dei are «work well done», «work which educates», «satisfaction», «love in work» and «dynamism in work» (V. García Hoz, 1997)

These principles can all be found in *Personalized Education*, an expression coined by García Hoz for the theory he defined and developed precisely in the years that Economy Ministers with Opus Dei leanings were leading Spain to become one of the world's industrial powers. As well as being the main theorist of *Personalized Education*, García Hoz was also the leading proponent of Opus Dei and was at the centre of a hegemonic network of students, researchers and collaborators across Spain for more than fifty years.

García Garrido and Pérez Juste were closely linked to this network. They were among the authors of the monumental 32 volume reference work entitled *Treaty of Personalized Education*, edited by García Hoz and published from 1988 to 1997 (Bernal Guerrero, 1999).

This work was enormously important in research in Spain and overseas. Volume 2 on the concept of the *individual* («persona» in Spanish) and Volume 30 on *Personalized Education in the Context of Work*, were particularly important in showing that the ideas of Opus Dei were relevant to capitalist and industrial modernity. Like the best-known work by the founder of Opus Dei, *Camino* (1939), the *Treaty* made a clean break with the otherworldly position of traditional Spanish Catholicism of the first half of the 20th Century which was rooted in resistance to the modern aspects of the world (V. García Hoz, 1997).

## Conclusions

The ideas presented at the 1999 Congress, receptive to the American model of educational quality, anticipated the principles that would

underpin the LOCE. In this law, the key aim, which is in fact made explicit in the full name *Law on Educational Quality*, is pursued mainly by way of curricular individualization. Congress speakers explained how the enhancement of humanism is an essential component of individualization which can allow education respectful of values and at the same time capable of fully exploiting personal and national competitive potential.

These principles can only be partly seen if the terminology used by Opus Dei is not taken into account. This is also the case in most Spanish education pronouncements from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to today. The theoretical foundations of Opus Dei were historically 'autonomous' and contained no overseas content, but the language used by Opus Dei blends the idea of economic enterprise with the full development of human potential. And this view allows there to be a close relationship with the neoliberal ideas of development and competition.

At the beginning of the millennium, the United States, locomotive of the Cold War, had become the dominating cultural attraction worldwide. But historical awareness of the language of Opus Dei leads us to reject the idea that the 1999 Congress speeches fundamentally reflected dependence on the United States. The situation was more complex, and would have been so even if the will of Spain had been stronger than it was to incorporate into its national ideas an external cultural body of ideas based on capitalist development and competition. The fact that the academics and politicians at the conference used Opus Dei terminology suggests that, rather than generic American 'influence', there was interaction between meanings and constructs, and that ideas from the United States were assimilated with ideas already current in Spain.

Lastly, the language of Opus Dei codifies principles and ethical values which are objects of the faith and life experience of its members, followers and sympathizers. Any ideological doctrine related to Opus Dei should therefore not be seen in purely 'theoretical' terms. It is important to consider what is often observed as neoliberal theorising in a sociological dimension, which needs to include life behaviour, dynamic actions, practices and interactions (Dardot, Laval, 2009).

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## John Dewey's *Impressions of Soviet Russia*, and the Post-revolutionary Educational System

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**ABSTRACT:** *Even though the reception of John Dewey's pedagogical theories in Russia and the Soviet Union has been extensively investigated, there are still several little-known aspects to the subject, especially concerning the circulation of his ideas in Tsarist and post-revolutionary Russia, and it is on these that this article focuses. Dewey's works were translated into Russian at the beginning of the twentieth century and again after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. During the 1920s, his writings formed the basis of a series of experiments in the reform of Soviet schools, which were not conceived as authoritarian institutions as they were later in the 1930s, under Stalinism. This article is divided into three parts. The first introduces the context in which Dewey's works were first translated into Russian, before the Revolution, in order to reform Tsarist schools. The second deals with the spread of Dewey's theories, and in particular the place of American concepts within Soviet reforms, as they corresponded to the values and purposes of the Marxist schools that the new Bolshevik government defined as polytechnics, charged to train future collective workers. The third section describes some aspects of the Soviet educational system that are presented in Dewey's work *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World: Mexico – China – Turkey*, which he wrote in 1929 after his trip to Russia in the previous year. In this writing, he observed the creation of a Marxist educational system during the 1920s, through which American activism was diffused.*

**KEYWORDS:** *John Dewey, History of the School, Educational System, Russia, Nineteenth Century, Twentieth Century*

### Introduction

Between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, there was a quest for new educational models, and these were discussed and exchanged internationally. It was proposed that these new models and the schools they inspired should correspond to developments in wider society and aim to encourage its positive progress. The science of the child, which was elaborated by the American psychologist Stanley Hall (1846–1924), focused on the need to educate on the basis of principles that related to psychological development. In America, the philosopher John Dewey realized that this aspiration to change society through education was a chance to offer educational opportunities to the next generation, in particular to the

children of immigrants and those from the lower classes (Sébastien-Akira, 2017).

Dewey's conception of education, which he developed at the University of Chicago Laboratory School, was one of the most important achievements of the American progressive education movement. Founded by Dewey in 1894, this school offered a real change in education, although he was not the only educator who was stressing the development of learning processes based on labor in schools. Its influence rapidly spread internationally, and it constituted a real model for change. Russia was the nation in which Dewey's theories spread most quickly because at the end of the nineteenth century, after the liberal reforms of 1864, education was considered to be the only means by which to improve the living conditions of the population and modernize the country. School reform needed models that could erase social differences, as these were still a feature of the old-fashioned Tsarist school system (Caroli, 2020). Interest in Dewey's ideas had already arisen in the pre-revolutionary context of debates about Tsarist reform. Recent studies have highlighted the different phases in which Dewey's theories were received, and the reason why they especially took root in post-revolutionary Russia. His ideas began to circulate most widely in the 1920s, when experimentalism was one of the main features of the Soviet school system (Kornetov, 2014; Rogaceva, 2016; Rudderham, 2021). For this reason, it is necessary to look at the early translations of Dewey's works in order to understand how his theories were received after the Revolution. His works were translated from 1907, at a time when a great variety of theories were circulating, all aimed at renewing educational culture, institutions and schools.

By comparing the two phases of Dewey's reception in Russia, before and after the Revolution, it will be possible to understand the reception of his work more comprehensively and in relation to the main educational problems that the country had to cope with. Before the Revolution, the main problems were the illiteracy of children and adults from the poorer classes, and a lack of education for neglected children from the urban working class (section 1). When Dewey's theories circulated in post-revolutionary Russia, they were considered to be one of the main supports for Marxist reform of Soviet schools, which aimed to shape a classless society (section 2). Finally, Dewey's *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World: Mexico – China – Turkey* is considered, in which he discusses the Soviet educational system, a huge communist enterprise that faced the major social problems of child abandonment and illiteracy and charged schools to train and indoctrinate a new generation of workers and peasants (section 3).

## **1. Dewey's reception in pre-revolutionary Russia**



Recent studies have demonstrated that an intensive pedagogical movement formed around the well-known school at Yasnaya Polyana, which was founded in 1859 by the well-known Russian writer Leo Tolstoy for peasant children. Tolstoy traveled throughout Europe in order to discover a model for a new type of school for Russia, but realized he was searching for something very different from the schools he observed. He wanted to create a 'laboratory' for knowledge, based on informal lessons and manual work, unique because there would be no timetable, physical punishments or homework. Freedom was one of the main principles and practices of this educational culture, which was inspired by Rousseau's philosophy of education. Tolstoy's innovative thinking was the starting point for the creation of 'new schools' in Russia in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, and, thanks to the author's fame, for the renewal of schools internationally (Caroli, 2020).

The pedagogical movement tied to Tolstoyan ideas was defined as the 'free education movement'. It was led by the philosopher Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov (1864–1940), who took a leading role in disseminating the ideas of so-called Tolstoyism (*tolstovstvo*), with a rich debate about innovations in schooling being encouraged by the publishing house Posrednik (Intermediate). This was set up in 1897, also by Tolstoy, to promulgate educational innovation, with the book collection *Library* (by I. Gorbunov-Posadov) *for Children and Youth* (*Biblioteka Gorbunova-Posadova dlia detei i iunoshestva*) and the journal *Free Education* (*Svobodnoe vospitanie*) being particularly influential. Posrednik also published the well-known Italian book *Hearth. Book for Boys* (1886) by Edmondo De Amicis, which was translated and adapted to Tolstoyan philosophy by Lenin's sister.

Tolstoyan publishing activity also concerned the publisher Pavel Aleksandrovich Bulanzhe (1865–1925), who was a writer and translator. After he met Tolstoy in 1888, the two writers developed a twenty-year friendship. From 1893, Bulanzhe worked at Posrednik, but for distributing prohibited works by Tolstoy and his contacts with sectarians in 1897, he was briefly expelled from Russia. After moving to England, where he published Tolstoy's works, he returned to Russia at the end of 1899, but from 1900 to 1904 lived constantly under secret police surveillance. Founder and owner of the publisher A. Pechkovskii-P. Boulanzhe and K., Bulanzhe published the very first translation of Dewey's *School and Society* (*Shkola i obschestvo*) into Russian in 1907. It was his own translation, and the foreword and annotations were by Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov (*ibid.*, 126). This was the beginning of interest in Dewey's ideas. Translations are often the first source of international circulation of educational models and ideas, but sometimes indicate that a deep interest already exists between cultures. Indeed, from the end of the eighteenth century, there had already been connections between Russian and American culture. For example, the city of Chicago and its university, at which John Dewey had arrived in 1894 to

take over the Department of Philosophy, Psychology, and Pedagogy, had contacts in Russia both in cultural and economic fields. Of particular importance are the reports written by William W. Brickman (1913–1986), a great supporter of Dewey's ideas, and co-founder of the Comparative Education Society (later renamed the Comparative and International Education Society) in the United States in 1956 (Brickman, 1960; 1964).

Another point of contact was the well-known philanthropist Jane Addams, founder of Hull House in Chicago, which catered for recently arrived European immigrants. She visited Yasnaya Polyana in 1896 and accepted a donation towards her social activities from Tolstoy. Later, in 1903, a Russian architect, Aleksandr U. Zelenko (1871–1953), lived for a time at Hull House, and probably met John Dewey when he gave lectures on social psychology there. On his return to Moscow, Zelenko spread a Hull House-inspired idea of settlement work with his collaborators Luiza Schleger (1862–1942) and Stanislav T. Shatskii (1878–1934). Through Zelenko, Shatskii probably became acquainted with Dewey's pedagogical conception. Close to the 'free education movement', Shatskii opened the first Settlement (in Russian *settlement*) for children from poor neighborhoods in Moscow in 1906; but this was closed by the Tsarist government after charges of socialist indoctrination were made. In the following years, Shatskii founded an experimental school named *Cheerful Life* (*Bodraia Zhizn'*) in Kaluga. This was an expression of his overarching vision that fully integrated education and work, and offered a boarding school education alongside training for agricultural work both for illiterate children and adults (Brickman, 1960, 83-84). It was based on self-organization and the collaboration of all participants with the activities that were offered. The model of the American progressive school was considered suitable both in terms of the type of institution and in terms of its curriculum. One member of the free education movement, Nikolai V. Chekov (1865–1947), argued that a further reform in Russia should introduce eight years of school attendance, and that this should be based on a decentralized organization. After the Revolution, Chekov joined the central administration of the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment and was one of the main specialists in the primary school system. The curriculum of these schools retraced the American model, being based on active methods of learning (Caroli, 2020, 125-128). Dewey's conception of developmental stages of learning, of an active methodology of learning, and of the role of education in the creation of a new society was crucial for the Soviet authorities as they shaped a new educational system.

## **2. Dewey and activism in post-revolutionary Russia**

From the October Revolution of 1917 until the 1930s, the reception of Dewey's ideas meant that Soviet educational authorities encouraged the

realization of Marxist schools, in which the learning process was associated with labor in order to guarantee training for future workers. The Soviet school system was ready to experiment with activism, and all educational strategies helped to shape a system that corresponded to the Bolshevik ideology of schooling. Different debates, tendencies, and solutions animated the cultural context of the post-revolutionary decade.

On the basis of the *Uniform Labor School Regulations* that were published on October 1, 1918, all schools came under the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment, and were given the name Unified Labor School. They provided free, compulsory, coeducational, and secular education to all children from eight to seventeen. They were divided into two levels: the first for children from eight to thirteen, and the second for children from fourteen to seventeen.

Productive labour must serve as the basis of school life, not as a means of paying for the maintenance of the child, and not only as a method of teaching, but as socially-necessary productive labour ... The school is a school-commune, closely and organically linked through the labour process with the environment. Instruction throughout the school was to have a 'polytechnical character' (Fitzpatrick, 1970, 28-29, 33)

While originally school was to be attended for nine years (five years at elementary school and four years at middle school). in 1921 it was reduced to seven, maintaining the nine-year cycle for vocational schools. Inside the People's Commissariat for Enlightenment, two main tendencies concerning so-called polytechnic work inside the future Marxist schools emerged. One of these was represented by the Ministry of Enlightenment's Anatolii V. Lunacharskii, who opted for education being prolonged until the age of seventeen without early specialization, while others pushed for early specialization in order to prevent youth unemployment. Utopian political projects concerning the introduction of 9-years school system collided with the scarcity of resources necessary for buildings, teachers and textbooks.

Simultaneously with institutional reform, curricula and methods were constantly discussed, elaborated, and revised in light of the Marxist political ideals of the new regime. In this period, the interest in Dewey's theories was made evident by the intensity of the translation into Russian of his works *Psychology and pedagogy of Thought* (*Psikologija i pedagogika myshleniia*, 1919, second edition in 1922). *School and Society* (*Shkola i obschestvo*, 1920, 1921 and 1925). and *The School and the Child* (*Shkola i rebenok*, 1921) by Stanislav Shatskii, R. Landsberg, and L. Azarevich. After 1925, though, translations of Dewey's works ceased. Although these translations have not yet been studied from the viewpoint of hermeneutical analysis, thereby highlighting how the translated texts respect the originals (and their titles) or were adapted,

by being cut or in other ways, for Soviet readers (whether reformers or teachers). one may observe that they played a huge role in the debates around educational reform. It was not only Shatskii but also other important pedagogues of the time, such as P.P. Blonskii, A.P. Pinkevich, and Anatolii Lunacharskii, who made frequent mention of Dewey's works.

Overcoming the traditionalists was only possible thanks to Dewey's works in particular and American progressive pedagogy in general, with the *Dalton Laboratory Plan* by Helen Parkhurst (1887–1973) and the 'project method' (in Russian also well-known as 'complex method') by Dewey's pupil and collaborator William Heard Kilpatrick (1871–1965). These methods introduced into Soviet school a new active way of acquiring knowledge (Holmes, 1991, 32-35).

According to the 'project method', learning was a project around which all activities were organized. All traditional school subjects ceased to exist, to be replaced by society, labor and nature, around which all pupils actively built their knowledge. William Kilpatrick's work *The Project method. Application of the Aimed Setting in Educational Process (Metod proektov. Primenenie celevoi ustanovki v vospitatel'nom protsesse)*. with an introduction by N.V. Chekov, was translated into Russian in 1925, and might have circulated before this date. Influentially, active learning, based on the 'project method', was introduced at the 'Timiriazev biological station', which was founded in 1918 near Moscow for the study of nature and natural sciences. This extra-school institution was the basis for the development of the Young Naturalist movement, which was very widely spread across the Soviet Union until the fall of the communist regime (Caroli, 2019).

In a similar way, the *Dalton Laboratory Plan* by Helen Parkhurst was implemented. This required that pupils undertook their assignments by learning from textbooks given to them by their teachers. An exhaustive analysis of the adoption of these active methods should be carried out in order to investigate how these methods were implemented, how the teachers reacted, and if the pupils enjoyed them and felt motivated. Both of these didactic experiments had been abandoned by the end of the 1920s.

In a very famous pupil diary, *The Diary of Kostia Riabtsev*, which concerned the school year 1923/1924 and was published in 1928, the ironic description is a representative case of how these innovations were received:

Our school is introducing the Dalton plan. It is a system according to which the schoolworkers [*teachers, in Russian shkrapy*] don't do anything, and the pupils still have to learn. At least I've understood so. There will be no lessons now, but the pupils will be given assignments. These will be given for a month, we can do them both at school and at home, and as soon as they are ready, we present them in the laboratory [*rather than a normal classroom*]. In each laboratory

there will be a 'schoolteacher' who is a particular specialist in his matter: in mathematics, for example, there will be Almakfish, in social science Nikbetozh, and so on. They are the spiders and we are the flies (Ognev, 1925, 7).

The pupil further describes the teachers' and the pupils' disorientation as the new laboratory did not have a desk. This method probably required better teacher training than it was possible to offer Soviet teachers. In any case, in the context of political and economic change at the beginning of the 1930s, different decisions about elementary schools – published in 1931 and 1932 – marked the end of experimentation and the return to a traditional way of learning that was based on subjects and discipline. Stalinist schools aimed to train future specialists to allow the planned industrialization of the country and the development of a planned economy.

Active educational methods were also to be found in other educational institutions, an example being the out-of-school activities of the Pioneer Organization 'V.I. Lenin'. This structured all activities in sections, to educate children in discipline, obedience, and a collective life that promoted Communist values.

A great number of colonies opened in Russia between 1918 and 1922, organized to address the problem of abandoned children that in post-revolutionary Russia assumed unprecedented proportions. These were also based on an active educational system. Children had to participate in everyday activities and work in handicraft laboratories (Caroli, 2004). In the first version of the Soviet film *Road to Life* (*Putevka v zhizn'*, 1931). by the film-maker Nikolai Ekk (1902–1976). which was dedicated to the reeducation of abandoned children and young offenders in one of these colonies, John Dewey appears on the screen to narrate the introduction, summarizing the film's content, which was set at the beginning of the 1920s:

Ten years ago, every traveler in Russia came back with the stories of the hordes of wild children who roamed the countryside and infested the city streets. They were the orphans of soldiers killed in the war, of fathers and mothers who perished in the famine after the war. You will see a picture of their old road to life, a road of vagabondage, violence, thieving. You will also see their new road to their new life, a road constructed by a brave band of Russian teachers.

After methods of repression had failed, they gathered these children together in collective homes, they taught them cooperation, useful work, healthful recreation. Against great odds they succeeded. There are today no wild children in Russia.

You will see a picture of great artistic beauty, of dramatic action and power. You will also see a record of a great historic episode. These boys are not professional actors. They were once wild children, they once lived in an actual collective. You will also see an educational lesson of the power of freedom, sympathy, work and play to redeem

the juvenile delinquent; a lesson from which we too may learn (Bowen, 1962, 5).

Huge reforms were made so that homeless children could be assisted and educated. Several colonies that were based on work offered a solution to this new educational problem. Shatskii, Makarenko, and other educators created hybrid models that mixed American experiences of educational and social work with Communist pedagogy.

### **3. Dewey's *Impressions of Soviet Russia***

In 1928, John Dewey visited the Soviet Union as a member of the American Society for Cultural Relations with Russia. This unofficial trip, which was made by twenty-five American educators, included the editor of the journal *School and Society*. Dewey's views about Soviet education appeared in several articles published over the following years, and in 1939 a book entitled *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World: Mexico — China — Turkey* was reprinted. Very critical about the educational system, Dewey was at the same time quite positive about the political system, observing that «Communism, if one judges from impressions that lie on the surface in Leningrad, lies in some remote future» (Dewey, 1929/1964, 47).

In the third chapter, he observes that «propaganda is education and education is propaganda» and that «propaganda and education» are identified by Soviet pedagogues (ibid., 71). Of the different aspects that Dewey observed as being oriented towards American liberal attitudes, it is important to consider three of them, in order to understand his comparative approach to the Soviet educational and school system: these are the condition of childhood, the public system of Soviet schools in relation to family education and its ideological content, and reception of the 'project method'.

Concerning the first aspect, Dewey observed in Leningrad, as many foreign visitors did, that «even the 'wild children' who have formed the staple of so many tales have not disappeared from the streets of the large cities» (ibid., 55). Besides cultural institutions, he also had the opportunity to visit an orphan asylum, which was unlike any he had previously seen because children:

...were not lined up for inspection. We walked about grounds and found them engaged in their various summer occupations, gardening, bee-keeping, repairing buildings, growing flowers in a conservatory (built and now managed by a group of particularly tough boys who began by destroying everything in sight). making simple tools and agricultural implements, etc. (ibid., 57).

From this perspective, Dewey presents the evolution of Shatskii's educational experiment, from constitutional democrat at the beginning

of the century (when he had contact with the Settlement movement and founded a colony inspired by Tolstoyism in Moscow) to Communist «as symbol of the social phase of the entire Soviet educational movement» (ibid., 75-76). He is aware of the fact that

those reforming and progressive endeavors which were hampered in every possible way by the Tsar's régime were actively and officially promoted by the Bolshevik régime, a fact that certainly influenced many liberal intellectuals to lend their cooperation to the Bolshevik government (ibid., 77).

Concerning the second aspect, Dewey describes the educational and school system, with some comparative details, in two central chapters of his work, titled *What Are the Russian Schools Doing?* and *New Schools for New Era?* The function of the school is «to create habits so that persons will act coöperatively and collectively as readily as now in capitalistic countries they act 'individually'» (ibid., 74). According to his impression, schools are «the arm of the Revolution» because they connect education with the formation of a new cultural attitude.

Dewey observes that one of the most important pedagogical innovations is «the technique which has been worked out for enabling teachers to discover the actual conditions that influence pupils in their out-of-school life», because this implies an important effect on the whole of family life. He remarks on the first part of the educational system, dealing with children from three to seven, and summer colonies, which were aimed to replace the family role, the parents being engaged in the industrialization process, and he concludes that «there are many elements of propaganda connected with this policy, and many of them obnoxious to me personally» (ibid., 86). Indeed, the increase in public schools was in general connected with a new conception of family education, and Dewey observes that «what is going on in Russia appears to be a planned acceleration of this process» (ibid., 85). Finally, concerning the 'complex method', Dewey deepens the concept of «socially useful work» as a criterion to determine the value of Kilpatrick's 'project method' used inside Soviet educational institutions (colonies and schools). and, although his impression doesn't correspond to reality, he argues:

That which distinguishes the Soviet schools both from other national systems and from the progressive schools of other countries (with which they have much in common) is precisely the conscious control of every educational procedure by reference to a single and comprehensive social purpose (ibid., 83).

In the chapter devoted to education, *A New School for a New Era?*, he underlines that the main idea of the underlying reform is connecting schools with social life. For the first time «there is an educational

system officially organized on the basis of this principle» (ibid., 88). He observes also that the American influence, rather than that of Tolstoy, was on the whole predominant. The central place of human labor in educational curricula was evident in the organization of the curriculum. Dewey underlines that the 'complex method' should be intended as a method that involves «a united intellectual scheme of organization» and that it was connected with the concept of auto-organization of children, which was adopted by another well-known educator, Moisei M. Pistrak, and other pedagogues, but was considered artificial in American schools. Dewey continues:

In view of the prevailing idea of other countries as to the total lack of freedom and total disregard of democratic methods in Bolshevik Russia, it is disconcerting, to say the least, to anyone who has shared in that belief, to find Russian school children much more democratically organized than are our own; and to note that they are receiving through the system of school administration a training that fits them, much more systematically that is attempted in our professedly democratic country, for later active participation in the self-direction of both local communities and industries (ibid., pp. 98-99).

The Soviet educational system was a «going concern: a self-moving organism». Nevertheless, he concludes that he felt humiliated that the liberal principles of progressive education were incorporated more in Soviet schools than in American ones, and that American teachers could find models in Russia of schools where progressive democratic ideas were completely embodied.

## **Conclusion**

Analysing some elements of Dewey's reception is important for the history of transnational education, because his ideas met very different political contexts, and his methods were therefore adapted to differing school systems. Nevertheless, comparing Dewey's reception before and after the Russian Revolution of 1917 indicates, on one hand, a very deep interest in progressive education and in its innovations and, on the other hand, a different degree of political openness toward these foreign innovations in post-revolutionary Russia and before the advent of Stalinist totalitarianism.

The advent of Stalinist schools at the beginning of the 1930s meant a return to the Tsarist culture of education, with strong discipline and traditional learning strategies based on teachers' authority. During the Cold War, there was a strong attack made on Dewey, and his impressions of Soviet Russia were considered from a political perspective. In 1952, the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* cut down the size of



the article on Dewey, and he is described as «a reactionary bourgeois philosopher and sociologist» who worked «in the interests of aggressive policies of the government of the USA». Moreover, he is charged with «spreading racial obscurantism, amorality, unscrupulousness», and is condemned for using education «as a tool to indoctrinate capitalism on the one hand, to foment hatred of Communism on the other», being «an ideologist of American Imperialism (and) a violent enemy of the USSR» (Brickman, 1960, 85).

It goes without saying that the translations made of Dewey's works corresponded to each phase of reception. In 1968, *Liberty and Culture* (*Svoboda u kul'tura*) was translated and from the 1990s, some other works have also been translated into Russian, the most recent example being *Democracy and Education* (*Demokratiia i obrazovanie*, 2000).

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## Dewey, Democracy, and Malaguzzi's vision for the Schools of Reggio Emilia

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**ABSTRACT:** Malaguzzi often refers to Dewey as one of the 'founding fathers', one of the threads weaving the warp, one of the cornerstones of a much larger building. In defining the value of these connections Malaguzzi explicitly refers to activism, creativity and mediation between individuality and society. Central in his vision is the need to connect individual and social dimension, build a culture and society able to embrace both, to work for the common good while respecting individuality. The quest for a 'new individualism' is strong in Dewey as well, together with the need for qualified participation. While the questions are mostly similar, this article aims at establishing whether the answers are too and whether a direct link can be traced between these two thinkers. Dewey lived a long and productive life, he died at 92, and left an incommensurable contribution to pedagogy. His work had a wide audience in post-WW2 Italy and became an essential reference for pedagogists. His philosophy left lasting traces throughout the Reggio Emilia Approach (REA). This article aims at investigating whether Dewey's vision of democracy and the role of schools in fostering it, inspired Malaguzzi and the schools in Reggio Emilia. Malaguzzi's idea of democracy is a complex, multidimensional vision, that imbues all his work and writings since the post-war years. Contrary to Dewey, Malaguzzi does not dwell on philosophical argumentation, he often talks about it, but almost never in connection with the official governmental form and never defines it. Our investigation is therefore not easy. It implies deconstructing the concept of democracy to find clues and indicators leading back to Dewey's vision. We will base our analysis on Dewey's texts available to Malaguzzi and compare them with his own writings, focusing on two main aspects: participation and the relation between individual and society.

**KEYWORDS:** Participation, Individualism, Community, Reggio Emilia Approach, Freedom of Intelligence

### The background

Dewey and Malaguzzi: a philosopher and a visionary practitioner, one the product of American society, the other an Italian communist, born 61 years apart. The consensus is that Dewey's socio-constructivist, hands-on approach and the role of arts, presented through the writings of influential intellectuals in post-WWII Italy, influenced the REA (Dodd-

Nufrio, 2011; Lindsay, 2016). Yet, looking closely, another truth emerges. Dewey and Malaguzzi consider education and schools as the key to unleash humankind true potential, democratic education as the only way to achieve a truly just society. They also share the inability to accept compromises and second-best solution when it came to core principles, to quality education and participation. On this common sensitivity a dialogic exchange across time and space could take place.

First step will be to consider Dewey's writings and theories could have been known to Malaguzzi. Then we will focus on content analysis and look for direct links.

The widespread diffusion of Dewey's corpus started from 1946 thanks to Ernesto Codignola, the publishing company La Nuova Italia and a group of Florence-based pedagogists. In 1945 Ernesto Codignola opened in Florence the *Scuola-città* Pestalozzi, inspired by Dewey's pedagogical idea. Malaguzzi knew Codignola personally, at least since 1948, through their common work for the Italian Commission of FICE. (Cagliari *et al.*, 2016)

Intellectuals in post-war Italy were looking for inspiration to build a new and democratic society after 25 years of Fascist regime. Florence became a forge for a new society and a new school with Dewey's philosophy at its core. This intellectual effort had two major avenues, on one hand translation of Dewey's corpus, starting from his political works, and on the other hand the construction of new approaches for society, pedagogy and didactics based on development of Dewey's original work. The first work printed were political essays: 1946 *Liberalism and social action*; 1949 *Individualism Old and New*, then came the pedagogical works: 1949 *School and Society* and *Democracy and Education*; 1950 *Education Today* (translated by Lamberto Borghi) and *Experience and Education*. After 1951 the translation of philosophical works takes place. New translations and publishing will go on until 1974 (Cambi, 2016).

Codignola and his group opened a critical dialogue with Dewey, that lasted well into the '70s with the writings by Lamberto Borghi, who had met Dewey directly in the US during the war. The effort was grounding a new Italian society and school on Dewey's rational rigor, that had humankind promotion holding both individual and society at large on equal stand. Dewey was a key reference in so far as he recognized the central role of school «quale agenzia di formazione culturale e di pensiero critico per tutti e luogo generativo di un vivere sociale autenticamente democratico» (Cambi 2016, p. 91).

While Florence, with Codignola and Borghi, was the most important center of research on Dewey, the debate spread across Italy (Cambi, 2016). Malaguzzi was aware of it and both translations of Dewey's work and Borghi's *Educazione e autorità nell'Italia moderna* (1951) had wide diffusion across Italy and in Reggio Emilia.

## 1. Democracy and participation

According to Dewey: a democratic form of government is not a goal per se. «Universal suffrage, recurring elections, responsibility of those who are in political power to the voters, and the other factors of democratic government [...] are not a final end and a final value. They are to be judged on the basis of their contribution to end.» (Dewey, 2010, p. 86). This 'end' is democracy, i.e.

primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, [...] is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory. (Dewey, 2001, 91)

A relational view of democracy, with communication, interconnections, and mutual influence at its core and each person individually contributing to this collective meaning making. Education is the enabling factor «for the participation of every mature human being in formation of the values that regulate the living of men together» (Dewey, 2010, p. 86). Exclusion from participation is a global loss because it implies that certain individuals will not contribute to this shared idea of society. (Simpson & Stack, 2010)

The idea of participation and cooperation, of plurality and ensemble, is often part of Malaguzzi's work. This participation has 3 pillars: Children, Families and Staff. In 1993 *Una carta per tre diritti* Malaguzzi defines it as a «pedagogy of participation and research» in opposition to a «pedagogy of self-sufficiency and prescription» (Malaguzzi 1993).

Participation and democracy [...] are specific forms of a life of relations, of personal and collective organization, that can be upheld with legislation, and that as part of the unfolding of history and culture derive from continuous and open processes. [...] Participation grows and safeguards democracy and liberty, liberty and democracy grow and safeguard participation. A need for change and faith in the possibility of change as the promotion of a higher and more just degree of individual and collective wellbeing are the elements that justify participation and make it move forward. (Malaguzzi, 2016, p. 355)

The connections with Dewey are striking: democracy and participation as a way to organize relations among mankind; institutional aspects as means not ends; democracy and participation as intertwined phenomena, one cannot exist without the other; participation as the way to ensure change, justice, and society development, with real contribution of each and every man and woman.

Dewey sees the role of education as enabler of individual participation into a global social discourse. Education must become a social endeavor carried out in institutions open to society and social changes. There is a silver lining connecting individuals, groups, social life, and community (Simpson & Stack 2010). A connection unavoidable since «organization, as in any living organism, is the cooperative consensus of multitudes of cells, each living in exchange with others.» (Dewey, 1999, 52).

It is often taken as a given that Malaguzzi's ecological vision develops fully in the '80s and '90s with other theoretical references (Bateson, Bronfenbrenner) and gives a prominent role to relations between all-beings and their environment. Yet many of the relational choices for the schools were made much earlier.

But if we reflect on our experience [...] we can say all the connections we were aware of, all the connections we were capable of, have been realized in some way as part of our organization. [...] the pair-teacher and our attempts to connect up things that traditionally were not connected; [...] connections between environments that contain a connected vision of systemic space [...] our attempts to go out often [from school] [...] the issue of social management [...] the very idea of the child we have tried to bring forward is a highly inter-related idea (Malaguzzi, 2016, 330)

These choices date back to the 1960s and 1970s, finding their official recognition in 1972 *Regolamento delle scuole comunali dell'infanzia* (Rulebook for municipal schools) approved by the municipality. The Pedagogy of Relations that so clearly identifies the REA, is already defined in the '70s: «...they (children) feel a stimulating solidarity alive around them [...] the wider fabric of this new pedagogy of relations, which sparks off communication and relations between the world of adults and children, between school and outside» (Malaguzzi 1971, *ibid*, p. 180). There is much of Dewey in this vision of a school as a living organism, that finds its deep meaning in communication and relations, «a community open to cultural exchange with families, and with the world of nature and man» (Malaguzzi, 1968, 131).

## 2. Participatory practices

For meaningful participation to unfold, tools are needed. For Dewey, participation is the way to obtain «liberty and justice for all»<sup>1</sup> by giving voice and dignity to everyone. Equality in opportunities to contribute becomes paramount. «if democracy has a moral and ideal meaning, it is

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<sup>1</sup> USA – Pledge of Alliance - «I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States and to the Republic for which it stands one Nation indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all» (1923 version)

that a social return be demanded from all and that opportunity for development of distinctive capacities be afforded all» (Dewey, 2001, p. 127). Individuals need to develop at the fullest of their potential, not only for their wellbeing, but also as a benefit to society at large.

Malaguzzi shares the connections between pedagogy and society improvement, since pedagogy of relations «resides in more than merely meeting but in genuine integration of parents, teachers, children, citizens and neighbourhoods, in a renewed and richer vision of society» (Malaguzzi, 1970, in Cagliari *et al.* (eds) 2016, p. 172).

In Dewey's utopian schools, all adults in society share teaching responsibilities (Dewey, 2010). Just as in Reggio Emilia new relations with parents need:

a school that is consciously open to all hypotheses for freeing and renewing methods and aims; and an organized social context that is equally open not only to recognizing but also to stimulating new concepts of citizens' powers, presence and contributions, and ways and times for discussing and resolving common affairs democratically.' (Malaguzzi, 1969, in Cagliari *et al.*, 2016, p. 144)

Parents are involved in Reggio Emilia pre-school system since its beginning. Malaguzzi believes that this involvement must be constructed through debate and qualified participation. He starts training/informative sessions since the '50s. In his experience, only with time spent together sharing a dialogue, contributions by participants become concrete, connected, meaningful and to the point. Not only are meetings organized to involve parents in pedagogical issues, but participation is monitored and urged (Cagliari *et al.*, 2016).

The parallel is with Dewey's concept of 'freedom of intelligence' as a base to grant personal happiness while contributing to society. The contrast is with 'freedom of action', a mystified idea of individualism that causes chaos and not full citizenship. The role of education in achieving and protecting democracy is creating independence of mind, ability to inquire, i.e., 'freedom of intelligence'. (Dewey, in Simpson, Stack, 2010).

As parents approach the educational services, their first concern is to their child. It is the school responsibility to integrate this dialogue into a wider environment and network. «Children's behavior is discussed and analyzed [...] not merely described but investigated by joining elements of biology and psychology with social elements and viewing each child as a living part of a system of relations, not a neutral entity» (Malaguzzi 1971, in Cagliari *et al.*, 2016, p. 181-182). Only families that are aware of schools educational choices can truly collaborate. This sharing has to be done on practical, concrete issues, such as school projects to foster collective knowledge and exchange. «An itinerary capable of orienting the walking together and growing together that are essential elements in an education that is equally reassuring and liberating»(Malaguzzi

1969, in Cagliari, *et al.*, 2016, p. 134). School as a community experience, that shares everything with families, not only positive aspects, but also problems, questions, difficulties, in order to trigger real dialogue and exchange and give to everyone the possibility of growing together.

Key tool for this task is documenting processes «using entrance halls, walls, larger spaces and areas with freedom of movement as privileged places for encounters [...] as surfaces for permanent exhibitions» (ivi, 229). Since the beginning Malaguzzi requires that teachers, in pair, prepare working plans and working notebooks as a «moment of great importance, of reflection, and of cultural and professional enrichment» a community effort «in which everyone participates: teachers, auxiliaries, parents, members of *Comitati di scuola e città*, members of the *Equipe Pedagogico-didattica*» (Malaguzzi, 1973, 192). These, together with children's productions and teachers' notes of children in action are traces that support teachers' reflection and designing (*progettazione*). Collegiality, reflexion, shared responsibility: «by making it participatory in this way, we give the work of education the meaning of a genuine practice of solidarity, of inter-subjective proposals and research, of effectively checking our own personal action, and of a project turned to social ends» (Malaguzzi 1984, 354).

School staff as a whole, without distinction among teachers and auxiliary is in a path of constant reflection and growth, through analysis, trainings, professional development (officially scheduled and mandatory for all) and meetings. The idea is empowerment, abandoning «attitudes of supposed inferiority, the feeling of being incapable or daunted» (Malaguzzi 1972, 188), because everyone has to contribute to granting quality educational experiences for children.

Comitati di Scuola e Città<sup>2</sup>, established in the Seventies are a tool to facilitate community participation to the schools. Open to every citizen, they are a forum for dialogue and frank discussion, to compare points of view, take common decision and make schools more credible. People participates because they feel their contribution matters.

Decreti Delegati (DD)<sup>3</sup> define parental involvement in state school with a different approach, limiting participation to parents and teachers as such. Parents, within the school context, are presented as fragmented individuals, because they must leave behind their other identities as workers and parts of society. This is unacceptable to Malaguzzi and his ecological vision. Parents can elect representative, consult the school only regarding their child, be informed of school choices. There is no mandatory request to create a common educational

<sup>2</sup> They are now called *Consigli Infanzia-Città* and their role is more of citizenry involvement into educational issues, than of social management of a single school. Elections take place every 3 years

<sup>3</sup> A set of 6 Laws passed by the Italian parliament from July 1973 through May 1974, that regulated national school system from pre-school to high school, excluding university



experience embracing children, families, and staff, and no common discussion or reflection on how to build new and democratic school. DD loudly proclaim freedom of teachers and families from societal constraints, but that to Malaguzzi is not real freedom. For him it means loneliness and inability to be effective, the effectiveness that can only be achieved through collective thinking and actions. (Cagliari *et al.*, 2016) Hard not to see the parallel with Dewey's focus on 'freedom of intelligence' vs. 'freedom of action'.

Pillar of Dewey's democratic school is teachers' direct involvement in decision making. Teachers should have a more direct saying in curriculum, methodology, pedagogical approaches. Only in a school where democratic principles are implemented through shared responsibilities between teachers, administrations, managers, and parents, can democratic ideas and mind frames be really passed on to future generation. Experiencing these principles first-hand is the only way to really 'learn' them. The idea that this should not be possible, due to teachers' incompetence, it is unacceptable to Dewey. As for citizens, only by participating and reflecting, can teachers become more aware and effective. «The system which makes no great demands upon originality, upon invention, upon the continuous expression of individuality, works automatically to put and to keep the more incompetent teachers in the school» (Dewey, in Simpson, Stack, 2010, 101).

In Malaguzzi's vision all the individuals who revolve around the school are competent: Children, Parents, Auxiliaries. Yet, just as for Dewey, a special competence is requested to teachers. As orchestrators of common participation, teachers in Reggio Emilia must acquire a new mindset.

Teachers must possess a habit of questioning their certainties, a growth of sensitivity, awareness, and availability, the assuming of a critical style of research and continually updated knowledge of children, an enriched evaluation of parental roles, and skills to talk, listen, and learn from parents. Responding to all of these demands requires from teachers a constant questioning of their teaching (Edwards *et al.*, 1998, 69)

### **3. Individualism old and new, subjectivity and the role of community**

Democracy and participation imply a balance between the right and desire of individual and the need of society. This balance differs across time and space: every culture struggles to find its own. Is it possible that two men, so different in time, culture, work path, could share a similar vision of this balance?

Malaguzzi is a communist and a distinct believer in community and society, in doing things together, in focusing on the group rather than

on the individual child. And yet he looks for a middle ground between two theoretical framework that do not convince him. On one hand the soviet school does not respect individuality enough; on the other hand, the western «myth of individuality», overlooks the social component of learning and does not imply «respecting the individual.» (Malaguzzi in Cagliari *et al.*, 2016, 267).

Dewey was also critical of the official American value system, especially individualism. Individualism in pre-industrial America was coherent with a community working together to build a new country. The open-frontier, and the equal opportunity it granted, ensured fairness. Working for one self-improvement meant contributing to society as a whole. In corporate America this individualism becomes a fight for the survival of the fittest. In big business America freedom and equality are not granted because individual opportunities and starting points are too different. Old values are distorted to suit the new reality and become barriers to the development of new ones. «there is a perversion of the whole ideal of individualism to conform to the practices of a pecuniary culture. It has become the source and justification of inequalities and oppressions» (Dewey 1999, 17).

The way out is supporting individual potentiality for development, that evolves and takes shapes in relation with the conditions and the challenges faced. These connections will trigger new imaginative way to contribute to society and produce free culture for all. (ivi, 94)

Dewey considers the term 'culture' as bearing two meanings: the personal intellectual life of each individual and «the type of emotion and thought that is characteristic of a people and epoch as a whole, an organic intellectual and moral quality» (ivi, 70). Without investment in the first, the second becomes poorer. Modernity tends to separate «...society into a learned and an unlearned class, a leisure and a laboring class» this separation is matched by the one «between culture and utility in present education» (Dewey 2001, 263). Education as personal intellectual growth only for the few, and as technical training for the working class. Dewey strongly disagrees. The ability to think, desire, imagine, and reflect, should be the key object of education for everyone, in order to achieve 'freedom of intelligence' and grant comprehensive participation (ibid.).

Education needs to change deeply, and rethink not only its practice, but also its theories. The path to find this new individualism implies involving every member of society in planning and organization, encouraging reflexive processes, moving away from a society made of few intellectual who plane and mass of people who execute.

Given this framework, Dewey is against presenting children and teachers with pre-made material, because it does not stimulate personal approach and reflection. Yet, he is also against laissez-faire in education because individuality is not a matter of feelings and impulses. True individuality, the ability to take control of one's own life, reacting autonomously to external events, can be achieved by children only

through learning by doing, facing real life problems and working together with peers, teachers and other adults to find solutions (Dewey in Simpson, Stack 2010).

This been said, Dewey calls for a new individualism, but individualism nonetheless. Yet is this so far from Malaguzzi's vision? For him, a classroom is made of children, not as an undetermined group, but one by one, an association of children, each of them with his/her own abilities, desires ideas. (Malaguzzi, in Edwards *et al.*, 1995) He appears critical of the soviet approach to education.

Even though Vygotsky, Luria and Leont'ev [...] have recovered the value of the environment in forming individuals, and the value of educators and education, they then conclude by saying that children's education is necessarily inter-psychic, and that it only becomes intra-psychic later. [...] I am always highly suspicious when a theory spells out two different situations in the individual. We cannot cut an individual into pieces (Malaguzzi, in Cagliari *et al.*, 2016, 267).

This fracture should be recomposed, both for Dewey as for Malaguzzi

saying that intra-psychic education only comes later, so that children only become the agents of their own achievements and experiences at a later point, [...] is highly suspicious to me. [...] This is to injure the capacity of the individual for autonomous and creative self-organization (ibid.).

This is true in Dewey as well. He opposes individualism detached from the social contest: respecting the individual is granting everyone equal opportunities for growth and not letting individual conditions determine your destiny. The changes in 20th century society impose a change in creeds and values, «to validate and embody the distinctive moral element in the American version of individualism: Equality and freedom expressed not merely externally and politically but through personal participation in the development of a shared culture» (Dewey 1999, p. 25). Malaguzzi's vision refuses the ideological dichotomy and is coherent with Dewey, because it respects the individual within a society. An individual who is liberated through his/her effective participation in collective wellbeing.

I believe an acceptable cultural matrix can only be found in a dialectical relation between inter-psychic and intra-psychic education and not in trying to conciliate the two. In an education where we are capable of self-producing, self-organising and self-making as participants in our own destiny and in our own education, in a context that is permanently dialectical; and [in an education that] avoids all risk of mythically exalting the individual on the one hand and an exaggerated collectivism on the other (Malaguzzi in Cagliari *et al.*, 2016, 267).

Each child has its own personality and a right to a personal space, in constant relation with the others and the environment. It is a culture of subjectivity and not individuality, a culture of democracy and, of free choices, but in constant dialogue with others. This balance between individual and society can be achieved by helping children developing an individual personality by interiorizing «different points of view, different points of life, different life choices, transpositions of life, transgressions» (Malaguzzi in Cagliari *et al.*, 2016, p. 399). Children are protagonists of their education, but within a community that supports their growth. Educators should not try to predetermine and establish children's emergent characteristics and use those as a guide in the learning process. Children change over time and are a never-ending discovery. Freezing our impression of them regarding educational achievements could determine a self-fulfilling prophecy. Imposing on them social role models and gender roles without critical thinking, undermines their ability to define themselves fully.

...an educational project that makes children and young people the holders of incommunicable knowledge and disciplines, represses their spirit of criticism and research, shapes them for passive conformism, authority, discipline, sexual repression, competitiveness, and diffidence towards active responsible social relations; it is a project that is incapable of leaving traces of a culture connected with tradition and memory, or of using research and experimentation as tools for knowledge and discovery, for the promotion of education, culture and society.' (Malaguzzi in Cagliari *et al.*, 2016, 216)

Just as Dewey, Malaguzzi does not want to forget who we are, the core of our culture and our tradition, but to find it we need to move away from dogmas and preconceive ideas and look at reality with an attitude of research and experimentation, i.e., Dewey's application of scientific methods to social sciences. What does this imply for schools? Schools should construct and reconstruct through vital dialogue and exchange, with people inside and outside schools and children, trying to be critical and not self-referential. To grant this, school contents must evolve along with society, opening to new needs and suggestions, ready to sustain scrutiny by a large movement, «constantly updated and strengthened through interpreting the needs of children, families and society (inseparably woven together), and creating [...] shared responsibility [...] examining and guaranteeing them in a constant democratic regeneration» (Malaguzzi 1975 in Cagliari *et al.*, 2016, 233).

## **Conclusions**

This article investigates Dewey's legacy on the REA, focusing on participation and the relationship between individual and society, two aspects that are often overlooked.

Malaguzzi knew Dewey since the 50s both directly through widely available translations of Dewey's work and indirectly, thanks to contacts with Codignola and his group. Faced with the need to rebuilt Italian society after a 20-years dictatorship, this article argues that Malaguzzi, together with many other educators, found his inspiration first and foremost in Dewey. This fits with Malaguzzi's profile as independent thinker and voracious reader, able to distance his stand from mainstream communist views.

While there is no direct prove for this inspiration, because Malaguzzi references to Dewey are too general and broad, the review of their stands brings compelling evidence. Dewey's views on participation, on individual and on society leaves lasting traces in Malaguzzi's writings and ideas since the mid-Fifties, and not just in general terms, but deep in the structural pillars of his mindset. The quality participation asked for by Dewey is incarnated in the REA, since «it recognizes and enacts the needs and rights of children, families, teachers and school workers, actively to feel part of a solidarity of practice and ideals» (Malaguzzi in Cagliari *et al.*, 2016, 353)

Yet it is in the vision of individualism within a society context and the dialogic approach between these two dimensions where Dewey's legacy is more evident. Individuals as protagonists of their own destiny, but within a 'solidarity', a social contest respectful of everyone's contribution, able to enhance personal research and foster 'freedom of intelligence'. This issue could be further investigated, analyzing the connections between Dewey's and Malaguzzi's esthetic of learning. An analysis of Malaguzzi's earlier writings and unpublished REA materials could prove his debt toward Dewey further.

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## Philanthropy and Education. An Alternative between Generosity and Democracy?

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**ABSTRACT:** *In his recent study on social inequalities entitled Capital et idéologie, Thomas Piketty dedicates some interesting observations to the role of philanthropy in financing and directing education both in advanced capitalist countries and in less developed economies. Essentially, according to Piketty, philanthropy paradoxically helps to deepen inequalities in three ways: subtracting large sums of money from the finances of countries; contributing to the strengthening of a meritocratic ideology that celebrates success and blames the losers; financing schools and universities according to the neo-liberal model in a fundamentally undemocratic way. Starting from this, the article intends to offer some further reflections focusing mainly on the following four questions: A) What cultural and ideological vision explains the success of philanthropic foundations established in the United States and often committed to funding educational projects? B) To what extent can or should philanthropic Anglo-Saxon experiences be exported to Europe, in a cultural and regulatory context other than that of the United States? C) How is philanthropic capitalism affecting the development of education, both in the United States and in Europe? D) Does the philanthropic model pose a threat to democratic education? To conclude, a reflection on whether the 'America Syndrome' or, more precisely, on whether the mutual influence between US and European or Italian education policies and models in particular, should also pay attention both to the role and possible developments of philanthropic financing.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Democracy, Education, Foundations, Philanthropy, Philanthrocapitalism*

### Introduction

In his recent study on social inequalities entitled *Capital et idéologie* (2019), Thomas Piketty dedicates some interesting observations to the role of philanthropy in financing and directing education both in advanced capitalist countries and in less developed economies. Essentially, according to Piketty, philanthropy paradoxically helps to deepen inequalities in three ways: *i)* subtracting large sums of money from the finances of countries; *ii)* contributing to the strengthening of a meritocratic ideology that celebrates success and blames the losers; *iii)*

financing schools and universities according to the neo-liberal model in a fundamentally undemocratic way.

All things considered, Piketty's remarks appear to be extremely reasonable, based on solid economic foundations and, moreover, capable of illuminating an aspect that often tends to go unnoticed when discussing education as a means of combating inequality. For these reasons, this article intends to offer some further reflections focusing mainly on the following four questions: *i*) What reasons explain the success of philanthropic foundations established in the United States and often committed to funding educational projects? *ii*) To what extent can or should philanthropic Anglo-Saxon experiences be exported to Europe, in a cultural and regulatory context obviously other than that of the United States? *iii*) How is philanthropic capitalism actually affecting the development of education, both in the United States and in Europe? *iv*) Does the philanthropic model pose a threat to democratic education and to democracy itself?

Without claiming to be exhaustive on any of these points, this article aims above all to offer some stimulus on a phenomenon that tends to go unnoticed or to be judged positively in a superficially hasty way. As we will try to make clearer, thinking about philanthropy means going against commonplaces.

## **1. Reasons for the success of philanthropic foundations in the USA**

### *1.1. A mixture of material and cultural factors*

Investigating how and why people donate to charity requires considering several factors and more than one level of analysis (Jung *et al.*, 2019; Maurrasse, 2020). As has been observed, philanthropy must be studied taking into account the micro-level of the actors (obviously with their personal characteristics and roles), the meso-level represented by the social relations of the macro-level and the macro-level constituted by society, with its structures and configurations (Barman, 2017). It is therefore only from a perspective that strives not to be reductionist that we can attempt to say why some societies encourage more philanthropy than others (Wiepking, 2021).

Having said that, it can be observed that the reasons for the success of philanthropic foundations in the United States are to be found in a mixture of material-economic and cultural-ideological factors.

On the one hand, one should consider that large-scale institutional charity offers immense economic benefits providing extremely generous tax cuts, to the point of being a considerable form of tax avoidance. It is therefore not surprising that very rich individuals invest large parts of their profits in philanthropic works. In doing so, they gain immediate economic benefits. As one can easily imagine, the political powers that have an eye on the donors, facilitating their affairs in various ways and thus contributing to further increasing their wealth.



On the other hand, one has to remember what the founding father of modern sociology Max Weber pointed out back at the beginning of the 20th century: the Puritan and broader Protestant ethic strongly encourages enrichment. And to this must be added the fact that the 'giving back' of part of one's possessions to the community is a typically Anglo-Saxon concept. Moreover, the role of so-called 'prosperity theology' is important (Wrenn, 2020; Lee, 2007). Radicalizing the Protestant view, prosperity theology considers donations as a way of increasing one's individual wealth.

However, it would be wrong to assume that cultural-ideological factors are entirely attributable to the peculiarities or current radicalisation of the Protestant religion. Indeed, the role played by political traditions in the narrower sense should not be underestimated. Particular attention should be paid to the fact that, in the words of McGoey (2016, 234), «the emergence of well financed, politically powerful behemoths is rooted in a political philosophy that cautioned power of states to plan or develop economic growth». In the United States, radically anti-statist thinkers along the lines of Hayek have been and are still very successful. It is therefore not at all strange that philanthropy has been and still is looked upon with a benevolent eye, and interpreted as an alternative to public spending that is less bureaucratic and closer to the freedom of enterprise and the much-vaunted American values.

### *1.2. Philanthrocapitalism*

Philanthropic foundations play such an important role in the current US economy and society that the term 'philanthrocapitalism' has become popular, or at least is quite frequently used by analysts and scholars. Inaugurated a few years ago by circles of *The Economist* (Bishop, Green, 2008), the term could at first sight be defined as a way of «solving public problems through private means» (Bishop, 2013). However, such a definition runs the risk of not capturing the new features that are introduced into the framework of institutionalised charity. More precisely, when speaking of philanthrocapitalism, it must be borne in mind that philanthropy is closely linked to market logic and that philanthropic activity itself is understood as an extension of entrepreneurial action (Dodgson, Gann, 2020).

What has just been said means that the alleged instincts of generosity are not anti-economic or even irrational, but are on the contrary placed at the service of the pursuit of extremely rational ends, even from an economic point of view. On the one hand, philanthrocapitalism pursues economic interests through charity and, on the other, it applies market models to charity itself. Moreover, it must be stressed that this is not a minor and unimportant phenomenon. Philanthrocapitalism has been and is central to the processes of economic reorganization carried out by mature capitalism. And this trend is likely to intensify both in the near and more distant future. Because of the increased economic

problems and the need to finance research for treatments and vaccines, the current pandemic has given further impulse to philanthrocapitalism and has thus also raised the visibility of billionaires doing charity work. On reflection, there is no reason to think that things will change substantially when it comes to dealing with the economic and social recovery after the end of the health emergency.

## **2. Could/Should philanthropic Anglo-Saxon experiences be exported to Europe?**

Except for Great Britain, which even before Brexit was a case more similar to the US, the European cultural and regulatory context is on the whole very different from the US. As is well known, the European social model has been characterized by the centrality of the welfare state in an essentially universalist perspective (although with no small differences between northern and southern countries, where families often compensate for welfare deficiencies). However, it is also well known that in recent decades there has been a crisis in the classical welfare model almost everywhere. As a consequence, reforms in favor of patronage and philanthropy are also being introduced in Europe in recent years, so that everything suggests that the future landscape will be quite different from the present one (Carnie, 2017). So, what can be said about Europe at present? All things considered, one may define the European situation as currently contradictory, with conflicting trends. On the one hand, in the European context there is a greater awareness of the role of the state, which is still seen as regulating a range of services both public and private. On the other, the European institutions are encouraging the transnational growth of voluntary work and foundations which invest in the social sector and in education.

However, the European Union seems to lack a strong, unified vision, basically accepting the differences between countries. One could say that this is a special case of a much more general problem, namely that of Europe's substantial political weakness. A relatively recent political creation that has for far too long focused mainly on ensuring competition and price stability, the European Union still seems scarcely capable of taking seriously even issues that affect its own future. All this, however, does not prevent us from asking an ironic or perhaps bitter question in this specific case: does it make sense to pose the problem of the 'next generation' without really caring who will actually direct the educational policies of the various members of the European Union?

## **3. How is philanthropic capitalism actually affecting the development of education in the US?**

It can be said that the most knowledgeable scholars have now understood the impact of philanthropic capitalism on education in the United States. Business groups and mega foundations nowadays have already become the «power brokers of neoliberalism» (Baltodano, 2017; Saltman, 2018), deeply influencing educational policies and other cultural spaces.

In particular, it is necessary in this respect to take into account a dynamic that is not easy to grasp immediately. Indeed, the very fact that large sums of money are showered on charter schools' results in the further deterioration of the social perception of public education. And this does not only represent a new victory of the private over the public, nor does it only have to do with images and ideas spreading in society. More precisely, we are dealing with a dynamic that also has an objective side and that applies in general since, by focusing on specific sectors or what with Pierre Bourdieu we can call 'fields' to change<sup>1</sup>, wealth profoundly alters their structures and their internal and external connections.

Understanding this, one inevitably looks with a different eye at the activism shown by some very famous billionaires such as Zuckerberg and Bezos with respect to the education sector. Such 'generosity' cannot be without consequences, as the particularly interesting case of Bezos shows very well. As mentioned above, since philanthrocapitalism applies market models to charity, Bezos' idea is to digitalise schools considering the child and the young student as customers to be satisfied, thus following the same logic applied successfully to Amazon.

#### **4. How is philanthropic capitalism affecting the development of European education?**

As mentioned above, the European situation is varied. To give a few examples, in Germany voluntary associations and foundations are particularly important in the health sector. In France, they mainly deal with social services and sport. The British case is particular. In the United Kingdom, the voluntary and philanthropic sector plays an important role in education and non-profit organisations administer all universities and 22% of all primary schools. In Italy, volunteers and foundations are very important in the social services sector, but it should be borne in mind that non-profit organisations run 20% of pre-schools. And this, incidentally, should also lead to reflection on the idea of bringing forward compulsory schooling to include pre-schooling.

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<sup>1</sup> Though pertinent, the reference to bourdieusian sociology of fields necessitates clarification. While Bourdieu (2012) believed that states retain a governing role in relation to the fields, current philanthrocapitalism shows an opposite tendency. Mega foundations aim to a certain extent at replacing states, in fact trying to deprive them of some of their traditional prerogatives.

Finally, it is to be considered that, due to the pandemic, 2020 was an exceptional and probably transitional year. As things stand, much of the energy and attention of the political sphere has understandably been devoted to the health emergency and possible developments remain to be seen. Moreover, we are at a time when states are having to invest huge sums to get out of the crisis triggered by the pandemic, and it is highly likely that they will welcome and facilitate greater involvement of philanthropic foundations. This also seems to apply to a country such as Italy with an essentially family-based capitalism and an economic structure made up of many small and very small enterprises (Piaggio, 2019; Pierri, Piaggio 2019). In fact, by travelling, exporting and developing international relations, the younger members of the Italian entrepreneurial class are currently proving to be sensitive to the examples visible abroad. Added to this is the fact that the Italian economy is not without its fragility and could therefore be a particularly propitious terrain for investments by large transnational foundations.

#### **4. Does the philanthropic model pose a threat to democratic education?**

Before considering whether the philanthropic model might pose a risk to democratic education, it is important to note that the model appears in some respects to pose a risk to democracy itself. Three reasons can be summarized in this respect:

- danger of lack of democratic control. While citizens can act on their governments through voting, the ‘philanthrocapitalists’ are in a position to exercise an enormous, uncontrollable power. Although billionaires and foundations spend money that could or should have gone to taxes, they are exempt from any accountability.
- danger of subjugation of political power. Regardless of whether they are right-wing or left-wing, ruling classes tend to be overly influenced by personalities with enormous wealth.
- danger of further weakening of democracy in the world. Mega foundations are now free to deal as equals with international and intergovernmental organisations. And, incidentally, public opinion tends to regard those foundations as public institutions.

As one can easily understand, these are very serious dangers that deserve careful consideration both by the political powers and by the public at large. However, while politics itself tends to be subservient, even ordinary people seem unable to see the problem properly. And this is not surprising, considering the fact that the philanthropic model can count on a considerable strength from the ideological point of view. By emphasizing the importance of wealth and free enterprise, it comes completely within neoliberal market ideology and can thus enjoy great credibility in common perception. What is more, the philanthropic model can make use of the rhetoric of altruism and generosity (Arrigoni

*et al.*, 2020). And this, on closer inspection, also brings with it problems related to privacy and to users' overconfidence in utilizing new technologies and social networks. Since ordinary people see the generosity of the owners of Microsoft, Amazon or Facebook widely publicized, they are probably unconsciously predisposed to think that those 'modern-day heroes' are offering their services free of charge to all and sundry for the common good.

Obviously, it is wrong to make excessive generalisations. The concept of philanthropy can be applied to very different situations and philanthropy itself has a very long history (Vallely, 2020). My subtitle provocatively asks whether there is an alternative between generosity and democracy. It must now be specified that such an alternative does not necessarily exist, but is likely in the case of organised philanthropy combining 'altruism' and investment.

It is therefore not difficult to understand the threats to democratic education. Schools are already at a crossroad today: should they submit to the demands of the market or should they give new life to their democratic vocation and thus also to the goal of equality (Baldacci, 2019)?

If organised philanthropy seems to increase inequalities (Callahan, 2017) and inequality itself appears as the «amniotic fluid» of philanthrocapitalism (Dentico, 2020), all Europeans who care about education should realise what is at stake. However, things would be no better even in the case of a hypothetical equality-oriented philanthropic model. The educational model pursued by 'philanthrocapitalists' focuses on self-entrepreneurship and individual performance, leaving no space for goals which are central for democratic education such as social cohesion, overcoming the dichotomy between manual and intellectual work, critical thinking, etc.

## Conclusion

To conclude, it may be worth mentioning some considerations by Linsey McGoey (2016, 233-4) that many may probably share:

Philanthropic donors don't like being told how to spend their money, and to some extent they have robust grounds for defensiveness: freedom from political intervention is what makes philanthropy a check on rather than a handmaiden to political power. But when philanthropy is used as a loot bag for well-financed hedge funders and private equity buccaneers, as in the case of US education, then more restrictions are warranted. If the donors kick up a fuss, one could easily repeat back to them what they often stipulate to their own grantees: a close watch on how dollars are spent is essential to ensuring the creation of 'social value'. And if you don't like the rule, then don't give the money. Pay the taxes instead.

While somehow maintaining faith in a high idea of philanthropy, and therefore emphasizing the importance of philanthropy's independence from political power, McGoey strongly hopes that political power can gain greater control over foundations in order to prevent abuses and distortions particularly present in the education sector. However, I believe that we should be less timid or perhaps idealistic than she is and state firmly that our societies and economies need more tax justice and more resources from the taxation of large assets and profits.

However, it is important to bear in mind that it would be an illusion to expect philanthropy to solve the problems of social justice (Reich, Cordelli, 2016; Reich, 2018). On the contrary, as a not insignificant number of scholars have come to realise, philanthropy seems to exacerbate tendencies now in place, introducing market logic into such fundamental areas as the right to health, food, environmental protection and, most importantly for us, education.

Especially in view of the above, reflecting on the 'America syndrome', i.e., the circulation of ideas, models and ideologies from one side of the Atlantic to the other, also means not allowing ourselves to be caught unprepared by a way of financing goods and services of public interest that has already produced profound changes in the United States.

As a sociologist, I can conclude by saying that this is not an easy conceptual challenge. One has to go beyond both the usual distinction between public and private, dealing with a case where the private party acts as if it were the public party and even manages to reshape common sense in such a way. What's more, in all of this, it is also necessary to be able to look beyond the sociological conceptualisations of a 'gift', be they the classic ones that have become canonical (Mauss, 1924) or the much more recent ones that are in many ways powerfully critical of what exists (Godbout, Caillé 1992; Caillé, Grésy, 2014).

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## **Economic and Financial Education: New Multidisciplinary Scenarios**

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## Economic and Financial Education for a Global and Sustainable Citizenship and Lifelong Learning

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**ABSTRACT:** *Thanks to many experts and scholars in the economic, financial, sociological, pedagogical, and political fields, sensitivity and attention to economic and financial literacy and skills have greatly increased, especially in recent years. Nevertheless, the results from international (OECD, UN, UNESCO, World Bank) and national (Bank of Italy, MEF, MUR, FEDUF, ONEF) surveys still confirm many critical issues in Italy, in skills both of children and of adults. Although the trend is towards an improvement, it is still little. In Italy, the debate, also at the political and institutional level, was lively and aimed at sharing the heterogeneous experiences achieved to try proposing coordinated initiatives. In addition to difficulties in finding organic and comprehensive information, we face with complexity deriving from multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, as the pedagogical/educational perspective is overshadowed or it is not while promoting only technical disciplinary skills. UN 2030 strategy and 2018 EU Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning focused on also mathematical and entrepreneurial skills, indispensable for making decisions and acting in every life contexts. Recently in Italy, many economic and financial education projects had activated, especially in upper secondary schools, but also in lower secondary and primary schools and in adult education too. The participation of associations and banks made a significant contribution, but still these are heterogeneous and non-systemic projects. What are the reasons why financial education struggles to produce satisfactory results in Italy? What are the prospects for establishing, even in our country, a culture for global and inclusive citizenship, based also on economic and financial education, in a lifelong learning way? In this paper we aim to start from the analysis of the literature and documentation available, nationally and internationally, and from a field survey, to provide an understanding key based on mainly critical-hermeneutical and heuristic research methods. From such analysis, we aim at suggesting pedagogical proposals towards curricular and interdisciplinary economic and financial education both in the school cycles and in adult education, towards human development and individual and social well-being, in a lifelong, lifewide and lifedeeep learning perspective.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Economic and Financial Education, Human Development, Global Citizenship, Inclusion, Lifelong learning.*

## Introduction

Studies and research in Economic and Financial Literacy by academic scholars spread around the end of the Eighties of the past century (Aiello, Bombi, 1987).

Nevertheless, it is recently, also due to considerable economic, social, cultural and demographic changes, to the long-lasting global crisis and to ever new typologies of poverties, that economic and financial literacy has been recognized by scholars, institutions and policy makers as crucial both for individuals and for societies.

### 1. Economic and Financial Literacy and Education

Economic and Financial Literacy concerns «all the specific processes of personality and character education, aimed at the acquisition of skills, competences, knowledge and attitudes with direct relevance in the economic and financial sphere» (Rinaldi, 2007).

Economic education and the skills to use money are essential for an active and aware citizenship. It must be learned from early age, to guarantee social inclusion and autonomy skills, and must be undertaken, improved, updated lifelong and lifewide. Furthermore, economic and financial choices have significant effects on individual and collective well-being. Positive and appropriate choices can help improve the production, but not only. Therefore, it is now essential to reflect on which economic and financial education is to offer within the school and university curricula, but also in adult education (formal, non-formal and informal education), to promote a lifelong, lifewide and lifedep learning perspective, for an effectively active, inclusive and global citizenship. The modern conception of economics was developed in the period of the Industrial Revolution, in particular, due in particular to the metaphor of the invisible hand by Adam Smith. Smith (1776) was also among the first to recognize the value of education/training of the person for the well-being and wealth of a nation. Since then, economic thought has evolved following different paths and multiple theories. Therefore, giving a univocal and definitive definition of economics is impossible: every economist has given his own definition. Robbins (1932) said that Economy «studies human behavior as a relationship between aims and poor means to alternative uses».

Finance is a discipline that studies the cash flows among:

- individuals (personal finance),
- businesses (corporate finance) and
- States (public finance).

There are many different study areas in Finance, such as Cognitive or Behavioral Finance (from a psychological/cognitive point of view) and

Ethical Finance (which involves respect for ethical-moral and social values and criteria).

Other issues came into highlight:

- Economic literacy concerns how people act on the market.
- Financial literacy is the knowledge that every person should know to manage money effectively and to build wealth.

The concept of financial capacity/Capability has recently been introduced as a person's capacity to effectively use the knowledge associated with financial literacy, that is, skills, behaviors. Currently, considering the data relating to the Italian population, both students and adults, it is still important to spread economic and financial literacy above all to stimulate a wide consciousness about it and, therefore, interest, motivation and active, participated and deep learning. Consciousness is necessary to «encourage» and motivate people, especially adults, to undertake literacy courses, and then education and training. Financial education is, according to OECD:

The process by which financial consumers/investors improve their understanding of financial products and concepts, can make informed choices, know where to go for help/support, and to implement other effective actions to improve their financial well-being (OECD, 2005, 13). Financial education is the process by which individuals improve their understanding of financial products and concepts; and through information, instruction and/or objective advice develop the skills and confidence to become more aware of financial risks and opportunities, to make informed choices, to know where to go for help, and to take other effective actions to improve their financial well-being and protection (OECD, 2005).

Since 2005, the OECD has issued specific recommendations aimed at identifying the tools for training intervention, suitable for the growth of financial education, based on the specific situation of each country, the different population groups concerned, and the involvement of operators (Chionsini, Trifilidis, 2010). The peculiarity of financial education is that its benefits are produced over a medium and long-term time horizon. Since then, therefore, activities aimed at financial education have intensified. In 2011, OECD/INFE stated that «financial literacy is a combination of the awareness, knowledge, skills, attitude and behavior necessary to make sound financial decisions and ultimately achieve individual financial wellbeing» (OECD/INFE, 2011, 3). Knowledge, behavior and attitude will be the three main areas that will be measured in many surveys carried out by OECD/INFE since 2012 (Atkinson, Messy, 2012).

## 2. Surveys and Guidelines about Financial Literacy

In 2014, the Global Literacy Survey of Standard & Poor's Ratings (Klapper *et al.*, 2016) was carried out. Over 150,000 adults were interviewed in more than 140 countries. Main results stated that one in three adults was financially literate. Women, the poor and those who are less educated are more likely to have low financial knowledge, even in countries with well-developed financial markets. Italy's results are lower than the average achieved by EU countries. From the Report about Italy, 256 different training activities emerge from 206 different institutions, showing themselves fragmented and external to any type of school planning.

In Italy, a *Charter of Intent* was signed in 2015 among the main institutions dealing with economic and financial education, such as the Bank of Italy, the Italian Banking Association, the Presidential Council of Tax Justice, the Guardia di Finanza, the Revenue Agency, Equitalia SpA, Unioncamere, National Association for the Study of Credit Problems, APF - Body for the Holding of the Financial Promoters Register, Foundation for Financial Education and Savings, Rosselli Foundation, together with Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Economy and of Finance, at the Court of Auditors. The agreement provides for the establishment of a coordination for a project proposal of: economic education, financial education, fiscal education and economic legality, addressed to teachers and students of the Italian school with the aim of fostering economic citizenship.

In 2017, the National strategy for financial, insurance and pension education was launched through art. 24bis of Law no. 15 of 17 February 2017, *Urgent provisions for the protection of savings in the credit sector*. Again in 2017, the *Salva Risparmio* decree established the Committee for financial education. The Guidelines within the *EduFinCPIA Project towards a National Plan for Financial Education for Adults* by National Technical Committee for the Promotion of Financial Education in CPIAs in 2018 were drawn up with a view to making adults aware of the fact that, by emancipating themselves through new skills in the financial literacy sector, the necessary premises are also fulfilled for acquire those key skills for lifelong learning necessary for a critical and responsible citizenship, with objectives, therefore, that go beyond the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills in financial education towards a full education for active and conscious citizenship, to make appropriate and autonomous choices in the economic field and for an ethical use of 'money'. The project involves the design and realization of specific teaching learning units for adults enrolled in CPIAs.

In SY 2017/18, 90 CPIAs participated in the project, 90 were the financial literacy courses and about 1800 adult students, increased in SY 2018/19.

From the 2018-2019 school year, the *Edufin Docenti* project was also launched which, considering teachers as adults within the family that

must be educated, provides for a continuing education activity for CPIA teachers on aspects of economics and finance.

The reference competences framework includes:

- Knowing how to manage liquidity and payment instruments (Money and the value of assets; Inflation and the macroeconomic context; Payment instruments)
- Knowing how to manage the family budget and plan (The sources of income; The management of the family budget; Financial planning)
- Knowing how to save (Savings; Sustainable consumption)
- Knowing how to invest (Investments; Financial markets and investment instruments)
- Knowing how to apply for a loan and manage one's debts (Apply for a loan; Manage one's debts; Creditworthiness)
- Knowing how to deal with retirement using social security tools (The social security system; The planning of retirement savings; The forms of supplementary pension)
- Knowing how to recognize the risks of life and insure (The identification of the risks that are run over the course of life and insurance; The essential characteristics of an insurance contract; The market for insurance products and the rules to follow)
- Knowing how to get information (Identify reliable sources of information and obtain adequate documentation before signing a contract; Consult with experts; Protection of the saver and the consumer)
- Knowing how to use technology and new digital tools (FinTech, DigiTech, InsurTech) (Digital banking and financial tools; Cyber risk; Digitized insurance tools - InsurTech)
- Knowing how to recognize a scam and know how to defend oneself (Financial scams and illegal abuses; False shortcuts to enrichment: gambling, investing in high-risk financial assets, deceptions of the mind – heuristics and behavioral traps; Insurance scams; The protection of personal data and other regulatory obligations).

The Committee recommends that the initiatives of financial education will include a wide range of skills to be achieved in order to respond adequately to the educational/training needs of adult citizens, also with interventions to be developed over time.

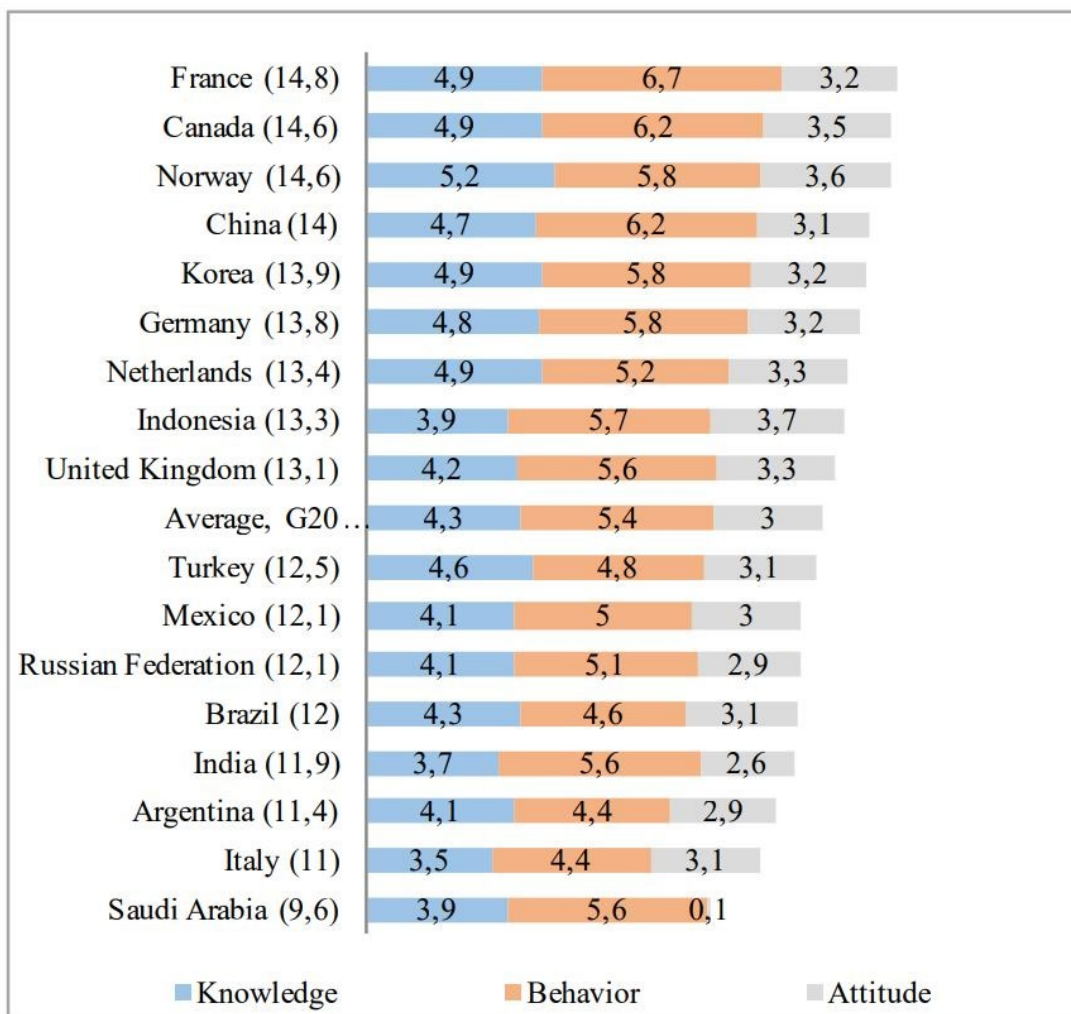
The process will include: detection of the training needs of the target group to which the initiative is directed; definition of the contents based on the analysis of the context, the objectives to be pursued and the detection of the prerequisites; organization of homogeneous groups; personalization.

In 2020, the Bank of Italy carried out, before the pandemic, the second Survey on Literacy and Financial Skills of Italians (IACOFI), included in the activities of the International Network for Financial Education (INFE), active in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

(OECD), using a questionnaire created for 26 countries (OECD/INFE, 2020).

The first survey was carried out in 2017. From the data obtained from it, the overall levels of financial literacy are highest in France (in particular for the adoption of positive financial behaviors), in Canada and in China, the only countries that obtain an average of more than 14 (together with the country guest, Norway). India, Argentina, Italy and Saudi Arabia instead achieved a score below 12, placing themselves among the last places. Also in this survey, Italy occupies the last positions, once again the need to improve national strategies to address these issues is reconfirmed (Refrigeri, 2019).

**FIG. 1.** Average score in the three survey areas



Source: OECD INFE Report on Adult Financial Literacy in G20 Countries, 2017.

The measurement of financial literacy in Bank of Italy Survey in 2020 is based on the OECD method too, that is an overall indicator from the scores achieved for three sub-dimensions:

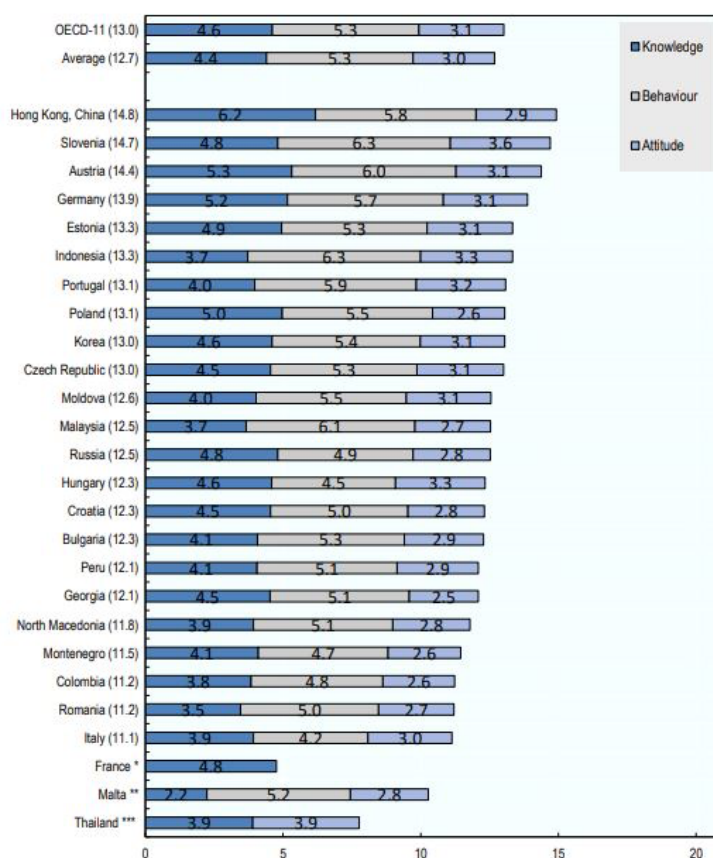
- knowledge (understanding of basic concepts),
- behavior (financial management) and
- attitude, or the orientations with respect to the long term.

The Italian sample was approximately 2,000 adults, aged between 18 and 79 years.

The level of financial literacy achieved by Italians in 2020 raised, on average, a score of 11.1, on a scale ranging from 1 to 21, a result in line with the first survey of 2017, with some small differences in the sub-dimensions: there is a slight increase in knowledge compared to a slight decrease in behavior and even less in attitudes.

The 26 countries participating in the survey in 2020 have an average score of 12.7. OECD countries achieve an average score of 13.

**FIG. 2.** Average financial literacy scores sorted by total financial literacy scores (given in parenthesis)



Note: Peru, attitude score - one of the three statements included in the financial attitude score for Peru uses different wording to assess long term attitude to money.

\* France has gathered data only for financial knowledge in this round of data collection.

\*\* Malta asked only 4 knowledge questions and 7 behaviour ones, so overall, knowledge and behaviour scores are not comparable. These scores are not comparable given that the Malta survey was carried out in between OECD's 2016 and 2018 survey cycles, hence the Malta survey research instrument was designed on a draft OECD questionnaire, which was not yet finalised. The next Malta survey is planned to sync with OECD's next survey cycle.

\*\*\* Thailand has used the 2015 OECD Toolkit and the behaviour score is thus not comparable.

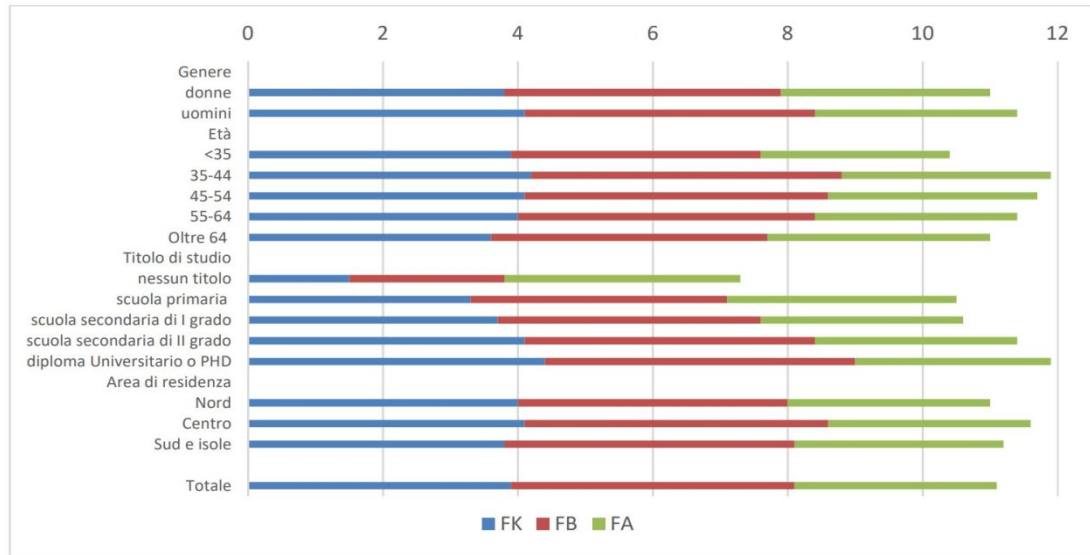
Averages exclude France, Malta and Thailand. The OECD-11 average includes the OECD member countries in the sample for which there is data, which are: Austria, Colombia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Korea, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia.

Source: OECD.

As regards the analysis of the results with respect to the socio-cultural-demographic characteristics of the interviewees, the results improve with the increase in the degree obtained: graduates reach higher levels of literacy.

Financial literacy is highest between the ages of 35 and 44; it is low in people under the age of 35, also because young people in Italy leave their family of origin late. The literacy of men is confirmed to be higher than that of women, especially in the South and the Islands.

**FIG. 3.** *Average financial literacy scores in Italy in 2020*



FK = Conoscenze finanziarie; FB = Comportamenti finanziari; FA = Attitudini finanziarie. Source: Bank of Italy.

However, Italians are aware that they do not have great financial knowledge and often underestimate them, especially women. What is important to point out is that, however, many of the people with low scores are often in charge of family budget management. So, how to engage, encourage, and involve adult low skilled people to take part to economic and financial education? And where and what?

The guidelines for the implementation of financial education programs for adults, created by the Committee for the coordination and planning of financial education activities in 2020, constitute a very well articulated reference document, with the aim of acquiring «Knowledge and financial skills for everyone, to build a peaceful and secure future». As we have also seen for the Bank of Italy survey, a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes is proposed that can support the decision-making process at the basis of every financial choice. These guidelines, therefore, represent an excellent tool for indications and support, with very ambitious objectives, which, however, as already partially observed by the same committee, before they can be applied widely, a period of widespread consciousness and deep is required to ensure that a large swath of the adult population is available, involved and motivated to undertake financial education courses throughout their life.



### 3. Pedagogical Perspectives

As current critical issues we can point out the fragmentation of education and training and the lack of evaluation about the effectiveness of each intervention. It is therefore essential that scholars, policy makers and institutions will act in a more integrated, organic and systematic way, even in a trans-disciplinary way. The European Parliament (2018) launched the *New Skills Agenda for Europe Agenda 2030*, in continuity with the 2014-2020 program New Skills for New Jobs:

Every person has the right to quality, inclusive education and lifelong learning, in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and successfully manage transitions in the labor market, knowing how to apply the basic mathematical principles and processes in the everyday context of the domestic and working sphere (for example in the financial sphere) or take financial decisions concerning costs and values.

Pedagogists have now recognized the importance of economic and financial education as part of its institutional, as well as theoretical, interest in the educational and training needs of society. Among the objectives for sustainable development to be achieved it is also necessary to think about systemic changes (UN, 2015). Pedagogy, therefore, in achieving the objectives defined by the EU and UN agendas, is called to play a fundamental role in the design of educational curricula aimed at learning specific skills in the environmental, economic and social fields (Dozza, 2018).

Among the most important problems for what concerns the economic and financial education of adults, there remains the difficulty in intercepting them, in attracting their interest and motivation, introjecting the awareness of the importance of this educational and training area. It will therefore be necessary to expand, at least for an initial phase, communication, through the multiple tools made available by the mass media, the network and social media, precisely to raise widespread and deep awareness of these essential educational needs. A crucial area for quality economic and financial education is the initial and in-service training of teachers of all levels. Currently, this is a very significant challenge and commitment, as teachers are among the 40% of Italian adults who do not have basic financial knowledge (Refrigeri, 2017). Even in the universities, economic and financial education is included in sporadic initiatives by individual teachers and researchers because it is not institutionally provided for in the curricula except as it is consistent with the course of study. As far as we know, there are no formal involvement of teachers of single-cycle degree courses in primary education sciences, but limited to scientific-didactic agreements concerning financial literacy or economic and financial education. Such activities include what has been realized within the Department of

Humanities, Social Sciences and Education of the University of Molise (Refrigeri, Palladino, 2021, 31).

Furthermore, it is crucial that scholars and policy makers reflect on which type of welfare should be refunded and developed. Zamagni notes that:

Recent studies by the London School of Economics have convincingly confirmed that a welfare system that places public institutions at the center lacks both superficiality and paternalism, even causing immobility. It grasps social needs marginally and often belatedly, has excessive difficulties in conceiving and implementing new response systems, often showing traits of inequity; in fact, subjects with fewer cultural, intellectual and economic resources generally find it difficult to fully exploit the possibilities that the system allows. Finally, it feeds a welfare conception of welfare, since it favors irresponsibility and spreads the conception of the person as a user and assisted, rather than as a protagonist of civil society (Zamagni, 2011, 162-63).

The new concept of welfare, therefore, will also have to provide for a profound empowerment of every citizen and an active and aware participation of it also «about the forms of procurement and use of the financial resources available» (Refrigeri, 2020, 15).

## **Conclusions**

The increasing complexity in all areas of contemporary life, not least the economic and financial one, requires education tasks aimed at promoting a new way of thinking and acting. Economic and financial literacy is recognized as essential for being able to consciously participate in the economic choices of one's life.

Economic and financial literacy, therefore, can be an instrument of social inclusion and the fight against inequality.

The concept of economic citizenship is linked to the achievement of global citizenship and sustainable development goals, and of a new relationship between culture and politics, economy and pedagogy (Malavasi, 2018).

Pedagogical proposals require to plan systemic and organic economic and financial education within curricular, extra-curricular and interdisciplinary paths, in order to create a global citizenship, active and inclusive, for individual and social well-being, in a lifelong, lifewide wide and lifedep learning perspective and pursue deep and effective changes in culture. There is still a long way to go, but opportunities for dialogue such as today can represent steps forward, for example in building and increasing collaboration networks between experts and scholars in a real and effective multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary way.

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# Why don't Women Knit their Portfolio? Gender and the Language of Investor Communication<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study investigates whether (lack of) familiarity with the language of investor communication may explain the well-documented gender gap in financial decision-making. Economists have demonstrated that men and women exhibit different financial behavior. Women are less involved in the stock market than men, and if they are, they take fewer risks. This gender gap in financial decision-making is generally explained by differences in risk tolerance (i.e., women are more risk averse than men) and financial literacy (i.e., women are less financially literate than men). Using an interdisciplinary framework that combines insights from Behavioral Economics and Finance and Cognitive Linguistics, this study applies the concept of familiarity, which has been extensively used to explain apparent paradoxes in people's financial behavior, to the language of investor communication. By analyzing the metaphors used in two websites –one in Italian and one in English– targeting unexperienced investors, the study finds that they come from the same conceptual domains, namely, war, health, physical activity, game, farming, and the five senses. As these domains refer to worlds that are predominantly and (stereo)typically masculine, the study concludes that the language of investor communication may give rise to feelings of familiarity and belonging among men while creating feelings of distance and non-belonging among women.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Familiarity, Gender Gap, Investor Communication, Critical Discourse Analysis, Conceptual Metaphor Theory*

## Introduction

Marketing practice and research demonstrate that words influence consumers' attitudes and behaviour by creating conceptual associations that may have a different impact on men and women. For instance, while women liked *Diet Coke* (Coca Cola's first ever sugar-free cola) from the moment it entered the market in 1983, the Coca Cola Company persuaded men to consume its zero-calorie cola only with the release of *Coca Cola Zero* in 2005. Obviously, 'diet' evokes associations with a (stereo)typical female world, in which she is overly concerned with her

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<sup>1</sup> A more comprehensive analysis of the topics discussed in this article can be found in Boggio *et al.* (2018).

weight, looks and physical attractiveness. 'Zero', instead, apparently evokes associations with a stereotypical male world, in which he is rational, tough and self-confident (Avery, 2021). This shows that the words used to describe these two different types of zero-calorie cola influence consumers' attitudes and behavior by creating conceptual associations that may have a different impact on men and women. Why is gendered marketing regularly used to advertise non-financial consumer products, but it is seldom used to describe financial products? On the one hand, because the household, not the individual, has traditionally been the relevant unit for saving and investing decisions (Donni, Chiappori, 2011). On the other hand, the financial industry is required to meet several demands from the law as well as financial supervisors when it comes to providing guidance and suggestions for investors, and these demands rarely take financial consumers' heterogeneities into account. Moreover, both academic research and financial industry studies don't go beyond documenting that men and women exhibit different financial behavior for three main reasons: 1) women have a lower level of financial literacy than men, 2) they participate less in the stock market than men, 3) and if they do participate, they take less risk.

Starting from these premises, this study, first of all, hypothesizes that the language used in investor communication may have a different impact on men and women. Then, it investigates the metaphors used in the language of investor communication and the likelihood of these metaphors to create feelings of belonging or distance depending on whether the financial consumer is a man or a woman. If that were the case, the gender gap in financial decision making could be explained by differences not only in knowledge and risk preferences but also by the degree to which men and women identify with the language of investor communication.

## **1. Theoretical background**

The present study is grounded in two main theoretical frameworks, i.e., familiarity and investing and Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The concept of 'familiarity' was first theorized by the economist Robert Merton (the 1987 Nobel Prize Winner in Economic Sciences). and it has been used ever since as an explanation for some stylized facts in investment behavior. For instance, it has been used to explain why investors hold much more stock from their home country –the so-called home bias in portfolio choices – diversifying less than would be optimal according to finance theory (Huberman, 2001; Baker, Ricciardi, 2014). If the existing economic research into the role of familiarity in influencing investor behavior focuses on the effect of geographical/physical closeness, this study's hypothesis is that preference for the 'familiar' could manifest itself also through language. If words evoke metaphorical associations

that create psychological closeness, they may have an impact on investor behavior which is similar to the effect created by geographical/physical closeness. Therefore, drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory, this study investigates the possibility that investor communication evokes a sense of familiarity for one of the genders, but not for the other.

Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980) pioneered the notion that metaphors, far from being merely decorative devices, underlie the conceptual systems according to which human beings think and act. In other words, metaphors make our thoughts 'visible', and, at the same time, they are the lens through which we view the world around us. This is why Lakoff and Johnson called them 'conceptual' metaphors. Particularly in abstract fields, such as finance, we use, often unconsciously, metaphors to make concepts and actions 'imaginable', more vivid, and thus easier to understand. INVESTING IS WAR, for instance, is a conceptual metaphor in which meaning is transferred from a concrete source domain, WAR, to a much less concrete target domain, INVESTING. This conceptual metaphor may result in many different linguistic realizations, or metaphorical expressions, of which the ones below are only two examples.

- The stock market is a battlefield. [EN]
- *La finanza [...] è un campo di battaglia che può decretare vincitori e vinti.* [IT]

The linguistic realizations of the conceptual metaphor INVESTING IS WAR are cognitive instruments because the interaction between thoughts from the source domain and the target domain leads to new understanding (Charteris-Black, 2004). This understanding, however, is informed by ways of talking about and defining investment products, strategies and services which have been formulated and then uttered over and over again, such that, though they are conventional, they come to seem natural. As such, these 'natural' discourse practices (Fairclough, 1995) in the field of finance and investing, historically dominated by men (Crystal, 2003; Ferguson, 2008). may result as unfamiliar, and thus also as unattractive, to women.

## 2. Methodology

A conceptual metaphor analysis of two websites –one in Italian and one in English– targeting beginning retail investors was conducted in order to investigate the most common conceptual metaphors used in investor communication, and whether these metaphors could create feelings of belonging or distance depending on the gender of the reader. The two websites selected are the following:

- *Investire in borsa - corso pratico per principianti* [IT]<sup>2</sup>

- *The beginner's guide to investment* [EN]<sup>3</sup>

These websites were chosen for a number of reasons. First of all, they are websites that potential first-time investors get to read. Second, they scored highest on Google when searching, in each of the two languages, for a combination of the words indicating 'beginner' and 'investment'. Third, being beginners' guides to investment, they try to avoid the highly specialized vocabulary of the field as much as they can. Finally, even though written in two different languages, they are more or less comparable lengthwise, and content-wise they give inexperienced investors similar guidelines. The starting point in the analysis was to identify and retrieve, through a manual search, metaphorically used words and phrases in the two websites. Therefore, it was checked whether words or phrases were used in their literal meaning or in their contextual – i.e., metaphorical – meaning, that is whether they described in more concrete and vivid terms an aspect of financial investing. Although the Pragglejaz Group's (2007) Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) was not explicitly employed, their extremely detailed procedure to identify metaphorically used words in discourse admittedly informed the way the metaphoricity of each expression found was established. Finally, each individual case of metaphorical expression was reported as such, noted with its immediate context (i.e., surrounding words) and eventually classified based on the conceptual source domain it belonged to.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

Table 1 below shows the number of metaphorical expressions found in the two chosen websites targeting beginning retail investors.

**TAB. 1.** *Summary statistics*

	Italian	English
Number of words in text	3,761	3,735
Number of metaphorical expressions found	92	148

Interestingly, all the metaphorical expressions found, both on the website in English and on the website in Italian, could be grouped into six different conceptual source domains: *Physical Activity*, *Health*, *War*, *Game*, *Farming* and *The Five Senses*. These source domains are listed

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.windoweb.it/dossier/investire in borsa/guadagnare in borsa 1.htm](http://www.windoweb.it/dossier/investire%20in%20borsa/guadagnare%20in%20borsa%201.htm); retrieved 25-9-2013.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.which.co.uk/money/savings-and-investments/guides/the-beginners-guide-to-investment/>; retrieved 26-9-2013.



hereafter with some examples<sup>4</sup>:

- Physical activity intended both as speed or motion (i.e., going fast/slow or up/down) and (de)construction (i.e., building or destroying):

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY		
	speed/motion	(de)construction
Italian	... fino a quando i titoli non danno chiari segnali di <i>un'inversione di rotta</i> . (... until your shares give clear signs of a <i>turnaround</i> .)	... può <i>far lievitare</i> un titolo. (... it can make a stock price <i>rise</i> .)
	... non è detto che i titoli <i>marcano</i> con utili a due cifre. (... shares not necessarily <i>march</i> on a double-digit profit growth.)	... ti <i>bruceresti</i> l'investimento al primo calo. (... you would <i>destroy</i> your investment after the first stock market drop.)
English	And while <i>riding out</i> the movements of the market, ...	How <i>to build</i> a successful portfolio ...
	A way <i>to steer around</i> the fluctuations in price of markets or assets is ...	... and ensure that your investments <i>are tailored</i> exactly to your needs.

- Health intended as both physical and psychological, including illness and death:

HEALTH		
Italian	Alcuni titoli hanno oscillazioni molto contenute ma altri possono essere più <i>nervosi</i> ... (Some stocks have moderate fluctuations, but others can be more <i>nervous</i> ...)	
	... i mercati sono <i>depressi</i> ... (... markets are <i>depressed</i> ...)	
English	... you may prefer <i>to drip feed</i> your money on a regular basis.	
	You have less time for your money <i>to recover</i> ...	

- War intended as physical violence (i.e., fighting). armed battle (i.e., a conflict) and military strategy:

WAR		
	fighting/conflict	military strategy
Italian	... è sempre molto meglio <i>mancare</i> un maggiore guadagno che <i>centrare</i> una perdita secca. (... it's always better to <i>miss</i> a greater gain than to <i>hit</i> a dead-weight loss.)	...le migliori <i>mosse strategiche</i> per investire in Borsa. (... the best <i>strategic moves</i> to invest in the stock market.)
	... come <i>difendersi</i> da questi rischi. (... how <i>to defend oneself</i> from these risks).	... compiere delle <i>manovre</i> sul mercato azionario. (... <i>to maneuver</i> in the stock market.)
English	When the credit crunch <i>hit</i> the following year ...	... you have to master the following four investment principles: <i>discipline, strategy, tactics and patience</i> .
	The investment market is <i>a battlefield</i> .	... <i>to maneuver</i> through investment rules.

- Game referring to games with rules (including sports) as well as games of chance (i.e., gambling):

GAME		
	games with rules/sports	chance-based games
Italian	... come fare a <i>vincere</i> contro il panico	Ma allora sì che <i>si gioca</i> ... e si corrono

<sup>4</sup> The English translation of each example in Italian is provided below the original metaphorical expression.

	da trading. (... how to <i>win</i> against trading panic.)	dei bei rischi. (But, in this case, you are <i>gambling</i> ... and you are taking big risks.)
	... desiderano <i>cimentarsi</i> in investimenti. (... they would like to <i>have a go</i> at investing.)	Non cercare di fare troppo il furbo ... rischieresti di <i>restare con un palmo di naso</i> . Don't try to be too smart ... you'll run the risk of <i>being very disappointed</i> .)
English	Investment can enable you to <i>match</i> or even <i>beat</i> inflation ...	Don't <i>bet on only one horse</i> .
	... inflation <i>is beating</i> the return on interest rates.	<i>How much risk</i> you think you're willing to take? No investment is <i>risk-free</i> .

- Farming referring to all the activities that need to be done to run a farm (i.e., growing crops, raising livestock, etc.):

	FARMING	
Italian	... e sperare che i titoli <i>diano i frutti attesi</i> . (.. and hope that your stocks <i>yield the expected benefits</i> ).	
	... non <i>mettere il carro davanti ai buoi</i> . (... don't <i>put the cart in front of the horse</i> .)	
English	If you want to <i>grow</i> your money, ...	
	... spread the risk and <i>do not put all your eggs in one basket</i> .	

- The five senses referring to human sensory experiences; namely, sighting, smelling, hearing, tasting, and touching:

	THE FIVE SENSES	
Italian	... <i>tastate bene il terreno</i> prima di decidere in quali titoli investire. (... <i>taste the waters carefully</i> before deciding which stocks to invest on.)	
	... forse i titoli <i>sentono odore di crisi</i> . (... perhaps your stocks <i>are smelling</i> the crisis.)	
English	Buying assets on a monthly basis is a means of <i>tipping your toe in the water</i> and monitoring your investments.	
	Listening to market predictions may <i>blur your vision</i> .	

Table 2 gives, for each conceptual source domain, the frequencies of the metaphorical expressions found whereas Figure 1 presents these frequencies graphically.

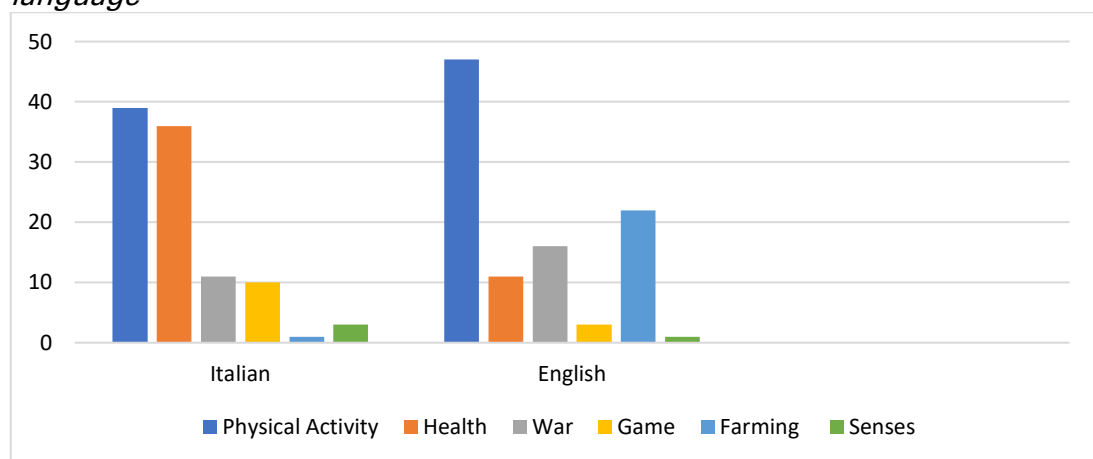
**TAB. 2.** *Metaphors by source domain, absolutes and proportions*

Source domains	Italian	English
Physical Activity <i>speed/motion</i> <i>(de)construction</i>	36 (39%) 34 2	69 (47%) 44 25
Health/Well-being	33 (36%)	17 (11%)
War/Conflict	10 (11%)	24 (16%)
Game ( <i>play/chance</i> )	9 (10%)	4 (3%)
Farming	1 (1%)	32 (22%)
Senses	3 (3%)	2 (1%)
Total	92 (100%)	148 (100%)

The chart shows that the metaphorical expressions found in the two

websites, written in two different languages, belong to the same six conceptual domains. Most important for the present study, it shows that the majority of these metaphorical expressions come from conceptual domains familiar to men and unfamiliar to women. How was this conclusion reached? Physical activity, health, war, game, farming and the five senses were categorized based on their gender familiarity by taking as a reference point the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974; henceforth cited as BSRI). a self-report questionnaire that asks participants how well 60 different attributes (adjectives) describe themselves. This list of attributes reflects the definition of masculinity (20 questions) and femininity (20 questions). and the remaining 20 questions are mere filler questions.

**FIG. 1.** *Metaphors according to their source domains, percentages per language*



The masculine and feminine attributes were chosen on what was culturally appropriate for men and women in the early 1970s, and the inventory was devised to tell what kind of gender role and individual fulfils and, most important, the level of androgyny of individuals. As part of the cultural transformation of the so-called second-wave feminism (Eckert, 2003). Sandra Bem, a professor of psychology at Stanford University, wanted to prove that women and men possess similar characteristics by testing the level of androgyny of individuals (i.e., their combination of 'masculine' and 'feminine' personality traits) and providing empirical evidence to show the advantage of a shared masculine and feminine personality versus a sex-typed categorization. Since the year the BSRI was published, decades have passed, and gender roles have changed. However, it was still valid at the turn of the century (Holt, Ellis, 1998). and it still is the instrument of choice in research on gender role orientation and perceptions. Therefore, it can safely be assumed that, despite trends towards egalitarianism in Western societies, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, essential imagery and metaphorical framing are still different between men and women.

According to the BSRI, women are assumed to be emotional, empathetic, caring and loving, supportive, cooperative and lacking

physical strength, whereas men are assumed to be rational and impassive, competitive, willing to fight and take risks, and possess physical strength. Therefore, Physical Activity, War and Game are source domains that correspond to conceptual systems that feel more familiar to men than to women. The decision to consider Health and Farming as source domains that are in a neutral position regarding gender was also made with an eye on the BSRI, and further linguistic evidence confirmed this decision. In particular, despite the large body of empirical research that supports the popular belief that there is a lack of expressiveness in relation to men's physical and emotional health issues, Charteris-Black and Seale (2010) demonstrated that both men and women talk about their health issues; what is different are the ways in which men and women talk about them.

As to the source domain of The Five Senses, linguistic evidence underscores the use of sensory metaphors across families of languages and cultures because they are more memorable –easier to retrieve from memory – than their semantic analogues. More specifically, sensory metaphors help express abstract concepts by linking them to direct bodily experiences with the physical world. For instance, calling an unfriendly person 'cold' suggests that, like a frosty winter, he or she is not very inviting (Akpinar, Berger, 2015).

**TAB. 3.** *Metaphors and their gender familiarity based on the BSRI, proportions*

Familiarity domain	Source	Italian			English		
		F	M	N	F	M	N
<i>Physical Activity</i>			39			47	
<i>Health</i>				36			11
<i>War</i>			11			16	
<i>Game</i>			10			3	
<i>Farming</i>				1			22
<i>Senses</i>	3				1		
Total		3%	60%	37%	1%	66%	33%

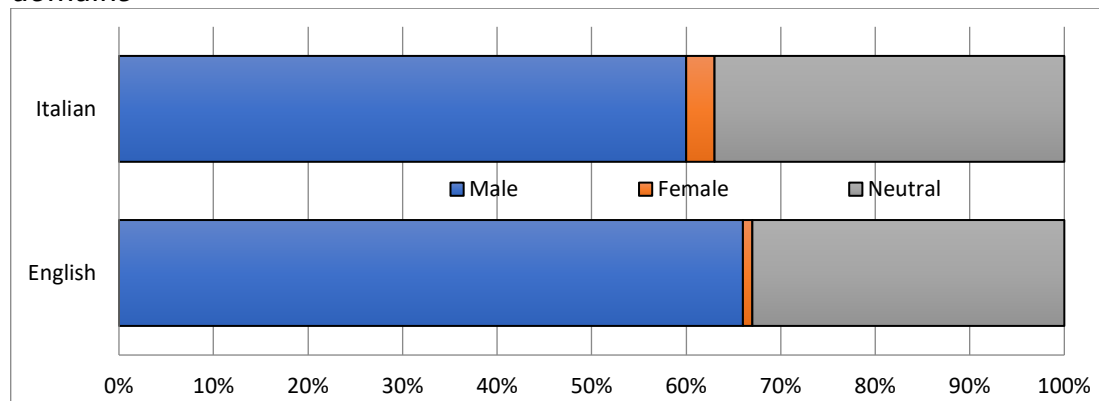
F: Feminine source domain; M: Masculine source domain; N: Neutral source domain.

Sensory metaphors provide a common ground for social interaction inasmuch as referring to universally shared human experiences – those of the five senses –strengthens social bonds and enhances conversation flow among people, independently of their gender. Still, as the agreed upon reference point of this categorization is the BSRI – according to which women are considered more 'sensitive' and 'emotional' than men and, thus, they are supposed to 'feel' more than men – The Five Senses was categorized as a feminine source domain. Table 3 shows the percentages of metaphorical expressions found and their gender

familiarity based on the BSRI.

Based on Figure 2, which shows the percentages of metaphorical expressions according to their gender familiarity and accepting a source domain classification based on the BSRI, the conclusion is that the majority of the metaphorical expressions found come from conceptual systems familiar to men and unfamiliar to women. Indeed, the only source domain women identify more with than man is that of The Five Senses (for a total of 4 metaphorical expressions, 3 in Italian and 1 in English).

**FIG. 2.** *Distribution of metaphors over masculine, feminine and neutral source domains*



To sum it up, the findings of this study show that: 1) in the two languages, Italian and English, metaphors in investor communication come from identical source domains; 2) there is a likely presence of a gender bias in the language of investor communication; 3) metaphors are either masculine (the majority) or neutral, rarely feminine; 4) metaphors used in investor communication are likely to differ in the familiarity they create among men and women as they evoke worlds men identify more with than women. Hence, the language of investor communication could indeed contribute to explain the gender gap in financial attitudes, financial decision-making, risk taking and portfolio choices.

## Conclusion

Why do we 'build' an investment portfolio? Why don't we 'knit' it? The title of this article is intentionally provocative, and the question wants to be a thought-provoking one. It does not really want to suggest a shift to a language that is (stereo)typically feminine. However, it would like to make financial sector supervisors and regulators as well as financial intermediaries realize the importance of adapting the language they use to present financial products and services, in particular to women. We live in a world where financial decision-making is becoming more and more important as financial risk is shifted toward individuals and,

therefore, there is a growing need for women to manage their own wealth and take care of their own financial security in retirement (as a result of divorce and/or reduction of survivors' benefits). As a consequence, finding ways to reach women effectively is of great significance, and this study wants to be a first step towards a better understanding of the effects of language, and conceptual metaphors in particular, on financial attitudes and behaviour.

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## An Italian Project of Financial Education for Migrants

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**ABSTRACT:** *After introducing the multiform phenomenon of financial inclusion/exclusion and offering a brief overview on migrants living and working in Italy, this paper presents and discusses an experience of financial education of migrants – FIN-Financial inclusion project – financed by the AMIF National Italian fund 2014-2020 and recently carried out in Italy. The multidisciplinary approach chosen for the realization of the project defined the objectives, the target groups and the educational initiatives, which are described and commented by the authors. While the newly arrived migrants have been addressed by courses aimed to develop their language skills – thanks also to the development of a specific manual, Financial literacy course for non-Italian-speaking students Level I – permanent immigrants have been following a second level financial course aimed at introducing them to financial products and services. In this second group a special attention was paid to the category of foreign women. The financial training experiences carried out as part of the FIN project, together with the other experiences – in Italy and in Europe – analysed, have provided very useful indications for identifying the most suitable tools and strategies to allow the financial inclusion of the most vulnerable groups as migrants. Considerations about teaching activities and a discussion of problems encountered during the project develop into a series of conclusive guidelines to better implement the process of financial education and inclusion and to eliminate the barriers that prevent the financial inclusion of migrants.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Financial Inclusion, Education, Migrants*

### Introduction

In recent years the financialization process has intensified, thanks to technological progress, financial innovation and the development of financial markets. As a result, the issue of financial inclusion/exclusion has become of central importance, as well as the need to clearly outline the content and boundaries of this concept, which is still uncertain and ill-defined. Therefore, while a clear and unanimously agreed definition of financial inclusion/exclusion is urgently required, many scholars

believe that a precise definition does not exist, since financial inclusion/exclusion is a multiform phenomenon. It can therefore present itself with different degrees of intensity, as well as with different characteristics.

The European Commission (2008) defines financial inclusion by considering its specular concept of financial exclusion. The latter is meant as «the process by which an individual finds it difficult to access or use financial services and products on the market, suited to his needs and capable of allowing him to lead a normal social life in the society to which he belongs». On the other hand, financial inclusion is defined as the «set of activities developed in order to facilitate access and effective use of banking services by individuals and organizations not yet fully integrated into the ordinary financial system. These services include financial credit services, savings, insurance, payment, with the transfer of funds and remittances, financial education programs and reception in the branch, as well as for the start-up of small businesses».

The financial inclusion is closely related to social inclusion and financial literacy, as the latter represent three fundamental pillars of the economic and social integration process of individuals, migrants included (Frigeri, 2018, 2014). According to Kapadia (2019), «the financial inclusion is a crucial element in the fight against poverty. The ability to take effective decisions regarding the use and management of money with required informed judgments is financial literacy».

This is especially true in crisis situations. Past experience has shown that poor financial decisions by large number of people can have a profound effect on the economy and society and force states to intervene, with serious consequences for financial stability (Lusardi, 2019). As shown by Atkinson and Messy (2013). low levels of financial inclusion are associated with low levels of financial literacy, and this should encourage decision makers to improve financial literacy to raise the level of financial inclusion. Thanks to financial education it is possible for individuals to make decisions consistent with their needs, so that they may be better equipped to deal with macroeconomic shocks (Klapper et. al., 2012).

Economic-financial inclusion concerns the ability of individuals to plan and carry out medium- and long-term projects and investments, identify objectives and needs and link them to tools and opportunities. This is very important for foreigners because it signals their intention to settle in the country in which they live. At the end of 2019 5,306,500 foreigners were resident in Italy, the 8.8% of the entire Italian population. Non-EU undocumented immigrants are estimated to have increased from 562,000 to 600,000 between 2018 and 2019, and likely to be nearly 700,000 by the end of 2020 (IDOS, 2020).

Foreigners who worked regularly in the Italian labor market were 2,505,000 at the end of 2019 (of whom only 43.7% were women). the 10.7% of all employed people in the Country. In addition, 404,000 foreigners are unemployed (in this case the majority, 52.7%, are

women). 15.6% of all unemployed in the country. Foreign workers in Italy are mainly employed in risky, tiring, low-skilled and underpaid jobs, the so-called three D jobs: dirty, dangerous and demanding (Abella *et al.*, 1995). According to the Direzione Generale dell'immigrazione e delle politiche di integrazione (2020), foreign workers are mainly occupied in the services sector, where they represent the 36% of the total workforce. The next sectors are agriculture (18,3%), hotel and catering (17.7%) and construction (17.6%). About 2 out of 3 foreign workers are involved in unskilled or manual jobs (63.6%, against only 29.6% of Italians), while only 8% have a qualified job (against 38.7% of Italians). Very often they get stuck in those jobs even after years in the country and working there. Their average net monthly salary is 24% lower than that of Italians (€ 1,077 compared to € 1,408). Their condition worsens in the field of assistance, the main sector in which foreigners work, especially women (OCSE, 2000), whose incomes are in 26.6% of cases below 3,000 euros per year and in 20.9% of cases between 3,000 and 6,000 euros (Domina, 2020). Compared to their Italian colleagues, foreign workers are over-represented in salaried work (87% vs 76.1%), among those with fixed-term contracts (19.5% vs 12.3%) and in temporary employment and above all among blue-collar workers (77.1% vs 31.7%) (Zanfrini, 2021). At the same time, the number of SMEs founded and led by immigrants has been increasing in the last years: in 2019 there were 616,000 units (+2.3% per year), representing 10.1% of all self-employed activities in Italy (IDOS, 2020)<sup>1</sup>. But it must be emphasized that these enterprises are mostly small-sized, and more than three-quarters (76.5%) are sole proprietorships, engaged in trade, construction, and catering<sup>2</sup>. 20.8% of migrant entrepreneurs are women, this figure is like that of Italian women entrepreneurs: 22.0% (IDOS, 2020; Unioncamere, 2020).

Regarding financial inclusion of foreign citizens in Italy, Frigeri maintains that (2020, 324-325): «between 2010 and 2017 the percentage of adults with a bank account went from 61% to 72%. A growing process, even if not yet concluded if compared to the percentage of Italians who hold a current account, which reaches 94% (CeSPI, 2017; World Bank, 2020). The propensity to save of immigrant citizens is significant, reaching 36% in 2017, a value well above the 11% of Italians (ISTAT, 2020), with a growth of 10% since 2012. An evolution which is accompanied by an increase in average income (+12% between 2014

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<sup>1</sup> These enterprises were also affected by the COVID-19 crisis, which caused a 40% reduction in the number of enterprises led by migrants in the first half of 2020, compared to the same period of the previous year.

<sup>2</sup> The economic crisis of 2008 has allowed the increase of immigrant entrepreneurship, which should also be understood as both a self-employment strategy and a reaction to the many difficulties lived by migrants in the Italian companies in which their autochthonous colleagues are favored in reaching the most prestigious positions.

and 2017) and the effective saving capacity» (Frigeri, 2020, 324-325)<sup>3</sup>. Two other important factors deserve to be mentioned: the growing tendency of migrants to leave their savings in Italy, as shown by the decreasing percentage of remittances<sup>4</sup>; 76% of migrants would choose Italy as the only place in which to invest.

However, these trends clash with Italian bureaucracy, which is too complicated even for natives and very often unintelligible for foreigners, thus causing discrimination in access to credit. According to Paladino (2019) the enhancement of management skills and the ability to make informed decisions are essential for the socio-economic integration of migrants.

In this context, the need to invest in financial education programs for migrants is necessary and urgent, and many initiatives have been launched in recent years with this goal in mind. However, because these are very recent initiatives, there is a lack of analysis to assess the actual usefulness and effectiveness of financial education programs. For this reason, this paper presents and discusses an experience of financial education – *FIN-Financial inclusion* project (hereafter FIN project) – recently carried out in Italy. It has, in fact, provided very important information on factors that can affect the effectiveness of financial education programs, and these results are very useful for better targeting future programs.

## 1. The FIN project about financial inclusion of migrants.

The FIN project was financed by the European Asylum, Migration and integration Fund (AMIF) for Italy 2014-2020 and implemented between October 2018 and December 2020. The FIN project involved a wide variety of stakeholders: university, associations of migrants, municipalities, third sector associations, guided by the NGO *Africa Chiama* as lead partner<sup>5</sup>. A total of 273 people with different professional backgrounds were involved: academics, social workers, intercultural mediators, sociologists, staff of the chambers of commerce and trade associations, policy makers. Teachers of Italian as foreign

<sup>3</sup> Original text in Italian, translation by the authors.

<sup>4</sup> In Italy are taxed at 1.5% for each single operation, all money transfers to non-EU countries, starting from minimum amounts exceeding € 10.

<sup>5</sup> The lead of FIN project was: *L'Africa chiama onlus*; other partners: (Marche Region) Comune di Pesaro, Association Stracomunitari, Università degli studi di Urbino Carlo Bo; (Emilia-Romagna Region) Centro studio cooperazione internazionale e migrazione società cooperativa sociale onlus (CIM). Association Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba (ACAB). Azienda pubblica servizi alla persona del distretto di cesena Vallesavio (ASP). Associazione nazionale comuni italiani- Regione Emilia-Romagna; (Abruzzo Region) Comitato provinciale Arci Pescara, European Development and education research association (Edera). Associazione nazionale comuni italiani- Regione Abruzzo, Creditfidi scarl. In Belgium: European center for economic and policy analysis and affairs (ECEPAA).

language from Provincial adult education centers<sup>6</sup> (CPIA) were also involved.

The overall objective of the project was to improve the financial inclusion of migrants in three Italian regions – Emilia Romagna, Marche and Abruzzo – in order to enhance the chance of socio-economic inclusion of newly arrived foreigners (humanitarian permits holders and asylum-seekers included) and of everyone in situations of economic fragility. This objective was pursued thanks to a collaboration between public and private actors who proposed several of educational programs. Some of the actions included in the project were also oriented towards the promotion of migrants' entrepreneurship and the creation of start-ups and micro-enterprises. At the same time, a study of the existing state-of-the-art in Italy and Europe in terms of financial inclusion was carried out and some best practices were identified and analysed. The results of this analysis, together with the feedback obtained from the education initiatives directly proposed as part of the project, have made it possible to obtain very useful indications for understanding how an effective financial education project can be designed and conducted, so as to support multilevel governance between public and private actors. The content, design and functional characteristics of these educational initiatives are described and commented on in the following session, followed by a discussion of the main lessons learned.

## 2. Implementation of the FIN project

The education programs offered as part of the project were distinguished according to the characteristics of the target groups. Two main categories were identified: *i*) newly arrived migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers included, not skilled in Italian language and with limited financial needs; *ii*) permanent immigrants (long term residents) with unstable economic conditions, paying special attention to the category of women.

For newly arrived migrants, the main aim was to develop their language skills, as mastering the language of the host country is deemed the first fundamental step towards financial and social inclusion. A guidebook title *Financial literacy course for non-Italian-speaking students Level I* was prepared for this purpose by experts from University of Urbino Carlo Bo. This book is based on the Communicative Approach to Language Learning, the predominant teaching approach currently adopted by educators in all European countries (Council of Europe, 2001). The promotion of the authentic use of the target language allows students to learn real language as spoken

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<sup>6</sup> *Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti* (CPIA): Provincial Centers for Adult Education.

by natives in real life communicative contexts (e.g., basic economic and financial language). The main advantage of this approach is to allow learners to acquire a basic financial vocabulary and learn some basic information to facilitate access to financial services and products. This book was tested in six classes and underwent an external evaluation process. This experience generated a lot of feedback, especially useful for improving future similar experiences. The effectiveness of this approach was confirmed, but the need for some changes emerged: the need to divide teaching programs and materials according to the level of knowledge of the Italian language of the recipients (pre-literacy level – A0 – and medium level – A2); to organize longer courses, of at least 30 hours; preference for lessons carried out in presence rather than online. It is difficult for this category of learners to follow lessons exclusively online and classroom interaction with other learners and a teacher proved necessary. At the same time, this experience showed the need to provide learners with digital teaching materials to reinforce their use of the language and to familiarize them with new technologies.

For long-term residents we planned a Second level financial course (30 h) replicated in the three regions involved in the project. This course was aimed at introducing migrants to financial products and services (i.e., access to credit services, savings, assurances, payments, funds transfers and remittances). Two training workshops also took place, one in presence in Marche Region and one online, aimed exclusively at foreign women. During these training workshops, women were involved in activities aimed at promoting their entrepreneurial spirit and developing business ideas. Entrepreneurship support services existing in the area to help new business creation were also presented. Finally, testimonies from successful women entrepreneurs, were presented to inspire the entrepreneurial attitudes of women participants. The accounts of the difficulties these women entrepreneurs encountered during their experiences, and the satisfaction they received, struck a chord with participants, stimulated discussion and led participant women to actually consider starting a business. Some education programs were also aimed to public operators, in particular social workers and mediators, in order to improve their knowledge of the importance of financial inclusion and education, and to support the creation of synergies and network with different actors. The main of this action was the promote a multi-stakeholders approach to provide solutions to local situations in Emilia Romagna, Marche and Abruzzo. This approach allowed the creation of a useful interaction among apparently very distant worlds, as for example, social workers and chartered accountants, trade associations and immigrant associations. Another education action was aimed at promoting creation of the entrepreneurial initiatives in agriculture. To this end, a group of immigrants and asylum-seekers participated in a workshop to learn permaculture techniques. The learning of this agricultural technique has allowed participants to increase their knowledge about agriculture and

has been an opportunity to develop a qualified professionalism to be used in future work experiences and for starting new entrepreneurial activities managed according to permaculture principles.

## Conclusions

The financial education experiences carried out as part of the FIN project, together with the other experiences – in Italy and in Europe – analyzed during the project, have provided very useful indications for identifying the most suitable tools and strategies to allow the financial inclusion of the most vulnerable groups as migrants.

First and foremost, our experience has shown that, to be effective, financial education initiatives must meet certain indispensable requirements:

- teaching materials must be differentiated according to the type of migrants (new arrivals vs long term residents). It is important to create educational materials suitable for users, exploit the potential of new technologies but at the same time take into account the life and working context of migrants. Regarding education activities, the experience of the FIN project teaches that longer courses (more than 30 h) are more effective, as suggested by all the teachers interviewed. Moreover, as evidenced by feedback received, it is important to use textbooks clearly divided by Italian language proficiency levels (A1 and A2).
- adopt in class a communicative approach and a laboratory mode. The experience of the FIN training workshop highlights how important the active participation of migrants is, and how stimulating is the presence of successful testimonials.
- trainers also need to act as intermediaries, be able to stimulate curiosity, bring migrants closer to new topics with practical implications on their life. Teaching techniques must be based on concrete examples, on an appropriate language that facilitates understanding, supported by specific teaching aids. The use of apps, and online lessons, can also be useful, in order to support the learning process.
- think to new forms of involvement of migrants is crucial. Even before the pandemic began it was evident that it was necessary ‘to get out of the classroom’, to meet migrants in their aggregation places, or in other organizations/associations they usually attend. The massive introduction of online lessons means that learners have a level of digital competence, personal motivation and autonomy that the most vulnerable categories often lack. For all these reasons it is necessary to rethink the education model commonly proposed, to train teachers and mediators so that they can intercept migrants’ needs and introduce new technologies gradually. In this regard we agree

with Ozili when he states (2020): «Future research should provide new ideas, strategies and interventions that increase financial inclusion in countries where all available options have already been used up».

Our experience also provided important evidence of what Ozili (2020) recently remarked: «financial literacy alone cannot enable financial inclusion. This is because having knowledge of how to use and manage money will itself not eliminate the structural barriers that prevent access to finance». This means that if we want to reach a real financial, and even social, inclusion of migrants, we can't just provide financial education, we must also create a context in which a set of conditions conducive to financial inclusion for migrants are also present. In fact we can draw some guidelines to eliminate the barriers that prevent the financial inclusion of migrants:

- Need for financial products designed for people with special needs, such as asylum seekers and refugees, or people with a different approach to financial services, for cultural reasons or because they have different habits. From this point of view, the banking and financial sector should open up to a new market segment, looking at migrants as an opportunity and a possibility for growth.
- Improve the role of banking groups, not only in offering products in line with migrants' needs, but also in removing obstacles for the access to basic services. Banking groups must show more courage and greater awareness of the importance of starting a dialogue with the subjects involved in financial education. Beyond the intentions, the Italian banking system should rethink its attitude towards foreign citizens. It should first comply with European directives, not discriminating against migrants in opening basic banking services<sup>7</sup>.
- Promotion of self-employment and entrepreneurship and support migrants in accessing credit. It is interesting to note how in the new *Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027* the European Commission outlines: «Migrant entrepreneurs contribute to economic growth, create jobs and can support the post-COVID-19 recovery. However, they face several challenges, such as a lack of networks, difficulties in accessing credit and insufficient knowledge of the regulatory and financial framework. Access to financial information and increased financial literacy can play an important role in overcoming these challenges. The availability of and access to financial services is essential for all migrants to fully participate in a country's economy or build a stable life for themselves and their families, including as regards

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<sup>7</sup> The Court of Rome confirmed the decree issued by order of 26/01/2021 inaudita altera parte of 21 dicembre 2020. (<https://www.asgi.it/notizie/tribunale-di-roma-discriminatorio-il-rifiuto-allapertura-di-un-conto-corrente-ai-richiedenti-asilo/>)



sending remittances. Digital finance can help in making financial services more accessible».

To implement these good intentions, it is necessary to support good business ideas and accompany them during the start-up process, in order to facilitate access to credit and intercept financing.

The collaboration of multiple stakeholders with different characteristics is essential, as the FIN project clearly demonstrated. First of all, it is important to provide quality and homogeneous information, then offer migrants effective support services, finally to maximize the resources (human and material) available, without duplicating services. It is desirable to develop a dialogue between different subjects at local, national and European level. Locally by integrating services, sharing information, and create synergies; at a national level by coordinating the various regional/local initiatives and promoting a system of the best practices; At European level by initiating a dialogue between the various Directorates-General (i.e., DG JUST – Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Responsible for European policy on justice, consumer rights, data protection and gender equality); DG HOME as responsible of Asylum Migration and integration fund (AMIF); DG FISMA – Directorate-General for Financial Stability, the Commission department responsible for EU policy on banking and finance). relaunching national financial education strategies, promoting those with the greatest impact. Finally, the European Union must supervise the banking and financial system so that there are no more instances of institutionalized discrimination. In promoting the bancarization of large sections of the population, the EU intervened with the directive 2014/92/EU, which gave impetus to the creation of basic current accounts, at low costs. Today, thanks to the adoption of national strategies for financial inclusion, which incorporate the recommendations of the OECD, we have a national plan in some states<sup>8</sup>, for the financial literacy of the population, which includes vulnerable categories (Lusardi, 2019). Unfortunately, this process involves the European states unevenly, with serious delays and insufficient coordination. Therefore, a greater effort is needed precisely in addressing the vulnerable categories, especially after the massive involvement of new technologies both in the use of financial products and in teaching initiatives. And it is precisely in the forms in which to do financial education that we must question ourselves more. In addition to the difficulties described above in accessing financial education programs where digital tools are used, cyber fraud also needs to be considered. People with low levels of financial literacy, and not skilled in the host language, as migrants, they can be subject to IT fraud. Moreover, the request to provide a lot of personal data (such as religion,

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<sup>8</sup> The Italian Committee for planning and coordination of financial education activities (*Comitato per la programmazione e il coordinamento delle attività di educazione finanziaria*) refers to the Ministry of Economy and Finance. <http://www.quellocheconta.gov.it/it/chi-siamo/strategia-nazionale/>

gender or ethnicity). through online forms, exposes them to the risk of being discriminated against by the financial institutions during the creditworthiness assessment process. In this context, a more incisive intervention by the European Union is urgently needed: 1) in consumer protection of digital banking services, 2) in ensuring that exclusion systems based on ethnic, religious or gender origin are not institutionalized, 3) in promoting financial literacy initiatives aimed at vulnerable categories, maximizing impact and encouraging the scale-up of best practices.

Our hope for the future is that a new perspective is adopted in looking at migrants and EU citizens with a migrant background. The recent COVID-19 crisis has underlined, once more, how interconnected and dependent we are on each other. The presence in our territory of people of foreign origin, who know several languages and (financial) markets, who have relations with other countries and possess the skills to interpret other cultures, represents an advantage and a precious resource that must be valued.

The political decision makers have the task of not neglecting this human heritage and of investing in serious financial and social inclusion. All of us must make the effort to get out of the emergency logic and enter a world of possibilities that are still poorly expressed.

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## Out of the Debt Trap. The Financial Capabilities against Financial Abuses

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article explains that the absence and low levels of financial literacy and awareness prevent consumers and entrepreneurs from fully satisfying their consumption and investment needs and, more generally, prevent them from realizing their life projects by constricting them into the 'debt traps'. Therefore, consistent with the capability approach (Sen, 1993, 1995), financial literacy is considered, first and foremost, an indispensable part of the general endowment of 'functionings' to reach well-being. The paper also stresses the importance of combating financial illiteracy to counter the spread of illegal finance. Once again, as far as Senius' theory is concerned, the spread of illicit finance should be interpreted as an external condition unfavorable to the diffusion of the 'capabilities' supporting households and entrepreneurs' financial choices. Unfortunately, during the current pandemic, loansharking, usury, and other criminal finance crimes have spread dramatically. Especially in the most fragile socio-economic contexts, where, moreover, organized criminal groups are stronger and more deeply rooted, and unfortunately, needy families and entrepreneurs stay in these 'debt traps'. Finally, the paper indicates possible new initiatives that would increase financial literacy as a capacity-building tool following the Edufin Committee of 2020 and the OECD Recommendation 2020. It could increase financial resilience, conscious consumption, and active citizenship and democratic opposition to financial abuse and crime.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Financial Literacy; Illegal Finance; Usury; Loansharking; Capabilities Approach*

### **Introduction. The coronavirus shock for households and businesses**

The crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic affected several critical domains of life, not only health but also aspects of socio-economic life, including production, trade, work and consumption. Recent research in Europe indicate that Italian and Spanish SMEs are the most affected. They reported considerable losses in their revenues of 30% and 33% against 23% in Germany (Di mson *et al.*, 2020). More generally, all SMEs will face financial and liquidity problems. These phenomena will exacerbate their financial fragility condition that was already pre-

existing to the pandemic (Juergensen *et al.*, 2020). Also, on the household front, a growing financial fragility is highlighted, which is also related to the increasingly precarious employment situation (Schneider *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, the pandemic is exacerbating some of the pre-existing inequalities and will leave important legacies that will have a long-term impact on inequality (Blundell *et al.*, 2020), especially for the most vulnerable population groups.

### **1. Background data. The economic and financial impact of Covid in Italy and the related increase in economic and financial crimes**

Preliminary estimates indicate the growth of absolute poverty in 2021. Increase regards households primarily. In 2021 the value passes from 6.4% to 7.7%. Mainly 335 thousand new households are in a condition of hardship, reaching more than 2 million in total. New poverty also concerns individuals. They grow from 7.7% to 9.4%. There are more than 1 million more needy individuals, reaching about 5.6 million in total. The impact of COVID-19 is uneven, and although the increase is more significant in the North, in the South of Italy, absolute poverty is the highest (ISTAT, 2021). Many companies will be increasingly financially exposed and searching for the liquidity they need to invest and restart their businesses. It could increase companies' financial fragility concerning the reduction in revenues from the lockdown of activities. Other difficulties will depend on the general slowdown in the financing, government support delays, and reduced available wealth.

In the face of these difficulties, some studies predict an increase in economic and financial crimes related to extortion, corruption and usury (Svimez, 2020). With specific reference to this last financial illicit, in the same half of 2019, reported crimes in Italy in 2020 increased by 6.5%. Exposure to usury increases the risk of hoarding vulnerable people's property by organized groups (henceforth OCGs) that operate this type of illegal credit for money laundering purposes (Libera, 2020). Usury is spreading among poor segments of the population and businesses in severe difficulty in the face of increasing social consensus for OCGs. These organisations are often perceived as criminal welfare because they give credit to suffering families and enterprises for their activities. Specifically, they have lower rates than in the past and even competitive with banks (Libera, 2021). So, the speed with which this liquidity granted in times of difficulty, such as the current one, makes usury increasingly pervasive and challenging to combat.

The spread of illegal credit is possible due to several factors. The first factor regards the financialization of everyday life (Martin, 2002; Dagnes, 2018) and the use of one's financial resources. This process depends on the dematerialized perception of one's financial assets. They are becoming intangible and appear infinitely enhanced. For them, the social meaning of financial honour is relativized and redetermined and,

therefore, the ethic of paying debts on time (Di Maggio, 2020: 283). Forced adherence to particular lifestyles could incentivise over-indebtedness of households and businesses and access to financing sources, sometimes even illegal, but in any case, exaggeratedly expensive, disproportionate to one's income and available wealth.

The second factor, which is educational, relates specifically to financial issues. It relates to the inability to understand the risk factors involved in certain purchasing and payment behaviours and concerns the ability to plan and have savings quotas to draw on in crisis times.

The third factor is structural and concerns banks' reluctance to lend money to fragile individuals, especially in socio-economic contexts in a perpetual state of depression.

The fourth factor indicates the judicial system's poor repressive and punitive performance in tracking down, punishing and deterring criminal practices, hence also a relatively low level of reporting of extortion.

The fifth and final factor is psychological combined with the last two because it concerns a possible Stendhal syndrome suffered by usurers. Usurers often consider their loan sharks, even if the interest rates are exorbitant, as the only loans source. The absence of legal loans from official banking institutions and their financially difficult status determines the relatively low level of complaints that moneylenders receive.

Therefore, financial literacy is vital to stimulate both households and businesses towards more responsible use of money and wise choices in saving and investing. Financial literacy can be the impetus towards active citizenship in denouncing illegal finance (Dalla Pellegrina, 2008) and usury. It can be a resilience tool to achieve more generally financial well-being. This initial evidence of pandemic economic and financial fragility points to the need for immediate and effective interventions for households and businesses. In addition to economic and financial support to solve their problems, there is a need for a more in-depth educational and cultural programme of financial education. It could increase their financial resilience and prevent them from resorting to illegal credit and indirectly strengthening the power of OCGs.

## **2. Problem formulation. The process of financialization and the spread of illegal credit**

Attitudes towards illegal credit as the usury throughout history and in different nations have not always been uniform. It has not always been considered immoral or illegal (Kaplan, Matteis, 1968). Therefore, we need to explain usury as social phenomena with specific reference to socio-cultural contexts, political and economic conditions, consumption, saving and investment habits, norms, and prevailing morality.

Specialized literature and reporting often treat illegal money lending, usury or loan sharking as ancillary criminal activities of OCGs (Marinero, 2017). The extent of the problem is, therefore, as we have already mentioned, probably underestimated. Indeed, the cultural motivations, the quality of general and specific financial literacy on which the related consumption and savings choices depend, and the consequences in the lifestyles of households and entrepreneurs who also resort to these forms of illegal credit to maintain specific consumption standards should be better highlighted.

The spread of illicit credit phenomena, as we said, is diverse and specific to the contexts and concern households as much as businesses. Especially concerns over-indebtedness due to irresponsible household consumption, the inability to plan expenditure and foresee risks, the SMEs' vulnerability to bank exclusion, and the propensity to default. Finally, it concerns recourse to easy but expensive credit until the tendency to accumulate debt to meet debt through other debt.

However, recourse to illegal credit is not only explained by the unsustainability of past debts, and those with unsustainable debts do not necessarily resort to usury (Cogno, Marcosano, 2019: VIII).

### **3. General research hypothesis. The use of illegal credit and financial awareness for emancipation from the 'debt trap'**

The general research hypothesis of this contribution is that recourse to usurious over-indebtedness practices is often linked to a lack of awareness of the use of money (OSCGC, 2020: 18) and, more generally, of one's rights and duties as a citizen. Therefore, properly managing savings and income could help to counteract the demand for loans to usurers. Conscious consumer choices and responsible investments, in this sense, could reduce demand for loans to usurers and the OCGs enterprise syndicate (Block, 1980) and their illegal credit. The main result could be the emancipation of the victimization mechanism suffered by the usurers and the related 'debt trap' that drive to financial poverty. Overall, socio-economically depressed contexts are also those where OCGs makes their illegal activities and also where is evident the diffusion of spread predatory lending (Geisst, 2017), shark lending (Mayer, 2010; 2012; Packman, 2014) and usury (Lisle, 1912). Several studies have shown that a kind of 'Stockholm syndrome' often arises between the borrower and the moneylender, to the extent that victims often refer to the same shark when asking for money, even if they have declared that they want to free from the debt trap. Many usury victims consider the shark a friend and, therefore, a financial intermediary capable of solving money problems better than legal financial institutions such as banks (Saunders, 2019). These illegal forms of contemporary financial intermediation (Greenbaum, Thakor, 2019) must be considered as specific activities of OCGs (Savona, Calderoni, 2016)



and also of financial crime (OECD-INFE, 2020) that no-mafias groups. Access to these forms of over-indebtedness results from income poverty and wealth poverty, which prevents the possibility of incurring unforeseen expenses of various kinds both for the family and business activities (Gambacorta *et al.*, 2020). In economically weaker areas, where mafias have historically been widespread, individuals cannot save or expend (Previati *et al.* 2020).

Concerning Southern Italy, usury is perceived as a social emergency so much so that some research shows that this type's crimes are lower than the media narrative of the problem (Scaglione, 2016). Therefore, it would be necessary to investigate beyond the predatory and violent nature that common sense attributes to this type of criminal phenomena. It would be necessary to verify why sometimes a specific form of reciprocity and exchange of convenience is in the same socio-economic context between usurer and victim (Stefanizzi, 2002). Usury is considered a typically southern phenomenon, and, as mentioned above, there are several causes, including the historical and deep-rooted presence of OCGs that make up for the unwillingness of banks to provide credit to businesses and households (Pardo, 2000). These OCGs, as it is now known, also operate beyond the traditional boundaries of the southern regions (Masciandaro, 2000) and, therefore, usury organized in this way is a national problem closely linked to the demand for credit (Europol, 2013; Savona, Riccardi 2015).

#### **4. Specific research hypothesis. Financial literacy and the 'capabilities approach'**

With specific reference to households, the OECD 2020 Recommendation highlights the increasing vulnerability of social groups that do not have even basic financial knowledge. OECD highlights that there should be educational efforts to promote adequate consumer protection and knowledge of their rights and responsibilities (OECD, 2020).

OECD refers to those people who are not prepared to make prudent financial decisions due to increasing risks and the growing complexity of the financial landscape. Those who have this basic financial knowledge also have greater financial resilience (Lusardi *et al.*, 2020) and thus do not exacerbate their over-indebtedness condition, preventing legal lending access channels and consequently directs towards illegal forms of credit.

Empirical studies show that financial fragility is related to disposable income, wealth, culture, and culture's specific level on financial issues (Hasler *et al.*, 018). The attitude towards saving is also directly related to acquiring financial skills (Lusardi *et al.*, 2017).

The OECD definition of financial literacy refers to making effective decisions in a range of 'contexts' by providing specific skills. Regarding 'contexts', we highlight the need to locate financial literacy precisely

and to decline it in its specificities based on precise socio-economic conditions. The specific research hypothesis is that financial literacy is a capacitive tool. It can provide emancipation from certain specific lifestyles (freedom from) and gives new meaning and value to financial-economic activity (freedom to). This hypothesis is consistent with the capabilities approach (Sen, 1993, 1995). We consider financial literacy an indispensable part of the general endowment of 'functionings' that enables overall well-being. So, the spread of illegal finance should be an external condition unfavourable to the diffusion of the 'capabilities' supporting households and entrepreneurs' financial choices (Xiao *et al.*, 2014; van Staveren, 2021)

Specifically, the diffusion of a specific literacy, which stimulates the responsible use of money, and which therefore invites us to examine the action of responsible consumption and investment critically, makes it possible to emancipate economic and financial activity from the possession and consumption of goods towards the effective exercise of multiple human capacities. This perspective emancipates the concept of economic and financial well-being from the utility derived from the possession of a list of goods. Increasing critical financial literacy would increase households and businesses' resilience, reduce their vulnerability, and contribute to a reduction in the use of illegal forms of credit such as usury and thus to the inevitable disempowerment of the OCGs that run it. Hence, financial literacy should be a tool for participation in economic life and, more broadly, individuals and society's financial well-being (OECD, 2020) and active citizenship.

### **Conclusion. Extending new initiatives against financial abuse and financial crime and for financial inclusion**

The specific research hypothesis overexposed is consistent with the indications of those who propose that other social and contextual aspects should also be taken into account in financial inclusion of financial well-being and related literacy measures (Bongini *et al.*, 2018) and provide for greater involvement of the adult population including teachers (Refrigeri, 2019). Our proposal is in line with the OECD Council Recommendation on Financial Literacy, which encourages people to take action and foster behavioral changes that can improve their circumstances, for example, by promoting the adoption of conscious and active choices that encourage more meaningful saving or limit inappropriate risk-taking (OECD, 2020).

It is also consistent with the EduFin Committee's aims to plan and coordinate financial education activities, which has promoted two guidelines. The one concerning young people is consistent with the need to be aware of the principal risks and adverse financial consequences (Edufin, 2020a), to protect their rights and fulfil their duties in the economic-financial field and to be aware of the socio-

environmental impact of financial behavior. Concerning adults and others, referring more generally to financial literacy, the importance of knowing how to defend oneself against financial abuse is highlighted (Edufin, 2020b). The conscious and responsible use of money can prevent access to forms of usurious over-indebtedness. Therefore, financial literacy is the immediate solution to replicating errors in consumption and savings and thus of behavioral biases such as overconfidence, which leads to underestimating the probability of adverse events and overestimating one's capacity to react or anchoring, hyperbolic discounting, etcetera. (Anderloni, Vandone, 2011).

In conclusion, we propose to consider financial literacy first as a tool to empower consumers and entrepreneurs and thus make them aware of their resources and achieve and maintain their financial and overall well-being. Financial literacy, more in general, is also the most crucial pillar of active citizenship and gives people the power to defend themselves against financial abuses, financial-economic crime, and the coils of illegal finance, thus defeating OCGs, and, overall, freeing the market and spreading well-being.

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## Special Education and Economy. New Scenarios for the Life Project of People with Disabilities and Their Caregivers

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**ABSTRACT:** *This chapter deals with the delicate issue of taking charge of families with children with disabilities, focusing on the delicate transition phase defined as Dopo di Noi ('After Us') and the criticalities of the current social welfare. The authors are arguing about the pedagogical and economic criticalities this period is living with it and they are focusing on the planning value: this planning is conceived over time and in time and is oriented to the Quality of Life of people with disabilities and their caregivers and, therefore, a new Welfare State. Among different proposals, the step from Durante Noi (During Us) to Dopo di Noi becomes important thanks to the creation of an Integrated Training System, which sees the people themselves and their ability to choose at the centre.*

**KEYWORDS:** *People with Disabilities, Caregivers, Special Education, Economy, 'After Us*

### Introduction

The research on the field of Special Pedagogy has achieved several results and has been able to identify and to interpret new pedagogical emergencies in response to current times. In this paper, we are going to deal with the fundamental issue about the *Dopo di Noi* ('After Us'), which attracts considerable pedagogical, social and economic challenges. There is always a careful action of planning and anticipation for future challenges in every goal achieved. As Montobbio and Lepri point out, all the life projects are «the results of a sentimental-educational and exponential process, precociously starting from an imaginary and a project, which is realised step by step, day by day, provided that it is clearly understood in which direction to go and which steps to take» (Montobbio, Lepri, 2000, 26).

In order to provide the reader with the coordinates of our work, we will start from the criticalities, which a family (in old age) often has to face, when there is a person with disabilities who has now reached adulthood, and we will finish analysing new operational procedures, which are able to guarantee adequate levels of Quality of Life of the entire family system (Giaconi, 2015a). Therefore, as we dealt with in previous studies (Giaconi *et al.*, 2020), we will take a semantic field leading us to rethink about a new Welfare State, which is more attentive to the caregivers of people with disabilities (including the complex ones), and a different 'After Us', which is able to plan in time the best living conditions for an adult with disabilities, beyond the life horizon of his/her family members.

### **1. Scientific basis for a new 'After Us' thought in the 'During Us'**

The scientific literature about Special Pedagogy examined the complex world of families with disabled children and highlighted how the criticalities of the existential course of the disabled person and his/her family often worse, when the perspective of the 'After Us' seems to be imminent (Pavone, 2009; Giaconi, 2015a, 2015b; Cottini *et al.*, 2016; Besio, Caldin, 2020). Sudden decisions due to emergencies (e.g., the illness or the death of one of the parents) or solutions, which have been thought out in advance and are largely corresponding to the life plan of the person with disabilities, take over especially at this particular existential moment of the families. Caldin and Friso remember how «the work of supporting the development process leading to adulthood already begins in the minds of the parents who have a little child and enjoy a forward-looking planning dimension» (2016, 29).

The scientifically based crucial point is represented by planning: this is a dimension characterizing the delicate process of growth of the child with disabilities towards adulthood on the one hand, and the family, who finds difficulty to think about their child's future, especially in the 'After Us' on the other hand. Expectations, fears, constraints, possibilities, rights and duties do not always balance each other and do not often make natural for families to think for the future, especially after the school period. Up to a certain point in a child's existential life, a family can enjoy the support of the school institution, which often represents one of the few certainties, as well as the potential source of an institutionally guaranteed inclusion. The end of school represents a leap into the void (Pavone, 2009; Giaconi, 2015a) and is associated with states of anxiety, feelings of abandonment and loss of learning opportunities and social inclusion (Pavone, 2009; Giaconi, 2015a; Aiello *et al.*, 2017; Del Bianco, 2019; D'Angelo, 2020).

We agree with d'Alonzo (2011) that people with disabilities and their families are «left without any help, because they do not strictly fall within any bureaucratic, health or social protocol, and are therefore



forgotten, because they are unfortunately in a 'no man's land'» (2011, 11). In this direction, the dream of a life project is undermined by a widespread predestination-oriented attitude (Ianes, 2007; Maes *et al.*, 2007; Pesci, 2009; Beadle-Brown *et al.*, 2016), which could prevent the 'After Us' from being pointed out in time and, therefore, lead young people to find themselves 'catapulted' without any support towards adulthood (Giaconi, 2015a; d'Alonzo, 2009) and projected into a «pre-structured adult life» (Midjo, Aune, 2018, 34).

Our reference literature underlines how the lack of planning the transition phases of a family with children with disabilities leads to perspectives, which can undermine the Quality of Life of people with disabilities and their caregivers (Giaconi, 2015b; Gauthier-Boudreault *et al.*, 2017; Lindahl *et al.*, 2019; Del Bianco, 2019; D'Angelo, 2020; Giaconi *et al.*, 2020). Since this is a delicate question, it is worth reflecting about some points of awareness and, at the same time, pointing out potential project lines, while avoiding rigid interpretations.

Starting from the title of this contribution again, if one of the new challenges in special pedagogy is the 'After Us', the preceding treatise has shown how it is not appropriate to think on answers, which are limited to certain times, but rather it is necessary to think on planning forms, which start from the 'During Us' (Giaconi *et al.*, 2019). The complexity of taking charge of people with disabilities should lead human services and social policies to rethink about courses and projects, which are able to guarantee «adequate levels of Quality of Life in terms of independence, social participation and well-being» (Giaconi, 2015a, 127). This ambitious goal cannot be achieved without an integrated perspective of interventions, services and people. Therefore, it is essential to have a network of local authorities, institutions, families and people with disabilities, so that actions are able to take shape and to support a future, which can be imagined (Ianes, Cramerotti, 2007) and designed over time and in time (Montobbio, Lepri, 2000; Ianes, Cramerotti, 2007; Giaconi *et al.*, 2020). In fact, in order to contribute to the achievement of ecological existential courses (Giaconi, 2015a), it is necessary that this planning does not withdraw into constraints, but rather it is oriented towards trajectories of meaning (Dainese, 2015; D'Angelo, 2020), which can be thought, chosen and shared only within this network.

By fully taking a systemic and integrated charge, it is possible to achieve good practices, which can be created starting from sharing common languages able to overcome the fragmentation of individual professional interventions (Pavone, 2009; Giaconi, 2015a; Giaconi *et al.*, 2020; Galanti, 2020). For example, this means rethinking on the habilitation courses for young people with disabilities in the direction of a specific training, which is aimed at acquiring skills for independent living and fostering processes of self-determination (Giaconi, 2015a; Aiello *et al.*, 2017; Del Bianco, 2019b; Galanti, 2020; Giaconi *et al.*, 2020) to be carried out starting from the family environment (Curryer *et al.*,

2018) to the community one (Abery, Stancliffe, 2003; Wong, Wong, 2008).

In conclusion, it is only through an integrated system of services designed in this way that it is possible to plan courses oriented towards the adult life of people with disabilities, when a family network can still be one of the strongest planning elements, that is, at the time of the 'During Us' (Giacconi *et al.*, 2019).

## **2. Towards a new Welfare State**

The challenges which a family, whose economically relevant members are old, faces are different: concerns about the future of an adult person with disabilities on the one hand, a modern Welfare State, which introduces a change of paradigm in producing and/or financing social care for people with complex disabilities on the other hand. If the 'After Us' represents a solution to market failure or inadequacy in economic terms, this is created in the 'During Us' in pedagogical terms and requires new actions, which are aimed at the life project of the person with disabilities.

The 'After Us' perspective, which introduces support and care to people with serious disabilities, falls within the definition of a modern welfare state. Made up of a mix of direct production, tax incentives and economic-financial management tools shared by regions, local authorities and third-sector organisations, this new programme provides the possibility of guaranteeing disabled people the innovative residential interventions, which are able to reproduce the housing and relational conditions of the original home, beyond the life horizon of their family members. The 'After Us' represents a change of paradigm in directly producing and financing social care to disabled people after their family members' death, which is traditionally managed through private resources or by their legal guardian, and introduces a programme of economic and financial tools, which are aimed at an innovative solution from a social point of view. The reforming scope of the 'After Us' is undoubtedly to be found in the system solution adopted, which is mainly entrusted to public planning through the adoption of two fundamental strategies: directly producing care services and directly financing the production of care services together with a regulatory phase, which is aimed at evaluating the socio-economic feasibility of the project to be financed and evaluating the allocative efficiency of resources. In economic terms, the 'After Us' project represents a first solution to market failures, both in relation to the distribution of incomes, because this does not necessarily guarantee that non-self-sufficient people will have sufficient assets after their family members' death, and in relation to the need to guarantee the choice for an excellent wellbeing of disabled people who may not be able to autonomously evaluate what to do in their own interests. The

obvious information asymmetries characterizing this kind of services (adverse selection and moral hazard), which are linked both to the phase of signing the contract and its execution, makes possible to include the 'After Us' among the rights to be protected and, therefore, to consider our legal system inclusive. So, the 'After Us' project is a meritorious good, which strongly justifies public intervention aimed at protecting the interests of non-self-sufficient people, when they specifically use these particular care services. In fact, in the case of meritorious goods, market failures are an unacceptable social risk and for this reason it is desirable to have a significant intervention by the State. From this point of view, only the intervention of a public institution with an infinite time horizon is able to guarantee an intertemporal solution, which is aimed at caring for the quality of life of people who are partially or totally dependent, when it is not possible to adopt organizational formulas based on coexistence and cooperation. In its ambition, the proposed objective requires that those who make political choices in the caring field are increasingly conscious of the impact such reform programmes have on economy and social system. In fact, the production or the self-production of permanent care services have both a productive value, since the necessary services are able to generate income and employment, and also an educational, (formal and informal) training and social value. Addressing the creation of the 'After Us' by emphasizing the importance of the productive component also facilitates numerous advantages from a social point of view. In fact, in a system characterized by low growth and lack of public resources, the attention of policy makers often turns to sustainable public spending, which is able to contribute to the achievement of a social objective without neglecting the impact on public budget. The possibility that the market solution can generate market failures with significant effects of social exclusion is very high in the face of a very unequal distribution of incomes. The 'After Us' can enter this debate and also be considered as a qualifying element of the Welfare State in terms of a driver for economic growth and the inclusion degree of a country. For this purpose, it is essential to help creating the conviction in the current political class that this kind of incentivized public/private spending has a social and economic value.

This set of uncertainties contributes to highlight some criticalities, which characterize the current institutional arrangements. Uncertainty in the provision of support services for people with disabilities entails a careful reflection from the point of view of a positive and regulatory economy. In fact, it is necessary to implement a careful analysis at a macroeconomic level, which is aimed at unambiguously identifying the role that the production of these services plays in terms of generating added value and its related impact on employment. The tertiarization process of the economic system, the demographic dynamics in place and the improvement in life expectancies are some of the reasons, which lead to the demand emergence for this kind of requirement in a

family at the same time and the search for a market solution over time, if a solution cannot be found within the family. The production of these services employs primary factors of production at the same time and activates the intermediate demand of several production processes. The absence of a market solution, which is mainly linked to the difficulty of concluding contracts and the application of a subsequent control phase, represents one of the main justifications for the direct intervention by the State structuring an additional sector for public spending, which is aimed at directly producing and financing operators who decide to undertake these activities. Therefore, at a system level it is necessary to structure an intervention programme based on the principles of solidarity and inclusion, where structural interventions increase the direct productive ability of the Public Administration. This process is based on the principle of a direct production aimed at providing a service, which is considered essential, when the family is not able enough to autonomously determine a solution. At the same time, the planning of a public intervention must include the introduction of tools for demand incentives or production subsidies, in order to generate greater opportunities for disabled people to access support services. Direct state production and public financing for this kind of services can help achieving the goals of effectiveness and efficiency for the system, mutually supporting each other.

An attempt to fill the regulatory gap about the above-mentioned aspects is represented by the law on the 'After Us' (Law 112 of 2016 *Provisions about the care of people with serious disabilities without family support*), which aims at enhancing the private resources of families and the right to autonomy enshrined in the UN Convention through a fiscal and financial planning of the person to whom the law is addressed. This law is innovative since it specifically deals with care, well-being, social inclusion and autonomy of people with serious disabilities and also provides for various tax benefits, the establishment of trusts and the availability of special funds.

This law enabled the establishment of the Care Fund for people with serious disabilities without family support. These resources can be used to finance programmed support courses for leaving the original family unit, that is, deinstitutionalization; support interventions for home care; programmes to achieve the highest possible level of autonomy; interventions for creating innovative housing solutions; and, residually, interventions for temporary permanence in a non-family housing solution.

Numerous tax exemptions were defined regarding tax benefits on assets and insurance, guarantee of social inclusion and development of autonomy, e.g., assets and funds placed in trusts are exempt from inheritance and gift taxes. Another kind of benefit, which is offered by the 'After Us', is the tax exemption for the conclusion of insurance policies aimed at protecting the disabled person.

This law also encouraged the creation of partnerships among banks, associations, cooperative groups and NPOs in general. Several banks have further strengthened their commitment in recent years. For example, in 2011, the Social Bond, that is, a bond issue linked to a liberal donation, was launched. Some banks created internal divisions, which are devoted to third sector and with which they devise financial tools, products and services for families or third sector operators – such as bank accounts, advances and financial support, life insurance, advice on generational transition – as well as specific solutions linked to fundraising activities and donations promoted by organisations, who carry out projects.

In conclusion, outlining these trajectories in a context without an economic system planning, which is aimed at highlighting the income-generating capacities of these services, could represent an operational limitation to the selection phase of the policy and technical component. Getting a picture of the economic relevance of intervention programmes, which are aimed at supporting the strengthening of the Welfare related to care, could be a diriment element, immediately increasing the degree of inclusion for disabled people.

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## Financial Literacy and Powerful Knowledge: Teachers' Perspectives

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**ABSTRACT:** *The notion of 'powerful knowledge' was developed by Young (2008) to re-establish the importance of knowledge in teaching and curriculum development. Powerful knowledge is defined by Young as coherent, conceptual disciplinary knowledge that, when learned, empowers students to make decisions and become action-competent in a way that will influence their lives in a positive way. By employing this construct, this paper explores what constitutes powerful knowledge in financial literacy and the implications for teaching. It emerges from the author's doctoral research aimed at exploring teaching and learning in secondary school economics in Malta. The underlying conceptual framework for this study is critical realism. The research method consisted in interviewing and observing fourteen economics teachers, together with four focus groups interviews with students. Data was analyzed by employing thematic analysis (e.g., Braun, Clarke, 2006). Financial literacy emerged as a theme in the teachers' and students' voices and in the lesson observations. This paper focuses on the teachers' voice discussing how economics education enabled students to grow financially literate. This resonates with the literature that economics education assists students into developing financial and economic literacies (e.g., Brant, 2018; Chang, 2014). By employing the notion of powerful knowledge from the area of the sociology of education, this paper assists the reflection relating to the teaching and learning of financial literacy and what constitutes powerful knowledge in this area.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Financial Literacy, Economic Literacy, Powerful Knowledge, Economics Education*

### Introduction

Financial literacy is the skill that connects academic with practical knowledge to cultivate financial attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Spotton Visano, Ek-Udofia, 2017). It equips individuals with the skills and confidence needed to enhance their financial wellbeing. Research evidence suggests that financial education is sometimes not provided in adequate ways to all students (e.g., Greimel-Fuhrmann, 2014). In Malta, for example, research with business education teachers and bank officials indicates a poor level of financial literacy of young people

(Farrugia, 2021). This is reflected in their tendency to seek immediate gratification through an over-reliance on credit facilities and the reluctance to save for the future. It is of utmost importance that students are equipped with financial knowledge that enlightens their future financial decisions. This paper discusses how secondary school economics education empowered young learners with powerful financial knowledge.

The context of the study is the Maltese education system. Malta is the fifth smallest state in the world. It is geographically situated in the central Mediterranean Sea, just south of Sicily and about 200km north of North Africa, with a population of about 476,000. It is an archipelago of three islands: Malta (316 square kilometers), Gozo (67 square kilometers) and Comino (2.6 square kilometers). The population density is one of the highest in the European Union and in the world. It has been part of the European Union since 2004. The native Maltese language is a Semitic tongue written in the Latin alphabet, with a strong Italian influence. English is spoken and written widely in Malta, and it is taught from the first year in the primary school. Education is compulsory between the ages of five and sixteen years.

The Maltese educational system has three main educational providers: the State, the Catholic Church and the Independent sector. All schools in the archipelago are bound by the Education Act of the country. The State and the Church schools cater for 68.4 per cent and 22.5 per cent of the student population respectively; the remaining 9.1 per cent of students attend independent schools (National Statistics Office, 2020). The central government is responsible for the State schools, the Church sector is run by the Maltese Archdiocese, while independent schools are privately-owned schools which are regulated by their internal statutes.

It is a priority for Malta and its governments to employ educational practices and strategies that help to reduce poverty, augment the country's intellectual capital, and foster and enhance social cohesion and competitiveness through employability (Bezzina, Cutajar, 2012; Camilleri, Camilleri, 2016; Mifsud, 2016, 2017). Evidence of this is the history of educational law updates, reforms, counter-reforms and policies intensification in these last four decades (Ministry of Education, Employment, 1999, 2005, 2012, 2016; Education.gov.mt, 2021).

The author's doctoral research explores secondary school economics education in Malta. Students proceeding to Year 9 of their studies at secondary school can opt for accounting, business studies and/or economics. State schools offer accounting and business studies courses. In Church and independent schools the main subjects taught are accounting and economics. Financial literacy is not taught at secondary school level, with the exception of three schools in the Church and Independent sectors who organize a financial literacy and entrepreneurship programme.

## 1. Powerful knowledge

The notion of powerful knowledge emphasizes the importance of knowledge in teaching and curriculum development (Young, 2008, 2021). Such knowledge is defined as being subject-specific, coherent, conceptual disciplinary knowledge and embraces what are considered to be the key concepts, the main procedures and processes of a discipline (e.g., Young, 2008, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2021). It is the entitlement of every pupil to have access to this knowledge, being «better, more reliable and nearer to the truth about the world we live in and to what it is to be human» (Young, 2008, 107). Powerful knowledge enables teachers to delve deeper into what is taught and empowers students to move beyond the experience they bring to school and make decisions that influence their lives in a positive way (Harland, Wald, 2018; Mitchell, Lambert, 2015; Young, 2008; Young, Muller, 2010).

Such knowledge is powerful «if it predicts, if it explains, if it enables you to envisage alternatives» (Young, 2014b, 74) and «if it helps people to think in new ways» (Young, 2015, n.p.). It is also powerful because «its concepts [...] can be the basis for generalizations and thinking beyond particular contexts or cases» (ibid.). It differs from knowledge that does not offer the potential knower any specific intellectual resources.

Powerful knowledge has three characteristics (Young, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). It is distinct from the common-sense knowledge acquired from the everyday experiences of learners. It is not context-specific and tied to the personal experience of students, but context-independent and therefore transferable to situations that are beyond a student's experience (Young, Muller, 2013). Powerful knowledge is differentiated from the experiences that students bring to school (Young, 2013). Secondly, powerful knowledge is systematic. The concepts are systematically related to each other in groups that are referred to as subjects or disciplines. Powerful knowledge can be the basis for generalizations and thinking beyond particular contexts or cases. Thirdly, «it is specialised, in how it is produced (in workshops, seminars and laboratories) and in how it is transmitted (in schools, colleges and universities)» (Young, 2013, 108). Powerful knowledge is knowledge that has been developed by clearly distinguishable groups with a clearly defined focus or field of enquiry and relatively fixed boundaries separating their form of expertise. Such specialized knowledge «is reliable and truthful: indeed, [...] it is the best it can be» (Lambert, 2014, 7). It is inevitably non-everyday knowledge (Harland, Wald, 2018).

## 2. Methodology

The author's doctoral research study, aimed at exploring secondary school economics education in Malta, addresses the following primary research questions: 1. How does economics offer secondary school students' powerful knowledge that enables them to think beyond their everyday experience? 2. How do teachers enact a curriculum underpinned by powerful knowledge?

I adopted a qualitative research approach aimed at developing a deep understanding of learning in the secondary school economics class. Qualitative research allows in-depth analysis, the investigation of highly sensitive issues and the making of comprehensive subject evaluation together with keen insight (Clough, Nutbrown, 2012; Charmaz, 2014; Cohen *et al.*, 2011, 2018; Grbich, 2013; Punch, 2014; Trafford, Leshem, 2008). Such an approach addressed the research questions, enabled face-to-face interaction with the participants, and allowed for in-depth data together with detailed insights and experiences to be gathered.

The research questions are rooted in the belief that there exists a reality, and that the participants and I as the researcher bring our own beliefs, values and experience to the study. The conceptual framework adopted is critical realism. It offers an understanding of the world that is real, but which may be differently experienced and interpreted by different observers (Bhaskar, 1979; Fletcher, 2017). The research is an attempt at describing, understanding and interpreting the reality relating to economics education as experienced by students, teachers and myself as the researcher. It is underpinned by an understanding that ontology is real, and epistemology is relativist; ontology (i.e., what is real, the nature of reality) is not reducible to epistemology (i.e., our knowledge of reality) – there is a 'real' world and it is theory-laden and not theory-determined (e.g., Fletcher, 2017).

This study attempts to capture aspects of the reality of teaching and learning of secondary school economics in Malta by exploring the views and perspectives of teachers and students and observing actual lessons. The emerging story is based on the assumptions and beliefs that myself and the participants bring to the study. To generate these rich insights about the complex reality of secondary school economics education in Maltese classrooms, I decided to use different methods consisting of interviews with teachers, focus group interviews with students and lesson observations. Apart from complementing each other, it was intended that these methods provoked different insights and perspectives. For instance, observations might shed light on the meaning that interviews might not fully capture, and vice versa (e.g., Phoenix, Brannen, 2013). The challenge and opportunity for me as the researcher was to interact with the research participants in such a way as to facilitate the generation of rich and complex insights.

The rationale for the interviews with teachers and students was to allow them to express their understanding of their perceived reality of teaching and learning economics at secondary school level. I therefore

decided that semi-structured interviews were the best fit for this purpose. This type of interview is guided by a number of standard questions with additional unstructured follow up questions, enabling the researcher to flexibly address the main aspects that need to be discussed to answer the research questions. The discussion generated enables the researcher to enter into more depth about issues raised by the participants by making use of adequate probing questions, adding or omitting further questions during the course of the interview depending on how the discussion evolves. My choice in favor of semi-structured interviews offered this degree of flexibility in an attempt to adequately address the research questions.

Since the population of Maltese economics secondary school teachers was relatively small consisting of twenty-four teachers, my aim was to recruit as many as possible of these teachers; each teacher would be bringing into the research an understanding of the economics teaching and learning process. Fourteen participants were recruited: eleven teachers from Church schools and three from independent schools. I asked the teachers' permission to observe one of their lessons; ten teachers consented. I observed two experienced participants twice and two student teachers who were in their final year of their teacher education course. In total, I observed fourteen lessons.

To explore the students' experiences and perceptions relating to economics education, I interviewed students studying economics. These were Year 11 students (roughly aged sixteen years) who were about to finish their secondary school education and had been studying economics for the last three years. Twenty students participated in the interviews.

All interview data was transcribed and lesson observations written up. Nvivo software was used for the qualitative and thematic analysis of the resulting data. Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013) advocate the use of thematic analysis as a flexible method of data analysis capable of dealing with complex qualitative data which can provide a rich account of the data concerned. Initially, each text was read over and over again. Textual passages were then categorized according to their relation to addressing the research questions. The length of the passages varied from a few words to a whole paragraph. The software was useful in capturing all data relevant to the categories. Throughout the process, the aims, the research questions and the relevant literature guided the organization and interpretation of data. Finally, the results were written up from this information, once again allowing for further modifications within and amongst the themes.

Attempts were made to ensure that the data and its analysis reflected as truthfully as possible what was going on in these classes. Using multiple methods of data collection helped to capture the teaching and learning process in these classes in a rigorous and valid manner (Cohen *et al.*, 2011, 2018; Robson, McCartan, 2016). By piloting the interview questions and observation guidelines and being open to feedback from

my doctoral supervisor and a critical friend, an attempt was made to avoid bias during the questioning and the writing up of the observation notes. Furthermore, note was taken of all data including deviant cases (negative case analysis). This search for negative cases was an important means of countering researcher bias (Silverman, 2014).

### **3. Enhancing students' financial literacy**

Financial literacy emerged as one of the themes in the teachers' and students' voices and in the lesson observations. This paper focuses on the teachers' voices discussing how economics education enabled students to grow more financially literate.

#### *3.1. Acquiring financial literacy that broadened students' perspectives*

Teachers discussed how economics education assisted students to mature into financial literacy in a manner that helped them think critically about financial and economic situations. In this respect, it enhanced their understanding beyond their everyday experiences. This is a characteristic of powerful knowledge as Young (2008) envisaged it: knowledge that helps students predict, explain the world around them, envisage alternatives and guide their life paths.

Teachers claimed that students acquired knowledge about the financial world which they were not going to learn in other subjects. Mary, for example, reported that in most economics topics there was an aspect which she could discuss to help her learners mature in some aspect of financial literacy. Knowledge identified by teachers included learning to distinguish between a need and a want, opportunity cost, the way the market operates, how prices are established, the sources of finance available to businesses, money and banking. I argue that this constitutes powerful knowledge in financial literacy. It assists pupils to think in new ways (Young, 2015).

Such knowledge is specialized knowledge because it had been developed within an expert economics community. The literature does refer to the notions of opportunity cost, price formation and market structures as threshold concepts which once acquired bring about a transformed learning experience (e.g., Davies, Mangan, 2007; Shanahan, 2016). Teachers further noted that most students eventually worked in a business environment; economics students would therefore be in a better position to understand the issues involved. Teachers mentioned the example of banking services to illustrate how the financial literacy acquired through economics broadened their students' perspectives, helping them to «think the un-thinkable and the not yet thought» (Young, 2013). Antonia and Claire, for example, explained that students might only know about 'the earning rate of interest' from the point of view of the consumer depositing money at the bank. Antonia remarked that students 'broadened their awareness' that there was a

'payment rate', with 'banks earning profits from the loans students made'.

In line with the relevant literature (e.g., Brant, 2018; Davies, 2015; Davies, Brant, 2006; Jephcote, 2005; Mallia, 2015), these teachers did attempt to extend their students' thinking by considering aspects of critical financial literacy. This included an exploration of such questions as 'To whose benefit is the system operating?', and being critical about the services offered by financial institutions and about their motivation when they attempt to educate various sections of the general public in financial literacy. Claire, for example, informed her students that when one got a bank loan, charges were imposed immediately. She recounted how 'surprised and frustrated they become learning about this. They start thinking to be careful about getting into loans.' In this respect, Grace helped them reflect: 'If you indulge in hire purchase and loans on different items, what will happen to your disposable income?' Another example is when Mary told her students: 'We have reflected upon the advantages of banking services as used by the customer. What are the advantages that the bank benefits from?' She tried to broaden their awareness to evaluate who was benefiting from the situation. Davies (2015, 310) warns that situations «where students' knowledge of the banking sector is largely dependent on the story that sector chooses to talk about itself does not look very healthy for democracy». I argue that through their efforts in financial education, these teachers were educating for this healthier aspect of democracy.

Mary discussed that it was necessary for students as citizens of the European Union to possess basic knowledge related to monetary policy and exchange rates: 'We're often talking about these. They would know: 'Why the rate of exchange? Why does it change?' Being aware that students found it difficult to grasp these notions, she simplified her explanation, bringing examples from other countries: 'Students then start to understand and to like it'.

### *3.2. Financial and economic literacy*

These economics teachers educated their students in both financial and economic literacy. They attempted to distinguish between the two terms. Robert referred to financial literacy as the knowledge students possessed 'to understand financial aspects frequently encountered in daily life'. Ian argued that 'when students grow up, they do look for investments.' Economic literacy was understood to be broader than financial literacy; Monica reported that it was 'at a deeper level, going beyond financial literacy.' For example, regarding money, the subject of economics discussed interest rates and the supply of money, which she believed were beyond financial literacy. Similarly, Franky remarked that 'macro doesn't come in much into what I think is financial literacy.' Without referring to it explicitly as economic literacy, he opined that macroeconomics was important 'for students' life as citizens', particularly in equipping them with the tools to evaluate what politicians

were claiming, for instance, as regards real and nominal increases in GDP. Ian and Antonia stressed the importance of students understanding national income issues and educated them into being critical about aspects of it. For instance, when explaining the redistribution of income, Antonia discussed with her students: 'The GDP is high. But there's a section of the population who's living in poverty and not benefiting directly. What can be done?' Another similar example when she did not refer explicitly to economic literacy was when arguing that economics empowered students to reflect about not only to be critical consumers 'but also to be critical suppliers, learning to supply their efforts to the best employer and not to the first one who comes their way.'

### *3.3. Approaches to teaching the financial literacy aspects*

When teaching the economics content related to financial literacy, teachers were keen upon discussing the issues involved, bringing relevant examples from daily life and simplifying the content to the students' level. I mention the efforts of two teachers.

Claire argued that economics provided her with the opportunity to explore financial literacy issues through relevant examples. She narrated personal experiences so that students became 'aware of certain practical, down to earth issues ... I pass over to my students what I myself experience.' She discussed with them, for instance, the importance of opening separate bank accounts when they got married. Whilst referring to this and other issues, she stressed with her pupils: 'You need to be aware of these issues!'

Mary narrated how to clarify the difference between shares and bonds, she asked her students to bring a balloon. During the lesson, she asked them to inflate it and write on it 'share'. 'Why share?', she asked them. 'Because if the company goes bankrupt, you lose everything.' They were then asked to burst it. She then took out the ball, arguing that it was less likely to burst than a balloon. She likened it to a bond. She came up with this comparison to help her students understand that bonds were safer than shares. This PCK representation was grasped by the students, who also explained it very well to their parents.

These findings resonate with the findings of other research that approaches to teaching financial literacy based on hands-on experiences and experiential learning foster responsible financial behavior (e.g., Farrugia, 2021; Zammit, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

The teachers' voices evidence that learning economics fostered the growth formation of students beyond their current financial knowledge. This strongly resonates with the literature that economics education assists students into developing citizenship education and financial and



economic literacies (e.g., Brant, 2018; Chang, 2011, 2014; Davies, 2015; Davies, Brant, 2006; Jephcote, 2005; Jephcote, Abbott, 2005). My claim is that learning economics enabled students to acquire financial knowledge that could not be gained from their everyday experience. They were provided with access to knowledge that they did not have access to at home and in their own communities (e.g., Young, 2008; Young, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2021; Young, Muller, 2010; Young, Lambert, 2014). This is the argument of powerful knowledge during these economics lessons. These classrooms were special places where students were introduced to knowledge and knowledge making in ways that did not happen in 'everyday' places, empowering them to move beyond their particular experience, envisaging alternatives and participating in financial debates (e.g., Deng, 2018, 2020; Lambert, 2018; Young, 2013). This is an argument advocating the introduction of economics in Maltese State secondary schools and elsewhere where the opportunity to learn economics is not provided to adolescents.

This study highlights the urgent need of providing financial education to all secondary school students, especially those who do not study the business subjects. All learners have a right for epistemic access to powerful financial knowledge that «helps people to think in new ways» (Young, 2015, n.p.) and guide their financial decisions. I concur with the research advocating a financial literacy programme during the secondary school years (e.g., Buhagiar, 2018; Farrugia, 2021). This programme needs to include the powerful financial knowledge identified by the teachers who participated in this study.

By employing experiential learning teaching approaches, discussing the issues involved, bringing relevant examples from daily life, and simplifying the content to the students' level, financial knowledge was gradually built by the teachers concerned. This concurs with the argument of Mitchell and Lambert (2015) who contend that powerful knowledge needs to be elaborated upon slowly and skilfully. In due course, students were provided with the opportunity to move beyond their current knowledge and experiences and savour the possibilities that financial knowledge can offer them. After all, access to this knowledge is their right as citizens, consumers and future workers.

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# The Economic and Financial Literacy of Future Teachers: A Cluster Analysis

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper analyses the results of the survey on the economic and financial literacy of students enrolled in the Degree Course in Primary Education, conducted between the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 following the OECD/INFE methodology that assesses the economic and financial knowledge of individuals through a synthetic indicator obtained from the sum of the correct answers provided to a test. The survey reveals the low level of literacy among students. Moreover, literacy differs according to age, level of education, prior knowledge of economic and financial issues and economic and financial behavior of the participants. Using cluster analysis and following the approach of D'Alessio et al. (2020; Bank of Italy), students can be divided into four groups characterized by increasing levels of economic and financial knowledge: the excluded, the incompetent, the competent and the expert. Our estimates may be useful in setting more informed and targeted policy on economic and financial education of future teachers.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Financial Education; Financial Literacy; Teacher Training; Primary Education; Cluster Analysis*

## Introduction

In recent years in Italy, as well as in other countries, there has been a rise in interest in financial and, more generally, economic education, which has taken the form of training initiatives promoted by, among others, the Bank of Italy, the Consob and the Foundation for Economic and Financial Education (FEduF) and the implementation of the National Strategy for Financial, Insurance and Pensions Education, a task assigned by the Italian government to the Committee for the Planning and Coordination of Financial Education Activities, set up in 2017.

The relevant interest in financial and economic education is not a passing phenomenon, as it finds its reasons in the relevant global phenomena that are having profound repercussions both on the world economy and on the financial and economic decisions that each citizen is called to make in the course of his or her life. The downsizing of welfare state systems in advanced economies, the increase in life expectancy and the fall in the birth rate are the main reasons for this interest. No less relevant are technical and financial reasons, such as

missing of some forms of savings – which in the past ensured useful returns for the design of one’s own life project – in favor of an increasingly complex financial market, and the advent of information technology and digital services (Refrigeri, 2020).

It is therefore understandable why authoritative national and international bodies have recommended economic and financial education. The OECD, for example, in defining financial literacy as «A combination of awareness, knowledge, skill, attitude and behavior necessary to make sound financial decisions and ultimately achieve individual financial wellbeing» (OECD/INFE, 2011, 3), foregrounds the need for financial education to increase basic knowledge in the population, to improve understanding and to develop the appropriate skills to «make effective decisions in a range of financial contexts, improve the financial wellbeing of individuals and society and enable participation in economic life» (INVALSI, 2019, 17), in accordance with the European Commission which has been monitoring the levels of economic and financial literacy of the population over years (European Commission, 2008) and the World Economic Forum which identifies financial literacy as a 21st century life skill (WEF, 2016).

Following the profound importance assumed by financial literacy, there are many calls for this ‘knowledge’ to be included in the school curricula at all levels as an autonomous discipline or, at least, as a semi-disciplinary or cross-curricular area, because it would contribute to developing a more responsible and aware citizenship education.

If teaching, as it is desirable, is to be introduced in the context of school education, it becomes a priority to place the teaching function, on which the success of educational innovation depends, at the center of attention.

The Italian teaching profession, like that of other European countries, does not appear to be prepared to tackle this new task, due to the traditional lack of basic economic-financial teaching in initial training courses for the teaching profession, which is in turn determined by the lack of these disciplines in school curricula. In Italy, moreover, there are sporadic and approximate teacher training initiatives in this field even in in-service training. It turns out, in fact, that 75% of Italian teachers have never participated in economic and financial training initiatives, not even indirectly through assistance in activities carried out by other expert bodies for students, compared to the OECD average of 55% (OECD, 2014, 150).

Moreover, as the results of recent international surveys on adult financial literacy (OECD/INFE, 2020) show, part of the Italian teaching staff is included in the 44% of the Italian adult population that lacks the basic knowledge considered fundamental to make adequate financial decisions. This percentage rises to 57% according to the recent Bank of Italy estimates (D’Alessio *et al.*, 2020).

In line with what happens in schools, economic and financial education is also present in universities in sporadic initiatives by

individual teachers and researchers and not by statutory or institutional provisions. Aware that it is no longer possible to think of a process of financial literacy of the younger generations without the direct involvement of the formal education and training system, it was considered preliminary to initiate research to detect the levels of economic and financial literacy of future teachers, current students enrolled in the degree course in Primary Education Sciences. The first act was the scientific-didactic collaboration agreement, signed in 2015, between the Department of Human, Social and Educational Sciences of the University of Molise and the FEduF. The preliminary results of the research, which involved ten Italian universities and about 2300 students, have recently been published (Refrigeri, 2020; Refrigeri, Palladino, 2020).

The analysis presented here is a further chapter in the previous research undertaken. Based on the same dataset of Refrigeri (2020) and Refrigeri and Palladino (2020) and using cluster analysis, it defines and describes students' levels of economic and financial literacy, grouping them into four categories characterized by increasing levels of economic and financial knowledge: excluded, incompetent, competent and expert.

Specifically, section 1 illustrates the objectives, the methodologies used and the survey methods; section 2 describes the composition of the sample; section 3 is devoted to the analysis of students' economic and financial literacy; section 4 highlights the factors impacting on the literacy levels measured; section 5 presents the results of the cluster analysis and the last one reports the main conclusions.

## **1. Objectives and methodology**

The research launched as part of the scientific-didactic collaboration agreement, stipulated in 2015, between the Department of Human, Social and Educational Sciences of the University of Molise and the FEduF set itself the objective, firstly, of surveying the levels of economic and financial literacy of students enrolled in the Degree course of study in Primary Education Sciences.

By analyzing the data collected from the survey, this paper aims to: *i*) classify the participants on the basis of the scores obtained in the economic-financial test; *ii*) describe the groups on the basis of individual characteristics that have a significant impact on the economic and financial knowledge possessed.

In order to survey economic and financial knowledge, a test consisting of five economic and five financial questions was prepared and administered, using the Big Three test designed by economists Lusardi and Mitchell (2011). For the economic part, the choice was made to focus on the variation of prices, the functioning of the labour market and monetary policy, identifying topics that can be found in everyday life; for the financial part, maintaining the same principle of everyday

life issues, the questions concern: the calculation of simple interest on capital, the accrual of compound interest and the return on a bank account deposit, the return on money deposited in a current account in relation to inflation, share investments and, finally, the relationship between the rate of return and risk<sup>1</sup>.

Following the OECD (2020) methodology, the score obtained in the economic and financial test was used as an indicator to measure economic and financial knowledge. The test is preceded by a 15-item questionnaire aimed at detecting the individual characteristics of the participants: demographic, cultural and related to economic and financial behavior (Table 1). The administration took place between November 2019 and January 2020 through the Google Forms tool, involving the Presidents of the degree courses involved.

In order to classify the participants on the basis of the scores obtained in the economic-financial test, a cluster analysis was used, which was carried out, as usual, in three steps: first, the grouping criteria were identified, i.e., the variables to be used to group the subjects. Next, a distance measure is defined to calculate the closeness (or similarity) between the subjects on the basis of the selected variables. Finally, a group construction algorithm is adopted to assign each subject to a group in order to maximize homogeneity within groups and heterogeneity between groups. In our case, the students were grouped on the basis of a single variable: the score obtained in solving the questions of the economic-financial test.

For the second step, the common practice of using Euclidean distance was followed: the greater the distance, the less similar the subjects. Finally, Ward's (1963) agglomerative hierarchical classification on standardised variables and Euclidean distances was adopted for cluster construction. The number of clusters was defined using the index of Duda and colleagues (2001) with the associated pseudo-T-square method and the pseudo-F index developed by Calinski and Harabasz (1974). The results obtained with the cluster analysis allow to classify the students in 4 types, named, following the model proposed by D'Alessio and colleagues (2020): excluded, incompetent, competent and expert. To assess the effects of individual characteristics (demographic, cultural and economic and financial behavioral factors) on economic and financial knowledge, a regression analysis was conducted, estimating a Tobit Model. The regression model used is represented by the following equation:

$$\text{Economic and financial knowledge} = \alpha + \beta X_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where: the dependent variable is the score obtained in the economic and financial test by the individual  $i$ ,  $\alpha$  represents the constant,  $X_i$  indicates the set of individual characteristics described in Table 1,  $\varepsilon_i$  the

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<sup>1</sup> The test is published in Refrigeri and Palladino (2020).



error term. Finally, the characteristics of the individual groups obtained with the cluster analysis were described, using the results of the regression analysis.

**TAB. 1.** *Factors measured by the questionnaire*

Demographic factors	University of origin Sex Age Year of enrolment Work
Cultural factors	Secondary school of origin Degree Father's education level Mother's education level Economic and financial education
Behavioural factors	Frequency of online purchases Instruments of payment Financial instruments Supplementary pension funds

## 2. Descriptive statistics

### 2.1. Population and sample

As shown in Table 2, the sample, including 2,321 students, represents 18.28% of the student population enrolled in the degree courses in Primary Education in the ten universities that decided to adhere to the survey, which amounted to 12,700 units. The sample, moreover, represents 7.2% of the total of the entire student population of Primary Education degree courses enrolled in Italian state and non-state universities, which amounts to a total of 32,180 units. For the calculation of the total number of students enrolled in degree courses in Primary Education, the criterion of places programmed by decree by MIUR from the academic year 2015-2016 to the academic year 2019-2020 was used.

The composition of the sample is as follows: 71.73% includes students enrolled in the five participating state universities (Bari, Molise, Roma Tre, Salerno and Aquila) while the remaining 28.3% belongs to the five non-state universities (Bolzano, Univerità Europea in Rome, Enna Kore, Sacro Cuore in Milan and Suor Orsola Benincasa in Naples).

**TAB. 2.** *Population and sample representation*

Cases in the sample	Share of surveyed students in the population	Share of surveyed SFP's students in the population
2321	18,3%	7,2%

### 2.2. Demographic factors

The average age of the students is 25 years, the mode is 21 years and the median, in a range between 18 and 55 years, is 23 years. As expected from the type of degree course, 95% of the sample consists of

females. In relation to the year of enrolment, students enrolled in the third year (29%) participate in the largest number, followed by students enrolled in the fifth year (24%), second and fourth year (21%); only 4% of the sample are first-year students, while those not in the course amounted to 2%. About 35% of the sample has a job, whether self-employed or employed, occasional or permanent, a percentage justified by the wide range of ages of the students (from 18 to 55) and by the number of those who already have a degree, about one third.

### *2.3. Cultural factors*

Regarding the secondary school of origin, it was found that 29% came from the scientific high school, 25% from the humanities high school, 15% from the classical high school, 9% from the linguistic high school; only 10% came from technical institutes and the remaining 12% of the sample was distributed, in decreasing order, among students from the economic-social humanities high school, professional institutes and other secondary schools.

In relation to educational qualifications, however, graduates account for 70% of the sample; the remainder have a university degree. The educational level of the parents was analyzed on the basis of their educational qualifications. 39% of fathers have a compulsory school leaving certificate, 32% a high school diploma, 16% a professional degree and 13% a university degree. The situation for mothers is more or less in line, with 32% having a compulsory school leaving certificate, 41% a high school diploma, 12% a professional degree and 15% a university degree.

Of great interest is the survey on prior knowledge of economic and financial education: 22% of respondents said they had heard of it in informal contexts, 19% in formal contexts, following seminars or courses in the school and/or university context (19%); the remaining 59% of students had never heard of it.

### *2.4. Behavioral factors*

In relation to the use of electronic means of payment, it should be noted that very few students do not use the Internet to make purchases (7%), or use it no more than once a year (9%); on the other hand, 31% say they use it between two and four times a year, 19% between five and eight times a year and only 34% say they buy online more than eight times a year. Focusing on the means of payment used for purchases (prepaid card, debit card, credit card, bank transfer and app), 54% of students use only one, 26% two and 11% three; but there is still a 5% who said they do not use non-cash means of payment and the remaining 4% use more than three.

Then, the possession of financial instruments was investigated, asking people to declare their possession of a bank account, savings book, savings bond, investment funds, government bonds and shares. 58% said they owned only one, almost all of them a bank or post office

current account, 20% owned two, 7% three and the remaining 1% were distributed among those who had between four and six instruments; relevant is that 14% say they do not own any. Only 6% of the interviewees make use of supplementary pensions, confirming what is already widespread in the scientific literature of reference, which stresses the low interest of young people in forms of savings and/or long-term investment, especially if with a view to future life security (Refrigeri, 2020).

### 3. Economic and financial literacy

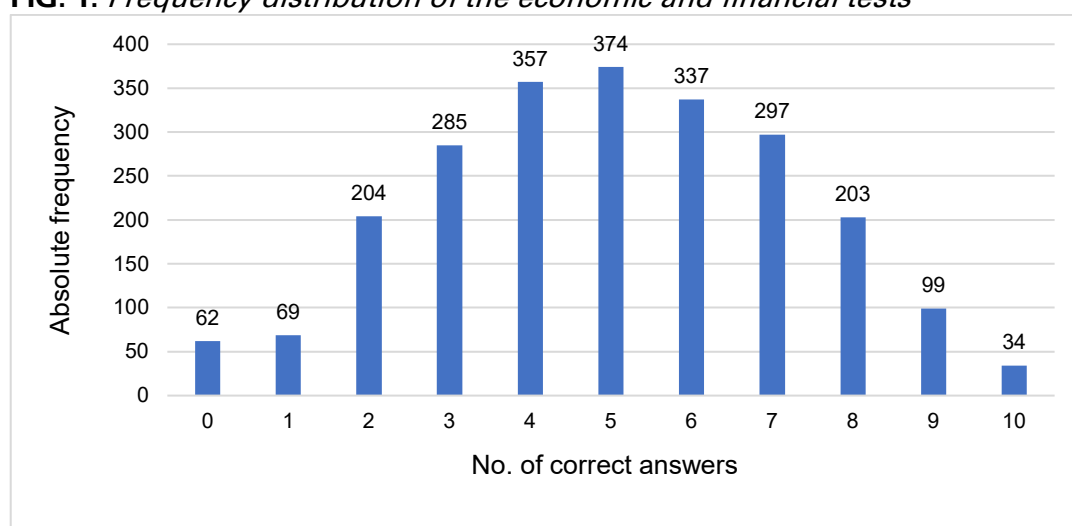
As is well known, an individual's economic and financial literacy is a non-directly observable concept that can only be measured through partial indicators. The OECD/INFE methodology envisages that individuals' knowledge is assessed through a synthetic indicator obtained from the sum of the correct answers.

**TAB. 3.** *Frequency distribution of economic and financial Abc tests*

No. of responses exact	Absolute frequency	Percentage	Cumulative frequency	Cumulative percentage
10	34	1,5%	34	1,5%
9	99	4,3%	133	5,7%
8	203	8,7%	336	14,5%
7	297	12,8%	633	27,3%
6	337	14,5%	970	41,8%
5	374	16,1%	1344	57,9%
4	357	15,4%	1701	73,3%
3	285	12,3%	1986	85,6%
2	204	8,8%	2190	94,4%
1	69	3%	2259	97,3%
0	62	2,7%	2321	100%

Source: Refrigeri, Palladino (2020, 34)

**FIG. 1.** *Frequency distribution of the economic and financial tests*



Source: Refrigeri, Palladino (2020, 35)

Following the OECD/INFE methodology, it is therefore possible to deduce the level of students' economic and financial literacy by analyzing the answers given to the ten questions of the test. As shown in Table 3, 41.8% of students answered 6 out of 10 questions correctly. Further on, however, the response rates drop dramatically: only 27.3% answered seven questions correctly and only 34 students out of 2,321, or 1.5%, were able to answer all questions correctly. The frequency distribution takes the form of a normal distribution (Figure 1). The mode and median have a value of 5, the mean of the correct answers is 4.99, with a standard deviation value of 2.25, a skewness of -0.05 and a kurtosis of 0.56.

#### 4. Regression analysis

The analysis of the scores obtained by the students does not make it possible to capture the individual characteristics that influence performance. In order to evaluate, therefore, the effects of individual factors, all else being equal, a regression analysis was conducted by estimating the Tobit model. The dependent variable is the score obtained in the test, the independent variables are: demographic factors (university of affiliation, sex, age, year of enrolment, work activity); cultural factors (qualification possessed, parents' level of education, knowledge of economic and financial education); economic and financial behavior factors (frequency of online purchases; means of payment used; financial instruments possessed and insurance policies taken out)<sup>2</sup>.

The most significant factors in explaining the observed gaps in economic and financial literacy are: age, educational qualification possessed, knowledge of economic and financial education topics, payment instruments used and financial instruments possessed. In particular, as age increases, test scores increase. Younger people are therefore less prepared. The educational qualification plays an important role: university graduated score better. Also relevant to the cultural factor is the role played by knowledge of economic and financial issues. In this respect, those who have dealt with the topics in formal courses (school or university) report higher scores.

Finally, greater literacy is found among those who use more than one payment instrument (including prepaid cards, debit cards, credit cards, bank transfers and apps) and who own more than one financial

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<sup>2</sup> The regression analysis, accompanied by the necessary references to the methods of construction of the variables, has already been presented in Refrigeri and Palladino (2020), to which we refer. In the following commentary and in the description of the clusters, we will refer to the factors that have the greatest impact, measured through the so-called *Effect size*, which in the Tobit model is calculated through marginal effects.

instrument (including bank accounts, savings books, savings bonds, investment funds, government bonds and shares). The other factors taken into account in the regression analysis have little or not-significant impact.

### 5. Students and financial knowledge: excluded, incompetent, competent and expert

Based on the level of economic and financial knowledge, detected for each student, and using the techniques of cluster analysis described in the methodological section, students can be classified into four types: excluded, incompetent, competent and expert (Table 4).

**TAB. 4.** *Clusters of students according to their economic and financial knowledge*

Cluster	No. of cases	%	Minimum score	Maximum score	Average score
Excluded	335	14,5%	0	2	1,4
Incompetents	1016	43,8%	3	5	4,1
Competents	634	27,3%	6	7	6,5
Experts	336	14,5%	8	10	8,5
Tot.	2321	100%	0	10	5,1

Source: Own processing of survey data

In order to proceed to the description of the individual groups, the results from the regression analysis, which highlighted the factors with the greatest impact on the scores obtained by the students, will be taken into account.

1. 'The excluded'. About 14% of students show low economic and financial knowledge, with an average score of 1.4 on a scale of 1 to 10. They have an average age of 23.5 years, have mainly a diploma (73%) and have mostly never heard of economic and financial education (67%). With regard to behavior, they are characterized by a low use of means of payment (71% do not use them or only use them), favoring cash; 84% do not own financial instruments or own only one of the listed ones.
2. 'The incompetents'. About 44% of students have insufficient economic and financial knowledge. Their score is 4.1 against an average value of 5.1. They have an average age of 24.3 years, have mainly a high school diploma (73%) and have mostly never heard of economic and financial education (63%). They are also characterized by a low use of alternative means of payment to cash (63% do not use them or use only one), and by the scarcity of the financial instruments they own (75% do not own them or own only one).
3. 'The competents'. With an average score more than one point higher than the average (6.5 against 5.1), they represent about

27% of the sample. They have an average age of 25.4 years; 70% are high school graduates and the remaining 30% are university graduates. Almost half of them (46%) have heard about economic and financial education, in informal or formal contexts. About half of them (47%) use more than one means of payment and 32% have more than one financial instrument.

4. 'Experts'. They make up 14.5% of the sample and have an average level of economic and financial knowledge almost 3.5 points higher than the average (8.5 vs. 5.1). The average age is significantly higher than the other groups (28 years). Experts have the highest percentage of students with a university degree (40%) and more than 50% of experts say they have heard about economic and financial education and, most of them them, mainly in formal contexts (55%). Finally, experts have the highest percentage of individuals who use more than one means of payment (57%) and of individuals who own more than one financial instrument (41%).

## 6. Conclusions

The survey shows that the level of economic and financial literacy of future teachers, who are current students in the primary education course, is on average poor. Financial literacy is heterogeneous across the various segments of the sample. Regression analysis showed that: the financial literacy of younger people is low; university graduates perform better than non-graduates; knowledge of economic and financial education issues is decisive for greater knowledge as is economic and financial behavior.

Conducting a cluster analysis on economic and financial knowledge, students were classified into four categories: 1) the excluded, accounting for 14% of the students; 2) the incompetents, 44%; 3) the competents, constituting 27% of the sample; 4) the experts, 14.5%. If the first two categories are added together, the result is that 58% of the students have insufficient economic and financial knowledge, nowadays considered indispensable for making informed choices, a fact that is even more critical considering the strategic role that students on the Primary Education degree course will play in the education of future generations.

This figure, although in line with the data emerging from the survey on the adult population conducted by the Bank of Italy, which estimates the percentage, including excluded and incompetent people, of the adult population at 57%, is difficult to interpret. In fact, if Italy's rearguard position in the OECD ranking is, in part, explained by the lower levels of education of Italians and the higher proportion of elderly people compared to other countries (D'Alessio *et al.*, 2020), the figure found by our survey cannot be explained by resorting to comparative

data, since there is no financial literacy survey focusing on university students at OECD level.

Until this gap is filled, and expert interpretations can be provided, however, useful indications can be drawn from the evidence that emerged from our survey. First, the inclusion of economic and financial education in the school and university curricula would help to raise the level of economic and financial knowledge. For schools, an important step has already been taken with the publication, by the Committee for the planning and coordination of financial education activities (2020), of the Guidelines for the development of financial skills in schools. However, targeted actions can also be launched in the universities, especially in training courses for future teachers, so that the guidelines for the first and second cycle of schooling can find fertile ground for their implementation.

A further indication comes from the positive impact that economic and financial behavior has on relative economic and financial knowledge. It is conceivable that there is a two-way impact between knowledge and behavior: students who use more means of payment and own more financial instruments are better informed and therefore have a higher level of financial and economic knowledge; those who have more knowledge tend to use more means of payment and have more financial instruments if they have the opportunity. The circularity between behavior and knowledge is a not insignificant aspect of the virtuous effects that economic and financial education can trigger for the benefit of future generations.

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## Economic and Financial Planning in Schools: Reflections and Practical Proposals

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**ABSTRACT:** *The Italian position on financial literacy was critical even before the COVID-19 emergency. The Pisa 2018 report (OECD-2020) indicated a high risk of 'financial illiteracy', showing how, among the G20 countries, Italy was in the second last place for financial skills. The latest Consob reports show as 80% of Italian citizens are unable to choose effective financial products matching their needs. The debate on intervention methods and their effectiveness is still ongoing and today, in particular, an effort to design and adapt actions to the current situation is required. It is important to remember that 'quality education', 'decent work and economic growth' are among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations General Assembly for the 2030 Agenda. In order to achieve these goals, it is also necessary to address economic and financial education interventions as early as to children and adolescents, since they are able to make economic decisions related to the goods available at their disposal and that helps them to become skilled citizens, active and aware agents as adults (Valle et al, 2020). To nowadays, in the Italian context, there is no curriculum dedicated to the development of economic and financial competences, but recently economic and financial issues have been included in the school Civic Education curriculum. This opens up the chance of projecting specific good practices: incorporating the study of economics into the curricula would enable teachers to systematically approach the subject and children to perceive and experience its relevance, as well as to understand the link between economic knowledge and other school subject areas. A useful modality is the so-called Learning Units, defined as interdisciplinary didactic pathways related to a specific topic that, through several methodologies, involve children and favor the acquisition and consolidation of notions. In the current scenario, the present paper seeks to use the Learning Units projecting as a methodology to include financial and educational intervention from a multi-disciplinary point of view (Marchetti et al., 2020). This methodology also favors the distance learning activated during the COVID-19 lockdowns allows the use of digital platforms where it is possible to create content tailored to the users and which can be transformed into webinars or public events, including recreational ones.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Economic and Financial Education, Financial Literacy, Educational Interventions, Intervention Projecting, Learning Units, Agenda 2030*

## 1. Introduction

The economic and social context instability perceived in the last years not only by adults, protagonists and main actors of the economic crisis, but also by children and adolescents (Berti *et al.*, 2017), offers a golden opportunity to reason about people preparation to the rapid evolutions of the current society (Lofstrom *et al.*, 2013). Thanks to many researches evidencing that poor economic and financial knowledge is disadvantageous for people's lives (Lusardi, Mitchell 2014; Choi *et al.*, 2011), and that people with higher knowledge (i.e., about retirement planning, paying bills on time, budgeting, saving, and setting financial goals; Hilgert *et al.*, 2003) have better economic outcomes (Grohmann *et al.*, 2015), people's financial literacy has become a central topic in the western countries. As evidenced by the last PISA report, the Italian position on financial literacy is critical, specifically for children and adolescents, and was critical even before this pandemic emergency: the latest Consob reports show as 80% of Italian citizens are unable to choose effective financial products matching their needs. At the light of the data available, the debate on intervention methods and their effectiveness is still ongoing and today an effort to design and adapt actions to the current situation is required. To date it is believed that to achieve a good economic and financial literacy, it is necessary to address economic and financial education interventions as early as to children and adolescents, since they make economic decisions related to the goods available at their disposal and that helps them to become skilled citizens, active and aware agents as adults (Valle *et al.*, 2020).

With the aim to indicate some guideline for the designing of education programs on financial topics, the OECD (2014) proposes a broad definition of financial literacy, combining three aspects considered different in the literature: 'financial literacy', the knowledge of financial concepts and procedures, 'financial capability', the skills to apply this knowledge in the real life, and 'financial inclusion', that indicates opportunities and motivations to act in the financial field. In recent years, in order to improve both the financial literacy and capability in children and adolescents, many financial education programs are created, with the aim to reduce the possible problems in their adult's life and the negative impact on the society of a negative approach to economic and financial issues. In a literature review, Amagir and colleagues (2018) evidenced that the main goals of the financial education programs are to motivate and empower financial behavior and to make goods financial decisions. The author identify three main components of financial literacy that inspired financial education programs: knowledge and understanding, typical of

programs that aimed to inform in economic and financial matters (for the primary school, for example, planning and budgeting, saving, spending and credit concepts), skills and behavior, typical of programs that aimed to teach how manage a specific domain (topics are decision-making, development of transferable skills, problem-solving skills), and attitudes and confidence, typical of programs that improve self-efficacy and motivation.

In the Italian context (Refrigeri *et al.*, 2020), a lot of financial education programs are generally designed by state or private institutions outside the school: although these institutions are very prepared from the point of view of the content to be covered, they do not use the school's own teaching methods. Moreover, often the programs they propose represent a parenthesis in the learning path, as they do not fully integrate into the students' curriculum. This can limit the positive impact of these proposal, relegating new financial learning to a specific context, without children being able to attribute an adaptive meaning to it in their own reality.

To nowadays, in the Italian school there is not a curriculum dedicated to the development of economic and financial competences, but recently these issues have been included in the school Civic Education curriculum. This opens the chance of projecting specific good practices: incorporating the study of economics into the curricula would enable teachers to systematically approach the subject and children to perceive and experience its relevance, as well as to understand the link between economic knowledge and other school subject areas (Marchetti *et al.*, 2020; 2021).

Starting from these reflections and new opportunities, we think that two key questions are:

1. How can psychology support teachers in building specific learning programs?
2. Is it possible to use existing methods to plan teaching in economics and finance matter at the primary school?

About the first question, an important role of psychology is to individuate the age of development of some competences directly involved in the economic education and the psychological processes that develops with age. In fact, children's cognitive development has an important role in the reasoning about economic topics: for example, we know that the naive representations are at the base of new knowledge, and they can represent cognitive obstacles for new learnings (Berti, Bombi, 1981; Berti *et al.*, 2017). Sometimes, people possess incorrect, partial, or incomplete information on a specific topic: this information become active when the topic is brought up again and they may represent an obstacle to the correct interpretation and understanding of the new content. This specifically happen during the development, since children generally possess partial knowledge of reality, linked to the necessarily limited experiences they have had directly, to the teachings of their parents, often unsystematic, and to their cognitive abilities,

which increase during development and allow them to understand complex and abstract realities not before adolescence.

An important cognitive process involved in the financial reasoning is decision-making, that develops with growth and experience and that it is composed by both cognitive and emotional factors that change during development (Marchetti *et al.*, 2016; Marchetti, Castelli, 2012). In fact, decision-making is a complex psychological process involving not only the analysis of evaluative and deliberative aspects of a situation, but also emotions, Theory of Mind or perspective-taking ability (the ability to interpret the behavior in the basis of mental states; Premack, Woodruff, 1978) and sensitivity to social and moral norms (Lombardi *et al.*, 2017). Decision-making develops from infancy to adolescence: infants and children decide as *homo oeconomicus*, because they try to maximize one's own profit in social exchanges, whereas adolescents apply their perspective-taking abilities and social knowledge to obtain the better results in a social and relational context (e.g., Castelli *et al.*, 2010).

Another aspect involved in the economic education are emotions, that play an important role in all learning processes (Immordino-Yang, 2017) and in the decision-making process (Lombardi *et al.*, 2021): for example, the emotion of 'regret' affects the decision-making orienting the aim of this process, and the emotions felt during interpersonal relationships can guide a decision about the management of money (Marchetti, Castelli, 2012). All these components of the psychological development and decision-making take on meaning when read in the light of the cultural perspective that emphasizes the meaningful learning, constructed into specific contexts and relationships, relevant for children and culturally constructed in social interactions (Vygotskij, 1978). In fact, context and interpersonal relationships gives meaning to learning, and without the consideration of the specific cultural context no meaningful learning can take place. In the economic sphere, for example, the value of money takes on a different meaning according to the context, including values, in which it is placed. What children learn in the family about money is not just about its value from a 'mathematical' point of view, but about the meaning that their own culture attaches to money, work, and the distribution of resources in general. In this sense, the school is one of the main social contexts in which children and adolescence learn cultural meanings about both all the school subjects and all the aspects of their life, including money.

## **2. Designing financial education programs with the teachers: the reality tasks and the learning units**

Starting to this point, we decided to use the psychological knowledges to help teachers in the creation of financial education programs. Today, the school requires the use of teaching methods which increasingly take

into account students' prior knowledge, and which are ecological, i.e., close to their reality. In addition, it is recommended that they be cross-disciplinary and include operational activities, to engage students and encourage meaningful learning.

Two teaching methods useful for these purposes are the reality tasks and the learning units. A reality task is a problem situation which arises in the student's reality, then it is relevant for children, and it has not a single solution. In this task, children together must find a solution to the problem generating a concrete product (for example, a poster, a power point presentation and so on). The reality task requires the use of prior knowledge and generates a concrete product; it can be cross-disciplinary (same topic for all disciplines) or multidisciplinary (each discipline adds something new). A reality task originates from topics that interest the students, arises from problem and discussions, requires the use of both new and previously acquired skills and knowledge, and it is operational and relevant to children's everyday life.

The second teaching methods we adopt is the learning unit, that is more complex, because it involves a set of cross-disciplinary activities using different tools (for example, the reality task, the role play, the circle time...). A learning unit introduces and support competence-based instructional design, requires the active participation of the students, encourages the tailoring of the learning paths (use of diversified tools), may involve the use of reality tasks, aims at meaningful learning, concerns collaborative activities, has a flexible structure, and promotes the evaluation of learning processes.

In the present experience, we decided to work with two groups of teachers in order to create a set of reality tasks and learning units for primary school children. The first step was the organization of two focus groups with primary school teachers to understand their attitude towards economic education, their difficulties to teach economic topics and their previously experiences. Then, we work with this teacher's group to create a set of reality tasks; finally, a second group of teachers was involved in the creation of the learning units. To better understand the starting point of the teachers and to explore the possibility of using the methods identified for economic and financial education at school, we asked teachers the main difficulties they meet when they introduced economic topics and programs in their schools. They indicated the lack of time to design extra-curricular learning paths, the difficulty in dealing with cross-disciplinary topics with colleagues, the difficulty in dealing with topics considered complex for teachers and children, linked to the belief that the economic contents are the domain of specialists in the field (low sense of self-efficacy), and the importance to treat money in terms of values, that sometimes are different from the values of the families (ethical vs. consumerist money management). Moreover, the teachers do not identify the school as a source of economic information for children. In fact, the teachers suppose that children learn about money management in the family, with peers, thanks to the mass media

and in other educational settings, such as the oratory/church. This evidence has discouraged many teachers from proposing economic content. Nevertheless, we think that it is important for schools to become a point of reference for students, using the methodologies at their disposal to systematically incorporate economic education into the school curricula.

During the first phase of our work, a group of primary school teachers created some reality tasks for their pupils. The topics were the currency in the world, the value of money, exchanges, and bartering. By way of example, you can analyse the first reality task, *My class coins: the currency in the world*, aimed at multi-ethnic classrooms of 6 to 8 years-old children. The general aim was to collect and organize information on the currencies of different classmates' countries of origins, and school subjects involved were Information technologies and Geography; the main activity was the construction of a power point presentation to show currencies and countries of pupils' origin on the map, correctly placing the coins on the map. The teaching method used was the cooperative learning, and the learning aims were: to learn to use writing, graphics and spreadsheet software; to use the Internet to search for technical, scientific and economic sources and data; to identify countries on the map and to know the culture of the country of origin. Moreover, the children have the possibility to develop soft psychological skills, such as problem solving, social competences, and spatial representation, and some school skills, for example the use of computers and search engines (digital key competences), and the map reading (key citizenship competences). The teacher evaluation was about cooperative work ability, the performance of required tasks, and achievement of learning aims.

**TAB. 1.** *Contents according to work phases*

Phase 1: buying, selling and using money	Brainstorming with the aim of recalling students' prior knowledge of buying and selling (value of products, payments, change, etc.)
Phase 2: experience buying and selling in the class	Role play to simulate an experience of buying and selling that involve each student with a specific role (seller, buyer, expert, mathematician, etc.)
Phase 3: drawing up a cost estimate	Students choose a useful product for the class, collect information (information leaflets, internet, etc.), draw up two or more cost estimates and choose the best one.
Phase 4: buying the chosen product	If possible, students go with the teacher to the shop and buy the product/buy it online.
Phase 5: take stock!	Self-assessment: students reflect on their work (strengths and weaknesses) and construct a conceptual map of what they have done.

The learning unit and its design are more complex. A learning unit is composed by several phases (the number is chosen by teachers) and for each phase the teachers indicate: the description of the activities to be carried out by pupils; the role of the teacher and the methodologies

she/he applies; the implementation times; the school subjects involved; the knowledge and skills that are evaluated. Each learning unit may include the use of reality tasks or other teaching methods useful for the learning process.

One learning units created by the second group of primary school teachers involved was titled *Money management and value* and was aimed to fourth and fifth classes, that were involved in this work for two months. The aim was experimenting with buying and selling in order to make a cost estimate to buy a useful product for the class. School subjects involved were mathematics, science, geography, Information Technologies, citizenship education, and Italian language. The competences to be developed (as indicated by the MIUR) were mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering, business competence, digital competence, personal and social competences, learning to learn and citizenship competence. In Table 1, we summarize the contents of each work phase.

### 3. Conclusion

The experience we described in this paper aimed to create with primary school teachers some education programs in economic and financial topics using didactic tools who are already part of the school. This is a new approach because today all the existing programs are created and proposed by outside consultants, with high expertise in the topic, but generally less prepared in the didactic and in psychological development. At the light of our experience and our collaboration with the teachers, we think that reality tasks and learning units are useful methods to learn economics and finance matter at the primary school. In fact, they are didactic methods known by teachers and students, they promote the improvement of both knowledge and competence, they support the direct experience of the pupils, and they promote cross-disciplinary learning, all characteristics considered from the literature necessary in the economic education. Moreover, teachers are experts in these didactic methods, then they can use them integrating the economic and financial topics in the daily school activities, and they feel able to use them also in relation to topics that they otherwise feel are distant and difficult to learn into the classroom.

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**Education for Sustainability [EFS] as a Ground  
for Innovation  
Both in Methodology and Knowledge.  
A Strategic Alliance for Transformative  
Education Between Schools and Community**

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## The ARTUR LAB: a social intervention for a sustainable well-being education

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**ABSTRACT:** *The operational guidelines of the National Strategies and the 2030 European Agenda for Sustainable Development towards educational activities underline the importance of fostering creative, inclusive, and positive communities in resilient territories; for an educational action-oriented towards social sustainability development and well-being. In these novel scenarios, care management and educational responsibilities become strategic assets for the future of civil society, capable of supporting the challenges in contrast to the current educational poverty. The 'generative' action requires a holistic-transdisciplinary intervention conceived in the Deweyan perspective of learning by doing. In this sense, we present the Association of Responsible Adults for a United Territory against Risk (ARTUR) and its Laboratories for Adolescents and their Needs (ARTUR LAB). The ARTUR aims to implement pedagogic interventions to ensure the timing and effectiveness of education in territories at risk of adolescents' antisocial behaviour. The ARTUR LAB are workshops that guide adolescents to think and act according to ethical and moral society principles. The activities are divided into 'indoor' and 'outdoor' modules and are built around sports, arts and active citizenship activities, all linked to the 4C risk prevention models (i.e., Countering, Treating, Co-responsible, Sharing) to transform crises into possibilities, poverty into opportunities and to educate adolescents to become responsible adults of tomorrow.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Pedagogy; Association; Transdisciplinary Intervention; Risk prevention*

### 1. Introduction

The Coronavirus has changed our daily life, causing profound changes in the organization of living systems. In particular, the educational system has changed its spaces, times and forms of acquiring knowledge via digital tools (Bertagna, 2020).

The suspension of standard school activities had increased the risk of social exclusion (Nicola *et al.* 2020) already high before the pandemic where over a million adolescents were reported in a state of cultural poverty (ASVIS, 2018). The 'post-covid' estimates believe that this fragile population has increased by at least 20% (Nuzzaci, 2011).

The paradigm of educational sustainability at the time of the Coronavirus must be declined in the constraints and opportunities generated by the pandemic to form resilient individuals capable of facing emergencies (Beck, 2008). In this sense, the educational professions have been called to exercise their 'mission' with care, responsibility (Iavarone, 2019), resilience (Vaccarelli, 2018) and inclusive approaches (Besio, Bianquin 2020), in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015) which emphasizes the need to promote the acquisition of skills useful for education oriented to sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, peace and inclusion.

Hence, non-formal educational activities promoted by networks of local associations constitute precious opportunities for the most vulnerable. The experiences, acquired with the pedagogical logic of 'learning by doing' (Van Poeck *et al.* 2018), generate transdisciplinary educational spaces (Jeder, 2014) and formative processes care oriented (Boffo, 2010), and require new educational figures capable of intervening as a link between school and extra school activities, playing as 'frontier' and 'pivot' to bridge the institutional gaps in which social exclusion, anti-social behaviors, marginality and deviance lurk (Iavarone, 2021).

According to these theories, the following contribution presents the Adults Responsible for a United Territory against Risk association (ARTUR) and its Laboratories for Adolescents and their Needs (ARTUR LAB).

## **2. Well-being education to prevent risk: the ARTUR association**

The Association ARTUR founded in response to the violence suffered by Arturo, a Neapolitan student stabbed in Via Foria on 18 December 2017 and left almost lifeless, at the age of 17. The episode has become a paradigm of redemption and social and civil resilience (Iavarone, 2020) to facilitate well-being education (Iavarone, 2008).

The ARTUR Association offers socio-educational interventions aimed to contrast the risk of adolescents' deviance (Sales, 2015). Working in particular with adolescents that struggle to recognise the educational institutions as 'authoritative' (Barbagallo, 2010). Furthermore, for those that have been born in a family with criminal records seems almost normal that they are the protagonists of an ineluctable destiny of violence and anti-social behaviors (Iavarone, 2020). Hence, the ARTUR promotes educational interventions, against adolescents' anti-social

behaviors, built on system actions of an interinstitutional nature collected in the short *Manifesto of Civil Pedagogy* (Iavarone, 2020) of the association and based on the '4C' shown in the Table 1 below.

The practical action of the 'Manifesto of Civil Pedagogy' is expressed in a series of diversified initiatives that the association carries out in dialogue with the territory. These initiatives are built on the needs and potential that the territory, and the people who live in it, offer. These initiatives are shown in Table 2.

**TAB. 1.** *Manifesto of Civil Pedagogy of the ARTUR*

Countering	Treating	Co-responsible	Sharing
Risk 'predictors' in order to reduce the phenomena of deviance.	Give attention to minors also by establishing academic courses for sports operators-educators.	Establishment of regulatory devices to encourage families at risk to adopt adequate educational behaviors.	Involve civil society for the establishment of a 'welfare system center', a territorial network made of schools, associations and civic society.

Beyond these initiatives, the ARTUR association also carries out other actions trying to respond to the needs of the territory and of the moment. In particular, during the first wave of the pandemic, ARTUR stood out for the capillary work of creating and delivering covid-19 protection devices. In addition, it has launched a crowdfunding in support of the Loreto Mare Hospital (Naples, ITA) which has made it possible to donate € 31.369 to be allocated to the purchase of intensive care ventilators to treat to help intensive care units during covid infection.

**TAB. 2.** *The initiatives of the ARTUR*

Initiatives of the ARTUR association	Contents and Objectives
ARTUR Network	ARTUR has a formative network that includes about 50 educational institutions. The network agreement is stipulated with schools, other associations and third sector entities, companies that are particularly active in educational area.
ARTUR Lab	Workshop training courses that aim to help adolescents in needs.
ARTUR Tourism	The ARTUR association makes 'social school tourism' programs. The activity is aimed at all students, it consists of an entire day to be lived at our Association, or at the decentralised offices of ongoing projects, where participants will have the opportunity to talk with operators and educators but also to take part in different training experiences (Graphic Arts, Social Theatre, Body and Emotions, Expressive Movement) under the guidance of laboratory experts.
ARTUR Training	The ARTUR association has collaborated in the design and implementation of the training and teaching activities of the University Master for <i>Expert in motor and sports education for the inclusion and prevention of risk</i> active from the academic year 2018-19 at the University of Naples Parthenope. The objective of the one-year MSc course is to train educators capable of reading, interpreting and preventing the problems

	connected with social exclusion and deviance, carrying out the functions of 'educational supervision' and 'pedagogical alert' in the absence of adequate families to carry out their task. With this purpose the MSc carries out activities in collaboration with third sector associations, sports organizations, rehabilitation communities and juvenile justice centres.
ARTUR Listening point	The ARTUR association provides free educational consultancy meetings for parents, educators, teachers aimed at analysing problems and finding answers concerning education.
ARTUR Talent	The ARTUR association aims to enhance the talents of the area by supporting creative projects of artistic, visual and creative nature in general; a sort of social incubator of youth creativity to help young people develop their best attitudes.
ARTUR Food bank	The ARTUR association organizes food banks by distributing food parcels for family groups in needs.
ARTUR Supportive wardrobe	The ARTUR association provides solidarity wardrobe service where it is possible to leave or take used clothes, objects and accessories for children between 0 - 16 years old.

### 2.1. Adolescents and their needs: the ARTUR LAB

The ARTUR LAB are socio-educational interventions that starts from the observation of adolescents through their emotions and experiences (Mossi, Corvi, 2019). Specifically, it is tailored at pre-adolescents and adolescents in the 'bridge' years between primary and secondary school.

They are laboratories that are characterized by the realization of body-motor activities aimed to improve the relationship of adolescents with themselves and with others: managing emotions and uncertain identity processes (Aruta, Ambra, 2020). dysfunctional school and family relationships (Ferraro, 2010; Iavarone 2013); and use of social media and new technologies in a conscious and responsible way (Iavarone, Ferra 2017).

The laboratory activities take place in schools or in a sports and cultural centre near the neighbourhoods of origin of the adolescents that are receiving the intervention and are team or individual sports (such as basketball or judo) or dance activities sports (such as hip hop or break dance). Additional activities include educational walks, marathons and performance installations as the result of dance-theater, visual e graphic arts workshop. These activities focus on the body and (e)motion activities as tools of interaction and relationship (Ferrari, Coudè, 2018). and to reflect on issues of social relevance (Aruta *et al.* 2020). The ARTUR LAB are divided into Reflection Units (RU) each of 6 hours carried out in 2 monthly meetings of 3 hours and are conducted by a team of educators, psychologists, performers, pedagogues and sportsmen from the professional and academic world (Iavarone *et al.* 2019).

**TAB. 3.** *The Reflection Units (RU) of the ARTUR LAB divided into objectives and items*

Reflection Units	Objectives	Items
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Family	Get to know your own self and discover the others. Learn to know and re-know your Self and to name your emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identity in adolescence</li> <li>- Self acceptance</li> <li>- Sociality</li> <li>- Building relationships</li> <li>- Emotions in the family</li> </ul>
School	Be aware of one's own educational growth project in terms of learning; develop a critical spirit and independent judgment, be aware of one's motivations, self-esteem and self-efficacy.  Know and re-know the emotions linked to the reference context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learn to manage and contain them</li> <li>- Contrast and inhibit negative emotions (violence)</li> <li>- Get excited in love</li> <li>- Countering violent love</li> </ul>
Free time, sport e peer group	What it means to be part of a group (acceptance/exclusion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The group</li> <li>-The dynamics</li> <li>- Languages</li> <li>- The rites</li> <li>- Icons</li> <li>-The components</li> <li>- The roles</li> </ul>
Technologies	Know the possibilities and risks of the network. Become a user aware and capable of self-protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The network</li> <li>-My smartphone</li> <li>-The apps I use</li> <li>- Social networks</li> <li>-Virtual relationships</li> <li>-The risks: the 'fake'</li> <li>-Strategies of use and self-control</li> </ul>

The RU are the single didactic units and are built around the 'life areas' in which adolescents experience their emotions: school, family, sports, free time and technologies (Ambra *et al.* 2019; Ferraro *et al.* 2020). Currently, the pandemic and the extensive usage of Distance Learning (DL) increased inequalities (Ambra *et al.* 2020). affecting the well-being and cognitive development of adolescents (Ferraro *et al.* 2020; Commodari, La Rosa 2021). The RU are specific 'work clusters': in the following Table 3, the objectives of each unit and the thematic elements that compose it. Each RU has a specific didactic setting shown in the following Table 4:

**TAB. 4.** *Didactic structure of the RU.*

Warm-up: theme proposal
Videos/short films with the theme of reflection
Reflective (unstructured) activities in circle-time with the students
Laboratory activities (structured)
De-briefing
Production of a video with the students at the end of the RU (such as Spot of 3/4 minutes)

The goal of the RU is to attempt a journey into the 'real' world of adolescence, in those hidden spaces, made up of thoughts, actions and behaviours mainly unknown to adults. It is interesting and important to try to access the languages of this generation, their visions and cultural positioning.

### **3. Conclusion**

The ARTUR aims to assist the development of today's adolescents so that they become responsible adults of tomorrow (Ambra *et al.* 2021). The ARTUR LAB are socio-educational interventions built among sports, art and active citizenship. In their programming, body-motor and (e)motion activities play an important role on adolescents' health and well-being (Snedden *et al.* 2019). The lockdown has impacted on the quality of life of adolescents (Slimani *et al.* 2020) who have paid the consequences of inevitable emergency choices but have given little thought to the needs and discomforts of the adolescents themselves (Musso, Rosalinda, 2020). Education has the duty to try to read adolescents by going under the surface, where a profound existential unease lurks, a cry unheard by adults (Iavarone, 2019) that 'resounds' even louder despite the return to school (Waters, 2021). According to these assumptions, it is essential to primarily restore the presence of at least one significant adult in the life of each child at risk: in the absence of a family capable of doing so or of teachers unable to do so, the reference adult can be represented by street educators, teachers, sports who functions like an 'existential tutor'. It is important that adults establish an 'authentic' relationship with adolescents made up of understanding, dialogue and clear generational positioning (Iavarone, 2013). They must be a healthy model to follow, capable of accompanying and guiding adolescents along the most insidious stages of their life journey.

For this to happen, it is important that today's adolescents can become responsible adults tomorrow, capable of wise and conscious choices for the future. For every adult unable to do this, there is a disoriented, unhappy and frustrated teenager who often 'cures' these emotions the wrong way, using illicit and harmful substances or violence. Such behaviors are destructive to themselves and to others; as happened to Arturo, whose attack took place in a 'boring' afternoon of four violent young teenagers (Iavarone, 2019). In this sense, the role of third sector associations is crucial to help adolescents to cope with the «Post-covid Era» (Ferraro *et al.*, 2021).



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## Civic Education and Service-Learning: towards a Sustainable and Supportive Curriculum

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**ABSTRACT:** *Law 92/2019 has provided the inclusion, starting from the current school year, of 33 hours of civic education in teaching curriculums at all levels. The Ministry of Education has identified three axes in the Italian Constitution, within sustainable development and digital citizenship, on which teaching will be articulated. These guidelines will have to be explored through a transformative and systemic approach, which accepts the challenge of designing interpretative paths capable of re-signifying and building new access keys to reality. The transversality of civic education calls for a different reference paradigm to be assumed from the one adopted up to now in bringing together the individual disciplines: it is a question of generating more committed and participatory forms of citizenship that involve the whole integrated training system, creating synergies to generate networks and promote a common language on which to construct the entire pedagogical-educational planning. From an in-depth reading of the Law, the need emerges in all its significance to carefully consider and communicate the issues proposed by the Italian Constitution and the UN's Agenda 2030 with the aim of building sustainable and supportive communities. In this direction, the gradual but significant dissemination in school curricula of good practices focused on the pedagogical proposal of service learning (Tapia, 2006; Mortari, 2017a) identifies inter and intragenerational solidarity as an interesting point of access for interpreting in an unprecedented way what is required by the regulatory provision. Service-learning is a choice of meaning to give life to responsible and welcoming learning environments, which offer the opportunity to work together on common causes and see the students as protagonists in offering a service to the community.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Civic Education, Service-Learning, Sustainability, Community, Co-Responsibility*

### Introduction

What does it mean to educate for active citizenship? What features should the educational life of a school assume in adopting a civics curriculum?

Preparing the younger generations for active participation in the life of their community and contributing to the development of citizenship is an unavoidable task for educational institutions to which the recent Law

92/2019 relating to the 'repositioning' of civic education in student curricula, asks, through the three axes in which the proposal is articulated, to «identify rights, duties, tasks, personal and institutional behaviors, to promote the full development of the person and the participation of all citizens in the political, economic and social organization of the country» (Ministero dell'Istruzione, 2020, 1).

We are faced with a request for transformative education, which makes it possible to take informed decisions, according to a multidisciplinary perspective, and to take individual and collective actions as a response to a change of direction in our society. In accordance with UNESCO (2015, 15) «Global citizenship education aims to be transformative, building the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that learners need to be able to contribute to a more inclusive, just and peaceful world».

Starting from these indications it is necessary to ask ourselves what are the organizing principles of the civic education curriculum, in order to plan, according to an organic, sensitive and dialogic direction within the various disciplines, also in the sign of a broader awareness of educational roles and civilians of schools, families and the territory, insofar as «education is conceivable only in the context of the human community and through its forces» (Spranger, 1959/2020, 40).

Citizens must exercise their rights and fulfil their responsibilities as members of a community; it is therefore essential that they acquire relevant intellectual and participatory skills. It is a question of giving life to an educational process which, in the becoming of the person, helps to problematize «the presence of man in the world, [...] to assume an increasingly critical position in front of the world» (Freire, 1973, 110). to nourish a constant dialogue with others and the capacity for discernment.

The concept of citizenship must therefore start from the local dimension and then consider personal and community fulfilment according to a global perspective that favors the birth of a cognitive democracy (Morin, 1999). The centrality, in the construction of active citizenship, of the educational and socio-cultural aspects, allows to overcome an exclusively legislative and political approach, so as to authentically signify the person, his identity, his purposes, also in relation to cultural and social contexts, in the network of relationships that it interweaves and that have a significant impact on the entire community.

The teaching of civic education «a crossroads of knowing, being and doing» (Santerini, 2010, 27). like any discourse on education, presupposes asking oneself about the idea of the person and society underlying a specific educational institution; in order to generate an authentically human community and respond effectively to the new emerging cultural and training needs, it is necessary to innovate, through a plural approach, educational processes through the promotion of relational networks capable of putting the dignity of the

person at the center and its dynamic relationship with reality. Law 92/2019 on civic education is oriented in this direction, which, through the guidelines, invites us to assume this teaching as a «transversal value matrix that must be combined with the study disciplines», envisaging the need to educate tomorrow so that they can internalize and act «ways of living that are inclusive and respectful of people's fundamental rights». In particular, the regulatory text emphasizes the importance of guiding the development of knowledge that allows access to understanding the current human condition, urging the search for truth through the comparison and critical scrutiny of different opinions. It is important to broaden one's gaze also.

### **1. A 'new' civic education**

Attention to global citizenship is a fundamental component of 21st century education. If a citizen is someone who, in compliance with public rules, knows how to assert their rights, fulfill their duties and contribute to the common good (Puig, Giron, Martin, Serrano 2011). Schools of all levels are asked to build a planning framework capable of implementing participatory forms that account for the active role of each and make the younger generations responsible for their growth process.

Educating for citizenship, therefore, does not only mean teaching the fundamental norms of the legal systems to which we are part, but promoting active participation and comparison, to build a solid personal and collective identity. The Law on civic education goes beyond the simple knowledge of rules, regulations, norms that regulate civil coexistence and is oriented towards their conscious application in everyday life, so that they can become a habit embodied in everyone's lifestyle.

The need to identify new languages and new concepts that help change the gaze emerge, by favoring processes of imagination opening up to possible futures and allow to validate an idea of a school oriented towards care and civic sense (Dato, Ladogana, 2021).

Law 92/2019 confirms this perspective; without any pretense of reviewing the complexity of the debate currently underway, I emphasize in particular, three elements that contribute to problematizing from a pedagogical point of view the need to interpret civic education as an opportunity to acquire a new outlook on oneself and on the world.

The first concerns the transversality and collegial co-responsibility of the discipline, which, as the regulatory text indicates, does not belong to a specific curricular subject, but is entrusted to the entire teaching team or to the class council. The school is asked to assume a different reference paradigm from the one adopted up to now in combining the individual disciplines:

the thematic nuclei addressed through this teaching cannot be ascribed to a single subject, due to the plurality of learning objectives and expected skills. Educating for citizenship calls into question the daily behavior of people in every area of life, in relationships with others and with the world; therefore, it concerns each discipline which is an integral part of the civic and social education of each student.

According to this perspective, there is a need to overcome a rigid curriculum in favor of integrated visions that start from the recognition of frailties and are able to respond to the great challenges of our time, promoting a culture of dialogue and encounter; it is necessary to build knowledge paths aimed at favoring the acquisition of autonomous instruments of judgment and the internalization of the values of democracy, cooperation and peace (Malavasi, 2020).

The second element refers to the need to carefully consider and create a dialogue between the themes proposed by the Italian Constitution and the UN 2030 Agenda with the aim of building sustainable and supportive communities: 'doing' civic education means to promote responsibility in the younger generations and to agree on strategies, paths, actions based on help and respect for the other. Living in a sustainable way requires educating to thoughts and actions of justice towards creation by moving from a precise anthropological vision centered on the notions of person, relationship, witness, commitment, openness to dialogue and intra and inter-generational equity.

This in-depth dimension provides guidelines to schools for the design of educational paths capable of training citizens for a democracy in which the interests of the individual are reconciled with those of the community, to nourish a profound sense of responsibility and respect for human dignity. UNESCO (2021) emphasizes how learning related to sustainability issues must be integrated into the entire curriculum, not only by enhancing cognitive knowledge but by involving students socially and emotionally, through learning and participation.

The moral, economic and social duty to implement public policy measures capable of countering the increase in inequality cannot be separated from a capillary pedagogical-educational action that critically analyzes the growing complexity and proposes solutions for a new way to live, produce, consume. The debate on sustainability generates horizons of meaning that commit pedagogy, theoretical and practical knowledge in continuous construction, to confer an ethical value on education for the well-being and autonomy of each one.

The third element is the need for a design that starts with the initial assessment of specific contexts. It is not a question of the mere application of protocols, but of a process that implies intentionality and systematicity, commits to confrontation, exchange with the territory and brings out the relational instance of the notion of citizenship.

This strengthens each school in its role as the heart of the community to which it belongs, enhancing the participation of pupils in active



citizenship experiences and through collaboration with families in order to promote behaviors based on citizenship that is aware not only of rights, duties and rules of coexistence, but also of the challenges of the present and the immediate future. Therefore, planning approaches are needed that respond to the resources and peculiarities of the territories and communities to which they belong, able to start from real training needs and from the concrete enhancement of potential synergies that can be activated.

Being citizens is a commitment to each other, a requirement that social life places, guiding people to recognize and achieve the common good and to build solid interpersonal relationships based on dialogue, mutual respect, respect for one's own and others' rights, according to a logic of solidarity and equity.

## **2. An intelligent citizenship of the world. 'Learning to serve, serving to learn'**

What experiences can allow students to see and perceive themselves as part of global problems, and parts of global solutions?

«A community is not only a reality to grow, but it is also an already existing fact, already rich in skills and energies, therefore it has a «character as a resource already present to be exploited» (Triani, 2018, 66). From this perspective, reflections and experiences have arisen which have led to the enhancement of the importance of the community through unprecedented pedagogical devices, now significantly diffused in the classrooms of different parts of the world. Promoting educational and cultural tools useful for acting in personal and collective responsibility means generating a new way of learning. As a space and time of meaning, the school must accept the challenge of educating authentic, competent, supportive people in the logic of respect and acceptance. This configures a constant pedagogical and didactic solicitation to design new educational paths, privileged and multi-experiential spaces that allow to interpret the concept of citizenship in an unprecedented way. The values that are the foundation of a democratic community can find their full realization and interpretation in sustainable educational contexts that recognize the mutual respect for community and the responsibly shared construction of the future.

In this direction, the pedagogical proposal of service learning can be helpful. It identifies inter- and intra-generational solidarity as an interesting entry point for interpreting in a new way what is required by the Law on Civic Education.

Service-learning addresses the wholeness of the person, promoting an education in sharing knowledge learned in the classroom, which is applied to respond to needs present in the community. An emblematic slogan that sums up the proposal well is «learning to serve, serving to learn» (Tapia, 2012); learning to 'serve', because one renders a service

to others, exercising responsibility, commitment, gratuitousness in an anthropological condition increasingly marked by crisis, fragmentation and the search for profit in the short term. An important socio-affective dimension also emerges since serving, also understood in the sense of being useful to the other (Bornatici, 2020) promotes the development of a feeling of belonging and a common humanity, of sharing values, promotes solidarity and respect for differences and diversities.

'To serve teaches' as it is not a one-way path, from those who offer it to those who receive it, it is not voluntary or welfare assistance, but an opportunity to apply one's knowledge and transform them into effective skills; serving allows you to learn about, understand and critically evaluate the contents to be transferred to your community and to evaluate the resources available in a thoughtful way.

Service-learning has its epistemological roots in the thinking of authors such as Dewey, who stressed the need to move the educational model towards the direct experience of citizenship, or rather towards practices that stimulated critical thinking, reflective learning, to learn by doing, in a direct relationship with society.

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Significant elements of the pedagogical device of service learning can also be recognized by approaching authors such as Freire, Maria Montessori, Don Lorenzo Milani, Danilo Dolci, who recognized the centrality of the person and his ability to affect society through an education based on enhancement of the talents that each one possesses and on the progressive participation of the student in the life of their community; this being part of the social environment in which he lives forms his habits and strengthens his capacity for cooperation and interaction.

Service learning, distances itself from a traditional, static and closed school vision, in which pupils spend most of their hours at their desks and proposes an activist approach in which the community, if supported by appropriately thought-out pedagogical intentionality and structured, it becomes an equipped space, an effective didactic and multidisciplinary tool object of study.

The involvement of students in the design of the course enhances autonomy and, as documented by accredited studies, working with others allows you to improve the prosocial reasoning ability, contributing to the development of skills related to the management of social problems. Effective service learning, programs offer the opportunity to develop a sense of value, competence and connection with others (Scales, Blyth *et al.*, 2000). generating meaningful relationships, characterized by empathy and reciprocity. Offering students the opportunity to experience civic education in their own

community, starting from school, means developing a sense of belonging to a place, improving well-being and nurturing the belief that they can effectively become levers of change (Williams, 2016).

Because of this approach, orienting educational processes according to cultural models that anchor reflection and action to the territorial context in which they are inserted, asks to consider individual, relational and organizational variables and to develop transformative processes capable of consciously re-meaning resources and knowledge. In line with what was stated by the Council of Europe, in 2016 in the Document: *Competences for democratic culture. Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies*, to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live in peace together with others in democratic societies, schools need to promote respect, civility, responsibility and self-efficacy.

Through the Service Learning, the school is transformed into a real civic center for neighbourhood life, defining an effective and sustainable model to combat educational poverty; it is a school that becomes a research community, allows itself to be permeated by the territory, breaking up the space of the classroom for the benefit of sustainable and supportive learning.

### **3. An education capable of future**

A pedagogical perspective, in reflecting on the educability of the person and on the contexts in which education takes place, assumes solidarity as the regulating criterion of one's actions and configures the necessary support to face that «great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge that lies ahead, and will ask us to undertake the long path of renewal» (Francesco, 2015, 202).

Thus, the need to favor a way of thinking and acting emerges that asks one to direct one's own existence by recognizing the particular value of the other, through a profound relational and ethical openness that encourages trust and confrontation. What emerges is the need to open up spaces for dialogue and mutual support, forging educational alliances to seek together new forms of active participation by young people and adults.

On one hand, contemporary pedagogical debate has broadened and redefined certain heuristic frameworks, opening up to new horizons of thought; on the other, it is called upon to make fundamental anthropological choices so as not to dilute the scope of certain instances that are profoundly close to the characteristics of human ontology and ethical thought. The value of the relationship is part of the person's own existence, it allows us to overcome unilateral visions and self-referentiality, going beyond rigid and pre-constituted thoughts. Staying in the relationship, building it, sowing it every day, assumes an anthropological specificity ingrained with the human being in his

system: the root of every transformation, but also of individual success is to be found precisely in the relationship of circularity between people, in the inter-subjectivity of their expressions in the social and cultural sphere. Extending educational processes to all the expressions of human life that have man as their point of reference requires pedagogy to be rigorous and balanced. A second element emanates from the relationship, gratitude, which seems to have lost its generative force and its educative-formative connotation that did not give room for interpretative risks but was able to encourage an awareness and a free and constructive solidarity. Gratitude, understood as a way that consolidates the relationship between human beings even at a distance in time and space, beyond being something anachronistic or linked exclusively to moralistic exhortations, discloses the mystery of otherness, and carries within itself the concepts of commitment and dignity, allowing a relationship of sharing and deep proximity to be established. Applying to education the three characteristics of the gift – giving, receiving, reciprocating – found in the rule of exchange formulated by Marcel Mauss, it is possible to rediscover that form of the human being which takes its cue from a relational principle. The person is being with and for others, and only through forms of proximity that recognize in the Us an added value and a testimony, can it find its fulfilment.

Extending educational processes to all the expressions of human life that have man as their point of reference requires pedagogy to be rigorous and balanced. A second element emanates from the relationship, gratitude, which seems to have lost its generative force and its educative-formative connotation that did not give room for interpretative risks but was able to encourage an awareness and a free and constructive solidarity. Gratitude, understood as a way that consolidates the relationship between human beings even at a distance in time and space, beyond being something anachronistic or linked exclusively to moralistic exhortations, discloses the mystery of otherness and carries within itself the concepts of commitment and dignity, allowing a relationship of sharing and deep proximity to be established.

## **Conclusion**

Promoting sustainable educational processes that lead everyone to behave by imagining that their choices can be made by all the people who populate the Earth means seeing the human being as both a value and a constraint, a starting point and a destination, a resource for generating a shared project that systems and strengthens new participatory and reflective processes. Attributing educational importance to being with the other means decreeing the inseparability between human formation and the moral dimension in a framework of

values that places the person in a generative condition with respect to his own context of life.

We are called upon to inhabit the earth with concern and fraternity (Malavasi, 2020): in this perspective, civic education is part of the issues related to human formation and represents a challenge linked to the educational system for the promotion of the rights of the person, envisaging a reference to its axiological dimension and educational ethics.

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## **Educating for Ecological Thinking. The Contribution of Sociology to the Spread of a New Educational Paradigm**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The connection between education and sustainability has been hypothesized as fundamental for achieving social development compatible with environmental protection. To verify this hypothesis, it is necessary to start from the study of the system of relationships within the school that arise from the educational paradigm in use today. The currently widespread paradigm is of a cognitive-rational type and arises from a model of social relationship based on productivity. School production is conceived in terms linked to the rational needs of the productive world and generates microsocial behaviors of competition and oppression. However, the modern educational challenge requires acquiring the skills necessary to live sustainable relationships. The real strength of ecological thinking lies in affirming itself as something new and different, distancing itself from selfish and aggressive impulses. It is a challenge to be won by activating all institutions and educational centers: schools, families, associations, media. The proposal to introduce a new socio-relational educational paradigm can constitute a concrete solution to transform the school into a true educating community where everyone can feel stimulated to create sustainable relationships. In this direction, the dialogue between sociology and pedagogical sciences becomes fundamental for building new relationships within the educational system, favoring the development of ecological thinking.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Ecological, Sustainability, Socio-Relational, Interdisciplinarity, Outdoor*

### **Introduction**

This article is the report of an action-research carried out in agreement with the sociology department of the University of Salerno, which involved five hundred children from 5 to 16 years old and the pediatric ward of a hospital, with their respective teachers and parents, in an educational path based on the combination of different teaching techniques: reading literacy, storytelling, autobiographical writing and outdoor education. Our survey made it possible to verify the effectiveness in the fight against youth discomfort and in education for

sustainability, through a targeted sociological intervention, aimed at building an authentic educational community in the school.

### **1. Paying attention to human relationships**

To achieve an authentic education in sustainability, a new socio-educational paradigm based on the combination of ecological education, ethical principles and mind development is needed.

Working in this direction requires sociological intervention in the school because Sociology has the specific investigation and methodological tools necessary for studying the system of relationships in the school and for the elaboration of intervention strategies on micro-social and in the school-family relationship.

Starting from the studies that show how literature encourages attention to the others, inducing the reader to take care of the world around him (Oatley, 1992, Gibson 2007, Carroll 2002). we have exploited the educational power of narration in all its forms. Our path has focused on the importance of reading literacy, also understood in its emotional aspects, and we asked ourselves to which extent reading literacy, storytelling and outdoor education could be linked with sustainability education. The question was absolutely new because these techniques, already known in the didactic field, had never been used before in combination with each other. Above all, they have always been included in an educational paradigm of a cognitive-rational type, while in our case we have tried to structure all the activities in the light of a socio-relational approach.

Educating children and teens to ecological thinking is a process that requires deep reflection by teachers and parents. The real strength of ecological thinking lies in establishing ourselves as radically different, taking for example a distance from aggressive drives, especially those of a personalistic nature. Our goal was therefore to raise the awareness of young people in a dimension that considers 'we' and not just 'me'. And the premise from which we started was to cultivate the dimension of 'we' by creating synergies between pupils and also between school and families, so that children receive coherent educational inputs from all their reference adults.

Extensive studies showed that our Self is continually recreated in the relationships with others because our stories are inevitably intertwined (Mead, 2010). We now know that thought and knowledge have a strong relational dimension (Bruner, 1992) and that each competence is first social and only later becomes individual (Vygotsky, 2010). Therefore, it is important to create right synergies in school within a socio-cultural didactic approach. Preserving life of our planet means paying attention to climate change and pollution, but even more to human relationships.

Starting from these assumptions, as a sociologist and research director I worked, in agreement with the teachers, to develop a socio-



didactic path that could help us find answers to achieve the research objectives.

At the beginning of the research, we asked ourselves a question: 'what can Nature do for school?' And thinking together we discovered that it was also necessary to ask the question in reverse, that is: 'what can school do for Nature and for a sustainable world?'

To foster authentic relationships among young people we needed a strategy that could stimulate the listening skills of the other people and the inner dialogue. I therefore thought of using literature, and other forms of written and oral narrative, as a basic tool to encourage the formation of an educating community. Of course, needless to deny it, school practice must broaden its attention not only to the *inner landscape* but also to a contact with Earth and its spaces. An ecological literacy process must be an invitation to hear Nature speaking through our emotions. For this reason, direct contact with Nature must necessarily intertwine with reading in a harmonious *continuum*. Moreover, since ancient times the stories told near the fireplace had plants, animals and humans as protagonists (Grimm, 1800). Nature is part of the stories, because stories have always been used to help us satisfy that need for peace and harmony which we are constantly looking for.

Through narration, children and young people can meet the lives of people, animals and plants, and they can feel part of the only large community of living things. And this is essential because walking into Nature and preaching altruism will be ineffective as long as we consider ourselves separate from each other. The narrative dimension linked to Nature embodies the meaning of being in the world, which in turn is linked to the sensory sphere, to perceiving through the senses.

In years of field studies, we verified that the educational model that can function today is the narrative-laboratory model, which develops synergies and transforms the class into a research community. On this purpose I developed a special teaching strategy called *Fiabadiario* (Talediary) that combines narration (written, oral and graphic) with outdoor movement. It consists in the annotation of thoughts, ideas, collective or autobiographical stories built according to fairy-tale narrative styles, drawings, collages, which develop from two activities: reading and walking outdoors (Bruno, 2020).

It is an educational strategy based on known techniques, but usually applied in a disjointed or unsystematic way. In this case they are linked in a harmonious way. The three basic techniques are: literature circle, collective writing and autobiographical narration (also developed as information design). The Literature circle is based on collaborative learning and is a group reading technique implemented for the first time in 1982 by the teacher Karen Smith (Daniels, 1994). The introduction of collective writing at school is instead due to the pedagogue Freinet (Legrand, 1993). Finally, autobiographical narration is a centuries-old practice.

*Fiabadiario* intertwines these three techniques and combines them with physical activity in nature, in a systematic and consequential way, establishing synergies among pupils and between school and family. The path starts from the stories in the illustrated books, which are particularly suitable in ecological education for the particular mix of text and images they offer.

Some scholars found that from the early years of life visual art arouses the activation of the orbitofrontal cortex, that is, the brain area related to personality, emotions and social conduct (Gallese, 2013). It was shown that already at three years of age, the cerebral cortex is sensitive to the vision of artistic sculptures and activates pleasure impulses during observation (Di Dio, 2011). These studies reinforce our conviction: the artistic illustrations contained in the picture books can be an effective didactic tool to transmit knowledge and start new attitudes. I have personally a preference for picture books with fairy-tale stories, but any type of illustrated book can be effective in education for ecological thinking.

The path of *Fiabadiario* is made up of five phases and the core of the activities are the stories that spring from the books. The first phase is the one in which text and images become an opportunity to express one's thoughts and compare them with others. It begins with reading aloud in class, followed by a discussion on the contents and images of the book. Children are invited to communicate the sensations and the ideas arising from the story. Each one then transcribes the thoughts in his notebook, and in this way the creation of a special *Fiabadiario* begins.

We then move on to the phase of collective writing, in which a story inspired by the reflections emerged from reading is invented together. The collective story too is then transcribed into the personal *Fiabadiario*. The third phase takes place outside the school walls, in the school courtyard, in a city park or in the countryside, and consists of a reflective walk in which you observe the environment while paying attention to the sensory stimuli. During the walk there are breaks to allow children to write down in their diary sensations and memories evoked by what they see and hear.

The phase of autobiographical writing follows, in which everyone is invited to complete their fairy tale by writing or drawing a story in which the sensations experienced during the previous phases are mixed: emotions, memories that have emerged, ideas, desires, joys.

In the fifth and final phase, we have a re-reading aloud of the book from which the whole journey began, followed by the sharing of everyone's writings with the rest of the class.

The duration of each phase is decided by the teachers, based on the necessary times that may be different for each class. Phase one and five are designed to be carried out also in collaboration with families. For each of the five phases there are precise management methods, designed to make the laboratory effective and joyful, because nothing

can be learned without joy. Ample space is given to emotional-sentimental education, with an approach that facilitates the transition from the issues of interpersonal affectivity to ecological training, creating wider synergies. This strategy was implemented with four hundred children from public schools, together with their teachers. The involvement of a large number of pupils of various ages allowed us to verify with a good margin of certainty that reading and writing, combined with the reflective walk, are truly able to advance children towards the acquisition of attitudes of *eco-wisdom*.

There are no grades or judgments: what matters for the success of the course is to transform the class into a research community, where teacher and parents also get involved, building together the right attitudes to find one's own well-being together with others' well-being, in an atmosphere of collaboration. The *Fiabadiario's* approach leaves room for the introduction of additional activities, such as the creation of a class blog and the discussion of current topics closely related to ecological education, like social equity, defence of biodiversity, knowledge and respect to natural resources. During the course, as research director I was present at all the laboratories, alongside teachers and parents, to observe and write down what was happening, but also to actively participate. Since it was an action-research it was necessary to be involved and monitor the activities, noting everyone's reactions. But writing down what happens is always useful in educational paths, as it allows you to rationally organize activities, improving any critical issues.

Before starting the path of the *Fiabadiario*, I held a training course for teachers and parents on how to read aloud and on the behaviour to be followed during the various phases. The rules we agreed on together are: create a relaxed time; build a small reading ritual, to be repeated methodically; propose a choice of books to children without directing them in the decision; encourage dialogue by actively participating; never give judgments, at best reflect together on any inconsistencies.

## 2. Initial questions and curiosities

In the introductory phase of the research, the teachers' requests for help were numerous and the contact person of the school grouped their reports under the title: Relationship difficulties emerging in the classrooms. Shortly afterwards, the data emerging from the teachers' Focus groups, from the time budget and from the semi-structured interviews of the children, showed that most of the inconveniences were attributable to specific difficulties: problems of communication and management of emotions, apathy, lack of concentration, disinterest in studying.

Since these difficulties fall fully within the framework of the *Nature Deficit Disorder*, as a consequence of a lifestyle characterized by

isolation, sedentary lifestyle, excessive use of digital devices and lack of contact with nature, we asked ourselves this question: 'is it possible to introduce a system of relationships at school that promotes the development of sustainable ways of living?'

Starting from the studies that show how literature encourages attention to the other, inducing the reader to take care of the world around him (Diamond, Donatelli, 2009). we started with the teachers' reflections on the educational power of narration in all its forms. We focused on the importance of reading literacy, also understood in its emotional aspects, and we asked ourselves to what extent reading literacy, storytelling and outdoor education could be linked with sustainability education. The question was absolutely new because these techniques, already known in the didactic field, had never been used before in combination with each other.

To foster authentic relationships among young people we needed a strategy that could stimulate the listening skills of the other and the inner dialogue. I therefore thought of using literature, and other forms of written and oral narrative, as a basic tool to encourage the formation of an educating community.

## **2. The socio-educational path of the *Fiabadiario***

The development of the socio-didactic path required a rather long time due to some difficulties to be solved. The first difficulty was reconciling educational practices that were always conceived as distinct: reading literacy, storytelling (and self-storytelling). outdoor education. The second difficulty was managing to articulate the activities so that they were easily adaptable to the different ages of the subjects of the survey, included in the range from 5 to 16 years. The third difficulty was finding a name to attribute to the path so that it would be captivating for children and young people and give the idea of something joyful without being too childish, so that everyone could feel attracted.

After careful reflection, I chose the name *Fiabadiario* (Talediary). consisting of two words: *fiaba* (fairy tale). ancient symbol of narration, and *diario* (diary). which refers to the annotation of lived experiences. The fairy tale narrative encourages reflection on important and universal themes, at any age. In the same way, the personal diary is an opportunity to become aware of emotions and of oneself. Combining these two genres of narration in a single path means strengthening their potential.

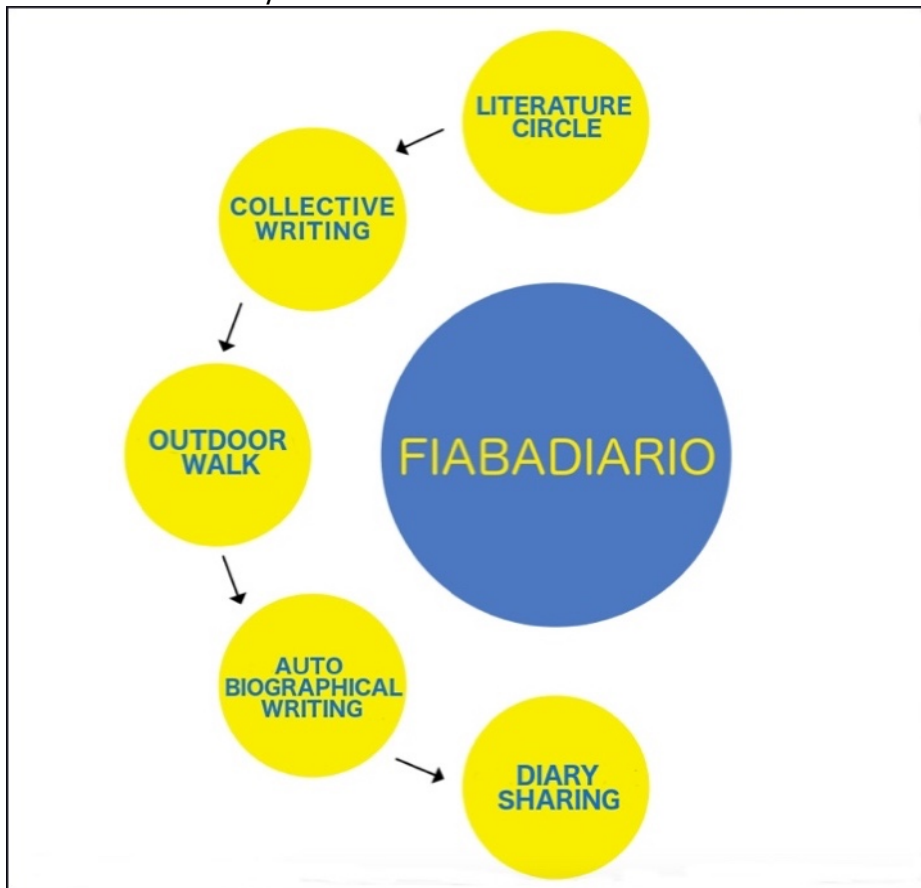
To achieve our objectives, we built a research team together with the teachers and worked to create synergies between the children and between school and families by building a socio-didactic path that would combine reading literacy, storytelling, autobiographical writing and outdoor education. The choice of these practices was inspired by studies on Literary Cognitivism (Carroll, 2002) which demonstrate the

intertwining of literature, neuroscience and biology. Literature guides by involving emotions (Oatley, 1992) and allows to open a discussion on important topics (Gibson, 2007) such as the relationship with the other and respect for life, promoting the acquisition of an *eco-identity*.

After two years of research, the results highlighted new attitudes and behaviours in children. The system of relationships at school has improved, children' interest for the natural world developed considerably and the classes took on a connotation similar to a community.

The *Fiabadiario* therefore consists in the annotation of collective or autobiographical thoughts, ideas, stories also built with collage drawings, and which develop from two activities: reading, also understood in its emotional aspects, and walking outdoors. The path is divided into five phases and it harmoniously combines three techniques: *literature circle*, *collective writing* and *autobiographical narration* (also developed with drawing). combining them with the activity in Nature.

**FIG. 1.** *Fiabadiario phases*



Source: Educare al pensiero ecologico (2020, 81)

Literature circle is a group reading technique first implemented in 1982 (Daniels, 1994). The introduction of collective writing at school is instead due to the pedagogue Freinet (Legrand, 1993). while the *autobiographical narrative* is an ancient practice. The stories contained

in the books represent the fulcrum around which the workshop activities revolve.

In the first phase the text becomes an opportunity to express one's thoughts and compare them with other people. Reading aloud in the classroom is in fact followed by a discussion in which the children communicate sensations and ideas arising from the story. Each one then transcribes the thoughts that emerged in his notebook, initiating the creation of a special personal *diary*, that is, *Fiabadiario*.

We then move on to the phase of collective writing, in which a story inspired by the reflections emerged from reading is invented together. The collective story is then transcribed into the personal *Fiabadiario*.

The third phase takes place outside the school and consists of a reflective walk in which the environment is observed, paying attention to sensory stimuli.

The phase of autobiographical writing follows, in which everyone is invited to complete his *Fiabadiario* by writing or drawing a story in which the sensations felt in the previous phases are mixed: emotions, memories that have emerged, ideas, desires, joys.

In the last phase it is planned to share the personal diary with classmates.

Phases one and five were designed to be carried out also in collaboration with families. The duration of each phase was decided by the teachers, on the basis of the time needed in the different classes. No votes or judgments were foreseen because the aim was to establish a relaxed atmosphere of collaboration where children, teachers and parents freely involved themselves.

As the director of the research, I attended all the phases to observe and write down what was happening, also actively participating. Being an action-research, the participation of the researcher was indispensable.

### **3. Initial training and detailed execution of the various phases**

Before starting the path of the *Fiabadiario*, we organized a training course for teachers and parents on the profound meaning of reading literacy, on how to read aloud and on the behavior to be followed during the various phases. The course was also aimed at acquiring a full awareness of the emotional and rational mechanisms that develop in the classroom. A detailed look at the progress of the individual phases clarifies how synergies were created within the classroom and how the formation of an eco-identity was encouraged:

#### *3.1. Phase 1, shared reading in the classroom and in the family*

We started with a proposal: the teacher introduced five illustrated books to the children, showing only the cover. After leafing through the books

(without reading them). the children chose one through an informal vote. The chosen book became the centrepiece of the workshop.

A good quality book can speak simultaneously to people of different ages, including adults, because it presents multiple levels of reading, becoming the starting point for different actions, such as writing, drawing, moving outdoors, playing. For this reason, the methods of conducting the workshops were also designed identically for each grade of school. Only the level of reading, writing and discussion skills changed, to be each time adapted to the age of the pupils. Moreover, the presence of images allowed everyone to understand the story.

After reading the book aloud, all the questions and reflections that emerged were noted on the blackboard, including those of the teachers and of the eventually present parents. Each child transcribed them in his notebook, which since that moment became his personal *Fiabadiario*. Talking about the characters in the books, it happened that we talked about us, our thoughts and memories intertwined with the words that we read, and ideas emerged on how we wish our future to be.

To facilitate the presence of parents in the classroom we agreed times and days, compatibly with their work needs. When their presence was impossible, we invited the children to reread the book at home with their parents and to write down in their diary thoughts and observations arising from reading in the family.

### *3.2. Phase 2, from reading to writing*

After the reading phase, which stimulated questions and encouraged hypothetical thinking, the class became a research and exchange community, in which everyone began to feel free to contribute with his own ideas.

The way stories are invented is also important. We provided ourselves with pen, pencil and notebook, because the creation of a story requires a particular concentration that only manual writing allows. But that's not the only reason. Neuroscience demonstrated the close link between graphic competence and motor skills development (Berninger, 2019). With dyslexic and dysgraphic children we used compensatory measures. But even in this case, writing brought benefits to intellectual and emotional growth. What matters, for everyone, is activating imagination. We split into groups of three: each group around a desk and, on each desk, one or more copies of the book. We teachers were also an integral part of the groups, sitting at the desks with the children.

The first operation was browsing the book read in the previous phase in search of a word from which to start to invent a new story. We called it *sign-word*. Interesting stories were born in which technologies became valuable allies to make ordinary daily activities more exciting, such as in the case of flying cars or teleportation that catapulted us in a moment to the other side of the world. The micro-stories invented together with each one's group were then noted by the children in their own *Fiabadiario* and, in the end, each group read aloud the fairy tale of

another group. In kindergarten, where writing skills were not yet possessed, narration was made through drawing.

### *3.3. Phase 3, from the classroom to the garden*

The phase of outdoor education took place in form of a meditative walk in the park located near the school. Before leaving, we took a pencil, a pen and a notebook. Arriving at the park, we invited the boys to close their eyes and remain silent to listen to the noises and feel the smells. Three exact minutes to pay attention to even the smallest rustle. We did not expect the children to be able to resist 180 seconds in silence. Their scrupulousness in carrying out the exercise surprised us. We reopened our eyes, shared the sensations we felt and wrote them down in the *Fiabadiario*, accompanying them with small drawings and sketches with the pencil. At end, each child noted in his fairy tale his own *sign-word* in reference to the emotions aroused from the walk.

### *3.4. Phase 4, autobiography*

Encouraging the ability to talk about ourselves was the goal of the fourth phase of the path. We sat no longer in a circle, but each one at his own desk. The indication we gave the children was to write about themselves using emotions and memories that aroused during the journey. In this phase too, compensatory measures were used for dyslexic or dysgraphic children, and the children who did not yet know how to write told their stories with drawings.

It was an opportunity to experience first-hand the pleasure of experimenting with each one's story, this time giving life to a story that held a personal story. In this phase too, the teachers got involved with the children, completing their own *Fiabadiario* with a short autobiography. The autobiographical story, performed after moments of reading and walking outdoors, was helpful in getting to know one's inner world by discovering its connection with Nature.

Starting from his own sign-word, each child told his story, made up of memories and feelings re-surfaced, of questions awaiting an answer, of doubts to be clarified, of discoveries. Very interesting stories emerged in which personal experience crossed the natural world, from an emotional and rational point of view. After the written story, we moved on to drawing. Everyone completed the autobiography by talking about himself also in a visual form, freely using lines and colours. At the end of the work, we asked everyone how they felt and the almost unanimous response was positive. Their faces expressed serenity and their attitudes revealed a greater openness towards classmates, as well as an availability for communication and mutual help, for example in collecting papers fallen on the ground, arranging the backpack and tidying the classroom.

### *3.5. Phase 5, finding ourselves close to each other*



If in the autobiographical phase one explores his own interiority, in phase five the reciprocity of an educating community is realized by listening to the stories of the companions. We often consider our Self as distinct from society, forgetting that in reality we are each other interconnected: talking about ourselves makes us aware of belonging to a single large community (Mills, 2018). This awareness is the starting point for creating a change, in a direction of sustainability.

The word community comes from the Latin expression *cum munus* (with a gift). By encouraging dialogue, we can replace the economy of unbridled consumerism with the economy of the gift. Because the gift, in its gratuitousness, breaks the imbalance of relationships based on abuse. A community in which everyone brings himself as a gift is a community from which result bonds that regenerate, and it is the starting point for the construction of a sustainable world. This is why the *Fiabadiario* was built as a common project, in which to create the right synergies between pupils, teachers and parents.

In this last phase of the path, we therefore dedicated ourselves to the exchange of stories. Respecting the sensitivity of each one, the children were left free to decide whether to share their own *Fiabadiario*. Except for two girls, everyone read his autobiography aloud.

The goal was learning to welcome other ones' words to find out what we can receive by listening. Sharing our stories allowed us to recognize pieces of ourselves in the other, to resize self-centeredness and selfishness. We discovered that fragility belongs to everyone, albeit with different forms, and this made us feel part of a single large community that lives in the same house. We then invited the boys to share their autobiographies also with their family. We also asked parents to reciprocate by writing in turn a short autobiography to share with their children.

#### **4. Distance learning activity**

In mid-March 2020, when the lockdown phase started due to the pandemic, we decided to continue the path by distance learning. The lockdown thus became an opportunity to find ourselves reflecting together on the type of society we would like, also involving parents in the compilation of the *Fiabadiario* and hypothesizing new life models together.

In synchronous video connection, we read books and chose the sign-words, as we would have done if present. For the walk, not being able to get together to go out, we focused on the sign-word *heaven*. We therefore decided to observe the sky in the different phases of the day, reflecting on the sensations that the vision evoked in us.

Reading the diaries together also served to dampen the sterile atmosphere of distance learning, as well as reflecting on the sense of

solidarity that becomes crucial during a pandemic. And it allowed us to become a community, a fundamental objective of our research path.

At the end of two years of research, the assessment of the path is resulted positive, the results show a concrete change in the attitudes of most children and families involved. These are apparently small, but important changes:

- decrease in episodes of taking advantage of classmate (80% decrease);
- reduction of hyperactive attitudes (in all subjects with an ADHD diagnosis);
- marked curiosity about nature (in all subjects);
- better care for pets (in all subjects);
- decrease in time spent on digital tools (60% decrease)
- increase in time spent with peers (20% increase)
- increase in reading time (40% increase);
- development of inclusive attitudes (in all subjects).

Some children with disabilities, who were previously excluded from birthday parties, at the end of the course were spontaneously included in all the recreational activities organized outside the school.

On the basis of these data, we can affirm that with the path of the *Fiabadiario* we managed to create a sense of community and sharing in the school environment, improving the relationship system and the approach to the natural world.

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## National Training Course. Environmental Education for Sustainability. Competences Learned, Competences Acted

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**ABSTRACT:** *The perspective of ecological transition and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda make education crucial because what is needed is a transformation of how we think and act, and individuals need to be equipped with knowledges, skills and values that empower them to become sustainability change-makers (UNESCO, 2017). The Italian National Strategy for Sustainable Development (2017) awards to education a transversal role, aimed at transform knowledges in competences and promoting a holistic understanding of the issues that are at stake. This need of an ad hoc training for environmental and sustainability education is very much perceived at all levels and sector of the Italian Environmental and Educational system, that includes a lot of public and private entities. The national training course Environmental Education for Sustainability: competences learned, competences acted, developed in the context of an Institutional Agreement (2018 - 2020) between the Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) and the Ministry for the Environment (MATTEM). actually named Ministry of Ecological Transition, was planned with the aim to promote an understanding of the competences for educators as 'Change Agents', namely through the twelve-competences Model of the Erasmus Project A Rounder Sense of Purpose (RSP). The project has been realised by ISPRA, with the collaboration of the Agencies (ARPA/APPA) of the National System for Environmental Protection (SNPA) and the support of experts of the Italian Association for Sustainability Science and of the Green University NGO of Bologna; over 100 participants attended to the training course, representing all Italian regions. For its experimental and flexible training approach, the course may be considered as a pilot initiative, eventually replicable both at national and at regional level.*

**KEYWORDS:** *National-Regional Alliance for EES, Transformative Education, Active Learning, Interdisciplinarity, Replicability of the Training Model.*

## Introduction

«Transformative learning for people and the planet is a necessity for our survival and that of future generations. The time to learn and act for our planet is now» (UNESCO, 2021).

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations [UN], 2015) is substantially a global call for action. Member States, recognizing the severity of the global challenges to be faced, declared in the Preamble:

«We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind» (UN, 2015, 1). As known, the Agenda provides a Plan of Action made up of 17 Goals (SDGs) and 169 Targets, that must be seen as integrated and indivisible, related to 5 key areas: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership. In this framework, Education for Sustainable Development is placed in the context of the Goal 4 on Quality Education, namely Target 4.7 has the purpose to ensure by 2030 to all learners «the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including [...] human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship [...]» (UN, 2015, 17). But, at the same time, the crucial importance of Education as a mean to achieve all the SDGs must be underlined, because what is needed is a «profound transformation of how we think and act [...] to engage with sustainability-related issues [...] individuals must become sustainability change-makers. They require the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower them to contribute to sustainable development» (UNESCO, 2017, 7).

The problem of the SDGs and the need of a radical transformation can be better understood if we think that issues concerning sustainability are a typical example of wicked problems. That means that they are difficult or impossible to define and to solve, because of their complex and interconnected nature, and for their tendency to change and evolve continuously. For this reason, they can be tackled in a pragmatic way rather than theoretical or philosophical approach (not true or false solutions, only good or bad are needed) and they can be solved only by means of a collaborative approach, involving all stakeholders (Rittel, Webber, 1973).

Coming back to 2030 Agenda and looking at its implementation in Italy, the Italian National Strategy for Sustainable Development (SNSvS). edited in 2017 by the Ministry of Environment and land and sea protection (MATTM) – now Ministry of Ecological Transition (MiTE). and currently under periodic review, also assumes transformation among its guiding principles, together with integration, universality and inclusion. Moreover, a sixth area is added to the '5P' areas of 2030 Agenda, focused on sustainability vectors, transversal and fundamental

means in facilitating transformation. Namely, education is one of the vectors (IV): its targets are, again, to help the «transformation of knowledge into competences» and to promote initiatives aimed at: «ensure in every educational context [...] interdisciplinary and participatory courses aimed at spread knowledge, competences, skills and attitudes oriented to Sustainable Development» (MATTM, 2017, 99). So, it is clear that: «urgent change is needed, but lasting change is impossible without education» (UNESCO, 2021, Short Summary, 3). But which kind of education is useful to face the radical and urgent shift needed by sustainability?

Basically, an education that chooses to adopt a transformative approach rather than a transmissive one. Such an education, referred to constructivism, as for the pedagogical paradigm, enables people to change because: it promotes a critical, reflective and creative learning; it is oriented to learner and to the learning process and not to the transmission of knowledges; it is based on experience and problems rather than themes and considers the necessity of participation and negotiation of sense and meanings; it is aimed at supporting a transgressive social learning (Lotz-Sisitka *et. al.*, 2015). capable to challenge the maintenance of the *status quo*.

With a closer reference to the link between Education and Sustainability, if it assumes that it is fundamental to shift towards an ecological paradigm, based on the principles and values of diversity, autonomous thinking, responsibility, cooperation, also the educative paradigm should be consequently changed to be coherent with this vision. Neither education *on* sustainability and education *for* sustainability are sufficient to reorient and transform education as a whole, because they touch the levels of contents and of values, but they cannot change the prevailing mechanistic and transmissive paradigm. Only education *as* sustainability, as a systemic change of educational culture, is the transformative and epistemic answer able to assist the transition to sustainability (Huckle, Sterling, 1996).

### **1. Environmental and Sustainability Education in Italy: actors, role of the SNPA and key-points about Educators' Training**

The Italian Environmental and Sustainability Education context is very much varied and complex and includes a lot of public and private actors, mostly engaged in non-formal and formal education. The most representative ones are central institutions, overall the Ministry of Ecological Transition (MiTE) and the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR); Regions and Autonomous Provinces; National System for Environmental Protection (SNPA). composed by the Italian Institute for Environmental Protection and Research (ISPRA) and the Regional Environmental Agencies (ARPA/APPA); Regional Environmental Education Centres (CEA). deriving from the Information

and Education National System (INFEA); Associations, Foundations, NGOs; Protected Areas, Parks, Museums; Schools and Universities.

Concerning the SNPA, it is the scientific and technical network established by law 132/2016 and made up of ISPRA as coordinator - Public Research Body under the vigilance of the Ministry of Ecological Transition, and 21 Territorial Agencies (ARPA/APPA). It ensures technical and environmental protection activities and provides data information, with over 10.000 employees and 200 territorial offices. SNPA is also competent for Environmental Education and Training activities, playing an important role both at national and regional level for almost twenty years. The specificity of the role of SNPA in environmental and sustainability education is to provide a bridge between technical-scientific knowledge, based on research and data information, and the pedagogical approach and methodology, to support citizens in the understanding of the complexity of ecosystems mechanisms and to act responsibly. In this context, some key points must be considered.

First, for many years formal and non-formal education, in fact, have been considered and managed in a separate way, by different reference institutions – Ministry of Education on one side, Ministry of Environment and Regional Systems (INFEA) on the other side, not always well linked one to another as for Education Strategies and Programmes, although several Memoranda of Understanding have been signed over time. However, in the period 2005 – 2014, the Italian Decade of Education to Sustainable Development (DESS), led by UNESCO Italian National Commission, succeeded in achieving a mobilization and involvement of all actors, both institutions and associations, in the campaign. Namely, the final statement of the Decade made up by the Scientific Committee delivered a shared position on the matter, recognizing a good, responsible and sustainable education as a transversal and transformative strategy, that gathers values, competences, responsibilities and actions and needs an alliance between all actors involved (Mayer, Tamburini, 2014). Moreover, the recent approval of the Law 92/2019, by which Civic Education has been formally included in school curriculum, with ES contents associated, gave a push forward in the direction of a stronger dialogue and integration between the environmental and educational sectors.

Secondly, the environmental educator's professional profile in Italy is yet not well defined by regional laws, except for some of them like Liguria Region. As a result, there is also a lack of a formal and specific training curriculum for young people, or of a formal acknowledgement of the professional credits acquired, for people with a long experience as environmental educators. This situation has not much changed either after Law 205/2017 concerning the rearrangement of pedagogical professions, that has included environmental education as a job opportunity for graduates in Pedagogy. The new legislation, and in general the greater consideration of the environmental issues and of the



role of education for the challenge of sustainability, have not yet drive to a strong and widespread increase of training opportunities, both at university and post-graduate level.

These are some of the reasons why, for all the above-mentioned entities, the issue of an appropriate Training is crucial and very much perceived.

## **2. The Agreement ISPRA-Ministry of Environment**

In 2018, an Institutional Financed Agreement was signed between ISPRA and Ministry of Environment, with the general aim to promote actions to give a new value to Regional EES Systems, to strengthen the quality of the educational services to local communities, also by means of a better cooperation between Regional Systems and SNPA Agencies in environmental and sustainability education activities.

It is worth highlighting that the Regions' Commission on Environment and Climate, led by Sardinia Region, had strongly requested Ministry for undertaking such an initiative. The realization of a training course, aimed at strengthening the professional competences of Environmental Regional and SNPA Educators, was proposed to the Ministry by ISPRA. In fact, it can be considered the first experimental attempt of a Training Course at national level, addressed to this professional category. The project of the Training Course was set up by ISPRA, with the collaboration of the Agencies (ARPA/APPA) of Emilia Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Campania and Sardinia of the National System for Environmental Protection (SNPA). and with the experts of the Italian Association for Sustainability Science and of the Green University NGO of Bologna.

## **3. Citizens' and Educators' Competences for sustainability**

The cultural and methodological background on which the ISPRA training project was set up refers to the transformative paradigm of education, and to the development of Competences for Sustainability Educators. The transformative model is based on the concept of competence, to which the learning process is intended, opposite to the transmissive approach, which is based on Knowledge's transfer.

A definition of competence can be provided, by combining multiple authors' thought, as the capacity to carry out a task with a certain level of complexity; to respond to an individual or social need, by mobilizing consciously its own intellectual, affective and decisional skills, and by using the external ones in a coherent and effective way (Pellerey, 2004; Rychen, Salganik, 2003; Baldacci, 2006).

Competences are a combination of values, knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context, that individuals need for personal

fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion and active citizenship, and they are achieved by means of a lifelong formal, non-formal and informal learning (Council of Europe, 2018). Namely, in its guidelines on the learning objectives related to the SDGs, UNESCO outlines that, in order to engage with sustainability-related issues, individuals must become sustainability 'Change Makers', equipped with cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioural competences, which are essentially cross-cutting competences, that can be defined competences-in-action, because they are acquired through both experience and reflection (UNESCO, 2017). Therefore, to support individuals to be change makers, E&S educators must be 'Change Agents' and 'Learning Facilitators', able to help learners in: building a critical, creative and reflective thinking; developing empathy with other people and with nature; taking appropriate decisions, even in uncertainty. These ones can be also considered the main components for a training addressed to E&S educators, because they must own for themselves such competences, thus they must be learners in turn. With this aim, in 2011 the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) had provided a framework made up of 39 core competences, divided in 3 pillars (Holistic approach; Envisioning change; Achieving transformation) and 4 learning clusters (Knowledge; Capabilities; Social skills; Values and attitudes) (UNECE, 2011). However, this framework was conceived not as an operational guide, but as a Recommendations for policy makers, to promote the professional development in all sectors of education. For this reason, it resulted too much complex and theoretical and it was not really used neither for training and/or for self-assessment.

#### **4. The Erasmus Project *A Rounder Sense of Purpose***

To review the UNECE framework and to provide a more practical framework for EES Educators for use in any educational context and in the SDGs perspective, the Project *A Rounder Sense of Purpose*<sup>1</sup> has been carried out within the Erasmus Plus Programme (RSP 1: 2015-2018; RSP 2: 2019-2021). The University of Gloucestershire (UK) was the leader of the project, the other partners were from Cyprus, Estonia, Italy, The Netherlands, Hungary in the first phase, to which Spain, Switzerland and Germany have been added since 2018. Namely, the Italian partner was the Italian Association for Sustainability Science (IASS).

In the first phase of the project, a set of twelve-competences, divided in three Columns (the same of UNECE framework) and 4 Areas, was elaborated and experienced in the partners' countries; each competence has been also associated to Learning Objectives and Underpinning

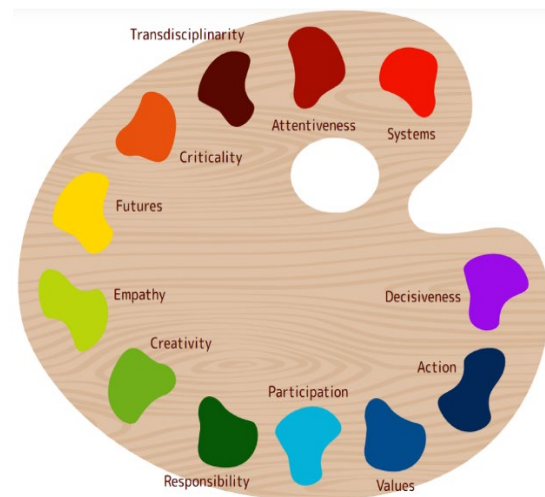
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<sup>1</sup> <https://aroundersenseofpurpose.eu/>

Components (Vare et alia, 2019). Guidelines and instruments of implementation were also elaborated, to support educators and teachers in carrying out activities based on the RSP model. The competences' panel is presented as an artist's palette, to highlight educators rarely focus on one competence at a time, rather they blend competences in response to each context, as a painter does by mixing together several colours for its purposes. The second phase of the project was aimed at deepening and reviewing the model; furthermore, a series of tools, such as focus group, activities and questionnaires, were set up and integrated into the framework, to make it useful and effective as an instrument for training and self-assessment. After some presentation and experimental application both at national and regional level (Farioli, Mayer, 2019). finally the RSP twelve-competences model has been proposed in the context of the ISPRA Training Course, to equip participants with theoretical and practical instruments to improve their professional activity and to promote an awareness of their role as 'Change Agents' for a transformative education.

**FIG. 1. The RSP twelve-competences panel**      **FIG. 2. RSP artist's palette**

Thinking Holistically	Envisioning Change	Achieving Transformation
<b>Integration:</b>		
<b>Systems</b> The educator helps learners to develop an understanding of the world as an interconnected whole and to look for connections across our social and natural environment and consider the consequences of actions.	<b>Futures</b> The educator helps learners to explore alternative possibilities for the future and to use these to consider how behaviours might need to change.	<b>Participation</b> The educator helps learners to contribute to changes that will support sustainable development.
<b>Involvement:</b>		
<b>Attentiveness</b> The educator helps learners to understand fundamentally unsustainable aspects of our society and the way it is developing and increases their awareness of the urgent need for change.	<b>Empathy</b> The educator helps learners to respond to their feelings and emotions and those of others as well as developing an emotional connection to the natural world.	<b>Values</b> The educator develops an awareness among learners of how beliefs and values underpin actions and how values need to be negotiated and reconciled.
<b>Practice:</b>		
<b>Transdisciplinarity</b> The educator helps learners to act collaboratively both within and outside of their own discipline, role, perspectives and values.	<b>Creativity</b> The educator encourages creative thinking and flexibility within their learners.	<b>Action</b> The educator helps the learners to take action in a proactive and considered manner.
<b>Reflexivity:</b>		
<b>Criticality</b> The educator helps learners to evaluate critically the relevance and reliability of assertions, sources, models and theories.	<b>Responsibility</b> The educator helps learners to reflect on their own actions, act transparently and to accept personal responsibility for their work.	<b>Decisiveness</b> The educator helps the learners to act in a cautious and timely manner even in situations of uncertainty.



## 5. The Training Course *Environmental Education for Sustainability: Competences learned, competences acted.*

The Training Course *Environmental Education for Sustainability: competences learned, competences acted* has been carried out from April to October 2020. Originally, it was planned as a blended course, combining an e-learning phase on the learning platform of ISPRA (asynchronous training) and two face-to-face Training Laboratories, to be realized in Bologna and Rome. The e-learning phase, made up of Four Modules and Fifteen Training Units (Fifteen Training Hours). was intended to provide the following training contents: Mod.1)

Development and governance of Environmental Education in the Italian context; Mod.2) Issues and challenges for EES in the light of 2030 Agenda and other cultural movements; Mod.3) The Competences for Environmental and Sustainability Educators (RSP framework); Mod.4) Models and instruments for a qualitative planning of educational and communication initiatives for sustainability.

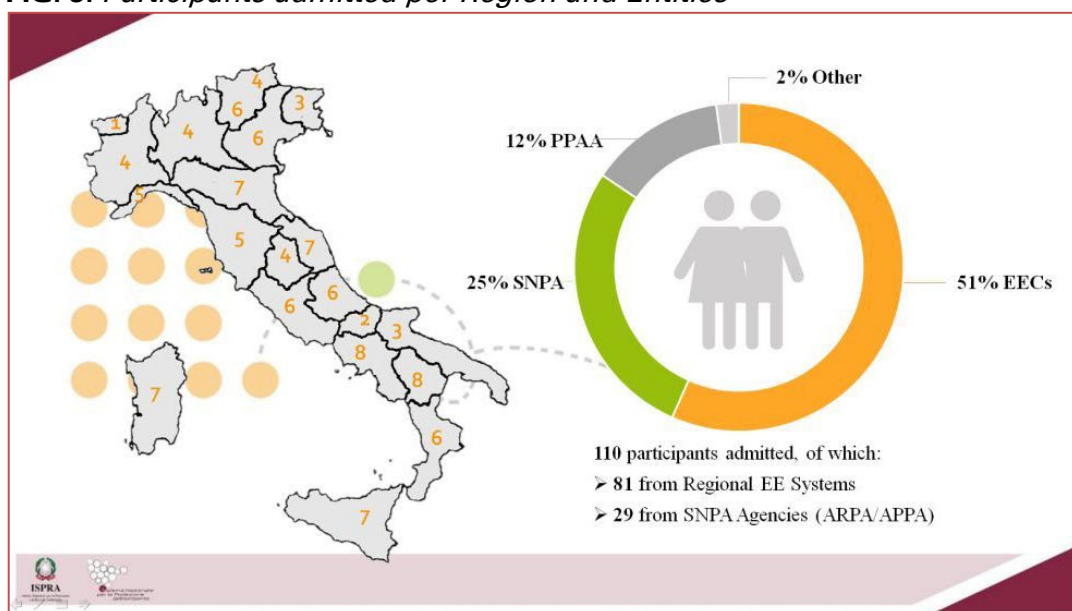
The face-to-face Laboratories were aimed at providing participants with practical and collaborative experiential learning, to deepen the training contents and to train to the use of self-evaluation tools. Due to the COVID-19 emergency, the face-to-face activities were changed in four online Laboratories (eight hours of synchronous training). Their structure was rearranged, trying to maintain an active learning approach, by means of alternating plenary sessions, working groups and also activities with digital means, such as clouds and online surveys.

For the promotion of the initiative, both Environmental Regional Departments and Environmental Agencies of SNPA were involved. Two hundred requests of participation were collected through the online application form. An evaluation was made to finally select one hundred and ten participants, by applying some priority criteria:

- centres acknowledged by the Region of reference;
- professional role filled (for example, project or programme coordinator);
- years of experience in EES (more/less 5 years).

The learners came from Environmental Education Centres, NGOs, Associations, Regional Offices and Environmental Agencies of SNPA. Eighty-one participants have attended the whole Training Course (E-learning + Online Laboratory).

**FIG. 3.** *Participants admitted per Region and Entities*



## 6. Tools for the learning evaluation/self-evaluation

The following tools of evaluation, derived from the RSP methodology, were used, both in the e-learning phase and in the Online Laboratories:

Questionnaire on Educational Beliefs. Scope: to assess learners' point of view and approach towards Education, highlighting attitudes and values that underpin actions. The Questionnaire, conceived by Prof. Michela Mayer (IASS) specifically for this course, with the help of other members of the staff, includes twenty-eight statements, with four options of answer on Likert Scale. Some items specially relate to the Transmissive educational approach, while some other to the Transformative one. Ninety-four participants' answers were examined. Results: the factor analysis of the Likert Scale showed the two factors (transmissive and transformative) quite distinct and allowed to divide the participants into four clusters. The most numerous are those with a strongly transformative vision (46). few participants show a strongly transmissive vision (7). while some more (15) present a more transmissive than transformative vision. Finally, a rather consistent group (22). shows the possible coexistence and integration of the two factors, and seems to make the best use of both 'transmissive' and 'transformative' educational approaches.

**FIG. 4.** *Results of the Educational Beliefs Questionnaire*

CLUSTER DESCRIPTION	TRANSMISSIVE APPROACH (%)	TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH (%)	N.
Very Transformative	44,3	54,0	46
Very Transmissive	65,4	37,4	7
More Transmissive than Transformative	45,7	33,7	15
Very Transmissive <b>and</b> very Transformative	60,0	56,8	22
Outliers			4

Homework on experience storytelling. Scope: to assess the learners' capacity of self-evaluate in an objective way. The storytelling exercise had been originally proposed into the RSP Erasmus Programme by IASS (Farioli, Mayer, 2020). Learners were asked to elaborate a storytelling of a personal educational experience, and to identify competences acted, among the twelve-competence RSP model. Homeworks have been analysed during the online Laboratories, by asking the question: 'Which difficulties have you found in identifying the competences used in your activities?'. Results: the main difficulties reported by the participants were: to tell a real story from a subjective point of view; to reflect on themselves and to give an accurate name to competences acted; to single out competences, strictly connected one to each other and acted together; to mistake their own competences (as educators) and competences observed in learners.

Form of self-evaluation on RSP competences. Scope: to improve the learners' self-evaluation capacity and to monitor improvements over time. For each of the twelve competences, learners assigned themselves a score 1–5, according to the level's description included in a guiding table. Results: by the analysis of the eighty-two forms filled by the participant, a ranking of 'Competence's confidence' has obtained, taking in account, on one hand, those on which participants assigned themselves high rates (4/5) and, on the other hand, those on which participants assigned themselves low rates (1/2).

**FIG. 5.** *Rankings of High and Low 'Competence's confidence'*

COMPETENCES	N. PARTICIPANTS WITH HIGH RATES (4/5)	COMPETENCES	N. PARTICIPANTS WITH LOW RATES (1/2)
Systems	50	Decisiveness	26
Attentiveness	44	Values	24
Transdisciplinarity	43	Creativity	18
Participation	43	Criticality	18
Futures	42	Attentiveness	18
Emphaty	42	Transdisciplinarity	17
Responsibility	42	Futures	17
Attentiveness	42	Emphaty	17
Criticality	40	Action	16
Creativity	38	Participation	14
Values	35	Responsibility	12
Decisiveness	28	Systems	9

## 7. Effectiveness and Transferability

After the conclusion of the whole project, a Technical Report has been produced by ISPRA, to be delivered to the financing Ministry. Namely, the effectiveness of the Training Course has been tested through the administration of an evaluation and satisfaction Questionnaire to the final participants. By the elaboration of the answers obtained, it resulted that the Training Course was much appreciated by learners (98% were much/very much satisfied by the course).

Namely, the contents of the course and the methodological approach to competences, proposed by the project, were considered useful and innovative. Furthermore, the intertwining of competences, planning of educational paths aimed at EES and evaluation of the quality and impact of projects, that were the main subjects of the Course, was considered important and to be repeated. Considering the specific question 'How much do you think to apply the RSP model in your job?':

- 32% of learners answered they would use the RSP model 'Always';
- 42% answered 'Almost always';
- 26% answered 'Sometimes'
- 0% answered 'Never of few times'.

For its experimental training approach and contents, the Course may be considered as a pilot initiative, suitable to be replicated both at national and at regional level and in several contexts. Furthermore, it demonstrated to be flexible and easy to apply also in the COVID emergency, combining e-learning training modules and laboratories, realized through online platforms.

## Conclusions

In consideration of the features and of the results of the initiative, several future applications and developments of the Training Course can be outlined, with the common aim to spread the transformative vision of Education and to support Environmental and Sustainability Educators in acting as Change Agents. As for example: a new edition of the ISPRA Training Course, addressed to SNPA employees, to improve the integration between technical-scientific and educational competences. For the moment, an edition of the course, addressed to about one hundred ISPRA employees, is just finished, and its results will provide new findings and considerations; realization of other training courses at national level, to continue capacity building initiatives for EES Educators of Regional Systems; programmes in cooperation with Universities or Public Research Entities, addressed to students and graduates, could be designed to support young people who want to undertake the EES profession; training initiatives for School Educators, namely the ones involved in Civic Education teaching, for which methodological competences are as much important as the scientific ones.

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## Territories that Learn

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**ABSTRACT:** *Learning is not merely an individual but a collective process. Beyond the fact that one always and in any case learns within relationships and thanks to relationships (Sielig, 2001), and that each one needs others and a context to learn (we always learn through interposed discourse as Galilei said in the Dialogue above maximum systems: above all, certain learnings are either collective and lead to collective transformations (of communities/societies, organizations, territories) or they are not. This seems to be true especially for what concerned to the processes of building sustainable societies and economies, the great challenge and the great horizon of the next thirty/fifty years. But what does it mean to learn as a community? For what kind of sustainability? Which methodological and organizational devices need to be activated? Through which processes of reflection, documentation and evaluation is it possible to bring out and enhance results? For years now, in an Alpine Piedmont area, a sort of 'territory/laboratory' due to its ancient and long tradition, several processes have been designed and concretely implemented in which social, educational and sustainable territorial development dimensions are closely integrated. Starting from the analysis of some of these experiences, we intend to focus on the first methodological lines relating to how to activate and make lasting community processes aimed at sustainability. In this context, the notions of community and sustainability will be discussed first, which require complex gazes and definitions: community understood as a network of local relations, which is not given but must be built; sustainability understood as recognition, care and enhancement of common goods (resources, networks, local milieu) by Local Territorial Systems. The methodological analysis will also focus on the descriptions of specific methods such as the Future Lab (Jungk, Mullert, 1996; Pellegrino, 2019) and the Laverack (2018) matrix and on specific contexts of community construction such as the Community Educational Pacts, which can represent the framework within which to activate long-term co-planning between territory stakeholders, schools and other non-formal education agencies.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Sustainability, Formal and Non-Formal Education, Community Empowerment*

### Introduction

In our paper we intend to support the thesis that a territory, a polis, in order to intervene on complex problems – such as those involved in the processes of building sustainable societies and economies, even on a

local scale – must think and build itself as a learning community. And that this implies adopting organizational and methodological devices, in which the role of reflection on what is being done is central. To this aim, we will describe a series of paths/experiences conducted in the last three years in a specific territory, all structured as research/action processes.

The methodologies that we illustrate in this paper have accompanied a work still in progress which has not yet expressed, as a general result, a unique and stable system of indicators, suitable for the different contexts and contents of the projects we are going to describe. However, the variety of contents and the level of in-depth analysis, in a defined territorial context and therefore available at a good level of verification, allow us to hope for the structuring of a system of indicators, reading grids, matrices as a result of the work of interpretations that can reach an interesting level of reliability, transferability and replicability. From this point of view, the use in the field of reliable and validated methodologies helps a lot to identify the right questions to ask the universe of phenomena and transformative elements that we would like to investigate and govern.

The premises, the theoretical assumptions, or the hypotheses that are the basis of these paths/experiences, or on which their planning and management is based, are:

1. Communities do not exist in themselves, but require political/social work to exist. As Aldo Bonomi says: «The word community and community action, today, if they are not used as stereotypes invented against the other by oneself, are nothing more than naming an absence, something that does not exist. This absence, this lack, this emptiness precipitates into an urgency: the artificial and symbolic construction of what is missing». (De Rita, Bonomi, 1998).
2. The work of community construction evoked by Bonomi requires, implies, translates into the development of participation. Participatory processes capable of involving citizens, starting with those who 'have no voice' (children, young people, ...) and of promoting empowerment, citizenship, social activation. The reference is to an idea of the polis and politics such as the one developed by Hanna Arendt, understood as a continuous dialogue between citizens around problems and common goods (Arendt, 1958/2017).

Participation, in addition to giving substance in a systematic and not occasional way to the idea of polis as a dialogue around common goods, is also a technical necessity (even before ethical), since most of the social objectives that a community fundamental (health, education, well-being, sustainability, fight against educational poverty, security, fight against climate change, etc.) are the result of the interaction of many factors and the action of many people and cannot be prosecuted regardless of these interactions and actions. The active participation of

citizens is therefore not an accessory element, but represents a necessary condition for achieving complex objectives.

1. Learning is not just an individual process, but a collective one. Not only because we always and in any case learn within relationships and thanks to relationships (Sielig, 2021), and each person needs others and a context to learn (one always learns through interposed discourse as Galilei said in *Diálogo sopra i massimi sistemi*), but above all because certain learnings – such as all those required by the challenge of the ecological transition – are either collective and lead to collective transformations (of communities/societies, organizations, territories) or, if confined to an individual dimension, they have no possibilities of developing or, in any case, they are ineffective.
2. A territory that learns carries out a political experience: responsibility, care, participation, relationship – all purely political dimensions – when they are explicitly at the center of the public discourse, and are concretely put to work, they require designing the maintenance and government of transformations.
3. At the same time the processes we are talking about require to be effective to assume reflection and evaluation as a necessary critical practice.

Research/action is a research logic which, on the one hand, involves not only and not above all research specialists, but primarily the actors involved in the processes and, on the other, invites these actors to equip oneself with tools and methods to reflect and remodel one's own paths, closely unites knowing and acting and, in this way, creates bonds, trust, the ability to build collective and shared learning (Dubost, *et al.*, 2005; Kaneklin *et al.*, 2010)

### 1. A 'lab' territory

For some years now, in a Piedmontese Alpine territory, Val Pellice, which has a long tradition of social and cultural work behind it around common goods, several processes have been designed and concretely implemented in which the social and educational dimensions and that of territorial sustainable development are closely integrated. The paths activated are many and here we will consider only a few. But all of them characterize this territory as a sort of living and permanent laboratory, beyond and despite errors, problems, limits of different types and kinds. The paths considered seem particularly significant not only for the issues addressed, but for the contribution they make to community growth and the development of its general competence in dealing with complex issues related to the search for sustainability.

The experiences are:

- a. the construction of an integrated educational system 0/6;
- b. paths and activities to promote and support the protagonism of

young people in thinking and support the sustainable development of the territory;

- c. ways of contrasting the effects of the pandemic on children and young people – (particularly the project frame named *Word to the children*).

Based on the analysis of these experiences, we try to focus on (first) methodological lines about how to activate and make lasting community processes aimed at sustainability.

Let's briefly describe the three experiences.

*a) The construction of an integrated educational system 0/6*

The project *lo sto bene qui in montagna*, through a plurality of actions and interventions spread over three years (which due to Covid crisis have become three and a half), intends to set itself the medium-term objective of achieving the construction of an educational system 0/6 years that takes into account, on the one hand, the new regulations (which assimilate the 0/3 services to the area of educational and school services) and on the other hand the development and maintenance opportunities that this framework would guarantee to the territory. In a context of progressive decrease of the younger age groups, and of the territorial characteristics that determine the fragmentation of settlements, distances to be covered, very low local thresholds for young populations, it is very important to be able to preserve and possibly implement a system context in any case able to provide quality services, to adapt to changed conditions, to anticipate changes with planning over time, to express solidity in the pedagogical proposal.

The project is divided into ten main actions which become 26 specific actions, involves 11 local and supra-local partners and has a total budget of approximately 500,000 euros.

This path requires the participation of a large number of local actors, bearers of different skills and functions. On the other hand, this participation cannot be limited to a pre-planning phase, so to speak, but must be prolonged and intensified through practices, actions, cross-checks, through the experimentation of new forms of collaboration. It is a very complex process to govern. Not all the actors involved are stable (teachers and educators, as well as families or local administrators, are often 'in transit', holding their roles for a limited period of time), but it is important that the basic relationship, the culture of cooperation between stakeholders, becomes local cultural heritage.

In a first phase of the project, a research/action was carried out that started from the need to listen, understand, raise awareness and motivate. The information collected was used to give substance to the actions envisaged by the project, but also to correct, amend, clarify. For example, the involvement of the kindergarten was greatly favored by the possibility of reaching a dialogue with teachers through different local figures: social workers, educators/coordinators of nursery services,

local administrators, parents' associations, the project management, the young people involved in the initial survey.

The presence in the project partnership of a subject specifically dedicated to evaluation then made it possible to develop these first process results through the use of a participatory methodology, developed in the field of health policies, which made it possible to structure also in the temporal dimension the approach described. Laverack's methodology allowed us to express an assessment solidly based on collective learning, able to compare and measure, and to recognize the evolutions during the project.

There are in the literature different scales of measurement of the empowerment of a community. A reading review was recently conducted (Labonté, Laverack, 2008), which summarized the main dimensions, called domains (9 in all). A matrix crosses the domains on a scale from 1 to 5. We thus obtain 45 'modalities' that can describe the state of a community, among which a certain community can choose by recognizing itself in them.

The matrix can be used both as a self-assessment tool and by external evaluators. The community can be understood both as a local community and as an organized community, such as schools, health services, workplaces, prisons... or the contexts of life and work of people in their daily life.

How is this methodology used in the 0/6 years project *lo sto bene qui in montagna*? A working group has been set up that represents, in miniature, the local community that deals with children. This group has drawn their own profile by choosing their current ranking for each domain. This allows us to work on hypotheses for overcoming critical issues, identifying concrete actions within next six months.

The operation will then be repeated after six months and so on until the end of the project. The differences recorded between one profile and another give the measure of the changes produced. The entire process allows the various subjects not only to have control over the development of the project, but to influence it by reshaping it gradually.

At the end of this process, the evaluation actions were further developed with the administration of a questionnaire directed to the families of the children aged 0/6 years. Approximately 20% of families were reached with this questionnaire. The questionnaire focused on the representation of services for children, as a system and as a distribution of services throughout the territory. It will be repeated one year after the end of the project, to assess the performance of the representations and the sustainability of the services or actions carried out by the project.

*b) Paths to promote and support the protagonism of young people in thinking and activating the sustainable development of the territory*

This is the goal of some projects that have followed one another over time, financed by banking foundations, in particular by the Compagnia

di San Paolo. The active project at the moment is called *Mind our Valley*. It was born from an idea of a group of young people and is supported in its implementation by local authorities and associations. It includes 3 actions:

Action 1 - Green Economy Laboratory. As said by the young people themselves «.... The first action is inspired by the works from which we were born as a group. We want to continue to investigate the issues of the green economy, here in Val Pellice, but also to take action! We want to involve many other young people, who study, even abroad or who have experience of precious jobs here in our area, those for which you need to know everything, know how to use your hands as well as your head. And we want to involve them in a permanent laboratory of ideation and proposal, to take the floor, and then.... move from words to deeds! Because we all love this valley which is our home, and we want to take care of it ...»

Action 2 - River parks. Always as expressed by the young people: « We have a beautiful river that flows through the valley and all its municipalities. Along its banks you go to run, to sunbathe, or to study. But there is no system of routes that unites all the places, even partially equipped, which we are fond of. We want to start designing and building a system of connected parks that connects the whole valley and all the villages and hamlets where we live, near and far. Not only for us, but also for those who visit the valley. And in these places we want to organize events: sporting, social, cultural, musical ...».

Action 3 - An Eco-Festival for young people. «.. our third action: to organize a youth Festival every year, always renewing it, starting from the desire to make it an ever-greener Festival !! an *Eco-Party. No plast! No waste!* and many contents of green and environmental culture in laboratories, book presentations and much more. ...».

Each of these actions implies a multiplicity of initiatives, to organize which the young promoters, together with the institutional and associative partners, have an organization for the governance of the project, divided into moments of coordination, connection, evaluation, and in groups dedicated to each action or overseeing some essential functions, such as internal and external communication.

*c) Pathways to contrast the effects of the pandemic on children and young people.*

Numerous initiatives have been activated by the reference area to counter the social and emotional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these, aimed at minors, were developed as part of the *Di necessità virtù* project, funded by the Time 2 Foundation.

The project was born with the intention of giving a concrete answer to the social and emotional difficulties of children following the subsequent lockdowns. In particular, specific actions have been designed to support and accompany minors at the opening of the school in the school year 20/21. The action we intend to take into

consideration is called *Word to the children*, and is aimed at primary school pupils. The goal was to respond to the children's need to be able to express their experiences and thoughts about the pandemic, often overlooked both at school and in family contexts, causing profound imbalances and fragility. To express one's own experiences, to recognize and manage one's emotions, tools and methodologies inspired by the *Word Groups 2* and the *Siblings Groups 3*, led by specialized educators, have been developed. Each participating class has developed a cycle of 4 meetings to allow children to 'speak', to listen and listen to each other, to express themselves without being judged, to tell and tell each other, to share their thoughts, working on literacy and intelligence emotional. At the end, a moment of confrontation was held between the educators and teachers of each class, to share what emerged and reflect together with a view to meeting different professionals.

## 2. Research objective and questions

The long-term objective of our research is to define, on the basis of the analysis of the experiences in progress, a system of indicators through which to read community work processes and in particular the collective learning that this work, if effective, feeds on. In the current phase it is possible to pursue a preliminary objective of approximation, consisting in the analysis of the experiences in progress to select the aspects, elements and relevant factors that unite them, as a basis for then in the near future to fine-tune the system of indicators.

The questions that guide us in our research are the following:

- How do the different experiences taken into consideration contribute to creating community?
- How do we learn collectively in these paths?
- What learnings emerge?

For each experience we intend to expose tools and methodology through which it is possible to verify and point out evidence relating to research questions.

## 3. Definition of community and sustainability

At the outset, it is necessary to clarify which notions of community and sustainability we refer to. On the basis of the *SloT* model - Local territorial systems (Magnaghi, 2020; De Matteis, Governa, 2005) community is understood as a network of local relationships, which is not given but must be built. In the elaboration of De Matteis and others, a *SloT* in fact consists of a network of subjects who have a common project that values local resources, relates to supra-local networks,

elaborates original solutions and produces «territorial added value» (De Matteis, Governa, 2005).

#### **4. Analysis of experiences**

##### *4.1 Paths to promote and support the protagonism of young people in thinking and activating the sustainable development of the territory*

The courses are characterized by some methodological devices to promote the empowerment of young people. The most significant is the FutureLab method which was used as a space to express fears and desires, build shared images of the future and produce project ideas to be developed later through ad hoc working groups (a very significant one involved a group of 25/27 years in an in-depth survey on the green state of the local economy, with about forty production companies from all sectors involved) and through further initiatives (a contest to bring out green projects for young people, courses in schools led by young people themselves, etc.).

FuturLab is a methodology developed by German sociologists Robert Jungk and Robert Mullert (Jungk, Mullert, 1996) which is used in Northern European countries for planning and improving services to citizens. It is a participatory methodology based on listening to citizens, which reflects on the limits of the present and on how we can address them from a perspective of future vision. It is a very interesting methodology to be used also in educational contexts, at school but also and perhaps above all with young people in non-formal education contexts (Pellegrino, 2019; Borgarello, 2020).

The methodology in its standard is divided into 3 phases, for a total duration ranging from about 9 hours (3 meetings of 3 h each) to a few months (more meetings for each phase):

1. criticism/dystopia: in this phase the participants are called to identify the problems of everyday life, in relation to private and social life, imagining how these can degenerate into a negative/dystopian future;
2. utopia: in this phase the participants instead try to imagine a different, better future in which they would like to live;
3. presentation of proposals and feasibility analysis: in the latter phase, utopian ideas generate concrete proposals for improvement of both policies and activities that take place in the local context.

In the projects it has been re-proposed on two occasions, each time involving approx. 50 young people. And each time it is crucial to bring out ideas and the desire to make them happen.

Some data: Valpellice (9 Municipalities) live about 2200 young people 15/25 years (14% of the total population); of these about fifty are actively involved (with defined tasks and roles) in the projects in progress, many others have been involved more sporadically (just think that the *Eco-*



*party* alone in its first edition saw the participation of about 1200 young people). It should be emphasized how young people through these initiatives become vectors of innovation and transformation in the community fabric, producing and developing concrete ideas.

On a governance plan of the *Mind our Valley* project, a work of constant reflection and monitoring of the project is underway which involves all the project partners, from the young people of the promoting group to the Municipalities (politicians and technicians) and Associations. This work proceeds through meetings that take place on a quarterly basis and are methodologically conducted by the YEPP Italia Association, the person in charge of the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation for this purpose. In each meeting the objectives, strengths and criticalities are taken up, solutions to problems are proposed, the quantitative and qualitative involvement of young people is taken stock, using an Empowerment Scale. This work is proving essential to carry out the project, creating common representations between the different actors participating in it.

#### *4.2 Pathways to contrast the effects of the pandemic on children and young people.*

Overall, 3 Comprehensive Institutes participated in the *Word to Children* action for a total of 7 classes, one of which is currently divided into two sections due to the number of children expected in relation to the size of the classroom, an issue linked to the pandemic. Overall, *Word to the children* involved 128 minors.

A questionnaire was proposed to teachers, designed ad hoc to re-elaborate the path, reflect on its criticalities and potential, focused on the following aspects:

- Involvement of the class;
- If the workshop proposal represented a response to the children's need to increase their tools to manage their emotions;
- if the path made it possible to process the experiences related to the epidemic and the lockdown
- if a proposal of this type can be a good tool, in some way to standardize, for emotional literacy.

The answers and the opinions expressed by the teachers were strongly positive (around 90% for each question). This leads us to believe, on the one hand, that having proposed to give the word to experiences has played an important role in cohesion and community holding in such a difficult period as that of the pandemic, for children, their families and teachers who are felt supported and helped in a highly critical moment, and, on the other hand, these experiences must be extended and deepened in the academic year 2021/2022.

## **Conclusions**

Evidence, data and elements for reflection emerge from the experiences that confirm the initial hypotheses, and which are useful for building a system of indicators for community empowerment and learning and other tools to design and evaluate processes of this type in perspective. Among the most significant elements, which represent as many territorial 'learning' (partial, fragile in some cases, but experienced and real) we point out:

1. The need to plan and take care of Temporary Organizations to support the paths, with particular regard to governance structures.
2. In this direction, in order to develop network and community work, some essential functions must be taken care of
  - coordination
  - communication
  - process facilitation (essential in the projects analyzed is the role of subjects such as the APS Social Psychology Studio and the DORS-Health Documentation Center of the ASL TO 3 in the zeroisei project *lo sto bene qui in montagna*, or the YEPP Association in the *Mind our Valley* project)
  - rating.
3. The importance of having a methodological toolbox: in the cases analysed, for example, the FutureLab or Laverack methodology.
4. Understanding community and network work above all as sharing 'representations', from time to time relating to the problems to be addressed, the objectives, the meaning of what is being done, the rules of work, the methodologies to be used, but also related to the outcomes, to what it is believed to be producing and what value to attribute to it, to the adjustments and modulations to be made to the paths.
5. In the face of recurring, even if 'normal' frays and efforts, especially in the case of long and complex projects, develop a continuous activity of building meaning among the participants.
6. To experience that facing problems, imagining the new and the future, transforming oneself and the territorial context is possible. In this sense, it is also of great importance to make small experiences and small positive, successful steps, which nourish further capacity to desire and to achieve.
7. Paying great attention to relationships: it is the relational quality (listening, empathy, etc.) that produces the levels of trust, mutual recognition, cohesion on which the life and development processes of a community and its ability to tackle and solve complex problems.
8. Develop future and sustainability skills in all local actors to be understood as action competences (Del Gobbo *et al.*, 2017; Mayer, 2020; Borgarello, 2021); a set of skills that constitute a sort of mindset to think about complexity, take care of common goods and build sustainability (Rimanoczy, 2020; Orsenigo, 2020; Borgarello, 2021).

It is now a question of translating these elements into indicators and descriptors, an objective to which a vast and widespread research and elaboration will be dedicated in the coming months and years.

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## The Place-Based Approach for Citizenship Education: New Didactic Scenarios

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**ABSTRACT:** *The social, environmental and economic challenges we are experiencing emphasize the need to invest in a project for the future that aims at a re-construction of man in his environment to re-inhabit the territory, as pointed out Magnaghi (2020), based on new forms of community self-government that see in the relationship with others and in connection with the territory the founding principle. The systemic and complex nature of the environmental problem and sustainable development that sees political institutions, educational and training institutions, communities, individual citizens interconnected, brings out the need to invest in the transformative power of knowledge and knowledge to all life (Loiodice, 2018). These aspects can be favoured by a place-based approach that puts the subjects in training in relation with their own territory, strengthening the identity and the sense of belonging to their local environment, knowing the history, the problems that afflict the territory and actively involves in solving real problems and improving places (Smith, 2013). Attention to the territory, to the dialogic development of the person in his habitat, can become a good starting point which, if well managed, leads to forms of awareness of the human footprint and therefore, indirectly, puts under observation habits and lifestyles of the moment as they are configured in the social group to which they belong. Our contribution aims to re-evaluate and renew the models of environmental education for the promotion of the culture of sustainability and glocal citizenship through the proposal of a place-based approach.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Sustainability Education, Citizenship Education, Place-Based Approach*

### Introduction

Stefano Boeri, urban architect and designer of Bosco Verticale, in an interview with Micol Serfatti, reflects on the possibility of a redefinition of the spaces of sociality, in the post-pandemic period, and on the way to reoccupy outdoor spaces and sets as a point for the restart the need to review, to rethink the relationship between man and nature, a

relationship that must no longer be considered as something external to us, but as the basis on which we must recalibrate our future.

The social, environmental and economic transformations we are experiencing place, in fact, the accent on the need to invest in a project for the future that aims at a re-construction of man in his environment to re-inhabit the territory, such as underlines Magnaghi (2020), based on new forms of community self-government that see the founding principle in the relationship with others and in the bond with the territory.

The relationship between man and environment has always been characterized by a reciprocal influence which in turn has determined the evolutionary history of man, as Mattioli and Scalia (2007, 13) underline, in fact, «the indissoluble interweaving of environment, culture and economy has determined in the course of human history the rise and fall of an infinite number of types of social systems». For years, thanks to technological development, man has governed the environment and exploited the resources present in the ecosystems of which he himself is a part, thus becoming independent of nature (Mattioli, Scalia, 2007). Environmental issues have now led man to rethink his position with respect to the environment and to prepare a new paradigm for development. With this in mind, man must reconsider his lifestyles, the patterns of production and consumption of resources, must «be able to maintain his own safety and further develop the quality of life, taking into account the fact that it is part of the ecosystems to be on which it depends and that degrading them to the point of not making them more productive would mean sealing one's own end» (Mattioli, Scalia, 2007, 14).

Despite an increase in natural disasters, alarms launched by environmental associations and references to international documents aimed at the protection and conservation of the environment and the construction of sustainable development, there are still situations of imbalance between the economic dimension and development technological and ethical emancipation. Despite everything, man still appears unable to reach horizons illuminated by commitment and a sense of responsibility, unable to carry out actions aimed at change for the realization of a more just, equitable and sustainable future and the safeguarding of environment as a place that is granted to men so that they can live in peace. A substantial and sudden change of direction is needed that has the unavoidable task of taking care of our common home and of the people who live there, «cultivating and caring does not only include the relationship between us and the environment, between man and created, also concerns human relationships» (Pope Francis, 2013).

Sustainable development implies a common responsibility which is expressed in an active participation of all citizens, local communities, environmental protection of natural systems and human well-being, is a caring for, a concern for the other. (Cambi, 2010; Giosi, 2019; Mortari,

2015); it implies otherness, the willingness to see the other, being concerned with guaranteeing future generations equal opportunities for growth and being responsible towards those who live with us on Earth (Pope Francis, 2015). D. Goleman underlines how much our behaviour and our choices affect the planet and how strong is the danger that comes from not considering the close interdependence that exists between our daily decisions and the effects on the entire system. «Using, as a guide in purchasing decisions, a deeper knowledge of the impact of the things we use, we can count on a tool with the widest repercussions on the entire world of commerce and industry» (Goleman, 2011, 12). A «radical transparency» is therefore necessary to activate 'an ecological intelligence' and a social sensitivity that «could save us from ourselves by making us aware of how urgent it is to develop a shared awareness and coordinated efforts by all as consumers, producers, citizens, public and private institutions» (Santelli, 2018, 39). For Goleman, ecological intelligence is «an intelligence that speaks to our ability to adapt to the ecological niche in which we live. Ecological refers to an understanding of organisms and their ecosystems and intelligence to the ability to learn from experience and to interact effectively with our environment» (Goleman, 2011, 54). Ecological intelligence represents a form of collective intelligence which, as Santelli argues, we should learn to master as a species and which, given the difficulties and diversity of the problems that loom and the impossibility of possessing all the necessary knowledge as individuals «should reside in a distributed way among networks of people who are distant from each other» (Goleman, 2011, 60).

## 1. Educational dimension

All the indications made explicit up to now risk remaining an end in themselves if they do not materialize also in formative experiences that stimulate real behaviour in this direction. More than thirty years after the Brundtland Report, after the realization of the decade of Education for Sustainable Development, which began in 2005 and ended with the Conference in Nagoya, Japan in November 2014, many initiatives for education are recognizable all aimed at enhancing the importance of 'quality training' (Agenda 2030). As Santelli believes, we cannot imagine that the environmental problem can be solved only with technologies, although they are very important, it must be understood that this problem must be faced starting from the formation of new generations more attentive to the causes that trigger impacts rather than techniques to reduce them. The commitment of education to sustainable development «aimed at elaborating systems of meaning and promoting suitable interventions to make human development compatible, the use of material and cultural, technical and productive resources to promote a greater balance between development of society and the very survival

of the planet is aimed not only at young people but at people of all ages by relaunching the proposals for permanent education careful not to leave anyone on the sidelines of training courses» (Santelli, 2011, 44).

It is important to underline that with regard to the objectives, rather than focusing on specific contents, it is necessary to tend towards cognitive, emotional, ethical, behavioral dimensions such as: the increase of lasting attention towards the environment by overcoming the interested approach but often unfortunately on the surface; the strengthening of cognitive energies aimed at the perception, analysis, evaluation of the various issues relating to the environment in compliance with the basic principles; the spread of a civil passion that raises the levels of participation: the maturation of ethical choices that respect oneself and the other. The proposal of specific planning and intervention models (Semeraro, 1988) is recognizable above all in the dialogue between family, school, associative, administrative, political and work world and contributes to the affirmation of permanent training experiences, a training in which we live there not only as recipients of an educational action but also «as subjects who responsibly contribute to giving it» (Gobbo, Guidolin, 1998, 305).

In this perspective, the aspect on which pedagogy and teaching are particularly committed today is to try to reduce the gap between the guidelines developed at various levels and national and international locations and the actions actually implemented. The recognition of the human dimension and the systemic and complex nature of the environmental problem and sustainable development brings out the need to «invest in the transformative power of knowledge and knowledge, throughout life» (Loiodice, 2018, 110).

As underlined in goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda, it is the task of education and training to «transmit to all students the knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development» (Agenda 2030, goal 4.7), to train the new, more attentive generations. to the causes that generate impacts rather than to the techniques aimed at reducing them, moving the problem from the resolution of the effects to the elimination or reduction of the causes. Education must therefore abandon the purely transmissive model of information and knowledge which, although they can certainly provide a contribution, cannot «bring about our change» (Bertolino, Perazzone, 2015, 160). This change, as Bertolino and Perazzone (2015, 160) still underline, «cannot be imposed, but, on the contrary, must emerge from a reflective attitude, capable of increasing awareness of our impact on the environment». For this, educational interventions are necessary that are able to foster concrete experiences that make it possible to work for discovery, to develop critical thinking and reflexivity on actions, which are linked to the territory, to the needs expressed by citizens in order to promote participation. active, conscious and responsible towards others and the future of the earth (Bertolino, Perazzone, 2015; Zakri, 2006; Perla, 2020).



The concept of sustainability involves a rethinking of the notion of citizenship which must necessarily extend from the local to the global. Socio-cultural and environmental problems arise as 'global challenges' that can be solved if we learn to consider ourselves part of a community not only national but planetary and therefore to «act for the dignity of other human beings. It is not enough for education to produce individuals who can read, write and count. Education must be transformative and create shared values. It must cultivate an active care for the world and for those with whom we share it» (UNESCO, 2015, 15).

Educating for global citizenship means transmitting values, attitudes, knowledge and skills with reference to different disciplinary fields (civic, political, historical, digital, etc.), in order to understand the interconnections between local, national and global issues (UNESCO, 2015; Kisby, 2021) and to be able to make a change in the ways of acting and thinking. A change that must take place, therefore, on a personal level (changes of the individual in his individuality), social level (in relation to the commitment in public life), spatial level (linked to the interdependence between individuals and systems), temporal (rethinking the future) (Elia, 2014).

## **2. Place-based approach**

Climate change and environmental problems must in fact be tackled starting from a review of culture and in particular of schools and universities as places for the promotion of culture (Thornton *et al.*, 2021). Education «enters into a fruitful relationship with society [...] comes to fertilize society above all by fertilizing the thinking and actions of teachers» (Perla, 2020, 222). Jennifer Bleazby talks about «social reconstruction learning», with this concept the need to connect students with their community in order to reconstruct their learning experiences, taking as a starting point the John Dewey's idea of experiential education based on direct interaction with the environment (Thornton *et al.*, 2021). It is on this idea of experiential learning and social reconstruction learning that the place-based education approach is based. It is an approach that puts the subjects in training in relation with their own territory, strengthening the identity and the sense of belonging to their local environment, to know its history and the problems that afflict the territory and actively involves them in the solving real problems and improving places (Smith, 2013).

The place-oriented educational practice starts from the idea of place as an «organized structure of meanings», as Henryka Kwiatkowska defines it, «places are not neutral and objective segments of physical space but are a territory of specifically human involvement. [...] Places are a gift, a refuge especially for difficult times, they are the source of meaning» (Majchrzak, 2012, 8). The place is something with which the subject identifies himself and to which he gives meaning. It emerges,

therefore, how places and subjects influence each other, overcoming the dichotomous man/nature aspect. Man, his activities, are in fact integral parts of nature, «the human social world is incorporated into the natural world» as Cole and Somerville argue (2020, 1).

The place becomes an educational space that can be semiotically analyzed on the basis of the meaning attributed to it by the individual and by society but can be considered as a didactic mediator capable of creating and promoting education. The place and the community, as Smith (2013) states, become texts that are added to the learning of students. Reading and analysing these 'texts' allows students to touch and experience the problems present in their territory, in their neighbourhood. This approach allows for a better understanding of the nature of inequalities and power dynamics, as it enables students to learn in an authentic context that makes them active participants in their learning process and especially in the problem solving it brings. to an improvement of their own places and spaces of social life. As Smith (2013) states, as children are shown that their efforts can influence decision-making and lead to improvements in social, local and natural settings, they develop a greater sense of one's capacity as agents of change. Furthermore, it fosters the development of responsibility and strengthens a sense of belonging to the community as well as of personal identity.

Through the use of the place-based approach, it is possible to incentivize processes of eco-fabetization and education in environmental sustainability by educating to critical and responsible consumption; it allows us to understand the interdependencies that exist between food production, distribution, environmental sustainability and social equity; reflect on cultural, anthropological and social values, foster the development of a critical and conscious environmental awareness as an important expression of active citizenship and of one's own life in the world.

Attention to the territory, to the dialogic development of the person in his habitat, can become a good starting point which, if well managed, leads to forms of awareness of the human footprint and therefore, indirectly, puts habits under observation and the lifestyles of the moment as they are configured in the social group to which they belong.

Place-based learning, therefore, can become and can be considered an approach to shape education paths for local and global citizenship. The objective of citizenship education, as Ben Kisby (2021, 1) writes, is to «improve the levels of knowledge and political understanding of citizens and educate citizens as actors of civil society in order to promote a critical and active citizenship, with citizens able to develop their abilities to engage in civic and political activities to bring about the social changes they wish to see».

The place-based approach allows to know and deepen the history of places, to understand the social and ethical aspects, it allows to reflect

critically and self-critically on what has been and on possible future developments through sharing and comparison processes. with the other leading to the recognition of a shared responsibility for the common good, the development of valuable attitudes and the acceptance of otherness (Majchrzak, 2012).

Education through place-based allows a transformation of the citizen both on a personal, social and spatial level and develops along the three dimensions identified by UNESCO in the guide for education for global citizenship (2015), namely: the cognitive dimension - acquisition of knowledge, analytical skills and critical thinking with respect to global, regional, national and local issues; the socio-emotional dimension – development of a sense of belonging to humanity and sharing of values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity; the behavioral dimension - the ability to act responsibly at the local, national and global level for the development of a more sustainable and peaceful world.

## Conclusion

As stated by Santelli (2018, 181) «in the current pedagogical setting, despite the multiplicity of developments, a common approach is recognizable: assuming the awareness of the complexity and fragility of existence is configured as a basis for recognizing the need to acquire the appropriate cognitive, affective, social, ethical, religious tools» to face and govern reality in the awareness of the importance and centrality of education. Educating to empower the citizens of tomorrow to actions that go towards the other, that take care of the other, overcoming self-centeredness and to «prepare to understand the needs of others» (Perla, 2020, 226).

It is only by promoting forms of collaboration on the part «of all the components of society up to individual citizens that sustainable development will pass from being a wish to an effective path» (Santelli, 2018, 182), working on a vision of the world that protects itself an eco-sustainable model also brings with it the right to peace to positive forms of coexistence in diversity and to social justice that we can imagine translating the aforementioned objectives of the 2030 Agenda into a reality plan. to achieve this, as mentioned at the beginning, it is also necessary to rethink the methodological models, focusing on approaches that favor active and situated learning, such as place-based learning.

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## Civic Education at School: Towards Changing the Road? The Contributions of Research to the Field

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**ABSTRACT:** *The recent introduction in the school of civic education teaching – transversal and object of evaluation – identifies among its three macro-areas, together with education for active and digital citizenship and in terms of the Constitution, education for sustainable development, with a clear reference to the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development of 2015 (Law 92/2019). This legislative device seems to represent a significant step, supporting training aimed at promoting cultural change, or rather at generating a culture of sustainability. In fact, from many sides there exists a convergence towards the idea that a shared political-pedagogical planning can trace valid guidelines and identify effective solutions to issues concerning the living together, in the direction of the common good and of human promotion (Malavasi, 2012). But is it a feasible and transformative change in education or does it still appear as the inclusion of a 'new' subject, additional to the school curriculum? The answer to such a question can be configured in the choices of governance and in the evaluation decisions concerning approaches and ways in which school managers and teachers intend to concretely achieve what is envisaged, in specific contexts. A first essential aspect consists in assuming the perspective of sustainability as an interpretative-regulatory prerequisite, at the foundation of the entire educational offer, including widespread practices and, above all, of living the daily life of the school. Secondly, an idea of school is outlined as an active reality and strictly interconnected with the life of the community, which knows how to combine synergies and skills present in the territory, for an educational co-responsibility aimed, in particular, at removing obstacles and eliminating all forms of inequality, in order to guarantee quality education for all (goal 4 – 2030 UN Agenda).*

**KEYWORDS:** *Sustainability, Education, Citizenship, Historical Memory, Educational Alliances*

### Introduction

My reflection begins by trying to answer an unavoidable and fundamental question concerning the meaning of educating today – of an education located in today's socio-cultural scenario – and to formulate possible and achievable guidelines. What contribution is education called to offer in the face of the need for an ecological transition?

The urgent and complex environmental problems on a global scale, from climate change to the destruction of forests, from the depletion of water resources to the multiple forms of pollution – just to name a few – attest to a relationship between man and the environment, between man and nature, which needs to be modified (Anelli, 2016; Mortari, 2020).

To carry out such a transformation, a widespread consensus is aimed at supporting the relevance that heuristic outcomes of scientific communities, technological innovations, governance choices and economic resources can determine. It has been reiterated that a clear legislative orientation can constitute a generative pact of concrete actions both locally and globally, if they are accompanied by adequate training and continual monitoring – in the name of human cultivation – and if they are aimed at making all citizens active participants in the change (Vacchelli, 2017). However, while underlining the value of all this, the commitment to promote a cultural change, a change of mentality in and between human relationships and with the environment itself remains urgent. This is therefore the crucial role that education and training can, or rather, should play in this sense, in the perspective of interdisciplinary reciprocity, in particular with political discourse.

### **1. Education and Politics for a Culture of Sustainability**

Mainly it is intended to highlight the importance, in the national panorama, of the following legislative devices: the law 92 of 2019 which introduces the school teaching of civic education, followed by the guidelines and the plan for the training of teachers for the civic education of July 2020, in the wake of a path already started in 2017 with the aim of combining citizenship and sustainability in the training curricula, of which the document *National guidelines and new scenarios* is mentioned in particular. In fact, the recent introduction into the school of civic education teaching – transversal and object of evaluation – identifies, among its three macro-areas, education for sustainable development together with education for active and digital citizenship and in terms of the Constitution, with a clear reference to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of 2015 (Law 92/2019). This legislative device seems to represent a significant step, supporting training aimed at promoting cultural change, or rather at generating a culture of sustainability. In fact, from many sides – both in the context of the international institutional debate and in the pedagogical discourse in the environmental field – there is a convergence towards the idea that a shared political-pedagogical planning can trace valid guidelines and identify effective solutions to issues concerning living together, in the direction of the common good and human promotion (Malavasi, 2012; Bertolini, 2003).



It is from the interdisciplinary confrontation between pedagogy and politics that it emerges that, on the one hand, education in the enhancement of natural and cultural heritage represents an essential and constitutive moment of human formation; on the other hand, how the political project of wanting to live together requires participation and commitment to action, for a democratic, supportive and sustainable coexistence. By encouraging opportunities for dialogue and exchange, it is a question of defining shared guidelines for building a common goal. Indeed, reflection on the relationship between pedagogical and political discourse – while recognizing autonomy, not subordination and peculiarities of the two sciences – allows us to accept the challenge of building a humanizing coexistence. «The link between educational actions and the objectives of politics is fundamental for the future society that we intend to build» (Iori, 2020, 18).

Both dealing with the person and his service, they share the tension to achieve the common good and to support promotion in search of truth. In fact, pedagogy places the uniqueness and unrepeatability of the human person at the center of its attention, in its relational dimension, outlining prospects for intervention in the sign of a fully integral development. Politics, for its part, proposes answers to problems experienced in everyday communities, analyzing the institutional management of 'public affairs' and also questioning the civil vocation of interpersonal relationships (Granato, 2009).

## **2. Exchange of Memories for Sustainable Citizenship**

Since «our living is reduced to an indifferent transit where people are almost not seen and not heard» (Mortari, 2008, 43), an education in the sense of place, understood as a feeling of bond and belonging to a territory can contribute to support the participatory commitment to the life of its own social context of belonging and to cultivate a desire for community, in the dimension between local and global (Santerini, 2001).

The pedagogical examination is therefore called to outline educational paths to promote encounter and dialogue in intergenerational relationships and between cultures and, through the exchange of memories, to try to start the reconstruction of one's own individual identity, able to commit to active participation and responsibility for the life of the community (Malavasi, 2007). Precisely by exploring the environment and the surrounding and even non-everyday places, including the historical dimension, with intentional training, systematically and gradually, an enhancement of critical thinking and also the acquisition of new awareness are possible.

The design of educational paths that know how to orient towards a new humanism has to favor the formation of skills of dialogue and inclusion around the places of everyday life, to arouse in the pupils that

sense of belonging that is the foundation of a common identity. Educating for the democratic participation of citizens in the places of life – lived, explored, represented – can thus encourage responsible commitment to achieve that change in the development model nourished by a culture of sustainability and can present new forms of living environments, in which by meeting one has the «possibility of recognizing oneself and of being recognized» (Iori, 2003, 56).

The environmental heritage can, therefore, become a reason for the construction of a new planetary civilization and the pedagogical discourse, with the peculiarity of its heuristic coordinates, can support the design of those indispensable balances for a solidarity coexistence between man and the territory.

The environment always takes on a double connotation: it is a physical place but it is also, and above all, a social space, a territory of obligatory confrontation for the growth and development of the identity of the individual and the community to which he belongs (Iavarone, 2008, 116).

Responsibly engaging for the good of the community and participatory democracy in the governance of the territories – between the capacity for dialogue and comparison – describes an essential goal to which educational action must be inspired in promoting a culture of sustainability. Here, then, is that pedagogical reflection is called upon to reconstruct the link between memory and the present and to seek a dialectical continuity in which fragmentation is inserted into an order of meaning. In this way, man has the opportunity, in the present, to recognize the signs of the past in it and to open up the possibilities of the future, thus determining a reality that preserves historical memory and hope for the future. Memory thus constitutes, today, a possibility for man to redeem himself in order to plan his future in a responsible manner.

In today's context, man is overwhelmed by images, information and impulses that come from the past, which crowd thought and memory and force him to re-compose everything in unity endowed with meaning, according to an ethical and existential perspective. Memory is therefore forgotten due to the superimposition of stimuli and the inability of man to transform them into lived experience. Existence itself becomes a thickening of ephemeral and momentary experiences that are exhausted in the very instant in which they are formed. The pedagogical tension must, therefore, aim to develop paths to settle and re-elaborate one's own experiences, in order to confer meaning and unity in the present and to validate the recovery of the subject's concrete experience and his vital participation in the world. The person will then be able to carry out a constant interpretative activity by attributing meanings to events and also giving value to the past, living responsibly in the present and waiting for the future.

In the current scenario of memory oblivion mentioned above, the subject struggles to find constructive resources for his own personal identity in the past; however, by resorting to traces, which are available in present reality, it is possible to reappropriate one's own history, but only to the extent that the subject is able to construct a meaningful dialogue with them (Amadini, 2006).

Therefore, the educational action has the task of implementing educational paths aimed at reconstructing personal identities and collective memories, strengthening the sense of belonging to one's own territorial reality and revealing those shared axiological ideals around which communities have based their history. Furthermore, in order to rebuild one's own terrestrial identity and cosmopolitan citizenship, the urgent need is to promote educational actions based on reciprocity in the enhancement of differences (Chiosso, 2004).

At the same time, it is also necessary to promote a conscience of solidarity among the populations, realizing the intent to think globally and act locally also in an orientation towards the future. Following Jonas' ethics of the future, education can offer its contribution to promote a sense of responsibility towards the neighbor, the distant, subsequent generations (Santerini, 2009). According to Morin,

terrestrial identity is a common belonging to the homeland, as a community of destiny, in the awareness of the contemporary unity and diversity of humans, who inhabit the same living sphere. The commitment to responsibility and solidarity for all the inhabitants of the earth must emerge from this identity (Premoli, 2009, 43).

In the search for their personal identity, each person perceives and experiences their own singularity and diversity in a unitary and continuous way, even in the processes of change that accompany the entire span of life.

In relation to the fact that each community elaborates and transmits values and social norms that favor the training of a belonging linked to the places lived, travel and distance experiences involve separation from people, places and things; this can become a reason for a re-elaboration of one's personal and social identity. The relationships that characterize personal stories intertwine around these real places of memory, experiences are shared and meanings are built; they evoke memories and experiences that can reinforce the sense of belonging (Zannantoni, 2007).

The places of memory are therefore constituted as meeting places between people, in which it is possible to build new common identities.

The question of identity is therefore configured as the search for a balance that pedagogical ontology interprets through the notion of person as an end in itself in the perspective of reciprocity. Self-care and concern for others must be composed in respect of a harmony

between 'one's own person' and the 'person of each other' (Malavasi, 1998, 178).

For its part, solicitude clearly highlights the dimension of dialogue, characterized by the tension towards the good life and the benevolent spontaneity of receiving and giving.

Human formation, becoming historicized, responds to the call of solicitude when it takes into account the fact that what the individual wants is that the other takes an interest in him, esteems him for what he is, considering him in his splendid unrepeatability (Malavasi, 1998, 59).

According to Ricœur, the possibility of remembering is closely connected with the narrative function of language; it allows the configuration of a narrative identity that dynamically intertwines with the story of others, as in the plot of a story. «The possibility of exchanging memories arises from the narrative constitution of each personal identity and the intertwining of individual existence in the history of others» (Malavasi, 2007, 202). In today's scenario, as mentioned, connoted by oblivion, understood as a deliberate refusal to remember the past, and by the disorientation of identity, telling oneself is an opportunity to give shape to one's identity. In the relationship with the other, in the exchange of reciprocity, recognition allows a meeting and a reflection, aimed at promoting the person, respecting his dignity and affirming his inalienable rights.

### **3. Educational Alliances for Sustainability**

Resuming the analysis, again with reference to the Law 92 of 2019 already referred to, a second important question arises: is it a feasible and transformative change in education or it still looms as the insertion of a 'new' subject of study, additional to the school curriculum? The answer to such a question can be configured in the choices of governance and in the evaluative decisions concerning the approaches and ways in which school managers and teachers intend to concretely implement what is envisaged, especially taking into account the real contextual situations.

A first essential aspect consists in assuming the perspective of sustainability as an interpretative-regulatory prerequisite, at the foundation of the entire educational offer, including widespread practices and, above all, of living the daily life of the school. In this regard, it should be noted that the implementation of environmental education and sustainable development interventions in projects and learning units integrating the school curriculum, albeit transversal between disciplinary knowledge and in continuity between school

levels, certainly mark an important approach, but not always so effective in bringing about that change in education capable of modifying the way of conceiving and weaving relationships, both human and with the environment. In other words, similar educational-didactic paths would confirm that «the overall vision still seems to be that of a sustainability that adds to and does not transform existing educational systems» (Sterling, 2013, 13).

Furthermore, the orientation should not be to implement the school curricula with a further discipline or to include the perspective of sustainability exclusively in the context of scientific subjects, but rather it aims to train in the pupils those citizenship skills according to which they can be able to contribute responsibly to the enhancement of the territory and to make cities more liveable and characterized by greater social cohesion.

It should be noted, in addition, that the educational proposals cannot be characterized merely by the transmission of contents – although the information moment constitutes a relevant aspect of the training process – according to an uncritical presentation of certain environmental issues, thus neglecting to promote a reflective thought on the inherent complexity of the issues addressed, also in relation to socio-economic dynamics (Hermes, Rimanoczy, 2018).

Educating in, with and for the environment (Birbes, 2016) therefore represents a possible perspective to grasp the interconnections of phenomena in a 'glocal' form and to generate renewed lifestyles. In pursuing the goal of promoting sustainable development, training is essential to create a different way of thinking and weaving human and environmental relationships. In the sign of a renewed alliance, knowing how to deliberate for the common good according to a competent participation in generating territorial development and respectful of environmental ecosystems and, at the same time, knowing how to direct one's lifestyles for the full fulfilment of the personal existential project, are inescapable goals.

Secondly, from the legislative device, the pedagogical examination proposes an idea of school as an active reality and strictly interconnected with the life of the community (Del Gobbo, 2017), which knows how to combine synergies and skills present in the territory for an oriented educational co-responsibility, in particular, to remove obstacles and to eliminate all forms of inequality, to guarantee quality education for all (goal 4 - Agenda 2030). In fact, it is necessary to ask ourselves how education can constitute a significant fundamental element for a cultural change in society when, with regard to the formal moment of learning, the school system today suffers from a general skepticism characterized by the widespread perception of an increasingly marked between teaching practices and the world of life. In this regard, «the idea that school is of no use is increasingly popular in public opinion and a sort of renunciation is spreading among adolescents» (Ripamonti, 2015, 21).

In fact, there is a general lack of trust in the educational institution which in some cases determines the subject's renunciation of any personal planning, especially with regard to his or her own existential sense. Added to this are the still relevant phenomena of early school leaving and unemployment which further signal the difficulty of training systems in preventing youth discomfort, in supporting the commitment to study and in building a constant and fruitful dialogue with the world of working professions.

It is by recognizing the school for its emancipatory value and of personal growth and by rediscovering it in its constitutive identity, as a place of socialization and inclusion, of transmission and intergenerational exchanges of cultural heritage and orientation to work and entrepreneurship, that it is possible to regain confidence in it. But, following this perspective, the fundamental core of the discourse becomes knowing how to take care of the other, in particular in establishing meaningful and supportive relationships also through the establishment of networks with the various educational components of the territory. It is therefore a question of building an educational alliance that involves schools, universities, families and the various educational realities and that knows how to be generative of cultural transformation without disregarding the principle of educating to a renewed alliance between man and the environment.

For the initiation of the transformative process, heuristic paths are identified from the answers themselves provided by the teachers and collected through a questionnaire administered in March 2021 to teachers of all levels in the context of Brescia schools, with reference to the Plan for the training of teachers for civic education (MIUR, July 2020). Two substantial evidences emerge from the analysis of the recorded data: the need to deepen training on sustainability and the need to define organizational models that allow more inter-multidisciplinary shared planning.

Therefore, incisive abilities of the world of education according to solid pedagogical references and effective networks, of schools and with the territory, in governance choices according to the interpretative-regulatory prerequisite of sustainability constitute an essential combination to set in motion the desired change.

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**Learning from Contemporary Complexities.  
Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education  
and Care in Times of (post) Pandemic**

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## Rethinking Professional Roles in Contemporary ECEC by Reducing the Gap between Health and Education: Lessons Learned from the Pandemic Crisis

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**ABSTRACT:** *In the last months, ECEC practitioners in all European countries have been facing the challenge of continuing their educational work despite the constraints and limitations imposed by the pandemic crisis. Under the pressure of health security during and after lockdown family life, children's daily experience and professional practices have dramatically changed (OECD, 2020). New rules have been set and different educational strategies have been invented and enacted. More reflection and discussion are required to provide practitioners with adequate support to respond to the 'social health' emergencies generated by the pandemic – especially regarding prevention/support actions for disadvantaged families and children (educational poverty, migration, economic/environmental disadvantage, disabilities, special needs). This paper discusses the need to develop an 'interdisciplinary-based' professional language and culture for ECEC educators, and to revisit their expertise in light of how the COVID-19 emergency has changed their educational responsibilities, calling for new competences and richer professional development. Responding to emergencies implies intercepting signs of vulnerability in children and families as they first appear in the daily life of ECEC settings. This can be most effectively done through community work based on stronger networking relationships with other practitioners and services, especially health professionals and paediatricians. The post-pandemic crisis highlights the need to invest locally in the professional development of ECEC educators as key «tutors in resilience» (Cyrulnik, Malaguti, 2005) as well as in that of paediatricians and other practitioners, based on the assumption that social health includes the physical and mental health of children and of the entire community. This means rethinking both how CPD (continuing professional development) is organized and its contents. As a starting point for reflecting on these issues, I draw here on preliminary findings from a family survey about children's experiences during the initial 2020 COVID-19 lockdown (Mantovani et al., 2021). which was administered through the paediatric network SICuPP (Italian Society of Primary Care Paediatricians – Lombardy) in Northern Italy. This study is itself the outcome of promising collaboration with a network of paediatricians in a region of Italy that has been severely affected by the COVID-19 emergency.*

**KEYWORDS:** *ECEC Practitioners, Wellbeing, Health, Interdisciplinary*

## Introduction

In this paper, I explore the need to rethink professional roles in contemporary early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, within a multidisciplinary strategy that connects education and health. I outline how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the educational responsibilities of ECEC practitioners working in the 0-6 sector, highlighting the need for new interdisciplinary-based competencies and richer professional development.

The aim is twofold: first, to focus on a few possible lessons for the future, from the perspective of ECEC practitioners; second, to argue for the development and deployment of specific professional competences in early childhood education, to ensure a healthy community for all children and families. The paper is divided into three parts: first, I share a few of the lessons learned from the pandemic experience, with a focus on the role of ECEC professionals; then, I report findings from a recent Italian study which investigated how families reacted to the emergency; finally, I propose some directions and actions for the future.

### 1. The systemic resilience of the education system

There is a broad global consensus on the leading role of ECEC practitioners during the COVID-19 emergency. Despite the incredible difficulties and challenges caused by the pandemic, educators acted as key responders in the crisis, suddenly finding themselves on the frontline: although most ECEC educators lacked any formal preparation for the pandemic scenario, they refocused their efforts around issues of health, wellbeing, and community education, modifying their own role and responsibilities within the community. Given that the system was forced to overlook concerns about staff preparedness, ECEC educators displayed a noteworthy capacity to keep the education system *alive* (an ability that has also been defined as «collective agentic action», Campbell, 2020, 340).

Education practitioners adjusted their educational routines, rules, and practices to continue fulfilling their educational role; they creatively revisited how they provided education, learning, and wellbeing; and wherever possible, they provided remote resources to ensure that children received educational and learning opportunities despite the limitations and constraints imposed by the emergency (Pramling, 2020). They provided families and children with support in dealing with the new rules and routines within a safe environment. In addition, ECEC practitioners experimented with new forms of parent-teacher communication, introducing flexible modes of remaining in touch with and providing support to parents, despite the huge challenges involved in educating young children remotely.

And interesting results emerged. For example, recent research involving a small sample of Latino parents from low-income backgrounds (Soltero-González, Gillanders, 2021) examined the implications of the pandemic for school-home relationships, finding that the challenges of the pandemic have fostered positive changes in the way teachers and parents interact. Good outcomes included: a more dialogical approach, a more authentic home school partnership, increased parental involvement, and a deeper knowledge of children's everyday lives in their homes on the part of educators (Soltero-González *et al.*, 2021). These positive outcomes, which are also confirmed by other European studies (e.g., Italian studies on parents and educators' perceptions on remote learning in pandemic the pandemic context: Antonietti *et al.*, 2021; Gigli, Trentini, 2021) – highlight the need to offer educators adequate support to reinforce and keep these new practices and attitudes alive in the post pandemic era.

ECEC's educators reacted as individuals, but also as a system, developing «community responses» (Campbell, 2020; OECD, 2020). Professional collaboration – meaning «joint work around a shared focus» (Campbell, 2020) – in responding to these challenges was crucial at many levels: between educators and parents; between parents and children; between educators and other practitioners working in the community; and between early years' educators and preschool teachers. ECEC educators functioned as «bridges» over systemic gaps that were not filled by other institutions during the emergency (Azorin, 2020).

As Campbell argues in a recent article: «teachers and school leaders have been able to creatively and collaboratively rethink how they support the learning, development and well-being of their communities now and are beginning to consider what this could mean for the future» (Campbell, 2020, 338).

Although we know that there are cross-cultural differences in how early childhood services reacted to the pandemic crisis, as is beginning to emerge from research and national reports (Park *et al.* 2020; Pramling Samuelsson *et al.* 2020). overall, ECEC professionals have displayed impressive professional capital and agency. However, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic go far beyond these positive outcomes. The impact of the public health emergency on the lives of children, families, and educators is far from being positive. Today, millions of children and families are experiencing exacerbated condition of poverty; a high number of families are at risk and lack healthy living conditions, while many educators face increasing stress and uncertainty (Save the Children, 2020). The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic raises key questions about the continued resilience of early childhood practitioners over the coming months. We should not underestimate the personal and professional consequences of their emergency efforts, and this leads us to the second lesson learned.

## **2. Psychological distress and secondary impact concern education practitioners too**

While the agility and resilience demonstrated by ECEC staff and education specialists has been impressive, we should not overlook the fact that for educators, the COVID-19 pandemic posed a key adaptive and transformative challenge, with multiple consequences. The health and wellbeing of educational staff is a critical concern (Jennings *et al.*, 2020). We know that educators' own social and emotional wellbeing influences their ability to support positive mental and social health in others (Eadie *et al.*, 2021). As stated by many authors, the «emotional and psychological» impact of the pandemic – the so-called second pandemic – today bears upon the lives of all those involved in the care of young children (Jennings *et al.*, 2020). The range of personal and emotional issues affecting educators' lives and identities in the current post-pandemic phase is self-evident. Secondary psychological distress and impacts concern education practitioners too.

Today, there is growing consensus that many early childhood educators are experiencing high levels of stress due to new emotional and psychological tensions and contradictions, such as:

- increased workloads and increased responsibility for children's safety and health;
- difficulties and challenges in engaging in dialogue with overstressed parents about the new rules and routines introduced during the emergency;
- awareness of the possible high level of risk of infection in workplaces;
- job insecurity and uncertainty;
- a lack of training in communicating about health, safety, and wellbeing with worried parents;
- challenges in exchanging their expert knowledge with other stakeholders and practitioners (such as paediatricians, healthcare professionals, and others) within the community.

Given that poor educator wellbeing has significant implications for children's educational and learning outcomes (Eadie *et al.*, 2021), we need to provide early childhood educators with adequate support so as to enhance their wellbeing and self-efficacy (Cumming, Wong, 2018) and thus increase their capacity to deal with the wellbeing issues of the whole community (Jennings *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, research evidence is emerging to suggest that «EC educators felt they were able to sustain strong relationships with children despite the perceived negative impact of the pandemic on their wellbeing» (Eadie *et al.* 2021), encouraging the hope that their experience during the pandemic will inform positive changes in their everyday educational practices following the return to 'normality'. This brings us to the third lesson learnt: the interdisciplinary nature of early childhood education.

### 3. The interdisciplinary nature of early childhood education

The pandemic crisis shows that a healthy community demands authentic, solid, long-term *intersectional* action via the active involvement and participation of a range of stakeholders and practitioners (OECD, 2020). The mere juxtaposition of different communities, responsibilities, and sectors is far from being a resource, as we have experienced over the past months. In contrast, forming habits of sharing expertise, knowledge, and opinions, and developing consistent practices and behaviour within a systemic framework will be key to recovering community health (Tamburlini, Di Mario *et al.*, 2020).

The problematic aspect of this is that in the aftermath of the pandemic crisis, the conditions under which care, education, and health currently operate are changing, as are their meanings. Therefore, it is becoming more difficult to define shared educational and health goals, apply universal criteria for meeting these goals, and provide tailored responses to the needs of children in individual ECEC services. Consequently, more intersectional and situated actions are required to restore community health over the coming months (Blewitt *et al.* 2020). However, we first need to learn more about how families with children have coped with the emergency. This information is required to enhance the capacity of the educational system, in strong synergy with the health sector, to respond to the new needs of children and families in the current post-pandemic phase.

The study presented in the next section was designed to fulfil this aim by collecting parents' narratives about their family lives during the spring 2020 lockdown.

### 4. Brief overview of the study: an example from Italy

The study, entitled *Children and lockdown: the voices of parents* (Mantovani *et al.* 2021). was carried out during the spring 2020 lockdown<sup>1</sup> by the Italian Society of Primary Care Paediatricians (SICuPP)<sup>2</sup> in collaboration with the University of Milan Bicocca and the *spin off* Bambini Bicocca, in Lombardy – the Italian region that was earliest and worst affected by the health emergency. It was based on a family survey involving parents with children aged 1-5 years and 6-10

<sup>1</sup> Between March and May 2020, Italy closed all ECEC services (0-6) and primary schools (5-11) Consequently, educators and teachers organized distance learning to guarantee the continuation of educational/didactics' activities.

<sup>2</sup> Principal investigation: Picca (SICuPP-Lombardy) & Mantovani (University of Milan-Bicocca). The main co-investigators were: Bove, Ferri. Further contributors: Braga, Mangiatordi, Ripamonti, Veronese of Unimib and Cravidi, Mariani, Mezzopane, Marinello of SICuPP. This study would not have been possible without the cooperation of pediatricians in designing and administering the questionnaire and the strong participation of all the families who took part in the survey.

years<sup>3</sup>. A convenience sample of 3,443 parents responded to an online questionnaire<sup>4</sup>, forwarded to them by local pediatricians<sup>5</sup>, concerning their everyday family lives and their opinions about how their children were currently behaving.

The aims of the study were to explore parent's opinions about their children's everyday lives during the lockdown, identify the families' resources and vulnerabilities, and assess the children's developmental changes.

Parents (93% mothers) responded to a set of questions about their child's everyday activities, routines, play, learning and development during the lockdown, and described the impact of the restrictive public health measures on their children's lives. They also responded to questions about the use of technology and their children's reaction to distance education and remote learning experience. A final few open-ended question concerned their worries – as parents – about the future.

Currently, a follow-up questionnaire is being administered to monitor continuity and change in children's behaviours during the 2021 lockdowns, the second phase of the health emergency (Picca, *et.al.*, 2021 *ongoing*).

Despite the limitations of the study (e.g., the participating families were relatively privileged compared to the average Italian family; respondents were mainly mothers; the sample was not statistically representative; the study was a single-region's family survey; we did not use validated measures/scales). the findings – although not generalized – raised some key flags to be included in the debate on how to achieve greater synergies and collaboration between educational and health services within our communities.

#### 4.1. What have we learned from the study?

The first key finding was evidence for «systemic resilience in families», as defined in a previous article (Mantovani *et al.* 2021); that is to say, the capacity of parents and children to positively react to the new and unexpected situation, which is in keeping with the outcomes of other studies (Egan *et al.*, 2021). Almost all parents displayed a form of resilience, in terms of confidence and self-efficacy concerning how they had coped with the difficulties caused by the emergency; this resilience was further enhanced by their capacity to network and establish connections with other parents. 'We made it' was the most frequent response to the question on how they had coped with the emergency overall.

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed presentation of the research design and methodology, see Mantovani, *et.al.* 2020.

<sup>4</sup> The study considered all ethical research standards: the questionnaire was anonymous, and participation in it was completely voluntary

<sup>5</sup> In all families with children aged 0–14 years are entitled to attend, in addition to a family doctor, a paediatrician in the employ of the National Health Service.

Surprisingly, despite the many restrictions imposed by the pandemic, a significant number of parents of pre-schoolers (60.4%) reported experiencing 'solidarity among parents' (with 31.4% mentioning support, 14.8% indifference, and 9.7% help). as did 60.3% of parents of older children (with 37.3% mentioning support, 18.1% help) (Mantovani *et. al.*, 2021). A smaller percentage of parents, however, had experienced a greater sense of stress, isolation and anxiety.

This key outcome confirms the social nature of resilience (Ungar, 2012) and its «dynamic and interactive nature» (Millican, Middleton, 2020, 3): in other words, «the 'systemic resilience' of families is not only an internal phenomenon, but also operates between the family system and the surrounding environment (other families/the community)» (Mantovani *et al.*, 2021, 39). Interestingly, the role of community relationships and parent-to-parent solidarity emerged as key protective factors that increase families' capacity to respond positively to emergencies.

The second key finding was the perceived capacity of children to react to the new situation. Almost all parents described their children as capable of adapting to the novel scenario. Despite noting a certain amount of distress, due to the lack of opportunities for socialization and interactions with peers, the majority of the parents of the younger age group described their children as willing to accept the limitations (80.6%). as did 83.3% of the older group.

In addition, parents reported some «unexpected improvements», as already observed in a previous work (Mantovani *et. al.* 2021, 42). such as: improvements in relationship with parents (40.8%) (this result is consistent with recent national research findings: Cusinato *et al.* 2020); improvements in relationships among siblings (32.8%); gains in linguistic development (50.1% of the younger children); improvements in the capacity to play alone (39.1% younger; 31.2% older).

While relaying these positive outcomes, which are borne out by other Italian studies (e.g., Balenzano *et al.*, 2020; Gigli, 2020). our respondents did not deny that their children had suffered due to the interruption of their social/play relationships with peers: for the majority of parents, in both the younger and older age groups, the greatest difficulty was not being able to attend school, followed by a lack of exercise and outdoor activities.

The third key finding was the parents' relatively positive perception of the distance learning experience (in Italian called LEAD<sup>6</sup> *Educational connections at distance* or DAD *didactic at distance*). Many parents in both groups viewed the distance learning offered by ECEC practitioners and teachers as 'positive on the whole', as noticed by other Italian studies (Gigli, Trentini, 2021). while only a small percentage rated the

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<sup>6</sup> MIUR (2020). Commissione Infanzia e sistema Integrato Zero-sei. Orientamenti Pedagogici Sui Lead. Legami Educativi A Distanza (<https://www.MIUR.gov.it/orientamenti-pedagogici-sui-legami-educativi-a-distanza-per-nido-e-infanzia-lead->).

experience as 'negative'. Not surprisingly, some critical issues emerged too: notably, a lack of interaction with teachers; excessive demands on parents – as has also emerged from other Italian studies (e.g., Pastori, Pagani *et al.*, 2021) – and too much homework assigned to the children. A major concern expressed by parents was the excessive use of technology. This is an important finding that should continue to be monitored going forward.

Alongside these positive results, the data revealed some areas of vulnerability that call for new systemic actions and interventions, including:

- changes in eating and sleeping patterns;
- changes in mood, typically for the worse;
- an increase in irritability and unreasonable behaviour;
- increased television viewing;
- excessive use of digital technologies;
- poorer and more intermittent concentration, especially in older children;
- increased fear of going out and meeting other people again, especially in the older age group;
- difficulty keeping rules.

Although the data suggest partially divergent outcomes for the two age groups, in both cases, the disruption of normal routines affected the way children behaved during the lockdown.

The final key finding was the effectiveness of the collaboration between the educational sector and the health sector. This study may be viewed as «an example and an outcome of promising collaboration between the educational and health sectors» (Mantovani *et al.* 2020, 14). given that these two areas are called to work together to design appropriate research, and develop strategies, for responding more effectively to the new needs of families and children in the post-pandemic period. Without the strength of the paediatricians' community-based network, it would not have been possible to reach such a high number of families during a challenging public health emergency; at the same time, the interplay of health and educational perspectives in the process of both developing the questionnaire and interpreting the data enhanced the research group's capacity to detect families' resources and needs within a systemic framework.

These results, although we cannot generalize from them, raise some key points which should be taken into account in the discussion on how to reduce the distance between health and education:

- first, the need to respond to the new needs of children and families more quickly and effectively: both ECEC educators and pediatricians regularly see children and have the opportunity to intervene at an early stage, also representing a major source of support and counselling of parents;
- then, the need to design new observational tools for continuing to monitor the identified areas of vulnerability over the coming



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months, via interdisciplinary professional development and inter-professional work;

- finally, the need to develop a shared perspective and language for ECEC and healthcare practitioners that will enable them to urgently discern the conditions required for individuals and communities to maximize their health potential.

As stated in the recent Nayec 2019 report, «early childhood [education] is an interdisciplinary, collaborative, and systems-oriented profession. An interdisciplinary, systems-oriented perspective is essential if professionals, particularly as they advance in their practice, are to integrate multiple sources of knowledge into a coherent approach to their work» (Nayec, 2019, 8).

Indeed, in order to promote exchange and dialogue, new interdisciplinary and cross-sectional professional development interventions are required, together with the capacity to introduce new behaviours. For example: early childhood educators need to expand their view of children's daily lives and routines by including issues such as health and safety, redefining their practices accordingly to promote the children's wellbeing (broadly defined to include the «right to health, play, affection», Bradford, 2012). They should make their implicit or tacit knowledge (the so-called «folk pedagogies» or «implicit assumptions», Bruner, 1996) of children's socioemotional and physical health and wellbeing explicit in order to promote a more authentic dialogue with parents and other professionals, including parents from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds. At the same time, healthcare professionals should pay more attention to the 'context' in which children live. They would benefit from the first-hand knowledge about the lives of children in their 'natural context' that is characteristic of educational expertise.

Equally, educators would benefit from learning more about the 'indicators of vulnerability' detected by paediatricians, in relation to key aspects of health such as eating, sleeping, exercise, attention, and so on.

Both require new lens through which to urgently discern the conditions needed by individuals and communities to maximize their health potential, develop joint strategies with other practitioners, and further reinforce the community ties and relationships developed during the lockdown period.

This implies promoting systematic and inter-professional dialogue among different groups of practitioners: each group of stakeholders, no matter what sector they work in and what families they interact with, brings perspectives that can ground plans in the needs of children and their families and help young families connect with services that support their growth and systemic health. Promoting networking and multisectoral collaboration among the different agencies that provide support to families with young children (in the health, education, social

and community sectors among others) is a key priority for contemporary ECE (UNESCO, 2020).

## **6. Further directions and implementations**

As we have learned from both the lessons of the pandemic crisis and the, albeit not generalizable, research findings presented above, new, more intersectional actions and work are required to respond to families' needs and offer them empowering settings. Possible actions include, for example:

- including the voices of families, educators, and healthcare professionals when making plans for responding to the new needs of young children and families;
- investing in novel/flexible and inter-professional in-service training of both ECEC practitioners and healthcare professionals;
- training educators in developing tools to map the 'health status' of families with young children, in collaboration with local paediatrician networks and other community health professionals, with a view to identifying vulnerabilities and resources as early as possible;
- providing guidelines for prevention and health education programmes for communities; prioritizing information sharing and partnerships across services that deliver education and health to children;
- reinforcing social relationships, social cohesion, and parent-to-parent solidarity in the community as 'key protective factors'.

The core assumptions here are that networks of cooperation among local health and education agencies need to be strengthened, with a view to ensuring the delivery of healthcare and education services, and to designing and implementing new agile and sustainable tools in support of preventive community intervention.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, in the current post-pandemic period, ECEC practitioners and health professionals can play a crucial role in reducing the gap between health and education, by acting to 'observe deeply, listen deeply and connect deeply', with a view to becoming health guarantors or «tutors in resilience» (Cyrulnik, Malaguti, 2005). The underlying assumption, as stated earlier, is that social health includes the physical but also the mental health of children and of the entire community.

This means rethinking both the organization and content of ECEC continuing professional development. Responding to emergencies implies intercepting signs of vulnerability in children and families as they first appear in the daily life of ECEC settings. This can be most

effectively done through community work based on stronger networking relationships with other practitioners and services (OECD, 2020). especially health professionals and paediatricians.

We know that detecting families' needs and resources in our contemporary society is far from easy, especially when recent phenomena, such as parents' growing insecurity concerning how to ensure their children's health and safety, parental fears and stressors, and practitioners' anxieties or difficulties surrounding the negotiating and communicating of new rules and routines to families, have all been exacerbated by the ongoing emergency.

Nonetheless, working in this direction represents both a key responsibility for the ECE community and an excellent opportunity for both sectors – education and health – to reinvent their practices, via a bottom-up process of reflexivity and innovation from within, based on dialogue, reciprocal learning, and inter-professionalism.

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## ***Farsi Comunità Educanti (Fa.C.E.). A Case Study for Inclusion, Participation and Quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Services***

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**ABSTRACT:** *Fa.C.E. Farsi Comunità Educanti (from here on Fa.C.E.), a 3-years project (2018–21) lead by Reggio Children Foundation and financed by social enterprise Con I Bambini, has «increasing access to ECEC services, especially for disadvantaged families» as core objective. Innovative to this project is not the goal, but the approach: doing it through the creation of educating communities, both on a local and national level. This article will analyse the project strategies also in the light of the Successful Educational Actions for inclusion and social cohesion. (Flecha, 2014). In a year long process, built on dialogic approach, national (AMREF, Gruppo Nazionale Nidi Infanzia) and local (Palermo, Naples, Teramo, Reggio Emilia) project partners co-designed the pilot actions. Through a collective reflexive dialogue, they investigated the reasons for lack of access to quality educational services, mapped local realities, sketched actions combining both. (Malaguzzi in Cagliari et al., 2016) This community has become a safe space where new and generative ideas could take form. (Rinaldi, 2006). This structure allows the project to proceed, through the stops and goes due to covid19 emergency. Taking the lead from this ecological approach, stakeholders were involved in actions design, gaining ownership of them. Everywhere parents, with or without access to ECEC, widely expressed the desire to spend quality time with their children engaging in educational activities. This is action 1: children and parents learning, playing, and understanding together, within a community. This common reflexive space for families has a positive effect on parental involvement, and on connecting vulnerable families with ECEC and with a larger parental community. (Del Boca, 2020) Action 2 varies. In Palermo it takes the form of conversations on parenthood between experts (educators, doctors) and parents. In Teramo it has involved school, municipality, and associations in opening a new toddler center, granting quality educational service to families in the middle of the pandemic. Preliminary results of the project, emerging from impact evaluation and qualitative analysis, include: the creation of local and national networks providing integrated health, social and educational services to families, through different tools, including an online space; the sharing of strategies and visions among actors of different areas of the country highlighting new areas of common efforts; growing understanding among the families involved of the role of ECEC services and the opportunities they provide for children; a national conference to foster results dissemination.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Quality and Integrated ECEC Services, Accessibility, Co-design, Stakeholders' Involvement, Disadvantaged Families*

## Introduction

The social enterprise *Con I Bambini* is a non-profit organization whose core purpose is funding programs to contrast Educational Poverty in Children and Youth. Fondazione Reggio Children (FRC) «promotes quality education for the wellbeing of communities»<sup>1</sup>. FRC sees promoting children's rights and quality education as part of a more comprehensive process toward improving the life of the communities where these children live. Children are often the weaker part of society, sustaining their growth automatically implies improving the life of their communities. It also involves working together with all stakeholders to change educational patterns. This systemic, ecological view of children growth and needs (Rinaldi, 2006; Malaguzzi in Edwards *et al.*, 1998) reflects on the approach of every FRC's projects. It also informed the 2017 application to Con I Bambini grant, and the Fa.C.E. projects completion. In light of it, FRC coordinated a team of 20 local and national partners in 4 urban areas in a year-long dialogic co-designing of all actions.

Final objective, to which all project actions aim, is to create the conditions to build an educating community which would lead to a redefinition of educational policies in the areas involved. Key to foster these conditions are parents' involvement and public commitment on granting quality education to early childhood<sup>2</sup>

This article will analyse this innovative approach considering its efficacy in promoting inclusion, social cohesion and the structuring of an educating community. It will consider the role of partners and stakeholders in the planning and decision-making path that led to the pilot actions. These are key aspects for the creation and sustainability of educational services that can become educating communities' social capital. (Bartee, 2019; Flecha, 2014)

### 1. Educational services as forum

Schools and educational institutions are places where children learn. They acquire knowledge and the know-how they will need as adults, together with the soft skills developed by doing it in a social environment. Educational services are also substitute home to help working parents. Educators guide each child in its journey. At the end of each time sequence, the institution assesses the children, and it is, in return, evaluated by parents and the public to determine the quality of its educational offer. This is apparently a natural way of looking at

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.frchildren.org/en> (July 1st, 2021)

<sup>2</sup> Fa.C.E. project presented to *Con I Bambini*.



education as a service, to which each family access individually. Yet this mind frame has strong consequences. If it is a service provided to families not as a community, but as a sum of individuals, parents and students can easily become consumers. Educational services in turn are seen as quality driven organizations, based on structured and normed practices, available to consumers on an open market. Quality assessment must be scientifically established in order for comparison among institutions to take place. Educational and social interventions can only be grounded in behavioral and social sciences research.

Although sometimes this approach to education is presented as a given, it is not the only possible one. Another paradigm, originated from the socio-constructivist movement, has emerged in the past 30 years. It is the idea of schools as «public forums situated in civil society in which children and adults participate together in projects of social, cultural, political and economic significance» (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007, 73). According to the author civil society is the place where social interactions involving state, market, associations, social movements, families, and individuals, can take place.

Civil society diversity and complexity need special places for interactions to take place. This is the idea of public forum. Here people can interact on the ground of mutual respect and reciprocity. Through this democratic interaction different approaches and point of view can come together in a collective meaning making. (Edwards *et al.*, 1998) They do not need to apply majority ruling but can be venues for collective actions and dialogue «this ideal of pedagogical work presupposes early childhood institutions which are permeated with active participation and a reflective culture, and which are open to, and engaged in dialogue with, the surrounding world» (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007, 76). This idea of school as public forum has been central to Fa.C.E. approach.

Beside the reflexive and dialogic processes, we have mentioned, there are further key ingredients to this approach. «Pedagogical documentation as a tool to assist critical and reflexive thinking and understanding of pedagogical work, by enabling us 'to submit practice to strict, methodological, and rigorous questioning'» (Freire, in Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007, 107). Another important tile is the role of facilitators. These are experts who sustain participants in deepening their understanding, broadening their ideas, and substantiating their judgments. In Fa.C.E. this role was carried out by the national partners (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007).

## **2. Social cohesion and inclusion**

Social cohesion and inclusion and the role of schools in fostering them are a growing concern world-wide. One of the European studies that has tried to tackle the issue through an evidence-based approach is INCLUD-ED: Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from

education (a 2006–2011 project financed by the European Commission). Aim of the project was:

to analyze educational actions that contribute to social cohesion and those that lead to social exclusion in the context of the contemporary European knowledge-based society. INCLUD-ED has striven to clarify successful and unsuccessful strategies in terms of educational success and social inclusion and then use this information to provide key elements and approaches to improve educational and social policy. (Flecha, 2014, 2)

The project did not look for best practices, but for Successful Educational Actions (SEAs), i.e., «actions that can improve school success and contribute to social cohesion in every context where they are implemented» (Flecha, 2014, 3). One of the project 3 clusters focused on the relationship between schools and communities. It defines 5 ways in which a community can participate to schools, highlighting their strengths and limitations. We will focus on the two which are closely connected with Fa.C.E. approach. The 'educative' style implies that community members are involved to different degrees in students' learning activities. These strategies use more effectively community human resources, increase learning venues for children in need and, by reducing learning group size, create more interactive learning experiences for pupils. The 'educative' approach also offers educational programs that respond to adults' needs. This idea in Spain is known as learning communities. It implies an egalitarian, dialogical approach to adult learning. Classes are offered on the base of adults' needs and interests. Sometimes children and parents attend together. This approach is most effective for the promotion of interactions among pupils and with adults, improving multicultural coexistence, enhancing human resources in the community (Flecha, 2014; Bartee, 2019)

The 'decisive' style implies that stakeholders take part in decision-making processes. This style grants that all voices can be heard, not just for consultation, but for the definition and management of educational activities, leading to greater democracy. The dialogic confrontation on issues and the need for common decisions help overcome prejudice and improve relationships within the community (Flecha, 2014; Bartee, 2019).

The project applied a communicative research methodology, a mixed-methods approach that «requires the researcher to create the conditions that enable intersubjective dialogue between participants and researchers and establish clear criteria and consensus to identify emerging categories and contrast interpretations» (Flecha, 2014, 10). Without going into too many details, it is a process aiming at collective meaning-making and giving space to all contributing voices. This idea has been central to REA research approach since the beginning. (Cagliari *et al.*, 2016; Edwards *et al.*, 1998; Rinaldi, 2006).

### 3. How does Fa.C.E. fit in?

#### 3.1. Civil society

FRC involved a series of national partners since the initial stage of the projects. They were involved on specific overarching aspects due to their long-lasting professional standing in their field. Here the partners' list and their specific tasks:

- AMREF, to involve health and social services for granting a comprehensive approach to children's and families' wellbeing.
- *Fondazione E35*, to support budgeting and sound financial accountability.
- *Gruppo nazionale nidi e infanzia*, to support the creation of quality ECE services.
- *Fondazione Collegio Carlo Alberto*, as the evaluating board.
- Reggio Children srl, to design and support training actions tailored to local needs.

They participated since the beginning in the designing process, together with several local partners in the 4 urban areas involved: Reggio Emilia (Regina Pacis); Teramo (city center); Naples (Ponticelli); Palermo (Sperone-Brancaccio). The areas were chosen for a combination of reasons. They are specific neighborhoods, where great potentials and educational efforts experience difficulties in overcoming educational poverties. Reasons for educational poverty vary. In the Palermo and Naples areas, the issues relate to economic distress, unemployment, and criminality, beside local peculiarities. Teramo was struck by a big earthquake in November 2016. The city center suffered great structural damages, with many people forced out of their own homes and damages to the social tissue. Reggio Emilia, Regina Pacis neighborhood, is an area populated by low-income families, from a variety of Italian and migrant backgrounds. There are almost no popular meeting places for the whole community. The area is crossed by many access roads, and people tend to drive by and not stop. This is also a neighborhood where many families with no access to ECEC services reside. (FRC, 2018-2021)

FRC had data on these areas' strengths and threats due to previous projects, such as Fare Scuola. Yet, the first action was opening a dialogue with all possible stakeholders. A field research mapped all ECEC services and needs, and open interactive meetings brought together known partners and new potential ones (60 associations and institutions have participated to the process from the 20 initial partners). These first steps focused on keeping together the national and local levels, building a dialogue among territories and partners, creating the reflective posture needed to listen to local needs and imagining and designing new ways to fulfill them. In each area, the project involved in the dialogue at least one school, local administration, formal and

informal associations, individuals, and families. The need to trigger and sustain open communication channels among all services needed by families with children, has been one of the silver lining of the project. Socio-health and educational services must work together to grant children wellbeing and development. AMREF role both nationally and locally, has been central. In the 3-years span of the project, this effort has constructed a comprehensive national and local network, with an online space for sharing information and organize activities. These are the key aspects of Fa.C.E.'s idea of civil society, that finds strong backing in the literature (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007).

This involvement has implied collective reflections and actions. From May 2018 (project 2 days long kick-off meeting in Reggio Emilia) to April 2019 (when each area presented its executive plan) there were 2 national meetings, countless local meetings and activities, local visit from national partners, tailored training sessions. These were not just meetings to present preconceived ideas and solutions. They were encounters, activity-oriented gathering, workshop aimed at triggering a common reflection through non-competitive, collective actions. This approach allowed new ideas to emerge and grant the widening of the partnership. (Flecha, 2014). It also widened the number of associations and institutions involved, from 20 local and national partners to 60 participating entities.

I connect some strong words: taking «care» of new ideas, of new experience, of the educating community. We have become conscious of the educating community, after 3 years I start to see it better and to better understand how to develop it. We have seen it through the protagonism of parents and the dialogues among partners, through training, key component of the project<sup>3</sup>.

### *3.2. Codesign*

The year-long codesigning phase had different aims. First step was understanding strengths and threats of each area by mapping socio-demographic characteristics, ECEC existing services, associations and resources, formal and informal meeting places, and other aspects of community life. All areas shared the need to build new connections among associations, groups, and institutions, that, while actively engaged on specific actions for early childhood, had little connections with each other.

For needs and desires to emerge, the project partners had to engage all possible stakeholders in active dialogue. Health, social and educational services were actively involved in reaching these stakeholders. This helped them establishing or strengthening a network. One of the key questions in this phase was also analyzing specific reasons for lack of access to quality educational services.

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<sup>3</sup> Anna Amato, Teramo Children, presentation at Fa.C.E. final national online event, May 28th, 2021.

Based on this year-long journey, different actions were designed to meet local needs. Everywhere parents widely expressed the desire to spend quality time with their children engaging in educational activities. This desire became: Time-lapse in Reggio Emilia, Piazze d'incontro in Teramo, Face zone in Naples, Ben-Essere di Comunità in Palermo. Yet every local reality had also special requirements for the emerging educating community to gain strength. Teramo lacked quality educational services for children aged 2 to 3. In Palermo parents needed to have a safe space where to meet expert and start a dialogue, also among themselves. In Naples the available human resources, with great ideas and abilities to engage children in educational activities, needed spaces and tools. In Reggio Emilia, Regina Pacis, but also other areas of town, needed a way to recreate a community. Action 1 and 2 will be presented in greater details in paragraph 4.

Co-designing is a rich, but also complex process. This duality emerges strongly in the words of Mariachiara Spallanzani, president of the Cooperative Comunità Educante, project partner in Reggio Emilia.

Co designing is fascinating, but really hard to manage, because there are many different ideas, and all people involve try, sometimes unknowingly, to work on their objective. Even if there is a common goal, everyone tries to design actions that are closer to his/her sensitivity [...] Yet it is possible to give value to everyone's talents [...] especially in the beginning I think it must have been hard [...] for the coordinators who had to keep the group together [...] after a while I think we were able to work effectively together. [...] There are different voices, opinions that can be accepted or rejected, there are new ideas emerging. So, a real positive, fascinating side, but also real difficulties<sup>4</sup>.

During the 2 years-long implementation 9 educational spaces have been refurbished to become quality learning environments (1.200 m<sub>2</sub>) and more than 3000 people involved, 1100 of which were children. According to partners this long co-designing phase together with the time span of the project, gave them a chance to get to know and learn from each other, creating new synergies. It enabled them to move beyond educational poverty starting from the richness that every area has to offer<sup>5</sup>. This was a key ingredient for granting the project implementation even during the spring 2020 country-wide lockdown and through the difficult stop-and-go phases in the project final year. Moreover, it has proven to be a strong base for continuing activities and relations even after the project final completion. In every area both

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<sup>4</sup> Interview, February 2020

<sup>5</sup> «We built a real educating community. We have brought mutual understanding between parents and children and turned the concept of educational poverty into educational richness, in a community that grows and learns together». Nino Marchesano, Principal IC Marino Santa Rosa, Naples.

public administrations and local partners have expressed the intention and finalized concrete plans to continue with both action 1 and 2.

### *3.3. Documentation and meaning making.*

Documentation is a key component of any project financed by an external agency. Therefore, it will come as no surprise to know that every step of Fa.C.E., mapping of ECEC services, partners' and stakeholders' meetings, co-designing phase, daily activities implementation, has been documented. The quality and thoughts behind this documentation effort are very different. They are not meant as a static picture of a specific point in time, or a trace for future evaluation. They are a crucial step in the process of collective meaning-making.

...meaning making welcomes contextuality, values, subjectivity, uncertainty, and provisionality. The language of meaning making opens up to evaluation as a democratic process of interpretation, a process that involves making practice visible and thus subject to reflection, dialogue and argumentation, leading to a judgement of value, contextualised and provisional because it is always subject to contestation. (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007, IX)

Fa.C.E.'s traces include comments left by parents on sticky notes, children's descriptions of their work, pictures and videos of actions, collaborative workshops where partners shared their ideas. Each document is collected, reviewed by partners and becomes a paragraph of a collective narrative. It helps rethink the activities, change, or confirm patterns, modify the environment. It calls educators into actions in new ways. Sometimes this documentation is a single voice emerging, other times is a collective effort co-constructed by a group, with emerging characteristics. What matters is that it is never abandoned but always becomes part of a common reflective process, often moving beyond each area to involve the national level and the other territories. (Edwards, *et al.*, 1998; Cagliari, *et al.*, 2016)

### *3.4. Active participation*

Fa.C.E. project was built on active participation, both of partners and stakeholders. In the voices of people involved.

- «We have the chance to learn together with our children» – A mother from Face-zones Naples
- «It has been nice to experience food as a universal language.» a father from Reggio Emilia Action 2 *Cucina di Quartiere*
- «These people come back because they feel welcomed. [...] they can actively take part in designing this project.» – Matilde Montanari, chef di Pause – team member for *Cucina di Quartiere*

In the final national coordination meeting, partners from all areas shared their ideas, but also actively engaged in mixed group building a virtual bike, representing Fa.C.E.. «Bicibusturbopubblico» based on the idea of a train, bringing lots of people around, all together. «Carretto dinamico persistente intruppico», where the central idea is harmonic chaos: getting things done in unforeseen ways and with lots of style. This dialogue triggered by active engagement, brought a collective synthesis of deeper meanings.

### *3.5. The 'wise' facilitators*

National partners and FRC have been active co-constructors of the project since the beginning. Their role has not been easy. First, they had to listen to local partners, triggering the emergence of real needs, without imposing their own opinion but helping them move beyond their biases and search for real data. The first tools in this direction have been the national meetings. There partners sharing similar and yet different problems got together and could brainstorm, starting from different cues, practical activities, readings, shared experiences. National partners' local connections (Amref in particular), local visits, and the involvement of social and health services alongside with educational services were also key.

Local communities' potentials and strengths had also to emerge alongside with their needs. Here national partners role was not only listening, but also sustaining strengths with suggestions and training. The process had to encourage, improve, support without twisting original ideas and meanings. Again, not an easy task, that went on throughout the project. National partners led local partners' meaning-making process based on weekly collected documentation.

In REA this is usually the pedagogists' task, and this is what Dahlberg, Moss and Pierce refer to when they speak about the «wise facilitators» as instrumental to a new type of evaluation for educational services. Yet, FRC and the other national partners embodied this idea both with specific human resources (*atelierista*, pedagogist, paediatrician, and so on), but also with an overarching structure aimed to facilitate and not impose solutions.

## **4. Action 1 and 2**

All these aspects we have defined, based on the reflective culture, came into life in this 3-years long journey, embodied in 2 specific actions in each of the 4 territories. Through them educating communities and opportunities for what Putnam (1993) refers as «intense horizontal interaction» emerged. This, in turn, has fostered, both among partners and stakeholders, the increase of social capital as «features of social organizations, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit» (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007, 79).

#### 4.1. *Think global act local*

Action 1 presents parents and children sharing quality educational activities together. In the words of parents from Teramo: «a special and exclusive moment, only for us, without needing to be concerned of the passing of time» and «finally a bit of peace». To ensure quality, each local group of partners started from the educational richness of the area. In Palermo *Ben-essere di comunità* carried out half of the activities in a farm, this increased connections between families and a wider territory. In Naples Face zone used Remida, the reusing center, as a key partner, fostering the culture of sustainability and ecological awareness in the community. Moreover, schoolteachers were actively involved in structuring and leading the activities, enabling their professional development. In Teramo *Piazze d'incontro* theatre and body expression had a central role thanks to the association *Deposito dei segni*, bringing new awareness of children potentials. In Reggio Emilia, Time-lapse activities combined children's actions with parents' reflections, generating new connections among families and between them and ECEC services.

The evaluation of Action 1 by Fondazione Collegio Carlo Alberto has shown how participating families have changed their perspective. They give greater importance to family participation in educational activities as a way to support children's growth. They also consider educative cultural sights as places to bring quality to people's life. 83% of those who had not enrolled their children in ECE, expressed the intention to do so, especially as an opportunity for children to socialize with others. Those families have proven more aware of the strengths and threats electronic devices pose. They have increased participation to groups and associations<sup>6</sup>.

#### 4.2 *Examples of action 2: Teramo and Palermo*

In Teramo from the co-designing phase the need for a toddler center, for children 2 to 3 years old, emerged. Many children of this age group could not access educational services due to lack of spaces. The town in general had not yet adopted a comprehensive and integrated approach to 0-6 services. *Gruppo Nazionale Nidi e Infanzia* helped reflecting on the issue and planning effective actions to move in that direction. Opening a toddler center in the same building as one of the state pre-schools, was identified as a possible way to grant vertical continuity. The school, the educators, architects from the municipality, together with FRC, were actively involved in designing the facility and the refurbishing plan. As the structure opened, in the middle of the pandemic, both training and reflective actions on documentation continued. FRC and Reggio Children srl supported educators' professional growth,

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<sup>6</sup> Preliminary results presented at the Fa.C.E. final online national meeting (May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021)



reflecting together on documentation, but also providing training for Teramo teachers' community<sup>7</sup>. In Palermo parents needed a time and a place to share doubts, ideas and ask questions to experts who could support parenthood. A recent survey carried out in two state primary schools in Reggio Emilia has confirmed that many families have little support on solving doubts and problems concerning their children. *Oriente-Menti* has been designed as a safe, non-judgmental space where all questions were acceptable, all ideas could be shared. While the experts shed light on specific doubts, parents found also a place to talk to other parents. First mostly mothers took advantage of the opportunity, but latter also fathers came. It triggered the creation of an online communities, bringing cohesion and lowering isolation among families.

## Conclusion

Based on the idea of educational services as public forum, this project embodies SEA that enhance social cohesion and inclusion to fight educational poverty. The approach has proven to be duplicable and effective in very different social context. It created a local and national network providing integrated health, social and educational services to families. It provided a venue for sharing strategies and visions among geographically and culturally diverse actors, highlighting new areas of common efforts. Families involved have developed a growing understanding of the role of ECEC services and the opportunities they provide for children. Fa.C.E. has also established new and lasting educational opportunities in the areas involved. This project's lasting contribution on the debate on quality ECEC services is the transposition into praxis of common reflective processes, namely: stakeholders' and partners' involvement in codesigning, the usefulness of long project span, the role of documentation, common active participation. In the words of Carla Rinaldi, FRC president:

*Farsi Comunità Educanti - Farsi* - to be made into: there is an idea of action, of change, of reflexivity. To do quality education implies a community, and if there is none, it needs to be created, built every day, through a reflexive and reciprocal process. It is demanding, because it is not based on those who know and those who don't, but on the reciprocity of the exchange. Educating communities, in plural, because there are many ways to be a community. The other elements: time, key in any educational process, together with negotiation, and respect<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Parents survey (February-March 2021 – Ic Pertini 2 Reggio Emilia – Research-training (Ricerca Formazione) of school staff led by Laura Landi.

<sup>8</sup> President Carla Rinaldi's final remarks at thr Fa.C.E. final online national meeting (May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021).

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## Educational Poverty and ECEC System. A Case Study

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**ABSTRACT:** *The concept of 'educational poverty', developed and spread in the scientific and political agenda in Italy, is considered within the idea of a multidimensional poverty. Investing in education in a productive way of thinking is the economical basis of human capital theory. On the contrary, the most recent approaches underline the opportunities, the freedom and the capabilities of human beings. The international intense debate could suggest that 'educational poverty' is a multi-sided concept, with its own risks and opportunities. How to examine an 'educationally poor' context, catching the opportunities and avoiding the risks? In my paper, I introduce to the specific micro-context of the public day-care services of Palermo and I argue that collecting and analysing alternative counter-narratives around them, highlighting their democratic and social value in the local community, can be considered a way to reformulate the politics of representation of the 'educationally poor' context, but also of the ECEC services.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Educational Poverty, ECEC System, Day-care Services, Palermo*

*We need critical hope the way a fish needs unpolluted water. The idea that hope alone will transform the world, and action undertaken in that kind of naiveté, is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism. But the attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, as if the struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach, is a frivolous illusion.*

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*, 1994, 8

### Introduction

The term 'educational poverty' is a more and more spread concept in the political and academic agendas. In Italy, the definition given by Save the Children is mainly adopted: the 'educational poverty' is defined as «the impossibility for children and teenagers to learn, experiment, develop and freely foster their capacities, talents and aspirations» (Save the Children, 2014, 4). Despite the recent definition of this new category of poverty, and the following criteria to measure it, the term has been readily spread in social, economic and educational policy as well as in the academic research.

Although this positive appeal, and the consequent development of strategies and processes to fight the educational poverty in our country, however, the concept of 'educational poverty' is not a neutral idea, with a homogeneous theoretical frame and well-limited borders. It is conceived within an intense international debate, both historically and geographically.

In this paper, I suggest examining the 'educational poverty' as a precarious, non-neutral, changing concept. I argue that it could be useful to look at the 'educational poverty' as a double-sided concept, even a multiple-sided one, for unveiling the risks, the limits and the advantages, the potentials of it, especially referring to the 'educationally poor' local contexts and communities. The paper is organized in three sections. The first highlights 'educational poverty' as an interdisciplinary and multi-sided concept. The second section is focused on some questions around this new category of poverty. The third one argues that rethinking the 'educationally poor' contexts, analyzing the politics of representation and the counter-narratives around education and poverty, could valorize the relationship between the ECEC services and the local community and bring to a cultural reconsideration of these territories. Furthermore, it could suggest the cultural recognition of the ECEC services in the light of their political and democratic value.

### **1. Educational poverty: an interdisciplinary and multi-sided concept**

The human capital theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964), developed in the Sixties, was an economic theory that provided a conceptual basis for a positive relationship between education and poverty reduction. The econometric principle was that investing in education is fundamental to improve the productivity of a society. In 1961, Schultz wrote:

Although it is obvious that people acquire useful skills and knowledge, it is not obvious that these skills and knowledge are a form of capital, that this capital is in substantial part a product of deliberate investment (Schultz, 1961, 1).

The aim of the theory is to realise [...] a search to determine the rate of return to children (child capital) and to the acquisition of useful skills [...] (Schultz, 1963, 22).

This perspective is still influencing the international educational policies, but while much empirical work tends to support the human capital theory, it is a theory of human capital investment and labour market earnings, not poverty. As discussed in many research, earnings are only one of the main determinants of poverty. There are other aspects (i.e., gender, family composition) or life events (disability, unexpected loss of parents) that have to be considered as sources of

poverty that human capital theory doesn't shed light on. Furthermore, the question of inequalities, which can be understood as one of the 'missing links' between education, economic development, and poverty reduction is not included in this theory. Are there other theories that highlight these other aspects of poverty?

Deneulin and Shahani took distance from the human capital theory, because it

sees the role of education as being instrumental to economic growth. Education provides people with the necessary productive skills that an industrialized economy requires. Education is an investment that yields economic returns (Deneulin, Shahani, 2009, 207)

The focus of the human development and capability approach is, indeed,

the expansion of human freedom to live the kinds of lives that people have reason to value, then the role of economic growth in expanding these opportunities (Deneulin, Shahani, 2009, 212).

The human capital theory has changed over the years, but even if

the study of human capital has evolved and refined, for example distinguishing between cognitive (or intellectual) skills and non-cognitive (or socio-emotional) skills (Heckman, Corbin, 2016, 6),

It has been criticized because ignoring the sources of the poverty, such as the absence of jobs, lack of affordable housing and showing a gender-blindness, only considering the poor mothering (Heckman, 2013). Heckman's approach is rooted in the human capital approach within economics, and he deals with broad-based research programmes in collaboration with psychologists, health experts, and family specialists. But his

important empirical and formal work has until now been insufficiently cited in work on the Human Development Approach. [...] Empirical studies show that early intervention is crucial, building the case for preschool interventions and programs that partner with families in seeking to develop potential in a society riven by inequality. Indeed, Heckman contends that a great deal of human potential is being wasted by the failure to intervene early, both through programs designed to enhance the future human being's health in utero and through programs after birth (Nussbaum, 2014, 194)

Even the term 'capabilities' is not understood in the same way: Heckman, for example, understand it as skills or potential for achievement. Other differences and similarities are underlined by the researchers:

the capability literature and the economics of human development have much in common. Both analyse inequality, equality of opportunity, and social mobility. Both use inclusive measures of inequality. Both evaluate policies and states of the world, going beyond one-dimensional measures like GDP, rates of return, or scores on achievement tests, which still dominate many public policy discussions. [...] Research on capability theory is conceived as strongly reflecting the personal beliefs of ideal ethical structures for society: this gives it a more comprehensive, philosophical perspective, but it limits its empirical application and policy relevance (Heckman, Corbin, 2016, 4).

This question is also highlighted by Sen himself, when he affirms that

A hopeless, poverty-struck destitute, or a downtrodden labourer living under exploitative economic arrangements, or a subjugated housewife in a society with entrenched gender inequality, or a tyrannized citizen under brutal authoritarianism, may come to terms with her deprivation. She may take whatever pleasure she can from small achievements, and adjust her desires to take note of feasibility (thereby helping the fulfilment of her adjusted desires). But her success in such adjustment will not make her deprivation go away. The metric of pleasure or desire may sometimes be quite inadequate in reflecting the extent of a person's substantive deprivation (Sen, 2017, 24).

Moreover, referring to the Capability approach, Martha Nussbaum affirms that

It has (at least) two versions, in part because it has been used for two different purposes. My own version, which puts the approach to work in constructing a theory of basic social justice, adds other notions in the process (those of human dignity, the threshold, political liberalism). As a theory of fundamental political entitlements, my version of the approach also employs a specific list of the Central Capabilities. [...] Sen's primary concern has been to identify capability as the most pertinent space of comparison for purposes of quality-of-life assessment, thus changing the direction of the development debate. His version of the approach does not propose a definite account of basic justice, although it is a normative theory and does have a clear concern with issues of justice (focusing, for example, on instances of capability failure that result from gender or racial discrimination) (Nussbaum, 2014, 19).

## **2. Educational poverty as a challenge: risks and opportunities**

The definition of the 'educational poverty' is directly inspired by the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the theories

based on capabilities by Amartya Sen e Martha Nussbaum. As I observed, the theoretical frame is heterogenous and complex, constantly evolving and changing, involving a wide field of research. These characteristics could bring misunderstanding or lack of understanding, with the consequent further difficulty to co-build a common and shared vision of what 'educational poverty' means. On the other side, the same characteristics could suggest developing a critical approach to the concept, highlighting the risks, the limits and the problems it takes, but also the opportunities and the benefits for the society. I resume this double-faced aspect using the umbrella term 'challenge', connotated as negative and positive, to underline the potentiality of these two dimensions. The effective and concrete strategies, practices and actions we choose can embrace one side, the other side, or both ones.

### *1.1. The risks*

Starting from the negative connotation of the expression 'educational poverty as a challenge', I have identified three risks (at least) related to the term 'educational poverty'.

a) The non-critical use of words. The political and academic discourse around the educational poverty adopts specific keywords, such as 'development' and 'poverty'. As many authors underline, these terms are born at a certain point in time:

We propose to call the age of development that particular historical period which began on 20 January 1949, when Harry S. Truman for the first time declared, in his inauguration speech, the Southern hemisphere as 'underdeveloped areas'. The label stuck and subsequently provided the cognitive base for both arrogant interventionism from the North and pathetic self-pity in the South (Sachs, 1992, 2).

The invention of the development contains the potential – and the historical concrete realisation – of a colonising process of the underdeveloped contexts. As Nussbaum noticed,

All countries are 'developing countries', although that phrase is sometimes used to refer to poorer countries: every nation has a lot of room for improvement in delivering an adequate quality of life to all its people. [...] the dominant theories that have historically guided policy choice in this area are deeply mistaken, as I shall argue, they have steered development policy toward choices that are wrong from the point of view of widely shared human values (such as respect for equality and respect for dignity) (Nussbaum, 2014, X-XI)

Moreover, anthropological, sociological and historical research have showed the ontological, epistemological and axiological complexity of 'poverty' (Giustini, Tolomelli, 2012; Krumer-Nevo, 2020), arguing for the

need to bring the political back into theory, research and practice. They underline the importance of the awareness that the power imbalance, in regard to people in poverty,

can be a potential source of dominance, when it becomes a mode of subduing her [the Other] in a network of interpretations and representations. In this case, the Other is trapped in her uniqueness and is transformed into an icon of permanent Otherness (Krumer-Nevo, Mirit, 2012, 299)

b) The conception of 'education of a measurable product',

while actively negating concepts of education that do not fit the assumed model, including the multiple ways of viewing childhood and pedagogy within ECEC's diverse traditions such as socio-cultural and socio-pedagogic models, indigenous knowledge(s), and democratic traditions in the early years (Sousa, 2019, 155).

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was influenced by the so-called 'trickle-down theory',

so common in the 1980s and 1990s, which suggested that the benefits of economic growth are bound to improve the lot of the poor, even if no direct action is taken in that direction. That theory has now been shown to be questionable in a number of ways. For example, the comparative studies of Indian states carried out by Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen (a particularly good thing to study, since these states share a set of political institutions but have pursued utterly different policies in matters of growth as well as in health and education) have shown that increased economic growth does not automatically improve quality of life in important areas such as health and education (Nussbaum, 2014, 47).

The Human Development Index (HDI), pioneered by Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq and promoted by Amartya Sen, is considered an alternative measurement of the quality of life, because it is a multidimensional index, including a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living. Since 1993, it has been adopted by the United Nations. Since 1990, UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) yearly has been published the Human Development Report.

Although education and knowledge, included in the index, are recognized as fundamental dimensions of the quality of life, they could be assimilated into the 'standard of living, that «encapsulates all the dimensions of the dominant paradigm of the West, of modernity and of development» (Latouche, 1992, 254). This process could impoverish the ways of viewing and practicing education or hide the innovative and alternative ones.



c) *The temptation of a renewed 'culture of poverty'*. The birth and spread of the expression 'educational poverty' nurtures a new cultural label, the 'educationally poor'. As every label, it may reinforce the bias and the stereotypes of specific communities and contexts, previously labelled as deviant, poor, underdeveloped. The consequential temptation could be to represent these contexts in the light of the «culture of poverty», according to the Oscar Lewis's view. As the anthropologist Ferdinando Fava (2008) wrote, referring to the Zen neighbourhood placed at Palermo (Italy), the representation of the micro-context is strongly influenced by the statistics as well as the 'privileged witnesses', both considered self-explanatory in confirmation of the established schemes. In other words, the life of residents is fixed in terms of illiteracy, underdevelopment, under-employment, overcrowding: all these elements become executive representations when they are translated into 'objective' statistical indicators of the level of education, unemployment rate, quality of life. These categories exhaust the description of inhabitants, depriving them of any personal initiative and autonomous actions unless the deviant, defective, limited ones.

## *2.2. The opportunities*

Considering the educational poverty as a challenge can also mean that we can take the opportunity to rethink the education, reframing the educational system, making it more visible, valorising its political and democratic value. As Moss and Urban wrote, «Education is, first and foremost, political and ethical» (Moss, Urban, 2011). It could be possible by reinventing the representations of the 'educationally poor' people and contexts. Changing the cultural attitude and expectations to what we can listen or learn or find out in an 'educationally poor' context could be a challenge in the realms of research, policy and practice (Krumer-Nevo, Mirit, 2012).

## **3. Rethinking ECEC services for emancipation: the public daycare services of Palermo (Italy)**

Knowing the Other is one of the major motivations for doing qualitative research. The researcher wishes to know the Other in order to give a voice to people who were previously ignored or were the object of distorted conceptions. The motivation to know the Other is also beneficial for the research participants because, unlike other kinds of inquiry, in qualitative research they have the opportunity to experience recognition, acknowledgment, and empathy. In this respect, knowing the Other possesses a potential for emancipation from binding stereotypes (Krumer-Nevo, Mirit, 2012, 299).

### *3.1. Public day-care services and educational poverty: the statistics*

Palermo is the capital of the Sicily (Italy), the fifth most populated city of Italy (total population in 2019: 647.422 inhabitants). Moreover, it is the Italian city, among the ones with more than 250.000 inhabitants, with the higher percentage of 0-2 years old population on the total (in 2018: 2,6% = 17.552).

Looking at statistics around ECEC services and educational poverty, it is important to consider the Index of Educational Poverty developed by a scientific commission, promoted by Save the Children Italy and defined between 2014 and 2016. The Index includes the provision of public ECEC services for 0-2 years old children as one of the parameters to measure the educational poverty in Italy (Save the Children, 2014; 2016). Moreover, according to a recent Report about the educational poverty in Sicily (Osservatorio sulla Povertà educativa, 2021), the Southern region is second to last referring to the provision of ECEC services for 0-2 years old children. Palermo offers a low provision of public day-care services to children. In the scholastic year 2018/2019, the total number of 0-3 years old inhabitants were 22.661 children. In the 25 day-care services of Palermo, only 954 children were admitted (the 4,2% of the total)<sup>1</sup>.

### *3.2. Public day-care services and educational poverty: alternative counter-narratives for emancipation*

How to catch the potential for emancipation as researchers? How to examine an 'educationally poor' context, catching the opportunities and avoiding the risks? Many feminist scholars share an awareness for the role of researchers as «cultural brokers» (O' Connor, 2001). Krumer-Nevo and Benjamin (2010, 2-3) identify three dominant current narratives of the politics of representation, and their potential risks<sup>2</sup>:

1. The structure/context narrative challenges the subjects' attributed inferiority by unveiling the general and specific structural/policy context within which poverty takes place and is enhanced.
2. The agency/resistance narrative challenges the assumed moral deficit, passivity and dependence of people living in poverty by showing the many ways people negotiate their best path of action within limited opportunity structures.
3. The voice/action narrative challenges the assumed intellectual inferiority of people in poverty by shedding light on their voices and their knowledge, an act which can serve as a basis for valuable critical analysis of society and for social protest. However, despite their intended critical objective, each of these counternarratives can be used in ways that undermine their

<sup>1</sup> Sources: Statistical Office of the Municipality of Palermo; official lists and documents published by the Municipality (Tripi, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Some aspects of the described politics of representation may remind of the narratives around the ECEC services and the childhood, a universe made by idealization and underestimation (Becchi, Julia, 1996; Luciano, 2017).

critical value. The structure/context counter-narrative carries the risk of dehumanizing people with direct experiences of poverty by causing their 'invisibility'. The agency/ resistance counter-narrative may idealize life in poverty; and the counter-narrative of voice and action carries the risk of exploiting people in poverty.

The local context of Palermo could be included into a conservative narrative, that explains the condition of poverty focused on three phenomena – illegitimacy, violent crime and economic inactivity – (Krumer-Nevo, Benjamin, 2010). Moreover, different researchers have described, denounced, explained the conditions of poverty of the Sicilian context, underlining the connection between poverty and education (i.e., Dolci, 1958; Callari Galli, Harrison, 1977; Fava, 2008). The narratives and the counter-narratives about poverty and education in Palermo should be critically analyzed not only in terms of unveiling the politics of representation, but also defining the local history and the collective memory referred to the local ECEC services, exploring the relationship between the ECEC system and the local community, considered an active element of the system itself, collecting and analyzing new alternative counter-narratives, to avoid to reinforce fixed labels and bias and to promote the self-recognition and the cultural recognition of ECEC services in different local contexts.

In conclusion, the 'educational poverty' concept could unveil the politics of representation of 'educationally poor', promoting a cultural change towards the poverty and people in poverty, as people who have knowledge; the South and people living in the South, not labelled only as 'poor' or 'exotic'; the ECEC system, recognized as a system of democratic practices and participation (Moss, 2007), not represented as a form of Otherness than the school system; at least, the children, even nowadays not culturally acknowledged as citizens, as people being able to think, to make hypothesis, to make decisions. Even sometimes not acknowledged as human beings.

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## Education, Democracy and Rationalization

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## Teaching Innovation through SWA: from the Neoliberal Model to the School-Centred Model, Inspired to the Capability Approach

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**ABSTRACT:** *The aim of this paper is addressed to how School-Work Alternance (SWA, thereafter) is taking shape in Italy: this measure is still building up and redefined recently. To reach this aim, it is useful to conceive SWA as one of the main measures of «Lifelong Learning», namely the European paradigm reorienting Italian educational policy in the last twenty years. That paradigm connects social inclusion to the transmission of competencies useful to enhance individual skills substantially concerning finding an adequately well-paid job. Based on the application of Bernsteinian perspective (Bernstein, 1973, 1977, 2000), this paper shows the findings of a survey carried on a sample of upper- secondary schools in Italy, whose SWA coordinating tutor were interviewed. Through multivariate analysis applied on factors concerning scholar and territorial context, pedagogical innovation, networking practices (between school and extra-curricular organizations), findings show the bivalent nature of SWA: alternative experiences seem emerge, beside the diffusion of practices connected to the educational neoliberal model or to its rejection. These alternative experiences seem to point out how schools may arrange their relationship with local companies and social organizations, creating an educational model following the vision of capability approach in some way (Sen, 2000; Nussbaum, 2011), in turn connectable to the analysis of what Bernstein calls «pedagogic rights» (Bernstein, 2001; McLean et al., 2013).*

**KEYWORDS:** *SWA, Lifelong Learning, Neoliberalism, Scholastic Innovation, Capabilities*

### Introduction

The aim of this paper is to understand to what extent School-Work Alternance (SWA) in Italy follows the neoliberal vision inspiring the wider global reform of education (Ball, 2012). About this we will show an empirical research on a sample of teachers coordinating this educational policy in schools.

SWA is a policy strongly wanted by the right-wing governments at the beginnings of XXI century in Italy: it was thought within a framework that foresaw both more space for private operators in schools and the spreading of managerial organization in educational field (l. 53/2003 and dl. 77/2005). In the second decade of XXI century this framework persisted to the extent that SWA was introduced also in high schools (l. 107/2017).

About this, Biesta (2013) spots that European educational system increasingly is based on 'learning policies', characterized by the teaching of skills such as 'learning to learn', behind which there is the idea that education is merely technical training.

This last idea constitutes the pillar of the integration between education and labour market, in turn addressed to the achievement of two inconsistent ends: through lifelong learning, and especially policies as SWA, the EU aims to make its companies more competitive and at the same time it wants to increase social inclusion of young people in the 'knowledge society'. These aims are inconsistent because the instrumental conceiving of education may conflict with the youth likelihood of finding a good job position and so the satisfaction of companies' needs prevails: companies are interested in low-cost labour or at least they want to shape labour force dedicated to managers rather than critical citizens engage in the defence of common good and workers' right to social emancipation.

This basic contradiction reflects the ambivalence of lifelong learning, which in turn depends on the conflictual nature of the educational field: this last one is today crossed not only by the top-down spreading of measures aimed at privatising schools and developing managerial logic within them (Gunter *et al.* 2016), but also by practices of resistance on the part of some teachers and school heads.

In particular, the emphasis on lifelong learning in these last two decades has been allowing professionals engaged in the educational field claim a «welfarist approach» to policies (Parziale, 2012).

Education professionals are calling for a welfarist approach to lifelong learning as they conceive education as a social right that has to be guaranteed by state rather than a market resource addressed to make individuals more competitive. In other words, a number of education professionals (educators' practitioners, teachers, pedagogues, lectures in educational sciences and so on) fight the neo-liberal idea of education as technical training for companies and call for greater public investment in education for everyone.

Starting from these remarks, this paper is addressed to understand how social conflict in educational field is translated with the implementation of SWA in Italy, in particular in the 2018-2019 school



year, when this policy was turned in «PTSO» (Pathways for transversal skills and orientation) through l. 145/2018<sup>1</sup>.

Of course, the name change does not assure that the underlying policy approach has been changed, as the most important idea of SWA keeps being central, namely that learning by doing is relevant and should at least partly replace vertical teaching based on teaching theoretical knowledge.

Nonetheless, SWA seems to be almost in part reconsidered because the cooperation between schools and companies in designing training paths based on learning by doing and «situated learning» in the second ones is only one way for the implementation of this policy. Indeed, the recent l. 145/2018 allows schools organize experience of learning by doing also within themselves, resorting to external professionals experts. An even more relevant aspect, the new law states that these pathways are addressed to the development transversal competences and students' guidance and not only to the teaching of professional/vocational skills.

The legislative change on the one hand confirms the ongoing conflict in the educational field and on the other hand offers an additional resource to school actors less bound to the neoliberal vision. In other words, we are arguing that this policy could theoretically be implemented according to an alternative vision to the neo-liberal one, and in particular closer to the capability approach proposed by Sen (1999) and also developed by other scholars as Nussbaum (2011).

In order to understand this potentiality, it is necessary to clarify the theoretical framework that oriented our empirical research on the implementation of SWA in Italy.

## 1. Theoretical framework

The research here illustrated is based on a theoretical framework highlighting the historical process originating the modern educational system: this last one emerged from the XII century over seven centuries through the integration of various institutions (Archer, 1979), built by different fractions of upper class, at odds over the ends of education (Mannheim, 1929) and its relationship with the labour market (Brint, 1998).

The global reform of education in the last three decades (Ball, 2012) is part of this historical process and it is sustained by the market forces that are trying to counteract the effects of educational democratization detected in the second part of the XX century.

Indeed, in line with neoliberal regulation, this reform is addressed to turn education from critical learning into technical training useful to

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<sup>1</sup> The law 145/2018 introduced the 'PCTO' (*Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e l'orientamento*), here retranslated into the acronym PTSO.

legitimize the economic order, and in this way, it promotes the idea that we need to transform scholastic abilities in vocational skills. Actually, this idea is useful to reproduce the technical division of labour required by capitalism (Bowles, Gintis, 2003).

The struggle about the implementation of neoliberal educational policies represents one of the most social conflict area today (Apple, 2012): on the one hand political and economic ascent by working class in XX century increased educational mobility of subaltern young people and the demand for an educational system more democratic (in this aim working class was supported by middle class intellectuals involved in the expansion of educational system); on the other hand market forces and middle class turn out to be associated to the same social closure strategy: the first ones want to make labour force is dedicated to the managerial goals rather than being social actors critic towards capitalism thanks to a long educational path (Vercellone, Negri, 2007); and the second ones can obtain social advantage from the achievement of high educational credentials that allow the reducing the demand of social mobility by working class youth and at the same time increasing the legitimation of official culture (Bourdieu, 1979) and current social stratification (Parziale, 2016).

This conflict also concerns the implementation of European lifelong learning paradigm and especially policies as SWA (or PTSO).

This question can be better understood, if we resort to the main conceptual categories of the sociological perspective proposed by Bernstein, who conceives the unequal distribution of knowledge in society as the source of the unequal distribution of power. According to Bernstein, inequalities between social classes depend on the use of two different linguistic codes that affect the way knowledge is organised and the way schools are attended. The latter employ the «elaborate code», namely the typical code expressed by upper and middle classes to reproduce their social status to the detriment of the working class.

Indeed, fruition of the school system is affected by the unequal power relations in society, since students from working-class backgrounds tend to follow shorter educational paths, as they pay more difficulty in using the school code. Thus, they stop at the lower levels of education where theoretical knowledge is less developed and more linked to common sense, in addition ideologically oriented by the upper class – we might add using Gramsci's thought (2019).

On the contrary – Bernstein continues (1973) – at the highest levels of education, theoretical knowledge is more developed and it is linked to pedagogical relations that promote critical knowledge and potentially increase young people's favor towards universalist policies, addressed to social emancipation. This potential is little exploited by working class' students, not least because the democratization of educational system is hindered by some teachers and the upper-middle classes.

Nonetheless, Bernstein notes how the gradual opening up of higher education to the working classes increases the possibilities for students

from modest social backgrounds to learn and rework the elaborated code in a way that challenges the existing institutional order hereafter they internalize theoretical knowledge.

This process was analysed by Bernstein when he focused on the progressive and slow redefinition of educational content and pedagogical relationships as a result of the shift from collection to integrated curricula in the late 1970s.

The first type of curriculum is based on the vertical teaching of knowledge organized hierarchically into distinct disciplines with clear boundaries. This type of curriculum is based on theoretical knowledge that can either reduce education to a mere technique of transmission of notions, useful to legitimize power relations in society (Freire, 1968), or, on the contrary, nurture students' capacity for generalization and rational thinking, making them conscious subjects and thus capable of reflecting critically on the social order.

On the other hand, the integrated curriculum is based on transdisciplinary model and more horizontal pedagogical relationships, centred on student learning. This type of curriculum mixes theoretical and practical knowledge, requires teachers to work in teams and focuses on students' desires and needs.

Despite the democratic potential of this second type of curriculum, at the end of his career Bernstein (2000) pointed out the possible risks of a more horizontal and transdisciplinary pedagogy than the traditional one. In fact, the depotentiation of theoretical knowledge together with the personalization of teaching risks transforming education into a market good that implies the prevalence of students' and their families' interests over the development of critical thinking and efficacy of the social right to knowledge.

According to Bernstein, neo-liberal globalisation aims to make the State the main agency for reproducing the unequal distribution of knowledge in the direction of legitimizing the capitalist order. Indeed, public education (increasingly organized on the basis of the private managerial logic) takes on greater centrality than in the past by virtue of its ability to convey models of conduct acceptable to the social order. On the contrary, every aspect of social life is regulated by pedagogical practices that avoid deviance from the needs of the capitalist system. About this Bernstein uses the expression of «totally pedagogised society».

Bernstein's perspective focuses on the relationship between the organisation of knowledge (and related pedagogical practices) and the formation of social identities.

Bernstein use the concept of «pedagogical devices» to indicate the way in which knowledge produced in society is reorganised into curricula and teaching practices and thus it is transmitted.

Depending on the type of device, the communication between teacher and learner changes, and roles and identities of each other are established. Following this perspective, we can argue that lifelong

learning activities focus more and more on the acquisition of soft skills, which in fact are empty categories (as the British sociologist himself states), useful both to legitimise the way of being of the upper-middle classes and to focus attention on teaching techniques rather than on training individuals capable of decoding social complexity.

In particular, the SWA-PTSO is characterised by the devaluation of theoretical knowledge in favour of practical learning which is congenial to legitimizing the habitus (Bourdieu, 1979) of working-class students, pushing them to shorten rather than lengthen and deepen their education.

However, we can assume that the implementation of policies in a conflictual field such as education can vary depending on the type of action taken by school actors and thus also on the way they relate to extra-curricular organisations that can be involved in the SWA-PTSO (companies, non-profit organisations, public bodies, and so on).

In particular, we assumed that: 1) there are different ways in which schools relate to the socio-economic environment of reference (Scott, 1995), which cannot be traced back to the mere opposition between an attitude to reject this policy and the acceptance of the neoliberal education; 2) it is possible to identify an organizational model of SWA (then become PTSO) based on the questioning of the collection curricula, typical of the traditional school, in order, however, to favor the development of the students' capabilities rather than a vocational training indirectly oriented to satisfy the short-term needs of companies.

## **2. Data and methods**

To corroborate our two hypotheses, we reworked data from a broader research on the implementation of SWA in Italian upper-secondary schools. We focused on schools with a single educational path, distinguishing high schools from technical and vocational institutes. Out of a population of 1,233 institutions, we constructed a random sample of 433 schools (35% of the total). Then, we administered a structured questionnaire to the SWA coordinator teacher in each institution, asking him/her about how the school reorganizes teaching when SWA projects are implemented.

Our attention focused on a set of indexes obtained through the synthesis of variables carried out through the Principal Component Analysis (PCA: Di Franco, Marradi 2003), subsequently converted into new categorical variables in order to detect the degree of scholastic innovation according to the guidelines of the reference legislation (see introduction).

In the table below we report the indexes we considered in this kind of analysis (Tab. 1: for further information see the other our contribution in this collection of essays, Chimenti *et al.*, 2021).

Among the eleven indexes in the table, six can be directly linked to the Bernsteinian perspective. In fact, first of all we paid attention on the distinction between a collection and an integrated curriculum, also identifying a hybrid type halfway between the two. In fact, the PCA allowed us to understand the extent to which schools were inclined to revise the hierarchical and disciplinary organization of knowledge, at least as far as the time devoted to the implementation of the SWA was concerned.

**TAB. 1.** The indexes analysed and their modalities

<i>Indexes</i>	<i>Modalities</i>
Type of curriculum	Collection, Hybrid, Integrated
Teaching Innovation	Medium-High, Low or Absent
Distribution of work between schools and extra-curricular organisations	Integrated Work, Separated Work
Cooperation between schools and extra-curricular organisations	Strong, Weak
Type of Learning	Situated Learning, Centralised Learning
Policy Sharing at School	High, Medium, Low or Absent
School Head Engagement	High, Medium, Low or Absent
Individual Teacher Engagement	High, Medium, Low or Absent
Type of School	North High Schools, Centre High Schools, South High Schools, North Technical-Vocational Schools, Centre Technical-Vocational Schools, South Technical-Vocational Schools
Tertiary Sector Involvement	Medium-High, Low or Absent
Primary or Secondary Sector Involvement	Medium-High, Low or Absent

In particular, with this index we summarized three variables: one revealed how willing schools were oriented to adapt traditional teaching (frontal lessons in the classroom) to the implementation of the alternance-work projects; another variable concerns the degree of consistency between the selection of classroom tutors for the alternance-work and the contents of the projects; finally, the third variable regards the tendency to reorganize lesson times according to the alternance-work activities.

In other words, the more schools tend to revise their organization and teaching according to a policy centred on learning by doing, the more we can argue that these schools shift from a collection curriculum to an integrated one.

However, we also built five other indexes to better understand the trend towards this change. One shows the schools' tendency to

innovate scholastic activities independently of SWA, namely to adopt cooperative learning models, as well as to integrate the frontal lessons with laboratory activities on digital media and circular lessons.

Another index examines the distribution of work between extra-curricular organisations by schools: the last ones can choose whether to carry out integrated work with partners or only monitor the implementation of projects designed by the latter (in this case we have «a separated work»).

The fourth index measures the degree of cooperation between schools and extra-curricular organisations, namely how much the networking is established (see again Chimenti *et al.*, 2021).

The fifth index distinguishes between the orientation to carry out projects in the workplace (situated learning) and the opposite orientation to carry out projects involving learning at school (centralised learning).

We also considered another index that measures the degree of teaching board engagement in the implementation of the SWA: we defined this index «Policy Sharing at School» and in this case we could detect three different modalities (High, Medium, Low or Absent).

In addition to those ones just illustrated, we also built other indexes to detect some aspects less connected to the Bernsteinian theoretical framework, but nevertheless important for a better understanding of the organizational models adopted by the schools. First, we wanted to understand how much school heads and individual teachers support their SWA coordinator (again we refer to Chimenti, *et al.*, 2021), envisioning three different modalities (High, Medium, Low or Absent) also for these two indexes. Then we also considered both the economic sector in which the partners of the implemented projects operate and the type of school. About the economic sector, we detected how many projects regarded the tertiary sector and how many the other ones (primary and secondary sectors): we started from estimating the number of projects for each economic sector and then we build two specific indexes, one addressed to analyses the involvement of the tertiary sector, another one useful to consider the involvement of the other two sectors in this policy. Regarding the index concerning the type of school, instead, we firstly distinguished high schools from technical or vocational schools, and then we subdivided these two types of education path by geographical area, taking into account the tripartite division into Northern, Central and Southern Italy. In summary, we obtained six different types of schools (see Table 1).

Eventually, we carried out multiple correspondence analysis (MCA: Benzécri, 1973) in conjunction with cluster analysis (Di Franco, 2006): the use of these two techniques allowed us to analyze the relationships, even non-linear, between the indexes. Thus, we were able to reconstruct the organizational models adopted by the schools in implementing the SWA. We have to add that the analysis started with MCA was also based on the introduction of another variable concerning

the ends of policy. As mentioned, we asked to SWA coordinator teachers if the projects of their school were oriented predominantly to vocational ends, to the transmission of transversal competences or to the development of the student's guidance skills.

Indeed, firstly we were able to examine the collocation of schools along two dimensions: one concerns the opposition between innovation and resistance to the change; the other one represents a specification of the first dimension as it investigates the direction assumed by innovation considering also the possibility that traditional scholastic organization persists.

Then, we managed to divide the 432 schools to which the interviewed SWA coordinating teachers belong and thus to identify 4 different organizational models with regards to the implementation of this policy.

### 3. Findings and discussion

The classification of schools through cluster analysis made our two hypotheses were corroborated. Indeed, in addition to a group of schools (19%) that implemented the policy in line with the neoliberal interpretation suggested by the reference legislation, and to the presence of schools (29%) that did not fully adopt this policy, two other organisational models can be identified. On the one hand there is a model (concerning 20% of sampled schools) that radicalizes the neoliberal vision of SWA and on the other hand there is a model (32%) in which schools take the policy on themselves, reinventing it in such a way as not to delegate projects to extra-curricular organisations nor give up the full implementation of the policy. The variability of models makes it possible to corroborate the first hypothesis: for more details see the other our contribution in this collection of essays (Chimenti *et al.*, 2021). Here, however, we want to pay attention to only last one of the four models identified, that supports our second hypothesis. In fact, the schools in this group adopt SWA in a creative way, exploiting the emancipatory potential of the shift from the collection curriculum to the integrated curriculum, that the adoption of this policy presupposes.

In fact, 64% of schools are characterized by strong cooperation with extra-curricular organisations and – more importantly – slightly fewer (56%) work in an integrated way with them. In a nutshell, the monitoring, design and implementation of alternance projects are shared in the school, which thus integrates SWA into its teaching offer (see Table 4 in Chimenti *et al.*, 2021).

In particular, the orientation to transversal competences and guidance seems to be the direct consequence of an organizational model in which the school challenges its practices, but without delegating SWA projects to companies or other extra-curricular organisations. This attitude seems to signal a distancing from the

neoliberal model of lifelong learning: it is worth reflect on this aspect, which leads us to speak of «innovative-scholastic SWA».

As indicated in the first paragraph, SWA can be translated in a different way by those teachers and school heads who do not intend to renounce education as critical training (*Bildung*), resorting to the ambivalence in the lifelong learning paradigm itself (see introduction). In this regard, teaching transversal competences or guidance skills can be interpreted by these actors as a way of organizing the school curriculum in a direction that leads students to reflect on the social construction of society and on the active role of each individual citizen in strengthening democracy.

This way of conceiving lifelong learning, including the SWA-PTSO, is possible if we keep following the Bernsteinian perspective in such a way as to consider what he calls «pedagogical rights» (Bernstein, 2001): such rights develop when education enables people to think of themselves in a different way, namely in a way that is different from what common sense, the class code, habits and traditions lead them to do.

In this case, education makes rights practicable by leveraging on what Sen (1999) calls «capabilities». As far as our research topic is concerned, it is possible to identify three rights connected to as many capabilities: the right to the means of critical understanding and to new possibilities, to which confidence is connected as a capability; the right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally (the right to be autonomous) to which the capability of belonging in groups is connected; and the right to participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social order, to which the capability related to civic discussion and action is connected (McLean *et al.* 2013).

If we resort to the previous theoretical framework (see par. 1) in order to analyze our findings, we can note the conflict within the scholastic field: it is reasonable to argue that some school heads and teachers are partly in favor of the neoliberal reorganization of the modern education system; while other school heads and teachers pay little attention to policies like SWA, showing a closed attitude towards innovation in scholastic practices. At the same time, it is worth noting that in other cases teachers and school heads appropriate the rhetoric of lifelong learning in order to claim a greater centrality of public investment in education and their own professional autonomy. Such a claim should thus feed the idea that the ultimate purpose of school is to form citizens who are aware and equipped with critical knowledge, especially in a context of social and cultural complexity such as that induced by economic globalization (Mayo, Vittoria, 2017).

In fact, the innovative scholastic model is characterized by the shift to the integrated curriculum according to practices that see the cooperation of teachers, school heads and tutors of extra-curricular organisations without implying the pandering to the professional needs of the latter. In fact, the orientation towards learning by doing is mitigated by the centralization of learning: teachers control the



curriculum change and collegially shape the policy (through the teaching board) so that this last one is addressed to the development of transversal competences and students' guidance.

This organizational model tends to be adopted by southern high schools, which are far from subordinating a part of their teaching to aims more directly linked to the acquisition of professional skills, in some way consistent with the immediate needs of companies. Indeed, both in terms of the type of training on offer and their geographical location, southern high schools tend to favor theoretical knowledge typical of the intellectual and management professions, which can be accessed by pursuing studies at university. In summary, the orientation for change imparted by the introduction of the SWA seems to be pushing some high schools, particularly in the South, to creatively translate the alternance policy so as not to give up their conception of education and their teachers' pedagogical identity. In this case schools follow the idea of lifelong learning as a necessary practice for inclusion in the knowledge society, without sharing the neoliberal vision from which this same idea comes actually. Future research, especially of an ethnographic kind, could shed more light on the concrete pedagogical practices implemented by schools linked to the innovative scholastic model, and thus lead us to understand how bidirectional the exchange of knowledge is between schools, businesses and other extra-curricular organisations. Such an investigation could show the potential change not only of schools, but also of the way they can influence in the medium-long term the innovation of enterprises, public bodies and Third Sector associations. Such a change seems to be based on the redefinition of scholastic curricula through the creative selection of knowledge located in extra-curricular organisations, without this implying the questioning of the virtuous effects deriving from the learning of theoretical knowledge transmitted by the educational system, as already highlighted by Bernstein (2000) two decades ago.

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## Where and From Whom Can Democracy Be Learned? The Results of Mixed-Method Research in Five Different Territorial Contexts

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper presents the principal results of a research regarding the forms and ways of participation in the public sphere of adolescents, and on the socialization processes to participation activated in the family, at school, among peers, and in other contexts (e.g., on the Internet). Several scholars argue that democracy is learned from childhood. Both instrumental literacy and, even more so, cultural literacy (such as the development of cognitive and non-cognitive, civic, social, and affective-relational skills related to personal autonomy and the development of critical thinking) are influenced by different contexts and actors. Active participation in community life might be considered, on the one hand, as the result of socializing processes, and on the other hand as an own educational value. The presented results are based on a mixed-methods study, which consists of community profiles, focus groups, and a survey carried out with adolescents (14-17 years old), in five Italian towns (Pordenone, Ancona, L'Aquila, Rome, Trebisacce), where it is undertaken the project RIPARTIRE (Regenerating participation to innovate the educational network), funded by Impresa Sociale Con i Bambini and led by ActionAid Italia. The entire research is developed on four areas: the meanings, forms, and practices of the civic participation of adolescents; the perception of the effectiveness of their participation; the participation models learned in the family, at school, and in other socializing contexts; the (physical and virtual) spaces in which adolescents take part in the society.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Democracy, Adolescents, School, Capability Approach, Mixed Methods Approach*

### Introduction

This contribution presents the early findings of a research aimed to investigate forms and ways of participation in the public sphere of adolescents, and the processes of socialization to participation, which

may be interpreted as socialization to the democracy: in the family, at school, among peers, and in other contexts (e.g. on the Internet).

According to literature, democratic values and rules are learned from childhood to adulthood: political and civic learning is a lifelong process. Yet the 'impressionable or formative years' between childhood and adulthood are believed to be a crucial period for the formation of citizens' political attitudes and behaviors (Jennings, Niemi, 1981; Neundorf, Smets, 2017).

Active participation in the community may be considered as the result of socializing processes, and as a factor to increase transversal knowledge and skills, important to live in current societies.

In this paper, it is assumed that the lack of opportunities to learn cognitive and non-cognitive skills affects the participation levels and, ultimately, the quality of democracy.

School, as a crucial socialization agency, may have a great role in the development of civic and political engagement of young people. It may offer opportunities to learn and to experience democracy both within the school and in the community.

The research work is one of the actions of the project named *RIPARTIRE* (Renovate participation to innovate the educational network), which is aimed to contrast educational poverty through the promotion of civic and social skills and engagement of young people to generate new educational and democracy opportunities at school and in the local community. The project involves 5 areas: Pordenone, Ancona, L'Aquila, Roma, Trebisacce. The project is funded by Impresa sociale Con I bambini and led by ActionAid Italia.

The University of Calabria is responsible for the activity *A2 Research on participation and socialization of youth and adults in the educating community*. The main objective of the activity is to investigate how young people (14-17 years old) interpret and exercise civic participation and how much their opinions, beliefs and practices are influenced, limited, or supported by specific models adopted and transmitted by adults in the educating community or by peers.

To this end, the University of Calabria team has designed a mixed methods research, using secondary and primary sources and developing 5 community profiles (one for each involved area), a web survey and six focus groups carried on young people. The paper is made of four sections: the first introduces the theoretical framework, the second gives details on the research methods; the third illustrates the main findings and the last offers a synthetic discussion.

## **1. Theoretical framework**

Several scholars argue that democracy is learned from childhood (Biesta, 2011; Schulz *et al.*, 2018). Different contexts and actors influence both instrumental literacy and, even more so, cultural literacy, such as

the development of cognitive and non-cognitive, civic, social, and affective-relational skills related to personal autonomy and the development of critical thinking (Muscarà, Zapparrata, 2017). Active participation in community life might be considered: on the one hand, as the result of socializing processes; and, on the other hand, as a set of actions having an educational value and impact.

As suggested by Ekman and Amnå (2009), civil participation is a latent form of political participation, referring to different kind of actions in the public sphere. These authors elaborated a typology distinguishing individual/collective forms of attention/actions. The interest in relevant issues in one's community is considered as social involvement. The set of actions to influence the society on specific issues that are relevant to others, such as discussing and following political issues, recycling, volunteering, proposing solutions to local problems, or contributing to improving the conditions of certain groups in society are defined as civic engagement.

On the educational side, the involvement in civic activities allows the access to knowledge, skills, and values needed to exercise the role of conscious and active citizens in political life, and offers opportunities to meet different individuals and cultures, strengthening social and solidarity ties (Almond, Verba, 1963; Putnam, 1993 and 2000; Biorcio, Vitale, 2016; Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2014).

As known, social inequalities might be reflected in different degrees of participation in the social and political life of a community, especially among the youngest, underling a strict association between poverty and low participation (Biorcio Vitale, 2016). Civic participation therefore could be influenced by the effective or possible participation opportunities in different social contexts experienced by young people (family, school, peer group, media).

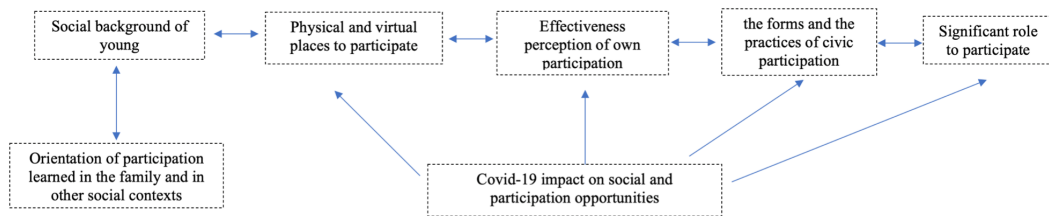
In this theoretical framework, the paper is developed based on the hypothesis according to which the lack of learning skills opportunities (cognitive and non-cognitive) may affect the participation levels and, ultimately, the quality of democracy. Also, it takes into account the influences of the socio-economic context and the family background on the access to effective or possible participation opportunities in adolescence.

Furthermore, it highlights the role of school, which may assume an agency role in civic and political engagement of young people (Brint, 1999; Colombo, 2001; Besozzi, 2006). For instance, it could offer opportunities to learn and to experience democracy both within the school and in the community, and, it could facilitate conditions for the activation of the student to be free to choose and doing so for the significant development of his person (Sen, 2000; Nussbaum, 2012).

The mindmap below (Figure 1) is helpful to reflect on these hypotheses. The mindmap is a guide for the research to select, firstly, the relevant concepts (at the preliminary stage) regarding the civic participation of youths; and secondly the indicators for the drafting of

the questionnaire and focus groups, and in the analysis of collected data (Marradi, 2007). Each box represents a single factor (or conceptual dimension) that contributes to the definition of civic participation, as defined theoretically. Each factor is in a mutually interacting relationship, as symbolized by the two-way arrows between the boxes.

**FIG. 1.** *The mindmap of research*



On the mindmap, the first factor (on the left-hand side of Fig. 1) can be traced back to the opportunities for participation present in the life contexts of young people: in the family, at school, and in the peer group. It is linked to civic engagement (of reference or induced) and is also influenced by the orientation and quality of the participatory opportunities experienced in the family, at school and in other socializing contexts. The second factor is that of the spaces (physical and virtual) in which one takes part, and coincides with the dimension of individual and collective social involvement. The third factor is inherent in young people's perception of participatory self-efficacy, influenced by other factors. The fourth factor is referred to the forms and practices of participation and defines the dimension of individual and collective civic engagement. Finally, the fifth factor, reconstructed and influenced by the previous ones, is related to the meaning of participation and to one's own orientations.

It was also considered appropriate to investigate whether the confined at home period because of the covid-19 pandemic has affected both the pre-existing or offered opportunities for youth to participate and the quality of their interpersonal relationships (last box at bottom of the mindmap).

## 2. Methods and Data

### 2.1. Mixed Methods Research

The research adopts a mixed-methods approach in order to, on the one hand, observe the contextual elements in order to define the local peculiarity also from a perspective of civic and political culture and subculture, and on the other hand, to collect information about the participation experience of young people.

As mentioned, the adopted research techniques are:

- 5 community profiles, which provided information on key territorial, demographic, socio-economic, political, civic and educational indicators regarding the cities of Pordenone, Ancona, L'Aquila, Trebisacce, and the district 'Municipio VI' of Rome;
- 6 focus groups, which were conducted online with different groups of 4-8 participants, investigating: a) the sensibility of pupils regarding current social themes, b) the main interests of pupils, c) the participatory experiences (done and desirable), and d) the role of cohabitant adults in the socialization of civic and social participation of the youths;
- and 1 web survey, on pupils who live in the 5 target cities, exploring a) the meaning, the forms and the practices of civic participation of the young, b) the effectiveness and influence perception of own participation; c) the orientation of participation learned in the family and in other social contexts; d) the (physical and virtual) place and the significant role to participate.

## *2.2. Strategy of involvement and activation of territories*

The local partners were actively involved in the research work, starting from the elaborations of community profiles to the different steps of the survey and the organization of focus groups.

As for the web survey, the partners were getting involved in a meeting to present the mindmap and the first draft of the questionnaire and focus group protocol. The meeting is used to discuss how to explore the issues (e.g., other possible indicators to be detected were suggested) and also on the form of questions and more child-friendly response options, with a view to greater usability of both the questionnaire and the focus group results by young people.

In a second phase, the final text of the questionnaire and the themes of the focus groups were presented to the partners, and the strategies for promoting the field research work were shared.

In order to support the contacts with the local actors involved in the promotion of the research, an invitation letter and a brief presentation of its purpose were prepared. In collaboration with local partners, the following actors were contacted:

- upper secondary schools (partners and non-partners of the project);
- local associations that deal with countering educational poverty and others (family associations, sports, recreational, etc.);
- parishes and youth groups;
- local and thematic Facebook groups;
- Informagiovani (an infopoint for youths).

These actors were asked to 1) disseminate the link to the questionnaire and the supporting material (posters and brochures with QR code for filling out the questionnaire) through their own communication channels (website, Facebook page, WhatsApp groups, etc.); and 2)

directly involve young people in the focus groups in the local partners' network.

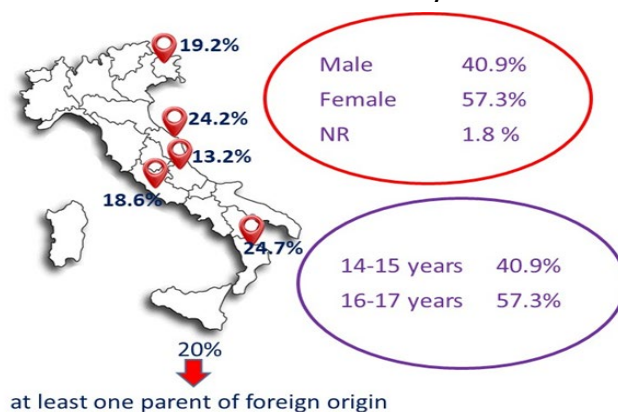
The major difficulties in conducting the research, in the period of lockdown (November 2020 - May 2021), led the entire research team, together with the partners, to redefine the contact strategies for promoting the research, focusing mainly on the strong relationships that the local partners, the Unical group and the lead partner ActionAid had with schools (project partners and not), individual teachers or other realities closer to the world of youths.

### 2.3. The sample of Web Survey

The web survey aimed to reach 1,500 young people 14-17 years old in the 5 areas of the *RIPARTIRE* project. It was deemed appropriate to adopt a stratified sampling (Di Franco, 2010): 300 interviewees for each involved city. This choice is motivated by the interest to ensure a congruous number of interviews for each profile in each territory and make the results of the web survey comparable, taking into account that the demographic heterogeneity of the territories involved would not have allowed defining a sample for proportional shares with respect to the resident population in the specific age group.

At the end of the survey, completed just at the end of April 2021, we collected a little more than 1,200 responses (Fig. 2). It was not really easy to reach this target because during the survey students were attending school by distance learning (called in Italian, '*Didattica a Distanza, DAD*').

FIG. 2. The stratification of sample



### 3. Early Findings

The findings presented here follow three main issues linked to the main question of this paper: where and from whom can democracy be learned by adolescents?



1. Social involvement and civic engagement: in what, how and how many.
2. Where adolescents learn to participate and from whom.
3. Views on democracy and citizens' role.

### *3.1 Getting involved: in what, how, and how many*

From the analysis of the participation experience of respondents it comes clearly out that adolescents are mostly involved in light and invisible forms rather than being engaged in manifest civic or political actions (Figure 3).

The 39,5% of our sample declares to be involved in sport, cultural and recreational associations (particularly youths in Pordenone, 48%); and over half of the interviewees keep up with the news (especially females, 61%; and young residents in L'Aquila, 72%). Only in Trebisacce, the adolescents declare to practice a visible form of participation: 20% of respondents claim to participate frequently in demonstrations (e.g., at school, or to take to the streets in protest).

The dense and visible forms of participation do not come out. In fact, in our sample, it appears a lack of attendance of discussion in organized places (real/virtual) such as general assembly at school, thematic group on Social Network (respectively 57,5% and 51,8%); and of social association experience (never for 79,6% of the sample).

### *3.2 Learning: where, from whom, and how*

School is the place where adolescents spend much of their time and establish relationships with adults and peers. Slightly less than half of the respondents of the web survey feels – very or very much – a part of the school they attend. It is interesting to observe that the youths feel to belong more to the school than to the local community. Also, for this reason, adolescents often refer to scholastic context, either directly or indirectly, in the narrative of experiences during the focus groups.

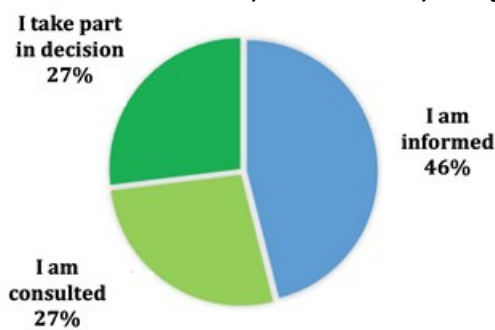
However, according to respondents, schools do not offer much space and opportunities for participation to the young people.

The latter have little autonomy in decisions that affect the organization of school activities. In particular, just over a quarter of them say they take part in decision-making. And another quarter is consulted concerning the ordinary activities of the class or school (e.g., how to organize questions, what films/documentaries to watch, how to use school spaces, what stops to choose for field trips). Slightly less than half declare to be only informed about decisions, taken by others without their involvement. There are no significant differences either by gender or by age. From a territorial perspective, however, respondents from Ancona and partly from Pordenone describe a less participatory school, on the contrary of young people from Trebisacce.

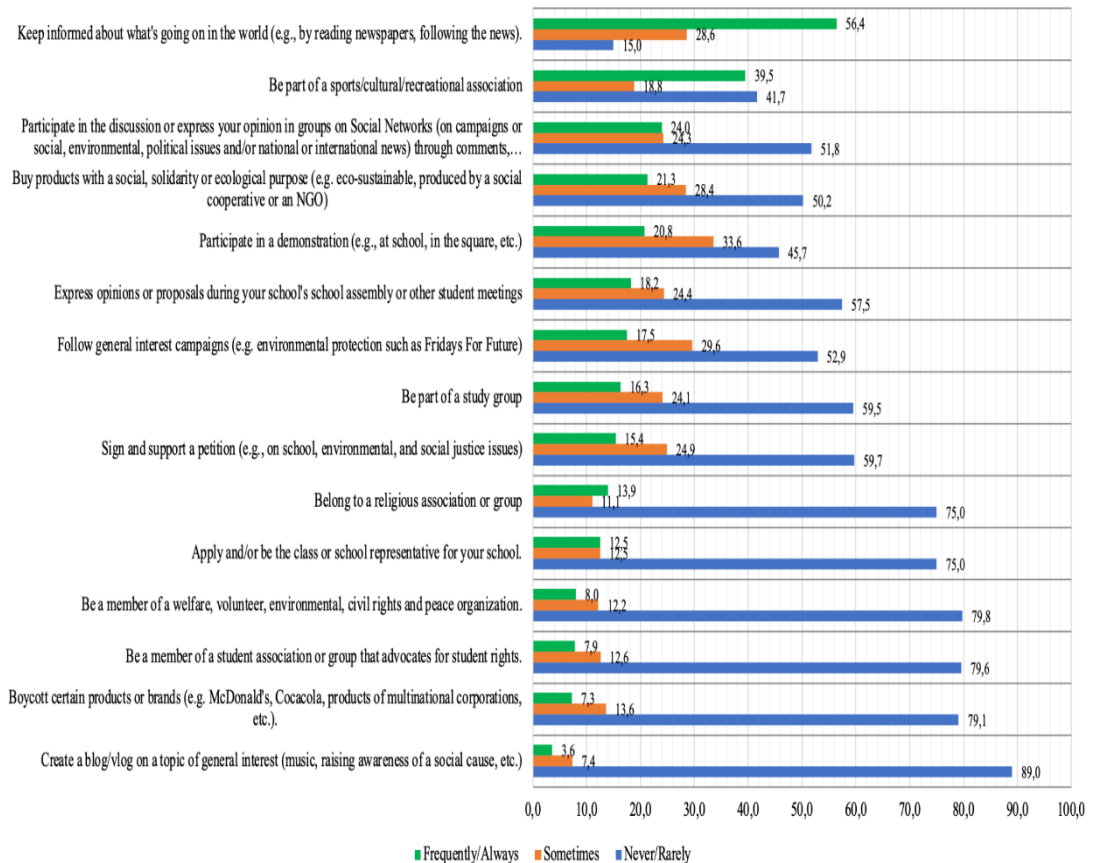
There is also little active participation during school assemblies or student meetings: about 60% of the sample do not express opinions or proposals – ever or rarely – on these occasions.

The participants of focus groups confirm that they do not feel included in school decision-making and that their opinion is not much considered. School is also a space where students interact with teachers and peers. Yet, the survey data show that 44% of respondents do not recognize teachers as having contributed to the formation of their civic identity (e.g., the way of being together with others and taking an interest in what is happening in the world). The value increases in the cities of Ancona (54.4%) and Pordenone (52.6%), while it is lower in Rome-Municipality VI (36.7%) and L’Aquila (36.1%).

**FIG. 3. Forms and practices of young participation**



**FIG. 4. Young’s role at school**

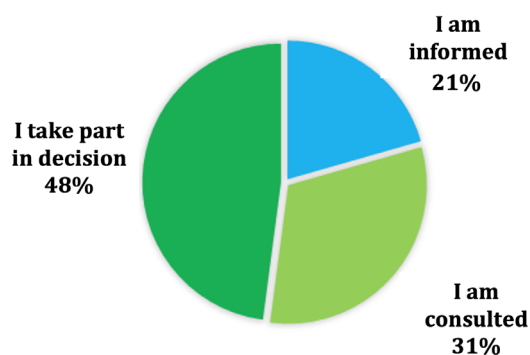


The civic profiles of the territorial context may partly explain these data: the existence of more participatory opportunities in the local community, might also provide young people with more chances to hang out with other reference adults in addition to teachers and parents.

Curiously, in the focus groups, participants recognize some participation activities experienced at school, highlighting the importance of less formalized or extra-ordinary educational opportunities. For example, in some areas, such as Trebisacce, the school is also 'something else': it is precisely in non-ordinary activities – mainly PON projects directly or indirectly related to the acquisition of civic skills – that it becomes a training ground of democratic and participatory action, providing the knowledge necessary to be aware citizens.

Overall, the information, collected by the focus group and by the web survey, highlights that young people experience a greater degree of autonomy in their families, in making choices regarding both the management of free time and the decisions of educational paths.

**FIG. 5.** *Youths' role in family*



Half of the students say they get involved in decisions taken in the family that affect them more or less directly. When they do not take part in the decision, they are at least consulted (in 30% of cases). They are the recipients of the decisions taken by others only in 21% of cases (the highest percentages are recorded for the items: 'coming home time', 'where to spend the holidays', 'when to visit relatives').

Both from the survey and the focus groups, it comes out that parents are not more active than their children in terms of civic participation. However, the conditions for learning the basics of democratic decision-making seem to be maturing within the family space. The focus groups also reveal an attitude of parents to not inhibit their children's involvement in extracurricular activities or social engagement. Also, from the web survey, it emerges that for 46.2% of the interviewees the availability of parents to carry out extracurricular activities is very or very important, and for another 32% it is quite important.

Generally, the parents appear as a key figure that conveys to young people useful references regarding their interpersonal relations and

forming an idea of society. Indeed, the young people interviewed feel they learn from their parents about how to be in relationships with others and about their interest in what happens in society: 'very much' and 'very much' from mothers 60% and fathers 53%.

For respondents the relationship with peers is a relevant element for the activation of the participation process. The research allows saying that the class group (even if penalized by the pandemic period), the peers' group, and the group of friends represent informal contexts in which one tends more spontaneously to express the opinion.

### 3.3 Views on democracy and citizens' role

According to literature, populist culture consists of some components and ideas commonly present in most experiences. These are, for instance, the call for power of 'the people', the claim for direct democracy, the centrality of the leader, the direct connection between the leader and the people, the lack or refusal of intermediation bodies (Baldini, 2014; Rooduijn, 2014). This culture, which is quite widespread in Italy (and not only), is somehow transmitted to youths and some signs can be observed in the responses given by students of our sample (see Fig. 6).

**FIG. 6.** *The views on democracy and citizens' role*



The need for a strong leader as the most important factor for ensuring social order is the response that gained the maximum number of choices among a set of items (frequencies are much above average in Trebisacce: 75.3%; slightly above among girls: 69.2%). However, a little more than half of respondents do not agree with the idea that only political representatives have the power to make changes. While it is perceived that citizens have the power, there is little awareness of the value of collective action and the need for new political movements is not clearly identified.

Civic and political identity of teenagers appears still under construction and undefined: at least 1 out of 5 teenagers involved in the survey 'Neither agree nor disagree' with several statements on civic and political issues. Furthermore, respondents do not feel ready to take political action such as voting (56.2% of respondents do not agree with the proposal to give the right to vote to 16 years old).

Yet, a large percentage of youths (71.8%) believe that in order to make their voice heard, young people need spaces where they can meet and discuss directly. Therefore, there is a kind of preliminary awareness that democracy is based upon discussion and pluralism.

#### **4. Discussion**

The early analysis, based on data collected by web survey and the focus group evidence, shows that there are 1) different contexts where democracy can be learned by adolescents and 2) heterogeneous figures from whom they learn it.

As shown, adolescents are getting involved in light and invisible forms of participation following the generally low level of citizen participation in Italy (ISTAT, 2020b; 2021).

They learn participation attitudes especially in family and among peers. Parents specifically do not inhibit their children's participation within the family itself and in society. On the contrary, they encourage them to get engaged. However, findings both from the survey and the focus groups reveal that parents are rarely involved in social, civic, or political activities. As for the other main socialization agency, the school, this doesn't seem to play a role in offering civic participatory opportunities for adolescents. Rather, according to students, it represents a physical place that involves adolescents in socialization (first) and participation (eventually, after) only exceptionally, not in the ordinary activity. It rather impacts socialization to civics and democracy because it is the place where peers engage in informal discussions or during extra-curricular activities such as special projects (e.g., PON).

Regarding the views on democracy and citizens' role in its functioning, some seeds of the populist culture seem to be present in the young interviewees' responses. Nonetheless, some contradictory positions and the lack of a clear opinion on different items can be understood as a sign of a civic and political identity still under construction.

Young people claim for space to meet and discuss, but at the same time, most of them do not use the existing places or opportunities (e.g., school or classroom assembly), perhaps because these are not the features they expect.

The analysis of early findings, overall, shows that in informal contexts, the young people interviewed tend to 'talk' more spontaneously, to make an exchange 'about what is happening around

them' but also to resolve conflict situations that have arisen in their friendship group. And in doing so, identity and worldview are strengthened. In the peer group, there emerges a greater willingness to take the floor, to make one's point of view heard, even on matters of general interest. However, the need for ordinary places within school and the community and of adults, different from parents, willing to discuss and give attention to opinions, ideas, suggestions are also clearly expressed. Democracy values, rules, and needs require much more not-occasional commitment from socialization agents such as the school managers and teachers, and other subjects of the educational community.

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## Higher Education, Beyond Public to Common Good: Enhancing Knowledge Democracy

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**ABSTRACT:** *The principle of public good as applied to higher education appears to be challenged by the greater diversification of actors and sources of funding and by the influence of neo-liberal ideologies which emphasize the private and economic benefits of higher education. As well as undermining principles of equity, these changes may also affect the ultimate purposes and main functions of universities in order to meet the needs of the knowledge economy. This theoretical paper provides a revisited interpretation of the application of the principle of public good to higher education in light of current trends of privatization and marketisation. While acknowledging the importance of the role of the State in educational governance, however, it also argues that a mere reaffirmation of this principle may not be sufficient to counter the effects of the market in both the public and private domains. Referring to the concept of common goods, this paper explores complementary frameworks for the development of new approaches likely to strengthen participatory and deliberative processes and to implement sustainable and ethical forms of cooperation according to different realities. In contrast to dominant development discourse, this normative concept favors a humanistic approach and highlights the quest for knowledge as a shared endeavor and responsibility. Considering higher education as a common good entails fostering the diversity of worldviews and knowledge systems in order to envisage new social structures and development models while ensuring more equitable educational policies.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Public Goods, Common Goods, Privatisation, Commodification, Knowledge Democracy*

### 1. Introduction: The international context of higher education, main trends and issues

Between 2000 and 2019, the global rate of enrolments in higher education has doubled, rising from about 19% to almost 39%<sup>1</sup> from around 100 million to more than 200 million students. To address this growing demand for higher education which has been putting greater

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank database. School enrollment, tertiary (% gross) - <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR> [Accessed in March 2021].

pressure on public funding, governments worldwide have been developing different strategies and policies to expand cost-sharing by shifting some of the cost burden onto individual students. One particular strategy relates to the increase in tuition and fees for students, a trend which is displaying in all parts of the world and especially in OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries where private expenditure has increased more quickly than public expenditure over the last decade<sup>2</sup>.

The global higher education landscape is also characterized by the growing enrolment in private institutions, especially for-profit ones. Indeed, in 2015 more than 30% of students were enrolled in private HE institutions (UNESCO, 2015). It should be highlighted that the growth of the for-profit sector responds to the logics of the market and of private returns to higher education that have been spreading globally since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In this context characterized by increasing private spending on tertiary education, it is necessary to find a careful balance between funding education through public sources and requiring students and families to cover some of the costs (OECD, 2019). The balance between the costs and returns of education is related to recent discussions on the nature and contribution of higher education to society. It is generally argued that the greater the private benefit, the greater the costs covered by households or individuals should be. However, it should be highlighted that «[d]irect and indirect costs of studies in higher education remain the main cause of exclusion» (UNESCO, 2015, 46). Indeed, the expansion of private institutions and the privatization of the public sector have an impact on principles of equity and social justice (Altbach *et al.* 2009).

In the discussion on the public versus private benefits of higher education, the indirect and societal benefits engendered by a better educated society – which would benefit not only those who have had the opportunity to get to the tertiary levels, but society in general – should be taken into account. In this regard, the analysis of the concepts of public and private goods as applied to higher education may help address these complex issues which ultimately relate to the preservation of principles of equity and equality of opportunities in higher education.

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<sup>2</sup> «Reliance on private funding by tertiary educational institutions has been growing. Between 2010 and 2016, private expenditure on these institutions increased more quickly than public expenditure. Between 2010 and 2016, on average across OECD countries, private expenditure on tertiary educational institutions increased by 3% on average each year while public expenditure grew by just under 1% a year over the same period» (OECD, 2019, 2)

<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/6b7ded53-en.pdf?expires=1610204066&id=id&accname=quest&checksum=461257DC0CC1FCD674235AF40A9B396B>

## 2. The principle of higher education as a public good under strain

Over the last few decades, there has been increasing reference to the concept of higher education as a public good in education development discourse and research. Differently from lower levels of education, discussions on the concept of public goods as applied to higher education have mainly centred on issues of funding and on the purposes of higher education institutions, rather than on questions of state delivery and ownership (Marginson, 2011; Tilak, 2009; UNESCO, 2009). Forms of state funding and regulation are considered as necessary to ensure equitable and affordable higher education opportunities, especially when considering the striking inequalities that affect higher education systems worldwide (UNESCO, 2017; Marginson, 2016a). Higher education is generally considered as a public good in itself and in the light of the various outputs universities engender (i.e. knowledge, information, research, often considered as public goods themselves).

Having said this, it is questionable whether the public-good framework is still a valid one particularly in light of the current dynamics of the higher education landscape characterized by growing trends of privatisation and commercialization. Indeed, as well as undermining principles of equity, these trends are increasingly affecting the ultimate purposes and the main functions of universities, whereby higher education is increasingly perceived as a private good, a producer of knowledge and skills for economic competitiveness, and a facilitator of private interests.

### *2.1. Main challenges to the principle of public good as applied to higher education*

According to the economic theory of public goods as developed by Samuelson (1954), higher education does not correspond to the classical definition of a *pure public good*, that is, a good that has both characteristics of non-excludability and non-rivalry. Indeed, a classroom space can be excludable and a higher number of students in a class may affect the quality of education being provided and consumed, making it rivalrous. Moreover, differently from lower levels, higher education has not been turned into a free, universally available and compulsory service provided by the State, exhibiting the characteristics of non-rivalry and non-excludability typical of public goods. Moreover, there is a general assumption that higher education provides higher rates of return for the individual as compared to lower levels, thus displaying the characteristics of a private good. In this sense, control would be left to individuals acting through market mechanisms.

In addition to this, the massification of higher education has inevitably put greater pressures on public finances. Indeed, despite the

spectacular expansion of enrolments at this level of education, inequalities persist among and within countries (UNESCO, 2017). Education budgets have shrunk as result of austerity measures adopted in many countries worldwide and the expansion of higher education at the global level has not been met with substantial increase in the allocation of public funds. Declining public resources have therefore been complemented by greater private expenditure. The high private returns to tertiary education have led a number of countries to expect individuals to make a greater financial contribution to their education at tertiary level. In all OECD and partner countries, the proportion of private expenditure on education after public-to-private transfers is far higher at the tertiary level than at lower levels of education. In 2017, nearly 29% of total expenditure on tertiary institutions in OECD countries was sourced from the private sector after transfers. Households account for 74% of private expenditure on tertiary institutions, representing the biggest source of private funds in the majority of OECD countries (OECD, 2020).

As well as greater reliance on private and household expenditure, the global higher education landscape is characterized by the emerging of new private institutions, in particular for-profit ones. The trend towards opening up the sector to the market is based on the perspective that higher education represents an essential part of the «Knowledge Economy», an «engine of development», a perspective which results from the global reforms that have been spreading worldwide since the 1980s. In this context, the aims of neo-liberal ideology have been translated into policies marking shifts towards greater reliance on the mechanisms of the market in the management of social services and goods such as education. It was suggested that, without privatization, the tax burden on citizens could not be reduced, making it difficult for them to choose whether or not to buy the services they needed or wanted. Many of these arguments were further developed in theories of «New Public Management» which suggested that the business ideas that had proved successful in the private sector could also be applied to the management of public services (Rizvi, 2016). These reforms were adopted in several countries «across the West» and promoted in developing countries especially in Latin America (Ball, Youdell, 2008). With specific attention on outputs and performance rather than on inputs and process, these reforms fostered private engagement in the field of education and encouraged the idea that education institutions could be easily «managed» as private companies.

The marketisation and privatization of the sector calls into question the very concept of higher education as a public good. Indeed, if most of the costs are borne by the individuals, higher education resembles more a private good than a public one. This has implications for the political economy of higher education especially with regard to the role of governments in the governance of the system and in ensuring equity, and on the purposes of higher education institutions themselves where

greater emphasis is being placed on private/economic benefits, thus challenging the social compact between higher education and society.

Finally, even assuming that some forms of state intervention are necessary if higher education is considered as a public good, it is important to note that this principle does not call into question the very foundations of neoliberal discourse grounded in an individualistic perspective. Taylor (1995) asserts that public goods are essentially conceived as «decomposable» goods in the ordinary understanding within welfarism. Public goods are considered individual goods, since they «cannot be procured for one person without being secured for a whole group. But the goods it produces are surely those of individuals» (p. 55). In this perspective, the production and consumption process of public goods is directly characterized by an individualistic and utilitarian approach which conceives the specific goods as decomposable and instrumentally valuable (Locatelli, 2019).

## *2.2. Re-establishing the public in higher education*

In order to re-establish the *public* in the field of higher education it is necessary to revisit those rules that have favored the expansion of market ideologies at the expense of equality and democracy in both the private and public sectors. The public sphere is certainly «under attack» as neo-liberal claims and managerial approaches have decreased the «space of criticism» (Apple, 2006). However, the governance of education should not be considered as another education market since

[t]he market place excludes politics and leaves decision-making to the outcome of the rivalry between different groups representing individual, short-term interests (Tedesco, 1995, 108).

Indeed, the difference between public policy, which should be a participatory and democratic process, and private markets in education is very important and ought to be safeguarded.

Higher education should undoubtedly be considered in the domain of the public. It has been argued that the public domain – or the public sphere (Habermas, 1989 [1962]) – denotes a particular quality of human interaction which is different from that of the private domain and of the market domain. The more normative perspective of the public sphere concerns the particular forms of action and relationship that are possible in «public» spaces (Biesta, 2012). Building on the philosophy of Hannah Arendt, Gert Biesta acknowledges that *the public* is necessarily a space which makes political activity possible. The political and democratic understanding of freedom (different from liberal freedom-as-sovereignty) is seen as the defining quality for all action and is fundamentally interconnected with, and contingent upon, the freedom of others. The construction of the public sphere is considered as an ongoing process of «becoming public» which is about

the achievement of a form of human togetherness in which [...] action is possible and freedom can appear. (Biesta, 2012, 693)

However, the way the public sphere should be reconstituted requires a «shift in culture», combining top-down and bottom-up approaches in order to significantly revisit the way public institutions themselves function. In this light, it is fundamental to overcome the narrow economic framings of education by developing new approaches in order to integrate the notion of education as a public good with its fundamental social and cultural components which are often disregarded within standardized approaches. This is necessary to enhance transformative and alternative systems of governance that promote education not only as an economic tool for individual progress but, above all, as a collective endeavour for the fulfilment of human-beings and of their communities. This represents the corollary of a larger project of state and societal transformation.

### **3. Higher Education as a Common Good**

#### *3.1. The particular nature of common goods*

The use of «*common*» as an adjective dates back to Roman law and designated a certain number of things as common (*res communes*), for example air, running water, the sea and its shores. These resources are considered as common by nature: that is, they cannot be owned and are for use by all. However, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that the issue of common goods, classified in standard economics also as common-pool resources or common property resources, became generally considered among scholars. The more recent interest in the issue around the *commons* is the result of several social and ecological threats which have been increasing since the late 1960s and which include destruction of resources and sites caused by population growth and industrial development.

It is in line with these concerns that in 1990 Elinor Ostrom formulated an innovative hypothesis on how to avoid *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968) as elaborated by Garrett Hardin, an American ecologist and philosopher. In her book *Governing the commons*, Ostrom demonstrated the baselessness of some of the implicit assumptions of the model developed by Hardin, based on her investigations on how communities succeeded or failed at managing the *commons*. Ostrom rejects the overly schematic opposition between the State and the market, supporting the existence of forms of governance and ownership that are different from public and private. In this perspective, unlike the notions of *public* and *private*, the *common* does not necessarily designate a system of ownership and belonging but rather a method of governance and of consumption (Nivarra, 2012).

Although the classification of the *commons* has expanded to include natural, ecological, social and cultural goods, and more generically material and immaterial goods, it has been argued that this concept holds a minimum semantic core that can be traced as common in all socio-political claims, and which can be identified in the following features: (1) the opposition of the concept of *commons* to the dynamics of neoliberalism; (2) the re-composition of networks of cooperation within communities; (3) the development of instruments of participatory democracy (Coccoli, 2013).

A particular note should be made regarding the different use of the terms *commons* and *common goods*. In the field of education, the use of the concept of *common goods* is preferable to that of *commons* as the latter seems hardly applicable to goods or services such as education which necessarily require public institutions to play an important role in their governance. The way this concept is defined and used in this analysis should not be confused with the concept as it is framed within the economic theory that presupposes rational-optimizing actors. When dealing with *common goods*, it should be noted that it is not about «goods» as defined in the economic theory of public-private goods but rather «goods» understood in the broadest possible sense, as a whole set of tools, activities, values, rights and processes (Locatelli, 2019).

### *3.2. The principle of Higher Education as a Common Good*

Referring to the concept of common goods, complementary frameworks for the development of new approaches likely to strengthen participatory and deliberative processes at the level of higher education can be explored in order to implement sustainable and equitable institutions according to different realities. Indeed, the concept of common goods is increasingly being adopted in philosophical-political spheres since its theoretical foundations are grounded in the alternative practices which oppose the spread of market policies that have been occurring both in the private and public domains. The notion of common goods goes beyond the more instrumental concept of public goods. Indeed, unlike *public goods*, which can be enjoyed as individual goods, *common goods* necessarily require forms of collectivity and shared governance both for their production and enjoyment (Deneulin, Townsend, 2007; Taylor, 1995). These goods are necessarily grounded in a strong conception of the cultural and social dimensions of a specific community and are identified for their contribution to the «general interest», to conditions of justice and well-being. Indeed, the concept of common goods at the micro level is related to the idea of *the* common good at the macro level, «understood in terms of social solidarity, social relations based on universal human rights and equality of respect» (Marginson, 2016b, 16).

The concept of higher education as a common good suggests that university is a shared societal resource and therefore calls into question

the utilitarian model which sees higher education as merely an individual socio-economic investment. It favors a humanistic approach which implies the enhancement of the cultural, social and relational dimensions of each educational process. This normative principle highlights the pursuit of learning as a shared endeavor and responsibility. It entails empowering communities and fostering deliberative processes in order to envisage new social structures while ensuring more inclusive and sustainable higher education systems. This has implications on both the organization of higher education systems, with regard to the enhancement of participatory processes and sustainable forms of cooperation according to different realities.

Higher education as a common good emphasizes the intrinsic and societal value of higher education institutions whose purpose is to extend human understanding through its three fundamental functions: teaching, research and community engagement. The relational dimension of *teaching* is highlighted in contrast to trends of separation and individualization of the education process. *Research* is not only intended to be immediately «useful». While some forms of research necessarily need to be purposeful, the longer perspective should not be neglected. At the same time, this concept presupposes the possibility to bring together different components of society. A particular emphasis is hence placed on the so-called *third mission* of universities, which normally have a residual role. In the perspective of higher education as a common good, the social responsibility of HE institutions is the core of their contribution to the envisioning of new social structures and to democratic development.

### *3.3. Enhancing knowledge democracy*

It is argued that «[u]niversities are embedded in a global economy of knowledge and are shaped by its inequalities» (Connell, 2019, 191). However, their privileged position allows them to contribute to the questioning of current imbalances of power in the governance of knowledge, and to counteract the current trends of knowledge commercialization (Biesta, 2007) while providing different conceptions of development and of (human and planetary) well-being (McCowan, 2019). Indeed, the creation of knowledge is necessarily a collective process, which is intrinsically shared and therefore should not be subject to market principles. By introducing cooperative elements within the system, the concept of higher education as a common good may offer a useful complementary framework to foster alternative visions of the world and strengthen more democratic institutions and practices.

## **4. Conclusion**

The current pandemic has exacerbated some of the constraints universities are facing such as the lack of resources, increasing



involvement of private actors, especially for-profit ones, the process of dismantling the university to make it look more like a market where services can be sold and purchased separately. Moreover, international rankings represent a pressure to prioritize elite research over local engagement (Chankseliani, McCowan, 2020). Having said this, the pandemic also offers the possibility to reframe the organization and the purposes of higher education as a common good. Indeed, while underlining some of these constraints, it has also revealed the great interconnectedness of our societies and the fact that global challenges can be promptly addressed only through cooperation. As argued by Connell (2019),

[a] good university system is cooperative rather than antagonistic and competitive. Whatever the level of resources, the work will be most effective – and efficient – if universities consistently give each other respect and support. Only a system organized for cooperation will allow specialization, division of labour, regional and institutional diversity, and sharing of facilities, without institutions having to fear they will lose status or money (p. 175).

The concept of higher education as a common good presupposes a different model of interaction among universities, which goes beyond a narrow competitive perspective and one which enables scientific and academic cooperation where the objective is not only to improve the single institution, but society as a whole. Greater equity within the higher education system is a precondition for creating more stable societies grounded on democratic culture and values. Public funding and regulation are necessary to promote equity, but this is not enough to counteract existing inequalities in higher education. Together with this, a new approach and model should be developed which allows universities to be truly engaged in civic and social life.

In response to the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19, the concept of higher education as a common good may represent «the central pillar around which a more equitable and sustainable post-pandemic model of education may be built, and a guiding principle by which we may reform our higher education practice»<sup>3</sup>. It may offer the possibility to mitigate the effects of the new educational stratification that has been developing over the last few decades in both developed and developing countries.

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## Building inclusion in the school

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**ABSTRACT:** *Migration flows bring to the fore the constitutive dilemma that lies at the heart of liberal democracies: «the one between the claims of the sovereign right to self-determination and adherence to the universal principles of human rights» (Benhabib, 2006, p. 38). The solution lies in recognizing that: a) «no human being is illegal»; b) the crossing of borders and the demand for access to a different political community is not a criminal act, but is the expression of human freedom and the desire for better living conditions in a shareable world (ibid, p. 40). But to what extent are we willing to renegotiate our point of view on rights, citizenship, democracy? Is it possible today to offer a solution to the question of intercultural conflicts with valid and adequate tools for the multiple treatment needs advanced in the name of cultural diversity? How can the school favor processes of effective inclusion? More than a century ago J. Dewey (1916) placed at the center of education the study of the environment through history and geography, the space for work and play, the role of secular and democratic social values, collaboration between subjects who live together in the school to operate and train. These didactic-educational indications are still valid today and, indeed, should be resumed. More, they have to be further enhanced to counter any discrimination, intolerance, weakening of democracy in a historical moment in which multiculturalism at school, in neighborhoods, in cities, seems to bring out inequalities in the equality of opportunities in learning and socialization (Malusà, 2020). The inclusive educational perspective that the contribution intends to illustrate has as its objective the enhancement of the transcultural dimension that characterizes our times (Hannerz, 1996; Welsch, 1999) by encouraging the encounter and contamination of knowledge, of the practices, of the experiences. Transcultural pedagogy is inclusive because it works for social justice, for the recognition of rights not based on an abstract cosmopolitanism, for the development of individual capacities, for the enhancement of individuals. The didactic-educational indications present in this contribution urge teachers and educators to build a located and rooted know-how to act, which helps to form future citizens of the world with local and global cultural and identity references (Hannerz, 1996), rooted in local geo-history, projected in an anthropological dimension that concerns the world. It suggests moving through the disciplines, taking ideas from various fields of study, being interested in the existences of the subjects, the places of existence, non-formal learning opportunities, cultures in its various narrative forms.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Democracy, Inclusion, Pedagogical Anthropology, Transculturality.*

## Introduction

This contribution offers an analysis of the nature and characteristics of widespread and participatory learning in secondary school which has as its reference the transcultural paradigm developed by W. Welsch (1999): it indicates a condition of permanent interconnection and fluidity of 'cultures', due to two main factors: an external one, consisting in the dense network of communications, relations and exchanges that connects all the countries of the world, but also the communities in a given territory; an internal one, deriving from an interior disposition of contemporary man, much more accentuated than in the past, to go beyond one's own geographical and psychological boundaries, to explore the territories of otherness (Hannerz, 1997; Berg, Ni Éigeartaigh, 2018).

The transcultural dimension assigns otherness a crucial role in the construction of identity, capable of promoting authentic relations between cultures. Individuals today are inherently transcultural. This is not only true for migrants, but increasingly for everyone. This multiplicity of voices that inhabits the self feeds that constant internal dialogue, or reflexivity, which is one of the characteristics of contemporary man (Giddens, 1991).

From these first introductory bars, the liberation of the transcultural perspective from intercultural education is evident. The latter insists it recognizes the 'differences' but tends to incorporate them in a 'universalist' perspective (Palaiologou, Dietz, 2012), resulting, in the end, assimilationist (Demetrio, 2003). The empirical researches, conducted at national and European level, attest that we are far from 'inclusion' and highlight phenomena of hardship and exclusion that increasingly affect immigrants and the children of second generation immigrants with the consequent growth of school mortality in the last twenty years (Moro, 2004; Gorski, 2009; Ventura, 2012; OCDE, 2016; Lerin, 2018; Tarozzi-Malusà, 2018; Malusà, 2020).

For a different conception of 'culture' and 'relations between cultures' it may be useful to critically re-read John Dewey's didactic-educational action, using the concept of 'democratic iterations' as the basis of the 'deliberative democracy' advocated by Seyla Benhabib. The two thinkers, in fact, are animated by a similar ethical-political vocation. Suffice it to recall: the defense by Benhabib to the position expressed by Dewey (Benhabib, 1996, 70-71) towards those who discredit «deliberative democracy» due to the «poor preparation and aptitude of American citizens» as argued by Walter Lippmann (Dewey, 1927, 117-118); the genesis of the concept of «deliberative democracy» (Dewey, 1916, 1927; Benhabib, 1999, 2004, 2006); their contribution in the historical evolution of this model (Benhanbib, 1996; Passerin d'Entrèves, 2006; Bernstein, 2010). Furthermore, Luisa Santelli Beccegato insisted

on the affinity between the two thinkers (Santelli Beccegato, 2005, p. 176). Finally, the transcultural dimension of Deweyan activism highlighted Alain Gossout (2012) also present in Benhabibian political philosophy (Benhabib, 2003).

The proposal to read Dewey and Benhabib integrally leads to enhancing the 'cultural experiences' of the school's protagonists through disciplines and practices: the informal learning opportunities that are given within the relational dynamics between teachers, students and families. The world of the school thus becomes the place of the fundamental «democratic iterations» for the «right belonging» to the «political community» (Behanbib, 2008).

### **1. The didactic-educational action. The example of history.**

We distinguish between didactic action and educational action: the first implies a focus on contents whose cultural value generally refers to the disciplines (considered in their training potential of a mainly instructive / cognitive nature); an explicit effort on the part of the educator in the choice and organization of the same (Chevallier, 1991; Calvani, 2007; Cohen-Aria, 2018, 221-228) and the identification of the most suitable presentation and communication methods. The educational action, on the other hand, tends to be referred to the broader sphere of personal training, considered according to an integrality of growth dimensions that go beyond those strictly cognitive or, in any case, connected to the acquisition of knowledge.

The distinction between didactic action and educational action is supported by Bertagna (2018) while for other authors it is instead suspect (Massa, 1987; Mantegazza, 2006; Peticari, 2007; 2012). Privileging the perspective of the latter, it must be observed that the acquisition of scientific-disciplinary knowledge by the pupil, a moment in which it is customary to focus on the didactic action, obeys criteria of a general formative order, of enhancement valences not only of a cognitive / instructive nature, but also ethical-value, social, emotional and affective, perceptive, in general for the promotion of the personal growth of students. Therefore, the disjunction between the didactic and educational dimensions, between 'education' and 'education', is very suspect from the point of view of educational-pedagogical epistemology because it tends (fictitiously) to separate the scientific-disciplinary content from the 'values'. Indeed, considering the didactic-educational action deeply integrated by the didactic and educational dimensions favors (and guarantees) scientific education, the ethical and political, psychological and cultural dimensions of the pupil (and the teacher). The prevalence of teaching risks losing sight of the integral education of the pupil. A trend denounced in the lashing notes of Mantegazza (2006, 11):

Presenting history as a useless weight on the shoulders of men or as an accumulation of deaths and rubble, politics as the administration of the existing or as a utopian project doomed to failure, theory as an idle pastime for educated people or as a complication of life so simple and clear : these are the faults of so much pedagogy, these are the undignified and somewhat vile tricks to escape the duty of fixing one's gaze into the horizon of the blackest black. Of course, history has also been a mass of deaths, politics has also been reduced to shrewd and dishonest administration, theory has also been an empty game of false dialectics: precisely for this reason, and without ignoring all this, to resume talking about history as balance always poised between emancipation and barbarism, of politics as an attempt to implement the human dream of a just society, of theory as a true and deeper form of intellectual and pedagogical practice, is an unavoidable duty for a pedagogy that still wants to think of itself as a science of emancipation and liberation of man, woman, animal and plant (Mantegazza, 2006, 11; author's translation).

In the direction of carrying out a further process of clarification, we limit ourselves to a few justifications regarding the option taken by referring once again to Dewey and in particular on the teaching of history and geography in *Democracy and education*. The most explicit part of the Deweyan vision of history is in the pages in which he speaks, so to speak, of the didactics of history. Dewey inserts these notations into the broader concept of an idea of 'school-laboratory': the link between history and geography to facilitate the understanding of the reasons for urban settlements; the active involvement of the pupil so that he gets used to exercising the habit of research and the autonomy of judgment against memorization and imitation; the suggestion of starting from local history to arrive at universal history, according to the didactic criterion of the passage from the known to the unknown, considered valid since ancient times; the advice to use biographies and anecdotes. But these are not the aspects for which the reflections on Dewey's history are worth mentioning, especially in the light of contemporary studies of didactics of history (starting from the *Annales*), led to emphasize the 'activist' aspects, losing sight of the priority aspect: why should one study history and what should one learn by studying this discipline? This is the point from which we must start: the search for the particular usefulness of a discipline which, in itself, is a knowledge aimed only at expanding knowledge and judgment skills.

There are two points of reference for understanding the role and meaning of this knowledge: on the one hand, the fact that it presents itself as a 'sociology in direct', that is, a tool not to review the past, but to understand the development of social changes and, therefore, the present and the lines of its development towards the future (Dewey, 1916, 43-106); on the other hand, the fact that every activity and every human experience cannot be understood, described and exploited outside the awareness of their intrinsic dynamism, which depends not



only on the category of becoming, but also and perhaps above all on the element of interaction, thanks to which everything is in constant transformation, based on the principle of the reciprocity of the elements.

As emerges in *Democracy and Education* and in *A Faith in Common*, education is the ability to control becoming, preparing the future, through the exercise of the imagination (Dewey, 1916, 56-88; Id., 1934, 21) and forming the mental habit of problem solving, which is first of all the ability to read the present in the light of the cultural heritage and, then, to resolve its imbalances thanks to a constructive tension towards the unprecedented. Secondly, education is structurally a relationship or, better still, an intertwining of relationships that ceaselessly and necessarily leads to the continuous reconstruction of the world and of oneself.

In fact, education cannot take place regardless of the relationships that constitute it, but, at the same time, the more education is established, the more these relationships are guaranteed and protected. It can therefore be inferred that the educated boy is the one who knows, consciously and responsibly, to give meaning to history because he builds it and, at the same time, by interpreting it, he invents the path day after day. The educated subject is not at the mercy of time, but, on the intellectual level and with the mediation of the imagination, is able to control it, organize it and prevent its development, planning it and directing it towards richer meaningful and more profitable ways to the good of oneself and of what surrounds it in a network of reciprocal connections.

It is a theme that reaffirms the close connection between science, society, culture, politics and education: where subjects and groups no longer receive, through school and other extracurricular educational opportunities, solicitations for growth, the exercise of thought and imagination, education and history are destined to be irreparably separated. And not because the becoming of existence is blocked, but because the understanding and interpretation of this course are hindered. On the one hand, education sinks into didactics, while history is no longer perceived as a sort of common home to the construction of which education contributes.

The link between education and history is not accidental and contingent, but necessary and intrinsic, to the point that, if we separate the two elements, we can never reach a true education. Subjects and groups capable of interpreting the contexts in which they live, of grasping their weaknesses and/or opportunities, of directing their experience in logically well-founded ways: this is the result to which the open and continuous process of education must lead. Not surprisingly, Dewey himself, underlining the intrinsic dynamism and problematic nature of the experience for which nothing can be given for sure forever, writes: «[Democracy] must be realized anew in every generation, every year and every day, in the relationships there from

person to person in all forms and social institutions» (Dewey, 1940. 454).

The equation between history and education, therefore, is not the result of a democratic society, but, rather, guarantees, on a practical and contingent level, outcomes of democratic quality. In fact, everyone, not one less (as the title of a film by Chinese director Zhang Yimou, 1999, which would find the approval of Dewey), are called to build individual and social experience and question their experience without prejudice or ideological hesitations or mortgages.

## **2. The democratic iterations**

Recalling the Deweyan reflection was useful for understanding the subsequent developments of education for democracy. In particular, following Dewey's discourse, education for democracy proceeds from the 'relationship', which is the very heart of the educational process, to the 'word', which gives voice to the interpretation and narration of my experience and that of others; from 'imagination', which allows you to prepare new paths and plan new goals, to 'processuality', which is allied with 'relationship', from 'continuity' to 'complexity'.

In line with the Deweyan perspective, Benhabib's 'dialogic-relational' conception reformulates the knowledge and organization of the world and the entities that inhabit it, including man, combining 'narrative of the self' and 'knowledge of others'. These allow us to weave together identity, difference, recognition and belonging, fueling the life of the polis, recognizing that man's identity is fragile and conditioned and therefore needs to be narrated. For Benhabib there is a close link between 'networks of interlocution' (Tylor, 1989, 33-45), narrativity (Benhabib, 1999, 335-361) and the narrativity-Self relationship (Benhabib, 1992; 2002); 2004; Fazio-Nicolini, 2006). Already in the very idea of culture (Rorty, 2002, p. 155) there is the discursive and dynamic aspect that opposes the vision of cultures «as clearly describable totalities» (Benhabib, 2002, p. 23). What matters at Benhabib is not the point of view of the social observer (narrator or chronicler) who aims to find a coherence of culture – which inevitably makes culture an 'object' of observation to be subjected to control –, but the point of view and the narrative descriptions of those who participate and are protagonists of that culture. In fact, Behnabib writes: «those who participate in culture experience their traditions and stories, their rituals and symbols, their tools and their material conditions of life by means of shared, albeit controversial, narrative description» (ibid.).

Therefore, culture is given by an intertwining of human actions and interactions that are linked with the narratives in an evaluative relationship, what Benhabib defines as «evaluative attitudes of the actors towards their own acts» (ibid., p. 25).

Culture, for Benhabib, is nothing more than this process; narration by means of evaluative processes, binary oppositions and complex dialogues between the parties creates culture understood as 'interactive universalism'. On the one hand, interactive universalism allows all moral beings to enter the conversation, without excluding anyone and without privileged recognition of rational abilities; on the other hand, it highlights the importance of cultural narratives thanks to which one becomes aware of the identity of the other. The awareness of the otherness of the other and, in particular, of certain aspects of his identity (which in the eyes of the subject make the other concrete) is achieved thanks and only to his narratives (Benhabib, 1999b, p. 344). Thus, the individual's action is dictated by his ability and need to weave relationships and build his own personal story starting from narratives (ibid.).

The narrative activity thus becomes a tool for collaboratively reflecting on specific situations on the experience of the person and the community. In these exchanges the narratives become an interactive production and the interlocutors themselves become co-authors (Benhabib, 1999, p. 345).

In the story, in fact, the discursive relationality allows each moral subject, that subject who, by the mere fact of being able to narrate himself and be able to account for himself and his own gestures, must be respected in his own irreducible humanity, to understand himself as another, and at the same time to evaluate the 'wisdom' of one's life project (Tumino, 2020, 416).

The exercise of democracy is therefore attested to in this ethical-political and pedagogical perspective that we have traced, following our thinkers, as the fundamental relational grammar of all individuals who, considered equal on the moral and political level, but different on the cultural level, can give rise to deliberative acts of discourse, where power, knowledge and decisions on well-being are structured as a public and collective exercise of arguments. The communicative-relational action can, therefore, restore, in the encounter with the stranger, individuality and subjectivity to all the actors of a conversation and with them give voice to desires and needs, these fundamental elements for reconfiguring belonging and redesigning the political practice in the name of 'participatory deliberation' (Benhabib, 2004). Here, again, it is possible to recover the productive and not only reproductive role of the imagination in individual and collective action, a role which, albeit starting from a reproductive synthesis, must always be based on experience, and yet, manages to go beyond the already given, the already said, the already thought, recovering the dynamics of a planning open to the future.

### 3. Conclusions

The process of 'transnationalization' of the present age has repercussions on history, on culture, bringing negotiation and co-construction in cultural experience (individual and collective) at the center of lives and societies and redefining, along this process, the identity, therefore, as the crossing of several texts. A polysemy that captures in the alterity of uses, customs and languages, a horizon of different senses, given to the world, which provocatively urge us to regain confidence with our way of speaking and inhabiting the world.

If we understand culture as a *constellation of social and narrative practices*, where the accent is to be placed on processuality, we could take a significant step forward and understand cultural identity as an intersection of different paths, a mapping of the self in continuous becoming and subject to contamination and hybridism. The migrant's experience indisputably highlights the permeability of cultures, the result of complex trans and infra-territorial dialogues. The presence of the 'foreigner' manifests a challenge to thought, which forces us to include in the identity, as its constitutive trait, the relationship with otherness.

Then it would be useful for the didactic-educational action to take place through these points: facilitate suitable conditions for 'foreigners' to find the most suitable hosting habitat; propose arguments that recall the prestige of 'other' cultures; enhance the language and literature of the countries of origin; present guiding themes found in the most diverse cultures such as travel, pilgrimage, nostalgia, roots, the stranger.

If understood and managed in this way, the presence in the classroom of pupils with ethnic or cultural differences could represent an opportunity for enrichment not only for all pupils, but also for the teacher: to improve training curricula, communication styles, structure and the very aims of the teaching courses. As a reward for the greater commitment, the teacher would increase their professional and human competence. Even uncertainty would become a resource, stimulating starting not from pre-established solutions, but from a question, from a need to seek innovative paths.

Ultimately, perhaps a transcultural re-reading of the knowledge taught in secondary school would be desirable, which passes through a 'revision' of school curricula and teaching programs (Brunelli, Cipollari, Pratisoli, 2007; Fiorucci, 2008; Luatti, 2009).

To give some examples:

1) in the teaching of history there would be to revisit the theme of the discovery / conquest of America (Todorov, Baudot, 1997) and of the encounters between peoples in the age of Columbus (Abulafia, 2008) with particular reference to;

a) the point of view of Arab historians on the Crusades (Gabrieli, 1957; Maalouf, 1989);

- b) the history of the 'Mediterranean' (Braudel, 1977; Riccardi, 1997) as a space for dialogue and encounter between civilizations;
- c) the close relationship between Europe and Asia (Goody, 2010)
- d) the review of the Italian colonial experience (Di Sapio, Medi, 2009; Tomasello, 2004);

2) for the teaching of geography, think of the role that knowledge of other cartographic representations of the world could play, such as, for example, the one proposed by Arno Peters (Peters, 1988; Grillotti Di Giacomo, 2008);

3) for music, think of the hybrid dimension of jazz, blues and world music;

4) for the economy, think of the strong correlations between migration and economic globalization.

In light of this, we can finally say that: the teacher / educator / cross-cultural operator is a border operator; transculture represents a modality, a versus, a direction, a thought, a process to be built and invented 'new cognitive niches'; the third millennium can become a possibility / occasion so that borders and customs do not become obstacles to cognitive processes.

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## **The International Dimension of Citizenship and Civic Education**

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## How to Debate National Identity in Real Life and on Social Media

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**ABSTRACT:** *Thanks to the widespread diffusion of the Internet, the last few decades have been characterized by the growing importance of social media. Furthermore, phenomena such as globalization, gender studies, economic crises, climate change and migration flows have raised doubts regarding traditional identities and have favored the formation of different representations of individuals and communities. A specific intersection of the aforementioned trends is the conceptualization of national identity by users of social media, a topic with implications in various thematic areas, for instance the functioning of the Internet (including algorithms), its most dangerous communicative and cognitive dysfunctions (such as fake news and post-truth), the role of debate and the right to citizenship. The paper aims not only to reflect theoretically on the matter, but also to elaborate a multidisciplinary didactic proposal based on an inductive approach and addressed to upper secondary school students, who are likely to show interest in those issues: in addition to using social media and living in multicultural societies, they may study subjects such as law and philosophy and may start developing a social conscience. The goals of the project are to teach participants how to write on social media and to enable them to acquire critical thinking by analyzing authentic texts and pictures and debating constructively both in real life and online. In other words, the students are expected both to manage the semiotic complexity of social media and to carry out debates on fundamental subjects regarding civic education by not simply expressing their own opinions, but also acknowledging their opponents as interlocutors worth respecting and listening to. The paper is threefold in structure. The first part provides the theoretical framework: after explaining the main features of social media, it takes into consideration the most common representations of Italians and foreigners promoted in the media over the years. The second part analyses two Facebook posts and their associated comments focusing on the label of «Italian». The case studies prove to be particularly suitable for designing two learning units, which are sketched in the third part. The didactic activities fulfil two main objectives: firstly, they raise awareness of the importance of an ethical and effectively communicative use of social media, especially when debating (Mastroianni, 2017; Gheno, Mastroianni, 2020; Mastroianni, 2020); secondly, they problematize the concepts of national identity and of citizenship by showing the models of integration and the citizenship laws adopted in some multicultural societies (Colombo, 2011).*

**KEYWORDS:** *Civic education, Citizenship, National identity, Social media, Debate.*

## Introduction

The current times can be defined as an era of complexity and heterogeneity because of the emergence of several interconnected factors having a radical influence on everyone's life. Thanks to the widespread diffusion of the Internet, the last few decades have been characterized by the growing importance of social media, which serve multiple purposes, often intertwined: they can be used as means for sharing information and knowledge (Ferrini, 2020), for example if an institution needs to reach a large audience in times of crisis (Delle Chiaie, 2020); they allow users to establish or maintain the social contact (Miller, 2008; Marrone, 2017); they are tools to exhibit one's features and signal their belonging to one or more online communities (Pistoiesi, 2020); they offer ways to promote events, products, services or ideas, for instance political parties and figures (Bentivegna, 2011). Furthermore, phenomena such as globalization, gender studies, economic crises, climate change and migration flows have raised doubts regarding traditional identities and have favored the formation of different representations of individuals and communities (Arcangeli, 2007).

A specific intersection of the aforementioned trends is the conceptualization of national identity by users of social media. After conducting theoretical reflection on the main features of social media and on the most common representations of Italians and foreigners promoted in the media over the years, this paper presents two case studies from Facebook and elaborates a multidisciplinary didactic proposal based on an inductive approach and addressed to upper secondary school students. The project is aimed at teaching them how to manage the semiotic complexity of social media and carry out debates on fundamental topics regarding civic education both in real life and online.

This paper is threefold in structure. The first part provides the theoretical framework; the second part analyzes the two Facebook posts and their associated comments focusing on the label of 'Italian'; the third part presents the didactic proposal inspired by the two case studies.

## 1. Theoretical framework

### *1.1. The main features of social media*

In order to foster a better understanding of social media, it is necessary to adopt different scientific perspectives: considered synergically, the following linguistic (Gheno, 2017; Fiorentino, 2018; Pistoiesi, 2020), semiotic (Marrone, 2017; Bartezzaghi, 2019) and sociological (Miller, 2008) studies demonstrate the predominance of what Roman Jakobson

defined as the emotive or expressive function and the phatic function. On the one hand, the egocentric and exhibitionistic nature of social media clearly emerges; on the other hand, these platforms are based on the social and relational dimension, which implies the need for creating and maintaining contact with one's friends. In other words, personal thoughts and emotions become meaningful only if shared and ideally liked, reposted, retweeted and commented. The identitarian expression, which according to Marrone (2017) is central to social media, both showcases one's personality and reinforces their belonging to one or more groups.

This raises three interconnected points. The first two points are observations. Social media's morphology and language are dialogical and promotional (Fiorentino, 2018), yet what often matters is only to signal one's presence, to state that 'you are there', which explains the aphoristic character of some online content (Bartezzaghi, 2019). The last point, briefly mentioned by Marrone (2017), corresponds to a fundamental question: if the referential function plays a minor role on social media, do the interactions between users yield constructive exchanges of information and opinions?

This question becomes even more relevant when analyzing some features not only of social media, but also of the Internet. Algorithms personalizing each user's experience on the web according to the content previously accessed may have dramatic effects: the so-called homophily, the human tendency to trust similar and close people who think alike, can be intensified until resulting in filter bubbles, echo chambers, cognitive bias and confirmation bias. These phenomena, together with fake news, post-truth and hate speech, could be defined as communicative and cognitive dysfunctions which, despite being strengthened online, tend not to be exclusive to the Internet. Their consequences are examined by Ferraris (2017), Gheno (2017, 2018), Gheno and Mastroianni (2018), Lorusso (2018), Prada (2018) and Ferrini and Paris (2019): in addition to being unable to identify what is accurate and reliable, Internet users prefer personal emotions and impressions to rational arguments and facts and become prisoners of their own certainties, which are obsessively repeated and excessively reinforced. To put it another way, if they conform to their tailored web surfing experience, users may just side with whoever is the most similar to them following the basic dichotomy agreement/disagreement, think that reality corresponds to what they already believe and even behave inappropriately without paying attention to the context. Under these circumstances it seems rather unlikely to carry out a productive debate.

### *1.2. The most common representations of Italians and foreigners*

It is difficult, if not impossible, to define Italian identity. In her historical study, Patriarca (2010) posits that the virtues and the vices selected to represent the Italian character vary according to the periods, the geopolitical contexts, the international relationships and the objectives

to achieve. In other words, not only are the representations of national character built relationally and affected by the other nations' narratives, but they are also aimed at reaching a consensus and justifying political and economic decisions or even war actions. Moreover, Patriarca warns against traditional representations, which tend to reify a community on the basis of a common past, usually whitewashed, and an alleged uniformity: Italy is now a multicultural country which needs to produce inclusive discourses and distance itself from its old national myths and stereotypes centered on victimization and virilism.

Similarly, Bianchi and Scego (2014) call for a new collective image not only of Italians, but also of foreigners. The starting point should be setting aside the self-absolving myth of the «*Italiani brava gente*» (Italians are decent people), openly criticized also by Patriarca (2010): it is crucial to retrieve the memory of the Italian colonial past, which has been disregarded, and tell history adopting the perspective of the oppressed ones. Bianchi and Scego set an example taking the reader on an emotional journey across «*Roma negata*» (neglected Rome), the capital's monuments, buildings, bridges and squares which keep a trace of the Italian past domination in Libya, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Raimo (2019) mentions the two previous texts, however he draws an open conclusion which demonstrates a different view. Despite sharing their observations about the lack of critical thinking and appreciating their reflection on an alternative Italian identity, he advocates for a shift in the interpretative paradigm: possible solutions would be the passage from the concept of identity to the one of analogy or the preference for ethics over ontology.

Whereas the conceptualizations of Italian identity vary depending on the authors, the representation of foreigners has been seemingly consistent in the last few years. Turchetta (2020, 92) argues that in contemporary Italian society the words 'straniero' (foreign/foreigner) and 'immigrato' (immigrant) have acquired negative semantic connotations opposed to those of «italiano» (Italian) and «emigrato» (emigrant); 'immigrato' in particular has become synonymous with interpretations based on acrimony, mistrust and fear.

The discourse on migration is one of the main research interests of Paolo Orrù, who has written various contributions adopting several methodologies, such as discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, corpus assisted discourse analysis and politolinguistics. In Orrù (2014, 2019, 2020), the linguist analyses the discursive strategies employed in the Italian press in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, drawing attention to the tendency towards an alarmist narrative which relates migrants mainly to desperation and criminality and emphasizes the thematic frames of invasion, danger and insecurity. Other features are the use of negatively connoted and often scarcely appropriated lexicon such as 'clandestino' (illegal immigrant) and the presence of dehumanizing metaphors and rhetorical strategies, for example the insistence on the word «*ondata*» (wave), as well as numbers, quantifiers and collective terms.

The aforementioned thematic and rhetorical trends are widespread. Evidence is found by Orrù (2020) and Orrù and Mamusa (2018) respectively on some Facebook pages providing alternative information and on the official social profiles of Matteo Salvini (Facebook and Twitter) and Beppe Grillo (Facebook). Despite using a different methodology, based on manual analysis, Ferrini and Paris (2019) report similar results in their study of 2.347 Facebook posts in which hate speech is addressed to foreigners: the posts derive both from the official profiles of political parties and figures (Forza Nuova, CasaPound Italia, Matteo Salvini and Giorgia Meloni) and from informal pages publishing racist and xenophobic content. A different perspective on migration is offered linguistically and visually by three television documentaries, which investigate some aspects often overlooked, such as the suffering endured by migrants during their journeys, the complexity of the European bureaucratic apparatus and the flaws in the Italian welcoming process (Orrù, 2016). Furthermore, they try to encourage empathy, yet they sometimes reveal a simplistic, banalized, stereotypical or ethnocentric point of view. In a nutshell, these publications outline that, since language shapes our thought and the reality which we experience, we need to use it appropriately and responsibly, especially when addressing complicated and delicate issues such as identity and the representation of 'the Other'.

## 2. Analysis of two case studies

In the light of what has been said so far, the two following Facebook posts reveal to be particularly relevant. They are analyzed comparatively for two reasons: *i*) the authors are two politicians who promote an inclusive national and local identity; *ii*) many comments are characterized by stark juxtaposition between the polar opposites of agreement and disagreement.

The first post (Figure 1)<sup>1</sup> was published by Davide Baruffi<sup>2</sup> on 29 May 2017, on the occasion of an institutional visit to Mirandola, a town in the province of Modena, by the President of Italy Sergio Mattarella<sup>3</sup>. Baruffi, who was then Deputy of the Italian Parliament as a representative of the Emilia-Romagna region<sup>4</sup>, posted the photograph of a young student of Senegalese origin wearing a dress reproducing the Italian tricolor and holding the Italian flag; he also added a short text containing a couple of hashtags which refer to the event. The second post (see Figure 2)<sup>5</sup> was published on 7 February 2020 by Matteo Macilotti<sup>6</sup>, who has been the

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/davide.baruffi.5/posts/10213209396531056>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/davide.baruffi.5>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.quirinale.it/elementi/6012>

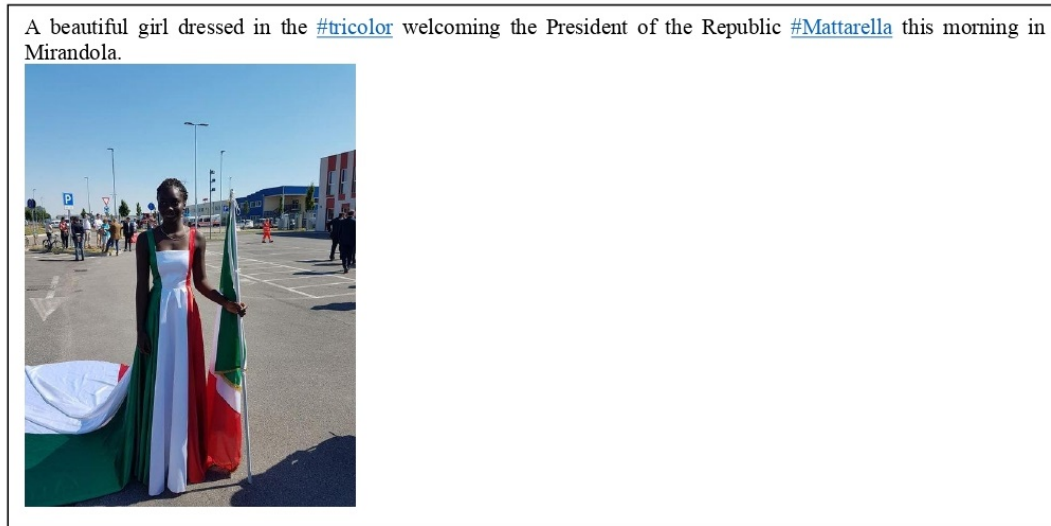
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/giunta/davide-baruffi>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/matteo.macilotti/posts/10157756132070309>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/matteo.macilotti>

mayor of Chiampo, a town in the province of Vicenza, since 2013<sup>7</sup>. Macilotti posted the photograph of a model of Senegalese origin which appeared on the cover of the magazine *Vogue Italia*<sup>8</sup>: the young woman was portrayed holding a sign reading «Italia» (Italy) as an example of Italian beauty. The picture was accompanied by a longer text providing information on the model and the photograph. The two post texts have been translated into English.

**FIG. 1.** *Davide Baruffi's Facebook post*



**FIG. 2.** *Matteo Macilotti's Facebook post*



The protagonists of the two posts are young women of African origin, who are celebrated as representatives of Italy and of the local

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.tuttitalia.it/veneto/50-chiampo/storico-elezioni-comunali/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.vogue.it/moda/article/vogue-italia-febbraio-copertina-vittoria-ceretti-maty-fall>



communities where they live. The posts have a strong symbolic value, embodied by the tricolor dress and the Italian flag in the first photograph and by the toponym («Italia») and the ethnonym («Italian») in the second photograph. Ironically, these inclusive messages spark off dynamics of separation in the comments.

As anticipated above, a relevant number of comments could be classified into two separated groups according to the polar opposites of agreement and disagreement, since many users clearly align themselves with a side or another: the members of the former group appreciate the inclusive messages, whereas the members of the latter openly criticize them suggesting that who symbolizes Italy should have different somatic traits in order to be typically Italian. Moreover, the two groups object to each other's positions: the ones in favor of an inclusive identity point out that the concept of 'typical' is arbitrary, whilst their opponents maintain that the representative of a community should share the physical characteristics of the majority of its population. Users are interested in reinforcing their own beliefs by stating their partisan belonging to a side, yet they do not get to the heart of the matter. On the one hand, the ones supporting the posts' messages do not clearly explain what should be valued instead of racial origins to define someone as 'Italian'; on the other hand, those disagreeing do not clarify the features of the people they identify as representatives of Italy or Italian beauty, since they generically refer only to white skin color.

These tribalistic dynamics emerge clearly when taking a closer look at the reactions. Various users reply to comments expressing contrary views, however they do not seem to consider their opponents' argumentations: the interaction only leads to a polarized debate, since people mainly tend to reiterate their previous ideas and ignore the points raised by their opponents. Despite these common characteristics, the two sides do not have the same weight, as the agreement front makes up the majority in numerical terms of members, comments and likes; however, some members of the disagreement group are backed up by a significant number of likes and comments of endorsement and interact frequently with different opponents.

A selection of comments is presented below in Tables 1 and 2. Users have been identified through anonymous alphanumeric codes (A stands for agreement, D stands for disagreement and each number refers to a user). The tables reproduce Facebook's layout, which distinguishes between direct comments to the post and replies to the comments (the latter are indented). All the comments have been translated into English with the intention of keeping the original meaning.

**TAB. 1. Some comments to Davide Baruffi's Facebook post**

- D1: I don't want to sound racist, which I am not, but honestly I don't get it, weren't there any Mirandolese girls?
- A1: Why, do you know her? Do you know that she is not from Mirandola?
- D1: A1 no, I don't know her, but she's for sure not representative of the typical Mirandolese beauty
- A1: Ahhhhhh, ok... You don't know if she was born or if she's lived in Mirandola, but "she's not representative of the typical Mirandolese beauty". That's fine
- A2: From where did you infer the idea according to which the President of Italy should be welcomed by a "typical beauty"? ..... maybe you're confusing it with the beauty contest "miss padania"
- A3: However, what is "typical"? If it had been a girl from the south, daughter of people who migrated to Mirandola in the 70s, would she have been so? Or the daughter of people from Rovigo or Mantova who moved here in the 50s or 60s, would she have been so? Or a girl from Cavezzo or Massa, arrived here even before? We are the results of thousands of movements of populations, there are traces of Barbarians, of Germans, of Asians, of Etruscans, of Greeks, of Spaniards in our genes. And the whole genus "homo" comes from the same strain, which is African. Isn't it enough to reflect on how the concept of "typical" is arbitrary and how only human family exists, composed of people who live in the same place?
- A2: Relating the concept of "typical" to the archetype of the local life; due to the fact that during the Precambrian era there was the open sea in Mirandola, and so with the reasoning of "typical" we should have welcomed the President with a giant sponge or a scale model of an Anomalokaris.
- D1: A2 of course maybe even a dinosaur!
- A2: I was joking,...however the dinosaur appeared later in our area and the giant sponges which preexisted by millions of years could raise a doubt about the dinosaur being typical of Mirandola
- A4: and if she had been of Langobardian origin, could we have considered her as typically Mirandolese??
- A5: The Mirandolina by Goldoni was an inn-keeper and behaved a bit like a whore\*. Typical? It would have been improper to introduce someone like her to Mattarella, don't you think?
- A6: Who told you she's not Mirandolese ?
- D1: That's not the point, but I see that unfortunately, as I feared, my comment has been misunderstood so I'm done here
- A6: actually I didn't mean to misunderstand but I personally think that anyone living and/or born in Mirandola is Mirandolese.
- D2: D1 you are misunderstood.. Believe me, many people share your thought!
- [...]
- D1: As it always happens in Italy, if you share your thoughts, which are innocent anyway, about people of color, you're immediately accused of every obscenity! Thank goodness You are all the democrats!
- A6: Actually your comment makes room for thousands of interpretations and not all of them are respectable
- D1: A6 actually my thought was that the girl in the picture is not representative of Mirandola, but I would have written the same if there had been a blonde boy with blue eyes in a Tyrolese dress
- A6: Exactly.
- A6: In your opinion, what is a Mirandolese like?
- D1: A6 For sure now I'll be insulted to death, but obviously white, but only because the majority of people here are like that, it has nothing to do with racism, but of course there's no room for this kind of argument.
- A6: Are we still stuck on that? White Mirandolese? No no, not even close.
- D3: A real racism against the Italians. . poor Italy what an end ..
- [...]
- D4: tangible evidence of what we'll become if we want to stay in our land
- [...]
- Davide Baruffi: D4 I fear that even with your best you wouldn't be able to become like that: because of the age (she's a child), because of the gender (she's a woman), because of the beauty (be brave), because of the color (she's black). Unfortunately the 4 reasons also apply to me 😊
- However don't worry: it's just a student from Mirandola. And dressed like that, she is a vision.
- D4: it wasn't meant to be a racist joke but seriously because of their behavior and number they start to have the chain down and I don't want to put it back up .It is necessary to set a clear and respected limit to all these disorganized and halfass migrations ( as Guccini sang )\*\*
- [...]
- D5: Shame on you! Italians are white

\* The original is "La Mirandolina di Goldoni faceva l'ostessa e un po' la mignotta".

\*\* The original is "non voleva essere una battuta razzista ma davvero per comportamento e numero cominciano ad avere la catena giù e io non la voglio rimettere su .bisogna porre un limite assoluto e rispettato su questi arrivi disorganizzati alla boia di un giuda ( come cantò Guccini )". The expression "alla boia di un giuda" comes from the song *Eskimo* by Francesco Guccini.

**TAB. 2. Some comments to Matteo Macilotti's Facebook post**

- D6: [She's] Definitely a beautiful woman. But saying that she's an Italian beauty is a different thing. Political correctness and the fear of being racist have led us to completely lose our common sense and become out of touch with reality. And while she's definitely a beautiful woman who is worthy of such an important cover, she is a beautiful Senegalese woman, just as there are beautiful Italian, Swedish, Chinese and Brazilian women. If a Chinese woman with Italian citizenship is a beautiful woman, I think that she would be proud of her origins and would like to represent them. Compliments to her again, but my dear Matteo this time you got it wrong

- Matteo Macilotti: Dear D6, she definitely has Senegalese origins, but she's also a beautiful Chiampese... Because Chiampo wouldn't be what it is now if Maty's dad, as well as many other dads, hadn't come here to our beautiful valley. They're part of our common history, this is the present and future Chiampo.

- D6: You're rather confused. And racism doesn't have anything to do with it. The world is beautiful because it's varied, with its nuances and wonderful differences. A Chiampese or a Mediterranean would never be a Senegalese and vice versa. Come to terms with it, and I repeat, politics doesn't have anything to do with it.

[...]

- D6: Why try to define someone as Chiampese who is not. In fact, I don't think this is out of a lack of respect. But I'll leave you to your radical chic conversation since you're capable of accusing me of being racist

- A7: Since no one decides where they are born, everyone is free to call "home" wherever they feel most comfortable living. From a legal point of view, a person becomes part of a country when they acquire citizenship, as in this case. So I would say she's a Chiampese beauty.

- D6: A7 I feel like I am Norwegian 😊

- A7: D6 Good for you

[...]

- A8: D6 and what would a typical Italian beauty be? A South Tyrolean blonde? A Venetian red? A Neapolitan black? I'm curious

-D6: A8 Actually, all that you mentioned are Italian beauties. How come you didn't mention Burkinese chocolate?

[...]

-D6: Thank God ius soli does not exist. Who is born in Italy is not Italian at all. Thank God (that's the law)

[...]

- D7: Beautiful will be beautiful, Italian will be Italian, but to me she looks more Senegalese 😊 Who knows whether she feels more Senegalese or Italian but to me Italian women look slightly different... The world is beautiful for its differences and it's also nice to acknowledge them [those differences] rather than consider everyone as one because being an individual is beautiful...

- A9: D7 This is all "Italian" reasoning. Black people are all Africans based on ancestral origins, but no one would ever come up with the idea of asking a Black American, French or English person whether they feel more African or more connected to the country they were born in, or maybe even where their grandparents and parents were born. What do Italian women look like? If you go to the South they mostly look Arab and if you go to the North they look Nordic and in Central Italy it's a mixture, which is proof that Italy doesn't have any pure people since it's a mixture of people. Are you going to ask the children of mixed marriages if they feel more Italian or more connected to the country of origin of their foreign parent?! They'll have two cultures understandably so, but all the children of foreigners or mixed marriages who are born and brought up in Italy will feel Italian since they have mostly been around this culture, just as the children of Italians born abroad feel more connected to that place than Italy. So these are just senseless questions.

- D7: A9 when I meet a person it is normal for me to ask them where they're from and talk to them about their culture; and I find it fascinating and beautiful to find people who are connected to their story and family so much; and when I ask these things to friends they're the first ones to tell me "I am and I feel..." And I find it beautiful... Of course if I go to either America or Asia or Africa and someone asks me I reply Italian... Also because I wouldn't feel differently... many friends of mine say that they're Italian even after spending decades abroad... I don't think it's nice to tell people who they are... If anyone feels a certain way it should be welcomed. I doubt there would be an Italian saying "I'm Chinese and I look Chinese" or anyway I've never heard of it... What do you think?

[...]

- A9: D7 the singer Madonna has Italian origins, but she's American and she feels American and she's not the only person with Italian origins who recognizes their origins, but she feels she belongs 100% to the place where she was born. When you meet a person and you introduce yourself and ask him/her about his/her origins and he/she replies that he/she's Italian he/she tells you so because he/she feels that way, asking about his/her origins makes you rude since you're basically saying that you don't recognize that person as a compatriot. An English, American or French person wouldn't ask senseless questions about origins when meeting someone with different somatic traits because it automatically takes away the sense of compatriotism; when I was in the Netherlands, people used to speak to me in Dutch because they took it for granted that I was Dutch even though I'm of mixed race, so these questions and this reasoning are just typical of Italy. Just stop asking about people's origins, because they do not even know sometimes and you can already understand what a person feels they are by their answer.

[...]

- A9: D7 if I tell you that I'm Italian Egyptian and you reply "ah Egyptian", how is Egypt?! I will say that I don't know a damn thing since I was born and grew up in Florence and it is possible that you know more about Egypt than I do, so once I've answered like that what do you get out of it?! You asked something to a person who doesn't know anything and you've intruded their space; So when someone tells you "I'm Italian" you'd better ask from what town/city, because if they do know something about one of their parents' country of origin, it will be them talking to you.

As noted earlier, the exchange of views does not yield a fruitful debate because of the lack of clear argumentations and explanations and a general indifference to engaging with the opponents' ideas, which prevents the interlocutors from finding a meeting point. Several interventions contain unnecessary examples (A4, A5) or peremptory statements (D5, D6 when saying «Thank God ius soli...»), which do not contribute to defining or clarifying the substance of the discussion. Not even the effort of deepening the knowledge of the matter is guarantee of pertinence and efficacy: firstly, although some people problematize the issue, they do not help to comprehend what defines a person as Mirandolese, Chiampese or Italian (A3, A7, A8); secondly, some ironic or

technical remarks are not appreciated or derail the conversation (the second and the third intervention by A2); in addition, other exchanges of opinion try to articulate ideas with clear reasoning and practical examples, yet they end up generalizing or drawing too much attention to the personal dimension (D7, A9); finally, there are interventions presenting unverified information or alleged theories devoid of scientific foundation (D4). The members of the two groups accuse each other of misunderstanding the point of the question or disapproving of contrary ideas: by doing so, they express indignation and stress their cognitive, emotional or moral superiority (particularly D1 and A6, but also D6 when saying «I'll leave you to...»). Generally speaking, the atmosphere does not seem particularly tense and the tone of the comments is not aggressive or frightening, yet there are a few offensive expressions (A5 says «like a whore», D4 uses the expression «halfass», A9 accuses D7 of being «rude» and employs the expression «a damn thing») and some users openly condemn their opponents keeping them at a distance (D3, D5).

What stands out from analyzing the data is not only the inappropriate modality of the discussion, but also the weak quality of its content: it is hypothesized that these issues may also derive from the communicative and cognitive dysfunctions previously outlined (see section 1.1.). Furthermore, national identity and citizenship are very complicated topics which are central to healthy democracies and deserve careful reflection and debate because of their implications in each person's perception of themselves and in each community's decisions regarding the acknowledgement of important rights. These observations serve as the starting point for designing the two learning units sketched in section 3.

### **3. The didactic proposal**

#### *3.1. General information on the didactic proposal*

The two case studies prove to be particularly suitable for designing a multidisciplinary didactic proposal addressed to upper secondary school students and made up of two learning units, dedicated respectively to teaching how to debate appropriately on social media and problematizing national identity and citizenship. It is believed that an inductive approach can be particularly effective, since it implies involvement, participation and cooperation through the direct and practical contact with the linguistic and visual material: the teacher should be a facilitator who guides the students across the two learning units, drawing the participants' attention to some specific aspects yet at the same time allowing them to have an active role in learning. Instead of simply being taught, the students feel motivated to discover empirically and cooperatively by formulating hypotheses, doing

autonomous research and interacting. The didactic proposal is implemented according to the following pattern:

- elicitation activities based on the guided analysis of linguistic and visual material;
- frontal instruction by the teacher, aimed at providing the theoretical and methodological framework;
- assignment of tasks to workgroups, which perform them collaboratively and present their results through flipped teaching.

In other words, the teacher arouses the students' curiosity with the guided analysis and then addresses several topics more specifically with theoretical explanations and targeted activities. This way, after encountering concrete and authentic examples in their context, the students gain a better understanding of the subjects involved and acquire critical thinking by studying and debating. Furthermore, the specific topics, namely social media and civic education issues, are probably relevant and captivating for upper secondary school students: in addition to using social media and living in multicultural societies, they may study subjects such as law and philosophy and may start developing a social conscience.

The two learning units are presented below.

### *3.2. The first learning unit: how to carry out a productive debate on social media*

What is posted on social media can easily become viral, so it is necessary to understand how to write on those platforms, especially when debating delicate issues shaping the public opinion. Mastroianni (2017), Gheno and Mastroianni (2020) and Mastroianni (2020) intend to fulfil this goal by raising awareness of the importance of an ethical and effectively communicative use of social media. Drawing on both theoretical knowledge and actual experience, the two authors provide examples and tools enabling the readers to gradually improve their communicative skills with the 'learn by practice' method. In addition to verifying the reliability of the sources and doublechecking the truthfulness, the correctness and the appropriateness of what is posted, users of social media should pay attention to Paul Watzlawick's second axiom, according to which «every communication has a content and relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore a metacommunication». This entails a decisive paradigm shift. Who engages in a debate does so not to 'win', but with the objective of deepening the knowledge of the topic discussed and improving the relationship with their opponents: communicating means focusing on the other and trying to understand their point of view. As Mastroianni (2020) explains, on the one hand it is fundamental to consider all the argumentations which enable to comprehend the matter better or contribute to the debate; on the other hand, what is only aimed at placing the interlocutor on a superior position, disturbing the exchange, derailing the debate, judging or even offending should be ignored. To



put it another way, the only way to render an exchange of ideas fruitful is to concentrate on the substance of the discussion and acknowledge the opponents as interlocutors worth respecting and listening to.

The learning unit starts with the guided analysis of the two Facebook posts (see section 2.). Then the teacher employs the texts by Gheno and Mastroianni to illustrate the main features of social media (see section 1.1.) and to facilitate a better use of these platforms. Finally, the students are divided into workgroups: after acquiring knowledge on a divisive topic, they are expected to discuss it, with the aim of carrying out a productive debate, firstly orally in real life and secondly in writing on social media.

### *3.3. The second learning unit: problematizing national identity and citizenship*

Contemporary societies are multicultural (Colombo, 2011) and characterized by super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007). Therefore, it is inevitable to carry out profound reflection on issues such as national identity, citizenship and intercultural contact, which are central to civic education. The ideal objective would be to facilitate not only tolerance, but also interaction, so that, instead of living separately inside the same territory, the different groups would feel to be part of an only community and contribute cooperatively to its wellbeing. Nevertheless, as Colombo (2011) posits, it is problematic to find a compromise between apparently incompatible needs: for example, national unity and equality before the law should coexist with the respect for the differences, as well as views on private life matters should not be in contrast to universal rights. Accordingly, multicultural societies have elaborated several models of integration and citizenship laws. As regards the former, some famous examples are the French, the British and the German models, based respectively on assimilation, pluralism and labor integration, while the basis of the latter is usually either *ius sanguinis* or *ius soli*. The models of integration and the citizenship laws can be combined and implemented differently, as exemplified by the widely used metaphors of the melting pot, the salad bowl and the glorious mosaic (Colombo, 2011, 51-60; see also Arcangeli, 2007).

The learning unit starts with a guided discussion on topics such as the difficulties of migrating and integrating into a new community, the perception of one's identity in multicultural societies and the relationship with 'the Other': the teacher helps the students to compare and contrast their ideas with the most common representations of Italians and foreigners (see section 1.2.) and the data provided by the two Facebook posts (see section 2.). Then the teacher reads some extracts from Colombo (2011) to provide general explanations regarding multicultural societies. Finally, the participants are divided into workgroups: their task is to elaborate an original proposal to ensure a pacific coexistence of the different ethnic groups present in Italy taking

into consideration their social, cultural and linguistic characteristics and necessities.

### **Conclusion**

The conclusion is devoted to a brief reflection on the learning impact of the didactic proposal presented above. The multidisciplinary project tackles topical subjects and provides essential knowledge and skills concerning language education and civic education. Participants are expected to manage the semiotic complexity of social media, carry out productive debates and acquire critical thinking on subjects which, despite constituting the basis of our societies, tend to be banalized. Firstly, social media have a central role in shaping people's opinions and therefore deserve careful attention. Secondly, reconsidering common stereotypes and oversimplistic positions is the starting point to improve the quality of democracies. Furthermore, the identitarian expression is extremely relevant, since everyone who has integrated into a society should be entitled to feel part of that community. Finally, the official recognition represented by the concession of citizenship guarantees some rights which can change an individual's life.

The methods employed and the issues addressed allow teachers to propose a wide range of activities, including Power Point presentations, oral discussions, written essays and narrative and autobiographical techniques. More detailed specifications are purposely left out, because it is believed that the didactic proposal could be easily implemented, expanded and modulated according to different needs.

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## The Rights of the Child as an International Dimension of Civic Education

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**ABSTRACT:** *We present some possibilities to work in the school of the first cycle on children's rights, in line with the aims and principles of the international dimension of civic education in Italy. Our didactical proposal aims to promote the idea that children are subject of rights, and that the assumption of this perspective leads to the resolution of many problems of adults too (Tonucci, 2021), so much that the issue of children's rights assumes a priority value (Costerbosa, 2019). The article contains some examples of activities with students (from 8 to 13 years old) and with immigrant women of a CPIA: we started from a reduction of the articles of the UN Convention and from the use of Tonucci's cartoons, which activate thoughts and emotions in original and provocative ways. Moreover, we argue that the proposal to work on children's rights is consistent with the aims of Law 92/2019, which introduced in Italy Civic Education and assigns it the task of promoting «all actions [...] aimed at feeding and strengthening respect for people» (art. 3, c. 2), including children. Finally, addressing the complexity of the issue of children's rights means addressing its international dimension, because this complexity is linked above all to the multiplicity of interpretations that different cultures give to the basic notions of children, law, protection, participation, etc.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Rights, Children, Civic Education, UN Convention.*

### Introduction

We start from the awareness that very few people, even among educators and teachers, know the Convention on the Rights of Childhood and Adolescence, from the conviction that the introduction of Civic Education must also take into consideration aspects of scientific literacy and, therefore, should also be understood as part of educational programs relating to science, with the hope that children and young people will be increasingly directly involved in decisions relating to what concerns them in their education and in associated life.

So, we present some possibilities to work in the school of the first cycle on children's rights, in line with the aims and principles of the international dimension of civic education in Italy.

## **1. Children's rights, a brief history**

### *1.1. From an 'object' of protection, to a 'subject' of rights*

The history of children's rights is long, and it is hard to trace its origins. If we wanted to narrow the field to the history of the Western world after the industrial revolution, we could find the progressive abolition of child labour and the introduction of compulsory schooling.

Then, the attention to the child spread more and more in the legal systems of Western countries. For example, in 1896 Germany approved a law that punished parents who mistreat their children, or in 1899 USA established juvenile courts. Thus, we arrive at the twentieth century, when the League of Nations in 1924 approved the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which defined the fundamental rights of the child, but it declined in 1946 with the dissolution of the League of Nations (UNICEF, 2014).

The same year, Korczak had written a declaration of the rights of the child, called *Magna Charta*, and among the rights there were the right «to have secrets», «to respect their sadness», «a lie, a mistake, an occasional theft» (Korczak, 1919/2017).

After the Second World War, it was necessary to wait more than 10 years to arrive at a new document: the Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN in 1959, which contains, for example, the right to a name and to education. In 1966, two International Covenants made certain provisions binding, such as the right to protect the child by the family or the state in the event of a parents' divorce. Finally, in 1989 UN approved the Convention on the Rights of the Child, so we moved from an idea of a child as an 'object' of protection to an idea of a child as a 'subject' of law (UNICEF, 2014).

### *1.2. Some issues about the UN Convention*

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, approved by the UN General Assembly in 1989, today is the «most ratified international document in the world», but this wide legal acceptance does not correspond to such wide knowledge or sufficient implementation (Bosisio, 2018). That is also because, since the Convention was adopted, «it has become increasingly clear that there are still wide cultural differences, from which we must not and cannot ignore if children's rights are to be made effective and the 'normative imperialism' is to be avoided» (Ivi, 9). There still are many issues raised over the years about the Convention: the appropriateness for children of the language of rights, their individual and social responsibility (Ronfani, 2013), the different interpretation of the concepts of protection and participation of children (Macinai, 2017).

From a pedagogical point of view, we suggest dealing this complexity directly with children, touching some fundamental questions, as «what is a right? What are/should be your rights?». This is a valid didactical way to promote the idea that children are subject of rights, and that the

assumption of this perspective leads to the resolution of many problems of adults too (Tonucci, 2021), so much that the issue of children's rights assumes a priority value (Costerbosa, 2019).

## 2. The 'stands of rights'

### 2.1. *Emma Castelnuovo and her Mathematical Expositions*

The educational activities we are talking about were tested during the *Didactics of Sciences* course held by one of the authors of this work, aimed at students at Sapienza University, in the degree course in Pedagogy and Educational Sciences. In this course we want to support an idea of science that can reach and interest everyone, which we must study how to bring to everyone mathematics and sciences in a friendly way. So, it is an idea of science that is not pedantic and fanatically positivist, but which questions itself and does not have complete answers for all the questions, which reads and rereads itself, which is connected to the world around us and to our experience with its constant new and complex challenges to our curiosities but also to our desires, our emotions, and our know-how.

With this in mind, the professor involves the students of the courses in different paths to question themselves on the didactic level, on how knowledge is built with the use of direct observation and laboratory experiences, with the construction of objects that become models and suggest metaphors, with the activation of imagination and the ability to ask questions. Another pole of attention is the child and the young person to whom our didactic action is addressed.

The path of the course flows into the construction of laboratories, which we call science stands: here, for a day, students experiment a didactic practice that questions and stimulates visitors – students, teachers or the general public –to discover, to whom they propose questions, (objects to be manipulated, calculations and observations in the open air, in the tradition of Emma Castelnuovo's *Mathematical Expositions* E.C. Esposizide di matematica, C.D.E. e N.L. Emma Castelnuovo). Emma Castelnuovo was a revolutionary teacher of mathematics at the Tasso middle school in Rome, from 1945 to 1979, and she conceived the *Mathematics Expositions* like moments, at the end of the year, when students become 'teachers' for a day, with all the responsibility of this condition: they can in fact receive difficult questions or find themselves managing unscheduled answers. Moreover, it is a particular form of final examination, which contributes to the 'evaluation' and 'self-evaluation of effectiveness' of the students. These, in fact, put themselves to the test with an audience that questions them to understand, that does not always know their arguments and therefore is very different from the professor who demands 'repetition' of what is proposed in class!

## 2.2. *'Give us the Moon!'*

In 2019, 50 years had passed since the first human landing on the Moon and for this reason, during the course of 'Didactics of Sciences', the human missions to the Moon and on it were taken as a guiding thread, starting from the fantastic literary journeys of Jules Verne up to the Apollo Missions of the years 1960-70.

In 2019, we were also 70 years after the Declaration of Human Rights and 60 from the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, reaffirmed by the International Convention on the Rights of the Child which, for master's students of Pedagogy and Education and Training Sciences or of Mathematics but interested in teaching, it is quite important to know.

In 2018, among the 'Science Stands', a laboratory was organized and entitled 'Give us the Moon', offering a series of activities and reflections on children's rights, starting with a text by Gianni Rodari.

Among the pages of the newspapers of the time, relating to the exploration of the Moon, at the end of the 1960s, the director of the *Corriere dei Piccoli*, the first weekly entirely dedicated to an audience of children, had invited a great journalist and writer, Gianni Rodari, to write a column. Gianni Rodari, whose centenary of his birth was recently mentioned, worked on the ability of children and young people to express themselves, knowing how to welcome, understand and value their point of view. A few decades ago, therefore, the famous writer had already grasped that adults were not very careful in taking care of the younger ones, who were thus quite defenseless in Western and industrialized societies. Then Gianni Rodari, in his column, in 1969, launched a proposal writing: 'GIVE US THE MOON!, not to us, but to the children.'

We will come up with our decisive, ultimate, revo... .. – wait for me to take a breath – revolutionary proposal: give us the Moon! That is, not to us: to the children. Since there is little space on Earth, and that little disappears in concrete and parking lots, reserve the Moon for children under 14: a Moon-Robinson, a Moon-amusement park, a Moon to play!

Rodari's provocation makes it clear how little space was left for children in cities and in the attention of those who manage them, even 50 years ago! A space that is reduced like the awareness that children have rights is reduced.

In a final course report, the students who organized this Stand wrote that they wondered why this great Italian writer for children, he used such provocative language and they asked themselves how little we are protecting the rights of children and young people: already in the early 2000s, this theme had taken on such importance, as to push the UN to

conduct a relevant international study, through UNICEF. The data collected, published in 2006, are not at all comfortable<sup>1</sup>.

For this reason, during the 'Didactics of Sciences' course, they asked themselves whether children and young people themselves, adults, parents, educators and decision-makers, are aware of the rights of children and their protection, enshrined in a Declaration of the United Nations, and in particular, they wondered if they know it.

### *2.3. Rights according to children (and not only)*

The students of the 'Didactics of Sciences' course, after having met Francesco Tonucci in a lesson of the Course and having read and discussed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they wondered if the children themselves, but also the adults, parents, educators and decision makers were aware of the rights of children and their consideration. But above all, they asked themselves this question: if children had the opportunity to have their say, what rights would they want to express?

So, during the Stand Exhibition, they asked to visitors of different ages and conditions, children, teenagers, adolescents, and adults of the CPIA<sup>2</sup> who visited the stand, to write or draw the rights they would have liked to be guaranteed to everyone in their own ideal world.

Especially with older children, it could be a gamble to ask 'what rights would you like to be recognized?'. A pleasant but serious situation was therefore created in which you understand well what the request is, in which you do not give any answer, but everyone expresses something truly thought and felt. The results obtained show how the right climate was created.

Visitors were asked to write or draw the rights they would like to be guaranteed for everyone in an ideal world. The proposal was welcomed by all with enthusiasm and the students have thus collected pages full of needs and desires.

The most frequently mentioned rights were the right to play, to rest, to go to school, to eat whatever they want, to study, to have a family, to be loved, the right to speak, to express themselves and to have free time.

Some rights have left us speechless for the sensitivity and courage that hide behind the pen or the drawing, such as the right 'to be sad'; to 'not have too bad teachers/professors'; to 'not be judged for one's culture or religion'; to 'have access to culture regardless of financial

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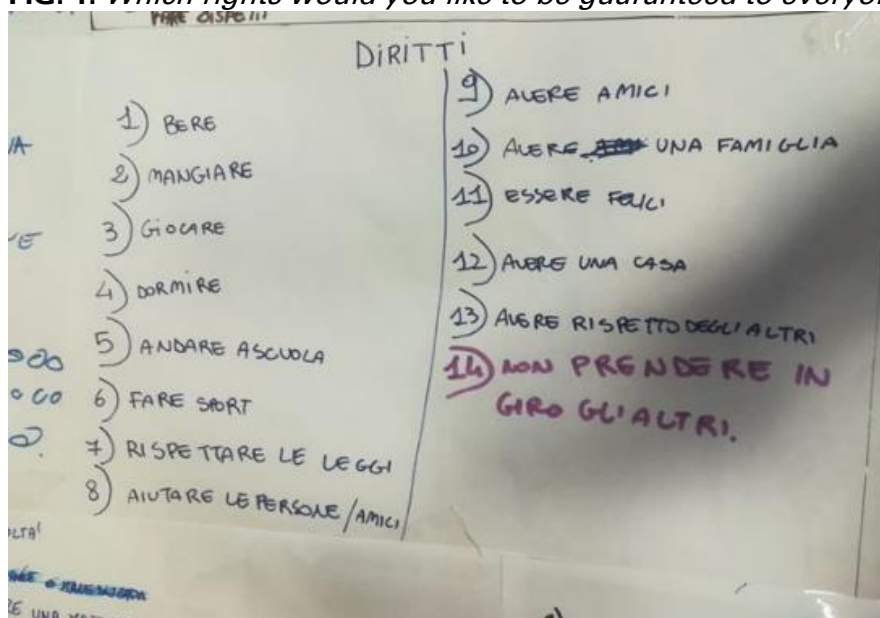
<sup>1</sup> Data collected between 2002 and 2004, published on the UNICEF website (United Nations Fund for Children). For any further information see <https://www.unicef.it/doc/323/studio-onu-sulla-violenza-contro-i-bambini-statistiche.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> CPIA are Provincial Adult Education Centers (*Centri Provinciali di Istruzione degli Adulti*). These are structures that offer personal and professional training services to Italian and foreign citizens of the territory.

resources'; to 'grow freely'; to 'freely decide who to be'; 'the right to gender equality'; 'to life and happiness'.

Many children and young people have given answers and explanations that have moved us for their depth: they have spoken to us about freedom, judgments and prejudices, happiness, future, autonomy, and self-determination. Wanting to quote some of the words they wrote, it is worth mentioning, among others, the right to 'have people who love you', to 'express their ideas', to 'make decisions for themselves' and 'to know what's happening in the world'.

**FIG. 1.** Which rights would you like to be guaranteed to everyone?



In other years, the Stand on Rights has been proposed, in which those who lead the laboratory place themselves in a position of listening and suspending judgment to facilitate the active participation of all. *The general objectives were explicit:*

- To promote awareness of the rights of children and adolescents.
- To contribute to the knowledge of the 'Convention on the Rights of the Child and Adolescent' of 1989.
- To stimulate the ability to share and reflect in a group.
- To promote actions that help to deal with conflict situations with adults and children.

Many coloured materials were used, such as posters, cards, pens, woolen threads, pins, scotch tape, coloured post-its, scissors, crayons, glue, and some cartoons by Francesco Tonucci, used in an original and provocative way capable of activating thoughts and emotions through a language that is not only verbal.

Francesco Tonucci is a researcher in sciences and theories of cognition of the CNR, currently retired, and is the creator of the project *The city of girls and boys*, active in Italy, Spain and in various countries of the Latin America. He is known by the name of Frato as an ironic

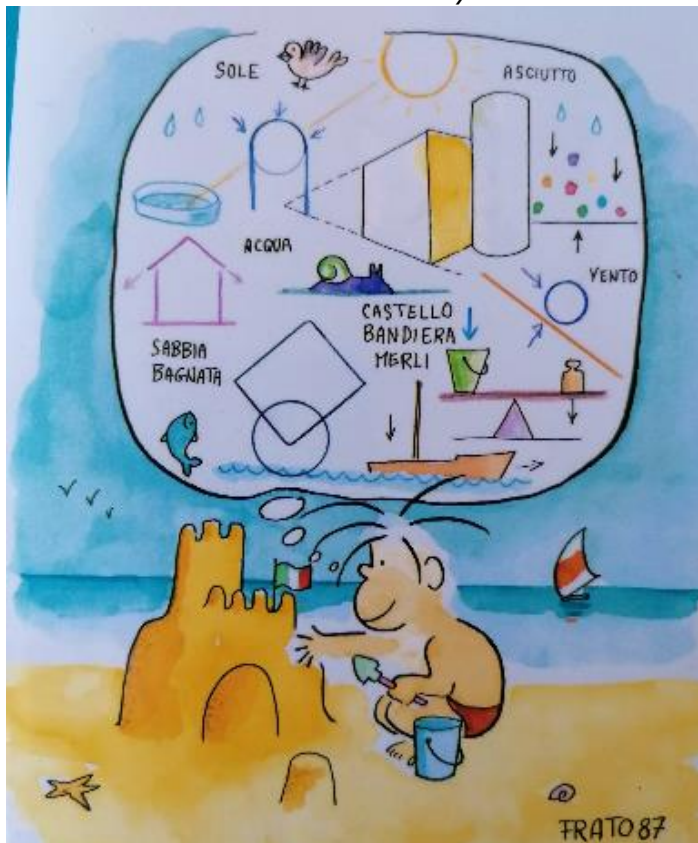


cartoonist, who takes the defense of younger children with respect to the rhetoric of the rules, customs, school habits, families, cities and who unmasks suffering, injustices, and distraught desires of repressed children, as Loris Malaguzzi writes about him in the presentation of the book 'FRATO 50 years with the eyes of the child'. Friend of Mario Lodi and active like him in the MCE (*Movimento di Cooperazione Educativa*), he has collaborated with magazines such as *Riforma della scuola*. In his recent text *Urban guerrilla manual - for girls and boys who want to defend their rights*, Tonucci introduces Janus Korczak, the Polish Jewish doctor who organized a sort of republic in the Warsaw orphanage with an assembly, a newspaper, and a court, and who died with the children, in 1942, in the Treblinka extermination camp.

In an emblematic Tonucci's cartoon, we can see a child making a sandcastle, and in the meantime he thinks of the difference between dry and wet sand, of the shapes it can give to its construction (a cylinder with a cube on top of ...), and to the slope of the hill on which to put the castle and to the direction of the wind.

When a child plays in the meantime he learns, puts into practice strategies, doing sends him back to many old and new acquaintances.

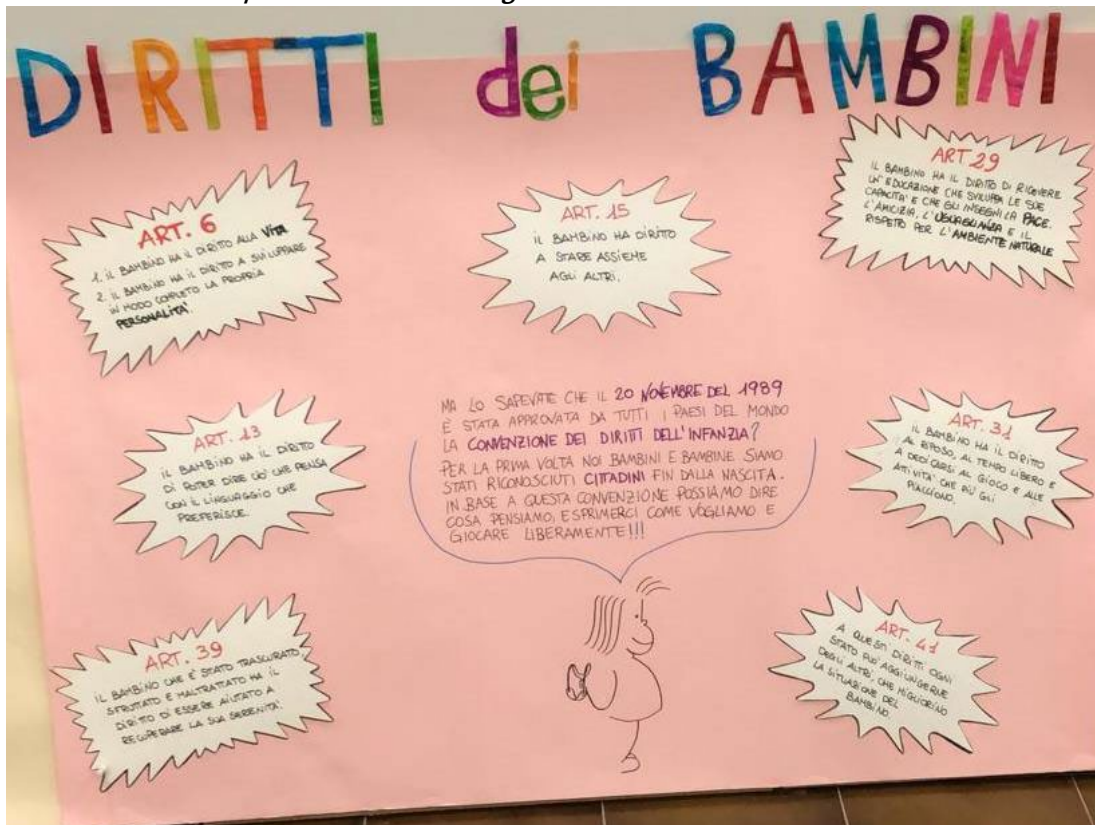
**FIG. 2.** An emblematic cartoon by Frato



Moreover, in the 'Stands of rights', the students transcribed some Articles of the Convention in the simplified version on coloured cards.

- Art. 6. The child has the right to life. The child has the right to fully develop his or her personality.
- Art. 13. The child has the right to be able to say what he thinks in the language he prefers.
- Art. 15. The child has the right to be with others.
- Art. 29. The child has the right to receive an education that develops his abilities and that teaches him peace, friendship, equality, and respect for the natural environment.
- Art. 31. The child has the right to rest, to have free time and to devote himself to the games and activities he likes best.
- Art. 39. The child who has been neglected, exploited, and abused has the right to be helped to recover his serenity.
- Art. 41. To these rights each state can add others, which improve the situation of the child.

FIG. 3. Some simplified children's rights from the Convention



#### 2.4. A three steps laboratory

The laboratory we are proposing is structured in three phases of work.

Phase 1, questions/guiding stimuli.

In the first phase, we ask some questions to the visitors of the stand, depending on the school degree. For primary school children, we propose to ask: have you ever thought 'it's not fair'? Who did you turn to?

For first grade secondary school students, we propose to ask: 'have you ever felt trampled on? Who did you turn to?' For everyone, we propose to ask: what is a right? Do you know that exist a 'Chart of the Rights of the Child'?

During the 'Didactics of Sciences' course, some visitors of the stand answered as follows. To the question 'What is a right?' a primary school child answered, 'That thing ... to go to school!', and another one replied 'But this is a duty!!!'. As we can see, they do not agree, so a dialog was opened in this case. Another one answered, 'Something everyone can do, not just a few.'

Some first-grade secondary school students answered as follows: 'One thing ... Of the laws ... For each person.', 'For example ... Go to school!', 'One thing you deserve.'

As we wrote in the previous paragraphs, the stands were also visited by some foreign women of the CPIA. They answered as follows to the same question ('What is a right?').

'It's something we must have ... something we have.'

'It is a necessity.'

'One thing you must have and you can have.'

'For example, the right to eat, drink ...'

'... Play, shelter ...'.

'... What is your due'.

Another question for first-grade secondary school students was 'Have you ever felt stepped on?' and 'Who did you turn to on these occasions?'

They answered as follows.

'Yes ... when one can do something, and the others can't.'

'We did not feel listened to by the teachers. They give us punishments because we are a class group, but to listen to us instead we are not.'

'I feel helped by my parents'.

'I, on the other hand, from parents, no, not so much ... sometimes from friends.'

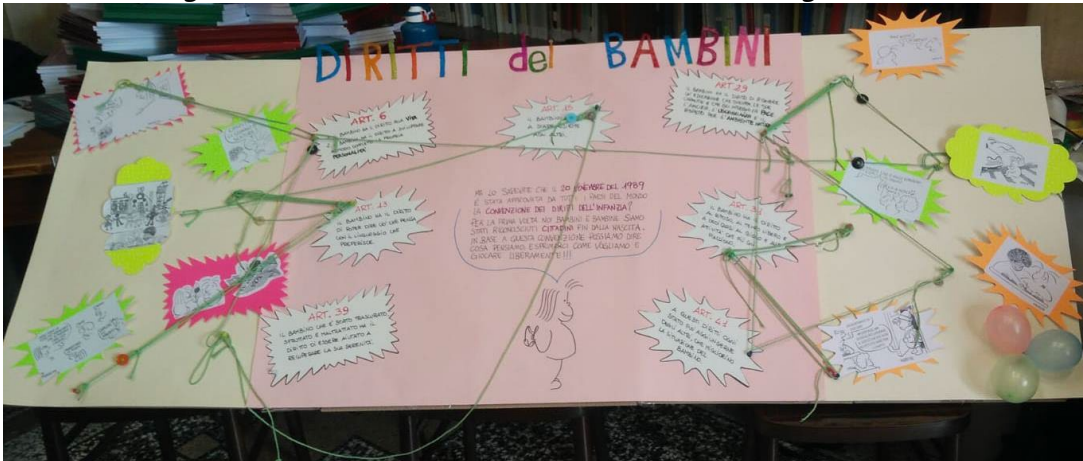
'It comes to mind in sports ... in football. They have power over you, they move you from one side to the other ... I talked about it with dad.'

Phase 2, activity.

In the second phase, for the primary school children, we divide them into pairs, and we distribute them cards with the cartoons of F. Tonucci. With the threads previously prepared, we ask them to link each cartoon to one or more articles, all arranged on the posters.

For first-grade secondary school students, we divide them into pairs, and we distribute cards with the cartoons of F. Tonucci, having previously deleted the writings from the comics. They have to complete the cartoons with the words they deem best suited to the images, taking into account the rights shown on the poster or others they know.

**FIG. 4.** Linking each cartoon to one or more articles, during the Stand



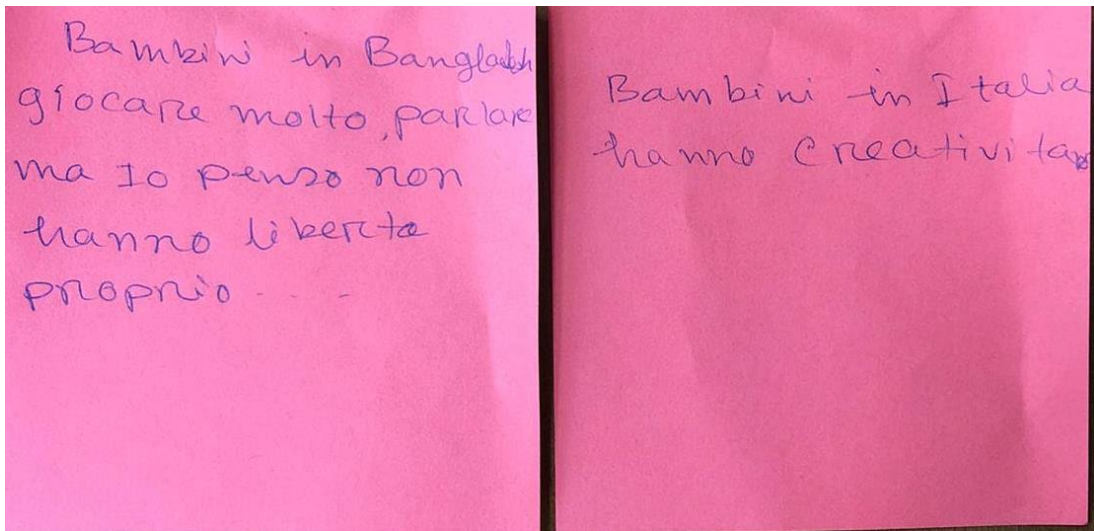
**FIG. 5.** Completing the cartoons with the words that students deem best suited to the images



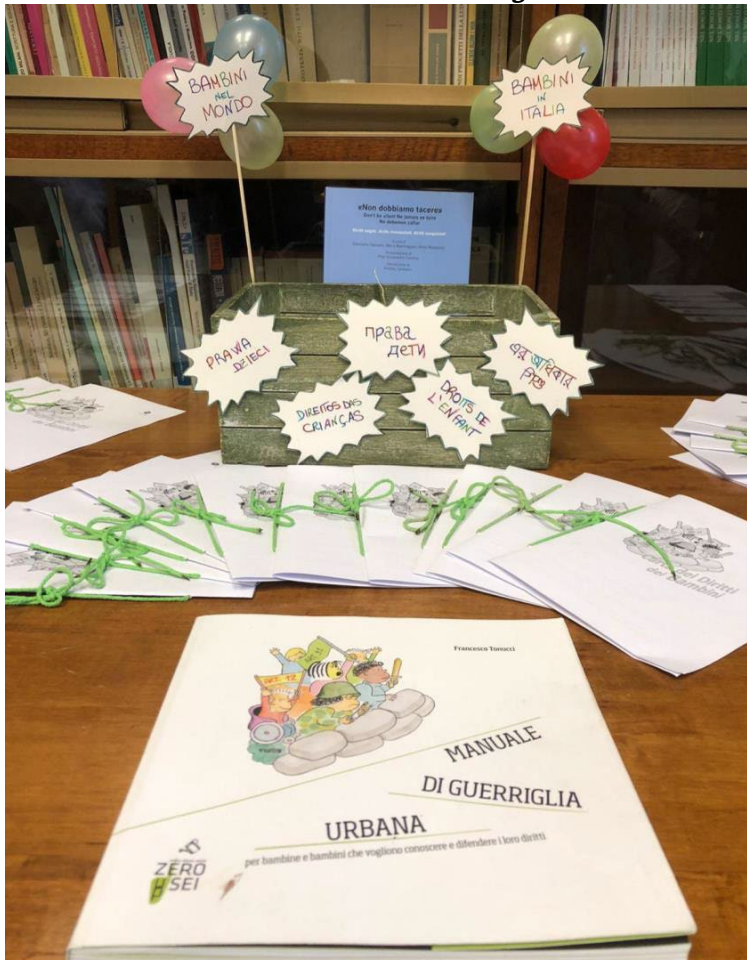
For the foreign women of CPIA, we ask them to write on two coloured post-its some characteristics or particularities that they have observed in children in Italy and in children in their country of origin.



**FIG. 6. Words of the women of the CPIA**



**FIG. 7. Materials from the Stand of rights**

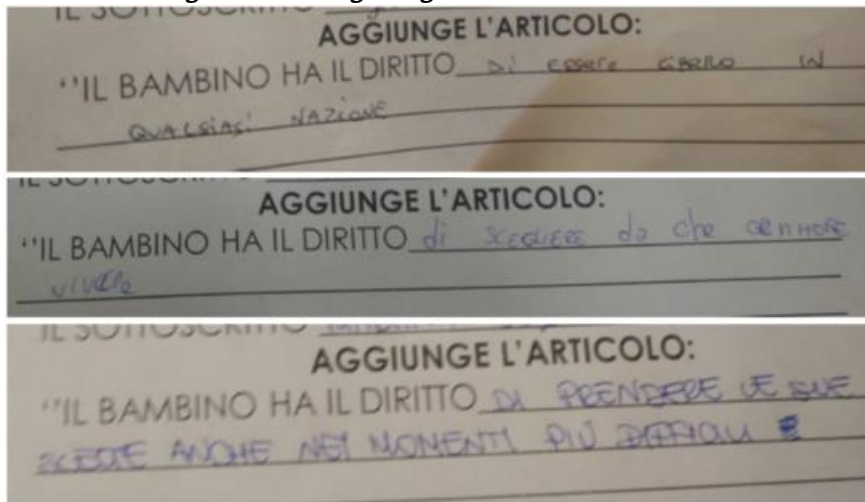


Phase 3, conclusion.

Referring to article 41, which states that «each State can add others rights, which improve the situation of the child» (Tonucci, 2018), we ask

children, students and women to write or add a right that they consider fundamental for every child in the world.

**FIG. 8.** *Writing and adding a right*



At the end of this laboratory, following the experiences observed in recent years, such as the urgency of what recent immigrant children and women have expressed with a sense of liberation, we thought about proposing to set up in schools a 'corridor of rights': trampled on rights, recognized ones, discovered ones, etc.

## Conclusion

Concluding, with this kind of activities, we confirmed that, also in our country, there's not enough knowledge of the Convention on the rights of the child, among children and adults too.

Moreover, we think that addressing the complexity of the issue of children's rights means addressing its international dimension, because this complexity is linked above all to the multiplicity of interpretations that different cultures give to the basic notions of children, law, protection, participation.

Secondly, we think that asking directly to children what their rights may be is a revolutionary act, in a world where adults try to keep their power. Indeed, adults struggle to leave room for children for one of their own active participations in the organization of social life, cities, family life, schools, parks, etc. That is why we think that it's important to listen to what children think and what they want, as we can see in some town around the world, where the municipal administration established the Kids' Council, from a Tonucci's idea.

Asking directly to kids what they want, for example we could find that they don't like to have parks with slides and plastic houses, but they prefer to have parks with logs, sands, fountains, places to hide, like hedges or caves.

Finally, we think that the proposal to work on children's rights is consistent with the aims of Law 92/2019, which introduced in Italy civic education and assigns it the task of promoting «all actions [...] aimed at feeding and strengthening respect for people» (art. 3, c. 2), including children. Moreover, it is consistent with the reference to the UN Agenda 3030, which sets among its objectives «the choice of inclusive ways of life that respect the fundamental rights of persons» (MIUR, 2020, 1). In addition, the law identifies, among the fundamental principles of civic education, the promotion of «full and conscious participation in the civic, cultural and social life of communities, in compliance with the rules, rights and duties» (art. 1, c. 1), as well as «the principles of [...] the right to the health and well-being of the person» (art. 1, c. 2).

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## Competences in Global Citizenship Education: From the Indications of the Italian National Curriculum to the Initial Teacher Training of Pre-school and Primary Education

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**ABSTRACT:** *Global Citizenship Education (GCED) is one of the strategic areas of UNESCO's Education Program that aims to instill in learners the values, attitudes and behaviors that form the basis of responsible global citizenship. This area has been developing in recent years in the different grades and orders of formal education, as reflected in the Eurydice report (2017). In line with this evolution, the present study analyses, from a documentary methodology, the competences of Global Citizenship Education present in the Italian curricula of Nursery School and Primary School. This analysis will allow us to deepen the competences to be developed in the new civic education subject that, by ministerial decree (D.M. n.35 of June 22, 2020), has been adopted in application of Law n. 92 of August 20, 2019. Furthermore, the study of the implementation of the transversal subject in the Pre-school education and Primary education levels of the Italian school will lead us to reflect on the new competences in Global Citizenship Education necessary to develop an effective and quality Initial Teacher Training.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Global Citizenship Education, Curriculum, Primary School, Nursery School, Higher Education.*

### Introduction

The purpose of Global Citizenship Education (GCED), as noted in the Outcome Document of the Technical Consultation on Global Citizenship Education *Global Citizenship Education: an emerging perspective*, is to equip students with the following core competences: an in-depth knowledge of global issues and universal values such as justice, equality, dignity and respect; cognitive skills for critical, systemic and creative thinking, which includes applying a multiple perspectives approach that addresses different dimensions, perspectives and angles of the problems; non-cognitive skills, including social skills such as empathy and conflict resolution, and communication skills and the ability to network and interact with people of different backgrounds, origins, cultures and positions; behavioral capacities to act

collaboratively and responsibly and pursue the collective good (UNESCO, 2013; UNESCO, 2015a).

GCED is based on three learning domains: cognitive, socio-emotional and behavioral. The cognitive domain deals with the acquisition of knowledge and reflection skills necessary to better understand the world and its complexities; the socio-emotional domain refers to the values, attitudes and social competences that contribute to the affective, psychosocial and physical development of students, and allow them to live with others in a respectful and peaceful way; and, the domain of behavior, which refers to conduct, performance, practical application and commitment (UNESCO, 2015b).

As UNESCO (2015b: 16) points out, education for global citizenship aims for students to contemplate a series of learning objectives, which have been established in the following table, taking into account the three learning domains (cognitive, socioemotional and behavioral):

**TAB. 1.** *Goals of Global Citizenship Education*

GOALS OF GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION (LIFE-LONG LEARNING)		
COGNITIVE	SOCIOEMOTIONAL	BEHAVIORAL
understand global governance structures, international rights and responsibilities, global issues, and the relationships between global, national and local systems and processes	recognize and appreciate difference and multiple identities, for example in culture, language, religion, gender and our common humanity, and acquire skills to live in an increasingly diverse world	take an interest in contemporary global issues at the local, national and global levels, and make own contributions from informed, engaged, responsible and reactive citizens
	develop attitudes of interest and empathy towards others and the environment, and respect for diversity	
acquire and apply critical skills for civic awareness, e.g. critical inquiry, information technology, basic media skills, critical thinking, decision-making, problem solving, negotiation, peacebuilding, and personal and social responsibility		
recognize and examine beliefs and values and how perceptions of social justice and civic engagement influence political and social decision-making		
acquire values of equity and social justice, and skills to critically analyze inequalities based on gender, socioeconomic status, culture, religion, age, and other factors		

Source: UNESCO (2015b, 16-22)

In line with this perspective, researchers Matarranz and Pérez Roldán (2016) denoted the need to create a new field of research that they called Supranational Education, which was born with the need to study new cultural and social realities, which they have incorporated into their own identity and culture global movements or trends. Education for global or supranational citizenship aspires to be a transformative factor, instilling the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that learners need in order to contribute to a more inclusive, just and peaceful world.

This first perspective of competences in Education for Global Citizenship has opened new lines of study in recent years, highlighting the model of the 20 competencies required for democratic culture and intercultural dialogue, which includes values, attitudes, skills and knowledge and understanding criticism (Council of Europe, 2018).

## 1. Global Citizenship Education at the Italian School

It is interesting to observe the reflection on the ethical and humanistic attitude of Nussbaum (2005; 2011) and Gil Claros (2018) regarding the insertion of global citizenship in the school curriculum, which according to the first author should start from an age early in school. This perspective is complemented by Lipman's proposal to teach to think already in the childhood stage (in what we could call a 'children's philosophy'); experiences that should generate, according to both authors, understanding and empathy towards the 'Other' (Gil Claros, 2018: 47).

In recent years, studies have been carried out in relation to the process of implementation of education for global citizenship although, almost in all cases, from national perspectives. For example, from Colombia we find the studies of Aguilar Forero (Aguilar Forero, Velásquez Niños (2018), Aguilar Forero, 2019; Aguilar Forero *et al.*, 2019) or from the Italian territory it is possible to observe specific studies of the National Observatory on the internationalization of schools and student mobility (2020).

Focusing on Italian regulations, the Ministerial Decree n. 35 of June 22, 2020, adopted in application of the law of August 20, 2019, n. 92 *Introduzione dell'insegnamento scolastico dell'educazione civica*, has marked the Guidelines for civic education as a transversal subject in all orders and grades of the Italian school. This subject is not defined as education for global, world or planetary citizenship (UNESCO, 2013: 3) although in the guidelines it is possible to find clear signs of internationalization. In this sense, in the first conceptual nucleus referred to the «Constitution, law (national and international), legality and solidarity», arguments such as the historical development of the European Union and the United Nations are analyzed. Likewise, in the second conceptual nucleus «sustainable development, environmental education, knowledge and protection of heritage and territory» an international perspective is observed as it is based on the 17 objectives set by the United Nations to safeguard coexistence and sustainable development of the 2030 Agenda; Finally, digital citizenship education brings us closer not only to the competence of the correct use of the medium, but also to endless possibilities of communication with national and international entities.

The transversality of civic education has modified the vision of the matter offering a paradigm of reference different from that of the

disciplines. Each discipline is, in itself, an integral part of each student's citizenship and social education. This new paradigm has led to the need to integrate the objectives, specific learning outcomes and goals of citizenship education in the curriculum of educational institutions, following art. 6 of Presidential Decree n. 275/1999 and the principle of autonomy for its implementation. The evaluation criteria approved by the teaching staff for the individual disciplines and already included in the PTOF, have also had to be integrated in such a way as to include the evaluation of citizenship education teaching, which will be carried out through the proposal of the teaching coordinator, and it will be incorporated in the evaluation document, after having been confirmed by the Class team.

### *1.1. Global Citizenship Education in the curriculum of Nursery School*

As indicated in the recent Guidelines for teaching civic education, children will be guided to explore the natural and human environment in which they live, developing attitudes of curiosity, interest and respect for the various forms of life and common goods. The constant, concrete, active and operational approach to learning can also be aimed at the virtuous initialization of technological devices, indicating the positive behaviors and associated risks of their use (Allegato A. *Linee guida per l'insegnamento dell'educazione civica*, 2020, 5).

Analysing the profile of the competences that students should have acquired at the end of nursery school, the following table has been created, which reflects the citizenship competences present in the 4 broad competences areas that were reflected in the Eurydice report (2017). It can be observed how the competences related to the dimensions of interacting effectively and constructively with others and thinking critically from the various fields of experience prevail.

Only in the field of experience 'The self and the other' we do find direct links with the competence to act in a socially responsible manner, noting the sense of belonging and respect the thoughts and feelings of the other when indicating among the learning goals «[The child] knows that he has a personal and family history, he knows the traditions of the family, the community and compares them with others» (MIUR, 2012: 25). It is also noteworthy that reference is made to knowledge and respect other cultures, religions as well as respect human rights through the learning goal «Asks questions about existential and religious issues, about cultural diversity, about right and wrong, on justice, and a first awareness of their rights and duties, of the rules of coexistence is reached» (MIUR, 2012, 25). Finally, we highlight from the table, how the competence of democratic action is observed in learning goals such as «Recognize the most important symbols of its culture and territory, institutions, public services, the functioning of small communities and the city» (MIUR, 2012, 25) or through the attendance at various types of shows (theatrical, musical, visual, animation performances).

**TAB. 2.** *Competences in Global Citizenship Education in the curriculum of Nursery School*

GOALS (National Curriculum Indications)	COMPETENCES (Eurydice)			
	Interacting effectively and constructively with others	Thinking critically	Acting in a socially responsible manner	Acting democratically
The self and the other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cooperation</li> <li>- Emotional awareness</li> <li>- Respect for different opinions or beliefs</li> <li>- Autonomy</li> <li>- Self-confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creativity</li> <li>- Questioning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sense of belonging</li> <li>- Knowing about or respecting other cultures or respecting religions</li> <li>- Respect for human rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Respect for rules</li> <li>- Knowledge of political institutions</li> <li>- Knowledge of or participation in civil society</li> </ul>
The body and the movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Autonomy</li> <li>- Self-awareness</li> <li>- Responsibility</li> <li>- Flexibility and adaptability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understanding the present world</li> </ul>		
Images, sounds and colours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicating and listening</li> <li>- Intercultural skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creativity</li> <li>- Knowledge discovery and use of sources</li> <li>- Data interpretation</li> <li>- Reasoning and analysis skills</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge of or participation in civil society</li> </ul>
The speeches and the words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicating</li> <li>- Flexibility or adaptability</li> <li>- Inter-cultural skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creativity</li> <li>- Reasoning and analysis skills</li> <li>- Data interpretation</li> <li>- Multi-perspectivity</li> <li>- Media literacy</li> </ul>		
Knowledge from the world		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Data interpretation</li> <li>- Understanding the present world</li> <li>- Reasoning and analysis skills</li> </ul>		

Source: MIUR (2012: 26-29); Eurydice, (2017, 48)

It is worth noting that awareness initiatives for responsible citizenship are present in all fields of expertise identified by the national guidelines for the curriculum. Health, well-being, knowledge of cultural phenomena, personal identity, the perception of others (similarities and differences that distinguish all people) as well as respect for oneself and others, which constitute the first experiences of citizenship (MIUR, 2018).

### *1.2. Global Citizenship Education in the curriculum of Primary School*

Table 3 indicates the competences in Education for citizenship from the Eurydice report (2017) in line with the learning goals for Primary Education established in the National Curriculum Indications (2012) for each of the disciplines.

As illustrated in the national indications and new scenarios (2018), the learning of several languages allows to lay the foundations for the construction of knowledge and facilitates the comparison between different cultures because «it represents a functional resource for the enhancement of diversity and the scholastic success of each person is a prerequisite for social inclusion and democratic participation» (MIUR, 2018: 9). It is for this reason that the gradual introduction of the CLIL methodology is hoped for in all grades and levels of school.

The teaching and learning of history, according to the 2012 curricular guidelines, contribute to cultural heritage education and active citizenship not only on a national horizon in a perspective of continuous dialogue between present and past, but also from a point of global view, as underlined in the national indications and new scenarios (2018: 10-11), in correspondence with the Guidelines for Global Education of the Council of Europe (2008) and the document Education for global citizenship. Learning themes and objectives (UNESCO, 2012).

Geography in the curriculum is represented as a subject that allows discussion on the great common issues and helps to develop skills related to active citizenship and to provide the tools to train autonomous, critical and responsible people in territorial management and in the protection of the environment, with a conscious look to the future (MIUR, 2012; 2018).

The scientific, mathematical and computational fields allow the construction of logical and critical thinking and to read reality in a rational way to consciously solve problems. The constant use of discussion and argumentation strengthens the openness to different opinions and the ability to argue one's own; relevant skills for the formation of an active and aware citizenship (MIUR, 2012; 2018).

The artistic disciplines and physical education are fundamental for the integral development of the person. They offer a favorable space for the activation of cooperation and socialization processes, the enhancement of creativity and participation, the protection of the artistic and environmental heritage and promote the value of respecting agreed and shared rules (MIUR, 2012; 2018).


**TAB. 3.** *Competences in Global Citizenship Education in the curriculum of Primary School*

GOALS (National Curriculum Indications)	COMPETENCES (Eurydice)			
	Interacting effectively and constructively with others	Thinking critically	Acting in a socially responsible manner	Acting democratically
Italian	- Communicate and listening	- Reasoning and analysis skills - Data interpretation - Flexibility or adaptability		- Respect for rules
English language and second community language	- Inter-cultural skills	- Understanding the present world - Reasoning and analysis skills - Data interpretation		- Participating
History				
Geography	- Inter-cultural skills	- Understanding the present world	- Environmental protection	
Mathematics	- Respect for different opinions or beliefs	- Reasoning and analysis skills - Data interpretation - Multi-perspectivity - Understanding the present world		
Sciences	- Responsibility - Self-awareness	- Questioning - Understanding the present world	- Environmental protection	-
Music	- Communicating and listening - Inter-cultural skills	- Data interpretation - Creativity		
Art and image	- Inter-cultural skills		Cultural heritage protection	
Physical education	- Self-awareness - Emotional awareness - Responsibility			- Respect for rules - Participating
Technology		- Understanding the present world - Data interpretation	- Sustainable development - Environmental protection	

Source: MIUR (2012: 36-79); Eurydice (2017: 48)

The lifelong learning competences in citizenship of the Eurydice report (2017), find their dimension for the compulsory educational context in the document established by the MIUR (2007), which includes the competences to be acquired at the end of compulsory education (1. Learning to learn; 2. Knowing how to design; 3. Knowing how to communicate; 4. Collaborate and participate; 5. Act responsibly; 6. Solve problems; 7. Learn to connect; 8. Check the information). It should be noted that the competences specified in the Italian curriculum refer almost entirely to the competences of Interact effectively and constructively with others and think critically:

**FIG. 1.** *Key citizenship skills: from Lifelong-Learning to the end of compulsory education*



Interact effectively and constructively with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how to communicate</li> <li>• Act responsibly</li> <li>• Collaborate and participate</li> <li>• Solve problems</li> </ul>
Thinking critically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verify the information</li> <li>• Learning to learn</li> <li>• Learn to connect</li> <li>• Knowing how to design</li> </ul>
Acting in a socially responsible way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Act responsibly</li> </ul>
Acting democratically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate and participate</li> </ul>

Source: Eurydice (2017); MIUR (D.M. n. 139/2007)

As can be seen from the preceding graph, the competences that lead to acting in a socially responsible manner and acting democratically have not been considered to a large extent in the indications of the curriculum. Both competences need a social action that allows developing not only the classical knowledge of the learning approach based on the knowledge of learning to know and learning to do, but they also need the knowledge of learning to live together and learning to be, as explained in the report *Learning: the treasure within* (1996).

To develop an educational project that includes knowing how to be and how to live together, it is necessary to open school to society. If the *Percorsi per le competenze trasversali e per l'orientamento* (Law 107/2015 'La Buona Scuola') were considered an innovative teaching method, which through continuous practical experience helps to consolidate the knowledge acquired in school in the last three years of high school, it would be necessary to consider the need to consolidate non-sporadic collaborations with entities both in the national territory



and internationally that allow us to open the nursery and primary school to society.

## 2. Initial Training in Global Citizenship Education

To understand the global evolution towards a global cooperation framework, the development of the education and training sector in recent years must be observed. One of the fundamental strategies in this change was developed by the framework *Education and Training 2020* (ET, 2020), which was adopted at the Council on May 12, 2009. This strategy aimed to address the substantial challenges that Europe had to overcome to become a knowledge-based economy and make lifelong learning a reality for all.

In the document published by UNESCO entitled *Global citizenship education: an emerging perspective*, the need to promote education for global citizenship was already shown, indicating among the actions to be implemented the inclusion in the study plans of the objective of education for global citizenship, the use of a transformative pedagogical methodology as well as the obligation to support alliances with civil society. In addition, this document focused its attention on the need to train administrators and teachers with training and support to implement and impart this type of pedagogy (UNESCO, 2013, 5).

It is necessary to train the new generations of teachers as conscious global citizens but, at the same time, a pedagogical plan for effective action in schools is necessary. In Italy, the new perspective of insertion of the civic education subject in a transversal way has implied not only the definition of the objectives, contents, evaluation criteria, learning standards, didactic methodology and competences to be treated in each discipline and the coordination of the hours to implement but also review the school curriculum and update the PTOF to adapt it to the new provisions (Ministerial Decree 35 of June 22, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary that our education professionals learn to critically analyze the guidelines and regulations that the Governance implements to modify the legislative documents of the specific school in which they work.

Future teachers should also be endowed with the necessary skills to develop the new roles that school needs in the field of citizenship. In this sense, the new figures present in the school in the field of citizenship education must be taken into account, among which the following can be highlighted:

1. Citizenship education contact person with coordination tasks who must collaborate with the Headmaster in coordinating the planning, organization, implementation of Citizenship Education activities. The contact person will have the task of promoting the implementation of citizenship education teaching through tutoring, consultancy, accompaniment, training and planning support for colleagues, according to the paradigm of 'cascade

training', of facilitate the development and implementation of multidisciplinary projects and internal collaborations between teachers, in order to give substance to the transversal nature of teaching.

2. Contact person on the prevention and fight against cyberbullying: Law n. 71 of 2017 provides, in every school, the figure of a referent teacher, for cyberbullying episodes and for every bullying phenomenon in general. The contact person has the task of coordinating the initiatives to prevent and combat cyberbullying. The guidelines for the prevention and contrast of Bullying and Cyberbullying phenomena indicate among the recommended actions the establishment of working groups that include the contact person(s) for the prevention of bullying and cyberbullying, the digital animator and other teachers engaged in the promotion of citizenship education (MIUR, 2021: 4, 5).
3. Contact person for environmental education and sustainable development: Environmental education and sustainable development is another of the areas that has implied the insertion of an educational reference in the school. MIUR, Indire and ASviS contribute to Target 4.7 together with initiatives such as Scuola2030, which web offers all teachers of the Italian school content, resources and self-training materials for an education inspired by the values and vision of the 2030 Agenda.

The various referents in citizenship education should also collaborate with families and with external entities in order to share and promote behaviours based on a conscious citizenship, not only of the rights, duties and rules of coexistence, but also of the challenges of the present and the immediate future.

On the other hand, it is important to disseminate among future teachers the European and UNESCO policies aimed at promoting common lines of action through both national and international initiatives and projects that invite them to analyze and participate together. Among these actions for example, we can quote the international days, years and decades dedicated to raising awareness of a topic of international interest. The General Assembly of the United Nations, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations and UNESCO establish and promote these anniversaries with their own infrastructures, also presenting a written report on the various activities carried out in the world on the occasion of the event and containing the recommendations for subsequent occasions.

In relation to national projects, it is noteworthy The National Operational Program (PON) of the Ministry of Education, University and Research, entitled *For the School-skills and learning environments*, funded by the European Structural Funds, which contains the strategic priorities of the education sector.

In an international perspective, they should be warned the Cultural exchange programs between schools, of which we cite as an example the following initiatives:

1. The UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet) brings together educational institutions from around the world with the common goal of international understanding, peace, intercultural dialogue, sustainable development and quality education. It is recognized as an effective tool to achieve goal 4 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda «Provide quality, equitable and inclusive education and learning opportunities for all» on the basis of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).
2. The eTwinning project, which promotes innovation, the use of technologies in teaching and the shared creation of multicultural educational projects between schools in different countries (twinning between schools), supporting distance collaboration between teachers and direct involvement of the students. Established in 2005 on the initiative of the European Commission (currently one of the actions of the Erasmus + 2021-2027 program), eTwinning takes the form of an IT platform, which involves teachers, making them known and collaborating in a safe workspace – called the TwinSpace – by exploiting the potential of the web (<https://www.indire.it/progetto/etwinning>).

Furthermore, future teachers, both during their training period and later, in their teaching work, are called to participate in exchange projects. Among these projects it is possible to point out the Erasmus+ program, in force since 1 January 2014, which is structured in three key actions (1. Mobility of individuals for learning purposes, 2. Cooperation for innovation and good practices, 3. Policy reform) and the project 'Professional Exchanges', as part of bilateral cooperation initiatives with France and Spain, which is a teacher mobility program that has the main objective of promoting the dissemination of teaching practices according to the Content and Language integrated Learning (CLIL) and the activation of joint projects between Italian schools and French and Spanish schools.

## **Conclusion**

The present study has led us to confirm that education for global citizenship is present in the Italian curriculum from the first years of compulsory education, developing in all orders and grades of the Italian school.

The key citizenship competences identified by the MIUR to be acquired at the end of compulsory education (1. Learning to learn; 2. Knowing how to design; 3. Knowing how to communicate; 4. Collaborate and participate; 5. Act responsibly; 6. Solve problems; 7.

Learn to connect; 8. Verify information) are present in the Italian curriculum, although they almost exclusively relate to interacting effectively and constructively with others and thinking critically.

Initial training should be one of the fundamental pillars to develop the various global citizenship competences of future teachers. Global citizenship competence in the initial training of future teachers should be promoted in a transversal way through the development of the four areas of citizenship competence defined by Eurydice, paying special attention to the psycho-pedagogical and sociological field.

The area in 'Interacting effectively and constructively with others' will be developed through the competence of cooperation and collaboration, which allows the creation of work teams, whose functions will lead to designing didactic contents in citizenship education in different school levels and diversifying the didactic paths of the classes. The collaboration competence will have to be equally promoted among families, in order to share and promote behaviors marked by a conscious citizenship, by also integrating the educational co-responsibility agreement.

It would also be convenient to develop leadership competences to fulfil the functions of the educational referents in education for citizenship (including the Contact Person for the prevention and fight against cyberbullying and the Contact Person for environmental education and sustainable development). The role of reference implies, in turn, the learning of skills that allow coordinating and monitoring the different phases (from planning to implementation) of the Global Citizenship Education experiences in correlation with the different disciplinary areas, guaranteeing functionality, effectiveness and consistency with the PTOF.

On the other hand, it is necessary to broaden the competences of the 'Thinking critically' area, which allow the development of planning in the PTOF, specifying the learning objectives, contents and evaluation of the subject of citizenship in a transversal way.

In addition, critical thinking skills will be needed to present a final report to the Faculty Board at the end of the school year, highlighting achievements and 'weaknesses' and allowing a record of good citizenship education practices, as established by the Ministry, in order to share and contribute to the dissemination of organizational solutions and experiences of excellence.

Finally, a direct and permanent collaboration should be established with the territory and with society in general (local-global) through cultural exchange programs (with training experiences between schools and universities and teacher exchange projects), which would allow observing from an intercultural perspective the reality of our world under a conception of democratic and inclusive culture. These competences, typical of the areas of 'Acting democratically' and 'Acting in a socially responsible manner', should promote both a sense of

belonging, sustainable development, knowledge of political institutions and international organizations, as well as participation in civil society.

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## **Religions in the Face of Planetary Issues: What Would Be the Contribution for Education to Citizenship**

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## Religious sense and dialogical experience as educational commitment. Reflections in view of Montessori, Panikkar and Korczak

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**ABSTRACT:** *An authentic educational process should lead to learn the beauty of living together, to promote the desire to know the other and to weave solidarity plots of Peace; a process involving the integrity of the person, supporting integrity (spiritual, corporeal, mental and emotional awareness). Educational concerns call for knowledge and action, question what it is necessary to know and what it is necessary to know how to do to promote and preserve integrity in relationships. Peace is an action that expresses full awareness, full decision-making capacity and self-mastery, respecting and considering the Other. As the Panikkarian reading suggests – recovering its Latin etymological root alter – the other is not the adversary, but the other of two, the other part of oneself, that through which one's identity matures in a relational sense. The existential nature of the human being – as well as of every existing form and force – is constitutively relational and unitary (Schroeder, 2002). This awareness is the aim of an educational experimentation adherent to the strong and urgent existential questions, projected towards the full realization of humanity – a quality implicit in the human being, but which needs to be cultivated in order to be able to express itself, as problematized by the human and pedagogical experience of Korczak (2017a). Observing the relationality of existence and the unity of mind-body-spirit – valued also within the Montessori pedagogical model (Cives, 2009) sensitive to the construction of peace and knowledge – the religious dimension is grasped in its being a fundamental experience of interconnection; religiosity is an expression of being in a condition of conjunction – as its etymological root, from the Latin re-ligo (re-join, re-connect) – helps us to consider.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Religiosity, Otherness, Inter-Being, Sense of Wonder, Education*

### Introduction

Pedagogical model of Montessori, as well as that of Korczak and Panikkar's cosmo-vision – are interwoven in the direction of a commitment to shake up thought, speech and action in support of the

quality of Life, rooted on 'interbeing'. It is possible to intercept implicit meanings that deserve to be explored in greater depth for their innovative potential in a perspective of education for citizenship, that is knowledge of how to live together, which requires the exercise of knowledge, understanding and respect for one's own dignity and that of others, which is never separated from knowledge, understanding and respect for the sacredness of life and therefore from a feeling of care, concern, protection and love. Some themes can be identified and explored for their – radically – transformative value, insofar as they question the meaning of education and the urgency of forming thought, word and action as an intra- and inter-subjective dialogue, fruitful in view of the flowering of humanity (Guetta, 2021). Some macro-areas can be intercepted as needful to be valued:

- education to interiority and spirituality;
- education to the experience of the universality-chorality of the existence;
- education to peace and democracy, through dialogue;
- education to meditation as a practice of silence as a matrix of listening and welcoming;
- education to experience the unity of body – mind – spirit, as a flowering of humanity.

I would like to start by referring firstly to the title of this second congress *Reinventing education* and the specific theme of the panel I attended: *Religions in the Face of Planetary Issues: What Would Be the Contribution for Education to Citizenship*. I will begin with some considerations that aim to configure the relevance of the religious dimension in the education of the person, in his or her entirety.

Not to fragment the person, but to recognize and value the person in his/her totality, is, perhaps, the first experience of a religious feeling and act (Tulku, 2002).

## **1. Religiosity as an experience**

It is fundamental to recognise the human being's need to access a vision of himself/herself and of the cosmos, cleansed of stereotyped and stereotypical representations; and it is necessary to give legitimacy to this need through an educational project that places him/her in a deep bond with the nature of which he/she is a part.

I start from the appreciation of religiosity as an experience (Casadei, 2018), which is why I link it with the aesthetic dimension, which in turn is an experience of the wholeness of the person in his/her place in existence, with a sense of wonder and beauty. The sense of wonder and the sense of beauty – mutually nurturing – should not be forgotten by pedagogy and education. In the recognition of mind-body-spirit unity, the aesthetic dimension is valued as a way of probing and experiencing the I-Other relationship according to a religious spirit

which, even before being an ideology and/or belief system, is manifested as a need: the breath of the self and of the life. The contemplative experience – in the conscious exercise of silence and breath – calls the body to composure, attention to awareness, emotion to balance and contributes to an existential posture open to the unknown, to feel and live religiously-minded. Wisdom traditions from all cultural and geographical latitudes share a common feeling: appreciation for nature, the link between mankind and the cosmos, beauty and the importance of living in harmony. Education is co-extensive with life and provides process for human beings to realize their being and inter-being. In the involvement of an educational experience aimed at unfolding the 'being', the person is not closed only to his/her own person, but through the deep experience of himself/herself matures the disclosure of the existential condition which is relational and interconnected. An education centred upon the care of being matters to the interiority and to the intersubjective relationship. Human being should be valued in his/her unity of body-mind-heart, in his/her dimension of choral relationality, of cosmic interconnection.

From a pedagogical perspective that recognizes within discernment bodily intelligence and sensitivity, effective educational action should involve the person's wholeness for the construction of his/her full integrity; from the current urgencies, we could define such an educational perspective as ecological, eco-systemic, aesthetic and ethical one. Education could be drawn upon vitalizing and constructive forces, aiming at the development of radiant possibilities of actualization, helping to unfold inner potential and the personal growth to be embraced. An educational project cannot be limited to the objective of a mere notional and technical acquisition, but must aim at the realization of the flowering of the person in his/her right to be: recognizing, accepting, loving, transforming and realizing oneself. Learning to be has to do with constructive energy, dynamic power: exploration, knowledge, understanding, listening, reflection, imagination, expression, creativity. These processes require to be applied through care, gentleness and respect, so that they can be realized as meaningful experiences in order to being and not to just having or merely exhibiting. Taking into account not only the intellectual dimension but also the corporeal, the emotional and the spiritual one (and the whole sensory universe), discovery is a vast experience in relation to the world and profound in relation to oneself (Montessori, 1970a). The aesthetic-religious dimension within which knowledge matures – as deep exploration, understanding, feeling and imagining – favors the emergence of the feeling of beauty, joy and love for what is done, for what is explored, for what is shared. And gratitude!

Knowledge, which is configured to be experimentation of oneself, of the world and of oneself in relation to the world, weaves the threads of a responsibility that is configured as awareness, care and commitment.

Education is also an expression of love, therefore it requires responsibility and decision-making capacity. With reference to the demands of lifelong education and sustainability a question rises: which means are essential to live together and to support the life of every living being? Which experience promote 'humanity' as a multifaceted dimension to be developed? Which sensibility has to be nurtured to understand and live properly the inter-being: the religious dimension challenges education for citizenship in its being the construction of visions, consciences and behaviors consistent with the commitment to know how to live together, in harmony, peace, respect and love – which means not sentimentality but care, thoughtfulness, courage and decision making capacity. For an authentic concept and reality of citizenship – that is a realized comprehension of the need to live together, as humans being aware to be connected to other living beings – the religious dimension is inescapable, since it locates the person in his/her constitutive link with his/her possibility of being and being fully.

The religious dimension also exerts its inspiring power in guiding education to coherence and pragmatism, being engaged through: a) action-behavior witnessing the commitment for citizenship and creating a reality consistent with it; b) words and communication truly expressing the aspiration to citizenship and promoting cooperative relationship; c) thought and feeling – not in terms of mere contents but in terms of their quality and nature – consistent with the idea of citizenship and nurturing its possibility to grow significantly fair, sustainable, reliable (Francesco, 2015).

In this regard, as guidelines for research, I identify the following questions: Do we speak what we seek? Do we witness what we think? Do we live what we feel? (Katagiri, 2000). I thought of Panikkar, Montessori and Korczak: their lives are a witness of religious work of care and commitment to make their thinking and feeling real in concrete action and at the service of life. Their view are significant in this regard: religiosity is recognized as constitutive of the nature of existence, starting from its deepest meaning of co-participation, co-existence, inter-dependence, equally keen to consider the sacredness of life from which all of them draw the inalienable sense-right-duty of human dignity. And all these quotes do not seem to be at odds with a genuinely scientific approach: «the experience of cosmic religion is the strongest and noblest driving force of scientific research» (Einstein, 2016, 23). Therefore, this is an essential plot for the formation of a human being who is fully realized in his *capax universi* – to quote Thomas Aquinas – who knows how to recognize the immensity within himself/herself. Citizenship should be rooted in this perspective of belonging to the vastness of human and cosmic experience. Education for citizenship needs to be rooted in the reality of things, which resides in the vastness and interdependence of every existing form and force. Human being is made up of this and participates in this order. In the

same way, the sense of immensity and interdependence nourishes a feeling of intimacy, intensity and energy that is oriented as joyful responsibility. It is possible to identify in their example some coordinates necessary to renew education so that it can effectively be a driver of transformation – a transformation that must take place concretely within the person, in each one of us, in a profound, sincere and radical way.

## 2. Being a responsible citizen: *Capax Universi*

Religiosity has to do with the radicality of being and is therefore the driver for an unreserved commitment. The religious sense invites us to consider that the fabric of relationships is much wider and more complex than what an ordinary, habit-distracted gaze can intercept. Commitment is played out not only on the level of mere action, however dictated by 'good' and 'right' intentions. It is necessary to sift through the concept of right and the concept of good, taking care to discriminate well within what is passed off as truth, just because it is supported by common sense and the majority – and from which to distort the meaning of democracy as dictatorship of the majority (Panikkar, 2000). The commitment to realizing oneself as a citizen<sup>1</sup> is towards an understanding of what it means 'to be', then to be 'human'; then this might lead us to realize that being is inter-being. The relationality within which existence takes place (human and otherwise) is the condition for living.

Being citizens, qualifies us as beings who have acquired and internalized the correct vision: that is the one that recognizes the relational nature of existence, and strive to refine the capacity to live together, in harmony, according to a common project of solidarity, cooperation, sustainability. In this respect I find the reference to Thomas Aquinas and his concept of man (and woman) *capax universi* congruent (Pérez Prieto, 2011). In the first place, because it redevelops

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<sup>1</sup> From the classical Greek *polites*, that is who is able to live the sense of relationship, able to intercept meaning and direction of a thinking that accepts dialogues and matures in it. The citizen is 'capable', willing and open to live the chorality as a space in which to express intelligence and responsibility. Intelligent and responsible citizen sees the relational dimension as constitutive of existence and aspires to know how to live together, to live the 'public thing'. On the contrary, ignorance of all this leads the person to be *idiotes*, closed in the myopia of one's own gaze restricted to the 'private thing', incapable of a gaze adherent to the reality that is irremediably vast and relational. From this perspective, religiosity – freed from a meaning restricted to the confessional sphere of a specific religion, but assumed in its being the experience of a necessity and a sense of the vastness of life – is reconfigured as a capacity, an expression of human intelligence and sensitivity in grasping the fabric of reality in the depth of its mystery and complexity. From this outlook, then, arises a healthy search for all congruent resources to achieve a healthy living in harmony, which today we might define with the term sustainability.

the term capacity not only in its strict meaning of ability, as if it were reduced to a technical application of learned notions, but rather in its broader, more articulated and profound meaning of a disposition to welcome: calling into question vision, feeling and action. Capacity is the act of accepting and containing that calls for – in order to be realized – a certain way of seeing and feeling oneself and the world, as well as oneself in relation to the world. I think it would be appropriate to recall, here, Thomas Aquinas's vision in the following words:

*Capax universi*, capable of the universe are your arms when they move with love. And I know it is true that your feet are never more alive than when they are in defence of a good cause. I want to fund your efforts: stay near beauty, for she will always strengthen you. She will bring your mouth close to hers and breathe – inspire you the way light does the fields. The earth inhales God, why should we not do the same? This sacred flame we tend inside needs the chants of every tongue, the communion with all. As capable as God are we. (Daniel Ladinsky, 2002)

In the concept of the citizen – a being who perceives himself/herself in a relationship with other beings, with nature and with life – lies the maturity of an intelligence that knows how to *inter*-read: it intercepts, decodes, represents and expresses the sense of inter-being. Panikkar, Korczak and Montessori are referred to for their conception of educational-existential planning in terms of human maturity, considering the human being in his/her constitutive complex simplicity (Panikkar, 2007): the recognition of the reciprocity of the bodily, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions. The wholeness of the person is at the heart of a transformational project (Montessori, 2017) towards the integrity (Korczak, 2013) as a realised expression of being in harmony with oneself and therefore a promoter of harmony in the world – social and natural one. For the three Authors, peace is the result of a profound and intimate process of knowledge: a knowledge that wants to go to the heart of self-experimentation, understood as exercise and self-control. A control that is never bent to compression-repression, but rather elevated to full self-mastery, the only true favorable factor of a joyful and gratified expressiveness. The full recognition of each of the constitutive dimensions of the person is at the heart of the message of each of the three authors in their intense work to reaffirm human dignity as the founding value of intra- and inter-subjective relationships, from which the authentic recognition of the dignity of Life, in all its forms, matures. Thus, preparing for a profound pedagogical reflection in terms of ecological-ecosystemic-sustainable education.

### **3 Education for citizenship: learning how to see, feel and act one's being in the world.**

Religiosity, as a capacity of viewing, feeling and acting in a vast fabric of relationship, can be also intercepted as an aesthetic experience – sprouting for and supporting a deep sense of awe and wonder at being alive. This posture assures a warding off a triple reduction: of being, exclusively to human; of human, exclusively to the intellectual dimension; of the intellectual dimension, to mere reason (Panikkar, 2005). In this regard, it can also be said that a deep religious sense value the corporeal-sensory experience as a relevant resource of personal growth and fulfilment. When a free spirit exists, it has to materialize in some form of work, and for that hands are needed. The hand of man has followed his intellect, his spiritual life and his emotions. The hands make all the changes in man's environment. (Montessori, 2008). Accordingly, free personal expression – which is linked, in the one hand, to the right to be guided into the process of exploring oneself, the world and oneself in relation to the world and, in the other hand, to the need to be encouraged towards the search for the meaning of existence – is combined with the sense of dignity, irreplaceable aspect for the realization of humanity (Korczak, 2017). Recalling these three Authors could be helpful in revitalizing some questions of meaning, among which I highlight the following: which themes can be identified, explored and actualized for their – radically – transformative value insofar as they question the meaning of education and the urgency of forming thought, word, feeling and action in view of the flowering of humanity?

In the light of an overview that considers religious experience to be relevant, as a personal path that opens up to a vision at the world geared to grasping the reality of interconnection and interdependence as fundamental, it might be possible to realize that not to fragment the person – but to recognize and value him/her in his/her wholeness – could be the first experience of a religious act. Thus it means:

- interest in the interiority of the person;
- scientific attitude that promotes a spirit of 'religiosity' (awareness of the relational and interdependent dimension of existence: openness, sharing, cooperation, solidarity);
- construction of an ecological identity, consciousness and reality of peace;
- dialogue not as a conversation but as an existential attitude;
- reflectivity competence;
- sense of wonder.

## Conclusion

To sum up I would like to highlight for each Author some key-issues, in which the religious sense is recognized as a growth resource for an ecological and cosmic identity.

With regard to Maria Montessori I would like to emphasize the concept of «joyful industry» and the sense of beauty in working for peace, rising the question: how to build achievement and harmony?

- Considering human nature in its constitutive unity of body - mind - spirit;
- involving the entirety of the person for the construction of his/her full integrity;
- valuing the sensory universe as a source of vast experience in relation to the world and deep experience in relation to oneself;
- building responsibility through an awareness of care from which arises the feeling of beauty, joy and love;
- promoting educational environments that are in themselves an experience of harmony and peace; working on the inner balance of the self (practice of silence).

With regard to Raimon Panikkar I would like to emphasize the concept of «blissful simplicity», rising the question: how to unveil the constitutive religious existence?

- Refraining from the threefold reductionism: of being to exclusively human, of human exclusively to the intellectual dimension, of the intellectual dimension to reason alone;
- reconnecting to a common root (not to ideology and/or belief system): the need to breathe;
- consciously experiencing the vital need to connect to a breath that runs through every existing form, deep and mysterious link between the inner and outer dimensions:
- valuing the otherness (lat. *alter* – the other of two) the other is not the adversary, the other part of oneself, through which one's identity matures in a relational sense;
- seeing the religiosity (lat. *re-ligo* - rejoin) in the inter-being of existence.

With regard to Janusz Korczak I would like to emphasize the concept of relationship between children and adult, rising the question: «how to love the child»?

- Taking care, pay attention not to kill the child's soul;
- watching out for hypocrisy and absolutes that generate violence and undermine respect for the sacredness of life;
- respecting the sacredness of life giving relevance to the query;
- learning to wait instead of claiming the answer;
- learning to think about what is right, about what gives joy;
- education at the service of life.

In conclusion, I would like to focus on the sense of wonder, as an essential disposition for a responsible living. capable of attention, care,



but above all courageous in looking at the vastness, at the mystery of the existence. And above all courageous in wanting to be fed on it. The sense of wonder is a fundamental energy to be kept alive. In the human it acts to motivate towards the desire for knowledge, from which the feeling of love and protection can be consolidated. Awe is an attitude that preserves from becoming trivialized, leading to neglect, indifference and disregard, which are certainly not the traits that should constitute citizenship. What it is necessary to know and to know how to do in order to promote and to preserve integrity in relationships? Viewing religiosity as an experience allows it to be linked to the aesthetic dimension, which in turn is an experience of the entirety of the person, in his/her place in existence, with a sense of wonder and beauty – which should not be forgotten or overcome by pedagogy and education. According to Montessori:

it is necessary to give the child so generously, let us give him a vision of the whole universe [...] The idea of the universe [...] will do much more than arouse his interest, because it will arouse in him admiration and wonder [...] Offering him the vision of the whole will help his intelligence to develop fully, since his interest spreads towards everything, and everything is connected to the others and has its place in the universe, which is at the centre of his thought (Montessori, 1970, 19-20).

From this perspective emerges the existentially strong sense of education and the religious sense of work that builds peace as the fruit of knowledge. The sense of wonder trains one to recognize the mystery as something to wonder about, even if it is not possible to say everything, as an exercise in ridding oneself off arrogance and resignation. Each individual perspective is limited «but there is always the possibility of an exchange and even a broadening of perspectives, and intercultural and inter-religious dialogue aims to do just that. Valuing the other's perspective and trying to be aware of it, even without understanding it, presupposes the beginning of overcoming the dichotomy between knowledge and love» (Panikkar, 2002, 9-10) For Korczak, too, the tenet of love and acceptance is underpinned by the need for knowledge - as co-constructed work. The acceptance of each child – which is a distinctive feature of Korczak's life – is accomplished through an educational relationship: teaching-learning the rules of coexistence, discussing them, choosing and sharing them. In his view, the sound groundwork of the educator does not disregard the energy of love in becoming a committed observation and engaged action «Years of work have confirmed with increasing certainty that children deserve respect, trust and friendship: that it is good to live in a serene atmosphere of delicate feelings, joyful laughter, enthusiastic first efforts and pure, clear, beloved joy; then work becomes challenging, fruitful and beautiful» (Korczak, 2011, 41-2).

Religious sense grounds – on a vast scale of existence – the sense of community: the word originates from two latin terms (*cum* and *munus*) meaning 'to share a task'. The religious sense – by educating to the depth and the search for a feeling of closeness to the mystery – constitutes a possible view to recognize the most basic of all communities: the Universe.

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## **Pluralism and Interreligious Dialogue at School in the Process of Building a European Citizenship. Principles and Practices**

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**ABSTRACT:** *European Union has undergone a profound evolution passing gradually from six to twenty-seven States, thus giving rise to a community where the identities of Europeans merge into a vast multicultural platform. In following the Schengen agreements, many borders have been removed and European citizens became free to move within the EU boundaries to study and work abroad and to experience collectively the common space. Thanks to the new and old migratory flows, in many cities there is now a great variety of languages and we live, more and more, in a community of culturally different individuals. In this frame, nowadays, in schools, universities, offices, the religious topic is sometimes the subject of debates and controversies, others it is left completely out of public space. However, if it is true that religion can represent the place where the person redesigns his identity, today the religious element can constitute the fundamental content of citizenship as an ineliminable dimension of the pluralistic configuration of contemporary society. The paper aims at giving an overview on some recommendations and guidelines produced in recent decades by European institutions on the function of interreligious dialogue in the construction of European citizenship and it focuses on the role played by religious actors in this process. Finally, it dwells on some case studies and practical applications.*

**KEYWORDS:** *European Citizenship, Education, Religions, Pluralism, Interreligious Dialogue*

### **1. Religions, cultures and citizenship**

Religious pluralism is a constitutive reality of European societies, but the coexistence among the different faiths has not always given rise to dialogue. The social, political and cultural changes of the last decades transformed the geopolitical scenario of religions, generating fertile ground for inter-religious exchange but potential conflicts, too. Suffice it to know the change that occurred following the fall of the Berlin Wall

(November 9, 1989), the inter-ethnic and religious conflict that tore apart the former Yugoslavia, globalization, the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent intensification of the migratory phenomenon. All these historical events produced in European societies a hybridization of cultures, ethnic groups and religious systems that threaten the continuity of the social bond. As concerns this phenomenon, in recent years the European institutions have provided the Member States with principles that guide the management of religious pluralism, particularly in the field of education in relation to the construction of citizenship.

The European institution that mainly deals with issues related to education in religious pluralism is the Council of Europe. In one of its recommendations, it describes education for democratic citizenship as «a factor of social, mutual understanding, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and solidarity which favors the establishment of peaceful and harmonious relations between peoples and within them» (Recommendation 12/2002 *Education for democratic citizenship*). In this sense, it is interesting to note how the initiatives promoting dialogue between institutions and religious communities and/or within the latter are often delegated to local realities that are held responsible for «making citizens aware that the mixture of cultures and civilizations, and their cultural enrichment, have contributed and continue to contribute to the construction of Europe, its cultural heritage and its values» (Recommendation 170/2005 on *Intercultural and inter-faith dialogue: initiatives and responsibilities of local authorities*). Local democracies should also «pay attention to the involvement of young people in intercultural dialogue, including through the development of policies aimed at preparing them to live in multicultural societies» (Recommendation 245/2008 *Intercultural and inter-religious dialogue: an opportunity for local democracy*). To fulfil this mandate, according to the Council of Europe it would be essential «to promote knowledge of religions in schools, an integral part of the knowledge of the history of humanity and civilizations, as well as indispensable for the history of conflicts between peoples» (Recommendation 1720/2005 *Education and religion*). Therefore, citizens are called to be critically aware and «invited to have a climate of openness in the classrooms to foster social, civic and intercultural competences» (Recommendation 195/ 2018 *On promotion of common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching*). Consequently, we move from a citizen's responsibility to activism up to critical awareness first acquired through tolerance, passing through dialogue and therefore from a 'passive' acceptance to an active search for confrontation with the other.

What do European institutions mean when they refer to 'the other'? We can find an initial answer in some recommendations that define and frame the different cultures of Europe. Starting from Jewish culture, in 1987 Council of Europe defined 'considerable and distinctive' «the contribution that Jews and the tradition of Judaism have made to the historical development of Europe, in the cultural field and other fields»

(Resolution 885/1987 *Jewish contribution to European culture*) and welcomed any enhancement initiative in this sense, such as the instruction of the symposium on Sephardi Jews and European cultures held in Toledo on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> April of the same year. With the same intent, Recommendation 1162/1991 on *Contribution of the Islamic civilization to European culture* described the Islamic culture:

Islam together with Christianity and Judaism, has had, over the centuries and in its different forms, an influence on European civilization [...] Islam has suffered and still suffers from incorrect presentations, for example through hostile stereotypes [...] and there is very little awareness in Europe of both the importance of Islam's past contributions and the potentially positive role of Islam in today's European society. Historical errors, educational eclecticism and an overly simplified media approach are responsible for this situation [...] a balanced and objective description of the history of Islam must be included in educational curricula and textbooks.

Also in this case, Council of Europe invite member States organizing thematic days on specific topics such as the institution of European Day of Averroes with the *Resolution on Islam and European Averroës Day* (1998), in which reciprocal influences were recalled in the fields of sciences and arts and contribution of Islamic civilization to European culture, especially through 'Al Andalus', the placement of Avicenna in this civilization and the influence exercised by Averroé on the culture of the Christian Middle Ages marked by obscurantism.

During the years Council of Europe produced other documents calibrated on the historical need of the time. For example, in the late 80s, some recommendations were promulgated on the relationship with Orthodox churches after the fall of Berlin, on the importance of the Yiddish culture and on Roma and Travellers integration in society. This last-mentioned case focuses on the school integration of Roma children and on strategies to avoid school dropout (Resolution 1989 *On school provision for Gypsy and Traveller children* and Recommendation 4/2000 on the *Education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe*). In this sense, strategies include, for example, the participation of representatives of the Roma community in the development of educational material on the history, culture or language of the Roma and the support for the training and recruitment of teachers within the Roma community.

Still on the study of other cultures, it's important to stress the role of the teaching of history in the reconciliation of people. Recommendation 1283 (1996) on *History and the learning of history in Europe* points out the political role of the History, because it can foster «understanding, tolerance and trust between individuals and peoples of Europe». It is then underlined that the teaching of History should allow students to acquire the intellectual capacity to analyze and interpret information in a critical and responsible way, to grasp the complexity of subjects and to appreciate cultural diversity. Recommendation 15 (2001) on *The*

*Objectives of History Teaching in the 21st Century* highlights the potential of the teaching of history as «decisive factor of reconciliation, recognition, mutual understanding and trust between peoples». The teaching of history would also help the identification of stereotypes based on national, racial, religious and other prejudices by stressing, in the programs, the positive reciprocal influences between countries, religions and schools of different thought in the historical development of Europe.

## **2. Pluralism, intercultural education and interreligious dialogue at school**

Yet, if we look at the different European contexts, we realize how the mosaic of educational systems is varied and how the paradigms on the relationship between education and religions are extremely diversified. According to some scholars such as Flavio Pajer (2007) and Wanda Alberts (2008), we can group the various types of religious teachings in Europe, classifying them according to the criterion of confessionality, into four categories:

1. theological-based religious teachings - *teaching/learning into religion*: openly confessional, close to the parish catechesis, managed on their own by the churches in those countries where one or the other Christian confession can still enjoy of direct influence in public school system. This is mainly the case of Ireland, Malta, Poland for Catholic religious education, Greece and Romania for the Orthodox area;
2. religious teachings based on theology and science of religion - *teaching/learning from religions*, as in the case of Italy in which the scholastic religious discourse is in continuity with catechesis because it preserves the same material object, but differs because it does not have the same pastoral purposes, making own the same educational purposes as the school;
3. teachings based on the sciences of religions - *teaching/learning about religions*, courses of religious and ethical-religious instruction that do not derive from a particular theological vision and which tend to present facts, doctrines and systems religious in the most impartial way possible and in comparative terms. This is the case, for example, of the teaching in England 'Multifaith religious education' or the Swiss canton of Zurich and Ticino, for example, which introduced a compulsory course in 'Religion and culture';
4. intradisciplinary approach to the religious fact - *teaching/learning out of religion*, as in France, the only European country where, under the old law of separation between state and churches, it isn't possible for public schools to impart religious teachings, not

even of a non-confessional type. The only possibility is to enhance the 'religious dimension' in the contents of the various subjects.

The question then arises whether these different approaches to the management of religious pluralism in European societies follow the indications of the European institutions or whether they simply arise from single national histories and experiences with the religious fact. Recommendation 1093 (1989) on *Education of the children of migrants* states that «the goal of intercultural education is to prepare all children, indigenous and migrant, for life in a pluricultural society». Resolution 312 (1995) *Response of education systems to the problem of racism* attests that school systems can effectively contribute to the promotion of respect, tolerance and solidarity towards people or groups of different ethnic, cultural or religious origins through actions such as the use of educational material that reflects the cultural diversity of European society and encouraging initiatives aimed at promoting cooperation between schools and local communities.

According to Recommendation 1720 (2005) on *Education and Religion* «governments should promote education in religions, encourage dialogue with and between religions [...] and teach children the history and philosophy of major religions with objectivity». Council of Europe also admits that «unfortunately, across Europe there is a shortage of qualified teachers to give comparative education in different religions».

To attempt to remedy these shortcomings in 2007 ODHIR (the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the OSCE) produced the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, a more implementing and emblematic document on the management of religious diversity at school, translated into Italian in 2015 and published in the text *I Principi di Toledo e le Religioni a scuola* (Saggiolo/Bernardo, 2015). These guidelines are divided in three main areas:

1. The preparation of teachers, in which is emphasized that the need for an accurate preparation based on a solid tradition of studies should correspond to a profound commitment to guarantee the student religious freedom. Furthermore, teachers should ensure that they have intercultural and interreligious skills which should therefore enable them, among other things, to understand the impact of religions and on society and culture, be aware of the religious diversity present in the communities and be able to connect it to global trends (the concept of *glocality*: knowing the local to understand the global) and create a learning environment where all students feel respected in expressing their opinions, guiding students in discussions and debates in a balanced way.
2. Programs and curricula. This section emphasizes the importance of evaluating the objectivity and equity of a teaching, so that there is no disparity between the majority religion and the other faiths present in the school. Attention to the specificity of the

territory is a particularly crucial aspect: the training offer should also be structured with respect to the different local manifestations of religious plurality. The preparation of curricula, textbooks and teaching materials for teaching on religions should therefore be elaborated in an inclusive manner and trying to avoid material marked by prejudices that corroborate negative stereotypes.

3. The role of families and religious communities. It's crucial take into account and not weaken the role of families and religious organizations in transmitting the values of their faith by holding remember that the principles enshrined in international law on this matter are clear in affirming that parents have the right to educate their children in accordance with their religious or philosophical beliefs.

### **3. The role of religious actors in education for dialogue**

We focused on European principles that regulate religious pluralism and on how fundamental the interaction and relations between school systems and religious communities are in educating to interreligious dialogue. Let us now try to understand briefly the positions of some religious actors on the topics of pluralism and dialogue. It is useful to start with an emblematic document produced jointly by the representatives of different confessions during events such as interfaith councils or forums.

In 2008, European Council of Religious Leaders produced The *Berlin Declaration on Interreligious Dialogue*. The text states that religions have always permeated Europe; the various places of worship in the area are proof of this. Furthermore, it is emphasized how interreligious dialogue is capable of enhancing both the differences and the things in common to those who practice it and that it consists in negotiating truths or making sacrifices of one's beliefs, but in one exchange of experiences that must enrich the other's point of view. The document affirms, finally, that everything must take place within the framework of respect for and promotion of human rights and that interreligious dialogue should help to rebalance asymmetric relationships in terms of power, economic and/or social disparities that often occur between peoples. Religious leaders therefore commit themselves in a common action against poverty, violence, ethnic, religious and gender discrimination.

Let's briefly analyze some of the most important documents produced by the religious institution that is the main and greatest driving force (for its weight and for its possibilities) of interreligious dialogue from 1965 to the present day: The Catholic Church. After Vatican Council II and *Nostra Aetate* declaration – document that laid the foundations for the relationship of the Catholic Church with non-



Christian religions – over the years various documents on dialogue with other confessions and on religious freedom were produced.

In 1991 the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue jointly with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples promulgated *Dialogue and Proclamation* in which The Catholic Church identifies four main forms of interreligious dialogue:

- a. The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in a spirit of openness and good neighborliness, sharing their human concerns;
- b. The dialogue of action, where Christians and others actively collaborate for the common good (e.g. offering services, solidarity works, distribution of food, clothing, blood donation, neighborhood cleaning)
- c. The dialogue of theological exchanges, where experts seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other's spiritual values;
- d. The dialogue of religious experience, where people rooted in their own religious traditions share their spiritual riches, for example as regards prayer and contemplation, faith and the ways of seeking God or the absolute.

Later, it was added also the interreligious dialogue as a 'political tool' for promoting peace in international relations and for facilitating the coexistence of communities within a State (for example, the 'agreements' are the result of the work between religious and political institutions) or the world, as in the case of Pope Francis and Aḥmad Muḥammad Aḥmad Al-Tayyib. These two emblematic figures for Catholicism and Islam met on various occasions, most recently in 2019 when they jointly produced the *Document on Human Fraterniy for world peace and common coexistence* (Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019), in which they declare to «adopt the culture of dialogue as a way; common collaboration as a conduct; mutual knowledge as a method and criterion» and define the diversity of religion as «the fruit of a wise divine will, from which derives the right to freedom of belief».

The institutions of the Islamic world articulated the discourse on religious diversity and interreligious dialogue especially after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The historical-political scenario of the time made necessary to take clear-cut positions: it was not only a duty to dissociate from violence condemning terrorism and fundamentalism, but above all put the dialogic nature of Islam and the history of its peaceful interactions with other cultures and religions in the center of their teachings. There are several initiatives promoted and statements produced in the last two decades. An example is the interreligious meeting called *Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions* held in Kazakhstan in 2003 in which, among other things, religious leaders state that the diversity of religious beliefs and practices should not lead to mutual suspicion, but to «mutual acceptance and harmony that enhances the distinctive features of every

religion and culture» and that educational programs are essential tools for promoting positive attitudes towards religions and cultures.

In 2003 too, a similar initiative was promoted by the Doha International Center on Interfaith Dialogue (DICID). Since then, every year in Doha (Qatar) a Conference on Interreligious Dialogue has been held in the context of Abrahamic monotheism. Also noteworthy is *The Amman message* (2004), a particularly relevant document that deals with the most difficult dialogue, the intra-religious one, in order to sanction unity in contemporary Islamic religious pluralism. Moreover, the *Open Letter to Pope Benedict XVI*, a theological response to the ambiguous quotation of the pontiff in Regensburg about Islam in 2006, and the following document *A common word between me and you*, which spreads a dialogical message starting from the commandments common to Christians and Muslims, that are love for God and love for Neighbor. Finally, another important document is the *Marrakesch Declaration* (2016), which reaffirms the inviolable right to religious freedom of minorities in lands with an Islamic majority.

#### **4. Italy and religious teaching: theories and case studies**

How does the Italian school system manage and interpret education in cultural and religious pluralism and dialogue? Ministerial Circular n. 73 of 2 March 1994, *Intercultural dialogue and democratic coexistence: the planning commitment of the school*, affirms that «intercultural education does not end with the problems posed by the presence of foreign pupils at school, but constitutes the highest and most global response to racism and anti-Semitism». In 2007 the National Observatory for the Integration of foreign students and Intercultural education produced a vademecum named *The Italian way for intercultural schools and the integration of foreign students* in which Islamophobia and anti-Gypsyism appear for the first time as forms of racism. In these recommendations it is also stated that the presence of immigrants in the school can make more evident some mechanisms such as stereotypes, images or representations that bring together characters or traits connected to each other, respond to criteria of economy and mental simplification in order to preserve a difference in favor of oneself and one's group.

In the last National Training Plan for Teachers (2016-2019) at the section called *Integration, citizenship skills and global citizenship*, the ministry of public education states that:

Historical-religious skills are necessary to understand each of the great faith communities, their history, the history of their relationships [...]. The presence of teachers capable of making diversity an extraordinary educational opportunity is therefore essential. An adequate formation to the pluri-religious landscape is therefore essential to develop in

pupils critical thinking, an attitude to dialogue (intercultural and interreligious), respect and mutual understanding [...].

It is therefore evident that intercultural and interreligious dialogue at school is seen as a tool, not only for understanding religious diversity in Italy, but also for the deconstruction of stereotypes, prejudices and conflict prevention. Also in this case, as underlined by the above mentioned Toledo Principles, the importance of having teachers capable of presenting religions in the plural is highlighted. We know that in Italian public schools of each order and degree one hour a week is dedicated to the teaching of Catholic Religion (IRC). Certainly, there is a right not to use it, but there is vacation of a valid alternative offer as well as constituting a training deficit, because it deprives some pupils of a space in which to address religious issues and it also nourishes the possibility that the pupils who 'leave' the class feel isolated.

With regard to the educational nature of religious teaching a school Saggiaro (2019) affirms that «the educational dimension understood as an apparatus for the transmission of knowledge, practices, knowledge is an integral part of all the human processes that go under the name of religion» and he underlines the need to spread the knowledge of the religious fact regardless of the individual memberships. He describes also the above mentioned field of *learning from religions* as a learning environment that does not offer data and notions, but rather «instructions to build a wealth of knowledge on the religious fact, creating an interaction profitable with the inhabitants of the area». A knowledge laboratory, therefore, in which everyday life becomes a matter of study and elaboration of awareness.

Since the only space dedicated specifically to religions is the hour of Catholic Religion it is appropriate to offer an overview of the positions of this teaching regarding the relationship with other faiths. In 1987 Catholic Religion programs of elementary schools had as its main goal that of «recognize the main signs of the Catholic religion» and «demonstrate respect for people who live different religious choices or who do not adhere to no religious beliefs». In the middle schools it was added to the attitude of respect also «the overcoming of all forms of intolerance and fanaticism» and «an open confrontation and dialogue with other culturally relevant forms and religious traditions». In High schools to these aspects also took over the development of «skills for comparison between Catholicism, other Christian denominations, other religions and various systems of meaning».

In 2012, the Agreement between the Ministry of Education, University and Research and the Italian Episcopal Conference on guidelines for the teaching of the Catholic religion in schools of the second cycle of education and in education and professional training courses stated that the aim of the subject was recognizing «the role of religion in society and understands its nature in the perspective of a constructive dialogue based on the principle of religious freedom» and studying «the

relationship of the Church with the contemporary world, with reference to new religious scenarios, globalization and migration of peoples».

Analyzing two case studies, they establish, in different ways, a link between some of the European recommendations, theological principles and indications and the concrete collaboration between schools and religious communities. Let's start from the last references in which the teaching of the Catholic religion helps students to deal with issues such as migration, religious freedom and interreligious dialogue. In the 2000s the Jesuit Refugee Service developed an awareness project dedicated to school called *Incontri – percorsi di dialogo interreligioso* (Encounters - paths of interreligious dialogue). The first motivation behind the project it was direct experience with forced migrants: some of the refugees with whom the service came into contact had experienced persecution religious and that, in some cases, had been the cause of the flight from their country. A second reflection started from a fact of reality: today, the global phenomenon of migration has resulted the different religious identities to mix and coexist in fact. Last but not least, the importance of remembering that in Italy there are some 'historical presences' (such as Jews and Waldensians) which for centuries have been an integral part of religious history and Italian culture, often unknown to most people except for the negative facts that have characterized it.

The project is part of that dialogue of life described above, proposing to make a contribution from below through the methodology of 'direct testimony', that tells the complexity of religions as much as they are complex the people who are part of it. After having listened to the witness of a religious faith in class, the project also includes some visits to a place of worship to allow students to get to know the territory in which they live also from a perspective of religious pluralism.

The Associations of Christian workers in Italy (ACLI) and Caritas, in collaboration with the Inter-religious Council and with the Inter-ethnic School of Europe in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) developed a project with similar characteristics named *Mir Sutra* (from the Bosnian language *Peace Tomorrow*). The initiative, that opens a window to the Balkans and its recent inter-ethnic and religious conflicts, consists of an educational trip to Sarajevo to help students reflect on the great themes of peace, interreligious dialogue and multiculturalism that distinguish the history and present of the city. It begins with a 'tour of memory' in the places that have made the history not only of Sarajevo, but of the whole of Europe (starting from the bridge where the archduke Francesco Ferdinando was assassinated, an episode that generated the First World War) followed by the 'reconciliation tour', which allows us to enter in the space of a morning in a Catholic church, an Orthodox church, a mosque and a synagogue. This project brings us back to the European indications in which knowledge of history is described as a factor of reconciliation and dialogue between peoples.

To conclude, from this first analysis we can trace, both in the European institutions and in religious actors, the need to govern and guide the management of content, methods and dynamics of the learning/teaching of/on religions in the plural. The reasons start from different assumptions. In European institutions is evident the concern to promote social cohesion and peaceful coexistence through dialogue between different religions that are geographically 'got closer' very quickly in the last thirty years, in order to prevent possible new conflicts. As regards the Catholic Church, the direct management of the contents on other religions it ensures that it itself is not excluded.

It's not easy to assess the impact of European policies on schools Italian and even less understand whether the Catholic Church – in its theology and in the practical applications that derive from it in the field of education – is in some way affected by it. What is certain is that the school and religious communities interact frequently locally; a dialogue on the territory that also takes place thanks to the deep interconnections that exist among those who live there: students, parents, teachers, places of worship are all part of an intercultural and interreligious community in constant evolution

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## Religion and Religions: Understanding the Coexistence of Different Traditions

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**ABSTRACT:** *This essay explores the different definitions of key terms of religion, conflict, and violence in relation to peace education and conflict management. To understand the coexistence between religious and spiritual traditions, it is necessary to clarify each of these three key terms and conceptualise their possible integration into education. First, it is necessary to consider the different meanings of religion as used in popular discourse and academic research. For example, in Western countries, most sociological theories have predicted a gradual decline of religion until recently. Second, we need to consider the different meanings of conflicts and their link with religion. The essay addresses the question of whether religion and the religious policies affirm power and cause conflict. It explores the perspective of new generations on these issues. Third, as in the last decades, there have been some contributions affirming that religions contributed to the development of culture of peace, this essay explores how structural violence relates to the absence of rights or inequality of rights in the religious sphere by using Galtung's theory. It delves into the different relations between religious traditions and state laws. Finally, this essay presents some reflections on how education must develop learning and skills which integrate religious and spiritual traditions into constructive dialogues, open to the comparison and exploration of the complexity of the human being.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Secularisation; Globalisation; Conflict; Peace; Education*

### Introduction

Many conflicts in today's world are framed in religious terms. For some (Sacks, 2017), this proves that conflict and violence are inherent to religion. Others assert that any 'true religion' is peaceful. Some (Naso, 2019) claim that religious conflicts are always about something else, and that religion only serves as a label or disguise for what are, in fact, socio-economic and political conflicts.

Research in the field of sociology of religions has shown that religions are systems of beliefs, with ritual and sacral references subject to processual changes. Moreover, religions seem to be the main cause of social destabilisation and violent conflicts (Burgalassi, 1974; Acquaviva, Pace, 1998; Cipriani, 2000).

At the same time, the idea that religions represent systems of moral and ethical values, as well as important mechanisms of aggregation and support for community life, developed especially in the last decades of the 20th century. Hence, it is important to involve and legitimize the role of religion as protagonists in the development of the culture of peace within civil society. This is a significant change of perspective which has helped to open dialogue, exchanges, and common social commitment, yet not free from either criticism or objections (Graziano, 2014; Naso, 2019).

### **1. The multiple meanings of the term religion**

The term 'religion' may be interpreted in various ways, and thus can engender different behaviors and choices. It is important to consider that every religion provides a different meaning to its own social role (Burgalassi, 1985; Bellerate, 2007; Crane, 2017). Jews perceive religion differently from Christians, Muslims etc. Every religion has had its own historical process of transformation. The meanings that different religions attribute to human life are the result of such transformative processes.

Theories aimed to explain religions have generally focused on the past, the origins, and the functions of religious social structures. Hence, the identification of the presence of universal characteristics is generally traceable in two fundamental elements: faith and practice (Abalogu, Okolo, 2020).

Subsequently, with the emergence of secularization beginning in Western Europe during the second half of the 18th century (Cipriani, 2000), it became clear that religions historically produced and perpetuated forms of exclusion, segregation, and suppression of otherness. Moreover, religions justified the use of «wars in the name of God» (Sacks, 2017). All this hindered the realization of liberal policies aimed at achieving cultural and scientific objectives (Graziano, 2014).

The socio-cultural role of religions in changing contexts responded to different philosophic-sociological models, often based on either substantialist or essentialist-oriented theories (Pals, 2006) and defined contents and meanings for people (Abalogu, Okolo, 2020). Hence, in relation to beliefs and their function, religions are simple elements to understand and are thus able to give security and stability for the transmission of values and maintenance of the social system of reference. The analysis of religious phenomena as of their 'supernatural' origin, enabling the transmission and the maintenance of values, is frequent in the anthropological studies by E.B. Taylor (Tremlett *et al.*, 2017).

On the contrary, functionalist theories, considered as such because they investigate religious as 'performative' functions of society, identify the psychological functions of religion in relational and social processes



at both the individual and the group levels. These include theories by Karl Marx on the role of religion in capitalist and pre-capitalist societies, Sigmund Freud's theories on psychological origin of religious beliefs, Émile Durkheim's studies on the social function of religions, as well as those by Stark and Bainbridge. This approach tends to be static, with the exception of Marx's and Weber's theories, which involve the interaction and dynamic processes between religion and society (Abalogu, Okolo, 2020, 51).

Significant and fundamental is the imprint given by Max Weber (1864-1920), founder of the Sociology of Religions (1988), who stressed the connections between religions to other social institutions such as the economy (Weber, 2003), while defining religion as a system of meanings or symbols, not necessarily linked to a written text. Yet, the idea that there is independence between the divulgation of the word of faith as written in the sacred text and oral transmission allows the detachment from the idea that religions are hierarchized as more or less evolved. This resulted in the criticism of the traditions of the Book which led to consider monotheistic religions superior to more 'primitive religions' (Weber, 1988).

During the process of secularization, the term 'religion' has also been referred to in its other forms such as political religion, civil religion, lay religion, and secular religion. These expressions are often traced back to that of civil religion (Bellah, 1975; Bellah, 2009). 'Civil religion' designates various experiences of the sacralization of politics by movements and regimes. In this case, it is politics that adopts a system of beliefs, expressed through rites and symbols, aimed at forming a collective consciousness following determined ideological principles, values and purposes. The sacralization of politics is a modern phenomenon which occurs when a political entity, e.g. nation, State, class, or party, is attributed the characteristics of a sacred entity. The political entity becomes the object of faith, worship, dedication, and as such, it is placed at the centre of a constellation of beliefs, commandments, rites, and symbols (Gentile, 2007). The reference to civil religion finds its modern origin in Rousseau (1712-1778) who, in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Rizzi, 1996; Burgio, 2003), considered the mutual usefulness of religion and politics to solve the virtuous circle that characterizes the relationship between the state and the individual citizen. Although the birth of the state implies the political rationality of citizenship, the citizen becomes politically rational only after being educated by the state.

The idea of civil religion found its way in many countries such as France and the United States of America. Unlike other Western countries, civil religion did not reach Italy. Lacking a civil religion capable of linking the individual responsibly to society, Italy thus holds the record in Europe for corruption, tax evasion, organized crime, and political litigation (Mancuso, 2009).

## **2. Between secularisation and globalisation: the transformations of religions**

Is it still relevant to talk about the presence and/or importance of religions in our reality? Have the processes of secularization and modernity completely deconstructed or replaced the forms of participation in religious traditions? Given that religions have lost the political, cultural, and social centrality due to the affirmation of a new morality, and given the 'supremacy' of reason and rights of the citizen, what have been the transformations that religions undergone (Sacks, 2020)?

These are questions that involve educational and school systems that are called to give the basic tools to know the anthropological meanings, customs, beliefs, sense of belonging, and behaviors of different religions as a precious intangible heritage of humanity. Therefore, in attempting to answer to these questions, it is paramount to consider the 1960s as the great breakthrough in the development of science, technology, and consumerism that took place. It was a common belief that religions would soon disappear and be replaced by a rational worldview, scientific explanations and policies that would guarantee social equality and the just distribution of wealth surpassing the traditional mechanisms set by religions. In practice, modernity would rewrite morality, whilst overcoming practical values and beliefs that now belong to the past. Faith and beliefs were perceived as obsolete. Symbols and references, apparently perceived as 'truer', more concrete, and tangible were needed. Science, ideology, and rationality alone became the new objects of faith (Pizzuti, 1985; Cambi, 2007; Berger, 2014).

At the same time, while the processes of modernization and secularization evolved, churchmen denounced social inequalities, forms of racism, and other social practices, namely those related to the hierarchical origin of power, which, in fact, prevented freedom of choice and freedom of speech. A clear example of this is Don Lorenzo Milani's denunciation (1967) of the educational system that reproduced class and social exclusion by models and practices of obedience generating dependence and submission and thus denying democratic freedoms (Milani, 1971). This is also illustrated in the cultural contribution, already oriented towards the vision of a 'Planetary Man' by Father Balducci (1985) as well as by the innovative instances of Don Mazzi in the Florentine Parish of Isolotto (De Vito, 2011; Savorana, 2015) that criticised the need to create participation and respect for human rights for those who were systematically excluded from larger society (i.e. the disabled, prison inmates, immigrants from Southern Italy).

Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the questions posed by the process of secularization were affected by an essentially Westernised

view of religion, secular and democratic, at least in its aims (Berger, 2014). Until the last century, the relationship between secularization, modernity, and religions has essentially affected European religions, especially Christianity (Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox) as well as Judaism (Pace, 2013; Guetta, 2015). For the latter, the discourse connotes specificities that would require analysis and special considerations. Jewish communities have been present in Europe for over two thousand years. In addition, in recent centuries, emancipative vicissitudes varied in each state. Despite the multiplicity of forms, Jews have always been considered the non-Christian minority *per excellence* for various reasons. Although they were tolerated, anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism were more or less present. A fragile tolerance, then overwhelmed by the Shoah, led to the destruction of thousands of European Jewish communities (Disegni, 1983; Luzzatto, 2003).

A further examination on this topic would require a discussion about the processes of secularization involving the Catholic Church and which produced a significant and flexible turning point, from which movements and currents emerged and seem to have broken the traditional unity and solidity of religions (Cambi, 2008, 25). Breaks that were either going to recompose the new ideas of social equality resulting in a different interpretation of the sacred texts, as in the case of the 'theology of liberation' which took roots particularly in South American Catholicism, or lead to the multiplication of communities that, while rediscovering the fundamental values of religious tradition, opposed and detached themselves from rigidity, worldliness, and history, inasmuch as they were not well accepted or were only recognized by the specific local congregation.

Between the Seventies and Eighties, religions returned to the scene and continued to change world history: the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the birth of the trade union movement *Solidarność*, and the primacy of religion with political consequences in the Middle East and Europe, despite their differences, which still persist today. Therefore, religions have not disappeared, but only changed, since they have modified and occupied another important role in the world's contemporary landscape (Tibi, 1997; Pace, Stefani, 2000; Graziano, 2014; Bontempi, 2019). Relations among the communities of the faithful change, as do the search for answers to questions about the meaning of life and human existence *vis-à-vis* local and planetary changes. There are many questions to which the institutions of the modern world cannot provide answers. «Science explains how phenomena happen, but not why. Technology gives us power, but it can't guide us on how to use it. Politics gives us choices, but it leaves us with no instructions as to how to make those choices. The liberal democratic state gives us the freedom to live as we want, but on principle, it refuses to guide us on how to choose» (Sacks, 2017, 24). Therefore, religion has regained its social space. According to Sacks (2017), no society survived long without religion. Not even the great modern substitutes of religion –

nation, race, political ideology etc. – have successfully replaced it. However, the religion that has returned to make itself heard has also taken on forms, as seen in the Iranian case, of antagonistic attitudes, aggressiveness by completely exploiting and denigrating the very values of religion that would be defended (Graziano, 2014). In recent decades, the world has not only discovered that religions have not ended. On the contrary, their vitality has enabled them to reappear, while threatening the same freedoms that have accepted them, and to become, wherever a politicized role has been given, radical and fundamental, sometimes through violence, extreme cruelty, and political control (Sacks, 2017).

Nonetheless, religions are also an opportunity to create important horizontal bonds. The construction of forms of aggregation that have characterized religions, both positively and negatively, can represent today a sensible response to the perception of bewilderment, separation, and loneliness that technology and media have engendered since the last decades of the last century (Putnam, 2000; Sacks, 2020). This led to the daily presence of the many forms in which the religious can express themselves and the need to alphabetize themselves to knowledge and culture. Every day people engage in the environment, cultural systems, media information and social conflicts in such a way that may have implicit and/or explicit references to religion. People often do not understand the dynamics, questions, and influences that religions have in daily life. Similarly, they do not understand the positive and/or negative links of religions to politics, the economy, the environment, and social conflicts (Putnam, 2000; Sacks, 2020).

Since the last century, the processes of globalization, which have begun to define the characteristics we see today, have involved religious issues in various respects (Beyer, 1994; Dessi, 2019; Methenitis, 2019). As mentioned, political events, including forms of violence and terrorism which are offshoots of improper and instrumental use of religion, have led to economic changes, political responses, and defensive actions in places far from the scene of events. The phenomenon of interdependence, which is at the heart of globalization, also calls into question religion, as it is involved in global issues, from the ecological standpoint to those regarding the defence of rights, whose respect must guarantee the well-being of the planet and of humanity (Morin, 2016).

In addition to the involvement of religions in the construction of social and cultural realities oriented towards the culture of peace (Guetta, 2015), the same religions claim that globalization brings with it other issues that impact other aspects of secularization. Among these are migration, the spread of beliefs and faiths, and the change of religious coexistence in cities (Zanfrini, 2004; 2007).

The first aspect relates to migration due to persecution and intolerance in countries of origin. In the past, Protestant communities and Jewish communities in Europe had to seek refuge elsewhere in

order to protect themselves from the violence of politics in their homelands. However, the displacement of people due to the flight from violence and the search for a better quality of life had significant effects on religious and local political issues.

In the United States, for instance, more than a century of immigration of Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, and others has contributed to the gradual reduction of the once-overwhelming proportion of Protestants, which has fallen from two-thirds of the U.S. public in the 1960s to about half today. In Western Europe, a more recent influx of Muslim immigrants has been producing political tensions along with greater cultural diversity. And in some of the oil-rich Gulf states, large numbers of foreign workers – including Hindus from India, Christians from the Philippines, and religiously unaffiliated people from Europe and North America – are changing the face of once-homogeneous societies (Connor, 2012, 8).

With globalization, the ways to get in touch with different religious traditions have changed. Nowadays, the spread of religious beliefs and practices also takes place via the channels offered by the web. A clear example is the search for meditative practices or contexts for religious affiliation by individuals born into the so-called 'New Age'. The possibility of finding materials, texts, and comments regarding different religions sometimes helps individuals to deepen, compare, and stimulate their knowledge. Yet it, also hinders, damages, and discriminates other faiths while adopting an antagonistic worldview.

The last aspect to consider is the material and immaterial religious patrimony present in our realities and how this is changing in relation to the recognition of different local religious communities and their needs. There is an increasing need for places of gathering and prayer but also for those enabling to share experiences with other faiths, in either spiritual or secular environment. Through these places, an opportunity for mutual discovery of the meaning of faith, their symbolic, ritual and ethical relevance, is created. This helps enrich and improve the social context of reference (Pace, 2013).

### **3. Beyond conflicts and violence: the contribution of religions to the culture of peace**

The separation between politics and religion prevents the instrumentalization of the latter for the cause of conflict and violence. If politics and religions have no borders, the strong sense of belonging to a religious group legitimizes violent acts justified by the power of justice and the truth of faith in the name of God (Sacks, 2017).

In the analysis, it is thus important to recognize the aspects that concern conflicts and violence. Conflicts, no matter how tiring, full of tension, and difficult to sustain, must not be assimilated or viewed in the perspective of violence. Conflicts are an inherent part of human relations. In pursuing creative solutions and original transformations,

humans are not limited to compromise, but aim at the active involvement of all stakeholders with unexpected outcomes (Arielli, Scotto, 1998; Galtung, 2006; and 2007; Novara, 2011). These are not compromises or solutions imposed by external judges which would leave the parties unsatisfied. Interreligious and intercultural conflicts also have particular characteristics (Consorti, 2013). For those involved, there are usually no common rules, values, and customs to which parties can unequivocally refer. This does not mean justifying or accepting any form of behavior, nor does it mean that a wrong or right decision be left to judicial authorities alone. Interreligious conflicts must be recognized by establishing points of common interest, values, and prospects in order to enable transformation in a constructive way, thus seeking a positive contribution to social well-being.

The consideration is different for violence. In addition to being a voluntary destructive act that causes irreversible damage both physically and psychologically, violence acts on different levels either manifest or latent. Gradually, religion has been considered a hindering factor for the realization of liberal policies and democracy. Particularly in the European context, religion is considered an obstacle to the achievement of democracy and social well-being. With its dogmatic references to rigid identities, religion has been held responsible for struggles, conflicts, and violence between groups and states.

Some scholars, such as Galtung and Bourdieu, highlighted the relations between religion and violence. However, their interpretations of the dynamics between religions, conflicts, and violence cannot be understood without clarifying the meaning of violence. Johann Galtung (1969) distinguished between direct, physical violence and indirect violence; which could be structural and cultural. Structural violence is not perpetrated by a person but is the result of societal conditions. For example, it can refer to the fact that the life expectancy of people belonging to lower social classes is usually shorter than that of people belonging to the upper classes of society. Every society has its ways of justifying and concealing this kind of violence, while making it seem 'natural'. In Galtung's conceptual framework, this is called cultural violence. In his view, indirect forms of structural and cultural violence can breed direct forms of violence. Direct violence (e.g., family abuse against wives, children, and elders) can become structural and cultural, once it takes place frequently and is thus seen as a normal part of life (Galtung, 1969).

Pierre Bourdieu (2005) argues that instead of cultural violence, symbolic violence should be considered (Paolucci, 2011). Symbolic violence is the oppression of certain groups in society wherein victims feel that their condition is justified. A strong example of this is male domination, which is often justified in so many ways that women do not perceive themselves as being oppressed, despite the clear difference between the 'actual' and the 'potential' position of women in society. Women earn less and reach lower positions in society. This is also true

for societies where gender equality is high on the political agenda.

The relationship between religion and violence has been used not only by scholars to analyze armed conflicts in the world, but also by extremist and fundamentalist groups in order to justify armed conflicts, terroristic attacks, and the destruction of holy places.

In the course of history, religious affiliation has determined cultural violence and consequently, structural violence. This is illustrated in the marginalization and discrimination of Jews and Protestants in Catholic Italy until 1848 (Disegni, 1983; Melloni, 2002), or in the condition of *dhimmi* for Jews and Christians under Islam. Religion has thus been used to justify discrimination and violence on other religious minorities. Unfortunately, given the spread of anti-Semitism and persecution of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and other religious groups in different parts of the world, violence has been progressively associated with religion.

In contrast to the idea of violence carried out in the name of religion, there are religious communities and large well-organized civil institutions that claim the right to religion of billions of individuals regardless of class and/or national divides. These religious communities have particular cultural understandings, infrastructures and resources. When people of faith embrace the bold vision of multi-religious co-existence and solidarity, they can face seemingly insurmountable global problems like poverty, disease, injustice, inequality, and degradation (Consorti, Valdambrini, 2009).

The community aspect of cooperation plays a fundamental role in the survival of human beings (Putnam, 2000). The logics of antagonism, supremacy and competition for the elimination of the other/adversary neither facilitates social well-being nor sustains the sense of human and civil responsibility. However, based on human experience, the group can also become a place of protection or rivalry in relation to other groups. On the one hand, there is the ability to organize people and to develop their potential to live together. On the other hand, there is also the possibility of such an organization to transform into a tool of violence, aggressiveness, fear, anger, and combativeness (Sacks, 2017). This results in people's will to fight or harm those who are simply seen as enemies, not human beings. The enemy, like the victim, has neither identity nor name and thus belongs to a different group. Groups unite but also divide. If in the daily relational conflicts, we do not educate people to recognize this human complexity, we risk perpetuating the simplistic logic that truth is on one side only and that the non-transformation of conflict into a constructive sense legitimizes the use of violence.

Therefore, religiosity is the best indicator of civic involvement. It is more accurate than education, age, income, gender, or race. Incidentally, regular synagogue or church goers are more likely to report themselves as being happier than non-goers, and they also tend to live longer. Putnam's book demonstrates that religion has not died

(Putnam, 2000). It is a fundamental and primary source of community and altruism (Sacks, 2017).

By the end of the last century, civil society has gradually addressed the political-cultural request to religions to play a role in promoting peace. After the Barcelona Declaration of 1994 (Lillo, 2012; Guetta, 2015), which promoted the recognition of this important commitment to building peace through dialogue, UNESCO launched an intense programme for the development of mutual knowledge and dialogue amongst religious faiths, spirituality and secularity. Since the late 1990s, new forms of interreligious dialogue have been adopted by governments and civil society in response to the resurgence of wars, racism and persecution in the name of God (Guetta, Verdiani, 2011).

## Conclusion

The analysis carried out so far has highlighted the complexity of the different forms and aspects of religion within social organisations, cultures, and daily life practices. Contrary to the prediction of some scholars in the last century, religious communities have not disappeared. Along with policies of secularization, modernity, and globalization, religions have changed. Processes that resulted in the political and cultural adaptation of the former have given way to groups to appropriate different paths within each and every religion. On the one hand, they have maintained positions related to radicalism and fundamentalism leading to violence. On the other, they have also participated in dialogue for secularized, democratic, and liberal policies.

«There is something in the tenor of relations within a religious community that makes it the best exercise in citizenship and good neighbourliness. Religions in liberal democratic societies are our ongoing exercise in the art of association that Alex de Tocqueville viewed as the apprenticeship of freedoms. Religion creates community and communities create moral persons» (Sacks, 2020, 335).

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## **Pedagogical Implications of Logotherapy. Spiritual Experiences and Religious Values for an Intercultural Citizenship Education.**

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**ABSTRACT:** *In an age defined by many scholars as post-secular, in which beliefs, new beliefs and non-beliefs are incrementally forced to dialogue and to compare each other, the religiosity, or more generally the spirituality, is increasingly becoming a human category on which to reflect pedagogically for the construction of a citizenship of solidarity. In this sense, religious and non-religious experiences and values can be the existential pillar for a peaceful education in a time marked not only by intercultural dialogue but also by intercultural conflict. Viktor Frankl's logotherapy has succeeded in harmonizing the biological, psychic and existential dimensions in a person for the construction of balanced personality. In this way, this psychological approach can contribute effectively to an educational theory based on values dealing with the theme of spirituality and religion as existential attitudes guiding choices according to a principle of conscience. After an introduction of some value aspects (meaning) related to logotherapy, we will consider how pedagogical implications (concerning religious education) are useful for the educational construction of personal and community paths that a) are inclusive on a principle of dignity of the human being, b) can manage intercultural conflict according to a perspective of hierarchization (personal and community) of values and c) are participative in the construction of a peaceful society open to transcendence. It is not, in fact, by suppressing religiosity/spirituality in the name of scientific neutrality that one can build a bridge of value between different beliefs or between belief and non-belief. It is only through the category of meaning, the emblem of community between human beings, that we can weave the threads of a social network free from religious fanaticism or furious atheism. A dialogue is open only if it is supported by sincerity of positions, in which each person can show his thinking, feeling and acting. When The 'logo-educator' works in a context of religious education or spiritual growth, he considers this perspective of authenticity and he places the meanings (the values) in a person and in his uniqueness, not only ontological, but also experiential and, above all, relational one. Values are not discovered, values are found and hierarchized. Certainly, peace is an 'attitude-value' that every religious and spiritual culture must have the right amount of respect for.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Logotherapy, Values, Intercultural Citizenship, Religion, Conscience*

## Introduction

I personally believe that different research projects are constantly interconnected in every scholar's life, even when dealing with different topics and/or moving from one subject field to another. This paper comes out within the context of two research projects I am carrying out at the University of Rome Tor Vergata with the financial support of Intercultura Foundation. Specifically, I am hereby referring to a study about the challenge of religious pluralism in Italian schools (Macale, 2020) and an ongoing research on the experiences and values of children who have had a study experience abroad.

The subject matter of this paper, logotherapy, as a school of thought connects both the above-mentioned aspects, which I will analyse theoretically from an intercultural perspective. In particular, this paper will be divided as follows: 1. A consideration on the contemporary post-secular scenario; 2. The Franklian anthropology, with particular regard to the noetic dimension; 3. Pedagogical implications of logotherapy for intercultural citizenship.

### **1. Beliefs and Non-Beliefs: Religion and Spirituality in a Post-secular Context**

Today's society is defined by many observers as a post-secular society. Although perhaps overused, the term 'post-secular' is beginning to take on different meanings. Given that post-secular is not in contradiction with secular because we are not simply talking about a logical or a chronological consequence, what is happening in this era is quite unique compared to the past. For a better understanding of some of the peculiarities of the current time we will try to grasp the message of three scholars.

Naso (2021) affirms that post-secular does not mean secularization but 'selective' post-secularization. In fact, the author reminds us that there is still a negative trend in some indicators such as people's participation in religious life, priestly or pastoral vocations, the crisis of youth movements, the decline in religious marriages etc. In the Christian sphere for example, historic Protestantism and traditional Catholicism prove to be in crisis, but the same cannot be said for evangelical movements or charismatic Catholicism, which reap the benefits of post-secularism, as well as for those religions that are linked to lifestyles. In addition to various charismatic movements that have arisen within the great monotheistic religions, we now also have new forms of religiosity that are linked to the world of nature or have arisen within the world of the Internet (Campbell, 2017).

Also, there is a current derived from atheism that is called anatheism (Kearney, 2011). This is a symbol of the new questioning of a section of

atheism which is not in opposition to belief and which considers the possibility of answering some questions of meaning by re-evaluating the category of Transcendent.

Because of these peculiar forms of spirituality our time has been defined as the «fourth secularization» (Berzano, 2017). In fact, religious choices are less and less linked to a religious affiliation or a community and more connected to the individual sphere. In the light of this scenario, several categories have been introduced in the related literature to explain an increasingly personalized religious experience. We have terms like religiosity, spirituality and also worldview, with the latter used to encompass those inner reflections that include non-beliefs. For the purposes of my reflection none of these terms will be chosen, since we can refer to conscience as the place that gives meaning to each person's life. In this paper, conscience will be specifically interpreted as that precise place that has a transcendent quality, since «conscience not only refers to transcendence, it also originates in transcendence» (Frankl, 1997a: 63).

## **2. Noetic Dimension and (Religious) Values as Topics of Logotherapy**

According to Frankl's anthropology human beings are structurally made up of three dimensions: somatic, psychological and spiritual. The latter «does not have religious connotation but refers to the specifically human dimension» (Frankl, 1986, xvi). The spiritual dimension is called noetic because it allows human beings to carry out the processes of self-detachment and self-transcendence, i.e., the processes of going beyond the 'here and now' (*hic et nunc*) dimension and opening up to a dimension of spiritual meaning.

It is evident that the noetic dimension is based on an explicit philosophical worldview. More specifically, «it is based on three fundamental assumptions which form a chain of interconnected links: 1) Freedom of will; 2) Will to meaning; 3) Meaning of life» (Frankl, 1967: 2). Free-will means freedom of choice and «freedom is not something we 'have' and therefore can lose; freedom is what we 'are'» (Frankl, 1986: 97).

Reconsidering the previous anthropology, Frankl affirms:

The freedom of a finite being such a man is a freedom within limits. Man is not free from conditions, be they biological or psychological or sociological in nature. But he is, and always remains, free to take a stand toward these conditions; he always retains the freedom to choose his attitude toward them. Man is free to rise above the plane of the somatic (bodily), and psychic (mind) determinants of his existence. (Frankl, 1967: p. 3)

According to the principle of inner freedom, what allows human beings to give meaning to their existence are values. Logotherapy has three main categories of values:

- Creative values (from work to art)
- Experiential values as human encounters
- Attitudinal values (Frankl, 1984: 115-119).

The last category of values includes religious values, not only as the values that give meaning to everyday life but also as resilience factors in conditions of extreme hardship. In fact, when facing an unchangeable fate (such as an incurable disease) «we still can wrest meaning from life by giving testimony to the most human of all human capacities: the ability to turn suffering into human triumph» (Frankl, 1997b: 64).

Dialogue among religions and between beliefs and non-beliefs can take place on all these three types of values. However, considering the new perspective proposed by intercultural pedagogy – which has moved from a ‘knowledge of the other’ to a ‘consciousness of the other’ (Granata, 2018) – as well as the idea that interreligious dialogue does not take place among religions as abstract entities but among people (Salvarani, 2003), it is easy to understand that the biographical encounter remains the real possibility for an authentic encounter between horizons of meaning. It is not only the cultural significance of a religious or areligious choice that determines the humanism of the different (Abdallah-Preteceille, 2001) because the value choice made by each individual human being occurs according to an osmotic process that takes place between the cultural proposal of the context where one was born or raised and the personal re-elaboration of the existing values.

### *2.1. From Values to Frankl's Interest in Religion*

In the history of the humanities the question of values brings with it an intricate philosophical question, namely whether or not values have a subjective rather than an objective connotation.

For Frankl, everything depends on the meaning we give to the word ‘value’. If we give it a relativistic meaning, we are facing a wrong perspective because human beings do not create values autonomously but perceive them in reality, in particular in the tension between will to meaning and context. It is therefore correct to speak of uniqueness instead of relativity because uniqueness is not a quality of just a specific situation but also of life as a whole, since life is a succession of unique situations (Frankl, 1969).

Thus, the person is unique and the values, which are manifold, are given. These values are also recognised in their uniqueness by several people over time and at the same time shared within a community. Indeed, Frankl writes that

There are also meanings shared by human beings through society and, even more, through history. Rather than being related to unique

situations, these meanings refer to the human condition. It is these meanings that we call values. Thus values can be defined as those universal meanings that crystallise typical situations that society or the whole of humanity has to face. (Frankl, 1969)

So, values are in relationship because the person, as a being, is always a being in relationship (Frankl, 2001: 33): with himself/herself when he/she chooses to be what he/she wants to be and with others in the negotiation of values. Some meanings are so deeply rooted in the human condition that they have turned into symbols as elements of identity no longer of individual persons only, but of communities. Among them, of course, are religious symbols, which have a strong aggregative function as they arouse belongingness (*symballo*) but at the same time can also break up, thus emphasizing the differences between one community and another. The next paragraph will deal with how such differences – although still important – cannot be a reason for violence according to an intrinsic religious orientation, i.e., an authentic choice of faith.

Frankl's interest in religion is not of a fideistic or doctrinal nature, but is related to the psychic health of the person. Religion provides human beings with a spiritual anchor, i.e., a feeling of security that they can find nowhere else in the same way (Frankl, 1969: 144). This is what is defined religious value as an existential meaning. According to Frankl, the religious sense is existent and present in each and every person, albeit buried in the unconscious (Frankl, 1997a: 151). Furthermore, clinical evidence suggests «that atrophy of the religious sense in man results in a distortion of his religious concepts» (Frankl, 1997a: 75)

While the prime motivation was pleasure for Freud or power for Adler, what guides man according to Frankl is the will to meaning (*logos*<sup>1</sup>), which interacts between the person's interiority and the challenges of reality (Fizzotti, 2008: 67). According to Frankl's anthropology, the human being is always directed – both in the depths of consciousness and in the depths of being – toward an ultimate meaning (Frankl, 1997a).

### **3. From (Religious) Values to Intercultural Citizenship**

The spiritual – or rather noetic – dimension of human beings is what gives meaning to each person's existence in sharing values within a community – an existential meaning which religious belief is an expression thereof and which can dialogue with other existential meanings, even if these are not overtly religious.

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<sup>1</sup> In logotherapy «logos means 'meaning'. However, it also means 'spirit'. And Logotherapy takes the spiritual or ontological dimension fully into account» (Frankl, 1967 :74)

In this last paragraph we will try to understand what pedagogical implications logotherapy may have in addressing the issue of intercultural citizenship, with particular focus on interreligiousness.

### *3.1. Identity for Interreligious Dialogue*

As Frankl reminds us, being a person means being absolutely different from every other person and it is precisely in one's uniqueness that a fertile ground for dialogue can be found. This also applies to religious identity, which – as an important aspect of personality – must be protected and valued even in strictly secular contexts: in adults its incompleteness or lacking formation is the symptom of a more or less serious disorder of the same (Filippi, 1994). Moreover, it is only between identities that a confrontation can provide ideas for co-educational growth.

Arendt reminds us that «not man, but men (= human beings) inhabit this planet!». In this respect, personal identity is a process. In fact, people can also distance themselves from their own culture as they reinvent and/or adapt it to their own spiritual biographies. Although identity enters into social and cultural relations it always has its own capacity for self-transcendence and for giving new meanings which sometimes may also be different from the proposed ones. Frankl even states that «once the self reflects on itself, it is no longer the true self that exhibits itself» (Frankl, 1997; 155) and therefore re-entering into relationship can continually bring novelty.

Dialogue is no longer between you and us, but primarily between you and me and involves our personal identities and meanings. It is important to remember that when Frankl uses the word 'encounter', he uses it from a clear perspective derived from existentialist literature, where existing actually means coexisting (Frankl, 1985). Several educational projects have taken up this educational perspective, for example the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, which points out that stereotypes that do not help build an authentic intercultural dialogue can be overcome only by looking for originality in the other instead of focusing on his or her belonging (Malone, 2020).

### *3.2. Potential Intercultural Conflicts*

We should also consider that this encounter between identities can be conflictual.

According to a Franklian perspective there may be a misunderstanding about the topic of discussion but not about the freedom to exist, which is a founding value. This means that there is no place for fanaticism, violence or indifference because every human being recognizes free-will as a right for every other human being. In fact, freedom of will is based on the existential meaning, and «the meaning is more than being» (Frankl, 1969: 128). In order to feel



authentically human, a human being must accept the challenges of reality. The interreligious challenge – or intercultural challenge in the case of non-belief – should be seen as a social tension toward the meaning of life.

Based on this concept, one can think of an inter-religious or inter-spiritual dialogue which supports forms of negotiation of values that can give rise to peaceful coexistence, as this would be based on the dignity of the person in his or her trajectory of meaning. Indeed, as Gramigna (2019, 151) notes, the path in exporting democracy is not practicable today because «what Jaspers effectively called the need for a 'community in truth' [...] where existential and political demands intersect on the single philosophical horizon is missing».

There is a need to move away from essentialist models of cultures that emphasise diversity and often lead to a clash rather than to mutual consideration. Biographical exchange is the new frontier of intercultural pedagogy because importance is given not to the identity of a community, but to the personal identity that re-elaborates the symbols and values of belonging.

I think it is important to understand that inter-religious dialogue cannot be only 'cultural' (i.e., referring to religious studies) nor only theological (sometimes too far from people's lives).

Interreligious dialogue should make use of religious or para-religious sciences but should focus mainly on religious or non-religious experiences that give value to existence. Knowledge about religion enables us to confront ignorance as a form of intolerance, the biographical encounter develops a capacity for acceptance – which is a welcoming attitude between human beings –, even in those regions of the world where war is often justified in the name of God, i.e. contexts where careful analysis and interfaith dialogue projects can prove to be very useful (Grit, 2019; Petersen, Wandera, 2020).

## Conclusion

We have considered the Franklian anthropology, and we have underlined that the noetic dimension is an authentic human dimension as it is a sense category. Existential meaning in human beings is acknowledged and conscious in terms of values.

Each of us has a hierarchy of values discovered through the encounter between our conscience and reality. The encounter between value hierarchies can also be conflictual, but no encounter or clash of values can deny the fundamental value of freedom that underpins all existence as well as the importance of protecting it.

For this reason, being human means being conscious and being responsible (Frankl, 1986, 5). In fact, «everyone likes to find the truth about himself, make decisions and feel unique. But logotherapy

reminds us that freedom is not likely to bring meaning if it is not exercised responsibly». (Fabry, 1979, 166).

Intercultural citizenship education for a caring and democratic society must consider that

Responsibleness has two intentional referents. It refers to a meaning for whose fulfilment we are responsible, and also to a being before whom we are responsible. Therefore the sound spirit of democracy is but one-sidedly conceived of if understood as freedom without responsibleness (Frankl, 1969: 49)

In conclusion, my purpose is to reflect about the notion that an authentic intercultural citizenship nowadays requires dialogue on the meaning of life and not only having a cognitive knowledge of the other. Relationships are not only based on cultural factors but also on personal experiences, especially in a multicultural era.

The role of the logo-educator in an intercultural perspective is on the one hand helping people in 'making value choices and accepting values that guarantee the achievement of the meaning of their existence' (Styczyński, 2015: 78); on the other hand, it assures the respect of the inner freedom of the other and the choice of other attitudinal values that, by their anthropological nature, cannot fail in sharing the responsibility toward life, i.e. a form of responsibility that finds its ontological grounding in the moral dignity of each person.

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## Building Dialogue through Habermas Theorisation and Islamic Tradition's Values

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper stems from the consideration that Muslim migrants seem to be in the public debate the problem of European integration. Although there is actually a lot of racism related to ethnicity, the religious question raises many debates. Starting from a brief analysis of this perception, we will focalise on the religious aspect of coexistence inside Muslim communities and between Muslim and the whole society. We refer to a Conference held in Marrakesh in 2016 in which important personalities from across the Muslim world looking for peacefully solutions to the tensions that run through Muslim societies. In order to achieve their aim of promoting peace, they intend to refer to both ancient Islamic and current Western sources, including an interesting reference to Habermas. Accepting this invitation to use his conceptual tools, we explore his theories on religion and his neutralising translation method. Then we try to apply the proposed method to some concepts from the Muslim tradition, showing some of them that can be categorized as extremist and others as tolerant. In particular, I will refer to the Sufi tradition and to the mystic Ibn 'Arabi in opposition to Ibn Taymiyya and Wahhabism.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Dialogue, Tolerance, Islamic Tradition, Neutralizing Translation, Sufism*

### Introduction

Migrations and integration of foreigners in Europe have been at the centre of the public debate for decades and, in the last 10 years, this debate has become increasingly heated and polarized. This is also a consequence of the significant migratory flow from Arab and Muslim countries following the so-called *Arab springs* (i.e. the rebellions, protests, revolution, civil wars and wars) that have inflamed the southern shores of the Mediterranean in various ways.

These political upheavals are caused both by economic, social and geopolitical reasons and by opposing religious trends. On the one hand, we can observe pressures towards the secularization of the state, of family laws and so on, and on the other hand, a religious fundamentalism with a call to return to a mythical past, which has had its most resounding realization in Syria's war with Daesh (known as

Isis). This debate on religion has spilled over into Europe with migrations, making the Muslim migrant the problem of European integration, as he is often seen as the unassimilable migrant, with a superficial association between Muslims and Islamic extremists.

We are therefore looking for theories that promote dialogue and help deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices, for Western theories not rejected by Muslims as colonial, racist, imperialist and assimilationist theories; and for Arab-Muslim theories that cannot be categorized as fundamentalist.

In his framework speech at the Marrakesh Conference (2016) Sheikh Abdallah Bin Bayyah point out the Habermas' political and philosophical proposal as a welcome Western production (Bin Bayyah, 2016). Accepting this invitation to use the conceptual tools offered to us by the German philosopher, the first aim of this work is to explain what Habermas proposes about the role of religion in contemporary societies.

I will therefore explain his theory, on how to build a communication aimed at understanding between different faiths and between believers and atheists in order to build a cohesive and inclusive society, and the method he proposes, that is the «neutralising translation» (Maceratini, 2020). The second aim of this work is to attempt to apply the proposed method to some concepts from the Muslim tradition that could help build and spread a tolerant attitude within the Muslim community and between the Muslim community and society. The intention is to show some concepts of traditions, opposed to Islamic extremism, useful to fight such extremism without the risk of falling back into Islamophobia, which only nourishes the Islamist phenomenon. In particular, I will refer to the Sufi tradition and the mystic Ibn 'Arabi in opposition to Ibn Taymiyya (Wahhabism).

## **1. The Marrakesh Conference**

In 2016, The Moroccan Minister of Endowment and Islamic Affairs Ahmad Al Tawfiq, together with the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies based in the United Arab Emirates, organized the Marrakesh Conference on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities (25-27/01/2016). This conference was held under the auspices of The King Mohammed VI of Morocco and participate in it hundreds of Muslim scholars and intellectuals from over 120 countries, along with representatives of Islamic and international organizations, as well as leaders from diverse religious groups and nationalities.

The conference stemmed from the need to reflect on and react to the serious situation of violence and religious extremism experienced within the Muslim world affecting Muslims as well as peoples of other

faiths throughout the world. It aimed to reaffirm the principle of the Charter of Medina, described as

[...] a constitutional contract between the Prophet Muhammad, God's peace and blessings be upon him, and the people of Medina, which guaranteed the religious liberty of all, regardless of faith (Marrakesh Declaration, 2016, 1).

The declaration:

Call upon the various religious groups bound by the same national fabric to address their mutual state of selective amnesia that blocks memories of centuries of joint and shared living on the same land; we call upon them to rebuild the past by reviving this tradition of conviviality, and restoring our shared trust that has been eroded by extremists using acts of terror and aggression (Marrakesh Declaration, 2016, 2).

In the Framework speech by His Eminence Sheikh Abdallah Bin Bayyah (2016) we can read that the Muslim tolerant and future-oriented perspective don't reject everything that comes from the West in the name of defending traditions, but separate what is good from what is bad. The document points out that they refuse the Western tradition that implement the Hegelian synthesis in which one side dominates the other but appreciate the Habermas' political and philosophical proposal as a welcome Western production insofar as it aims to promote a respectful dialogue between cultures and religions. In particular, he appreciates his concept of *National Constitutionalism*

[...] that describes equitable relationships among individuals within a group that live on the same land. This group is not necessarily bound by a shared ethnicity, historical narrative, or religion. Their framework is their constitution, shared values, and a system and laws that outline the responsibilities and rights of its citizens. It is a cooperative society comprised of individuals who are united by a contractual agreement in such a manner that even the newest member obtains the same rights and responsibilities as its oldest member (Bin Bayyah, 2016, 11-12).

The paper relates the Habermas concept of constitutionalism to the constitutionalism of the Charter of Medina and to The Charter of the United Nations and its Amendments, which include a declaration of human rights, considering the three sources as all aiming at dialogue and peaceful coexistence.

### **1. Habermas' reflection on religion.**

It is not the purpose of this paper to provide a summary of the vast literature on this author related to this topic. Despite this, we can

undoubtedly refer to a recent Italian publication to get a general overview of the author's theories and their reception in different research fields (Corchia *et al.* 2020).

Specifically, we can refer to the work of Ceppa (2020) for what concern the relationship between religion and democracy. For a critical discussion on the possibility and usefulness of applying concepts built on Western society to non-Western societies in general and Muslim societies in particular, we can refer to the work of Affuso (2020). It shows the applicability of Habermas' concepts, in particular that of *public sphere*, even outside the context in which they were born, due to their ductility and porosity.

It should also be borne in mind that, while Habermas' reflections on public sphere effectively originate in European society's history, his reflections on religion take on greater relevance in his theorizing precisely when the issue of Islamic terrorism emerges in the European debate (Borradori, 2015). He therefore already takes non-European cultures and religions into account in a non-Eurocentric way, as evidenced by the appreciation shown to his theory in the above-mentioned Marrakesh Declaration.

### *1.1. The role of religion in contemporary societies.*

Habermas theory is opposed to theories that foresaw the end of religions in Contemporary age, theories that were born with the Enlightenment and its faith in science. The author emphasizes that in reality religion has not disappeared at all, indeed, it is regaining ground thanks to the vacuum left by the end of great political narratives such as communism and thanks to the need for community felt by contemporary man who is increasingly isolated and socially disconnected. In this individualistic age, religious communities become a social bond on which the secular state itself relies; thus the modern idea of a state opposed to religious powers is outdated in practice, as in the contemporary age states and religious powers are allies.

States and secular civil societies benefit from the social and solidarity-based activities promoted by religious communities, which possess horizons of meaning that people cannot find in actual materialist society, and which are currently necessary for this society not to collapse on itself. For these reasons, the secular state cannot consider religious citizens as strangers to it, but must include their views in the public debate as equal citizens with non-religious citizens (Habermas, 2016).

Within the Habermas' truly impressive bibliography, we are interested in those works that deal directly with religions and Islamic religion in particular, thus his most recent production, which began in 2001 with an interview on Islamic terrorism. In her introduction, the author highlights the intellectual correlation between Islamic terrorism and Western Enlightenment philosophy, considering the latter, imposed



in practice through European colonialism, as a cause, and Islamic terrorism as a desperate reaction to it (Borradori, 2015).

Inside the Western debate about religious extremism, Habermas proposes one thesis aimed at striking against the sclerotic secularism of contemporary liberalism. To exclude religion from the public sphere, as has been done in Europe and especially in France, is to deprive society of important resources in the foundation of meaning (Ceppa, 2018).

Habermas affirms that institutional secularism of multicultural democracy represents today the condition to the revival of religion and that the secular reason is the constitutional basis of confrontation and deepening of religious authenticity. The meaning of secularism changed as much as the way of believing (Ceppa, 2018).

Religious extremism is more about a way of believing than about a specific text or religious dogma. From his point of view, whether we discuss fundamentalist Islamic, Christian or Hindu beliefs, we are always talking about violent reactions to the modern way in which we understand and practice religion in the Western world. In this sense, extremist is not simply a return to a pre-modern understanding of religion, or in other world, to a mythical past: it is a fearful response to modernity, perceived as a threat rather than an opportunity. By definition, Habermas argues, every religious doctrine is based on a dogmatic core of believes, otherwise it would not involve faith. Nevertheless, with the onset of modernity, religions had to give up the 'universally binding character of their doctrine, which, as such, lends itself to being politically imposed' in order to coexist within a pluralistic society. The transition from the pre-modern to the modern mode of belief posed a monumental challenge to universal religions, i.e., those whose exclusive claim to truth was supported and confirmed by political situations «from whose centre the periphery seemed to vanish into infinity» (Habermas, 2016, 543).

It is exactly the situation of Islam as a universal religion inside the immense Islamic empires: the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750), the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1517) and the Ottoman one (1517-1923), of which one can easily perceive the spatial but also temporal immensity if taken all three together as the time and space of Islamic power on the world.

The Islamic community, in Arabic *'Umma'* أمة, have lost its central political point of reference only a century ago, with the adoption of another political model, that of the national state, with its alien concept of state's laicism.

### *1.2. The neutralising translation*

The neutralizing translation (Maceratini, 2020) is the transposition of religious values onto a secular signification system so that they can be discussed rationally and enhanced within society (Habermas, 2016), it is a cooperative process capable of safeguarding the force of articulation

and the resources of meaning enshrined in the religious discourse (Ceppa, 2018).

It is how modernity have been built on Christian values, which were translated rather than rejected. The universalistic egalitarianism of modernity derives from the theological model of an Adam created 'in the image and similarity' of God. The 'discourse of modernity' received direct impulses from Christian concepts such as crisis consciousness, the expectation and temporal projection of the past onto the future, the ideas of political emancipation and social solidarity and fraternity (Ceppa, 2020).

The tolerance's concept itself has a religious origin, as a solution for the religious wars that inflamed Medieval and Modern Europe, and secular politics only later adopted it. This European tolerance is inherently unilateral: the prevailing authority arbitrarily sets the limit of tolerance, the boundary between what is permissible and what is not. However, and this is the core of Habermas' argument in defence of tolerance, the unilateral nature of religious tolerance is neutralized by the dynamics of a participatory political system such as parliamentary democracy (Borradori, 2015).

Emancipation, solidarity, tolerance, etcetera, are all ideas that post-metaphysical philosophy has learned to extrapolate from the religious encapsulation in which it initially received them. The main idea is that, in the ideas' history, science and faith had not run on two separate and opposed roads, as a positivist reconstruction of history has tried to inculcate, but in reality, they have gone hand in hand, contributing to each other in a reciprocal relationship of influence since ancient time. It is necessary to recognize the cognitive, and not only spiritual, drive that marks the birth of world religions in the middle of the first millennium BC. It would therefore be unreasonable to marginalize those strong traditions, as if they were an archaic remnant, instead of illuminating the internal connection that links them to modern forms of thought. Religious traditions still provide the articulation of the consciousness of what is missing. They defend from oblivion the dimensions of our social and personal coexistence, in which even the progress of cultural and social rationalization has produced immense destruction. Why should they not contain within themselves semantic potential that, once transformed into the language of motivation, and after giving birth to their profane content of truth, can exercise their own inspirational force? (Habermas, 2016, Introduction)

The intercultural integration needs, to be successful, not only that religious communities develop from within the indispensable conditions of modernity. It also needs to question the self-idea cultivated by secular reason, which has become sclerotic and rigid. There must therefore be an effort of self-analysis and mutual understanding between secular and religious citizens, without delegating the effort only to the religious. Secularized citizens have to develop the openness to a possible rational content of religious contributions and the

willingness to participate in the cooperative translation of these contents from religious idioms into a universally accessible language. The secularism of the scientific image of the world insists that the archaic conceptual forms of religious doctrines have been overcome en bloc by the advances of official science. Instead, post-metaphysical thought distrusts both naturalistic scientific syntheses and revealed truths, and considers it necessary that religious consciousness become reflexive in modernity and secularised consciousness overcome itself reflexively in the contemporary world, in two complementary processes of learning (Habermas, 2016).

## 2. Dialogue and Islamic Tradition

What are Muslim traditions to refer to in order to find values that tend towards peaceful coexistence? Or, to say it with other worlds, what religious contents it is useful to translate in a secular language?

Muslim tradition is not a monolithic, despite the false image of Islam propagated by fundamentalists and Islamophobes. To contrast this false image, contemporary scholars emphasize the existence of multiple forms of Islam.

The absence of a centralised magisterium, the diversity and theological schools within the Orthodoxy, schismatic denominations, and adaptations to various regional realities are all elements that have led to talk of different Islams, each with its own physiognomy and identity. These emphases, which are absolutely acceptable and necessary, have however in some cases led to the opposite excess, in the sense that the myth of single Islam is in danger of giving rise to an equally false image, which is of a disorderly jumble of ideas and trends, without homogeneity and compactness. In reality, the traditional Muslim world has been somewhere between these two extremes, constantly conforming to an inspirational principle that we could define as unity in diversity (Ventura, 2005, 5).

To find this unity and this diversity we look first of all at the principal source of all Muslim Traditions: The *Qur'an* (Ventura, 2010). The subject is quite complex to be dealt with in a short paragraph, so, without any pretension of being exhaustive, I will limit myself to providing useful examples for the reflection carried out in this work, without going too deep into the abysses of Islamic theology.

Then we look at the two major voices in medieval times, whose disagreements still permeate the theological and political debate in Muslim societies today, that are the Tradition that came from Ibn Taymiyya and whose principal current realization is the Saudi Wahhabism, and the Sufi Tradition and the mystic Ibn 'Arabi (Ventura, 2003; Leccese, 2017)

### 2.1. *The Qur'an*

According to tradition, the Qur'an communicates the word of God with its material characteristics (language and sounds, letters and writing) and with the spirit and deep meaning, which animates those sounds. To appreciate the true meaning of the Qur'an, therefore, one must not only hear and see but also understand. This understanding is difficult because, by being encapsulated in sound and visual forms, the divine word has become occulted, escaping the ordinary human grasp (Ventura, 2010, XI). The attention that Muslim societies has always dedicated to reading and interpreting the holy book gave rise to the Koranic sciences (*al-'ulūm al-qur'āniyya*) (ivi, XXXI). An important place is occupied by the chronological reconstruction of the revelations, or historicization, since later revelations can abrogate earlier ones if they differ; this is important because it means that, although the Qur'an is eternal, divine indications can be adapted to different circumstances at the time. Apart from chronology, Muslim community needed the sciences of interpretation to explain the meaning of obscure terms, the plots of sketched stories, the meaning of symbols in metaphors. The science of interpretation was divided into two types, one based on tradition and one based on personal opinion (ivi, XXXV-VIII). A separate mention should be made of mystically inspired interpretations, which we will discuss in the paragraph 2.2 as well as modern interpretations discussed in the paragraph 2.3. (XL-XLII)

After this dramatically synthetic introduction to the study of the Qur'an, we can read some verses, whose content is of interest for the purposes of this work:

Men, We have created you from a male and a female, and have created several peoples and tribes among you so that you may know each other. However, the noblest of you is the one who fears God the most. God is wise and knowledgeable about everything (Ventura, 2010, 322, v. 49:13).

And to you We have revealed the book in all truth in confirmation of the scriptures revealed before and for their protection. So judge between them according to what God has revealed, and do not follow their desires in preference to the truth that has come to you. To each one of you We have appointed a rite and a way, but if God had willed, He would have made you one community, and if He has not done so, it is to test you in what He has given you. So compete in good things, and all of you will return to God, and He will inform you of that wherein you differ (Ventura, 2010, 66, v. 5:48)

The rite and way assigned to each refers to the different religious laws and practices followed by human communities, differences that hide the basic unity of the divine message. The test to which people are subjected through these diversities could be precisely that of understanding the common ground beyond their multiple expressions. (Ventura, 2010, 494, v.48)

## *2.2. The Sufi tradition and the mystic Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240)*

Sufism, unlike rigidly structured currents such as Wahhabism, is not a monolithic school of thought, but a mystical approach to religion that embraces many different characters, thoughts, traditions and brotherhoods. A common point is the centrality given to the inner religious experience of the believer, in direct relationship with God, over the external aspects of religion, linked to law and social conventions (Ventura, 2003, 2005, 2016, 2017). A famous verse justifies the idea of an inner Qur'an to be read not academically but spiritually:

We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves until it is evident to them that this Qur'an is truth (v. 41:53)

The word of God can pass from the exterior universe of the sensitive horizons to the inner depths of man. To do this the Sufi mystics read the Qur'an as directed to themselves, as an intimate conversation. Sufi interpretation aims at the continuous search for the hidden meaning and attempts to remove the veils of ordinary language, to dissolve the symbols and to perceive the invisible (Ventura, 2010, XL).

This current of Islam flourished in the time of the great Islamic empires like the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258), one of the biggest empire of the history that stretched from Sicily to Iran, in which people of different ethnicities, religions and cultures cooperate peacefully to the cultural and economic development. Given the temporal, geographical and philosophical extent of Sufism, we must choose a point of reference within it, and we will therefore refer to Ibn Arabi, especially because of the severe opposition that his thought found among the more rigid and extremist currents like that founded by Ibn Taymiyya (m. 1328) (Leccese, 2017, 140)

From the Qur'anic verses we read, we can derive an idea of identity and tolerance related with Sufism. According to Ibn 'Arabi, in God there is no otherness but only identity, therefore God accepts in himself as identical all the separate individualities of the world. Any part of the world is the whole world and all things in the world are particular manifestations of God; from this view derives an inability to hostility towards adversaries seen as identical to themselves in God even if experienced as otherness in the world. Divine unity preserves all diversity, as opposed to Western tolerance from which derives assimilationist integration that marginalizes irreconcilable aspects of differentiation in order to centre the relationship on common values and principles, thus operating a selection that Sufi unity does not operate. (Smirnov, 2003).

The Salafi's polemic began early in the history of Sufism, and is often associated with the anti-Sufi arguments of Ibn Taymiyya in his critiques of Ibn 'Arabi. The modernist Rida (d.1935) gave to this polemic a new lease on life in the twentieth century, editing Ibn Taymiyya's works and

influencing later Salafi ideologues such as Hasan al-Banna (d.1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. For Ouṭb, Sufism was the first blow to be struck at the integrity of Islamic thought and the existence of the «Islamic nation» (Cornel, 2004)

### *2.3. From Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) to Wahhabism (XVIII-XXI centuries) and Salafism*

In 1258, the Mongols conquered and destroyed Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate. Arab people find themselves caught between the Mongol invasions from the east and the Christian crusades from the west. As the empire disintegrated, tolerant and universal ideas lost force and intolerant and particularistic ones gained strength, with a racial view of Islam as the religion of the Arabs. These views attributed the collapse of the empire to the moral degeneration caused by the estrangement from the Arab Islam of the origins. They advocate a return to *pure* Islam with the elimination of foreign elements.

Ibn Taymiyya was the major voice of this period and the first reference for this type of interpretation in Contemporary age. His interpretation is insofar the foundation stone of Wahhabism (at the beginning of contemporary western colonialism) and Salafism in the age of Arab struggles for independence. These interpretations of Islam see the test between people not as a challenge of understanding but as a challenge of domination.

Wahhabism developed alongside the Saudi monarchy, as a strict interpretation of Sunnis, but bordering on heresy. It was tolerated by other Sunnis and spread thanks mainly to the monarchy's oil power and western support from an anti-Turkish perspective. Its conservative character, with little concern for social problems and not at all revolutionary, soon made Islamist social and revolutionary movements such as the Muslim brothers in Egypt distance themselves (Ventura, 2005, 12-14).

Salafism is a trend that developed, particularly in Egypt, as part of what is known as *Islamic modernism* in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is so defined because of the ideal return it proposes to the era of the Salaf, the ancient ancestors, seen as representatives of a purity that subsequent developments in Islam had caused to be lost (Ventura, 2005, 3). The Egyptian Sayyid Ouṭb (1906-1966) elaborated socio-political theories that have more to do with the revolutionary and Third World ideologies of the West than with the religion of Islam. He reinvented *Jihād*, as a justification for revolutionary armed struggle against corrupt regimes in Islamic countries. Islam was only an ideological pretext; deprived of traditional religious culture, Ouṭb systematically dismantled the supporting structures of Sunnis, completing the work already begun by the Wahhabis (Ventura, 2005, 14-17). The modern interpretation of the Qur'an has acquired Western criteria, moving away from the traditional ones and shifting the focus from God to man. Most of these modern interpretations are difficult for

believers to understand and they prefer tradition, with the exception of Qutb commentary, which enjoys a wide circulation (Ventura, 2010, XLI-XLII).

## Conclusion

The cross-cultural challenge is not posed to Islam by the needs of contemporary society, but it is intrinsic to Islam from its origins, and ideas about how to manage diversities can be found within it. We can read extremist interpretations of Islam as a response to external aggressions and not as the basic message of Islam. Sufi Islamic Tradition have developed in many century interesting concepts of diversity and tolerance, whose neutralizing translation could be useful within the contemporary public debate on religion and coexistence.

The Iraqi Sufi 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili (d.1428), disciple of Ibn Arabi, sees non-believers as an indispensable component within God's plans (Cornel, 2004); Habermas sees believers as an indispensable component within the process of development and the current working mechanism of the secular state. The tension between faith and secularism can only be resolved by intellectual positions of this kind that not simply 'tolerate' them as wrong, not only recognize dignity in the other camp, but that recognize their ontological necessity within a much broader project.

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## The Relevance of the Religious Dimension in the Education to Universal Citizenship

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**ABSTRACT:** *This essay highlights the potential role of the religious dimension in the positively utopian hypothesis of an education to universal citizenship as a fundamental pedagogical target. Starting from some specific theoretical studies, we carried out several exploratory surveys and we also acquired some empirical data during some interreligious formative seminars. We also carried out a national research by survey in Italy, involving a significative sample of 2.675 religious people, which provided many data about the representations and experiences connected to the religious dimension. When we speak about the 'religious dimension', it is necessary to distinguish some elements in it. First of all, religiosity: an interactive and dynamic connection between an institutional, historical religion and the psychological and spiritual dynamisms linked to it. Secondly, the religious sense, which we hypothesize to be the transculturally characterized generative element of the religious experience. Both of the above-mentioned elements have to be differentiated from religion, which is an institutional symbolic system characterized by a proper theological and philosophical apparatus, a specific rituality and an organized structure. The interreligious dialogue does not happen among religions, but first of all among people's religious experiences. The scientific and social disqualification of religion itself has delegitimized religiosity as well, reducing it to a mere emotive-affective dimension. On the contrary, as we will try to demonstrate, religiosity presents a positive potential also with respect to civil cohabitation, on condition that it is understood and promoted through conscious educative processes. The evolution of the religious conscience toward tolerance can be born only from a religiosity able to understand the human limits in receiving any possible 'revelation', and consequently able to presume that the one God may have been known by different names or perceived tentatively. Under these conditions, we will be able to reduce conflict among human interpretations, even in religious matters.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Religion, Religiosity, Religious Sense, Education, Structural elements of Religiosity and of Education*

### 1. Religion, 'religiosity', 'religious sense'

First of all, it is necessary to distinguish between religiosity and religion. A religion is a symbolic and institutional system, with its own

theological and philosophical apparatus, a specific rituality and an organized, formalized structure. Thus, a religion is a historical and cultural object, always definable and describable. Religiosity, instead, is an interactive and dynamic intertwining between a form of institutional and historical religion and the psychological and spiritual dynamisms established with regard to it both from an individual and a social point of view. Consequently, religiosity presents a complex and global, concrete and personal dimension, which comprises psychological, anthropological and widely philosophical dimensions. It is always a concrete, existential datum, characterized by social sharing and a formative dynamism. It is born and develops in the same vital arch marked by formative processes, undergoing phases of evolution or involution throughout life, passing through specific stages of development (Fowler, 1981; 2000<sup>2</sup>). It can be hypothesized that, on the one hand, religiosity is a specific dimension of the human experience, while, on the other hand, it makes possible and orients the religious experience itself.

One first theoretical problem is summarized in a question: does there exist, in every concrete religious experience, a generative element, characterized by universality, or at least by transversality? This question alludes to the so-called 'religious sense', which is studied by different philosophical horizons and scientific perspectives. Nevertheless, the religious sense, this supposed transversal element, cannot be investigated outside the concreteness of the religious experience, within which it can be hypothesized and described at least through signs. Starting from this theme/problem, the research group the authors of this papers belong to has been carrying out a research program since 2010 at Bologna University (Moscato *et al.*, 2012; Arici *et al.*, 2014). To date, despite numerous publications and the development of a wide fieldwork at a national level (Moscato, Caputo, Gabbiadini *et al.*, 2017), we are still in a situation of work in progress in investigating religion and religious formation.

We are now oriented to consider (at least provisionally) religiosity as a personal quality, consisting of a group of orientations and attitudes, of intimate and deep beliefs that operate on one's motivational system, on his criteria of judgement and on his ethical choices. In particular, religiosity includes the mental representation of a relationship with the Divine, who is characterized by an image and a name, and to which the individual refers with specific forms of worship and prayer. So, religiosity is not a general, abstract category, but an existential, concrete and highly personal/subjective phenomenon. Such a concrete subjectivity doesn't exclude social sharing and an experience of membership, which are equally typical of the religious dimension.

It is possible to hypothesize that there is a conscious and unconscious structural dimension of the religious experience, which may also have a generative or germinal value in educational processes (Moscato, 2012). However, at the current state of knowledge it is not possible to state that

it is a universal element (pertaining to humanity itself) or a transversal element, that is, shared across different historical religious experiences and cultures). Neither is it possible to exclude this possibility.

On a theoretical and philosophical level, there are different theoretical positions and researches that underline the universal structure of religious experience, or highlight one of its probably innate generative components, (for example, the studies by Rudolph Otto, Mircea Eliade, Julien Ries). These authors, as well as some others, theorize and accept a notion of 'religious sense', however defined, as the source of religiosity, and incline to attributing ontological consistency to the manifestations of the sacred as it appears to the religious experience (which thus becomes the meeting point between human subjectivity and the Divine Object that reveals itself). From these perspectives, which also include some theological or pedagogical positions (Castellucci, 2012; Pinelli, 2017), the religious sense is not only a remote, archaic and indefinite matrix, but also (and above all) the inner structure of the religious conscience, the dynamizing core of concrete religion (Giussani, 1986).

Obviously, it would be most important to hypothesize and to recognize a similar transversal element in the current, increasingly widespread multicultural and multireligious situations, in which individuals and groups are confronted with each other in a direct and vital relationship. Today it would be supremely useful to rethink the education to citizenship in a multicultural and multireligious perspective.

In these terms, among human and social sciences Pedagogy should be the first to recognize religious experience as a significative object of research related to the educational processes in general and adult transformations. Unfortunately, the scientific pedagogy has kept silent about religion and religious matters for several decades; in the universities there are no specific tuitions able to stimulate research and be nourished by research itself, in a virtuous circle (Triani, 2015; Caputo, 2017).

This silence is not coincidental: on the opposite side of the aforementioned theories, human and social sciences have underlined for about two centuries, with different sensibilities, the culturally acquired nature of religion/religiosity, arguing that they are born from a potential educational and social conditioning. All these perspectives, even when they admit transversal elements of religious experience in human history, argue that religious experience itself is an illusory kind of satisfaction and reassurance answering the universal human needs of significance, membership, devotion (and above all of the human need to exorcise aging and death). The ideal leader of these demystifying positions is the classic Freudian theory (Pinelli, 2012; Caputo, 2018a).

To summarize, we can assert that the positivistically-oriented psycho-social sciences have long defined religion as a residual and surviving

cultural product, destined to exhaust itself at the fulfilment of the 'scientific modernization' of human culture and society.

These lectures have thus interpreted the religious beliefs as irrational and prescientific and as a sort of 'cultural hammering'; they have also brought on an explicit and implicit educational action against religion, with evident and unavoidable consequences on educational processes (and not only on religious education). In the cultural mainstream, religiosity is de facto denied in its own specificity, because it is confused with any other emotive, affective, irrational dimension of human experience. All of this determines a continuous rational delegitimization of religiosity as such, and a delegitimization of the religious person. This process generates some evident educational implications. It seems obvious that, if we want to positively use the whole potential that religiosity presents (and that we will explicit later on) while at the same time keeping under control the (explicit or implicit) risks of absolutization and violence that are always present in some dimensions of religiosity, we need first of all a greater and more serene social acceptance, both of the different religions and of the religious experience as such.

The personal religious experience, on the other hand, seems able to conciliate also its own contradictions. Let us examine, for example, this reflection by an university student in a paper:

I am sure I cannot demonstrate or refute it, but at the same time I am sure, when in the evening I pray before sleeping, that my words are listened by Someone. By the One I name Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that somebody else names God, or Allah, or Jahve, or Buddha... I cannot prove it in a scientific way, in the same way I can do, for example, about the origins of man. What science says and what the Church also accepts is unconfutable. We descend from apes, and even before we descend from monocellular organisms. Although I know that this is man's origin, the context I live in leads me to believe in something beyond. Something that gives sense. (Caputo, 2012).

This passage reveals a person fully conscious of various ambivalences and contradictions in her own religiosity, such as of her own cultural and emotional conditionings. In addition to disclosing some typical connotations of the contemporary mood, the text suggests that human religiosity implies a complex and ambivalent dynamism, stratified in its psychic materiality and of which there are different levels, both among different people and inside the same person throughout his/her existence.

As already announced, we have hypothesized, starting from some explorative studies (Caputo, 2012; Caputo, Pinelli, 2014a; 2014b), the existence of some 'germinative' cores, which often present themselves as 'images' of the mind, with a power of suggestion and evocation typical of the mythical and archetypal thought. We can also hypothesize that these cores are linked to the individual's early personal experience

and initial educational processes. They seem able to remain in stasis for relatively long periods, and to re-activate themselves (and, in this case, to develop) throughout the social and cultural experience, and throughout one's life. They consist in elements of cultural and educational origin, characterized by a late maturation in the structure of personality, and which could therefore remain latent, until they are awakened by certain existential events.

This dynamism could explain some apparently discordant and unpredictable adult choices; certainly, several life 'conversions' during one's adult age (and not only religious conversions), but also the adhesion to pseudo-religious experiences of different quality (which is sometimes devastating). In fact, from this point of view, the supposed stasis of a psychic nucleus may also hide a badly healed emotional wound, and consequently open an 'abyss', rather than unleash psychic energy, when 'touched' again throughout one's life.

Some violent and persecutory religious returns, which are typically unleashed in the multicultural and multireligious confrontation, and which could be bound to identity crises, may have remote origins in one's personal experience. In any case, there are definitely some germinative cores positively useful for both the intellectual and the emotional development: for example, some developments of symbolic thought, originated by narrations of religious content on which it is possible to rely back during the adult age, which open new understandings, which in turn are capable of changing even the quality of the religious experience. We come to hypothesize this structural level mainly starting from 'grey materials', as we call them, i.e. some empirical data that we have not collected during structured project-researches, but that we have obtained in situations similar to a 'clinical' context. The above mentioned structural level can be explored, not without many technical difficulties, by urging in people a consciousness about their lived experience, as it happens in some contexts of adult formation or coaching.

A detailed analysis of some potential germinative cores/figures would be important in order to understand the educational processes and the formative transformations in the adult person, of course starting from the construction of adequate empirical research tools.

## **2. Religious experience and religious education**

From the point of view of field research, we have chosen to investigate the phenomenology of the religious experience in the subject's life path (rather than investigating behaviors), assuming that the religiosity is not investigable outside – and separate of – the meaning that every single person confers to his or her own religious experience.

The structural elements in the personal religious experience are similar to those identified in phenomenological research as minimum

«religious universals» (Filoramo, 2014), and are closely connected to each other: belief (the content of the faith, the God actually believed); myth (a shared heritage, in written form, of 'sacred stories'); rite (expressions of veneration of the believed God: prayer, liturgy, places and ways of cult).

Some conceptual substructures or imaginative representations are inserted within these three major categories (belief, myth and rite). Such substructures (evil, death, human nature, etc.) directly depend on the essential structure of the professed faith. The global intertwining of these structural elements determines a worldview and a materiality of the religious experience in holistic, global and pervasive terms. From all this, an orientation of the person in choosing, deciding and acting arises during the arch of his/her life.

From the global intertwining of the elements of the religious experience in its historical and anthropological materiality, the process of the religious education originates. Such a process is not simply a 'transmission' of the religious faith, but, like any educational process, responds to a logic of 'regeneration' of human life associated in all its dynamisms and its risks, including the dimensions of personal autonomy and of transformation/transgression.

The minimal phenomenological constants of education consist of a) human malleability and the human child's long immaturity, which implies the protection of his long childhood as a privileged season of life; b) the educational relationship; c) the cultural, historical and social horizon; d) the finalization of the process towards progressive autonomy of the 'ex-immature'. This last point alludes to the stimulation of the personal capability to choose and to decide, and to the consolidation of personal identity (Moscatto, 2013; Moscatto, 2017).

If we want to delve into the field of religious education and to understand its dynamisms, we have at least to cross the two orders of structural constants (educational constants and minimum structures of religiosity). This crossing does not unify education: it unifies the language to 'tell about the experience of religion itself'; in other words, it determines the conditions of dialogue at all levels, starting from the one internal to disciplinary and multidisciplinary research.

In the process of religious education, the minimum structures of religiosity (content of the belief, sacred narrations, celebration of rites), de facto cross and penetrate the educational constants (human dynamic malleability; personal relationship; cultural horizon; tension towards autonomy). Their concrete interaction determines the possibility, the strength or the weakness, of a specific religious education. This implies that a simple scheme of such an interaction originates, at least for the pedagogue, a conceptual model and a research key that allow us to hypothesize the limits and potentials of the religious education in a given historical context.

Concretely, people and social groups can compare only their religious experiences: it is difficult to compare the dogmatic contents or the

historical/institutional structures of a religion. The comparison between different experiences – rather than different contents – is what *de facto* happens in a multicultural class, or in the encounter between families and teachers from different cultures or with different religious beliefs. We can affirm the same thing about the encounter between religious and secular people, as demonstrated by an experience of multireligious seminars (Draghetti, Pinelli, 2019).

For a constructive confrontation to happen, it is necessary that every religious experience in its specificity is recognized as such, between believers and non-believers, and among 'otherwise believers'. Prejudicial denials or contrasts, in terms of contents of belief or rituality, make dialogue impossible from the start. If we want to educate human religiosity, and moreover in intercultural terms, we have to recognize the right of existence to religiosity itself.

This pedagogical principle involves a reversal of perspective about the methods and objectives of religious education, because we need to orient ourselves not only to correctness or confessional orthodoxy (the intellectualistic dimension of education), but first of all to the quality of the religious experience solicited and accompanied within educational processes.

All this does not exclude the progressive comparison about specific material elements (belief, myth and rite) that would be gradually told (among teenagers, by students to teachers, by teachers to students); it rather allows to find the criterion which legitimizes this confrontation and makes it respectful and friendly. Above all, in young subjects the positive confrontation originates personal reflectivity, pushing them towards autonomy. A formation which is intellectually dogmatic and fusional in terms of social belonging tends to favor the emergence of the dark side of religiosity (aggressive fundamentalism). We cannot develop this point, but it is one of the problems to be addressed and classified adequately from a pedagogical point of view.

### **3. The religious universals**

Looking first at the dimension of rite, taking into account partially unpublished qualitative research materials, two elements to be investigated are immediately identified: the first one consists in the experience of prayer (when it is introduced, and by whom; with which words, and which representation of God it introduces); the second one consists in liturgical celebration (when it is learned, how it is subjectively acted and represented; how it is linked to the fabric of sacred stories). In the space of liturgy there are also the places of the cult, retreats and pilgrimages, to the extent that they are present in family life and the child perceives them.

In its dimensions of prayer (always personal, even when it is collective) and of liturgy (always collective, even when personally

experienced), rite determines (i.e., provokes and consolidates) in the personal psyche at least two decisive conditions of the religious dimension and of the quality of the person, intertwined with each other: the symbolism of thought and the sense of transcendence. Both of these elements are also strengthened by sacred narrations. Symbolism and sense of transcendence are so decisive in the process of development and consolidation of the Ego apparatus, that it is not possible to attempt even the briefest explanation of them in these pages, while it is necessary to bring on a wide analysis of their phenomenology. We will only specify that these are two necessary elements of the educational process, and it is probably through them that religious education (where it is present) directs the entire process, and remains (even in a latent way) in the adult person's process of formation.

Prayer is usually introduced in early childhood, in an affective (and sometimes playful and fantastic) way, especially by female and maternal figures, or who perform 'maternal-type' educational functions. Some data obtained by our explorative studies, coming from writings solicited in college students (20-22 years) generally confirm this fact. Mothers and grandmothers (and more rarely fathers and grandfathers) associate narratives and prayers, especially to the Guardian Angel, in the bedtime rituals, as shown by the following quotations:

«In the evening my mother, my sister and I recited the prayer to the Guardian Angel together. We recited it in the first person plural and not in the singular, so we had an Angel protecting all of us» (11FL16-F); «In my family prayer has always been experienced like a good thought, which we could have recourse to at particular times such as death, illness, difficult situations; it was also an act of praise for joyful events» (5FL16-F); «In the meantime I have grown fond of prayer; it has become a fundamental ritual to me, and accompanies me five times a day. This act allows me to regenerate through a direct relationship, especially at the moment of prostration. It opens my heart and puts my soul at peace» (Moscato, 2014).

It is necessary to underline the power of a praxis so connected to affective intimacy with these maternal figures, but, in any case we observe a permanence of the experience of praying, in deeply generative terms, both in the whole life of the subjects and transversally to the various religious confessions. The last quotation comes from the writing of a Muslim girl, on which Caputo worked in depth (Caputo, 2012).

We cannot develop in this text the theme of liturgy in religious education: we will limit ourselves to emphasizing the educational importance of the celebration or non-celebration of rites in the development of symbolic thought.

A third and essential element, which cannot be fully described here, not even in outline, is represented by the sacred narrations. If we consider that the dynamism of narrative thinking and its mythicizations,



at least according to Bruner's research from the last twenty years, are a fundamental element in the processes of construction of the Ego, it becomes clear why the use of these particular stories presents, for better or for worse, significant educational and formative consequences, both for religious people and for religiously indifferent subjects, whether or not they have had a specifically religious formation. The use of dramatizations in the didactic and educational field, the function of every received image (from religious iconography to film and mass media products) must be traced back to the narrative, to mythicization and the consequent identification processes.

Concretely, the Sacred Texts constitute *de facto* a millenary stratification of the religious experiences of mankind, translated into words and continuously reworked and reinterpreted from one generation to the next. The symbolic language characterizing this texts mediates the religious experience. Its narrative figures express very powerful and presumably transversal, if not universal, mythical-archetypal nuclei, working in a tacit and unconscious dimension of the psychic apparatus, long before they are translated and understood in representations and thoughts.

The development of symbolic thinking at its highest levels, reinforced by the sense of transcendence, constitutes an extraordinary resource of the person and of the human civilization. Religious education thus originates and determines a psychic force, which is both intellectual and moral and does not lose consistency when it becomes secular. The sense of transcendence thus supports the sense of history: a sense of human future which is not limited to one's personal life, and can support a truly multicultural universal citizenship.

#### **4. A (provisional) conclusive reflection**

In this historical period, the multicultural and multireligious composition of contemporary societies imposes as urgent several tasks related to multicultural education and the dialogue between religions, as conditions of a peaceful and productive coexistence between people and groups belonging to different religious denominations.

For this reason, the category of interpretation with which we approach religiosity as such is not irrelevant. This category will determine research outcomes and different methodological proposals on the educational and didactic level, but above all it will help us to a mutual understanding, derived from a more effective knowledge, between religious confessions, but also between religious identities and secular or anti-religious ones. It will also make us all able to understand ourselves better. It is necessary to reiterate that religiosity *per se* remains inseparable from faith in a God believed to be 'true'. The evolution of religious conscience towards tolerance can only arise from a deeper and higher religiosity, capable of understanding human limits

in the acceptance of every possible 'revelation', and therefore capable of assuming that the one God has been recognized and invoked with different names, and/or perceived tentatively and through deformed representations.

Authentic religious tolerance is always a component of a conscience capable of conceiving (and diminishing) the conflict between human interpretations, even with regard to divine revelation. To truly gain generous and peaceful tolerance, men should be more authentically religious rather than religiously indifferent.

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## Teaching on Religion from The Perspective Of Interreligious Dialogue: For A Paideia Of 'Knowing How To Live Together'

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**ABSTRACT:** *The question of religious teaching in Italy has previously been the focus of a debate in which cultural, political and ideological reasons emerged. Today, the conditions have developed for such a debate to be enriched with specific pedagogical reasons, starting from a revival of interest in Italian academic pedagogy for religious education in general and for teaching on religion. The publication of a dossier on the teaching of religion in a multicultural context, published in the journal Nuova Secondaria Ricerca, was very significant in this regard and was attended by colleagues from several Italian universities, who have approached the subject from multiple perspectives. There is a growing need to confront an increasing multicultural social context and the space that religious teaching can occupy in it, following the criteria authoritatively indicated by the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools of 2007. A correct approach to religious teaching can help build a mutual understanding and eliminate stigmas and prejudices, in the perspective of a 'paideia of knowing how to live together', which also considers the specificity of different national cultures and traditions. A further element that is important to consider is the growth and consolidation of experiences of interreligious dialogue increasingly significant and relevant: since the interreligious meeting held in Assisi in 1986, until the historic document signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Al-Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi in 2019. The dialogical approach to the religious phenomenon and the teaching about religion is placed in a perspective that goes beyond the 'paradigms of suspicion', seeking to offer a religious interpretation of religious experiences and, conversely, to offer an interreligious reading of the multicultural context.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Teaching on Religions, Interreligious Dialogue, Religious Education, Multicultural Society.*

### Introduction

Acknowledging the complexity and pluralism of the society in which we live also means becoming aware of the presence of a plurality of ideals and religious inspirations. The *Delors Report* (1996) to UNESCO outlined a sort of paideia of learning to live together (one of the four pillars of

education), considering our different cultural backgrounds, which involves the development of social skills and values, such as respect and concern for others, social and interpersonal skills, and an appreciation of the diversity of the World. In this study, we question the contribution of religious teaching in schools to that mutual understanding, which is the foundation of dialogue and condition of that 'knowing how to live together' the *Delors Report* spoke of, starting from some suggestions which we can read in some recommendations of the Council of Europe.

The problem we would like to raise here is placed in an interdisciplinary perspective, at the borderline between the social sciences, the pedagogical disciplines and the sciences of religions, concerning the criteria for a mutual understanding of religions or religious experiences. The two primary topics for analysis are as follows: how to conduct religious teaching in a multicultural context and how to involve representatives of different religious denominations. An important contribution to the analysis of the situation of religious teaching in Italy is found in a monographic dossier of a prestigious Italian pedagogical journal, on which many colleagues from different universities collaborated, mostly belonging to the *Italian Society of Pedagogy* (SIPED) Research Group on 'Religiosity and religious formation'.

### **1. From the Council of Europe Recommendations to The *Toledo Guidelines***

For many years, the reflections on religions regarding citizenship have been vitiated by a distrustful attitude, which is part of what, in a conference dedicated to this theme, we called 'paradigms of suspicion' (Caputo, 2018). In 2005, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation on the relationship between education and religion, which affirms the right to profess one's faith in a climate of full religious freedom, but, conversely, stresses grounds for distrust of the social role of certain religious beliefs, taking up a previous Recommendation of 1999 which stated that 'there is a religious aspect to many of the problems that contemporary society faces, such as intolerant fundamentalist movements and terrorist acts, racism and xenophobia, and ethnic conflicts; consideration should also be given to inequality between sexes in religion' (Council of Europe, 1999, 3).

The 2005 Recommendation explicitly raises the issue of reviewing the curricula of religious education to promote tolerance and limit fundamentalism:

School is a major component of education, of forming a critical spirit in future citizens and therefore of intercultural dialogue. It lays the foundations for tolerant behaviour founded on respect for the dignity

of each human being. By teaching children the history and philosophy of the main religions with restraint and objectivity and with respect for the values of the European Convention on Human Rights, it will effectively combat fanaticism. Understanding the history of political conflicts in the name of religion is essential. (Council of Europe 2005, 7)

The Recommendation further stresses that religious knowledge is an essential part of human history, but immediately states that such knowledge must be strictly distinguished from belief in a specific religion and that religious teachings should be alien to any form of proselytism, even in countries where there are 'predominant' religious confessions. For this reason, the teaching of all religions' histories is recommended. The text continues with specific recommendations, all oriented towards a model of historical-comparative teaching that should represent the educational antidote against religious fanaticism and fundamentalism. This approach is evidently linked to a distrustful attitude towards religious culture and religious experiences witnessed and lived.

The mentality with which this theme is considered two years later in an OSCE (2007) document, namely, the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools*, is quite different. This text was drafted by a panel of experts, which also included authoritative representatives of the most widespread religious denominations. The growing presence of religious themes in the public sphere is not described with concern but simply assumed as a given reality to deal with, in a historical and social context in which contacts between people of different faiths and non-believers are increasing significantly. The basis of these guidelines is explicitly traced back to two basic principles: «first, that there is positive value in teaching that emphasizes respect for everyone's right to freedom of religion and belief, and second, that teaching about religions and beliefs can reduce harmful misunderstandings and stereotypes» (OSCE, 2007, 12).

Notably, even in this text, reference is made to the fact that the teachings concerning religions and beliefs can help to prevent misunderstandings and stereotypes, including those that turn against the same religious beliefs. The text emphasizes that the teachings concerning religions in school cannot be confused with the different forms of catechesis used for the religious education of members of various religions. In any case, the condition of a believer (or non-believer) should not be a reason to exclude someone from the role of a teacher in this area. The most important passage of the text, for the objectives of our study, is the one that exposes the four reasons for teaching about religions and beliefs, reportedly:

Religions and beliefs are important forces in the lives of individuals and communities, and therefore have great significance for society as

a whole. Understanding these convictions is necessary if people are to understand one another in our diverse societies, and also if they are to appreciate the significance of the rights that protect them.

Learning about religions and beliefs contributes to forming and developing self-understanding, including a deeper appreciation of one's religion or belief. Studying religions and beliefs opens students' minds to questions of meaning and purpose and exposes students to critical ethical issues addressed by humankind throughout history.

Much history, literature and culture are unintelligible without a knowledge of religions and beliefs. Therefore, studying religions and beliefs is an essential part of a well-rounded education. Learning about religions and beliefs forms part of one's stock of education, broadens one's horizon and deepens one's insight into the complexities of both past and present.

Knowledge of religions and beliefs can help promote respectful behaviour and enhance social cohesion. In this sense, all members of society, irrespective of their convictions, benefit from knowledge about the religious and belief systems of others (OSCE, 2007, 19).

Each of these four reasons has an extraordinary pedagogical potential, in terms of defining the educational value of the teachings on religions and beliefs, from which we can grasp at least three dimensions: the personal existential dimension (the knowledge of oneself and the exploration of horizons of meaning through comparison with the proposals of the main religions), the interpersonal relationship dimension (which is facilitated by mutual understanding) and the cultural dimension (thinking of religious references in literature and history as well as the Bible as the Great Code of Western Culture, according to the well-known image proposed by Northrop Frye in 1981). Whatever model is chosen for religious teaching in schools, it is important that you value all three of these dimensions. In the Toledo Document, the *Human Rights Framework* is proposed as a conceptual background, at the centre of which lies the protection of religious freedom, not only regarding the free expression of thought and religious practice but also religious teaching in schools.

Taking some of the considerations of the UN Human Rights Committee, it is stated that 'the freedom of religion or belief permits public school instruction in subjects such as the general history of religions and ethics if it is given in a neutral and objective way [...] it is also permissible for public schools to be involved in religious instruction, noting that it would be consistent with human rights commitments to do so, insofar as provision is made for non-discriminatory exemptions or alternatives that would accommodate the wishes of parents and guardians' (OSCE, 2007, 33).



## 2. The Pedagogical Debate on Religious Teaching in Italy

The debate on religious teaching in Italy is articulated and complex; it is confronted with a historical situation that connects it to the Catholic religion as well as by virtue of the Concordat between the Italian State and the Holy See, signed in 1929 and revised in 1984, with the confirmation of the presence of a confessional, Catholic religious teaching. Faced with this significant presence of Catholic teaching, we had a significant critical reflection of a secular area, which was often characterized by a distrustful attitude towards Catholic culture (Bruni, 2020). In the years following 1968 (when the teaching of religion had been the target of criticism from both outside and inside the ecclesial world), an interesting debate had developed in Italy regarding the hypothesis of replacing or flanking Catholic religious teaching with non-denominational teaching of the history of religions. In recent years, this proposal has been relaunched in different forms (Macale, 2020), also through the experimentation of the teachings of religions' histories conducted jointly with Catholic religious teaching, for those who do not use it.

We cannot analytically deal with the many pedagogical questions that characterise this debate here, but we limit ourselves to referring to a couple of texts that offer an overall picture of the identity of the teaching of the Catholic Religion (Cicatelli, 2015; Porcarelli, 2020b) and, above all, a monographic dossier on religious teaching in a multicultural context, published by the Italian pedagogical journal *New Secondary Research* in December 2020, which is the result of the participation of scholars from several Italian universities and is placed regarding the activities of the Working Group on Religiosity and Religious Education established within the SIPED. The Dossier is divided into four thematic areas: 1) religious education in a multicultural context; 2) historical and institutional outlook on religious teaching in Italy; 3) educational and educational suggestions and 4) the training of religious teachers in a multicultural perspective. We cannot resume the rich contributions which are mentioned among the references here, but we limit ourselves to mentioning some more important issues.

The teaching of the Catholic religion in Italy has evolved over time, starting with the Gentile reform of 1923 (Bellelli, 2020), passing through the Concordat of 1929, the confirmation of the Lateran Pacts in art. 7 of the Constitution of the Italian Republic and the revision of the Concordat of 1984. It is precisely from these agreements for the revision of the Concordat that religious teaching is fully constituted as a scholastic discipline, abandoning any reference to forms of catechesis. The Concordat's text states that: 'the Italian Republic, recognizing the value of religious culture and taking into account that the principles of Catholicism are part of the historical heritage of the Italian people, will continue to ensure, within the framework of the aims of the school, the teaching of the Catholic religion in public non-university schools of all

levels'<sup>1</sup>. The text further states that 'with respect for the freedom of conscience and the educational responsibility of parents, everyone is guaranteed the right to choose whether or not to use this teaching'. It is, therefore, a teaching that the schools of the Republic must offer to all students, who (they or their parents) can decide whether to use it or not.

This is what Elsa Bruni (2020) defined as an 'Italian secular model' to distinguish it from the secularism that characterizes, for example, French political culture. In addition to the factors of evolution linked to the development of the Concordat agreements, the teaching of the Catholic religion also evolves for 'internal' reasons, especially since the Second Vatican Council (Porcarelli, 2020c). It is precisely in the documents of the Second Vatican Council that one can read an authentic and profound openness to dialogue with all Christians (*Unitatis redintegratio*), other religions (*Nostra aetate*) and the contemporary world (*Gaudium et spes*). Such awareness had an indirect, but significant influence on the evolution of the concrete ways in which the teaching of the Catholic Religion was approached, which valued the novelties brought by the council. An accurate analysis of the evolution of teaching programmes (Dal Toso, 2020) showed an increasingly cultural teaching with an increasing openness to the themes of multiculturalism and interreligious dialogue, which are central in the latest National Indications for the Teaching of Religion, issued in 2010 and 2012.

To monitor the progress of this teaching, several national surveys (Cicatelli, 2020) have been conducted by the Institutes of Catechetics and Sociology of the Pontifical Salesian University, in collaboration with some offices of the Italian Episcopal Conference. In this case, it is the empirical data offered by the surveys that testify to a significant evolution of teachers' teaching styles, and the progressive loss of an approach close to the catechetical and practices that are not fully inclusive (such as the recitation of prayers at the beginning of lessons). The analysis of textbooks used both in middle schools (Caputo, Rompianesi, 2020) and in high schools (Bortolotto, 2020) suggests a teaching that is attentive to the growth of students and open to dialogue with other religions and the great themes of ecumenism, even if – in the presentation of the great religions – a purely descriptive approach often prevails. However, there are texts in which the choice to enhance interreligious dialogue is clearer (Marotti, Porcarelli, 2021) as well as through the analysis of authentic sources and writings of authoritative representatives of different religious traditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Law 121/1985, *Agreement*, art. 9.

### 3. Interreligious Dialogue as A Pedagogical Horizon for The Teaching of Religion

There is a discipline that is properly configured as a theology of interreligious dialogue and has increasingly developed since the second half of the twentieth century in many religious denominations. As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, there is a strong change of perspective regarding the past, starting with the declaration *Nostra aetate* (Vatican Council II), but it is, above all, in the encyclical *Redemptoris missio* by John Paul II (1990) that we find very challenging statements:

The Spirit, therefore, is at the very source of man's existential and religious questioning, a questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situations but also by the very structure of his being. The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings, which benefit humanity on its journey through history. (John Paul II, 1990, n. 28)

The fact of seeing, in the existence of various religions, the sign of a direct action of the Holy Spirit represents a very inclusive and valuable way of presenting its value from a religious perspective and lays the foundations for an authentic dialogue. Moreover, the Magisterium of John Paul II and its witness of life shows an authentic openness to dialogue with all religions, which was symbolically represented in the eyes of the world by the great interreligious meeting in Assisi in 1986. From the pedagogical perspective, an authentic culture of interreligious dialogue profoundly affects the religious education of the believer itself and, for example, should encourage Christians to better deepen their own identity. That is why 'those engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with their religious traditions and convictions, and be open to understanding those of the other party without pretence or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side'. (ivi, n. 56)

The different forms of religious teaching proposed in schools can also benefit from applying the awareness from the theology of interreligious dialogue. An initial consideration may concern the hypothesis of a historical-comparative 'neutral' teaching, which deliberately excludes the involvement of any representative of a religious culture. We have already said that this hypothesis has taken shape regarding a culture of distrust towards religious experience in public contexts, and we believe the same risk still exists. Rather, one could hypothesize parallel and possibly confessional religious teachings capable of interacting, especially in those countries where different religious communities are significantly present. In this way, everyone could choose which teaching to use, both in the desire to deepen their religious culture using to the

school's cultural tools, and to know a religious perspective different from yours.

In Italy, it is difficult to imagine more than one religious teaching, in addition to the Catholic Christian one, even if there are important religious communities deeply rooted in our territory for centuries (such as the Jews and the Waldensians) or religious communities of more recent consolidation (such as those that are recognized in the Islamic faith), which could possibly propose their teaching, at least in the territories where their presence is most significant. We can still envisage strengthening the training offer for those who do not use the teaching of the Catholic religion, through the establishment of an alternative discipline, as occurred recently in the Republic of San Marino (where a teaching called 'Ethics, Culture and Society' has been active since a.s. 2019/2020). An alternative discipline built seriously, with a deep cultural proposal, which in this case could also recover some instances of a neutral type of teaching of religions' histories. In addition to being a more equitable educational offer for those who do not avail themselves of the teaching of the Catholic religion, it would also constitute a culturally significant interlocutor for the same religious teacher.

## **Conclusion**

While waiting for a review of the educational offer in Italian schools, with the possible introduction of an alternative good quality teaching, efforts could be made to maximize the intercultural potential of teaching the Catholic religion that currently exists. We have seen how, in the most recent National Guidelines for the IRC, there are very explicit references to the intercultural dimension and interreligious dialogue: it would be a question of consolidating its foundations in the initial training of teachers, starting from the Institutes of Religious Sciences (Gabbadini, 2020). Interdisciplinary paths could also be envisaged on some themes that are structurally more open to the intercultural dimension, such as, for example, those involving artistic expression (Musaio, 2020; Pinelli, 2020) or some cross-religious issues, such as the theme of compassion or forgiveness (Guetta, 2020). On these transversal issues, added to the involvement of several teachers (who are in turn, potential interpreters of different cultures), one could consider the involvement of representatives of the main religious traditions present in the territory that, by actively and equally participating in the construction of these interdisciplinary training courses, could be involved in the school context as representatives of their religious communities, in the spirit of that interreligious and intercultural dialogue discussed in this study.

To debate on these hypotheses serenely and constructively one could use, even at the level of method, the logic of interreligious dialogue, constituting, for example, the working committees (national or regional)

involving representatives of the main religious communities present in the territory, like what was done for the panel that produced the *Toledo guidelines* mentioned above. The same Italian Episcopal Conference, which is responsible – according to the Concordat – for both the drafting of the indications for teaching (what were once the programmes) and the issue of the authorization of the textbooks could, in turn, acquire a board of interreligious experts and manage its responsibilities regarding the teaching of the Catholic religion in a dialogical way.

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## Eastern Spirituality and Democratic Citizenship: Teaching of Religion in Aldo Capitini's Lessons (1949-1950)

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**ABSTRACT:** *The aim of the present research is to rethread the didactic and pedagogical proposal of Aldo Capitini regarding the teaching of religion. He is the founder of Non-violent Italian Movement and proposes a new religion inspired by the vision of the India Master Mahatma Gandhi. By using a phenomenological and hermeneutic method I examined various sources: literary (books, articles, critical literature), archive files (epistolary, memos, lecture notes) legislatives, visual, audio-visual, internet. Capitini elaborates an 'open religion' to be taught in the 'school of the future', a laical religion that establishes a dialogue with all the different religious traditions and goes beyond the separation between East and West. A precious and useful document for my research has been few lecture notes found in the Aldo Capitini's Foundation Study Center in Perugia, a written work that summarizes the academic Lectures of Theory of Education given in the University course of 1949-1950 specifically dedicated to the teaching of eastern religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism, Islamism, Sufism. These different traditions are introduced to the students at the University courses as religions that have something in common, not only among themselves but also in relation with western religions. Capitini points at the 'religiousness' as the common element of all the religions as a matter to be taught at school, anticipating the longing for the sacred that is spreading today, in the post-secular age. The capitinian education for a holistic religion, open and laic, which has been elaborated starting from the contest between eastern and western religions, can be proposed as an education for peace and for supporting the western democracies of our times, and it is searching for a commune foundation beyond the religious differences, it respects the pluralism and encourages the education for a planetary citizenship in response to the present processes of globalization.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Didactics of Religion, Oriental Spirituality, Planetary Citizenship, Secular education, Democratic school.*

### Introduction

Aldo Capitini (1899-1968), a 20th century Italian philosopher, is remembered as anti-fascist, non-violent, anti-establishment and anti-

clerical because of the clash he had with the Catholic Church after the Concordat stipulated with Mussolini in 1929. During the twenty years of Fascist dictatorship, he developed his political, religious and pedagogical thought, in which the idea of a post-Christian religion that goes beyond confession prevailed. His biography is the story of a deeply religious man who lived his relationship with God not as an escape from reality, but as a premise for religious and social commitment with regard to changing and improving society (Romano, 2016, 6). On the basis of this idea of an open and diverse religion, democracy is achieved as a religious practice that finds its foundation in the ontological and pedagogical principle of the coexistence of all, which «includes all beings that are born, the living and the dead» (Capitini, 1967, 78).

An education in democratic citizenship is for Capitini a spiritual exercise which is practiced as care for one's inner life and has a social purpose, similar to that of Mahatma Gandhi whose nonviolent approach and oriental religious vision he shares. According to the Indian leader «those who claim that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means» (Pontara, 1973, 31), therefore only by «experimenting with the truth» and promoting self-improvement can a decentralised power be built, a power that is neither hierarchical nor pyramidal, but inspired by «an oceanic circle» where everyone feels responsible and participates. This is the same situation that Capitini calls «omnicracy», that is the power of everyone (Capitini, 1999, 135-7).

Capitini's curiosity for oriental traditions does not end with Gandhi's nonviolent and spiritual vision, but extends to different religions and many masters, especially Indian ones, to whom he often refers in his writings, such as Buddha and Lao Tzu. As will be clarified, the knowledge of oriental spirituality leads Capitini to hope for a fruitful encounter between West and East in order to rethink the religious sphere within a universal and collective dimension, which makes no distinction between believers and non-believers, Christians and Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, atheists and agnostics, but rather includes and values everyone through reference to the co-existence of all. It is, therefore, an educational project, which in order to promote genuinely democratic citizenship, has to reform the teaching of religion, and at the same time social/civic education: both types of teaching contribute to the formation of a world citizen, that is, a citizen who is able to perceive humanity in a «global, compassionate and loving» way (Romano, 2014, 211).

### **1. The religious practice of democracy**

The religious theme runs throughout Capitini's thinking and is always intertwined with social concerns: in order to change society political and social commitment must not be separated from religious commitment.



Capitini also understood the necessity for political engagement, «to pass through public life» (Giacchè, 1991, 15), in order to achieve true democracy. Religion and politics for Capitini cannot be separated and what, in my opinion, deeply links them is the pedagogical paradigm of co-existence; the educational path consists in a passage from the inner to the outer, and it is in this sense that religious education and democratic education coincide: «the old society, the old reality, the old man transcend through what I call the 'presence of the one-all', or reality of all, which is the eternal co-existence of everyone in the production of value. [...] The means to overcome insufficiencies [...] is religious openness» (Capitini, 1950, 153). A religious and political reform programme should therefore be placed within a larger educational project, a path of human and spiritual renewal that has as its final outcome the establishment of an open society and ends up transforming democracy into omnocracy.

The world becomes a laboratory where the mystic puts his own religiosity to the test, practising it, excluding any form of contemplative asceticism and choosing to live in the world in a new way, without submitting to it but engaging in its transformation with a critical and constructive attitude.

In 1937, Capitini published his first book entitled *Elementi di un'esperienza religiosa* (Elements of a Religious Experience), which escaped fascist censorship being considered harmless by the censors who failed to understand its content, which was not only religious but also political and educational. As the author himself clarifies in the introduction to the second edition of 1947, the volume expressed a spirit that was «the opposite to that of prevailing fascism» (Capitini, 1947, 7), «more than a work of controversy» it was an invitation, addressed especially to young people, to «raise their soul to a completely different plane» (Capitini, 1947, 6). The aim was not «to found a new religion with a leader, a dogma, believers and meetings», but to liberate everyone through sincerity, love, truth and to show them the way to build a new society. It was not a treatise, Capitini pointed out, but the sharing of a state of mind and of a perspective, which affirmed the intimate divine framework of reality, and gave value to all beings: «this book of mine is not written thinking of one person, but thinking of everyone; everyone is a citizen here; the one who is the latest to arrive and who I meet is like someone I have known for a long time» (Capitini, 1947, 14).

Moreover, he acknowledged, his indebtedness to Gandhi for the breadth of focus of the book, where social, political and economic themes were treated together with those of a literary, philosophical, religious and moral nature: «Gandhi – he wrote – showed me with facts and his clarity of expression that my tendency to politics was no different from my intimate religious experience of serving best what is absolutely good» (Capitini, 1947, 11). Following the suggestions of Gandhi and Eastern philosophers, Capitini proposes an «open religion», which because of the co-existence of everyone assumes the character of

unanimity and universality, since «religion is a passionate openness to a liberated reality; it is the recognition of the primacy of unity and love with all» (Capitini, 1955, 15). However, it is also a practical religion that has the power to transform society: it is «service of the impossible, refusal to accept the current ways of having a fulfilled life and world as if they were absolute and the only ones possible» (ibid.). It is a non-institutional and secular religion, inspired by the vision of different Western and Eastern mystics, such as St. Francis of Assisi and Buddha, whom Capitini considers «the highest examples of religious life» (Capitini, 1957, XIV).

## 2. Lessons on Oriental spirituality

In Capitini's personal library, kept in Perugia at the Aldo Capitini Study Centre Foundation, there are many sacred texts belonging to the Eastern tradition, such as the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, Tao, as well as many critical books on the history of Eastern religions and biographies of some Indian masters. Capitini looked with interest at a form of rationality that went beyond the West, and he became more interested in Eastern thought thanks to the influence exerted on him by the philosopher Piero Martinetti, who had published a volume on Indian philosophy in 1897; the aim of both authors was to build a bridge between the two cultures in order to regenerate the decadent West (Romano, 2014, 37-38).

Capitini's interest in oriental traditions is focused above all on the dimension of sagacity: it is not a matter of a knowledge, which like western philosophy incessantly searches for the truth, but of a form of wisdom that manifests itself as a religious practice. Within the perspective of a holistic vision, the divine is not sought in a realm that transcends the world of nature, since it is at one with it. Oriental philosophy is *sophia*, it has a religious nature and it is a life practice oriented towards the attainment of perfect harmony of man with the cosmos.

A theme that Capitini learnt from the oriental mystical tradition is the educational value of silence: «a man turned to an oriental sage and asked him 'Teach me brahman (the fundamental principle of the universe and of all reality), O sublime one'. The sage then said, 'I already teach you, but you do not pay attention. This atman (universal spirit or soul) is silent'» (Capitini, 1968, 419). This story clarifies how for the oriental mystic the truth cannot be expressed with words, an idea already held by the Chinese master Lao Tzu who lived in the sixth century BC and who, according to Capitini, has the merit of wanting to start from within to remake man (Capitini, 1950b, 53). «He takes the ancient concept of Tao (absolute principle, inexpressible, perfection) and purifies it», releasing the individual «from the illusory bonds of the world to put him in the presence of something ethically superior,

absolute, in which lies his liberation» (Capitini, 1950b, 53). In his only book, *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu declares that «the Tao of which one can speak is not the absolute Tao». Therefore, the sage teaches without words (Mancuso, 1995, 28), meaning that the truth is ineffable, it can only be communicated in silence and not through words (Mancuso, 1995, 18). Truth for the mystic is not a thought but an experience that cannot be voiced. However, the very effort to express it can arouse in the listener the desire to know the inexpressible, making him aware of his thirst for ecstasy and peace; thus begins a journey of learning, an inner search which for Capitini begins with silence, continues with meditation, music and kindness, and has the effect of exercising «strict detachment from insufficient reality and an approach to liberated reality» (Capitini, 1955, 98). This is what also happens in Buddhism with the practice of meditation, a technique that leads to silence in a gradual way and like prayer for other religions, according to Capitini is «a true devotion, through which one achieves that inner absorption, whereby the spirit, increasingly gathering within itself and detaching itself from the external world, is gradually reduced, through successive stages of silence, to a state of supreme calm» (Capitini, 1968, 421). This state is called *nirvana*, namely, «the extinction of all impulses, cravings, attachments, the attainment of the absence of passions» (Parrinder, 2001, 109).

Therefore, it is not surprising that within the Pedagogy course held at the University of Pisa between 1949 and 1950, Capitini chose to devote some lessons to the Eastern religions that coexist in India. The course was entitled: *Man's Liberation in Eastern Spirituality*. In the notes made for the preparation of his students' examination, Capitini presents, in 140 pages, some oriental traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Sufism, Shintoism, Zoroastrianism (Capitini, 1950a).

The aim of these lessons is to introduce future teachers to other cultures and religions, so that they can cultivate an intercultural perspective and promote interreligious dialogue in the school of the future, making it a workshop for omnocracy, where care for the sacred goes hand in hand with care for the social. Capitini criticised the traditional teaching of religion in Italian schools as a form of catechism and dogmatism, and called for a more secular and open religion.

But what are the common aspects of the different religions presented during the lessons that can contribute to the reform of the teaching of religion? In the first place Capitini dwells on the «eschatological tension in which the final destination of man and of reality itself is expressed and experienced; where we are going, what will become of us, what is our liberation» (Capitini, 1950a, 187). This is an element that distinguishes the East, where spiritual tension is placed at the forefront and «the call to divinity is everywhere, in every house there is a place reserved for prayer and reflection», from the West, where instead more importance is given to material concerns (Capitini, 1950a, 59).

The theme of man's liberation is at the heart of Eastern spirituality and lies in the overcoming of the ego, i.e., the empirical self, in recognition of the illusory nature of the material world, or the 'veil of Maya' in the Vedas, and the reuniting of all with the One, i.e., God or Unity-Love, present in the world according to a pantheistic vision of existence (Capitini, 1950).

Despite the attention paid to different religious traditions, Capitini does not hide his admiration for Buddhism, since it has created «the highest ideal of man, one who aspires and practices to become Buddha, who is more than the gods. [...] Only man can embark on liberation by sublimating the possibilities within him. There is a faith not in technique and science, but in the power of the inner life» (Capitini, 1950, 191). Capitini sees Buddha as the master par excellence, since he is compassionate, free from the illusions of the world and wants, in turn, to free those who are still enslaved by it.

On closer inspection, the Buddhist religion is an education that «is based [...] on the efficacy of its teaching. It is possible to try Buddhism, because it is more than a faith, it is a practice» (Vigilante, 2010, 60), which in its techniques of awareness, such as meditation, concentration and silence, points the way to truth (Romano, 2020).

In the refusal [...] of Buddha – says Capitini – to give simple cognitive satisfaction regarding liberated reality (nirvana) we can see the value given to practice, to active liberation, to the laborious approach towards liberated reality: in the world as it is now, man can only rise, convert, change his values, dismantle his worldly habits and commit himself. The importance of practice is [...] in the call to a commitment, to an act, without which one cannot see the world more deeply [...]: an orientation and a choice (Capitini, 1955, 93-4).

The precedence given to practice that distinguishes Buddhism and other Eastern traditions is at the basis of Capitini's practical mysticism, in which religious education, namely an «incessant process of self-education» (Giacchè, 2008, 5) gains importance: the person persuaded does not reach awakening in a definitive way, but experiences an infinite process of enlightenment and continuous religious striving towards his own liberation (Pasqualotto, 1997, 12). In this educational practice of self-care, the person who assumes a leading role is the master, who in line with Eastern views, Capitini distinguishes from the teacher: the master is not an expert who communicates second-hand knowledge, but the one who shares his first-hand experience, becoming the interpreter of direct revelation and inviting his disciples to a concrete «renewing and broadening experience» (Capitini, 1956b, 44).

In this regard, it should be remembered that in the democratic education hypothesised by Capitini the figure of the master-prophet is central, a master who has travelled a path of self-awareness in *interiore homine*: «the prophet, before speaking, must engage in an inner work of

purification» (Capitini, 1956b, 44) and then announce a truth that is in open conflict with the surrounding world, urging mistrust of the present and openness to the future. The teacher-prophet is the one who is committed to improving himself and his pupils, who he lovingly accompanies on both their inner and outer journey of learning. He is not an authoritarian master who binds his disciple to himself, but an authoritative friend who commits himself, within the educational relationship, to encourage necessary detachment from his disciples, disappearing to help them become masters of themselves, «to make room for the liberated and for the festive state of liberation» (Capitini, 1956b, 56).

In Capitini's terms, the master par excellence among the Orientals is Gandhi, a non-violent master who brings a mystical vision to politics, building a bridge between East and West. The teacher, according to Gandhi, is the one who by example creates loving relationships with his students and shows them the way to liberation from all forms of exploitation and oppression: to achieve this end, he uses nonviolence as an educational method and as a political force, which has both the religious and political task to make the path of love manifest in public life. The Gandhian teacher is not the wise man who accepts things as they are with imperturbability, he is not an ascetic indifferent to worldly things, he is, if anything, a reformer, an outspoken rebel, a nonviolent revolutionary who, like the master-prophet described by Capitini, observes the world in all its insufficiencies and shows his disciples the way to start a process of overcoming that world, of non-violent transformation in an authentically democratic direction (Romano, 2014, 104).

The comparison with the traditions of the East allows Capitini to clarify his idea of democracy as a religious educational practice, where the master-prophet assumes the task of cultivating within himself and living out a 'political' and 'open religious love' (Mancini, 2005, 206). The purpose of this is the awakening of all human beings, who being educated in co-existence, engage in the world to achieve omnocracy.

### **3. The education of a new citizenship**

According to Capitini, religious-social reform creates solidarity, friendship and love among individuals and peoples, leading to the establishment of universal citizenship. Imitating the Buddhist and Hindu East it is possible to build an inter-religious dialogue that recognises every faith for its value, identity and difference, making every religion a resource for this same democracy. In this way he anticipates a problem present today in late-modern society, namely the coexistence of different faiths on the same territory, which brings to the forefront the need to promote mutual recognition, not of mere tolerance, but a true understanding of the 'religious Other', coming together in a common

search for truth (Romano, 2014, 206). It is a choice that implies the search for a common foundation of religious differences while respecting the pluralistic character of a democratic state, which has to cultivate an intercultural ethos of human dignity on which to base consensus between different faiths (Parrinello, 2011, 7). Education in the coexistence of all, going beyond the boundaries of this intercultural perspective, acquires a broader perspective that includes respect for other non-human forms of life, such as animals and plants, all united by a cosmic closeness. Namely, it opens up to a planetary perspective that educates towards a new sense of universal brotherhood inspired by the principles of open religion. It also looks at those who traditionally have been considered potential enemies, foreigners, as fellow citizens. All human beings, irrespective of geographical, social and cultural distinctions, are taught a new political conscience starting from a new notion of citizenship, which aims at fostering a sense of responsibility towards each other, breaking down the old barriers and cherishing the dream of a great human community.

Current pedagogical research proposes a new global, participatory and inclusive education for citizenship in order to build a global democracy that transforms spectator-consumers into active and aware citizens. It is a matter of education in responsible and open citizenship, no longer limited to civic education but «achieved through a set of activities and initiatives» (Capitini, 1968, 257) aimed at making all citizens of the cosmos conscious actors and participants in a power exercised from below. This is the lesson of Capitini, who gives new generations the idea of omnicratic citizenship that does not concern the exercise of power by a nation, but involves all humanity in sharing care for the common good, crossing the narrow boundaries of the State and acquiring international openness:

We must recognize – says Capitini – that civic education within the nation today cannot but be closely connected with international education, with an openness to knowledge and liking for all peoples, with the recognition that each has given and can give to the development of shared civilisation, to be seen above all as progress in the co-operative generation of values (Capitini, 1968, 257).

Ahead of his time, Capitini became spokesman for an urgency that is vital today: to educate all citizens in a common planetary destiny and in global, cosmopolitan, international and world-wide citizenship. On closer inspection, his most important contribution lies in the original, non-violent and religious solution that he proposes in order to achieve coexistence on the planet, formulating a holistic vision of the world understood not as the annulment of differences, but as the enhancement of these differences through openness of all people towards each other.

Seeing the world from a holistic perspective, as Capitini suggests through his comparison with the East, strengthens the sense of responsibility and urgency that today animates global society: the world citizen is a new man who cultivates «a new [...] loving care for the species as such and, more generally, for every form of life in which the deep kinship of man with the cosmos is revealed» (Balducci, 1985, 8).

## Conclusion

Capitini's education of holistic, open and secular religion, developed from a comparison with Eastern spirituality, leads to the understanding that we are one big human family, even if we have not yet learned to live together in peace, without violence and exploitation. The future of the earth becomes the principal spiritual question, the solution to which is found by Capitini in his practical mysticism placed at the service of the common good. Here, the inner dimension, dear to the East, and the outer world, prioritised more in the West, are subtly intertwined, with the awareness that we cannot successfully address one if we ignore the other.

Capitini's prophetic message focuses on the commitment and conscious responsibility of a new, world man who discovers in the coexistence of all things a new way of living that makes mankind more human. At the heart of this is the conviction that if an individual takes a step in the direction of the new and his spiritual quest is placed 'at the service of the impossible', the entire human species progresses through that individual and contributes to the achievement of a cosmic democracy.

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## Families and Religions in Italy: Educational Issues

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article highlights the multiple and complex educational issues related to families and religions in Italy. Italy is coming to terms with weary Catholicism, the advancement of atheism and agnosticism among young people, the increase in faiths other than traditional ones, the recurring need for new or alternative forms of spirituality. Italian families are depicted as corks in the ocean of a society that has lost its sense of education and where parents are laxer than proactive. If you observe how Italians live their Christian faith, you will notice different ways: elderly people are very religious, adults lead more essential and sober lives of faith, whereas young people between 18 and 34 years of age are noticeably less involved in the religious sphere. Beside catholic faith – professed by most Italians – there is a wide variety of religious denominations indicating a clear change in the social and religious geography of our country. The existence of minority religions in the public arena calls upon the role that educational agencies may play in the education of citizens and their families. Indeed, education for religious pluralism is all the more necessary, in the awareness that religious illiteracy hinders the creation of a culture of responsible citizenship and produces democratic illiteracy.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Families, Religions, Education, Italy, Religious Illiteracy.*

### Introduction

In the light of recent research, this article is meant to illustrate the multiple and complex educational issues related to families and religions in Italy. In our country, where most people are Catholics, Catholicism is perceived as a significant part of our national identity and family is traditionally seen as the core foundation of society and people's lives. In the last few years, Italy has been going through a significant period of transition in the religious sphere, because religious pluralism has grown widespread and has gained multiple forms while, in the family sphere, there has been a decline in marriages and the multiplication of family configurations. These changes have many facets, need to be investigated in a diversified and interdisciplinary manner, and have numerous implications in the field of education.

## 1. Religious pluralism and multiple family configurations

As far as religion is concerned, Italy is coming to terms with weary Catholicism, the advancement of atheism and agnosticism among young people, the increase in faiths other than traditional ones, the recurring need for new or alternative forms of spirituality (Garelli, 2020, 9).

In Italy, at present, there is a very complex situation of religious pluralism, which can be described as follows:

1. religious minorities (namely Orthodox Christianity and Islam) have increased owing to migration processes: overall, minority denominations accounted for 8% in 2017, whilst they were 2% in 1995;
2. those 'without any religion' were 16% in 2017 compared to 8,8% in 1995;
3. there is more religious variety owing to the very diversified ways in which significant portions of the population interpret Catholic affiliation and identity.

There are, in fact, four profiles of Catholic affiliation:

- a. devout and committed Catholics (this group includes more women than men, more elderly than young people, who are not particularly well-educated and it is not likely to attract new generations);
- b. devout but not always committed Catholics (this profile includes a higher number of young and well-educated people);
- c. the third profile encompasses those who declare themselves to be mostly Catholics by tradition and culture (this group includes more men than women – poorly educated – as well as young people who also have a low level of education. To the senior members of this group, faith takes the form of customs and tradition. To the younger ones, faith probably responds to their need for cultural and identity roots capable of conveying them a sense of belonging in a pluralistic society. These people are easily exploited by political groups);
- d. the fourth profile is made up of selective or critical Catholics who recognise themselves in some Catholic ideas only. This group comprises more men than women, in their adulthood and with a good level of education.

Therefore, in Italy, there has been a shift in balances in the religious sphere although the traditional religion has substantially held up well (Garelli, 2020).

Even if the family is one of the most cherished values in Italy (Cipriani, 2020, 63. 87), the number of religious marriages has decreased, whereas civil marriages or cohabitation without being married look more appealing (Garelli, 2020, 85-6).

According to the findings of the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2021), civil marriages exceeded religious ones in 2019 (52.6%

vs. 47.4%). In Garelli's opinion, however, the greater success of civil marriages since 2018 has been mainly due to an increase in second (or re-) marriages, which can only be celebrated in Town Hall, whereas 70% of first-time marriages continue to be celebrated in church (Garelli, 2020). In 2019, in fact, the percentage of second marriages reached 20.6%, while first-time marriages declined. The drop in first-time marriages is partly correlated to the progressive spread in conjugal partnerships of unmarried couples (non-marital cohabitation), which have more than quadrupled from 1998-1999 to 2018-2019 (ISTAT, 2021).

First-time marriages are being postponed mainly because young adults tend to stay in their families of origin for longer stretches of time. This longer stay is due to multiple factors: widespread increase in schooling and lengthening of the learning cycle; difficulties in setting off to the labour market and precarious employment; difficult access to the housing market (ISTAT, 2021). Young people are increasingly more disaffected with marriage *tout court*: this phenomenon is also affected by Italians' weakened religious sense. Something to be considered is that partners willing to live together are not particularly religious and as the years go by, they become increasingly less devout and less practising. Nonetheless, the parents of these cohabiting couples are not overtly non-religious but maybe only unenthusiastic believers. Therefore, in the intergenerational transmission process, children move far away from their upbringing in a variety of ways: atheism, unbelief or opposition (Piccone Stella, Salmieri, 2016, 39-45).

A survey carried out in 2017 found that divorce (72%) and the cohabitation of unmarried couples (74%) seem to be widely accepted by most of the population. This is in disagreement with Catholic family morals that have always taken a firm stance on the issue of divorce and have been concerned about the spread of cohabiting partnerships (Garelli, 2020, 193).

One might wonder why marriage is in crisis today. Several strictly related factors have contributed to its decline: women's entry into the labour market that has made them financially independent of men; the growing secularization of society; the weakening of religious control over social life and the tendency to consider faith as a matter pertaining to the private sphere; massive education; the emergence of collective movements – including feminism – that have challenged patriarchal authoritarianism and the traditional family model; the spread of mindsets that emphasize individualism and the sphere of the private realm (Zanatta, 2008, 11-13).

In pre-modern society, across all social classes, marriage was a covenant between families and individuals' feelings were totally irrelevant; the stability of marriage was secured by power and economic interests that formed the basis of such covenant. In contemporary society, as soon as love matches have replaced arranged marriages, couples' expectations of happiness have grown considerably. Simultaneously, however, traditional religious values have begun to

decline at the same time as subjectivity and pluralism of ideas have grown stronger. The union of the couple – founded on a sort of affective individualism – risks being more easily broken as the feeling of love fades away. This has brought about a transformation in family models leading to a growing risk of instability and vulnerability (Magaraggia, 2020). Family instability, however, may also be seen as one of the aspects of the instability in today's society as a whole, which has been defined by sociologists as the society of uncertainty: a «liquid society» in which even emotional ties are fragile, ever changing, and constantly challenged (Bauman, 2003).

Another important factor that has brought about transformations in the family is the evolution of women's condition in society. The spread of education and paid work among women has dealt a severe blow to their lower social status compared to their husbands (Pruna, 2007). Nonetheless, it would be simplistic to think that there is a direct correlation between women's work and the rise in divorces. This correlation, in fact, varies depending on each social and cultural context. In countries where gender equality is greater, women's financial independence plays a positive role on marital stability, whereas in countries like Italy, where gender equality is still far from being achieved, the increase in female employment is associated with growing instability. Moreover, one should bear in mind that employment provides women with greater bargaining power within the marital relationship and may be a source of conjugal conflict in that it challenges traditional role models (Zanatta, 2008).

In order to better understand the features of contemporary family, one should consider four major social and cultural transformations that are strictly related to one another:

1. The transformation of values: individualization. Values such as individual independence, freedom of choice, self-fulfillment, expectations of personal happiness have grown stronger. Marriage is made more unstable by the priority given to emotional relationships, which also implies their possible precariousness. Zygmunt Bauman (2003) coined the term «liquid love» meaning that today's men and women are eager to 'form relationships' while, at the same time, being scared to be caught up in 'stable' bonds.
2. The transformation of rules: private regulation. Rules of conduct are thought to be something that should be sought inside the individual rather than outside. Social norms and legal rules are no longer taken for granted. Rules of law are set aside to leave room to the private regulation of interpersonal relationships. As far as the family is concerned, the first consequence of this private regulation is the spread of forms of partnership other than marriage (non-marital cohabitation or de facto unions) and births out of wedlock. The second consequence is that marriage tends to be transformed from a social institution into a private contract,

hence revocable. Nevertheless, there is also an opposite tendency towards the public regulation of family matters, meaning that the State is increasingly called upon to regulate the social consequences of family decisions made by individuals, in particular when it comes to parent-child relationships (i.e., child custody after a separation) and the growing demand for social and legal recognition of family patterns not regulated by law (blended families, heterosexual or homosexual *de facto* unions).

3. The transformation of social models: pluralization. Social facilities as well as individual spheres and lifestyles are increasingly multiplying. In the family field, this transformation can be seen in the shift from one family model (founded on marriage) to a multitude of family patterns, many of which resulting from marital breakup (single-parent families, blended families, people who live alone after a separation or divorce). The different forms of family can be interpreted as different steps in an individual's life.
4. The transformation of gender relationships: towards equality. Women's gradual access to the dignified status of social and legal persons and to gender equality has marked family transformations. Gender equality has challenged traditional marriage and has triggered a democratization process inside the family, which has not been accomplished yet (Zanatta, 2008, 15-19).

Therefore, the contemporary family is outlined by conflicting and indefinite traits. In spite of everything, the family remains an essential and priority value for both adults and the youth; it is still a very important point of reference for most people and maintains a major emotional and existential meaning. Although the family is so highly valued, it has got a different face now.

Within this framework of major transformations, the situation in Italy is quite peculiar compared to the other Western European countries. Sociologists hold two different and opposing views. The first argument is specificity. According to it, Italy is not comparable to other Western countries because religious and cultural traditions have remained stronger in Italy, leading to a typically Italian phenomenon known as familism, which typifies how strong and important the family is in our country in both cultural, social and economic terms. In Italy, the family has played and continues to play roles and carry out duties that in other countries are the responsibility of public institutions, filling their gaps and making up for their weaknesses. Therefore, familism is not only a cause, but also a consequence of century-old failures of the Italian government.

The second group of sociologists points to the delay in Italy's modernization process. Although marriage remains the prevailing family model, couples that end up in separation and divorce are increasing and other family lifestyles are spreading because in Italy

there are the same drivers of change that exist elsewhere. As the modernization process moves forward and women's work spreads, similarities with other countries will increase too. Nevertheless, regional and local differences (sometimes deep ones) persist because they are deeply rooted in Italy's historical background (Zanatta, 2008, 20-1).

## 2. Families and educational issues

At present, Italians live in new and multiple configuration families: *de facto* families, single-parent families, blended families, single-person households (people living alone), mixed families (Gigli, 2015). Some scholars describe them in negative terms as «corks in the ocean of a society that has lost the virtuous and enduring sense of education» (Recalcati, 2014, 4), where parents are laxer than proactive, and more focused on seeking the consent of their children than motivating them to do better. This criticism is maybe a little ungenerous for it does not consider the lack of support and services supplied to families, the shortage of social policies aimed at helping families take care of their children and frail elderly (Saraceno, 2017), and the noticeable weakening of family relationships (Cardinali, Migliorini, 2018). The appropriate reply to this criticism should be based, instead, on supporting parents who personally live in multiple new family configurations, by helping them educate their children, in a disorganized and fragmented welfare system and an education system that is made vulnerable by the complexity of the social context and the disparities of the present time (Milani, 2021).

The family plays a major role in the intergenerational transmission of values that will have an impact especially in the long term. This transmission involves the system of moral principles handed down from previous generations to the following ones and how much of it the latter are willing to accept or refuse. The transmission of religion plays a specific significant role in the relationships between generations, although it has often been underestimated (Bramanti *et al.*, 2020, 571).

A 2017 survey found that most Italians consider religious faith as one of the fundamental values of their family of origin (67.7%), deem it important to educate their children in faith (70.4%) – if they are or were to be believers –, and feel the need to be attuned with their partners in matters of religion (57.9%). However, religious faith is considered more as a family asset than a distinctive trait of coupledness, more as basic cultural resource (to be possibly handed down to one's children) than a sphere of life to be shared with one's partner (Garelli, 2020).

The same survey also highlighted that compared to ten years ago, there seems to be an increasing number of respondents (about 7 %) for whom 'the hour of religious instruction' at school should remain as is: a Catholic class, whose attendance is optional for pupils and students. 20% of the population hope that similar courses will be set up in schools

for pupils and students from different beliefs. Less than a quarter of Italians (8,5%) disapprove of religious instruction and hope that this hour will be abolished or converted into a course in history of religions (15.2%). All in all, the hour of Catholic religious instruction seems to be fairly appreciated in our country, perhaps because it is not compulsory and perhaps for the flexible and dialogic way in which it is conceived (Garelli, 2020).

Beside catholic faith – professed by most Italians – there is a wide variety of religious denominations in Italy, indicating a clear change in the social and religious geography of our country. Religions other than Catholicism – namely Islam and Orthodox Christianity – are mostly followed by families with a migration background. Religion is an important element in the history of migrant families and a significant variable in these families' socialization processes in their host countries. As a matter of fact, religion can act as a vehicle for a good level of integration into society (suffice it to think of what the Catholic Church did for the early Italian migrants in the U.S.) or it may be considered as a hindrance (think of how Islam has been seen in Europe since 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001) for it conveys values that are supposed to collide with those of the host society. For migrants, a religious community can be a 'safe harbour' and thus become a driver of integration rather than being merely a marginalizing and alienating element (Granata, 2011). In Italy, for instance, the Orthodox Church is acting as a social integration vehicle for families and new generations.

Therefore, migrant families' religious affiliation has a twofold impact: outside families, on their relationships with society; inside families, on intergenerational dynamics (Bramanti *et al.*, 2020). When analysing the intergenerational transmission of religious values among migrant families, what is mostly emphasized is the clash of generations. However, at the heart of this clash, there may be often a difficulty in accepting one's paternal authority or, sometimes, the discomfort and shame caused by the typical traditions of one's homeland. Still, the clash is not the only option in intergenerational relationships: positive cultural hybridization is also possible for many young people (Bramanti *et al.*, 2020).

It should be noticed that generally, the children of migrants who were born in Italy are less religious than their parents, whereas the children of migrants who were born in their home countries are more devout. Parents and their children consider the transmission of religious beliefs as a way to preserve the integrity of values and morals, although young second-generation immigrants attach less importance to cultural customs, thus clashing with their parents. For instance, a sort of secularisation process can be noticed among second-generation Muslim immigrants who were born and live in Italy (Bramanti *et al.*, 2020).

In this respect, the question then arises as to the issues facing the Italian education system when dealing with pupils and students – in particular 'second-generation' migrant minors – who profess a religion

other than Catholic faith. Another question regards the most appropriate narrative to deal with religions other than Catholicism, in order to combat religious illiteracy, online and offline Islamophobia, and prevent forms of radicalization (Cuciniello, Pasta, 2021).

Promoting religious literacy among young Italian and foreign pupils and students is necessary both to avoid the ignorance of religious norms and traditions that leads to misunderstanding and feeds self-centred behaviors and to prevent any forms of fundamentalism and fanaticism. Religious illiteracy imposes a significant social cost on the quality of personal relationships and life in common, because it hampers appropriate social integration (Roverselli, 2019).

In Italy, in 2019, almost two marriages in 10 were mixed ones (in which one of the two spouses was Italian and the other one was foreign). The share of mixed marriages is higher in areas where foreign communities have settled down in a more stable and rooted way, that is to say in northern and central Italy (ISTAT, 2021). Those are bi-national families in which two cultures have merged in a migration context; there are often differences in the couple in terms of nationality, language, religious beliefs, ethnicity, race, social and family background.

The existence of minority religions in Italy calls upon the role that educational agencies may play in the education of citizens and their families. Indeed, education for religious pluralism is all the more necessary, in the awareness that religious illiteracy (Melloni, 2014) hinders the creation of a culture of responsible citizenship and produces democratic illiteracy. Therefore, it is hoped that the Italian education system may ensure religious literacy by relying on the teaching of Catholic religion as well as on all other subject matters transversally, as advocated in the 7<sup>th</sup> line of action of the document *La via italiana per la scuola interculturale* (the Italian Way to an Intercultural Education System) drawn up by the Ministry of Education (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 2007). This line of action suggests that while awaiting a revision of school curricula, we try to 'broaden pupils and students' scope of vision to embrace a multi-religious horizon, being aware of the religious pluralism that typifies our societies and education institutions and of the importance of religion as a dimension of interculturalism.

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## The Abu Dhabi Document and the Islamic-Christian Dialogue from an Educational Perspective

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**ABSTRACT:** *During Pope Francis' historic apostolic journey to United Arab Emirates from February 3 to 5 2019 (the first one by a pontiff in the Arabian Peninsula) the signing of a declaration that it is not exaggerated to describe as epoch-making took place: in fact, on February 4, the Pope and the Grand Imam of Cairo's Al-Azhar University, Ahmad al Tayyeb, signed the Document on human fraternity for world peace and living together in Abu Dhabi (in the presence of 500 religious and cultural political personalities from many countries gathered in the Global Conference on Human Fraternity, in front of journalists from halfway around the world and millions of people who followed everything on television). It declares that in relations between Muslims and Christians, violence is refused, hatred is rejected, terrorism is condemned and the path of respect and dialogue is chosen, with the aim of working together for peace. A text of great importance, that the writers explicitly wanted to address to schools, universities and further education and training colleges, so that it would become an object of reflection. The Document represents a precious opportunity to look deeper into the role of religions in a multicultural society; into the complex relationship between Christianity and Islam, which, as well as experiencing moments of contrast and pitting one against the other, also offers moments of integration and dialogue, like the meeting between Francis of Assisi and al-Kamil al-Mālik, sultan of Egypt, which took place at Damietta in 1219 (800 years after which another Francis symbolically re-traced his steps); into the outlook for an education in religious sense and fraternity. Our paper represents a punctual resumption and problematization of the main contents of the Document, in order to indicate how it can be valorized in paths of intercultural education and disciplinary teaching. Thanks to the use of a sociological, historical, theological-religious, pedagogical and didactic bibliography, it aims to make the view of young generations towards the Islamic-Christian dialogue more complex and richer and to suggest educational proposals to support it.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Religions and Multiculturalism, Education in Religious Sense, Education in Fraternity, Islamic/Christian Dialogue.*

### 1. A text addressed to the world of education

On February 4, 2019, during the first, historic journey of a pontiff to the Arab peninsula, in Abu Dhabi, Pope Francis and the Grand Imam

Ahmad al Tayyeb co-signed the *Document on human fraternity for world peace and living together*.

A document reasoned with sincerity and seriousness to be a common declaration of good and loyal wills, such as to invite all people who carry in their hearts faith in God and faith in human brotherhood to unite and work together, so that it becomes a guide for the new generations towards the culture of mutual respect, in the understanding of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers (Pope Francis, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, 2019, 3).

In his interesting volume dedicated to the Abu Dhabi event, Paparella (2019) notes the profound pedagogical intonation of the entire Document, drawing attention to the hope that the authors propose towards the end of the text: that it may become

the object of research and reflection in all schools, universities and educational and training institutions, in order to help create new generations that will bring goodness and peace and defend the rights of the oppressed (ibid.).

The intrinsic and intentional 'pedagogical nature' of the Document therefore makes it particularly open to a valorization, from multiple points of view, in the context of the teaching of religion at school.

Among the many possible approaches, the first one concerns the specific knowledge of this declaration in its contents and in its new profiles, the understanding of its overall meaning and its possible effects.

Pope Bergoglio and Imam Al-Tayyeb start from a common vision of the spiritual crisis that the people of our time are going through. First of all, they point out a «distancing from religious values» of large sections of society, under the pressure of materialistic philosophies that neglect the transcendent dimension of life, concerned only with earthly well-being (ivi, 16). In particular, they denounce the «deterioration of ethics», in the sense that shared values have disappeared; in this «cultural and moral decline of the world», an «exasperated individualism» (ivi, 14) has spread in the pursuit of one's own happiness, without thinking about the condition of others. The perception of the difference between good and evil has thus been lost, and the «anaesthetised» conscience no longer reacts to injustice and the oppression of the poor and innocent (ivi, 16).

Violence is rampant in order to prevail and gain power. It is true that since 1945 the world has enjoyed lasting peace, but it is also true that local wars in many parts of the world have been numerous, so much so that one can speak of a «third world war in pieces» (as Pope Francis has said several times), whose consequences of death, destruction, orphans, widows and refugees are before everyone's eyes. The arms race is a constant danger, because those who acquire weapons sooner

or later use them, triggering war (ivi, 18). It is true that our time has seen great development in many different fields: science, technology, medicine, industry and economics. But economic growth has also produced new inequalities, because wealth has been concentrated in the hands of a few, «to the detriment of the majority of the earth's peoples» (ivi, 19). On the other hand, the earth has sufficient resources, if well administered, for everyone to live on.

Faced with these social dramas of peoples, the two protagonists are aware of the «importance of the role of religions» (ivi, 24) and the «religious and moral responsibility» (ivi, 14) of believers in the face of history. Religious experience leads them to affirm that God «created all human beings equal» (ivi, 4). This constitutes above all

a profession of faith in the existence of a God who has a fundamental relationship with human beings, because he created them and made them equal in dignity. This is an affirmation of a religious nature, which also has important consequences in other areas of human life. It follows, in fact, that human beings are called to establish right relationships with God, from whom they have received existence, and right relationships among themselves, since they share a common origin and destiny (Marafioti, 2019, 243).

Therefore, the most proper relationship that binds human beings together is brotherhood: they are bound to recognise this mutual belonging, knowing that God calls them to «live together as brothers» (ivi, 4).

The reference to the divine root of the human being is followed by a heartfelt appeal through which Pope Francis and Al-Tayyeb speak out for the voiceless («In the name of the innocent human soul», «In the name of the poor, the miserable, the needy and the marginalised», «In the name of orphans, widows, refugees and exiles', «In the name of the peoples who have lost their security», «In the name of the brotherhood of freedom and justice», and finally «In the name of all people of good will») (ivi 5-12), and then to the fundamental affirmation of their historic meeting:

In the name of God and all this, Al-Azhar al-Sharif – with the Muslims of East and West -, together with the Catholic Church – with the Catholics of East and West -, declare to adopt the culture of dialogue as the way; common collaboration as the conduct; mutual knowledge as the method and criterion (ivi, 15).

Certainly

the authority enjoyed by Al-Azhar in the Muslim world is not comparable to that of the Pope in the Catholic Church. And yet the influence of Cairo University is by no means negligible. It is true that the Sunnis are not the whole of Islam, but they are still the majority.

And if Al-Azhar spreads a message of reconciliation and solidarity among the universities and mosques linked to it, it is possible that a mentality of mutual respect will form, capable of counteracting the messages of hatred and contempt of so many extremist preachers (Marafioti, 2019, 244-5).

## **2. Religions: a resource in the multicultural world**

A second approach concerns a central theme in the evolution of contemporary socio-historical processes, which the Document can help to problematize: *the sense and value of the renewed presence of religions in the world at the beginning of the 21st century*.

September 11, 2001 was the first tragic icon of the third millennium, which had opened with a symbolic re-beginning of human history, with the expectation of a time of peace and planetary prosperity. It immediately became clear that the impressive and unpredictable spectacle of two civil aircrafts dropped like bombs on two of the world's tallest skyscrapers, transformed in a few minutes from proud symbols of human enterprise into a heap of rubble littered with thousands of victims, was not to be considered as one of the many events, even tragic ones, that the chronicle grinds up every day (Tempesta, 2002).

It was in fact charged with considerable symbolic significance: some saw in the American event the emblem of the future that awaits us, marked by the collision of cultures. In particular, having been read by many as the initial moment of a 'war of religion', it has raised in the public debate the question of the meaning of religious experience in the global and plural world that we are called to inhabit. Are religious experiences fuel on the fire of conflict between cultural diversities or do they constitute a vital reserve of meaning for the work of those who want to build spaces and paths of coexistence in our time?

Faced with the underlining of the structurally polemical character of religious experience (typical of modernity), the problem seems to be that of an educational re-proposal which, starting from a phenomenology of human experience, rediscovers the religious dimension (which a dominant cultural *vulgata* presents as a matrix of irrationality, submission, violence, permanent conflict) in its nature as a living source of the human being and a source of cognitive and affective openness, a factor for the liberation of the person and social construction, a tension towards beauty and the care of the world, recognition of the transcendence of the other man. This can only happen by grasping and documenting, experientially and historically, the capacity of the religious dimension to respond positively to the deepest needs of existence, to exalt the most significant human values, to educate personalities capable of encounter and dialogue (Tempesta, 2017).

The important contribution of the Document is along these lines: the Pope and the Imam appear decisively committed to present the authentic face of religion and its value for human life.

First of all, they affirm that «religions do not incite to war», do not spread «hatred», do not push to «violence» (Pope Francis, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, 2019, 23). If in the past there has been a «political use of religions» to justify projects of domination in pursuit of «worldly and short-sighted economic aims» (ibid.), and if even religious men have lent themselves to spreading abusive interpretations of the spiritual messages of religions, today it must be said that this has been a deplorable «deviation from authentic religious teachings», which has led peoples to «carry out operations in open contrast with «the truth of religion» (ibid.). In this context, «fundamentalism and blind fundamentalism» in the reading of sacred texts is condemned without half measures (ivi, 17). It is qualified as «blind» because, linked to a materialistic and literal reading, it does not understand the text in the totality of the religious message, and does not accept the evidence of reason when it shows the contradictions between the inhuman behaviors it causes, and the goodness and divine justice announced by religions. In fact, exegetical fundamentalism leads to «extremism» and «fanaticism», which have been denounced and condemned many times (Pope Francis, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, 2019), because they inflame hatred and lead to terrorism. Pope Francis and Imam Al-Tayyeb also go into concrete details, simple but of great importance: we must «stop using the name of God to justify murder» (ivi, 23). There are acts, such as the killing of the innocent, that can never be considered religious actions to honour God, precisely because they are contrary to his justice and goodness; therefore, they spoke «in the name of the innocent human soul that God has forbidden to kill» (ivi, 5). These statements constitute the religious premises for the unmitigated condemnation of «execrable terrorism [...] in all its forms and manifestations» (ivi, 23).

Father Claverie, bishop of Oran (Algeria), who was killed in 1996 together with his Muslim driver and friend, M. Bouchikhi, by an explosive device placed in the courtyard of the bishopric, wrote:

At this end of the 20th century, it seems that religions have taken the place of imperialisms and ideologies in fostering conflicts between human groups and nations. In the past, they had already helped to set believers against each other in fratricidal wars, whose economic and political motivations were veiled under religious pretexts; manipulated, convinced and, unfortunately, also willing to justify the unjustifiable, men of religion were not the last to find the basis for all this in sacred texts. Christians and Muslims, we all have a long experience of these perversions so that we do not fight them wherever they are found. If history, since the origins of our encounter, is marked by endless conflicts, it also bears witness to possible overcoming them (Claverie, 2008, 13-4).

### 3. Dialogue with Islam, eight hundred years after the Damietta meeting

A third approach concerns the historical dimension: the visit to the Emirates and the Abu Dhabi Document can be an opportunity to get to know and understand *the complex relationship that has developed over time between Christians and Muslims*. Throughout history this relationship has been ambivalent: periods of relative calm, in which there have been significant and advantageous cultural and commercial exchanges, have been followed by other periods of violent conflict.

We cannot forget either the crusades, in which the motive of liberating the Holy Land was combined with the West's desire for expansion, or the four great battles in which the West managed to stop the advance of Islam: in 732 at Poitiers (Tours); in 1456 at Belgrade; in 1571 at Lepanto; in 1683 at Vienna. There were economic and political reasons for these events, but there was also a strong religious component. In many areas where Islam arrived, such as in North Africa and Asia Minor, Christianity disappeared, as is perhaps happening now in the Middle East (Marafioti, 2019, 236-7).

On the other hand, the contrast between Muslims and Christians has structured a great part of Italian culture. Think to the great poets, Dante, Ariosto and Tasso, but also to the adventures of Guerrin Meschino, narrated in the Teatro dei Pupi and painted on the sides of Sicilian carts. Nor should we underestimate the saga of the Cid Campeador in Spain and that of the Knights of the Round Table in France. And how can we forget the 'Saracen towers' that dot the coasts of southern Italy to warn the coastal populations? This defence system did not prevent the capture of Otranto in 1480 by Ahmed Pasha and the killing of what are now known as the 800 Holy Martyrs of Otranto.

In the fifteen centuries of relations between the Islamic and Christian worlds, however,

there have not only been conflicts, but also many peaceful moments of cultural exchange. In mathematics, we use the 'Arabic numbers', which the Arabs brought from India and spread together with algebra; in astronomy, we have many Arabic terms, such as zenith, nadir, azimuth; in philosophy, everyone remembers the influence of Avicenna and Averroes on the thought of our Middle Ages, also because of their knowledge of the works of Aristotle; in art, we have the arabesques in the works of our painters, and in architecture, the Moorish arches. In reality, the Mediterranean Sea has been the scene of bloody conflicts, but it has also been an area of fruitful contacts and cultural grafting (Marafioti, 2019, 237).

Aware of this articulated memory, Pope Francis symbolically wished to make his journey 800 years after that of another Francis, the Poor Man of Assisi, who in 1219 wanted to meet the Sultan of Egypt al-Kamil al-



Mālik in Damietta, on the Nile delta, in the middle of the Fifth Crusade: an event in which, therefore, 'conflict' and 'overcoming' (to use the categories used by Father Claverie in the passage cited above) are intertwined in a unique way. The method of Pope Francis comes from afar and recalls the Gospel 'tonight I am coming to your house', the method of those who do not hesitate to go out to meet others by taking the first step.

If at the beginning of this article we insisted on the profoundly innovative character of the Abu Dhabi event, it should in fact be pointed out that in the Christian experience the true novelty is never the brilliant idea of an individual, but always a deeper rediscovery of the origin, capable however of generating new and creative historical forms.

This is what the encounter in Damietta looks like to us, a story studied by specialists but still little known and understood in its richness by the general public, and which deserves to be known (with the foresight of the necessary historicization). In the summer of 1219, Francis embarked for Egypt, where the Crusader armies had embarked on a military campaign against the Sultan al-Kamil al-Mālik.

In a highly unusual move, and as such indicated by western chroniclers and observers, he, in the company of one or more friars, asked permission to go to the sultan to announce the good news and invite him to believe the Gospel. He was brought before him and given the opportunity to speak and, perhaps, to exhort him to peace and conversion. The encounter, sometimes interpreted in an excessively actual way, effectively expressed the innovative charge inherent in the action of two spirits who were certainly enlightened and eager to experiment with peaceful coexistence between Christians and Saracens, as Muslims were called at the time (Alberzoni, 2019, 9).

We do not know what the two said to each other during their meeting, which took place in the sultan's camp. The Latin sources agree on two aspects: Francis presented himself to the sultan to announce the Gospel and exhort him to conversion: al-Kamil al-Mālik received him with great humanity and even agreed to listen to him, although he refused to convert, and in the end let him return unharmed (and perhaps with some gifts) to the Christian camp. Francis had not achieved his goal, but he had experienced the possibility of being listened to and sought to direct his brothers in that direction. The first rule written by Francis for his *fraternitas* in 1221, in fact, dedicated an entire chapter to the way the brothers should behave among the Muslims, suggesting that they should witness to their faith first of all with their works and lifestyle («that they should not quarrel or dispute, but be subject to every human creature for God's sake»), then, if the opportunity presented itself, with preaching («and confess that they are Christians») (Alberzoni, 2019, 9). The rules of the Minor Friars of 1221 and 1223 clearly testify to the desire to bring about a peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims, which was to continue with the establishment of the Minor

Friars in the holy places and, above all, with the institution of the Custody of the Holy Land, which continues to this day.

The singularity of the initiative of Francis and his friars to go to the Sultan must have impressed even the men of the court of al-Kamil al-Mālik, if only one considers the testimony offered by an epigraph that still in the 15th century could be read on the tomb of the mystic Fakhr al-Din, spiritual advisor of the Sultan, which recalled as a noteworthy event 'his adventure with al-Kamil al-Mālik and what happened to him because of a monk', presumably Francis. The exceptionality of the meeting seems to be underlined by the fact that the sultan wanted to offer precious gifts to Francis, of which perhaps the ivory horn kept in the treasury of the basilica of St Francis in Assisi is an example (Alberzoni, 2019, 12).

The episode of Francis' encounter with the sultan was certainly grasped in its grandeur by the protagonists, but perhaps it was not fully understood by the hierarchies of the Church as well as by the leaders of the order of Minor Friars, who in fact promoted a version that was somehow adapted to hagiography and, therefore, to the ecclesiology of that time. Only the ecclesiology inspired by the Second Vatican Council has made it possible to re-evaluate and understand within a renewed horizon the meaning of the encounter that took place in Damietta in 1219: at the moment in which the other is no longer considered an enemy but an interlocutor, the foundations are laid for what we today call 'dialogue'.

Francis' initiative and the Sultan's welcome communicate two important issues: firstly, dialogue can only take place if two different identities are compared, but these identities must be well aware of their own cultural and religious affiliations, otherwise the possibility of dialogue will be lost. Secondly – and this seems particularly instructive for today's reality – the diversity of faiths does not lead to confrontation, but rather offers a common space within which initiatives of collaboration and encounter can be built up to the point of dialogue. In the case of Francis and al-Kamil al-Mālik, the conscious faith in the one God facilitated the encounter and perhaps favoured the agreements between the Sultan and Frederick II, which led to more than a decade of peace between the Christians and the Sultan in the Holy Land (Alberzoni, 2019, 16-7).

#### **4. For an education in religious sense and fraternity**

A fourth approach concerns the perspective dimension in the educational sense. Faced with the critical situation of our times, the Document affirms «the importance of reawakening the religious sense and the need to revive it in the hearts of the new generations through education».

Thematically examining the religious dimension of human experience, it should be noted that it is first of all at the level of some universal questions (which we can qualify as religious, and which belong structurally and ineliminably to man as such), even before the level of specific religious responses.

L. Giussani distinguishes and correlates these two levels: religious sense and religion. He conceives the religious sense as a dynamic element that expresses itself through the fundamental questions of existence, and that guides the personal and social expression of man, whatever his creed (Giussani, 1997). The religious sense therefore belongs to everyone, since it coincides with the inevitable need to correspond to the desires for truth, justice, goodness and beauty that structurally constitutes man in every time and every culture, and which is inexorably aroused by the impact with reality:

For the fact that one lives five minutes, he affirms the existence of something that is ultimately worth living for in those five minutes; for the fact that one prolongs his existence, he affirms the existence of a *quid* that is ultimately the meaning for which he lives (Giussani, 1988, 14).

When historical religions are not experienced as a response to the religious sense, they can play mainly an ideological function of justification of a certain *status quo*, of a certain social order. Hence the risk, which has occurred throughout history and is still present today, that they may legitimise closure in front of the new and the other, and become a source of violence. In other words: either religious confession is a response to the religious sense, developing and purifying it, or it plays a different and negative role (Campodonico, 2007).

The other educational emphasis concerns the development of a sense of fraternity. Becchetti has written:

By a strange twist of fate, modern and contemporary political history and thought has confined fraternity to the private sphere and the sacristy while it has developed and contrasted with each other in politics and society the principles of freedom and equality, the former supported by liberal thought and the latter by socialist thought. Social sciences and political debate have thus almost naturally concentrated on the LibLab space, where the individual, considered in isolation and unconnected, exists and is considered above all as a consumer, saver, worker, taxpayer, user of welfare services and his 'well-being' promoted through the action of the state and the market (Becchetti, 2020).

In the Abu Dhabi Document, on the other hand, the idea of fraternity is decisive for the common good, and finds its foundation in the truth of creation: the one God creates «all human beings» so that they may live «as brothers and sisters to one another» (Pope Francis, Ahmad Al-

Tayyeb, 2019, 4). The original paternity founds the common belonging, and the reference to the one God establishes the relationship of fraternity in which people belong to each other. Friendship may end, fraternity remains. And even if misunderstandings and enmities arise, the indelible relationship of fraternity constitutes an instance of reconciliation to rebuild fraternal love. Belonging to the common human nature and to the one Creator God is the foundation of human brotherhood: it is at the origin of the two main commitments made in Abu Dhabi, namely, to build peace and to care for the poor.

Pope Francis and Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb bore concrete witness to this tension towards fraternity, seeking each other out and meeting in order to create a courageous path that could contribute to the good of the human family (even though they were aware of the many existing difficulties and possible misunderstandings they might have encountered).

The Abu Dhabi meeting, in fact, was prepared by four meetings in which the two protagonists had the opportunity to grow in mutual esteem, to have the certainty of being able to trust each other and to be convinced of the validity of the step they intended to take. The first meeting took place in May 2016 in the Vatican and not much is known about it because it was strictly private in nature. This, however, led to the second meeting, with an invitation to attend the International Peace Conference organized in Egypt by Al-Azhar University in Cairo in April 2017. On that occasion, the Pope in his speech referred to the Grand Imam as 'brother', and specified that dialogue between Catholics and Muslims should not be considered a strategy to achieve ulterior aims, but a path of truth that deserves to be patiently undertaken to transform competition into collaboration. The goal is to build coexistence and peace as the social fruit of spiritual commitment, while those who spread «hatred in the name of religion» commit an «idolatrous falsification of God». A few months later, on 7 November 2017, the two met in the Vatican, probably to begin the preparation of the text they would sign; the fourth meeting took place on 16 October 2018, again in the Vatican with the same aim.

Pope Francis and Imam Al-Tayyeb, however, are not solitary leaders: they are moving boldly on ground that others have cleared. On the Catholic side, it is enough to think of the developments that have taken place since John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* (1963), Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), the celebration of the World Day of Peace, instituted by Paul VI on 1 January 1968 and then celebrated every year with the relevant messages from the Popes. Very important were the Interfaith Meetings in Assisi, where on 27 October 1986 John Paul II summoned Christian leaders and leaders of various religions to pray for peace. The meetings were repeated with some regularity in 1993, in 2002, and in particular on 27 October 2011 to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the first meeting. On that occasion Pope Benedict XVI invited all believers to renew their commitment to live their religious faith as a service to the

cause of peace. These meetings were particularly significant, so much so that the expression 'Spirit of Assisi' was coined to indicate the common commitment of religions to peace. On the Muslim side, the Abu Dhabi meeting was perhaps prepared for or inspired by the 2007 document signed by 138 Islamic personalities *A Common Word Between Us and You*. After the mostly artificial controversy that followed Benedict XVI's speech in Regensburg on 12 September 2006, serious reflection began among groups of intellectuals of Islamic origin to understand how to better shape the relationship between Muslims and Christians, finding a spiritual and religious foundation. The 2007 document recalls that Christianity and Islam together represent a third of humanity, and therefore have a great responsibility for maintaining peace in the world: if Muslims and Christians are not in peace, the world cannot be in peace.

In concluding our journey, we think we have shown how the Abu Dhabi Document is a very rich text, open to multiple possibilities of educational and didactic exploitation: it combines spiritual intensity, ideal vision and historical concreteness. Faced with the great questions of our time, as Pope Francis loves to repeat, it is a question of 'launching processes': certainly, these need the long-time of educational sowing and cultural change, but also the real event of the encounter between concrete men, which can sometimes be powerful and unexpected, giving history new and creative impulses.

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## Educating in Religious Diversity for a New Citizenship

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**ABSTRACT:** *The inedited post-modern pluralism requires to promote education in religious diversity even at school as a contribution to overcoming the identity paradigm and as an antidote to fundamentalism, enhancing interreligious dialogue. Educating to religious diversity helps not only to reply to 'holy ignorance' (with regard to the faiths of others), but it also helps not to make one's traditions and confessions 'fortified citadels'. Here we find the educational reasons for the interreligious dialogue: it can contribute to the crisis of relationships (including religious ones) and encourage coexistence. The dialogue between different religious worlds, that is promoted by education in religious diversity, is the bearer of the meanings and their multiple horizons that affect and query the contemporary society, all the more after the experience of the pandemic disease. At the heart of this new method proposal there is not a research and a reduction of differences to unity, but the enhancement of diversity. In order to avoid homogeneity, the education in religious diversity that we are hardly building also intends to prevent the fragmentation that avert a real encounter. It will therefore take care of the difference, which will never turn into inequality. In addition, education to diversity does not intend to interpret 'The other' starting from me, but it wants to take into account the context of life and experience in which 'the other' lives in order to better understand his or her thinking and worldview; it's based and embodies the hermeneutic principle that invites us to understand the other 'as he sees himself'. Education for diversity through interreligious dialogue does not lead to building one's own identity in a retrospective sense, as if to find one's own identity back in the past, but it pushes to discover, in the encounter with the other, the plural dimension of one own identity which is always under construction. Because identity is relational, open to encounter, never fixed and given forever.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Diversity, Identity, Pluralism, Dialogue*

### Introduction

Starting from the experience and the research carried out for more than ten years on a post-university master about the interreligious dialogue, the Institute for Ecumenical Studies (ISE) of Venice is aware that the topic of the interreligious dialogue is a topic to be investigated from a pedagogic and educational point of view, but also from a social, politic and theological point of view.

In fact, we think that a new dialogue theology may give an important contribution to promote the relationships 'with others', and with the different people living in our towns, which are more and more multi-cultural and multi-religious. We wish to try to reflect about how a theological meditation can promote the dialogue, and therefore, the education to the relationship with others.

### **1. Starting from a shared ethic patrimony**

The lesson of Pier Cesare Bori<sup>1</sup> reminds us that there is an ethic patrimony which religions may already share. Shortly, it represents values as:

- The certainty that law cannot be applied without the feeling of the obligation towards any human being (right and duty principle).
- The care to be addressed to those who are the poorest and the weakest.
- The superiority of those who don't react to evil with evil, but with the persuading force of the helpless word (Hinduism, Taoism and Buddhism).
- The value of behaving according to one's own conscience, independently from the results.
- The idea that we need to govern ourselves to govern others (Confucianism).
- The idea that the main war is the one against ourselves (jihad, Islam).
- Life lived as a number of benefits that is necessary to be given back.
- The respect and the mercy towards any human being (Buddhism).
- We get life by losing it (Gospel).
- The awareness that tranquillity and peace may only come from justice, and that they cannot rely on history, but on the actions of God and of the mankind.

### **2. Dialogue in times of pluralism**

If as stated by Bauman, dialogue is the real cultural revolution, in comparison with we are used to do, then, after having ascertained the possible agreement between cultures and religions, we need to know how to describe the context where we are supposed to dialogue. This is the season of a new religious pluralism which, according to experts,

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<sup>1</sup> Pier Cesari Bori, a religions historian, has fathomed for a long time both possible 'paths' and real 'agreement between cultures and religions. See among others Bori (1995) and Bori (2005).



takes the form as a path which may be represented traced with some images.

### *2.1. From death to God's revenge – The post-secularization and the modern religiosity*

After the season of 'God's death' (the secularization), when the role of religions has been questioned in its public dimension, we are living the season of 'God's revenge' (post-secularization) where religions ask for, also in the sick forms of fundamentalism, a role in the public forum and where the dogmatic assumptions which identifies each religion are no more valid.

According to the thought of the sociologist Ms Hervieu-Léger<sup>2</sup>, in the modern era this axiom is no more valid and religion have begun moving. This has happened also because today we have generations refusing to belong to a church. It is not only a dispute against religion, but there is a strong disregard towards something that is not understood, for which people do not have any more the cultural categories, the languages or a common code to discuss about.

According to the French philosopher Lyotard<sup>3</sup>, we are assisting to a 'crisis of the big stories', that is a crisis of big ideologies and interpretations which had been given to the society by the *Enlightenment* and by other schools of thought of the nineteenth century that nowadays are models which are going to implode as they are no more useful.

It is within this dynamic that, at least outside Europe, the post-secularization has been characterized by the '*God's revenge*', a process in which religion emerges again, but it doesn't emerge in the past kinds of the pre-secularization, instead in new forms: if we want to outline some characteristics of this season, we could say that they are:

- The creation of two new kinds characterizing the modern religiosity as 'in progress', defined by Hervieu-Léger (2003) as the *pilgrim* and the *convert*, where with *pilgrim* we can identify one who walks, the mystic of the religious research for the whole world, while with *convert* we can identify one who was born in a certain religion, but then he decides to change.
- In the past within the societies there was a close tie between belief and affiliation.
- The figure of the pilgrim, today introduces a strong symbolic dimension: the displacement, the pilgrimage represent how today religion is an in progress phenomenon.

Similarly, in contrast with what happened until a few decades ago, where the religious conversion was almost inconceivable, also the figure of the *converted*, implies a phenomenon of

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<sup>2</sup> This reflection is deepened by the sociologist Hervieu-Léger (2003).

<sup>3</sup> This concept is widely deepened in Lyotard (1987).

movement and displacement, that recently has become frequent among people, especially in western societies.

As theorized by Bauman by means of the concept of 'liquidity'<sup>4</sup>, the adherence to something (and in this something seems to be included also faith) is local, temporary and is supposed to give an immediate gratification and when this gratification ends, people change their target researching a new passion, a new emotion.

Facebook in some way tells us that 'we are the invention of our biography', that is by means of social we can speak about ourselves as we like, also if our story is not necessarily adherent to the photo of the reality.

- The birth of what we could define as 'the supermarket of religions'. People who state that the truth is considered as a process, in which there are almost infinite paths, among which everybody owns its own, that he can continuously amend.  
The routes of faith in the agricultural societies were collective, while nowadays they have become individual.  
The agricultural societies which have characterized the West until the half of the nineteenth century, the society and the world were changing very slowly and could be considered as 'static'. Some 'full' religious microcosms existed, within which the membership was not only related to religion but also to the whole society.
- The development of a dynamic called «believing without belonging» (Grace, 1994). This mechanism today is very spread, both among Catholic believers, where a lot of Catholic believers say 'I believe in Jesus, but I don't go to the church', and for example among the Muslims, whose majority can fast in the month of the Ramadan but during other months don't respect their religious duties.
- The growth of the so called 'tailored religions', that is the growth of a 'self-tailored', selective and individualized religion where everybody chooses to follow only the principles that are convenient for him as, for example, setting up a Christmas crib at school or getting married in church, without ever going to the service on Sundays or not believing in sacraments.
- The birth of a 'temporality' in the religious dimension, that is a temporary local belonging, where all what I am is valid only in this precise moment.
- The decrease of the religious dimension and, at the same time, an increase of the spiritual dimension.
- The transformation of religions in lifestyles, that is the way in which somebody lives is more important than what he believes in and this for example is implemented in being vegetarian, rather than eating meat, or buying a land rover rather than an electric

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<sup>4</sup> To better understand the sociologic phenomena at the basis of ongoing changes also from the point of view of the religious faith, see Bauman (2002).

car, etc. People have a personal ideal of religion pushing them to belong to a particular group which is identified by the same lifestyle.

- The development of the 'religious fundamentalisms', strongly opposing secularization. People take again strong politic and religious ideologies, with the conviction that they know everything about reality, with the aim of converting other people to the 'true reality', even by means of the use of violence.

These characteristics are typical of the period that sociologists call 'post-secularization', when the post-modernity doesn't replace the modern era, but it stratifies on it.

Over the course of two decades, therefore, from being considered 'vintage' in the way of speaking about religions, in the reflections about them we have become 'cutting edge', as now people study religions in order to understand the dynamics in the societies.

## *2.2 God has changed his address*

As we have already seen, Europe is the only continent within which a strong secularization persists, this shows in addition to that 'God is dead' and 'God's revenge', also that 'God has changed his address', that is if we look for him where we were used to find him present until the last century (in the Northern hemisphere of the world), currently we don't find him there anymore, but we find him very present in the Southern hemisphere.

The inhabitants of the earth are around seven point five billion, and the Christians are about two point three billion, of whom 1,1 catholic and today the most of Catholics are in Brazil, Mexico and the Philippines. With regard to Anglicans, the second country after England with the most of Anglican believers is Nigeria. There are also five hundred million Pentecostal Christians (also called Evangelicals), that very probably will represent most of the Christians of the future.

If God seems to have changed his address for Christians, this seems to occur also for Islam<sup>5</sup>: if up to 50 years ago 'Islam *AND* Europe', in the last years we are speaking about 'Islam in Europe' and, already as of today and in the future, we'll speak about 'Islam of Europe'. Moreover Muslims migrations will modify Islam also in the countries of provenance.

The Buddhist psychologist Riccardo Venturini assumes an imminent inculturization of Buddhism in Europe as: 'there is not only one Buddhism and its precepts are several, and so when it meets a new culture, this produces a new type of it'<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> In this regard, see the work by Naso and Salvarani (2015).

<sup>6</sup> Riccardo Venturini takes up the concept expressed by the Vietnamese master Thich Nath Hanh, analyzing the process of inculturation of Buddhism in Europe in Venturini (2010).

Surely from one side a sort of integration begins to appear, it occurs inevitably in public places and asks for long inclusion and substantial integration processes, as for example in economy, school, culture and welfare, the prevailing perception is always the one of conflict (and it occurs also by means of important members of the religious communities), as hardly we can understand how possible problems of coexistence between the natives and the foreigners are not linked to religion but to ethnic or education reasons, with the consequent unavoidable hardening of the minorities.

The final issue, easily verifiable of the analysis about religious pluralism, is that we are before a paradox: on one side we are before processes of substantial integration in several domains (school, work, institutions, law, ...) and on the other side we register a conflictual perception of others, who are often considered as completely strangers, if not even enemies.

### **3. The difficult route of education in religious pluralism**

The challenge of the education to religious pluralism is therefore a hard challenge as it involves the whole society and not only the religious aspect, in particular in the modern West, where the ongoing changes will characterize the societies of the future.

As we have understood, it is important to face the religious pluralism, not only as a reality fact, but also as a principle of a new coexistence paradigm, by accepting the irreducible character of the diversity, let us be questioned by the several interpellations, that the cultural and religious pluralism pose to our cultural and social context.

In today's world we are in a multicultural and multi-religious agora where the questions of the other help us to better understand reality and to better live also our religious belonging. But what may be the questions that the religious pluralism today pushes us to pose questions to our cultural context?

- Post-secular interpellation.

Without any doubt there is a crisis of the traditional historic religions... but that doesn't mean the disappearance of the 'research of the sacred'.

- The new Christian centre of gravity.

The post-secular society is assisting to the end of the Christian west. In 2050, among the Christians in the world only one out of five will be European. Christianity is 'inculturating' in other regions of the world, with specific and different characteristics.

- We are no more in the presence of a religion of the Italians, but rather of an Italy of the religions.

Italians are asked for a new religious culture, both for the 'old citizens', and for the 'new ones', the second generations of

foreigners, or anyway all those who are born in a 'new' and less monolithic society that in the past.

The awareness that an Italian may be Muslim, without ceasing to be Italian, is a consideration that up to a short time ago was not at all taken for granted (and that carries on not being taken for granted because of populisms of any political party).

- Poor consistency of the religious market in Italy.  
In comparison with other countries or communities, the religious diversity in Italy is still limited: others religions are (and are considered as) 'minorities'.
- Immigrants' religions.  
Another topic, if we look at religions arrived in Italy with the improbable suitcases of immigrants. Here the complexity is phenomenal and it requires to be interpreted with adequate tools<sup>7</sup>. For example, with reference to the different strategies adopted by the different religious communities: together with community claiming and asking for integration, there is a community claiming its own diversity and identity. The question arising from this presence is at first the request of help to create new religious leaderships able to be laic and democratic.
- The capacity of promoting the qualitative plurality.  
Where promoting is not a simple synonym of welcoming, but it is especially a synonym of maturing and being able to improve the different ways of living one's own faith. Letting grow those kinds of designer religion observed by social analysts (other people use the term religious bricolage)<sup>8</sup>.  
This plurality of research is to be valorised and it sounds as a further appeal coming from the religious pluralism existing within the same religious tradition (ex. Medjugorje, Santiago walk, ...).
- Deconstructing the idea of unity.  
The appeal deriving from the religious diversity existing in Italy is being able to respect and enhance differences, and not to accept to have only one word on topics and problems. The profit of this deconstruction directly invests the concept of laicality, which has to overcome the interpretation reducing it to a simple separation between state community and religious community, so that also religions may fully participate to the discussion about public policies, and in general, about the national life.
- Developing or simplifying juridical forms able to recognize and enhance other religious communities, different from the Catholic church.

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<sup>7</sup> For the Italian context there is still a tool of reference the annual statistic dossier by CARITAS/MIGRANTES and published by IDOS, which contains also data about the religious belonging of immigrants. It is anyway true that it is difficult to have a precise statistic picture of religions within the Italian context: for this, see Salvarani (2014).

<sup>8</sup> This expression has been introduced by Berzano (2014).

The current Italian legal dispositions are a 'layered' system, referring to an 'act about the admitted worships' (1929) and to the Constitution (1948). They make the following difference among the different religions, on the basis of: the presence of a Concordat, the presence of an agreement, a juridical formal recognition, the recognition of the 'appointed ministers' or finally absence of recognition.

It is therefore necessary not only to admit the religious specificity (French universalism), or to connect the individual to the community (Anglo-Saxon communitarianism), but it is also of the main importance to develop a positive relationship with the diversity.

The Italian route towards religious pluralism represented by agreements could, instead, be considered as a different possibility of governance of multireligiosity able to keep together laicality, respect of the rights and of the duties, public acknowledgement of the communities of faith, their organization transparency, and stimulus to constructive (and not only claiming) institutional relationships.

To do that, it would be necessary to streamline some bureaucratic complicated procedures but, before that, to supersede the interpretation of the immigrants world looking at immigrants as a scapegoat: responsible for the bad things of the society which had to rather than wanted to accept them.

- The request of new places of worship for other religions.  
This request doesn't concern only mosques (with the relevant 'anti-mosques' provisions issued by some regional institutions) but in general 'worship halls', premises where there are the offices of cultural associations which are used as places of worship, halls and sheds used as praying places, for which, in many cases, restrictions for the changes of the intended use, apply.
- Valorization of the popular aspect of the interreligious dialogue.  
The guilty delays of institutions, the ambiguity of politics, the lacking or small cultural investment on this topic by universities, the fearful prudence of church communities (also in rethinking starting from pluralism, their own pastoral), cannot hide the plurality of initiatives, activities and proposals present on the Italian territory<sup>9</sup>.

There is a popular aspect of the interreligious dialogue, made of initiatives, activities and proposals, that is claiming to be valorized, also because people want it. Because we must never forget that there isn't an interreligious dialogue tout court, there is a dialogue among people from different religious and spiritual

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<sup>9</sup> For a short description of the initiatives referring to the interreligious dimension, Dal Corso (2014).

beliefs. This applies for squares, but also for social networks and even more for school<sup>10</sup>.

- Overcoming the religious illiteracy.

Not only should the traditional religion of our country be known, but also other religions with which we come into contact in our lives.

While the Protestant Reform has offered other sceneries, for Catholics until 1968 the theological and religious matters didn't concern laics, who, as a consequence of that, didn't know the religious world and worlds, knowledge that today is essential to understand the changing world, as they have their influence on ethic, politic, sociological factors, etc.

'Being educated to others' implies therefore the fact of getting involved in order to overcome those interpretative paradigms no more useful if not even dangerous, by investing instead on a method for a correct and mature 'education to the religious diversity'. Educating to the other is useful to rethink the identity as antidote against fundamentalisms as contribution for the research of sense.

The education to others and to diversity is useful to reconsider identities, without interpreting others basing upon myself, but taking into account his life in his experience context, in order to better understand his thought and his view of the world.

At the centre of this new method proposal there isn't the research and the levelling of the differences but instead the valorization of diversity.

At the school of dialogue, we can learn to praise the disloyalty towards any kind of exclusion of the past, but also learn to feed the sense of the possibilities that the unknown future proposes to us, thus carrying on living on the border that is the style with which we are called to live the present time.

From this perspective, the contribution offered by an aware education to the diversity may represent a contribution to get out of the crisis. The sociologic and the philosophic literature and sometimes even the politic literature suggest that it is necessary to overcome the identity paradigm made of soil and blood if we want to rethink the coexistence today. And here the contribution of the theology of the dialogue may help us when it reminds that the identity itself doesn't exist, but we build it to the extent that we make ourselves neighbors of others.

Therefore, it is necessary to realize an interreligious theology of pluralism, a post-modern theology of dialogue, in which any religion, by dialoguing with others' religions, undertakes to develop a common interpretation of the history of salvation and to contribute in this way at the construction of a shared spiritual horizon for human history.

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<sup>10</sup> About the relationship between media and religion, Tridante (2014), while about school and training in general see Salvarani (2006).

#### 4. A dialogue decalogue

In order to create an even reduced vocabulary, we'll identify a 'dialogue decalogue', starting from the text *Minimum vocabulary of the interreligious dialogue for an education to a meeting among beliefs* by Salvarani (2008), furtherly refined by means of a series of concrete experiences which may be used both in religious and laic contexts.

- The dialogue is done among people.

We have always imagined that the dialogue was between Islam and Christianity, but this cannot effectively occur even if the maximum representatives of the two religions dialogue each other.

Therefore we have to think to a dialogue between people, a dialogue between Christians and Muslims, which may occur only if people are enabled to dialogue.

To succeed in having a healthy dialogue it is necessary to know the other and it is of the main importance to decentralize from ourselves, 'stay for three moons with small shoes, of another person' in order to develop a critic ability within a contemporary messy culture breaking our habit of understanding the context.

- The dialogue is done starting from concrete things and not from the theories.

To face the interreligious dialogue, it is not useful to begin from the relevant theologies, but 'from what we eat together'.

Therefore we have to try to begin from meeting and dialoguing about our cultural interests (cooking, music, sport, ...) and from the ordinary aspects of the day-by-day life and of human experience, also by celebrating together the religious feasts, thus giving importance to culture, dancing, music, arts.

- The dialogue is done starting from our identity.

Today identity has been given a more and more 'exclusive' connotation, a 'reactive' identity building itself in the face of an alleged enemy and which is thought and used as a shield towards others. Therefore it is important to build an aware identity, which mustn't be 'artificially built' and that mustn't be 'wielded' against the other.

Even if in Italy diversity is always presented as a non-value in the daily life we continuously realize an apprenticeship to diversity (in our families, at school, at work, ...) and it is necessary to acknowledge and think an identity in progress, without necessarily 'cage' our own identities, but on the contrary acknowledge them and think of them as an open cultural process and therefore subject to the contaminations from outside.

- The dialogue is done starting from things that we share.

When we think to others, we often tend to emphasize differences instead of the things we share and this doesn't allow us to catch



the several aspects we share. To strive this change of approach, it is necessary that the dialogue develops by means of welcome, hospitality and meekness.

- The dialogue is done without hiding the things that make us different.

When we open ourselves to dialogue, we don't have to be afraid that differences may alienate us because, when a relationship is sincere, there is the concrete opportunity of confrontation in relation to these differences, that make more fascinating and stimulating the relationship with others.

Therefore, the dialogue requires an investment in terms of empathy and passion.

- The dialogue is done first of all starting from someone narrating. In order to start the dialogue, it is necessary to create the conditions and the spaces of narration, so that anybody has the opportunity to narrate his own experiences. The attempt to tell about ourselves could be productive as the narrative dialogue doesn't impose that someone is right and someone else is wrong, but everybody is on the same level.

- The dialogue is also done by someone who listens to.

The fact that we live in a condition full of noise makes us get used to hear, but not to listen to.

The so-called 'Facebook algorithm' practically translates the mechanism through which we usually want to stay only with those who share our ideas. Among all the friends that someone has on Facebook, after a while, the algorithm causes that the posts which are presented on the first page are those posted by the people who are more similar to us, who agree with our opinions and this tends to reduce our own identity and to make it monolithic. Instead, it would be interesting to meet those who don't share our way of thinking in order to enrich our own identity.

- The dialogue is not made only of words.

At the base of a sincere and fruitful dialogue there aren't only words, but also gestures, attentions, silence, .... An example of that is the 'Peace Village', created in Israel by Father Bruno Hussar, where Jews and Palestinians, Jewish, Christians and Muslims live together and where at the base of the idea of co-existence, there is the thought that after centuries of fights, religions have to keep quiet and to leave their place to silence thus giving the opportunity to different people of living together.

- The dialogue is a glocal phenomenon.

As human beings, we have to consider ourselves as part of a local dimension but, at the same time, as citizens of the world, thinking of the dialogue as a both global and local phenomenon.

- The dialogue is something that mutually enriches and leaves us better than we were before doing it.

The humanization is our ability to create relationships and to meet others. Therefore, the dialogue is a way to identify our fundamental process of humanization. Instead of being afraid of others, we should learn to open ourselves, to be curious to know him, thus keeping daily relationships also among religions.

Taking inspiration from these hints, it is possible to start a concrete path of dialogue. The symbolic citizenship, mentioned by intercultural pedagogy, asks for a new vision of things. Before a right to be claimed, it is a different thought to make. When recognizing belonging to the same human family, we are willing to meet others, meet him/her in the enriching differences, applying new methodologies and paradigms that are essential in building a no longer exclusivist but dialogical and peaceful future.

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# Curriculum of Digital Civic Education, Teaching of Civic Education and new Citizenship

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## Digital Citizenship and Digital Literacy to Give Voice to Teenagers: A Participatory Research Project

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper takes on a theoretical frame of reference related to the concept of active, democratic and intercultural citizenship (Milani et al., 2020). It sits within a complex vision that takes into consideration the tendency towards the universality of human rights, interculturality and interdependency as well as the concept of citizenship as a concrete way of living and acting where there is a sense of collectivity to ultimately pursue common good and global education (CoE, 2016). The authors present data and reflections emerging from the project «The discomfort of teenagers during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown: educational problems and pedagogical reflections» (P.I. Lorena Milani, University of Turin). Teenagers from Val di Susa and Rivoli have actively participated in the research project supported by participatory research methodology (White, 1991). Students have been involved in the project as protagonists, actors and research subjects (Santerini, 2020). They have been considered social problems «experts» and have been involved in the process of making questions as well as creating the research method: an analysis of the discomfort experienced by teenagers (14-19 years of age) during the COVID-19 pandemic has become an opportunity for advocacy, development, digital citizenship and leadership (Rivoltella, 2020).*

**KEYWORDS:** *Digital Citizenship, Participatory Research, Student Voice, Global Education, Civic Education.*

### Introduction

Suspension of face-to-face instruction in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic has led Professor Lorena Milani and our research group to study physical and mental discomfort experienced by children. Her project has fostered a further research which investigated the effect of school closures and prolonged period of distance learning on teenagers' behaviour in high schools. It has focused on the discomfort experienced by adolescents.

The study met the need of Norberto Rosa's high school to carry out a PCTO project (work-related learning experience) with digital tools and to introduce students to the concept of *digital citizenship* (MIUR, 2018/145).

Students have been considered expert as protagonists of the pandemic distress and developed a questionnaire for the other students. The project promoted collaboration between University and High School with a scientific collaboration agreement (MIUR, 2015/17).

Several researches, within the Italian context, have highlighted the importance of the experiential dimension for the realization of the PCTO (work-related learning experience) (Tino, Grion, 2018). Among the different strengths highlighted by the research we find other confirmations including the importance of shared design, monitoring actions and curricular continuity (Morini, 2019).

## 1. The Context and Objectives of the Project

The need to transpose the design into telematic mode and to develop an online project within the PCTO has resulted in the need to create a questionnaire that would investigate both the possible presence of an adolescents' disease in this historical period, both the form and areas of manifestation of this discomfort, including the relationships and environments that affect it. The use of digital tools has also allowed the acquisition of skills necessary for the growth of digital citizenship by students (Lanfrey, Solda, 2018).

The project was carried out according to the Timetable:

**TAB. 1.** *Project Timetable*

October-December 2020	January-March 2021	April-May 2021	May 2021	September-October 2021
Creation of focus groups with the fourth grade students. Moment of clarification of the questions.	Creation of training sessions with students by the university researchers. Creation of the online questionnaire.	Online administration of the questionnaire to three high schools in the Val di Susa (TO) and one school in Cuneo.	First analysis of the results and discussion with the students.	Analysis and dissemination of research results (creation of events in which students will actively participate)

The first part of the project involved students and teachers of the humanities: psychology, anthropology and pedagogy.

The teachers realized focus groups during which the students expressed the uneasiness experienced during the lockdown months with respect to the school experience, the relationships of friendship and love, the family life, the expectations for the future.

From the material emerged during the focus groups were then processed the questions of the questionnaire that were then reviewed in a scientific way thanks to the help of university researchers in the formative moments. During the formative moments, which are entirely online, the students learned to use the digital tools provided by G-suite to create the questionnaire, reflecting on the research methodology.

During the realization of the project three important dimensions have emerged created by the direct active involvement of the students and teachers:

- Realizing the PCTO with digital tools: making students active protagonists in DAD (Distance Teaching) methodologies, which have often seen students passive receptors of content (Marcianò, 2020);
- Creating spaces to listen to the discomfort of adolescents by teachers to give voice to feelings, to become aware of what was happening all over the world (Freire, 2014). Many of the boys and girls claim to have lived the time of the pandemic from COVID-19, with emotional upheavals, spatial, temporal, affective, with difficulty (anxiety, difficulty in attending school, daily routine change, suspension of social occasions and activities, etc.);
- Offer a university orientation opportunity, dealing with research work in education. This is one of the goals of PCTO's paths (DL 22/2020).

Having the questionnaire built up for boys and girls means focusing the attention on the aspects that they, for the first, thought interesting. This allowed us to get closer to the students' point of view. It has been an important learning opportunity not only in relation to the contextual framework within which their experiences and emotions are placed, but also in view of a more timely and appropriate programming of the research process. In addition, the formulation of questions in the questionnaire by young people has provided important research data on which to focus pedagogical reflection.

The realization of this project was possible thanks to the collaboration between the Norberto Rosa High School and the Department of Education Sciences of the University of Turin. The law on school autonomy established by art. Article 21 of Law 59/97 states that «universities and educational institutions may enter into agreements with a view to encouraging refresher courses, research and educational and university guidance». This project built a link between university research, teaching community practice and student activity, trying to recompose the dichotomy between strong university science and weak knowledge of practice (Schon, 1999).

The project has enhanced the practical knowledge not only of teachers but also of students, who in this way acquire design skills and skills of global and digital citizenship. In addition to developing the attitude to research.

## **2. Co-constructing Change: a Participatory Research Project with Adolescents at the Time of COVID-19**

In the framework of a concept of citizenship understood as the practice of belonging to the community (Pescarmona, Matera, *in press*), which is

expressed in the care and responsibility – ethical, civil and moral – this research project aims to promote a context of expression and promotion of civic duty, as a willingness to actively contribute to the life of the community (Deluigi, 2012) for the common good, with a view to improving the living environment of each citizen.

In the national and international context, several research studies show how the COVID-19 pandemic, and related restrictive measures, have had important consequences on the physical and psychological well-being of adolescents (Minozzi, Saulle *et al.*, 2021; Marques de Miranda *et al.*, 2020), but mostly exploratory research has been conducted.

In order to provide a competent response to the existential, social and educational challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has produced and continues to generate, the research project aims, first of all, to understand what students' perceptions are of the current health emergency and its consequences. This as a starting point to re-interpret, through the eyes of the students, the phenomenon under study and to identify and implement strategies aimed at a more conscious taking charge of their state of mind and their needs by the adult society.

Assuming the interpretivist epistemological perspective (see Mertens, 1998), the research is inserted within the transformative paradigm, providing, therefore, a participatory approach (White, 1991; Mortari, Ghirotto, 2019) that aims to stimulate participatory processes from below, returning centrality to those who are considered 'experts' of a social and educational phenomenon, in a perspective of advocacy and social justice.

Therefore, through the active involvement of 1,157 male and female students from 4 schools in Piedmont (Italy) throughout the research process, the research has two main goals:

- Understanding the phenomenon: investigating the perspective of the subjects in training, the first recipients of educational interventions and welfare policies and reorganization of the school system, allows us to capture the complexity of the phenomenon, taking into primary consideration the points of view of people who live and mean the situation of study (see Lincoln, Guba, 1985);
- Improving educational practice: pedagogical reflection from minor' conceptions allow us to inform educational practice and, therefore, to provide a more adequate response to the needs that emerge from the educational context.

In particular, students were involved, in a circular process of generative dialogue between researchers and adolescents, in the phases of:

- *Design*, construction and validation of the questionnaire, based on the solicitations received from the students regarding the themes considered of greatest interest for the investigation. In this way, students were guided in the learning and use of digital tools, developing new skills in a process of digital literacy;



- Training, thus support and accompaniment on the methodology of research in education (in relation to research typologies, questions, objectives, methods and techniques) and on digital tools that can assist the researcher in processing and presenting research data (e.g., Word Art software for creating word clouds). The sharing of knowledge and perspectives between researchers and participants and the co-reflection on them led to the reworking and co-construction of more complex knowledge about the phenomenon under study and generate an epistemological transformation in both. The training connotation of the research process is fostered by the role of the researcher, who, by stimulating the creation of a mutual learning environment, helped to clarify and contextualize the subjective experiences of the research participants;
- Co-processing of research data, in which students were involved in the analysis supported by the researchers.

Therefore, collaborative strategies of data collection and analysis were used in order not to exacerbate the power asymmetry between researcher and participant, both *subjects* and *partners* of the research. The methodological choice is based, therefore, on the full mutual recognition of equal dignity in the process of knowledge construction, in a common planning supported by the reciprocal will to bring transformations to the context.

Throughout the research process, the active participation of students allowed them to share emotions, feelings, perspectives and suggestions, not only with the researchers, but also with other students, helping to reduce the learners' loneliness, to increase their confidence and to create an 'inclusive community' among peers in which to recognize themselves. Thus, the research takes on an ethical connotation on the micro level, proposing to facilitate improvements in the lives of the participants (Kara, 2015).

### **3. Research as an Emancipatory Tool**

The assumptions at the basis of this methodological choice are in the will to rethink the right to listen to the child, provided for by art. 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in terms of a right that is fully respected and recognized when the child is concretely granted the opportunity to produce information and to express it freely. In this sense, adolescents have been made protagonists, actors and subjects of research, together with researchers, because they are considered 'privileged witnesses' in the knowledge not only of the social phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences in terms of discomfort and restructuring of social and educational contexts and interventions, but also of the possible ways to investigate and to bring about improvements in the areas of life that have been affected by

the emergency. In the context of these considerations, two important goals emerged that the direct active involvement of students in the research project could allow to pursue:

- to provide a pedagogical and methodological perspective: firstly, to teach students to use research methodologies through practice. Secondly, to build spaces for discussion with adolescents, increasing their personal and social awareness and power in view of change (Freire, 1968);
- to be an important opportunity for orientation: approaching the discipline of scientific research can open up new opportunities for self-experimentation and generate new aspirations and motivations.

In conclusion, it is possible to state that the research assumed an emancipatory connotation. In fact, the participants were supported in the process of discovery and re-discovery of their own instances and their own potential and in that of making them explicit. Therefore, primary importance was given to the real needs of the research subjects and not to those 'thought up' for them by the researcher outside the context. In addition, the voice of the participants was supported by theory, in order to more consciously inform educational, social and welfare policies in favor of the same participants. Research thus becomes an emancipatory tool (Kemmis, Wilkinson, 1998): it encourages processes of self-awareness and self-determination in the subjects and fuels a political debate for change.

#### **4. Young voices, needs and freedom**

Students considered the project as a way to state their opinions freely, as well as an advocacy programme, which could reveal their unseen and unheard needs. Therefore, it has been defined as an 'open window' during the lockdown period.

They need to express and narrate emotions; school and home experiences, family and friends relationship and conflicts, episodes of violence and self-harm, changes in lifestyles, possibility of personal fulfillment, social disappointment and disorientation.

We want to report some extracts from the interview questionnaires which reveal disorientation, anger, discomfort, but also the desire to speak and explain the teenagers position to the adult world.

One of the student, witness 1, testifies the discomfort in relation to the misunderstanding of the adult world and the lack of listening «we always say *poor adults* who do not work or *poor children*, but...what about us? we scream and you are not listening to us. I have become continually depressed and suffering of anxiety attacks because of you, your attitude and your education».

The lockdown, prolonged by distance learning for adolescents, caused disorientation and a sort of temporal, emotional and relational

suspension that is described by many boys and girls. Witness 2 says «It was a bit sad, my friendships have not diminished, but returning to school I felt alive again. In this period of lockdown, it is as if i have not lived. I went from lessons to books, and I did the same thing every day».

The habits of adolescents are upset, and their passions remain suspended in a meaningless space-time: witness 3 says «I had many projects, trips, parties, appointments, friendships, entertainment, goals, desire to do, enthusiasm, dreams, passions, commitments that I had made and that I wanted to carry out. I had, now no more».

Along with emotional and motivational suffering, there is an increase in awareness of what the school is able to give and around the role of teachers «I felt a great demoralization and demotivation. I discovered that being in the classroom is precious, because, and this must be said, the teachers, the environment itself, captures us, holds us back. Being away and looking at yourself from a screen, where you are on the other side, who can do what you do, leads to more distraction» (Witness 4). Pupils recognize the educational role of teachers, beyond didactics: «I want to be honest, I missed most of the lessons, because I could use the phone, have lunch, mind my own business, just because in front of me, I had my pc, my sandwich and no camera on. Unfortunately, it happens, we get distracted, often. Professors are indispensable, their looking us i the eye, waking us up, letting us, follow us at all costs, it is precious. Staying at home was worse than good and with the arrival of the second wave, the colours, well, everything was in vain for me» (Witness 5).

Many students also spontaneously report the onset of episodes of violence, anxiety, sleep loss, eating disorders, depression. We can read this in the words of witness 8: «It has been a bad year; it has severed ties with almost everyone except the people I understand are important. Despite this, it was and still is a bad period that still leaves a trace in everyday life with anxiety attacks, panic attacks and emotional crises. I am not optimistic about the situation, and I think that everything will be repeated like last March as in a loop. My emotions are all in confusion, I don't know if I'm happy, sad or just apathetic, it's chaos».

Self-harm and pain also emerge both from the data and from the free declarations of the students: «I started to be more and more stressed and, to bite myself when inside of me I can no longer bear certain things. I just hope the situation improves and I hope I can have an experience like a normal high school student» (Witness 9); «I lost myself and felt emotions that I had never felt before, negative emotions. I suffered, I had eating disorders and self-harm, despite I always been a very sunny and positive girl» (Witness 10).

Despite the severe level of suffering experienced and suffered, the students demonstrate a lucid ability to analyze relationships with the adult world, the social situation and a profound introspective competence in the search for glimmers of hope: «2020 was a very difficult year, my outlook on the world has changed and – looking for a

positive side – loneliness allowed me to reflect on the person I am and the person I want to be» (Witness 11).

## Conclusion

The project aims to join participation, engagement and critical resistance of students. They have become agents of change:

- their active involvement as protagonists and researchers allowed to join more than thousand students in the Piedmont area;
- their words invite teachers and leaders to assume new educational postures;
- peer support and anonymity have allowed the most fragile subjects to report the situations they have been experiencing.

The students' questionnaires adopt the perspective of the Pedagogy of the word (Freire, 2002, 2014; School of Barbiana, 1967). The participants have chosen some specific areas of the questionnaire and the terms that have been selected can be defined as generating and liberating words.

The words that students have chosen, investigated and used restore freedom and can guide the adult world, educators and citizens in general, to become aware of the situation they have experienced. These words can accompany the fight against inequalities, can promote a social change and a paradigm shift. We do not hope that the world will change radically because it is changing language, but – with Freire's thinking – we believe that hanging language is part of the process of changing the world: the relationship between language, thought and the world is a dialectical, procedural and contradictory relationship (Freire, 2014).

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## Digital Educational Poverty: A Survey and Some Questions about the Detection of a New Construct

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper aims to rethink the concept of educational poverty in the digital age by verifying whether digital educational poverty coincides tout court with educational poverty or whether the comparison between these two dimensions requires a further in-depth analysis taking into consideration multiple social, cultural, pedagogical, expressive and psychological factors. In this perspective, digital educational poverty should not only be seen as social deprivation, but also as a cultural and expressive element, leading to reflection on the gap in creativity and 'authorship' that often characterizes a poor or problematic use of social media by young people. The COVID-19 emergency has highlighted the need to rethink the digital divide not only as regards the aspects related to technical access to technological devices and connection networks, but also in consideration of the deficit of conscious, innovative and creative use of digital technology, in a perspective oriented towards a participatory and responsible citizenship. Taking into consideration the four basic areas of educational poverty, this paper aims to investigate if and how digital poverty can be measured. This reflection is based on a survey tool which was conceived in consultation with the authors and already used in a survey carried out by the CREMIT-Catholic University and Save the Children, which in the first months of 2021 involved students at lower secondary schools (12-13 years) in Italy. Survey results will be examined with a view to highlight how different references to European documents and literature may lead to different perspectives in the survey methodology. In the last part, the paper points out a number of additional research perspectives and indications for educational interventions against educational poverty in relation to the concept of Dynamic Digital Literacies.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Educational Poverty, Digital Divide, Digital Educational Poverty, Digital Competence, Dynamic Digital Literacies*

### 1. Beyond the Digital Divide

The COVID-19 emergency heralded the all-pervading presence of digital technology and at the same time highlighted the problem of how people without the proper technological equipment and reliable IT connections can access essential services (Pasta, 2020; Marangi, 2020a).

Aside from the difficulties experienced in 2020 and 2021 in the spheres of school, work and social relationships, it seems clear now that inequality of access and the difficulty of using digital technology is not merely a matter of technological data, but extends to a broader sphere of expressive and relational competences, particularly in the case of young people.

This is why the notion of the digital divide needs to be re-examined, particularly with regard to theory of propagation (Flichy, 1995), whereby the massive spread of technology nonetheless produces its effects with a progressive impact. Access to performance technologies and adequate connective infrastructures is of course necessary, but it is no longer enough. Back in 1996, when US Vice President Al Gore spoke of the digital divide, it was already known that non-use of the Internet could give rise to a form of social inequality that was manifest in the gap between the *information haves* and *have nots*, and that specific public policies would be needed to ensure equal access. In sociological terms, the 'normalisation' thesis argues for the progressive elimination of the information gap, which gradually normalizes until it disappears completely as digital competences level out, according to Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory. In contrast, the 'stratification' thesis sees an ever-rising increase in the inequalities created by the Internet; rather than diminish over time, they persist and increasingly discriminate between the digitally included and excluded (Alù, Longo, 2020).

From complete exclusion to the conscious and varied use of digital technologies, Sartori (2006) suggests five dimensions to be adopted for bridging the digital divide: quality of available technological means; digital competence; availability of social networks for stimulation and possible advice; independent use to satisfy personal interests; and variety of aims of use.

With regard to these five dimensions, it appears to be crucially important to consider the digital divide from an educational and cultural perspective, across the different social strata. It is not just a question of gaining access, but of being able to acquire and use the key competences that let the user experience the digital world in an appropriate, responsible, ethical and creative way.

Bauman (2007) argues that the concept of poverty in contemporary society hinges not only on the possession of material resources, but also on the ability to use them and their levels of consumption. Nussbaum (2012) also reinterprets poverty and disadvantage, viewing it not so much as a scarcity of goods or income, but as a lack of opportunity and a failure of ability. He also emphasizes the importance of pedagogical strategies and educational activities that can help prevent and counteract this gap, which is no longer only material, but also educational.

The social and cultural aspects of the digital divide today need to be viewed more from a qualitative than a quantitative perspective. As Gui



(2015) suggests, increased digital use does not automatically translate into a greater social inclusion. The pervasiveness of the smartphone does not necessarily lead to greater access to information and resources on the web or to the user's ability to effectively and strategically adapt their online activities in order to design their way of relating or to achieve their communication goals. Conversely, it can be an indicator of certain aspects of cultural poverty, which sometimes evolves into a decreased access to other opportunities for developing relationships or for learning offline.

The ability to make the best use of the potential of digital tools and to avoid falling into a pattern of mere consumption or mechanically repeating a few operations suggested or pre-set by the device fits in the concept of literacy. Livingstone (2009) contends that the full development of media literacy must include four different dimensions of digital use: access, analysis, evaluation and production. But the actual process of knowledge acquisition can only be activated if one is able to turn individual competences into social practices and use them to build a real interpretative and productive framework in which knowledge of the different interfaces is always linked to the creative ability to design and adapt one's expressive and communicative actions to the various arising needs.

The structured competences that Livingstone sees as identifying media literacy in line with the complexity of digital media imply the existence of a new educational attitude, rather than didactic or scholastic, and, perhaps, the definition of new paradigms of interpretation of what has been happening in these years.

## **2. Measuring digital educational poverty**

In view of this scenario, the NGO Save the Children asked the Research Centre on Media Education, Innovation and Technology (CREMIT) of the Catholic University of Milan to contribute to the development of a tool to survey «digital educational poverty»; the first outcome of this work was the report *Let's rewrite the future. A survey on educational digital poverty* (2021). In the following paragraphs we will go over the survey execution methodology and look at the different theoretical frameworks used, assess its measurability, and finally discuss how we might define the construct itself, which is new in the literature. This discussion should bear in mind that, in view of the advocacy and summoning powers of stakeholders and political decision makers, Save the Children succeeded in introducing the concept of «Educational Poverty» and the related Educational Poverty Index (EPI) into the public debate, from coining the definition in 2014: these references are the basis for scientific reflection, social planning actions and national tenders.

In a context where absolute and relative poverty continue to be measured in economic terms by the National Institute of Statistics

(ISTAT), the EPI indicator has become established because it offers different perspectives, in the sense that it includes complex information on deprivation of opportunities and rights (education, health, culture, participation, social relations and physical development) (Caruso, Cerbara, 2020). Hypothetically, then, digital educational poverty should be measured in a similar way to EP. The EPI was made by using the AMPI method (Mazziotta *et al.*, 2010; Mazziotta, Pareto, 2013), based on a correction of the arithmetic mean with a measurement of horizontal variability that depends on the coefficient of variation of the indicators normalized for the reference territory. It generally varies between 70 and 130 and is calculated for each region as the arithmetic mean of the scores for each of the selected indicators, standardized against the reference value for Italy, which is set at 100.

The twelve factors that make up the IPE include, for example, the percentages of children between 0 and 2 years old without access to early childhood public education services, primary school classes without full-time attendance, pupils who do not use school canteens, children between 6 and 17 years old who have not been to the theatre, children between 6 and 17 years old who do not play sports regularly, or who do not read books, or who do not use the Internet.

As the research currently stands, it was not possible to create an IPE-like digital index; in the following paragraphs we will explain how the *AbCD – Autovalutazione di base delle Competenze Digitali* (Basic Self-Assessment of Digital Competences) tool was created, and then discuss the measurability of digital poverty.

Digital educational poverty does not just mean deprivation of access to devices, to the Internet, to distance learning and to integrated digital education – indeed, these issues have been mapped by other research projects carried out during the health emergency (Pasta, 2021a). The perspective adopted here refers to the lack of acquisition of digital competences, the 'new alphabets' that are needed in order to experience citizenship in the post-media society (Rivoltella, 2020). Quoting the definition proposed by Save the Children (2021, 15), «digital educational poverty thus refers to deprivation of opportunities to learn, but also to experiment, develop and allow skills, talents and aspirations to flourish freely, through the responsible, critical and creative use of digital tools».

In order to retrace the method for the development of the AbCD tool, it is therefore necessary to remind ourselves of the 'digital competence' reference frameworks. We can identify two main approaches.

One is based on a rights perspective, in line with the founding values of Save the Children, and is guided by the European Union's *Digital Competencies 2.1* framework (2017), associated with «a critical, conscious and responsible use of digital technology for learning, working and participating in society». It also complements the new *EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child* (2021) and the *General Comment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the rights of*

*children in the digital environment* (2021), with particular reference to the right to learning, access to correct information, privacy, freedom of expression and opinion, protection and non-discrimination. This perspective can be found in the idea of 'Digital Competence' of *Europe's Digital Decade 2030* (2021) and in previous European digital competence surveys, such as ICILS (2018) and DESI (2019).

The five areas of Dig.Comp 2.1 – Information and Data Literacy, Communication and Collaboration, Digital Content Creation, Security and Problem Solving – constitute a valid point of reference, but it is also necessary to avoid oversimplification, an error which is already visible, for example in the editorial policies supporting teacher training under Italian Law No. 92/2019, which tend to steer digital civic education (or digital citizenship) back to the Dig.Comp 2.1 framework alone (Carretero Gomez *et al.*, 2017; Martinelli, 2021).

A different perspective that gives more focus to the dynamism and transdisciplinary nature of competences is what Rivoltella (2020) calls New Literacy, stressing how a segmented approach betrays the 'citizenship vocation' of digital competence (Buckingham, 2019). From a theoretical standpoint, he reinterprets digital competence on the basis of three dimensions: criticism (semantics, meanings, social and cultural sense), ethics (values, responsibilities, citizenship), aesthetics (codes, languages, narratives), while also relying on the concept of Dynamic Literacies (Potter, McDougall, 2017). In Italy, we can detect this vocation in the five areas that constitute the *Digital Civic Education Curriculum* of the Ministry of Education (2018). They are: the Internet and Ongoing Changes; Media Education; Information Education; Quantification and Computation: Data and Artificial Intelligence; Digital Culture and Creativity. The vocation is evident also in the attempt to integrate the discussion into the three areas of Constitution, Sustainable Development and Digital Citizenship – of Italian Law No. 92/2019, so that civic education cannot be disjointed and treated separately, thus compromising the ability to critically assess the ongoing transformation processes. Finally, in the international and research arena, we find this approach in the work of the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) of Stanford University, in *Students' Civic Online Reasoning* (2019) and *Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning* (2016).

### **3. The 'AbCD – Basic Self-Assessment of Digital Competences' tool**

We created the 'AbCD - Basic Self-Assessment of Digital Competences' attempting to combine the two different interpretative paradigms mentioned earlier; the tool therefore includes self-assessment elements, socio-cultural data and certification questions (right or wrong answers), with the aim of identifying media equipment and consumption, self-

assessment of competences, 'measurement' awareness and ethical, aesthetic and critical attitudes.

The questionnaire's 34 closed-ended questions (taking about 20 minutes to cover) hinged on:

- personal data, family background and possession and use of digital tools at home and at school, as well as the perception of one's skills and the advantages and disadvantages of using them;
- students were asked to self-assess their digital skills and answer a series of questions on their 'positioning' towards new technologies, or what they appreciate most about their use, and also the aspects that cause particular concern;
- questions for each of the four dimensions of digital educational poverty – more about this shortly;
- perceptions on the future use of digital tools at school and in life, and what institutions can do to promote educational opportunities for the use of digital tools.

By way of example, two certification items responding to the different approaches to digital competence and its possible deprivation are given, respectively, Rights and Media Literacy Education.

Question 23 shows a screenshot of a Microsoft Word file and provides a list of options for answering the question: «How do you insert an interactive link into a text file». In this case, there is only one right answer, thus allowing technical competence to be evaluated. This type of question, which combines an iconic and a verbal mediator, takes into account the possible theoretical abstraction difficulties pertinent to the sample age group, i.e., thirteen-year-old students, and aims to mediate between purely abstract and mnemonic reasoning and iconic recognition of a concrete operational situation, which allows the respondent to also retrieve the data of the actual use experience in front of a digital screen, at school or in the home. In this way it appears possible to detect not only the presence or absence of abstract competences in technological knowledge, but also to outline a perspective on the familiarity or lack thereof, deriving from a more widespread or habitual use of a digital tool, a dimension that pertains not only to the cognitive sphere, but also to socio-cultural aspects.

Question 31, on the other hand, shows a screenshot of a TikTok video of an ambulance «being driven around empty for hours» in order to create 'a sense of terror' during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not hard to see that this is Covid-denialist, conspiracy content with an anti-institutional bias aimed at undermining social cohesion. It is therefore part of that category of products that have generated what the World Health Organization (WHO) has labelled 'infodemic'. There are no information elements, time and space references, or references to actual facts, allowing to associate the image (an ambulance driving along a random street) with the writing that accompanies it («Such episodes were reported in Lazio and Campania. Ambulance drives around empty for several hours. This is the strategy of terror»). The questionnaire

says: «You are getting information about the COVID-19 pandemic and you happen to see this video on TikTok»; this is followed by four questions that ask to identify the author, the emotional response elicited, possible time references and what the respondent would do if he/she saw this video online. Other questions take this approach, which is also found in the aforementioned SHEG research (2016, 2019). This type of question usually starts with a reference to the typical socio-cultural framework of the sample age group. In this case, it is not possible to identify a certifiably 'scientific' answer, but rather one that appears to be more desirable in relation to the development of critical skills – the recognition of news items and their source – and of the ethical dimension, aimed at assessing the respondent's ability to grasp the demagogic tone and the exploitative purposes of the video. Here, it is not enough to have access to technology and to be functionally efficient in its use; it is also necessary to demonstrate an understanding of the relevant communicative context and of the social, cultural and ideological aspects underlying some of the communicative dynamics of social media.

Digital educational poverty has been analyzed on the basis of four dimensions, which in turn form the basis of the educational poverty paradigm, referring respectively to learning opportunities for: understanding, being, living together, and living an autonomous and active life in the digital environment and in the post-media society. The first dimension 'Learning to Understand' refers to the deprivation of the cognitive competences needed for living in a world where the use of technology has become crucial; the lack of access to technology is accompanied by a lack of basic digital literacy relating to the knowledge of tools and their features and functionalities, and also to the knowledge of applications (e.g. how to use calculation and/or writing software, browsers, search engines or how to archive material) and problem solving skills.

The second dimension, 'Learning to Be', takes a broader view of the logic behind the tools and refers to the ability to create a digital identity and to measure, for example, in terms of deprivation, the inability to manage privacy settings on a social media channel. The 'Learning to Live Together' dimension refers to appropriate relationships with others in onlife society and encompasses deprivation in the ability to know, understand, accept and respect the diversity of identities, lifestyles and cultures of others in the digital world, a condition that in extreme cases can result in open discrimination, intolerance and cyberbullying.

Finally, the fourth dimension 'Learning for an Autonomous and Active Life', assess opportunities to gain access the vast and all-encompassing knowledge available in the digital world, and to digital activism, which can allow the user to become an agent of change through participation; deprivation thus points to a lack of creativity and critical thinking, two skills which would allow to select sources and to identify manipulation through fake news more efficiently.

In determining the percentage of children in digital educational poverty, we decided that this category should include those respondents who were unable to correctly answer more than half of the certification questions that measure basic competences for each of the four areas: (understanding, being, living together, active and autonomous living). Children who gave incorrect answers to most of the questions for all four areas were considered to be in 'extreme digital educational poverty'.

#### 4. The survey

In spring 2021, Save the Children used the AbCD questionnaire for an initial pilot survey on digital educational poverty in Italy. It was administered to a sample of 772 13-year-olds attending third grade lower secondary school in 11 Italian cities and provinces<sup>1</sup>.

The full report (Save the Children, 2021) gives a broad overview of the findings; we highlight some of them here in support of the introduction of the 'digital educational poverty' paradigm and its measurability.

First of all, there is some evidence confirming the link between digital educational poverty and the digital divide.

- The structural delay in the use of technologies in Italian schools is problematic: before COVID-19, 82% of children had never used a tablet at school; 49.8% had never used a smartphone for teaching activities at school and 34.6% had no experience of interactive whiteboards. This data is in line with other surveys (Pasta, 2021a), despite the plans for investment in 'digital schools' in recent years and the various methodological recommendations that the *Digital Civic Education Curriculum* and the Ministerial document *BYOD – Bring Your Own Device* (2018) have laid out for teachers (Rivoltella, 2018).
- Children's concerns about digital skills above all reflect the actual risks: viruses (66.2%), cyberbullying (26.1%) and meeting dangerous people online (35.6%). This is the focus adopted by many school civic education programmes in recent years, and it also characterises the layout of the Dig.Comp.
- Socio-economic variants continue to generate new inequalities: economic status of parents and educational attainment of families, as had previously emerged in relation to digital literacy levels found by the ICILS survey (2018). The clearest differences emerge, however, in the 'learning to understand' area: for these questions, 30% of the children whose mothers had no educational

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<sup>1</sup> The selection of the sample was made in consultation with Monica Pratesi, Full Professor of Statistics at the Department of Economics and Management of the University of Pisa.

qualifications – including primary or middle school diploma – did not reach the minimum level of basic digital literacy competences; for students whose mothers had higher education qualifications, the percentage was 13.9% and 5.5% when the mothers had a university degree. The percentages are almost identical when the father's educational qualifications are examined (26.1% - 14.6% - 5.1%).

- Higher levels of digital educational poverty occurred among those who: a) hardly ever did their homework; b) did not search for news on current events. A 29% segment of children who did not devote any time to homework were in educational poverty in the 'learning to understand' dimension, compared to 18% of children who spent an hour or more a day on homework. A 35.9% group of children who did not devote time any to looking up news failed to demonstrate a minimum level of digital literacy skills, compared to 16.7% of their peers who spent an hour or more a day on this activity.

We now report on the data that most directly points to digital educational poverty.

In the 'learning to understand area', the best results were obtained among the pupils in the pilot survey: only 20.1% got more than half of the questions wrong, which is consistent with the 24% of respondents in the ICILS survey (2018) who did not have minimum levels of digital literacy.

The failure statistics increase significantly for the other dimensions: 'learning to be' (46.3%), 'learning to live together' (56.8%) and 'learning to have an active and autonomous life' (46.1%).

It is important to remember that 28.6% of the children in the sample incorrectly answered more than half the questions in two of the four dimensions of educational poverty. This figure also includes 18% who incorrectly answered more than half the questions in two of the four dimensions and 7.3% who answered incorrectly in all four dimensions. The report considers this last group to be in extreme digital educational poverty.

Social variants mainly occur in the first area: of those children who incorrectly answered more than half of the questions in the 'learning to understand' area, 34.1% did not have a PC at home, while 16.6% had one or more PCs in the house.

It is interesting to analyze the answers to question 31 aforementioned (TikTok conspiracy video). Almost all the respondents answered correctly to the question asking them to state the author ('the author could be anyone'), while half of them (49.2%) failed to recognize the elements of time and space ('We cannot understand when the video was shot' is the correct answer). Among those who answered this last point incorrectly no significant difference was observed between those who are born in a foreign country (53.3%) and those whose parents

have a low educational level (50.2% - 50.4%). Wrong answers increase from 47.8% to 54.1% depending on whether or not fast internet connections are available in the house. Regarding the presence of digital devices at home it was noted that if the family has only one or no smartphone, the percentage of incorrect answers is 58.3%, which drops to 50.2% if there are two or three devices and to 48% if there are more than three. The same percentages are applicable to the PC, i.e. 54.2%, 44.6% and 39.3%.

In order to identify possible areas of noncoincidence between educational poverty and digital educational poverty, it would be interesting as a future iteration of the survey to administer the AbCD questionnaire to other particular target groups of children in educational poverty, such as unaccompanied minors. In fact, other studies (Pasta, 2021b) have shown how failure to capitalize on pre-existing digital skills among young migrants – groups with a high level of educational poverty – has proved to be a missed opportunity for the refugee reception system in Italy.

## **5. Detecting Dynamic Digital Literacies**

As previously mentioned, the Save the Children pilot survey proposed a completely new paradigm of 'digital educational poverty'. We consider this a very worthwhile initiative, since it re-examines the historical and unresolved problem of the digital divide, which has widened due to heightened social inequality during the COVID-19 pandemic (Pasta, 2020; Marangi, 2020b), with a much broader scope and a more complex character. This broader horizon is in fact educational poverty, which in turn broadens the concept of economic poverty.

At the basis of this reassessment there is, as has been reconstructed, a rethinking of digital competence and its deprivation. Taking an overview of recent decades, we can say that, particularly in schools and educational spaces, the technological path (provision of devices) has been prevalent alongside teacher training (Galliani, 2015). The 2018 *Curriculum* has clearly moved away from a technocratic vision and has instead set its sights on governing change and steering it towards sustainable goals for society (democratic citizenship goals) and promoting a gradual shift in focus from Digital Literacy to Digital Citizenship Education (Martinelli, 2021).

The AbCD tool provides a means for surveying digital educational poverty on a quantitative basis, but so far an index comparable to the IPE of educational poverty is not within reach. It is plausible that future thinking could go in this direction, provided that the understandable desire to measure the huge scale of the change driven by digital technology (Floridi, 2014), does not lead to an oversimplification or segmentation of the idea of digital competence, or to set it aside on technocratic grounds. By acknowledging this complexity we identify the



need to avoid a 'patent-like' certification approach, i.e. the issuance of a static certificate, which may, of course, be renewable annually, but which can only rely on partial or superficial surveys that are not representative of the various possible meanings of digital competence, be they formal or informal, individual or collective, and may display traits that recall the 'decatalogue route' or the drafting of 'manifestos' as forms of light media education.

Today, it seems inconsistent to suppose that we can measure e-skills by adopting a purely certification-based approach. While it is important to analyze quantitative data, we must also bear in mind that the development of digital skills must include a pedagogical and socio-cultural perspective that fosters a dialectic relationship between formal and informal levels, between cognitive and theoretical dimensions and between operational and pragmatic dimensions, thereby encouraging the emergence of each person's multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983).

In this perspective, the three conditions must be kept in mind the three conditions of the Community Technologies construct (Rivoltella, 2017): the communal and anthropologically relational use of technology; social intentionality built into a socio-educational framework; and the goal of establishing and creating the conditions to build and maintain substantial and lasting bonds, in both the digital and the physical reality.

## **6. A critical assessment and the new research perspectives opened**

The research carried out represents an interesting test to verify the reliability of the AbCD questionnaire confirming the hypothesis to create a DEPI (Digital Education Poverty Index). However, a number of factors must be taken into consideration.

First of all, the questionnaire should be submitted to a larger representative sample of subjects, in order to improve the hypotheses on the thresholds that will define the index.

Another consideration concerns the qualitative/quantitative nature of the questionnaire. This is an important factor to be considered because, as previously mentioned, digital educational poverty cannot be measured only by quantitative parameters (family income, presence or absence of an internet connection/digital devices, level of language skills), but it must also take into consideration qualitative factors. From this perspective, the choice to determine the DEPI threshold based on the percentage of incorrect answers to 2 of the 4 dimensions of the questionnaire must be considered as provisional. This issue will be addressed and resolved when the index procedure is defined, which will involve an accurate analysis of the mixed nature of the data on which the index will be built.

Moreover, it will be paramount to overcome one of the limitations of Dig. Comp. framework, namely its static nature. We cannot perform a

certification-based assessment of digital skills by creating a checklist and using the resulting totals to define the attained skill level. Assessment research in the field of Media Literacy Education has long since proved that media literacies are highly specific, which means that they must be measured in real-life contexts: we cannot evaluate digital competency unless we can, to some degree, observe it being applied to a specific issue in a real context. This represents a clear obstacle to any certification-based approach, which normally relies on information collected in non-authentic contexts (classroom) and in non-real-life situations. Furthermore, digital literacies are not static but dynamic (Potter, McDougall, 2017). This means that they emerge through ongoing use and are co-determined by other subjective and context-related variables; moreover, they tend to change continuously over time. Therefore, there is a tangible possibility that a literacy seemingly detectable today might not still be so a few days later.

As we can infer, similar considerations and methodological issues will have to be tackled and resolved, likely by refining once again the questionnaire, while reflecting deeply on how to determine the thresholds from which to derive the index. A working hypothesis that could perhaps be useful in this regard entails standardizing the questionnaire by increasing the total number of questionnaires filled out. If we were to ask professionals involved in digital education in schools and in youth centres to hand out a baseline questionnaire, and if these questionnaires were then used to implement a single large data set, we could assume that the mean and median values would stabilize. As a result, we would then have real thresholds to work with by separating the data in order to obtain a general index and specific indices, defined on the basis of age, geographical location, etc.

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## Digital Citizenship Education in the First Cycle of Education. First Results of a Collaborative Research in Lombardy and Molise (Italy)

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**ABSTRACT:** *Digital Citizenship Education is part of Civic Education, consolidating the role of schools to promote the education of citizens. Acquiring digital skills in today's society is a key element, emphasizing the importance of considering technologies as subject of reflection and not only as educational tools. The aim is to help students to develop a critical mindset, responsibility and ethical awareness, elements on which Media Education insists from the beginning. Since the school year 2018-19, CREMIT (Research Center about Media Education, Innovation and Technology) of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart and University of Molise are leading a research project to design vertical curricula (from pre-primary to lower secondary education) for the development of digital civic competences. 14 schools in Lombardy and 5 schools in Molise were chosen on the basis of the significance of past experiences in the field of media education and in order to represent all the provinces of the two Italian regions. The research project, which caused COVID-19 health emergency, has been postponed by one year, is structured as follows: a first year for designing the curriculum and a second year for experimenting paths of Digital Citizenship Education. Collaborative research has been chosen, allowing the direct involvement of teachers as co-investigators. The first results can be summarized as follows: collegiality as an essential condition for the full inclusion of Media Education in curricular teaching and the value of active methods to promote engagement and learning.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Digital Citizenship Education, Media Education Literacy, First cycle of education, Collegiality, Student-Centered Approach*

### Introduction

Acquiring digital skills in today's society is a key element. The aim is to help students to develop a critical mindset, responsibility and ethical awareness, elements on which Media Education insists from the beginning.

In the Italian context, since 2019 Digital Citizenship Education is part of Civic Education, consolidating the role of schools to promote the

education of new citizens, emphasizing the importance of considering technologies as subject of reflection and not only educational tools.

The contribution aims to present the first results of a collaborative research that took place in Lombardy and in Molise (Italy), led by Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan and University of Molise<sup>1</sup>.

## 1. Theoretical framework

### 1.1. *Media Education at school*

Reflecting on Media Education curriculum, the theoretical framework that guided us considers that it should include three levels of development. According to Rivoltella (2007, 20-21) they are:

- alphabetical: at this level, there are technical and language skills that allow a person to use tools, languages and codes of the media and increasingly develop sophisticated skills in relation to their languages. It is configured as the first condition to access the Web;
- critical: it concerns the analysis of media texts, in order to develop 'reading' skills, autonomous and critical thinking in the subject regarding the messages of media;
- expressive: finally, there is the ability to creatively use the media, in order to encourage original expression, with particular attention to developing a sense of responsibility about what is permissible or not to do on the Web.

One on the most debated issue is the integration of Media Education into the school curriculum:

Media Education has the potential of a real 'Trojan horse', a progressive influence that may very well exist within the traditional curriculum to challenge the most ingrained and outdated values and preconceptions (Masterman, 1997, 82-3).

The international literature review teaches that about the curriculum there are three hypotheses: disciplinary, transversal and mixed (Rivoltella, 2001).

In the first one, Media Education is an independent discipline. In this way, in English-speaking countries the subject is called *Media Studies*, in Italy, in the Seventies *Educazione all'immagine* or *Educazione visiva* (Brocca Commission). The main advantage of this hypothesis is that the topic finds an adequate space in the curriculum, with a specialized teacher and institutional recognition. However, the responsibility of only

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one teacher impacts on the de-responsibility of the other teachers and contributes to excessive 'schooling' by losing educational value.

Transversal hypothesis is called «curriculum across the curriculum» (Masterman, 1985): all the subjects must have an educational attention about the media. The main strength is that the responsibility of Media Education is shared between teachers, but a coordinator and co-design are needed. This solution requests an effort of collegiality that is not always present ('if everyone takes care of it, the risk is that no one takes care of it').

The last hypothesis consists in a mediation between the first and the second hypothesis, building a mixed model, with all the advantages and disadvantages already mentioned: a transversal approach in Primary Schools (Media Education) and a disciplinary one in Secondary School (Media Studies).

In any case, it is necessary that,

[...] the entire teaching staff takes on Media Education in an expanded concept of responsibility that does not mean reductively the introduction of media in the school as a theme to be addressed, but as a mentality to be shared (Rivoltella, 2001, 74).

### *1.2. Digital Civic Education in Italy*

In Italy, Media Education has historically struggled to carve out a relevant space in the school, even if there are many individual initiatives carried out by teachers more sensitive to the issue.

With the *National Digital School Plan (PNSD)* the theme of media at school emerges in a more organic and significant way even if the first sign of a turning point is in 2018 with the *Syllabus of Digital Citizenship Education* that for the first time thematizes it in school (Bruni *et al.*, 2019). The main topics of the *Syllabus* are five (see Figure 1):

- Internet and the ongoing change: general understanding of change, originating from the convergence between digital technologies and connectivity, Net neutrality and Internet governance, Internet Rights;
- Media Education: collaboration, respect the other starting from language and critical reflection on concepts such as identity and representation;
- Information Literacy: research, collection, use and storage of information, change in the information production and distribution ecosystem (fake news and information cocoons);
- Quantification and computation (data and Artificial Intelligence): social, economic, political, cultural and ethical issues connected to quantification and computation;
- Digital culture and creativity: cultural nature of digital media, creation of new genres and narratives, responsibility towards the implications of creating and disseminating content on the Web.

**FIG. 1. Syllabus of Digital Citizenship Education**

Source: <http://ecd.generazioniconnesse.it>

Schools must insert topics in their Triennial Plan for Educational Offer (PTOF) and above all they are invited to build vertical curricula of Digital Citizenship Education. On August 20th, 2019, law n. 92 made teaching of Civic Education mandatory from pre-primary to upper secondary school, expecting 33 hours for each scholastic year. One of the three conceptual cores of the law concerns Digital Citizenship (art. 5), for about 10/12 hours of Digital Citizenship Education.

The main issues are whether the expected time is enough to build Media Education paths to cover all the areas of Syllabus; furthermore, a risk is that, conceived in this way, Digital Citizenship Education could be reduced to be one of the many 'educations' (road safety education, environmental education, food education...) without being harmoniously incorporated into the curriculum. The Guidelines, adopted in application of the Law n. 9, recall the transversal aspect of Citizenship Education and on the other underline a real subject, especially for secondary schools. In the First Cycle of Education, Digital Citizenship Education is assigned in joint ownership, implying the aim of transversality or at least interdisciplinarity as a professional commitment that involves the entire class council; in the Second Cycle of Education, the involvement of teachers qualified to teach legal and economic disciplines is suggested.

## 2. The research project: structure and objectives

Since the school year 2018-19, CREMIT (Research Center about Media Education, Innovation and Technology) of the Catholic University of Milan and University of Molise have been leading a research project to design vertical curricula (from pre-primary to lower secondary education) for the development of media competence.



According to the original program, the structure of the research project should have provided for the first year (s.y. 2018/19) the design of vertical curriculum of Digital Citizenship Education and for the second (s.y. 2019/20) the experimentation of educational paths (Carenzio *et al.*, 2019). Due to the COVID-19 emergency, the project has been postponed by one year, so the schools continued during the s.y. 2020-21 the experimentation.

A total of 19 schools (14 schools in Lombardy, 5 schools in Molise) were chosen on the basis of the significance of past experiences in the field of Media Education and in order to represent all the provinces of the two Italian regions (see Table 1).

The postponement of the project impacted on the involvement of three schools (indicated with the symbol \*), which for various reasons have given up on experimentation (change of management, teacher turnover, COVID-19 emergency issue...).

**TAB. 1.** *The schools involved in the project*

	School
Lombardy	Achille Ricci, Milano (MI)
	IC Anna Botto, Vigevano (PV)
	IC Benedetto Croce, Ferno (VA)
	IC di Fara D'Adda, Fara d'Adda (BG)
	IC di Fino Mornasco (CO) (*)
	Istituto Giovanni Paolo II, Melegnano (MI)
	IC Lecco III (LC)
	IC Lodi III (LO)
	Istituto Maria Immacolata, Gorgonzola (MI)
	IC Monteorfano-IC Brescia Nord, Cologno (BS)
	IC Paesi Orobici, Sondrio (SO)
	IC di Porto Mantovano (MN)
	IC Umberto Eco, Milano (MI)
	IC Visconteo, Pandino (CR)
Molise	Istituto Omnicomprensivo "D'Agnillo", Agnone (IS)
	IC Colozza, Campobasso (CB)
	IC Amaturio-Pallotta, Bojano (CB) (*)
	Istituto Omnicomprensivo di Guglionesi (CB) (*)
	Infanzia Campolieti + Primaria Campolieti, Termoli (CB)

Each school is supervised by a university coach who assumed the role of critical friend (Rivoltella, Modenini, 2012): during the first year the coach had the task of facilitating the process of developing the curriculum and teaching activities. At least one 'experimenter' class and a relative experimenter teacher per school segment (pre-primary, primary, lower secondary) participated, with the opportunity to extend the experimentation to other classes.

The research objectives are:

- developing hypotheses of a vertical and transversal curriculum of Digital Citizenship Education;

- designing and experimenting digital civic education paths, in line with the curriculum created, promoting a functional alliance with families;
- documenting and disseminating good practices.

### 3. Methodology

Collaborative research has been adopted. It allows the direct involvement of teachers in the role of co-investigators, who implement a cyclic process of project ideas reviewing by experimenting in the field, documenting their practices, evaluating the results of the work in the classrooms and, finally, reflecting on acting out (Desgagnè, 1997; Lenoir, 2012). As Laurillard argues, teachers

[...] have the means to act as real 'researchers' by documenting and sharing, for example, their own designs. Without this, teachers remain the recipients of research results, rather than themselves becoming engines of new knowledge on teaching and learning (Laurillard, 2015, 7).

As Clarke and Erickson argue, a teacher can be said to be professional as long as he keeps on to analyze his own practice and do research on it (Clarke, Erickson, 2004).

Teachers, after having created the Digital Citizenship Education curriculum, were first involved in designing the activities and then they are asked to write a logbook, a reasoned account of the learning path carried out (Bassotto, 2001), to document good practices also with photographs, teaching materials, excerpts of conversations and artifacts.

The data collection was conducted by the coaches, using the following tools:

- classroom observations of one lesson per each segment provided in the work plan of the schools;
- pre-primary school children interviews;
- primary and low secondary school students focus groups (Morgan *et al.*, 2002);
- experimental teachers semi-structured interviews (Atkinson, 2002).

Data collection is still ongoing. The data emerged from an initial analysis of interviews (n. 30) and focus groups carried out with the students (n. 32) and of the interviews carried out with the teachers (n. 45).

The verbal material collected has been subjected to thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998); the researchers involved in the project have identified the recurring themes in the data through intersubjective comparison (Mortari, 2007).

## 4. First results

The curriculum development was undertaken by each school involved in the project, selecting on which dimensions of media competence (alphabetical, critical, expressive) and on which areas of the *Syllabus* carry on the subsequent micro-design of the activities.

From the interviews and focus groups analysis two main issues emerges:

- from the point of view of professional practices, the value of collegiality as a condition to succeed;
- from an educational point of view, the importance of a student-centered approach to make children protagonists of their learning.

### 4.1. Collegiality

Literature emphasizes the value of collegiality. Laurillard attributes an important role to sharing and discussion among peers for the professional growth of teachers (Laurillard, 2012). In line with this idea, co-design and co-assessment are also key elements (Friend, Cook, 2000). Traditionally, collegiality is more widespread in pre-primary and primary schools in which there are moments devoted to work in teams, but it is generally very important: working in a community, where people work well together allows teachers to be more motivated, feeling an integral part of the school (Hammersley-Fletcher, Brundrett, 2008). Collaborating with colleagues also enables to share objectives, responsibilities and resources (Amadini, 2020). A decisive task is carried out by the School Director, who allows everyone to perceive themselves as protagonists in the life of the school.

The project was carried out with 3 hands, or rather 6! My precious colleagues were with me, I had the task of coordinator and mediator. We were very often in co-presence... Being together also allowed us to reflect more. One does and the other helps, but also observes! (Teacher, pre-primary school, Molise, school n. 15)

The activity allowed us to truly feel like a Comprehensive Institution. Let me explain: preprimary teachers are often cut off from what is done. Thanks to the project, I have had many contacts with other primary and lower secondary colleagues. This was a positive experience: I felt more involved in the activities concerning the school (Teacher, pre-primary school, Molise, school n. 16)

We have always interacted in a collegial way with the shared work plan, with this we can compare ourselves in order not to do the same things, not to overlap each other, in order to complete the final product (Teacher, lower secondary school, Lombardy, school n. 1)

The project was conducted in a strictly joint, truly collegial way. I was the coordinator, but I had all the support from my colleagues in the class and we have extended the project to all fifth grades. We have always worked as a team, this was a really positive aspect! (Teacher, primary school, Molise, school n. 16)

In various contexts, collegiality has failed: experimenting teachers have struggled to involve other teachers as active partners.

We need to extend knowledge to others. The same people are always involved and therefore there is no transfer of knowledge between people. We also worked on coding, but most of the time it is done by me and they prefer to delegate (Teacher, primary school, Lombardy, school n. 2)

A small number of people were involved, the teaching board perceived the project as something 'experimental', for a few, so many thought 'Someone else will do it and carry the load'. You feel alone... I felt excited in doing something never done before, but I also felt the burden of tackling something alone, despite having a team of very collaborative colleagues (Teacher, primary school, Lombardy, school n. 3)

It is not easy to find colleagues who are willing to get involved. There is always someone who needs 'pulling' (and usually these projects are in charge of a teacher of Italian or Math that has more hours!) and others who are willing to follow... do not get me wrong, I'm glad I did and I found colleagues who supported me, but it would have been nice if more colleagues felt involved (Teacher, lower secondary school, Lombardy, school n. 15)

I work in synergy with my colleague who teaches Italian, but she has little confidence in her digital skills and struggles a lot in making it an object of work with students, although she is aware that it is important (Teacher, lower secondary school, Lombardy, school n. 10)

The main reasons that affect collegiality could be referred to poor continuity of teachers due to precariousness, little involvement of the School Director, sense of inadequacy and lack of competence of many teachers with respect to media culture. This is a crucial point that certainly deserves further investigation once the data collection is completed.

#### *4.2. A student-centered approach*

From the educational point of view, data analysis underlines a student-centered approach (Jones, 2007), strictly linked to the learning by doing method (Dewey, 1938) and use of digital media as authorial devices (Rivoltella, Ferrari, 2010). In order for students to acquire media skills, it will be necessary to put them in the conditions to work directly on the

media, both by activating them in analysis and production practices. Media making stimulates students' protagonism, as well teamwork.

Children were so enthusiastic! The project has allowed us to bring to the section tools that are not usually used: tablets and smartphones in particular. Children felt like protagonists because they were able to get their hands on them. There was great interest and participation... I must say that there is often interest and participation especially if you try to get the children 'out of the routine' (Teacher, pre-primary school, Molise, school n. 16)

We used the Internet a lot and traditional activities very little: I liked it because I really did things (Student, primary school, Molise, school n. 15)

I worked on the body (left and right), unfortunately we didn't use the Bee Bots. They were always asking 'What do we do next time?'. We placed the artifacts in the hall and when they came in and out they always showed their parents what they had done (Teacher, primary school, Lombardy, school n. 4)

Among the methods, the most present in teaching experiences are Episodes of Situated Learning (Rivoltella, 2013), cooperative learning and peer tutoring (Topping, 2014), in which everyone is considered as a resource. Group work becomes an opportunity for mutual knowledge and recognition of one's own and others' strengths.

Active methods affect the sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and they are also very important for inclusion (Cottini, 2017). In particular, peer tutoring is indirectly referred to in various excerpts, with regard to what has been experienced or with a projection on the future.

Children who don't understand well or struggle and those who learn quickly can stay together and help each other. A lesson explained by an adult doesn't always help, but by a partner yes, he understands it, he understands more easily the point of view (Student, primary school, Lombardy, school n. 1)

[In lower secondary school] we can also teach people who have failed to give too much information... who may need our help and we are more experienced, talk about certain things with our friends or with younger children that are facing certain difficult situations on the Web (Student, primary school, Lombardy, school n. 10)

## Conclusion

An essential element to design and implement a curriculum, also in Digital Citizenship Education, is collegiality. The collegial work between the different subjects that make up the school community, in fact, is not

an aspect detached from the quality of teaching and the sharing of good educational practices (Pietropolli Charmet, Riva, 1987). Designing together – at the macro and micro levels – makes possible to explain and share the meaning of one's professional action by tracing a common perimeter of educational objectives and strategies that allow teachers to feel co-responsible and pupils to have maximum educational coherence (Amadini, 2020). Without collegiality, the curriculum struggles to spread and easily leads to delegation mechanisms (in our case, given the theme, towards the Digital Animator).

From an educational point of view, Episodes of Situated Learning, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, the construction of artifacts and the use of technologies were found to be key elements that met with student satisfaction. A student-centered approach is connected to engagement: the engaging educational proposals, being able to experience first-hand and without anxiety have increased motivation. They are key elements, to be taken into consideration for the development of any competence.

Finally, the first evidence leads us to argue that investing in teacher training is more than ever necessary: for the development of Media Education Literacy – and to go beyond the digital skills provided by the DigCompEdu framework (Punie, Redecker, 2017) trained teachers are required. Many good practices – still under analysis – have emerged within this project. The aim is to systematize and valorise them in order to become a common heritage of schools and help teachers to feel more confident with media culture.

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## Innovation through E-learning, Constructivism and Cooperative Thinking: the Experience of PrepAIRed!

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**ABSTRACT:** *Air pollution is a global threat and one of the first attempts to human health. The WHO estimates that the deaths caused reach 4.2 million connected the dropout in non communicable diseases like stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, acute and chronic respiratory diseases. Around 91% of the world's population lives in places where air quality levels exceed WHO limits. Air pollution is indeed a major problem, and in Italy special attention is needed in the Po' basin where orographic and meteorological conditions contribute to have higher level of several pollutant beyond the limit. A common effort among regions is then essential as well a diffuse awareness among at local community level. Educational programs to air quality since early school became a primary driver to be triggered and support a conscious engagement of future citizens in the implementation of air quality policies. PREPAIR is a project aimed at harmonizing, supporting and strengthening the measures established in the regional plans and within the agreement of the Po Valley on a larger scale The ultimate goal of PREPAIR is to guarantee the sustainability of results and the empowerment of regulatory agencies. Within the PREPAIR project. PrepAIRed! is the action aimed at designing, testing and implementing different target-oriented training courses aimed at raising awareness and strengthening knowledge in the school system (teachers and students) on the issues of air quality covered by the project. PrepAIRed! tries to achieve its objectives through an innovative didactic approach in order to foster the concept of 'air as common good'. The educational path is divided in 5 modules representing the most impactful determinants of air quality and each module is organized in 3 learning phases reflecting the I-E-A paradigm: Information Experience and Action. The I-E-A paradigm is based on constructivism theory (Rivoltella, 2014) and constructivism techniques like flipped classroom and episodes of situated learning are implemented within the didactic proposal. The educational path is supported by a composite e-learning platform to support cooperative learning and to offer dedicated virtual spaces for teachers and single classic where it's possible to share interactive materials, homeworks communications and evaluations. PrepAIRed! activities also designed a 'support pack' for teaching in COVID-19 pandemic, providing a series of suggestion, measures, and tips to support teacher in distance learning lesson during the lockdown period.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Air Quality, Flipped Classroom, Constructivism, E-Learning, Cooperative-Learning.*

## Introduction

Air pollution, throughout the Po Valley, represents a serious threat to human health, ecosystems and cultural heritage. In recent decades, many European areas, previously severely polluted, have achieved a significant improvement in their air quality by intervening with more actions including training and education in schools in order to inform and prepare future generations. However, the problem of air pollution is still a dramatic challenge, as some air pollutants (e.g., particulate matter, ozone, nitrogen dioxide) are currently present in concentrations that can have a serious impact on our health and the natural environment. Furthermore, rising levels of anthropogenic greenhouse gases are driving climate change which, in turn, is negatively affecting atmospheric concentrations of certain air pollutants and their impact on human life, ecosystem services and food production.

An effective strategy against air pollution requires a comprehensive approach, capable of taking into account and integrating all current actions being developed in different regions and in different economic and social sectors. Awareness raising at the local community level is one of the key success factors for achieving more lasting results on air quality control and improvement. Therefore, it is essential not only to stimulate public attention on air quality problems, but also to raise awareness among individual citizens in order to provide local communities with more information and behavioral models to address the most critical aspects of air pollution, making them willing to help prevent and mitigate risks to human health and the environment. In this perspective, educational programs are a primary driver to be triggered first and therefore to support an active and permanent role of citizens in the implementation of air quality policies. PREPAIR is a project aimed at harmonizing, supporting and strengthening the established measures in the regional plans and within the Po Valley agreement on a larger scale with the ultimate goal of guaranteeing the sustainability of results and the empowerment of regulatory agencies. PREPAIR recognizes the value of education as a lasting strategy to ensure the sustainability and basic implementation of all actions under the regional plan.

Within the PREPAIR project, PrepAIRed! is the action aimed at designing, testing and implementing different target-oriented training courses aimed at raising awareness and strengthening knowledge in the school system (teachers and students) on the issues of air quality covered by the project.

The PrepAIRed action is specifically designed to adapt to the entire Italian school system at its different levels (primary, secondary and upper) throughout the Po Valley area. The approach used in PrepAIRed! it is based on a well-balanced combination of formal and non-formal

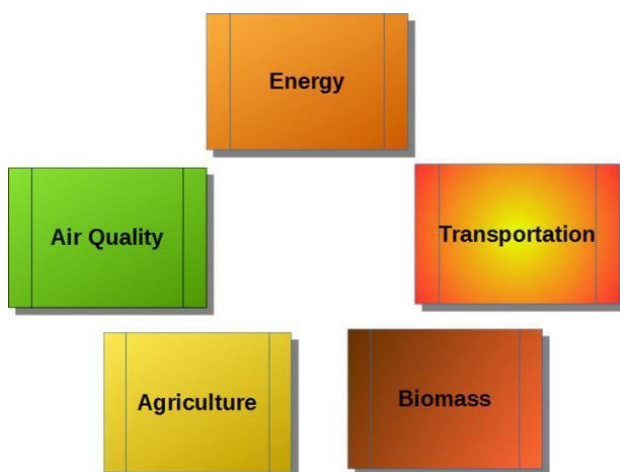
learning tools and constructivist methods within a shared educational path.

## 1. PrepAIRed! Objectives

### 1.1 Brief description of the didactic structure of the PrepAIRed!

The PrepAIRed course has been structured in 5 learning units (UDA), each of which represents a determinant of air quality which also represents a pillar of action of the Prepair project. Figure 1 shows all the UDAs, which are Air, Energy, Transport, Biomass, Agriculture

FIG. 1. PrepAIRed teaching units



Each learning unit is composed of 3 training moments corresponding to the INFORMATION – EXPERIENCE – ACTION (I-E-A) paradigm. The 3 moments are translated into three lessons of the module in particular:

- an informative lesson, in *flipped classroom mode* ('inverted class') aimed at scientifically informing and framing the topics of the module
- an experiential lesson, through a meeting with a non-educator formalis shown experience in relation to the topic dealt with.
- an activation lesson, in which an activity is proposed that can put the into practice acquired knowledge (laboratories, citizen science experiences) or a debriefing using *cooperative learning* [4].

The structure of the unit – understood as a sequence of lessons – reflects the didactic phases typical of ESL lessons (*Episodes of Situated Learning*) [1], which consist of:

- a moment of preparation: in which the class receives inputs (assignments, webinars and video lessons) with the aim of focusing attention on the learning target;
- a moment of activity: according to which the classroom produces artifacts related to the learning target;

- a moment of *debriefing/action*: in which the classroom resumes and elaborates the concept relating to the learning objective with structured methods (checklists, mindmaps, etc.).

During the learning path of the program *PrepAired!* the student is led to acquire new knowledge through the 'anchoring technique' which in turn is developed in three phases:

- a first phase in which students are led to remember their current knowledge about topic;
- a second phase in which current knowledge is compared with institutional knowledge;
- a third phase in which the connection with past ideas is fixed in a present scenario through the use of mind maps and keywords.

The entire educational path was divided into the test phase in at least 3 modules per class to be chosen among the 5 proposed. The choice implied the mandatory provision of the UDA on air quality plus two UDA on the determinants, possibly according to a path consistent with the characteristics of the territory.

### *1.2 Training Objectives*

Thanks to their structure and the techniques used, the PrepAired! learning units have been structured to achieve the following objectives:

- promote self-awareness and self-interest on the main issue of impacts on air quality, monitoring and control in the youth population
- promote the approach to solving problems on environmental problems
- Improve the cooperation skills of students to tackle common problems of air pollution
- Promote the vision of air as a 'common good'
- Promote an active partnership with the school as an actor room for the solution of the wider problem of air quality.

## **2. PrepAired didactic methodologies**

The didactic approach used by PrepAired! was based on the use of techniques related to constructivism (Roshi et al, 2013) and the alternation of formal and non-formal education methods. In constructivism the process of elaboration of knowledge is no longer seen as exhaustively represented by linear models and logical-hierarchical models and propositional, on the contrary it is seen as the product of an active construction of the subject, of meaning, which underlines the active, polysemic, non-predeterminable character and takes place through particular forms of collaboration and social negotiation.

Typical constructivist techniques that are used in PrepAIRed! are the flipped classroom, the episodes of situated learning (ETS) and cooperative learning sessions.

As far as formal education is applied, it represents a model of systematic organized, structured education, administered according to a set of laws and norms, contents and methodology. It is characterized by a contiguous educational process called 'current education', which necessarily involves the teacher, the students and the institution. PrepAIRed! tries to introduce non-formal education a process with a flexible curriculum and methodology, able to adapt to the needs of students.

It includes educational supports such as 'correspondence learning', 'distance learning' and 'open systems' and mainly involves external experts to bring experience contents. This methodology has been used as an educational setting for the 15 classes involved in the test phase of the PrepAIRed! program and for 117 classes in the following implementation year in the entire Po valley,

During the test phase, the 15 classes were made up of one for each school level (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary) for each of the 5 regions plus an Autonomous Province (Lombardy, Emilia Romagna, Veneto, Piedmont, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Autonomous Province of Trento) that were involved within PREPAIR. At the beginning of educational path, these methods were adequately transmitted to teachers through offline and online training moments. Teachers were also appropriately provided with a toolkit containing teaching material, guidelines for the implementation of UDAs, and guides and manuals to support the development of the required teaching methodologies.

### 3. The support of e-learning platform

The educational path of PrepAIRed! has been supported by the Moodle-based SELF-PA e-learning platform.

SELF-PA was used to create the virtual space for exchanging contents and materials and for interaction between co-beneficiaries of the project, teachers and students during the training course.

In particular, this space was conceived on four levels and on the profiling of 6 types of users as represented respectively in Figure 2 and Table 1.

As in Figure 2, the three levels correspond to conceptualizations of the domains of action of the training path and are:

- *Project level*: it is the level that abstracts the interactions and contents in the whole project PREPAIR
- *Action level*: it is the level that represents the specific action PrepAIRed! and all its development
- *Region level*: it is the district implementation level of the action, corresponding to the participating regions

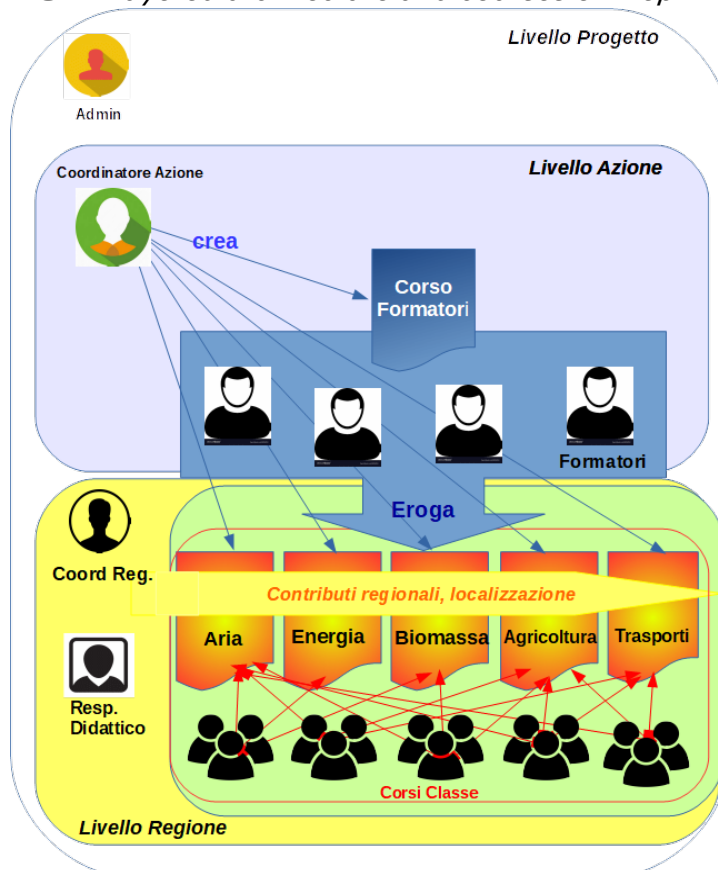
- *Class level*: it is the basic level corresponding to the action in the classroom

Within this architecture, the different actors – registered as SELF-PA users – interact on two types of e-learning courses:

- the trainers course; associated with the training for trainers and the coordination interaction between the action coordinator, regional co-beneficiaries and teachers
- the class course; of which an instance dedicated to each class has been created, corresponding to the students' actual training path.

Table 1 summarizes the profiling of the different actors as SELF-PA users: the different profiles were obtained from the basic SELF users – ie student and tutor – combining the latter with the different levels of permission within the two types of courses. Obviously, at the implementation level, the types of users always remain the basic ones of SELF-PA, but the combined roles within the levels and courses broaden the profiles portfolio.

**FIG. 2.** Layered architecture and courses of PrepAIRed! within SELF



The trainers course was used to insert the didactic material for the training of teachers and educators, as well as tutorial guides and insights on teaching methodologies and on the basic use of the platform itself. It was also used as a repository for the toolkit and teaching material for the classes, so that guidelines, slides, and

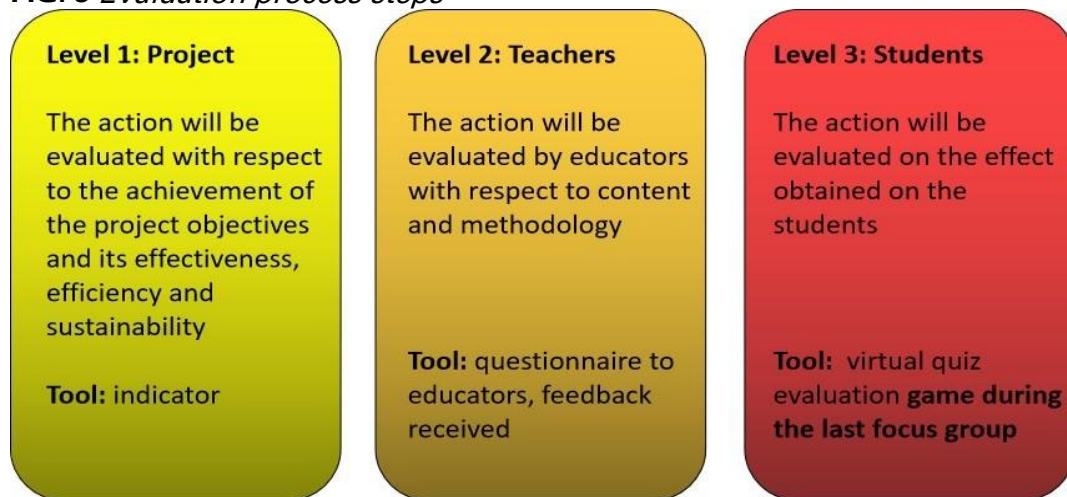
multimedia contents relating to the delivery of the lessons were also available for viewing only. The trainers course also played an essential role in the final evaluation procedure of the PrepAIRed! Action.

As shown in Figure 3, the PrepAIRed! evaluation and monitoring procedure has been multi-stakeholder, i.e., it took into account the feedback of all the actors involved, from students to trainers to regional managers and co-beneficiaries. In particular, multi-faculty was implemented by setting 3 levels of evaluation: a project level, designed to assess the quality and impact of the entire educational process and its consistency with the project objectives, a trainers' level dedicated to receiving feedback from teachers and a student level aimed at collecting the evaluation of the experience from the students.

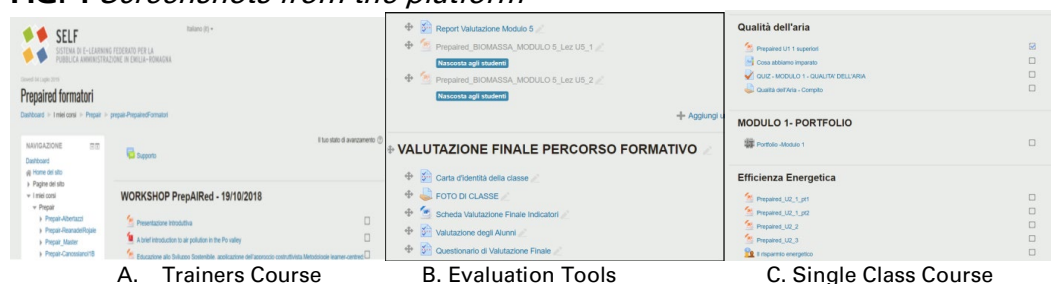
In fact, for the trainers' level the 'questionnaire' e-tivities represented the main SELF tool that allowed them to receive feedback from the teachers, in this case being the implementation basis of the end-of-module reports provided for each UDA; and of the final questionnaires for level 2 of evaluation and for the 'Identity Card' of the class for level 1 of the evaluation procedure (Figure 4.A).

The e-tivity quiz, glossary, assignment and workshop have been used more frequently in class courses as tools for interacting with students: the result of the interactions through these e-tivities was an integral part of level 3 of the PrepAIRed assessment procedure!

**FIG. 3** Evaluation process steps



**FIG. 4** Screenshots from the platform



**TAB. 1.** *Profiling of users on SELF-PA*

<b>Class User</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Actions Course Class</b>	<b>Actions Course Trainer</b>	<b>Moodle User</b>
<b>Student</b>	Attend course in each class	Enjoys the material of the didactic units (LO & Webinar) Participates in the e-tivities Participates in the communities of practice		Student
<b>Trainer</b>	Attend the trainer course	Communicates the pupils class at the regional resp.didattico Upload additional teaching materials and Assigns e-tivity and communities of practice supervises the conduct of e-tivity and communities of practice on the class	Up to the trainers course Participate in e-tivity Participate in communities of practice area enjoys the material didactic (LO & Webinar)	Tutor Self (Teacher editor)
<b>Regional Didactic Manager</b>	Supervises the contents delivered regionally coordinates the teaching in the classes involved	Communicates the users to be registered on the platform to the action coordinator	Participates in e-tivities Participates in the communities of practice Use the didactic material (LO & Webinar)	Tutor Self (Teacher editor)
<b>Regional Coordinator</b>	Coordinates the development	Maintains institutional communication with the coordinator Action	Communicates users to be registered on the platform to the action coordinator Supervises the development of e-activities and communities of practice on trainers (IMPLEMENTATION PHASE)	Tutor Self (Manager)
<b>Coordinator Action</b>	Coordinates the overall implementation of action	Uploads the basic teaching material General supervision	Uploads the material Basic teaching Supervises the development of e-activities and communities of practice on the trainers (TEST PHASE)	Tutor Self (Course Creator)
<b>SUPERUSER</b>	Platform manager	Manages users	Manages users	



#### 4. Teachers support during COVID-19 lockdown

After COVID-19 the Italian education system has challenged the hard struggle to continue its education mission with new teaching strategies as for example the intensive use of distance learning.

For many teachers this situation has represented an additional effort for their job, and for several of them the transition to distance learning has been not free of obstacles.

The PrepaAIRed! Coordination consortium of beneficiaries has decided to support teachers regarding the shocks on didactic activities consequential to COVID-19 lockdown.

Two main responses have been suddenly implemented as pandemic countermeasures has been applied nationally:

- Measure 1: all the teaching materials has been let available in an open format on the project PREPAIR website<sup>2</sup>, in order to let them to be used in distance learning even if the teachers were not officially enrolled into the PrepAIRed! educational path
- Measure 2: a collection of tips, suggestions and useful resources as interactive on-line gaming tools for remote education called *Note per la didattica durante il COVID-19*

All the materials related to COVID-19 countermeasures have been delivered suddenly to all the teachers and classes involved in the educational path in the current year, to allow them to continue promptly their activities with PrepAIRed!

#### 5. Conclusions

PrepAIRed! educational path represents a crosscutting space for environmental education on air quality, where experts and technicians from six region of the Po Basin has gathered and share their expertizes.

The results of this crossroads of competences have been a space for cross contaminated solution that finally lead to innovative solutions for teaching air quality awareness. PrepAIRed! is currently at its third year of activity engaging a quite number of classes considering the pandemic situation and strengthening partnership with other educational programs on air quality. Even was though to be performed mainly in presence, the innovation brought at its initial design has facilitated the adaptation of the learning programs to the lockdown conditions. The use of the SELF-PA platform within the PrepAIRed! it proved to be a useful aid to assist in the implementation of the proposed teaching methodologies.

The platform also made it possible to receive widespread and rapid feedback from the actors involved. However, standing to the responses

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.lifeprepare.eu/index.php/2020/09/03/nello-scorso-anno-scolastico-117-classi-hanno-partecipato-a-prepaired-percorsi-formativi-sulla-qualita-dellaria/>

to the first evaluation processes, the interactivity and usability of the Moodle-Based platform can be surely improved.

Furthermore, even if the e-learning platform support, PrepAIRed! cannot stand as a just online course on air quality, as the very bases of the constructivist and collaborative approaches that are at the core of the educational program requires experiential learning and physical presence to be fully operational. Actually, the work of the teacher on the classes is going to be accompanied with a capacity-building support for the teacher on open space classrooms, citizen science approaches and for the fruitful exploitation of the 'civic education hours' re-introduced since last year into the Italian educational system. Surely even if the work done in the last two years has reached an interesting level of maturity, lots of ways of improvement are now open especially by the challenges brought by the post-pandemic recovery situation.

#### *Acknowledgments*

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## Inclusive Citizenship Education in Times of Crisis

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## The Challenges of Global Citizenship Education before the COVID-19 and Beyond

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**ABSTRACT:** *Global Citizenship Education (GCE) represents UNESCO's strategy to address 'global issues' such as human rights violations, inequality, and poverty. It plays an important role in driving cultural, social and political change for building a more just and sustainable world. In the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, confronting these ongoing challenges requires, among other things, redefining social and educational needs, reformulating and reconceptualizing emerging problems, but also renewing institutional commitment and a sense of community, and defending democratic education. This contribution aims to introduce a design for exploratory research assessing projects and interventions activated in formal and informal contexts in the Municipality of Bologna. It also will be significant to observe how and to what extent teachers and institutions consider the aforementioned global challenges when addressing the educational needs that have emerged as a result of the pandemic.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Global Citizenship Education, COVID-19, Pedagogical Approaches, Formal and Informal Contexts*

### Introduction

Issues such as human rights and intercultural dialogue, equality, migration and social inclusion are becoming increasingly urgent at all school levels. A long-established scientific debate has valued GCE – Global Citizenship Education – as one of the most comprehensive pedagogical models, for it incorporates all the positive goals and practices related to both globalization and citizenship issues.

Such pedagogical models include citizenship education, global education, human rights education, multicultural education, environmental education, peace education, etc. (among others, Davies, 2006; Davies *et al.*, 2005; Hahn, 2005; Mannion *et al.*, 2011). In this vein, several authors define GCE as a pedagogical movement that aims to drive cultural, social and political changes for building a more just and sustainable world. In particular, as Estelles and Fischman (2020) states:

In the last few decades, GCE, although steered by very diverse ideologies and understandings, has been usually presented by both international organizations and scholars as means to respond to the challenges derived from globalization (Estelles, Fischman, 2020; Stromquist, Monkman, 2014; Suárez-Orozco, 2007). Particularly, GCE has often been identified as part of the solution to world problems such as respect of human rights, knowledge of global interconnectedness, knowledge of other cultures, development of global responsibility, environmental awareness, economic growth, and/or social justice (2020, 3).

Some scholars, however, remark some approaches adopt a narrow concept of GCE and neglect the heterogeneity of purposes and pedagogical frameworks available on a global scale, as well as criticism of each national contexts and the structural barriers young people face in their effort to participate in democratic processes.

Aiming explores some of GCE's perspectives, the first part of this contribution presents some theoretical definitions of GCE. We will highlight the meanings of GCE in the light of the new challenges and needs – educational, social, cultural – that have emerged in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, we will explore some more recent insights emerging from the literature on potential educational principles for a post-COVID-19 GCE.

The second part of this chapter presents the design of an exploratory research project that is still in its start-up phase. We suggest observing some actions and projects implemented in formal and informal contexts (i.e., Seipiù, Amitie, Amitie Code; S-Confinati, MigratED) in the Municipality of Bologna, which aimed at promoting GCE among young people. In particular, we aim to detect which methods and strategies motivate young people to take an active role in facing global challenges in pandemic and post-pandemic times.

## **1. GCE: diverse purposes and pedagogical criticism before COVID-19**

The definitions and criticisms of the GCE are very broad and the authors adopt different approaches and argumentation taking part in a rapidly evolving debate. UNESCO (2014, 9) has defined the GCE as «a framing paradigm which encapsulates how education can develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes learners need for securing a world which is more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable». This is the conception of GCE whereby the most recent international guidelines would invite education to «lead the change» of society and culture in order to implement initiatives aimed at promoting a more inclusive and sustainable society (Goren, Yemini, 2017).

Tarozzi (2016) understand GCE as a pedagogy for global social justice, grounded in a global outlook, a recognition of power and

inequality in the world, a belief in social justice and equity, and a commitment to reflection, dialogue and transformation. Some other scholars offered a broad GCE conception, differentiating between soft and critical GCE. While soft GCE could be equated with global citizenship education (Marshall, 2011) by providing students with an understanding of the world and cultural tolerance, critical global citizenship requires a deeper engagement. According to Andreotti (2006), critical GCE provides students with the skills to reflect on and engage with global issues involving conflict, power and opposing viewpoints; to understand the nature of colonial, liberal and Western assumptions; and to seek change. This critical approach implies a deep understanding of global cultural citizenship and of cultural symbols and structures that divide or unite members of different societies and considers the globalization of different cultural forms (Andreotti, 2006). In a similar way, Dill (2013) suggested that there are two domain approaches to GCE from which different objectives can be ascribed: the global competence approach, which aims to provide students with the skills needed to compete in a global society; and the global consciousness approach, which aims to provide students with a global orientation, empathy and cultural sensitivity, derived from humanistic values and assumptions (Dill, 2013). The same author has shown that different teachers apply the two approaches differ in accordance with their own perceptions of students' futures and that GCE is not always incorporated into schools as a tool for empowering and creating opportunities for students. The meaning of GCE is often reduced to the knowledge of the English language that would allow students to exercise the opportunities and mobility offered by globalization, sometimes in contradiction with the curricula and in-service learning, as well the objectives at all school levels (often at higher education). This discourse opens up a whole debate that requires exploring the geographical location of GCE (where GCE is promoted), its different degrees of integration into school curricula, the organization of which changes in each country in the South and the North. Moreover, several scholars explain it is usually neglected that GCE, although relatively popular among international organizations and educational scholars, remains peripheral in national school curricula (Myers, 2016) and is not clear the reason because GCE it usually been presented as a proposal to include in extracurricular programs or, at best, in social studies courses. These criticisms have led to the development of several GCE models, which allow scholars and policy developers to identify, articulate and evaluate the goals of the GCE from a critical perspective. In this vein, Goren and Yemini (2017) recognize a multidimensional model of citizenship included in the national curricula that often present global issues from a non-critical perspective, leaving students with only a limited understanding of how global citizenship fits into daily life and experience. In a similar way, Arnold (2014) and Hartung (2017) note that the idealism of GCE discourses tend to exalt idealistic potentialities,

instead of paying attention to the educational and socio-political difficulties that students and teachers face when implementing the CGE principles in daily lives and scholastic experiences. In this regard, if the literature already states that «the notion of GCE as a solution to pressing global problems does not necessarily contribute to the promotion of politically engaged pedagogical models», the pandemic has confirmed that reform of existing international organizations and the regeneration of a GCE debate is urgently needed.

## **2. The challenges emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic**

The current pandemic provides strong evidence that a more legitimate and democratic global governance is urgently needed. The COVID-19 pandemic has had deeply disrupting effects in many spheres of life, both at the individual and collective levels. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, all the educational institutions have been facing many challenges, affecting both the different actors and the social and cultural system as a whole coupled with previously global civic problems like the deepening of inequalities, authoritarianism and the problematic of digital surveillance among other complex dynamics.

Moreover, the pandemic has created financial burdens on individuals and nations that will likely accelerate and extend an economic recession. That recession, in turn, and the financial toll resulting from the public health costs of the pandemic, will constrain the ability of governments to fund other needed social services, such as education; and intermingling with pre-existing levels of economic inequality, it will further limit the opportunities to advance human well-being. In this regard, several scholars (Myers, 2016) agree that many effects that emerged from the pandemic have only made (more) visible some social and educational needs and problems that were already established before the time of the pandemic.

For this reason, the discourse on GCE is now focusing more on highlighting problems and inconsistencies with the idea that it is necessary to resume the school's dialogue with institutions, reformulate the prototype of the global citizen, rethink the function of the national school in the challenge of global citizenship. Following this perspective, the report of Unit State (2020) affirms the urgency to tackle the phenomenon of hate speech and discrimination in our society as well as the early school leaving. In line with this consideration and with existing literature, we have identified the exacerbation of hate speech as one of the most significant effects as result of the new Coronavirus. In this regard, the start-up *L1ght*, born in 2018 to filter toxic content online, reports how since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a 900% increase in hate speech addressed to the Chinese population and the nation of China and has registered a 70% increase in hate speech among young and children during online chats.



Furthermore, the study reports, the spread of tweets such as *#chinaliedpeopledied*, *#kungflu*, *#communistvirus*, *#Whuanvirus*, fomented by political leaders and influential figures, has had even greater consequences on the fears and uncertainties that dominate today (Human Rights Centre of the University of Padua, 2020). In addition to this, one estimate suggests that global learning losses from four months of school closures could amount to \$10 trillion in terms of lost learnings (UNESCO, 2020), while 108 countries reported missing an average of 47 days of in-person instruction due to school closures by the time of the survey (UNESCO, 2020), equivalent to approximately one quarter of a regular school year. For Estelles and Fischman (2020, 2), this global imaginary «makes evident a collective failure of civic education systems to promote empathy and to encourage creative and democratic forms of engagement and collaboration among citizens and governments from other regions of the world».

With a positive outlook, this crisis can be also viewed as a sort of opportunity for the application of a more reflective approach to GCE. In this regard, the same authors state:

The development of global solidarity at the individual level is rather uncertain, but there is no doubt that if we want to confront global phenomena, it is necessary and urgent. What makes us reluctant to cooperate with humans from other regions of the world? What motivates us to do it? Proponents of GCE have usually taken for granted that altruistic beliefs and seemingly purely Cartesian rational thoughts are the main drivers of global citizens' behaviours. However, emotions and non-altruistic behaviours are also an intrinsic part of our human nature (Estelles, Fischman, 2020, 7).

### **3. Reimagining a post COVID-19 GCE in formal and informal educational context**

According to recent literature, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the difficulty to put into practice the GCE principles by civic institutions both at the national and international level (Estelles, Fischman, 2020). The COVID-19 has also brought to light how some national policies and public speeches have reinforced thoughts and feelings of intolerance and distrust in the population. Moreover, in recent years this has found in the migratory phenomenon and in the figure of the migrant the new scapegoat on which to pour hatred and xenophobic attitudes.

Fighting the pandemic requires facing its darker sides. Decisive actions are urgently needed by states and all of us to safeguard the human rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized, including minorities, and migrants (Estelles, Fischman, 2020).

In this sense, today more than ever, there is a need to strengthen global responsibility and governance in order to make the democratization process more realistic and potentially feasible. Recently

Stein (2021) stressed the need to consider GCE within a VUCA<sup>1</sup> future (Bennett, Lemoine, 2014; Waller *et al.*, 2019), encouraging a reflexive approach to the 'description-prescription formula' of GCE shared up to now. As reported by Stein:

Description–prescription approaches to GCE tend to seek not only consensus, certainty, universality, and continuity but also coherence, all of which seek either the restoration or revision of a single forward for all humanity. However, in the context of liquid modernity, these desires have become increasingly untenable; and in light of decolonial critiques, they are deeply suspect. How might we reimagine GCE in ways that are strategically responsive to our current context of systemic crises, and ethically responsive to the ongoing colonial conditions that are at the root of these crises?

[...] I suggest the imperative to balance multiple, often competing or contradictory responsibilities, emphasising a 'both/and more' approach, rather than 'either/or', in relation to: concrete policy and open-ended pedagogy; critical and affective literacy; and intellectual and relational rigour (2021, 7).

Many recommendations have been proposed in the last year at national and global level, in continuity with the *United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech* (United Nations, 2020). These suggestions highlight the need to develop educational principles and strategies to identify, address and respond to hate speech and discrimination and make them strategically and ethically responsive in national contexts that are constantly in crisis.

There is a requirement to understand how GCE can develop actions that react to the feelings of fear that are fueled by authoritarian political systems.

Moreover, GCE could be an opportunity for teacher and student to critically reflect on the emotional pathway through which authoritarian populism (Zembylas, 2019) and hate speech are articulated. To date, the research areas most investigated by GCE have focused on two main objectives: *Student-centered studies* focused on students' perceptions and understanding of global citizenship and the GCE (among others *et al.*, 2014; Niens, Reilly, 2012); and *Teacher studies*, in which many teachers and educators recognize the importance of GCE. However, they often feel trapped between the curricular objectives that encourage its integration in the classroom and the cultural norms of nationalism or lack of practical resources that hinder their ability to actually teach it (Goren, Yemini, 2017).

There is also a lack of empirical studies regarding parents' perspectives of global citizenship as a component of their children's education (Goren, Yemini, 2017). This could be an interesting field of

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<sup>1</sup> Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous.

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investigation to explore new paths of actions and reflections of the principles that guide the GCE.

#### **4. An exploratory research design. Research questions, scope and methods**

In this research we will focus on issues related to the phenomena of hate speech and discrimination by investigating them in formal and informal educational contexts.

In order to understand these aspects, our research questions are focused on three main issues: *i)* How the Global Citizenship Education approach in a VUCA contemporary society is pursued during the pandemic?; *ii)* How can the challenges faced during the pandemic be transformed into opportunities for more inclusive educational contexts?; *iii)* How can effective actions and strategies be promoted to fight the growing phenomenon of hate speech and discrimination among young people?

The research therefore aims to understand the needs and criticalities emerged during COVID-19 by observing which actions are implemented in projects and interventions following the GCE principles activated, or in the process of being activated, in informal and formal contexts in the Bologna area (Italy). We also aim to identify which pedagogical approaches, methods and strategies can support the young generation to take an active role in the society in VUCA times.

The study aims to investigate the projects implemented in the Municipality of Bologna that followed the GCE principles (i.e., *Amitie*; *Amitie-Code*; *Sconfinati*; *MigratED*). The sample will be made up of young people, exploring good educational practices that raise awareness on issues such as: human rights, migration, intercultural dialogue, sustainability. In particular, the *MigratED* project (Migrations and human rights enhanced through Technology in Education) was carried out in the period before and during the pandemic. This project aimed to disseminate educational practices on intercultural dialogue, migration and human rights in the educational community, to raise awareness of a sustainable, innovative and inclusive education system. Through the use of new multimedia technologies and an advocacy campaign, the project promoted the development of civic skills, media literacy and digital critical thinking skills involving students, teachers and educators from different European cities. These purposes proved to be even more urgent during the lockdown due to the pandemic, as the project continued at remote, experimenting with innovative tools represented by participatory approaches such as IT, digital and audio-visual devices (WeWorld, 2021).

The project, as reported in the *Brief Analysis Report* drawn up in April 2021, highlights the need to open the field of reflection and action of the GCE with an intersectional look at the global challenges that today even

more require to be treated in their connection and complexity (Pashby *et al.*, 2020). In addition, three key findings are identified as transferable elements in the future and in line with the *EC 2020 Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025*, which aims at an educational strategy «based on sustainability, with green and digital transitions as transformation drivers». These concern the promotion of global competences and digital skills for life; participatory and multidisciplinary methods for inclusive education and pedagogical innovation; young people and educational communities as key actors to support political reforms in education (WeWorld, 2021).

We believe that the activities implemented in this project along with the recommendations provided can be a starting point to investigate how the principles of GCE need to be re-meaning and revised in practice. This, considering the changes and challenges that occurred during and after the COVID-19 pandemic towards the desired goals of transformative education with a common approach to education for global citizenship, green and digital skills.

Through semi-structured interviews and focus groups with young people and participant observations in formal and informal contexts that follow GCE values, we will seek to identify which strategies could adequately support young people to face today's challenges (e.g., hate speech and discrimination). In this first phase of the study, we proceeded a review of the literature and established contact with representatives of the Municipality of Bologna who coordinate projects in formal and informal contexts. Finally, we have researched existing projects on this topic and contacted interested parties. To date, we have experienced delays with the next steps due to slow responses from stakeholders. Some projects are already completed (i.e., Amitie; Amitie-Code; MigratED), while others projects will start with the new school year.

## **Conclusion**

In this contribution we have reported the first part of our study, still in its early stage. We have built a theoretical framework that examines the studies and the different orientations of GCE that have developed over time, trying to reimagine new possible interpretations and fields of action in light of the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Noting this need, we have launched an exploratory study that wants to try to trace these new instances in formal and informal educational contexts.

As argued in the discussion, the pandemic has highlighted even more the inequalities already present in our society and has accentuated feelings of fear and intolerance as well as the fragility and liquidity (Bauman, 2011) that characterize our time.

We asked ourselves about the aspects that more than others need to be investigated in times when hate speech and discrimination are increasingly gaining ground, especially among young people and in different contexts, online and offline. The necessity to analyze these contexts, such as the needs and expectations of young people, allows us to understand the first effects of the changes induced by the pandemic. Furthermore, on which paths research can contribute to offer new meanings and help identify new action strategies towards a transformative approach that looks at Global Citizenship Education, sustainability and digital skills in its complexity.

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## Civic Education in Times of Crisis – The Importance of Meaning and Meaning Making

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**ABSTRACT:** *Crisis situations are connected to different processes of meaning making, both public and private. While different organizations and public actors engage in public discourses regarding the correct interpretation of the events unfolding and the adequate responses to them, individuals are looking for explanations to imbue the events they are experiencing with meaning. For civic education, both aspects are of relevance, especially when an increased need for meaningful narratives leads to a growing belief in and spread of conspiracy theories. During times of crisis, learning should be seen as meaning making, a culturally shaped process in which objects or events gain significance for students. The uncertainty, need for understanding and public discourse prevalent during times of crisis lead to a relevance of meaning-oriented approaches to civic education, which are not only aimed at imparting knowledge, but also include the engagement with and reflection of processes of meaning making.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Civic Education, Crisis, Meaning Making, Conspiracy Theories, Narrative Thinking*

### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has created great societal challenges and situations in various societal areas which have been labelled as crises (Greer *et al.*, 2020). Some of the issues connected to these crisis situations are of relevance for civic education, such as the impact of the pandemic on schools, students and learning environments as well as its effect on political institutions and democratic values. While school closures and the growth of digital learning formats have led to negative impacts on students' motivation and overall achievement, disproportionately affecting disadvantaged students and emphasizing the need for supportive pedagogy (Catalano *et al.*, 2021; Kuhfeld *et al.*, 2020, Yates *et al.*, 2021), the pandemic has also highlighted the influence of meaning making on coping with difficult situations (Provenzi *et al.*, 2020; Yang *et al.*, 2021). For civic education, processes of meaning making become especially relevant when they are connected to beliefs in conspiracy theories and antidemocratic sentiments, which have been

gaining popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic (Davies *et al.*, 2021; Romer, Jamieson, 2020; Rothmund *et al.*, 2020).

Conspiracy theories address feelings of uncertainty connected to times of crisis by offering meaningful and unambiguous narratives for the situation at hand and steps to combat them (van Prooijen, Douglas, 2017). When conspiracy beliefs about the influence of powerful actors are connected to pseudoscientific, racist, and anti-Semitic narratives, educational processes are necessary to intervene and aid students in making critical and rational judgements. The focus on individual processes of meaning making has been part of civic and historical education approaches (Lange, 2008; Rösen, 1996; 2008; 2021), and the current situation highlights their importance. This paper will discuss the relevance of meaning for crisis situations as well as didactical approaches for civic education to address processes of meaning making by focusing on the process of meaning making and the challenges emerging in times of crisis.

## **1. Times of Crisis**

When speaking of the role of civic education in times of crisis, especially during a period designated as such from various perspectives (Aziz *et al.*, 2020; Coibion *et al.*, 2020; Dahwan, 2020, Greer *et al.*, 2020), it becomes necessary to discuss the term itself and the meaning associated with it. Due to the variety of phenomena which can be classified as a crisis as well as the multidisciplinary perspectives connected to them, many definitions of crisis exist throughout different fields of study (Coombs, 2010; McConnel, 2020). For example, when focusing on crisis perception, the classification of a situation as a crisis involves the comparison of an event to a certain standard, with the discrepancy being analysed for the probability of loss, the value of loss, and the extent of time pressure (Billings *et al.*, 1980). In contrast, a historical perspective describes a crisis as an epochal concept, entailing an exceptional transition period and a means of designating history as such (Koseleck, 2006; Roitman, 2013). Thus, a crisis is not only a condition to be observed and responded to, but also an observation that produces meaning (Roitman, 2013). Due to its social construction, the perception of an unpredictable event to produce negative outcomes plays an important role in analysing crisis situations (Coombs, 2010: 19). Such processes can involve organizations as well as societies as a whole, leading to the definition of societal crisis situations as «impactful and rapid societal change that calls existing power structures, norms of conduct, or even the existence of specific people or groups into question» (van Prooijen, Douglas, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic, with its impact on public health, education, public discourse and economic development, can be seen as such an event.



The cause of a crisis and its lasting effects on power structures and norms of conduct are part of a public negotiation. The characterization of a crisis as a transitional period from a certain point of history to another is a contentions process, in which different meaningful interpretations fight for prominence (Koseleck, 2006: 370 ff.). During this process, different plausible narratives regarding the causes and implications of a crisis become part of the public discourse and can influence the way a crisis is handled and ultimately how it becomes part of a collective memory (Jessop, 2012: 26; West, 2008: 337 ff.). Such a discourse about a crisis and its response is also connected to the individual level of understanding and meaning making. During crisis situations, people feel an increased need to make sense of the situation and are looking for explanations to imbue the events they are experiencing with meaning (van Prooijen, Douglas, 2017: 324). The narratives present in the public discourse are evaluated with regards to their plausibility and their ability to reduce adverse feelings connected to crisis situations, such as uncertainty and loss of control. Thus, narratives gain influence in public discourse by convincing individuals of their plausibility, although a plausible explanation does not have to be an accurate one (Mills *et al.*, 2010).

For civic education, it is necessary to address both the societal narratives as well as the individual level of people making sense of events during a crisis situation. Times of crisis can be seen as the designation of an event as an exceptional part of human history, which involves the substantial loss of resources, life, power structures or norms of conduct. Filling such a development with meaning is a process that takes place on the individual level with people trying to make sense of what is happening around them as well as on the societal level, where different narratives content by providing plausible and meaningful explanations for the events unfolding and the lessons to be learned from them. The role of civic education should be to help students to make sense of the situation and enable them to reflect their own as well as the societal processes of meaning making. However, before addressing possible approaches to involve meaning making in civic education, it is necessary to discuss the concepts connected to it.

## **2. Meaning as a concept**

Even though the concept of meaning is present in various disciplines and discourses, a common and unambiguous definition is lacking (Leontiev, 2013). However, for civic education and its role during crisis situations, the personal and the cultural or societal dimensions appear especially relevant. The former generally refers to the reflection of objects, phenomena, and events in a subject's consciousness, which are connected to emotions and included in a structural representation of the world. The process of creating meaning, or meaning making, highlights

the significance of certain objects or events for individuals, thus creating awareness of the concrete place they occupy in their lives and connecting them to motives, needs, and values (Leontiev, 2005). The cultural dimension of meaning entails the way society and culture create shared meaning as well as shared modes for «negotiating differences in meaning and interpretation» (Bruner, 1990a: 12 ff.). In this context, nothing has meaning in and of itself, but requires a background of social practice which provides a context of understanding and denoting something as meaningful (Zittoun, Brinkmann, 2012).

Both areas of meaning can be described as inherently connected since the individual process by which objects or events gain significance is shaped by the cultural system in which it takes place. Culture thus not only influences the way meaning is created, but it also shapes what is seen as in need of an explanation (Bruner, 1990a; 1990b). Certain actions for example don't warrant an explanation because they are perceived as ordinary and in accordance with a culturally shared mode of behaviour (Bruner, 1990b: 347; Olson, Bruner, 1996: 10). If objects or actions appear out of place, however, it becomes necessary to explain them, which usually involves a narrative mode that combines a presumed intentional state with an element of culture (Bruner, 1990b: 347). This narrative mode of explaining actions or events can be seen as one of two modes of understanding the world in which one acts. It involves the interpretive reconstruction of relevant circumstances, creates meaningful narratives and is predominantly applied in the understanding of social interactions. The other, a nomothetic approach, involves the conversion of intuitions about regularities in causal statements and finds its application in the generation of scientific theories based on falsifiability (Bruner, 1997: 71). Even though both modes of comprehending ones natural and social environment distinctly differ from one another, they can nonetheless be described as connected, complementary processes of understanding with differing applications, depending on the context (Bruner, 1996; 1997).

### **3. Meaning making and sensemaking**

Besides a distinction between different dimensions of meaning, some approaches also discuss the necessity to differentiate between its areas and applications as well as distinction between meaning making and sensemaking. Even though synonymous uses are common, certain approaches employ distinctions between both terms (Salvatore, 2019: 639). While literature on the phenomenon of crisis sometimes distinguishes between the inward process of understanding the situation, called sensemaking, and the outward articulation of these understandings, called meaning making (McConnel, 2020), psychological and linguistic literature discuss similar distinctions based on different aspects of the concept. Leontiev (2013) for example refers

to German and Slavic language and their use of different words for various aspects subsumed under the term meaning in the English language. While in German, *Sinn* (sense) usually refers to the subjective meaning in an individual's life or an important, value-laden cultural meaning and *Bedeutung* (meaning) describes the culturally fixed meaning shared by a, mainly linguistic, community, meaning in the English language covers both areas (Leontiev, 2013). Similarly, Salvatore (2019) defines meaning making not only as the attribution of semantic value, but as the interpretation which individuals apply to endow experiences with meaning, something that is consistent with a person's form of life (Salvatore, 2019). His distinction between meaning making and sensemaking is connected to Brunner's approach of narrative thought and cultural influence on the creation of meaning as well as semiotic theory. While meaning making describes the process of elaboration of meaning given to an individual, sensemaking describes the ongoing semiotic process through which these meaningful signs present the world to him or her (Salvatore, 2019).

Even though such distinctions between meaning making and sensemaking are relevant when differentiating between areas of meaning, they are not explicitly addressed in didactic approaches. Consequently, concepts connected to meaning and the processes of creating it as well as terms describing them vary. For example, in the German civic education discourse, the term sensemaking (*Sinnbildung*) is used to refer to students making sense of their social environment. This process is understood as the way individuals judge the social and political phenomena they interact with by marking them as significant or not (Lange, 2008: 433). The same term is however also used to describe the historical narration of experiences and of time (Rüsen, 1996: 508). Similarly, the term meaning is sometimes used to describe culturally influenced frames of reference as well as the narrative mode of human understanding (Mezirow, 2018; Hadzigeorgiou, 2016). However, despite the difference in terminology, these approaches refer to the importance of meaning for learning processes. In this context, meaning making as part of learning can be seen as the way in which people interpret events or objects by using their previous experience and culturally shaped knowledge and understanding (Zittoun, Brinkmann, 2012). Times of crisis highlight the way in which meaning is connected to learning and education.

#### **4. Meaning during crisis**

Meaning plays an important role during crisis situations, both for individual citizens and for actors involved in public discourse and dealing with the issues at hand. With regards to crisis situations and their analysis, two processes of meaning making are especially important. On the one hand, meaning making, as part of an official crisis

response, describes how actors use arguments and symbols to support an interpretation or a response to a crisis and its management and thus influence the public discourse. This entails the explanation of the events unfolding, communicating appropriate measures and offering guidance for the people affected by the crisis as well as the society at large (Christensen, Lægreid, 2020). Involved in the contentious dynamics of meaning connected to this process are not only institutional actors, but also journalists, editors and other participants of public discourse (Alimi, 2018). For governments, this process is an important part of a crisis and the subsequent crisis response, because formulating a sensible message during or after a crisis is necessary to create a credible and publically shared account of the events, which aids the development of trust in the government's actions (Christensen, Lægreid, 2020).

On the other hand, meaning making also includes the individual drive of making sense of the events unfolding during a crisis. Crisis situations often lead to increased sensemaking activities and narratives that become part of their representation of the events and in essence, history (van Prooijen, Douglas, 2017). Generally, people feel a need to explain events that appear unexpected or surprising, negative events warrant an explanation more than positive ones as well as events that are self-relevant compared to ones that are not (Bruckmüller *et al.*, 2017). Motivation to make sense increases when people feel that they are not in control of a situation or when they experience subjective feelings of uncertainty. When people experience such aversive feelings, they engage in increased sense-making activities in order to imbue a situation with meaning and purpose (van Prooijen, Douglas, 2017). Thus, crisis situations evoke a need to find an explanation. This need can be sufficiently satisfied by an official explanation of an event, but does not have to.

A present example for such a mismatch is the rise of a belief in conspiracy theories connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, its origin and the reason behind the implemented measures to control its spread. Conspiracy theories can be defined as «attempts to explain the ultimate causes of significant social and political events and circumstances with claims of secret plots by two or more powerful actors» (Douglas *et al.*, 2019). Crisis situations are a fertile breeding ground for conspiracy theories because they address feelings of uncertainty and loss of control by offering unambiguous narratives and culprits responsible for the situation at hand and steps to combat them, thus taking away part of the uncertainty and fostering a feeling of vigilance (van Prooijen, Douglas, 2017). Conspiracy theories thus function as a way to give meaning to situations. When people are exposed to aversive feelings, such as fear or insecurity, they tend to engage more in cognitive activities that give meaning and purpose to a situation in order to regain a certain degree of control. The same applies to situations in which individuals perceive a loss of control over their social environment (van

Prooijen, Acker, 2015). Conspiracy theories offer low-threshold starting points for this due to clear-cut explanatory patterns and attributions of blame, which, however, do not necessarily help to reduce feelings of anxiety and are associated with extremist political beliefs (van Prooijen, Douglas, 2017; van Prooijen *et al.*, 2018). Thus, the search for meaning and the process of meaning making is an important part of individual crisis response that can lead to a belief in conspiracy focused narratives. For civic education in times of crisis, addressing such beliefs is important, but has to include a reflection of the processes connected to them as well. This entails both the contentious public discourse regarding meaningful narratives and their cultural background as well as their impact on individual's processes of finding meaning in uncertain times.

## 5. The role of civic education

If meaning making processes are of importance in times of crisis and conspiracy theories are prone to fill the need for meaningful explanation of uncertain situation, civic education has to take these developments into account and incorporate didactical strategies to provide rational and meaningful explanations, help students cope with the uncertain times and enable them to critically reflect the societal discourses and processes of meaning making. Generally, civic education should help students to acquire the competencies necessary to participate in a democracy, public discussions, deal with political conflicts and share democratic values (Reinhardt, 2013). The goal is to contribute to the development of political, moral, and ethical autonomy through political maturity, which as part of self-determination always requires the ability to make independent and rational political judgments (Henkenborg, 2012: 28 ff.). These goals of civic education can be seen as universal and do not fundamentally change during times of crisis. However, since both the societal discourses as well as the individual processes of understanding the world can be altered significantly during times of crisis, civic education has to incorporate approaches that take the changed circumstances into account. Thus, learning should not only be aimed at imparting knowledge, but also include meaningful engagement with knowledge and the reflection of sense-making activity (Lange, 2011).

Such an approach to learning would entail an extension of established approaches to learning. Regarding the issue of a belief in conspiracy theories, certain didactical approaches, such as the training of an analytical or critical mindset or a focus on understandable scientific explanations for social and natural phenomena can help lower the susceptibility to believe in conspiracy theories (Swami *et al.*, 2014; Jolley, Douglas, 2017; Wilson, 2018). However, during times of crisis, ensuring these explanations are not only understandable, but also

meaningful, has to be considered as well. One way to achieve this can involve the application of storytelling to convey scientific knowledge as a way to combine logical and narrative thinking (Hadzigeorgiou, 2016). Narrative approaches aimed at providing a connected, story like explanation of events can be seen as a complementary tool to connect scientific facts and knowledge with meaningful descriptions and thus provide a better understanding for students (Hadzigeorgiou, Fotinos, 2007). Conveying facts about a crisis at hand, for example the novelty of the COVID-19 virus, its projected spread and the measures necessary to prevent them, may provide the necessary factual knowledge. However, also offering a narration of the events based on the scientific knowledge available, for example how the biodiversity loss and global mobility leads to the development and spread of viruses as well as the impact of inadequate risk assessment on political decisions (Gleißner *et al.*, 2021; Hâncean *et al.*, 2020; McNeely, 2021), can help students create a connected and meaningful understanding of the way events took place.

This should also involve the reflection of so called «frames of reference; the «structures of culture and language through which we construe meaning by attributing coherence and significance to our experience» (Mezirow, 2018), to enable students to analyse the principles leading to the adoption of certain explanations deemed to be meaningful. In this context, approaches of transformative learning can aid in making the process of construing meaning more inclusive and reflective. This process of reflection can furthermore be applied to the processes of societal level discourse. Contentious public discussions about the cause of a crisis and the conclusions that should be drawn from it can be used as a basis for civic education to reflect on meaning making processes. Since students learn about such political discourses, from different media outlets or discussions with peers as well as parents and integrate interpretations of current events into existing frameworks to determine whether the information makes sense or not, it is the task of civic education to address these discourses (Giesecke, 2000). Although the public negotiation of meaningful interpretations of crisis are not necessarily indications of key issues used to illustrate fundamental points of contention in democratic societies, they nonetheless offer an opportunity for continuous analysis and reflection of the dynamics and changes of such processes. Finally, this aspect can also be combined with an interdisciplinary perspective. A reflection of meaning-making processes is not only relevant in educational context when it comes to political discourse, but also when it comes to public history. In the current public discourse, both cultural fields are closely interlinked. An interdisciplinary approach can draw attention to this connection and further enable students to critically reflect on processes of filling events with meaning by referring to history and to deconstruct such processes (Rüsen, 2008).

## Conclusion

To summarize, civic education in times of crisis should address the need to imbue a situation with meaning and purpose. The approaches outlined in this paper can be seen as possible ways to include meaning, its creation and its reflection in civic education. This is however only the first step. Creating practical implantations and design based research approaches to evaluate their effect has to be the next one. Times of crisis highlight the way in which meaning is connected to learning and education.

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# **Transforming Citizenship Through Civic Education. Approaches, Methods, Experiences**

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## Language Education and Citizenship

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**ABSTRACT:** *The contribution aims to reflect on the role of school as a 'citizenization' agent in multilingual and multicultural societies. One of the tasks entrusted to schools by Italian constitution is to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of the free exercise of the rights and duties of citizenship and democracy. Of these, one of the first and «the most terrible (because it is the most hidden and concealed)» (De Mauro, 1995) is the inability to use words: «to control written communication, to have full access to the information» (ibid.). In the Italian school system, for historical and political reasons, this task has been interpreted from a monolingual point of view, both as adherence to a language as a closed, non-variable system of forms and structures – whereas the objective should be the ability to move with variable and multiple tools within a complex linguistic space – and as the offer of a single language, Italian, considering the plurilingualism, widespread for centuries throughout Italy, as an obstacle. This attitude towards language and language education has remained constant even when pupils of foreign origin have entered the school system. Their condition of plurilingualism was seen as an impediment to learning both the Italian language and the other school subjects. Thus, the new and complex plurilingual context has not been tackled as a challenge to reformulate the principles of democratic language education (GISCEL, 1975), and to reaffirm the centrality and transversality of language education itself, in the construction of people who think and operate actively in society, and for the construction of a truly inclusive school. Instead, the Italian school system has continued to adopt occasional and not structural policies in response to emergencies, or has gone after more or less transitory fashions, not making «educational research a field of experimental investigation and consequent action» (Ambel, 2018). In the last decades, however, both from a scientific perspective and through language policy recommendations and the proposal of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001 and 2018), it has emerged that respecting language diversity is a fundamental element of a just and equitable society. Many studies have demonstrated that the right to use one's own language is a decisive component in a person's intellectual and emotional development (Byalistok et al. 2008; Costa et al., 2014) and that the combination of the individual benefits and the educational benefits of plurilingualism has the potential to decrease social and economic inequalities and to increase the economic wellbeing of societies (Gazzola, Wickström, 2016).*

**KEYWORDS:** *Language Education, Plurilingualism, Language Policy, Italian Language, Foreign Languages*

## Introduction

The aim of the present paper is to reflect on the role of education as a 'citizenization' agent in multilingual and multicultural societies.

Citizenship is a factor of crucial importance for healthy democracies: it has been recognized as not only reducible to a legal status, but involving a multiplicity of cultural, social, political and economic dimensions as well and is nowadays a more and more contested and uncertain issue, that obviously challenges education. Various recent studies decline 'citizenship' in various ways and suggest different ways to improve it at school: focusing on Civic Education, on political literacy, on the teaching of Citizenship and Constitution, and present experiences and empowering practices, in some schools and in some different cities throughout Italy.

The objective of the present contribution is to start further upstream and focus on the conditions of possibility for the exercise of active citizenship.

### 1. Language, citizenship and democratic language education

De Mauro, starting from the *Ten GISCEL theses for linguistic democratic education* (GISCEL, 1975) and throughout his all life, warned us that «among the most terrible obstacles (because, more hidden and concealed) that limit the possibility of participating in national life and that would be the task of the Republic to remove stands and excel the inability to control written communication, to fully access the information necessary to live and, sometimes, survive, therefore to build an adequate critical equipment and a real ability to understand and control what happens around» (De Mauro, 1995, 39).

«Without the alphabet, no democracy. Without the alphabet, only underdevelopment» (ibidem) citing again De Mauro's words, words that already Gramsci and Don Milani used. With Don Milani, Pasolini and Rodari, De Mauro underlined the importance of the ability to use words in different contexts as a form of social redemption and guarantee of democracy (Ambel, 2018). With them De Mauro shared «a capacity for creative protest, exercised on the terrain of the most obvious everyday life» (Ambel, 2018), that is, the capacity to construct proposals and to «find and follow new, better, more human paths» (De Mauro, 1982). Proposals that, however, have not been adopted, paths that have not been followed.

In fact, it seems incredible to have to underline decades after the writings, interventions, inventions, proposals, protests, and hopes of these scholars, that illiteracy, defined as «the set of limits of the development process... critical points, unachieved objectives, deficient tools to make effective a process of linguistic-communicative

development of individuals and the community» (Ambel, 2018), should be fought as the most dangerous obstacle to citizenship.

And yet we still need to remember the art. 3 in the Italian Constitution itself: «All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions. It is the duty of the Republic to remove those obstacles of an economic and social nature which, by limiting the freedom and equality of citizens, prevent the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organization of the country». In this article after stating that the principle of equality is at the heart of the Charter, strongly and clearly is stated that one of the main objectives of the State is to eliminate the obstacles that prevent all citizens from enjoying equal social dignity and attributes to public institutions the role of removing these obstacles that prevent the exercise of rights and duties.

Certainly as far as language(s) are concerned, it is mainly the school that should take charge of providing all citizens with the tools for the full exercise of their citizenship, bridging the initial contextual socio-economic-cultural gaps, fighting illiteracy and fostering literacy, promoting the linguistic, expressive, communicative, cultural development at individual and societal level and even more designing and developing a project for such development, a project to promote plurilingualism in the broadest sense, to enlarge the linguistic space at the individual and societal level.

## 2. Language education at school

All the surveys, as we will see, continue to paint a picture of a national school and a country marked by profound differences and inequalities in results and conditions: between subjects, between types of school, between north and south, between regions, between schools and sites in the same territory, between boys and girls, between Italians and first- and second-generation immigrants, between social strata, even (unfortunately) between the first stage of schooling and subsequent stages (which are gradually becoming more and more unsatisfactory).

This picture also applies to literacy in the language(s). De Mauro warned us on this problem since 1975 when the *Ten GISCEL theses* (GISCEL, 1975) were published. «Giving children all the uses of language, all the opportunities that a language gives us» (Ambel, 2017), i.e., seeing languages as tools and resources for social redemption and political participation, is the aim of the *democratic language education* promoted by GISCEL (GISCEL, 2007; De Mauro, 2018).

The concrete proposal and precise educational indications contained in the *Ten GISCEL theses* have remained unheard (GISCEL, 2007). Instead, an inability or unwillingness to notice the centrality of linguistic

facts, in the social life, in the life of a community has prevailed both in the school and in the Italian intellectual culture, as De Mauro himself acknowledges, such as the inability «in connection with this, to see, to understand, to perceive the educational centrality of linguistic abilities» (2018: 12). The strategicity of the competence in languages for building future citizen has been and is still ignored, considered irrelevant and has never been the objective of a coherent, structured and consistent language policy intervention, paradoxically in a country like Italy that is historically plurilingual (Vedovelli, 2010).

Furthermore, in the Italian school system, for historical and political reasons (De Mauro, 2007), language education has been interpreted from a monolingual point of view, both as adherence to a language as a closed, non-variable system of forms and structures – whereas the objective should be the ability to move with variable and multiple tools within a complex linguistic space – and as the offer of a single language, Italian, considering the plurilingualism, widespread for centuries throughout Italy at individual and societal level, as an obstacle (De Mauro, 2007).

The results of the lack of a structured, coherent and consistent policy, aimed not only at promoting single projects in response to emergencies (such as the arrival of immigrant students in schools), and of this monolingual and normative vision, is evident if we analyze the ways in which the constellation of languages with which a learner may come into contact are managed and not reflected upon in the school context.

We can affirm that in Italy more than the question of the language (Italian for Italians), there is a question of languages, because the lack of literacy regards the whole constellation of languages with which a learner may come into contact. In the present contribution, we will only focus on the languages of education (Council of Europe, 2009), that are taught or learned at school: Italian and foreign languages.

Let's start with Italian language. Various data sources highlight the problems that still exist in literacy in Italian languages.

First and foremost are the results of the INVALSI tests, which are much discussed, often inappropriately and only when they are published and (Sobrero, 2020). For many years now, the INVALSI itself has been denouncing, with mountains of data that very few have read, the low level of students' Italian skills, which, paradoxically, becomes more marked in secondary schools from the end of primary school onwards.

And yet, in the best Italian tradition, the problems, thus ignored, have been left (or allowed) to fester in the general lack of interest. This was also the case for the expert report commissioned by the Ministers of Labour and Social policies, and of Education, University and Research in 2013. The Commission of experts analyzed the results of the OECD's Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which measures (by administering sample-based tests) the level of those competences that are considered essential for the full



participation of adult citizens in today's labour market and social life. In particular, PIAAC measures, for adults aged 16-65, the level of key competences such as basic literacy or literacy (LIT), defined as «the ability to understand, evaluate, use and engage with written texts to participate in society, achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential» (PIAAC, 2013, 2).

The 2013 expert report on PIAAC results, based on the survey conducted in 2011-2012 in 24 OCSE countries, in one of the last documents commissioned by Italian Ministries in which data-driven policies and strategic actions to increase formal education and training, combating drop-outs and promoting lifelong learning are suggested.

As the expert report states, the PIAAC survey highlights the strong relationship between levels of skills possessed by adults and their approach to and participation in civic and social life. Italy is at the bottom of the general ranking of the participating countries, it is last in literacy.

As the PIAAC survey highlight, results in literacy do not improve with the progression of education level: «in Italy, for each level of education, average results are much lower than the OECD average, and with very limited differences between one level and another. Even worse are the results for Italians with the highest level of formal education, who are significantly behind the OECD average [...] More analytically, the performance level of young Italians (16-29 years old) with tertiary education is all within level 3; this means that they are not able to search, integrate, interpret and synthesize information from complex, multiple, possibly discontinuous texts, nor to make complex inferences and evaluate evidence through reasoning (characteristics of levels 4 and 5). A young Japanese, Finnish, Dutch or Australian with upper secondary education performs better than a young Italian graduate» (PIAAC, 2013, 4).

The PIAAC results are in line with the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results based on a survey which measures 15-year-old school pupils' scholastic performance on mathematics, science, and reading. In 2018, Italy scored below the OECD average in reading: «77% of students attained at least Level 2 proficiency in reading (OECD average: 77%). At a minimum, these students can identify the main idea in a text of moderate length, find information based on explicit, though sometimes complex criteria, and can reflect on the purpose and form of texts when explicitly directed to do so» (OECD, 2018, 4).

Even those who do not (rightly) want to rely entirely on surveys that use different methodologies, techniques, tools, refer to different population samples, and analyze the results in different ways, are forced to note that all the survey results show that the question of language is always present in our country and how urgent it is to address it in a systematic way.

Similar results are provided by surveys of students' proficiency in foreign languages, the languages taught at school. Incidentally, we should remember that we are among the European countries with the most limited language provision at school: in practice, in Italy only English is offered, with the exception of one more language in upper secondary schools, for two years (Extra, Yagmur, 2012).

Starting from 2017, the system for assessing students' English language receptive skills at three key moments of their schooling career – at the end of primary school (Grade 5), at the end of lower secondary school (Grade 8) and at the end of upper secondary school (Grade 13) – was completed by INVALSI, the *National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System*. All Italian school students have the opportunity to test their English listening and reading skills in relation to the internationally recognized criteria of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018).

The results of the 2019 INVALSI tests of English show that problems come from afar and paradoxically grow as school levels rise, just as the differences among territories grow. The Italian primary school students do well in the English tests, but in the last year of upper secondary school (Grade 13) in the reading test, only 51.8% of Italian school students reach level B2 (the target prescribed for the end of upper secondary school) and 10.6% do not even reach level B1, i.e., they have a very low level of competence after 13 years of schooling. In the listening test, only 35.0% of Italian school students reach level B2 and 25.2% i.e., one student out of four does not reach level B1. In some regions of the South there is a greater number of students with very low levels of achievement in English (INVALSI, 2019).

**FIG. 1.** 2019 tests results in Italian and English (reading): primary schools and upper secondary schools

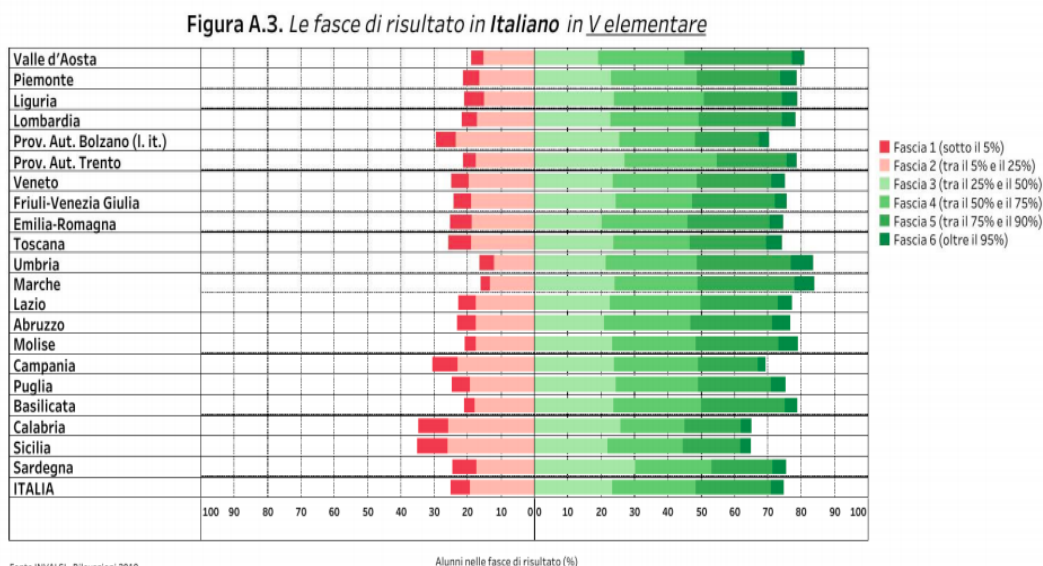


Figura A.5. I livelli di risultato in Inglese-lettura (reading) in V elementare

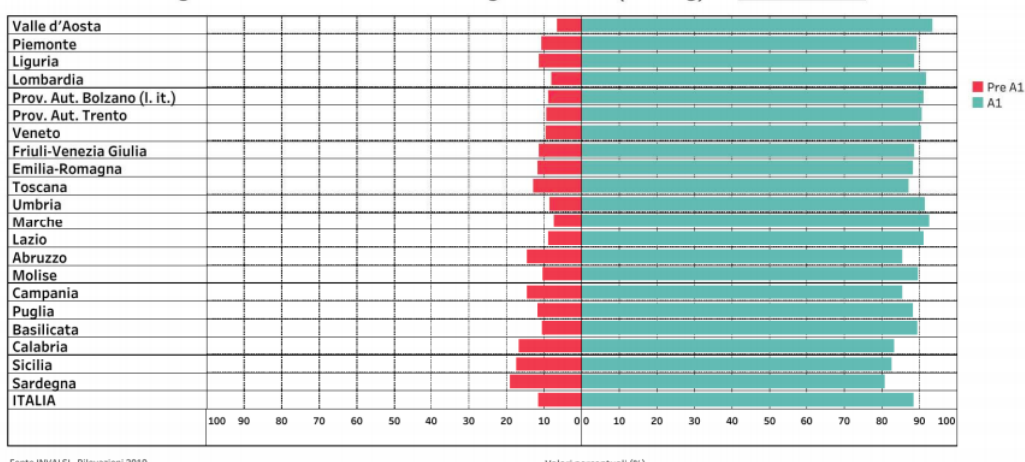


Figura A.13. I livelli di risultato in Italiano in V superiore

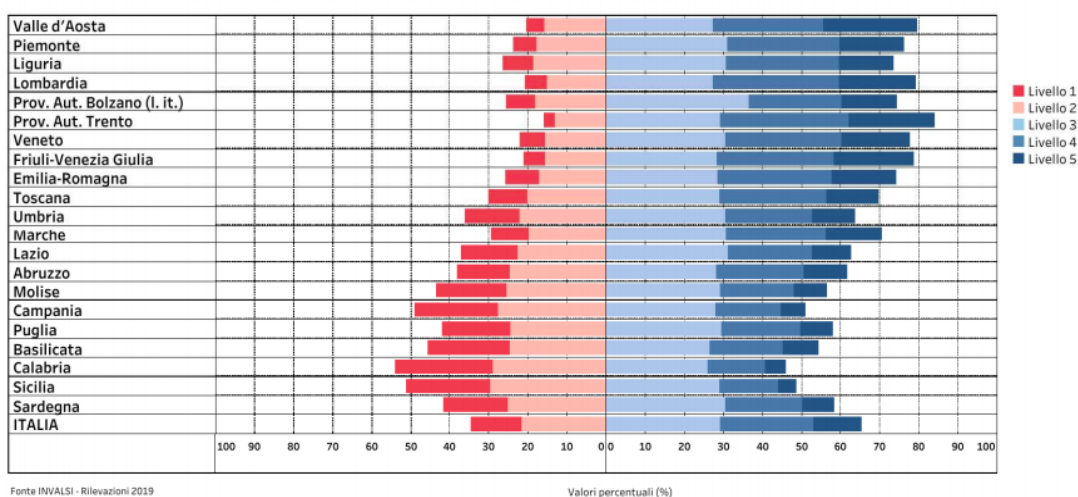
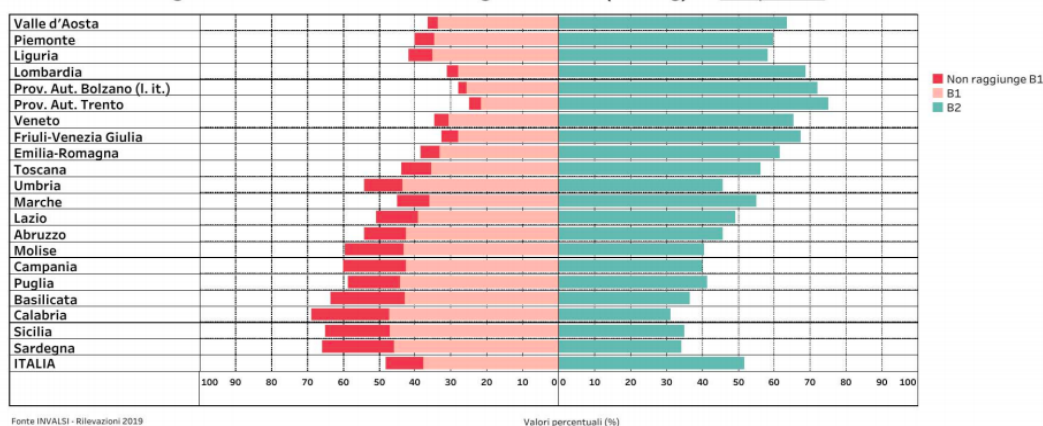


Figura A.15. I livelli di risultato in Inglese-lettura (reading) in V superiore



Source: INVALSI open (2021)

If we compare the results curves in Italian and English tests (Fig. 1), we see that they are the same for both competences in Italian and English. The differences are small in primary school, growing in upper

secondary school. The lack of competence in Italian and English grow as school levels rise, just as the differences among territories grow.

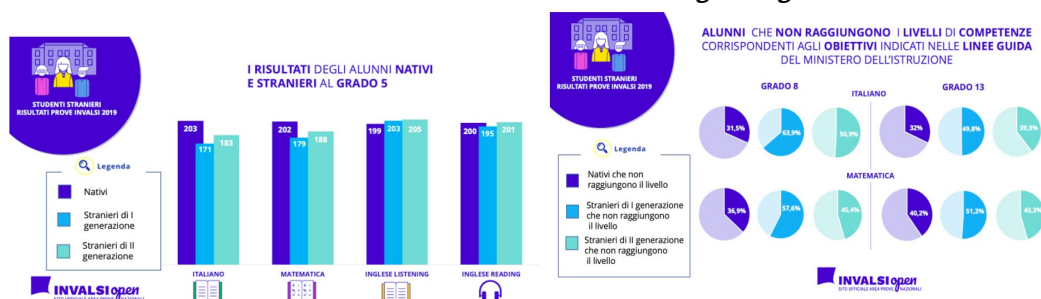
The attitude of neglect towards languages and language education has remained constant even when pupils of foreign origin have entered the school system. Their condition of plurilingualism of origin was seen as an impediment to learning both the Italian language and the other school subjects. But this does not mean that measures have been taken at national level to support the learning of the Italian language by pupils of foreign origin, but mainly emergency initiatives, fragmented, in the hands of teachers and school managers who had to deal with the emergency (Barni, 2012).

If we analyze again the results of the INVALSI tests (Figure 2), we can see that in the 2019 tests, students of foreign origin generally got lower scores than natives (INVALSI open, 2020). Their main problems are in Italian. At the end of the first cycle of studies, in fifth grade, first-generation foreign students are behind in Italian with a score of 171, about 30 points behind their native peers (203). Results in the population of second-generation immigrant students are only slightly more promising, even though these children were born and have always lived in Italy.

As recognized by INVALSI itself (ibid.), mastery of the Italian language influences not only the results of the Italian test, but also the mathematics test both for first and for second-generation immigrants, although to a lesser extent.

On the other hand, the same results of the 2019 test highlight that English is the subject in which first- and second-generation immigrant students demonstrate the most advanced skills, and furthermore outperform natives in the school grades following primary school.

**FIG. 2. 2019 INVALSI Test Results: native and foreign origin students**



Source: INVALSI open (2021b)

These results have been neglected, but are illuminating for at least two reasons:

1. As recent research has shown, children from multilingual backgrounds are more likely to learn other languages (see Garraffa *et al.*, 2020 for a review). Furthermore, many studies had already demonstrated that the right to use one's own language is a decisive component in a person's intellectual and emotional development (Byalistok *et al.* 2008; Costa *et al.*, 2014).

2. It is profoundly wrong and unjust to assess the Italian language competence of students of foreign origin with the same tools with which we assess the competence of Italian students. We should not forget that Italian is a foreign language for students of foreign origin, and it is not their home language even if they were born in Italy. When Italian and foreign origin students are both assessed in foreign language learning, it is evident that student of foreign origin, with a plurilingual background, perform even better than natives.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, unfortunately the new and complex plurilingual context in Italy has not been tackled as a challenge to reformulate the principles of democratic language education (GISCEL, 1975), and to reaffirm the centrality and transversality of language education itself in the construction of people who think and operate actively in society, and for the construction of a truly inclusive school.

Instead, in the field of language education, the Italian school system has continued to adopt occasional and not structural policies in response to emergencies, or has gone after more or less transitory fashions, not making «educational research a field of experimental investigation and consequent action» (Ambel, 2018).

The «unmissable opportunity» (Vedovelli, 2010, 44-45) that the arrival of our new fellow citizens and their languages had offered us has been missed. It could instead have been «a unique opportunity to define the fundamental objectives of a language policy that promotes the knowledge of foreign languages and that, consequently, by addressing the central critical point of the level of literacy in our society, promotes its general linguistic-communicative and cultural (and let us be allowed also economic-productive) development» (ibid.).

This is particularly regrettable because one of the founding values of the European Union is respect for the richness of cultural and linguistic diversity, and the European institutions have been recommending the promotion of multi- and plurilingualism for years. The EU's commitment to multilingualism, through decisions, recommendations and actions aiming at its management and promotion includes its language education policy that considers languages as commodities for employability, mobility and economic growth because «in today's interconnected world, the ability to speak multiple languages and communicate across linguistic divides are critical competences» (Dendrinos, 2018) and that the combination of the individual benefits and the educational benefits of plurilingualism has the potential to decrease social and economic inequalities and to increase the economic wellbeing of societies (Gazzola, Wickström, 2016). Furthermore «languages not only play a key role in the everyday life of the European

Union, but are also fundamental for respecting cultural and linguistic diversity» (Franke, 2017), a fundamental element of a just and equitable society.

The proposal for a *Council Recommendation on a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages*<sup>1</sup> in 2019 sets goals and priorities which are likely to impact language education in the EU in the years to come and invites Member states to invest in the initial and continuing education of language teachers and school leaders so that they are prepared for linguistic diversity in the classroom and that they encourage research in and use of innovative, inclusive and multilingual pedagogies, such as «moving away from the monolingual paradigm in education, and recognizing that semiotics is at the centre of all subject areas» (Dendrinou, 2018, 25). *Rethinking language education and linguistic diversity in schools* (European Commission, 2018), re-thinking the traditional way of teaching and learning languages, both for monolingual and multilingual learners is the proposal and the challenge launched a group of experts invited by the European Commission to outline the new educational recommendations. A challenge and a proposal that were at the core of *The Ten GISCEL Theses for democratic language education* 46 years ago.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605\(02\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(02)&from=EN)

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## History, Civic Education and Heritage Education: The Challenges of Teachers in Democratic Society

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**ABSTRACT:** *The law on the new Civic Education has the advantage of identifying a set of themes that the most recent training guidelines now consider as essential. This is an interesting trend, which revolves around the promotion of critical thinking, creativity, social and cultural awareness as precious tools to combat all forms of violence, injustice and discrimination. The indications also combine the needs of the labor market and economic progress with the safeguarding of ethical sensitivity to social issues, in accordance with the objectives of the UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable, equitable and inclusive development. Challenges that cannot be separated from the search for methodological innovations in the field of civic education through unconventional learning approaches. The reference is in particular to the reconsideration of the history curriculum starting from heritage education, as a renewal for the teaching of history, which passes through experiences of education for active citizenship.*

**KEYWORDS:** *History, Civic Education, Heritage Education, Inclusion, Democratic Society*

### Introduction

Among the numerous documents produced by the European Union, aimed at providing basic pedagogical uniformity to the European school system, the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 identifies eight key competences for lifelong learning, tended to the «acquisition of necessary knowledge for every citizen to be able to successfully enter the social and work environment». The key competences concern the «combination of adequate knowledge, skills and attitudes to deal with a particular situation» (quoted from *The Recommendation on key competences*), which therefore allows us to respond to constant changes in society.

From September 1 of the academic year 2020/2021, the transversal teaching of civic education was established in the first and second cycle of education, with Law 92/2019, for 33 hours per year, for each year of the course. Innovation is undoubtedly attributable to the transversal nature of the subject which, overcoming the constraints of discipline,

should ensure a holistic, global, multi-perspective approach and the development of learning processes. In fact, the identification of a set of themes that recent training guidelines consider essential, is oriented towards the overall education of the citizen. In this sense, the acquisition of the key citizenship skills that are certainly individual are enlivened by the awareness and enhancement of the relational, social and emotional dimension of learning.

The new law on Civic Education has the advantage of identifying a set of topics that the most recent educational guidance now considers as essential. This is an interesting trend, which revolves around the promotion of critical thinking, creativity, social and cultural awareness as precious tools to combat all forms of violence, injustice and discrimination. Furthermore, the indications combine the needs of the job market and economic progress with the safeguarding of ethical sensitivity to social issues, in accordance with the objectives of the UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable, equitable and inclusive development, which also includes the goal of an equitable and inclusive education.

It is therefore clear that the teaching aims to train responsible and active citizens and to promote full and conscious participation in the civic, cultural and social life of communities, in compliance with the rules, rights and duties.

Participation in the life of the community itself is fundamental through the enhancement of interpersonal relationships and between institutions, centers of cultural aggregation, families and the territory. The evaluation, with the new provisions of the year 2020/2021, provides for descriptive judgments instead of marks that were in force since 2008 with the Gelmini reform. In this way, Civic education paths can develop in schools «knowledge of the Italian Constitution and the institutions of the European Union to substantiate, in particular, the sharing and promotion of the principles of legality, active and digital citizenship, environmental sustainability, right to health and well-being of the person».

### **1. The teaching of history between citizenship and heritage education. Between yearnings, actual achievements and prospects**

Regarding the teaching and learning of history, some brief considerations need to be made. The discipline is mainly (not always and depends also on school grades) learned through the help of the manual. The story presented is very rich, the texts have six hundred pages, but we are fully aware that in the folds of those pages that story is partial; because his story does not reflect the complexity of the history of gender, the evolution of relations between men and women and because it is always lagging the contributions of historiography. And here, I come to a further brief consideration on the teaching of history. That is the need, I would say the urgency, to develop gender-

sensitive teaching through experiential paths that overcome the persistent stereotyped and silent vision of the presence of women in history. Attention to the genders of female and male subjects in their multiple identities is essential for didactics of history aimed at an education for active and democratic citizenship, given that the issue of gender identity is crucial for the formation of each person. Therefore, it must be addressed in all areas of knowledge; in particular, in the historical one through a coherent commitment aimed at reconsidering the historiographic interpretation through the effective plurality of the subjects of history.

In summary, restoring and building together with students the richness, complexity and articulation of our past is fundamental. With a recommendation: not a gender story as an object of study, but as a subject of the course of history, which knows how to open observers on the present, giving space to the everyday life of local stories and traditionally neglected female traces, with horizons and visions that are able to embrace difficult issues in manuals.

Starting from citizenship education, historical knowledge, built through laboratory experiences and openness to current events, can be renewed with the constant connection between local, gender and global history. Its transversal nature obliges us to reconsider the teaching of history that includes an education in (material and intangible) heritage, an integrating background of significant, educational and inclusive value, capable of projecting the specific contributions of local cultural heritage into wider horizons and of making use of the most up-to-date communication tools; with an approach that from the present and from the aspects of social life, identifies poles of interest through the observation of current events and the search for links with themes and historical periods to be addressed (development of topics with a broad disciplinary spectrum: climate, water, resources, pollution, planetary imbalances, migrations, confrontations and coexistence between cultures).

Marc Bloch said that history is «a rotten science» (Bloch, 1949), and Jacques Le Goff asserted, reinforcing the concept, that «to remain a science, more than any other, it must move, progress; cannot stop. The historian cannot sit still, as a bureaucrat of history; he must be a walker, faithful to his duty of exploration and adventure» (Le Goff, 2014).

Citizenship education, rather than being told, needs first to be practiced within the school. His teaching goes beyond any cumulative logic: it is not a question of adding a discipline by giving it a separate and autonomous space, but of integrating it with all the problems and projects related to personal and relationship life that unravel from school to the family, to the city and the territory.

It is a continuous reflection, which constantly puts us in contact and comparison with ourselves and with others, a self-reflection that is central to the structuring of the personality.

To educate to the recognition of one's rights and duties, of one's responsibilities towards others and in order to promote a coexistence based on the values of peace, tolerance, respecting the cultures and traditions of the different countries, it is necessary to count on a fruitful dialogue between the school and the territory in which local authorities and all other external educational subjects can contribute to setting up the training itineraries (Borghi, 2016).

The school is a *polis*, one of the first educational places of conscious associated life of social solidarity which presupposes the opportunity for students of countless opportunities for discussion and common activities. And it is, as in many cases, school experience that initiates and confirms the principles of solidarity and legality, as the school is a set of relationships and a space for discussion and freedom, where norms, rules, are indispensable for the rich and cohesive school community and therefore well lived. Only in this way we can feel protagonists of our life, because through learning about history and doing politics, we can be true builders of knowledge and active participants in the collective representation of history, of all its effective plurality of subjects.

It is only through the experience of participation that young people learn to live democracy concretely.

Coming to the concept of 'heritage', the need to know the surrounding heritage and practice direct observation of legible civilizations in the cities and in the signs preserved in the landscape in order to recognize the sedimentation is highlighted several times in the ministerial documents (the 2012 *Indicazioni Nazionali* and the 2019 *Piano Nazionale per l'Educazione al Patrimonio*). Aspects that cross all classes and disciplines aimed at identifying problems relating to the protection and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage, proposing suitable solutions in the context of the life of the boy and girl.

The experiential activities are aimed at acquiring a historical awareness that can motivate and assume a sense of responsibility towards the heritage and common goods by promoting actions of care and improvement, such as the safeguarding, recovery and conservation of the heritage itself.

The carrying out of these experiences therefore becomes the natural crowning of the research realized both on the local cultural heritage and on the wider one, precisely in function of the direct relationship between the levels of knowledge of the history that generated this heritage and the forms of respect and protection that they assume towards him. If these didactic practices can be considered satisfactory in the contexts of kindergarten and primary school (with experiences linked to contexts from near history and therefore local history), they are often difficult to implement in the higher grades, as the following considerations on teacher training and the acquisitions of recent research conducted on the subject attest.

Precisely in relation to the environmental and territorial aspects, it must be noted that a rigidly dualistic approach often persists in literature that contrasts nature and man, spontaneous and artificial, natural and historical. It was the biological and physical sciences that provided the foundations for a non-dichotomous reading between man and the 'outside world'. In this newfound harmony, even historical knowledge can contribute to a correct environmental education. The environment, the territory, the landscape, as current results of millenary processes of transformation, are themes on which to build basic and common notions and subjective elaborations, in that circular dialogue between the local and the general dimension, necessary for an active respect for both microsystems both entire ecosystems.

Education for sustainability, as stated in the documents of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005- 2014), proclaimed by the UN General Assembly, refers to an education in values, at the center of which there is respect for others, for difference and diversity, for the environment, for the resources of the earth. The challenge of the green revolution requires the training of people endowed with critical skills, respectful of the complexity of reality and able to start from simple things, from relationships, from cooperation, to weave a fruitful and innovative dialogue with the other self, guaranteeing of a sustainable planetary living. Sustainability education has as its constant reference the maturation of a personal identity that is at the same time communitarian, it must encourage the creation of collaborative situations in which to experiment forms of active participation in the life of one's own territory, facilitating the dialogical encounter between generations and cultures. The knowledge and conservation of the testimonies of the past and the renewal of memory must interact with the openness to the future, through the exercise of imagination and common planning. In this sense, every educational practice must in turn be responsible and constantly verified, because if it is to promote in people the ability to consider the long-term consequences of their actions, to think transversally in a world in which knowledge of reality and of ourselves is constantly changing, so every practice «... is not a destination [...] but a way of traveling» (Scott, Grough, 2003).

A recent survey (Galletti, 2020) which involved students of the single-cycle Master's Degree Course in Primary Education at the University of Bologna, attested that the teaching practice of teaching history continues to be strongly linked (the reference is to secondary schools of I and II degree) to the traditional model of unidirectional teaching, that is anchored to the presentation of historical events by the teacher and the consequent memorization of the same by the students with little attention to the formation of a critical sense. However, we must premise, as amply commented by European studies (Estepa Giménez, 2017), and by the recent global epidemic health events of Covid-19, that the use and development of new technologies to support teaching

practice has proved to be fundamental to give immediate response to the emergency, but also raised issues and reflections on the use and effectiveness of new technologies, certainly a reflection on the teaching of the same story. The pandemic experience has highlighted how likely it was that the teaching of the discipline did not want to tackle except casually in the last decade: the lack of adaptability of the school, and in particular the reference is to the learning and teaching of the subject history, to the needs of society and therefore of boys and girls. We must therefore note that heritage education continues to appear sporadic and scarcely present in the school curricula of lower secondary schools and in the teaching practice itself; this must also be linked to an insufficient university training of future teachers (Borghì, Cuenca López, 2003; Galletti 2020) and to a vision of teaching the discipline that must presuppose the very knowledge of the meaning of 'heritage' (often a narrow vision on the part of teachers who is oriented almost exclusively to monumental elements alone, for example leaving out the aspects of intangible heritage and therefore a holistic vision) and to the failure to acquire historical and social skills in an inter and multi-disciplinary perspective (Prats Cuevas, 2001).

Returning in summary to the results of the survey just mentioned, we confirm – again – the gap between the yearnings and the actual achievements of teaching due to the daily difficulties that teachers have to face, among which, first of all, the teaching load and a huge, complex program that leaves little room, especially for higher school grades, for effective teaching integrated with other subjects such as anthropology, art, law, philosophy, literature, music, science, technologies, history and geography.

## **2. Competences**

In relation to the key competences of the aforementioned *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council* of 18 December 2006 it is suggested that the design of learning units and history laboratories is strongly oriented towards the formation of skills and knowledge in the perspective of competences (Audigier, 2002) which concern in particular digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competence and cultural awareness and expression (Borghì, 2014). Skills considered essential for the creation and development of the basis for lifelong learning and personal development from a perspective of active citizenship and social inclusion; that while on the one hand they do not give up the contents of the History discipline, on the other they focus attention on the student's attitudes, on his personal motivations, on his critical thinking towards what surrounds him; learning that will accompany him throughout his life (Borghì *et al.*, 2015).

Regarding civic education in secondary schools (14-19 years), it should be noted that the teaching is given by teachers qualified in the teaching of legal and economic disciplines, if available in the autonomy; although, it must be specified, the transversal dimension of the discipline is not neglected, the themes of which cannot be traced back to law alone. The teaching is therefore organized in such a way that issues not strictly related to the legal-economic disciplines mentioned are addressed and that, as required by law, are those referred to in the point (indicate the reference page).

In the context of school autonomy, schools can initiate extra-curricular experiences to integrate and/or strengthen the teaching of civic education through the establishment of networks, even of multi-year duration, with other institutional subjects, with the world of volunteering and Third sector and with the municipalities (on knowledge of the functioning of local administrations and their bodies, historical knowledge of the territory and the stable use of green spaces and cultural spaces, knowledge of the functioning of local administrations).

Taking a look at the history programs of secondary schools and the connections with civic education, we can see that each thematic nucleus dealt with in the five years of school is oriented, and also supported by the discipline's manuals themselves, to interdisciplinary links with the right (e.g. to the difference between the codes of ancient civilizations and comparison with modern codes) for the concepts of equality present in Greek legislation and the concept of equality in modern constitutions; from the links with Roman law to the Italian Constitution, with a reflection on the very concept of European citizenship, aimed in particular at knowing how to distinguish the concepts of man, citizen, person, individual, intertwining the same articles with the personal experience of the student and student; to trace situations of discrimination and marginalization. Close ties with the Italian Constitution and the European Charter for general focuses that include world visions and that lead to international law. On the theme of the temporal and religious power of the Church, from the Donation of Constantine to the Lateran Pacts, the connection with civic education is expressed through knowledge of integration policies and the right to asylum; of the links of the contents of history (religious tolerance, dialogue between religions, humanity and war, the Constitution rejects war, the defense of the state and the role of the army and world organizations), which using laboratory methods unravels the historical origins of international relations.

Again, the importance of respect for the person and the enhancement of interpersonal and inter-institutional relationships and between cultural and relational aggregation centers for young people, families and the territory are reiterated. Art. 4 of the Ministerial Decree provides training, accompanying and monitoring measures by the Ministry of Education for the first implementation phase (2020/2022). Training and

accompaniment will have school managers and teaching staff as recipients; the monitoring of what is done by the schools will be implemented according to the times, forms and methods defined by the Ministry of Education itself.

### **3. Some final thoughts. Persistence and horizons on the teaching of history and teacher training**

In their continuous and necessary transition, the various subjects of scholastic, cultural and scientific training are facing a phase of difficulty, since, in the face of the rapid and completely unprecedented transformations of current affairs, disorientation, inertia, contradictions and anachronisms more and more evident are manifested from many sides.

Teachers of all grades and disciplines suffer particularly. They partially manage to meet and sometimes even react positively to new challenges, but they often feel alone juggling between contradictory and limiting internal regulations and external expectations, often largely outdated.

In this context of general difficulty, the underestimation of the didactic aspects by academic circles emerges even more clearly in which a deleterious contradiction has been consolidated for some time: a general ostentation of appreciation for the needs of teaching is countered by a persistent and an equally widespread substantial discredit of all that is didactic and informative.

Thus, behind the screen of full-blown intentions and rejecting the necessary dialogue with the real protagonists and subjects of learning, the very area appointed to train and update teachers is unavailable and unprepared for one of its main functions.

On the contrary, in order to face the growing and alarming symptoms of inadequacy of their courses, university professors should make the teaching issues their own, not only for a profitable training of teachers, but also and above all to draw the fruits of those experiences that concretely face the very delicate problems both of methods and contents and of the correspondence and effectiveness of teaching in the various disciplines.

For history, as for other subjects, attention to teaching strategies commensurated with the real difficulties that teachers encounter daily in their offices, cannot be eclipsed by that for disciplinary content.

Therefore, the respective 'didactics' must be approached with attention and care not inferior to those reserved to the parent disciplines, proposing courses aimed at experimenting with the itineraries and the fundamental tools of research and teaching, within a framework of training processes that privilege the methodological aspects, but also offer the basic notions and contents to then subjectively design coherent and effective didactic paths. In this



perspective it is also possible to find an effective balance in the contrast, sometimes exasperated, between those who support the primary importance of contents and those who instead assign greater importance to methodologies.

We would also like to highlight (perhaps unfortunately) a certain continuity with the *Indicazioni Nazionali*. Compared to the latter, there has been an update with respect to those of 2007 but, in fact, the founding principles and disciplinary aspects at the base have not disappeared. In the first cycle of education, «historical knowledge relating to the period from the appearance of man to late antiquity is assigned» (Borghi, 2016, 120). Knowledge concerning late antiquity up to the beginning of the 21st century is promoted to the secondary school, while in the high school it deals with ancient and early medieval history up to the present day. Such a curricular breakdown of history is not exempt from criticism (Dondarini, 2008). In fact, medieval, modern and contemporary history is excluded from the first cycle of education, delegating the study of these eras to the secondary school. The consequences of this ministerial decision are different. In the first place, the possibility is not offered (to primary school teachers) to address topical issues related to the historical periods indicated above as the students would not have the knowledge in this regard. At the same time, pupils' unawareness is fueled because they are excluded a priori from participating in school and extra-school educational projects concerning these historical periods. This does not only mean excluding them from interesting training courses but preventing them from actively participating in city life and the opportunities it offers.

In summary, for the teaching-learning of history to become more and more significant and in line with this rich epistemological orientation, the aspects on which we can continue to work are different. For example:

1. Teacher training. In particular, it is among the teachers that an underestimation of the educational role of the subject remains: in turn they are trained in the academic field with notional and transmissive approaches (except in rare cases and in particular in the training aimed at future kindergarten and primary school teachers); they are not often trained from the didactic point of view, which does not allow them to have tools to plan active and meaningful paths without particular supports, they continue to support the lessons in the use of a manual, which is often only a summary of the most important events, without any explanation of the connection between past and present, and indeed, often, without any reference to events and periods more current; the manual itself does not stimulate research and study. The lack of updating of teachers, from this point of view, feeds the vicious circle that sees history as a not very useful discipline, or at least not indispensable.

2. The preparation of truly meaningful and motivating paths. Be able to program modules, learning units, workshops, etc. truly capable of activating students and enhancing the fundamental elements of the discipline (e.g., knowledge of the past and one's roots; the enhancement of heritage; raising awareness of protection and participation in the community; the ability to interpret and obtain information from sources; etc.). These paths can develop knowledge, skills and lead children to the first forms of sharing and active participation in the life of the community, not only in a local sense, but also in a global sense.
3. A program that is increasingly capable of networking with the territory and the entire educational community. Building relationships of collaborations with the various actors present in the area (museums, associations, archives, etc.) so that the educational proposal is always rich and 'situated' and so that the value of these resources is also evident to children, in the hope of building between their ties and relationships that continue over time, with a view to lifelong learning.

In conclusion, we can only note that in an increasingly composite society it must also be aimed at promoting a cultural formation based on the awareness of the peculiarities and diversities living together, in the belief that every identity evolves, and that any presumption of its immobility is unfounded with which to justify the rejection of new arrivals and related changes. This can be verified in various fields starting from the socio-anthropological one, since the need to regain possession of the historical-cultural heritages of our communities has been accentuated by the formidable acceleration of transformations in individual and collective ways of life.

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## The 'Climate' of the Post-Covid Classroom. New Ideas for Civic Education and Citizenship Transformation

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**ABSTRACT:** *Based on the dramatic current global and social changes imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to develop and implement useful teaching and training methodologies to promote students' attitudes and behaviors needed to fulfil and deal with the present challenges. Service-Learning is a pedagogical approach that allows the development of significant curricular learning, through prosocial actions addressed to one's community or to the socio-territorial context of belonging. The Postgraduate School EIS proposed online Service-Learning laboratories for high schools within the pathways for guidance and development of transversal competencies (soft skills) that all the Italian high schools organize together with different institutions (companies, universities, NGOs etc.). The majority of students carried out advocacy Service-Learning activities, namely awareness initiatives to address a community's issues or needs, with the desire to make a difference by improving policies and practices as well as specific behaviours. This paper describes the Service-Learning laboratory that involved almost 100 students from four different schools of Rome and province, and the projects that they implemented.*

**KEYWORDS:** *E-Service-Learning, Citizenship, Soft Skills, Active Learning, High School.*

### Introduction

As the Philosopher and Professor of Ethics Luciano Floridi (2017) observes, we are living in the Mangroves Era. Mangroves are a type of trees that adapt to live in harsh coastal conditions. Specifically, they grow up and live in brackish water at the precise point where rivers join the sea. It is the only place they grow: it is an environment that cannot be understood by studying it in the context of «freshwater» or «saltwater», but it is the ideal environment for mangroves. Floridi (2015) suggests an analogy for the way we exist in advanced information societies, neither online nor offline. Floridi has described this way with a new term: «onlife». A new existence, therefore, in which the dividing

line between real and virtual life becomes like the brackish water of the mangroves – it no longer exists.

Surely, this kind of state represents a challenge for Education in the post-Covid pandemic scenario. A crucial role of education is the integral development of individuals, where learning is not merely the transmission of notions and data, but it also involves a process of cognitive and non-cognitive growth including civic and social aspects (High Level Group, 2013).

However, in the pandemic scenario, when social distancing was mandatory, it was really hard to perform these educational tasks. There are several reports of different international institutions, like UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank (2020), the OECD (2020), the International Association of Universities and the European Commission (Farnell et al, 2021) highlighting the problems that educators, at any level, from kindergarten to Higher Education, had to face during the Pandemic.

A survey of students in the EHEA organized by the European Students' Union (Doolan *et al.*, 2021) identified the challenges faced by students:

- challenges related to studying conditions (access to a quiet place to study, access to equipment and to a reliable internet connection, access to course study materials and confidence in using online platforms);
- challenges related to funding (loss of employment/income, difficulties in meeting living costs, issues with receiving scholarships);
- challenges related to well-being (lack of supportive social networks; prominent feelings of frustration, anxiety and boredom with academic activities).

Further studies investigated specific aspects of what was called «the largest online movement» in the history of education (Gangwani *et al.*, 2021). Faculty were instructed to organize their lectures through online platforms and incorporate online tools to keep students engaged, but many teachers were exposed for the first time to these online teaching tools (Gangwani *et al.*, 2021). While adopting this form of teaching, instructors familiar with traditional face-to-face methods met a new set of challenges, including students not turning on their cameras during synchronous class meetings held via videoconferencing (Castelli, Sarvary, 2021).

According to another study (Luburic *et al.*, 2021), instructors lack awareness and training for developing engaging digital educational content, which can exaggerate the problem.

On the other hand, students face many challenges that hamper their motivation and devotion to a course, and without face-to-face communication, their engagement declines (Luburic *et al.*, 2021).

Peper *et al.* (2021) highlighted that the students indicated it was harder to focus their attention and stay present while taking classes online. They also reported experiencing more isolation, anxiety, and

depression compared to face-to-face classes, although much of this may be due to COVID-19 social isolation. Students often appeared non-responsive when attending online.

To overcome these challenges, teachers, students and communities can join forces to produce transformations, aware of the new social realities, as indicated by the *European Association of Service Learning in Higher Education* (EASLHE, (Albanesi, *et al.*, 2020).

In order to foster these transformations, the European Commission created the European Skills Agenda (European Commission, 2020), a five-year plan to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills and to put them to use, by:

- Strengthening sustainable competitiveness, as set out in the European Green Deal;
- Ensuring social fairness, putting into practice the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights: access to education, training and lifelong learning for everybody, everywhere in the EU;
- Building resilience to react to crises, based on the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 1. The pedagogical proposal of Service-Learning

Based on the dramatic current global and social changes, it is important to develop and implement useful teaching and training methodologies to promote students' attitudes and behaviors needed to fulfill and deal with the present challenges (Cinque *et al.*, 2017). Service-Learning (SL) has been defined as a «course-based, credit-bearing educational experience that allows students to (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility» (Bringle, Hatcher, 1995, 112). This pedagogical approach, which has been spreading around the world since the end of the 1960s, has its roots in the civic concern of John Dewey and in Paulo Freire's concept of transforming the world through reflection and action (Deans, 1999). Since the mid-20th century, the practice of SL has gained increasing popularity in different cultural contexts and has become a global pedagogical movement (Culcasi, 2020). As regards our country, SL finds its pedagogical precursors in the experience of the Don Lorenzo Milani's School of Barbiana. The school of Barbiana, which had the words 'I care' attached to its entrance, was an example of a pedagogical model that placed the person and the community at the centre of its attention, in order to educate people to take care of their reality and of others (Fiorin, 2016).

Regardless of the different backgrounds, the SL asks students to put their knowledge and skills into practice in a real-life situation, to solve concrete problems with the community and thus linking school with life.

According to some studies (e.g. Celio *et al.*, 2011), there are four basic ingredients to guarantee the quality of a Service-Learning project:

1. Integrated learning: projects should be linked to academic objectives;
2. Youth empowerment: teachers should give students a voice in the planning, implementation and evaluation of SL experiences;
3. Partnerships: educational institutions should establish partnerships with the community in order to jointly elaborate the service objectives to be achieved;
4. Reflection: reflective processes to link service action with learning should be present throughout the SL experience.

The COVID-19 pandemic, transforming all aspects of society, including the education sectors, has generated a high level of uncertainty that has also affected community-active learning approaches – such as Service-Learning – and led to a rethinking of them (García-Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2017). Thus, SL went from being strongly characterized by fieldwork to being described as an e-learning pedagogy. This new way of doing SL with the mediation of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) – in a hybrid or complete manner – has been named Electronic Service-Learning (e-SL; Waldner *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, e-SL is not a mere digitization of processes that could also be carried out in person and that now, thanks to technologies, are carried out virtually. It represents a further step and requires thinking of the learning process not as a face-to-face transposition, but as a specific reflection on what its development would be like in a virtual environment, in which the singular and permanent continuity online–offline is reflected (Ruiz-Corbella, García-Gutiérrez, 2020).

This paper describes the e-Service-Learning path that the Postgraduate School *Educare all'incontro e alla Solidarietà* (EIS, Educating for Encounter and Solidarity) of LUMSA University has developed with 96 students from four different secondary schools.

## **2. e-Service-Learning in secondary schools: the EIS-LUMSA experience**

In the academic year 2020/2021 the Postgraduate School EIS of the LUMSA University of Rome (Italy) carried out the project *e-Service-Learning and active citizenship skills* to the local secondary schools. The project was part of the Pathways for Transversal Competences and Orientation (PCTO) and involved four different schools (two located in the city of Rome and two in the province), and lasted from February to March 2021. The role of the EIS School tutors was to support students in the realisation of SL projects. The PCTO project lasted a total of 40 hours (15 of synchronous activities and 25 of asynchronous ones) and included 5 phases. Finally, during the last meeting students presented the projects they developed. The students, supported and guided by teachers and tutors, planned their own Service-Learning actions in



groups and were able to develop transversal and active citizenship skills. The main goals of these activities were the following:

- Developing learning actions through solidarity practices;
- Bridging the educational and the social dimensions, through collaboration with institutions, associations and NGOs;
- Carrying out social interventions, starting from the real interests of the students;
- Developing citizenship skills (learning to learn, initiative and entrepreneurship);
- Improving students' soft skills, in particular prosociality, empathy, and active listening.

Due to the pandemic situation, the training and structured reflection activities took place at a distance (in synchronous mode) and the solidarity actions of the SL projects were also, for the most part, carried out digitally. Each of the five SL design phases proposed by the EIS School is presented on a theoretical-operational level: motivation, diagnosis, design and planning, execution, and assessment and closure.

### *2.1. Motivation*

The first phase is dedicated to the introduction of Service-Learning to students. This phase places the students in front of the challenge of being protagonists, stimulating them to acquire a proactive attitude for the entire duration of the project. It is a formative moment in which it is important to stimulate motivation with respect to active citizenship in order to understand why we do something for others and the meaning that this has for students, also in terms of learning. The phase of motivation can be carried out through brainstorming and reflection activities, using free websites such as, *mentimeter* (<https://www.mentimeter.com/>) that allow students to create word clouds that often represent a starting point for discussions. An example of a question to ask on *mentimeter* could be: «Why is it important doing something good for others?». In this phase it is also important to reflect on meaningful learning and the related characteristics. The tutor can ask students to think about previous learning experiences that made them feel protagonists, appreciated in their abilities, therefore useful for someone; or group experiences that excluded mnemonic learning requiring instead an application of knowledge.

### *2.2. Diagnosis*

The second phase is dedicated to the analysis of the personal, educational and social context of the students, in order to identify the problems/needs on which service activities will subsequently focus. It is possible that a variety of social issues may emerge during this phase, and students may be divided into interest groups, collaborating with peers from other schools. An operational way of creating subgroups can be to use free virtual boards such as, for example, *padlet* (<https://padlet.com/>), where problems can be written down and

commented on, inviting students to mark their names under the area of interest (Figure 1). Once the issues have been identified and groups formed, it is important to spend time exploring the causes and consequences of the chosen issues, in order to establish the aspect on which they can intervene. For example, if the students choose the issue of the climate crisis, it is important that they frame a specific cause of the crisis – such as, for example, the lack of awareness among young people and the resulting irresponsible behaviour – so that the SL project can then be articulated by them into operational and measurable goals. In encouraging students to analyse the problems, it is important to ask them to make an effort to think about which disciplines of the course of study they are following could contribute to the resolution of that problem. A useful tool for this phase is the Problem Tree: where the trunk represents the problem, the roots the causes and the branches the effects. By working on the chosen problem to identify causes and effects, students can better analyse the phenomenon and choose on which area to activate a project.

**FIG. 1.** Padlet on social problems identified by the students in the diagnosis SL phase



### 2.3. Design and planning

The third phase asks students to develop the solidarity projects: what they want to do, the primary and secondary objectives, with whom the solidarity service will be carried out, when it will take place, who takes on what role, and so on. Planning is a key moment in Service-Learning design because it challenges students to operationally decline solidarity intentions into actions, to be carried out in collaboration with the community. It is essential to reflect on the personal and scholastic-

professional growth aspects of the project, as well as linking the service objectives to the learning objectives. During this phase of conception and planning, it is extremely important to support students, in order to prepare them for the encounter with reality and the needs of the context that require high levels of flexibility. At the operational level, students – divided into groups according to the chosen problem – can work in virtual rooms and then return their ideas to the group. Cross-group discussion can also be exploited as a peer review mechanism. Studies have shown that peer review in SL plays a significant role in the success of projects (Lazar, Preece, 1999). Once the project has been defined, students can activate collaborations with the community and discuss the project proposal with the co-protagonists of the solidarity service. Indeed, in Service-Learning activities there are no donors and recipients because it is a horizontal service in which those who give, also receive (Fiorin, 2016).

#### *2.4. Execution*

The fourth phase is the operational part in which service activities are carried out in collaboration with the community. During this phase it is crucial to spend time on structured reflection: the tutor reflects with the students on what they are learning and on the challenges they are facing in order to help them; they reflect on the individual and social impact of the projects and on the long-term sustainability of the service activities. Reflection can be done individually or in groups; it can be written or oral, and is the key for a SL project to become an authentic learning experience (Albanesi, *et al.*, 2020). Solidarity actions, depending on their characteristics, can take place in city locations, NGO offices, community spaces such as parks, or in the digital space. There are several possible types of activities: service, communication, monitoring, curricular and extra-curricular learning, inter- and intra-institutional relations (Fiorin, 2016).

#### *2.5. Assessment and closure*

The fifth phase is dedicated to the conclusion of the projects. A final reflection and evaluation of the experience is carried out, in terms of learning and service objectives achieved. A day of celebration can be organised to share with the community the outcomes of the experiences and to thank those who participated in the projects. For the students, the celebration has a highly formative value because it offers opportunities to debate about the value of citizenship on a practical level. Operationally, the celebration can be structured as an online webinar in which SL projects are reported by the students. The purpose of this phase is: final evaluation, reflection and systematisation of projects; recognition and enhancement of the protagonists; promotion of continuity of SL projects.

### 3. e-Service-Learning projects and results

A total of eleven (e-)Service-Learning projects were implemented addressing the following social problems: Violence against women; Loneliness; Disinformation; Discrimination, stereotypes and gender-based violence; Climate crisis; Fast fashion; Children in family homes; Inclusion; Abandoned animals; Cultural heritage.

The majority of students carried out advocacy Service-Learning activities, namely awareness initiatives to address a community issue or need, with the desire to make a difference by improving policies and practices as well as specific behaviours (Berke *et al.*, 2010). Below, three e-Service-Learning projects implemented within the PCTO are briefly presented as examples.

#### 3.1. '*QRioso*'

QRioso is a project aimed at enhancing the cultural heritage of the territory of Monte Porzio Catone (an area in the city of Rome) that has seen the participation of seven secondary school students. These students have identified the need to enhance the cultural heritage in this area with a language suitable for young people. Thus, they decided to use technology as a channel to communicate with the new generation. Accordingly, the protagonists of QRioso, involving the Municipality of Monte Porzio Catone, created an itinerary in 15 stages (10 relating to monuments and areas of interest within the urban complex and 5 stages at the archaeological area of Tusculum) in which they applied QR codes, scanning them it is possible to view a card with information and curiosity about the place or monument, also accompanied by poems in Roman dialect. The students began their e-SL project by accessing the library of the Municipality to consult different sources and carrying out an inspection on the territory to choose the location of the QR codes. Then they started the contents preparation of the cards and the process of creating the codes and their allocation, in collaboration with the Municipality. During the moment of celebration, one of the students reported that through this e-SL project he discovered how strong his interest in history is, and that he would like to foster this passion through a specific university path.

#### 3.2. '*I am against*'

I am against is a project to raise awareness about psychological and physical violence against women, carried out by seventeen students from two different secondary schools. The students started with the identification of the problem of violence against women and reasoned about the importance of taking an active responsibility to inform victims of violence about help channels. They also identified the goal of raising awareness of the issue in order to involve as many people as possible in the fight for human rights. Thus, the students created an Instagram

account in which each of them took on a specific role, according to their personal interests and skills: some of them developed the content to be communicated on the page focusing on the history of women who have lost their lives due to violence, the channels of help and the contemporary women's fights against violence. Some of them were responsible for creating hand drawings. Others managed the interaction with the web community to create engagement on the topic.

### *3.3. 'Help line'*

Help line is a project to address loneliness in young people, carried out by a group of seven secondary school students. The learners reflected on the situation of young people who, in this historical moment of world pandemic, do not have the tools to deal with loneliness. So, the students set up a project to support their peers in situations of discouragement, which often cause a sense of isolation. The project consisted of creating an Instagram page for active listening – peer-to-peer – aimed at young people who feel the need to talk and let off steam, in an anonymous space (that does not replace professional intervention). The project's Instagram page, which is linked to the school's Instagram page, also offers periodic surveys and in-depth discussions on the topic of psychological well-being. The students are always contactable and guarantee anonymity through the use of nicknames associated with character descriptions (so that people can choose who to talk to) and the deletion of the chat at the end of the conversation. During the celebration, the students expressed that they felt useful and gratified to be able to help their peers in not feeling alone, in managing anxiety and family problems, without making them feel judged. They expressed the wish to present the project to the headmaster of their school in order to ensure that it could also be developed in face-to-face mode and with the help of specialised personnel.

## **Conclusion**

The LUMSA University EIS School programme – *e-Service-Learning and active citizenship skills* – accompanied almost 100 secondary school students in solidarity projects with the aim of facilitating in them the development of prosocial behaviour and soft and citizenship skills. From the students' reflections it emerged that they felt a sense of protagonism, engaged in what they care about and capable of carrying out actions of social impact. In some e-SL projects, the curricular connection with the service activities was also very evident and well-articulated. This shows that students have been able to put curricular and personal knowledge and skills into practice in order to achieve the solidarity objectives. In some projects there was also a strong collaboration with the community – from planning to closure – which

allowed students to experience an educational citizenship pathway. Below some of the keywords the students chose to describe their e-Service-Learning experience: love, altruism, memories, training, empathy, solidarity, new passions, desire to do, respect, knowledge, group, fun, new friends, skills, learning, emotions, awareness, positivity, sharing, union and community.

Among the areas for improvement, a broader planning phase should be considered, in order to better focus on curricular connections which in some cases were not easy to identify by the students. Moreover, longer experiences beyond the semester could be envisaged to ensure greater effectiveness of the projects. Finally, it would be interesting to extend the reflection phase with the students after the 'celebration', both to examine the meaning of the experience over time and to assess the long-term sustainability of the projects.

According to LUMSA University EIS School experience, (e-)Service-Learning offers a further added value to the PCTO experience: students are not only asked to measure themselves in a working or social context, but to become aware of social problems in order to contribute to their solution. The relationship with reality and with the community is neither disinterested, as in the case of academic knowledge, nor individualistic, as in the case of internships, but it is socially oriented (Fiorin, 2018). Through (e-)Service-Learning, students are encouraged not only to feel competent in a non-school environment, but to engage as active citizens, so that it is not only the individual but the whole community that grows and develops.

In this pandemic scenario digital technologies have permitted the creation of a new teaching environment and, in addition, the promotion of solidarity. According to García-Gutiérrez *et al.*, (2021) in this new space «technology is not only integrated into the project with a pedagogic aim, but also the project itself is designed from a digital perspective, that is, focusing the whole process from, in and for this space».

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## The Concepts of Heritage and Education for Active Citizenship in the Representations of Future Teachers: A Survey

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**ABSTRACT:** *In the context of school education, the notion of active citizenship is configured as an educational methodology that is transversal and integrated with knowledge. It is combined with the teaching of Citizenship and Constitution, pertaining to the historical, geographical and social areas of the study paths, which is carried out in a perspective of interactive dialogue between the various curricular disciplines in order to activate participatory learning of cultural processes and the formation of the individual. In relation to the European key competences and the cultural axes of the Italian national system, the acquisition of the principles of active citizenship is achieved through an educational path inherent in the three dimensions of person, citizen and worker and it is established as a theoretical-practical value profile oriented towards preparing young people for civic responsibility and social participation. At the same time, scientific research in the field of didactics of history has long underlined that historical knowledge allows citizens to be educated to understand the present; values, the development of strategies to deal with the uncertainty of the future; the ability to deal with relevant social problems and to deepen a democratic citizenship; to the enhancement, enjoyment, defense and conservation of cultural heritage and the development of a global awareness. In this context, the principles of active citizenship are strongly relevant and complementary to the cognitive path of historical and transversal issues such as the protection, safeguarding and accessibility of cultural heritage. Working on these issues at school allows, in fact, to develop objectives such as the concepts of identity and otherness, of relationship and participation. In order, therefore, to evaluate how historical and heritage education are involved in formal education, a questionnaire on the theme of heritage and on the teaching, methodologies linked to it was administered to 167 future teachers, university students belonging to the Single-cycle Master's Degree course in Primary Education of the University of Bologna in the academic year 2019/2020. Therefore, through survey-based exploratory research, it was possible to identify bivalent opinions: on the one hand, the interviewees recognize a significant educational impact on the heritage, aimed at developing the skills of active citizenship; on the other hand, during the years of compulsory schooling and during secondary school, they had to deal with a teaching that left very little room for an adequate treatment of the heritage in the classroom.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Heritage, Didactics of History, Teacher Training, Active Citizenship, Quantitative Survey*

## Introduction

Despite the widespread validity of traditional teaching, which often links heritage education only to artistic assets and, therefore, to a form of passive and contemplative citizenship; heritage - understood as «the heterogeneous and multiform set of legacies and resources, in which the characters, assets, values and environmental, historical-artistic and scientific ideals are collected and shared by human communities in their different territorial areas» (Dondarini, 2008) - in recent years has increasingly had a special role in the academic field, within the school curricula of all levels (Estepa Giménez, 2013; Fontal, 2013, 2016) and in the European and international legislation (Ávila Ruiz *et al.*, 2009). In fact, the ability to read the current heritage as the partial result of matrices, footprints and evolutions unfolded in history, means focusing on life of the generations who have lived there, of those who live there and those who will live there, in a special synthesis between past, present and future.

The term 'patrimony' derives from the Latin term *patrimonium* (from *pater*, father and *munire*, protect, make accessible) and means «inheritance of the father». From the twelfth century to today, the meaning attributed to it has changed significantly, from the idea of good that is passed on to children to the concept of material and immaterial good connected to the generations that preceded us and that we must dutifully pass on to future generations.

In this context, with heritage education it is possible to offer an alternative to exclusive teaching methodologies, pursuing a high didactic and scientific qualification that aims to enrich training, integrating it with the indispensable contributions of various human and technological sciences. The training sectors, such as anthropology, art, law, philosophy, literature, music, sciences, geography and history, in fact, gravitate around some coordinated thematic fulcrums, whose knowledge appears to be fundamental awareness of the present and planning for the future (Dondarini, 2000, 2007). The use of the resources that the territory and the disciplines offer are, therefore, essential for addressing an active methodology and supporting historical contents; and learning can make use of the contribution of specific realities such as: local museums; local associations dealing with history; municipal, provincial, parish and school archives; national history deputations; local libraries; departments of history and archaeology.

Education, therefore, through the launch of paths and activities related to heritage education has the possibility of educating the younger generations to responsibility, political commitment, sensitivity and values, assuming that active role that has always been revealed the best way to stimulate, not only the learning of contents, but also the adoption of critical research methodologies and tools and thus promoting solidarity and cooperation among citizens, for the

conservation of what belongs to all (world heritage) and the enhancement of what belongs to each community (local or regional heritage).

The educational visits to the patrimonial spaces (museums, protected areas, botanical gardens, archaeological sites and so on) propose an educational sequence that implies the recognition of patrimonial assets in order to be able to understand, starting from them, other ways of life, soliciting new interests and, above all, respect for what is preserved. The enhancement and study of cultural heritage thus contribute to the permanent training of pupils, helping them to increase knowledge about the society in which they live, stimulating a critical and participatory approach.

It is a strategy to relaunch the fullness of the person, putting in place all the cultural and scientific heritages that allow to promote and pursue a formation with broad horizons and unlimited developments; to arouse the ability to recognize, understand and manage the different components of cultural heritage in its variety and scientific entirety.

In this way, heritage education become, therefore, the means by which to educate to an active, critical, democratic and conscious citizenship.

In fact, despite the consolidation of localisms, regionalisms, nationalisms, heritage turns out to be inclusive, since the past belongs to everyone and that we are history, and its knowledge and enhancement is essential to stimulate openness and a common base towards the curiosity of other stories, other cultures, other identities. It finds its dimension in participation in the common good, which becomes a common home, and every act of participation and reconsideration of the good is an enrichment of meanings, openness to curiosity and an alliance and a bridge with other cultures; in addition to the fact, certainly no less important, of the effects that heritage has on us for achieving the full development of the human person: an improvement in well-being and in the quality of life.

In this context, the principles of active citizenship are strongly relevant and complementary to the cognitive path of historical and transversal issues such as the protection, safeguarding and accessibility of cultural heritage. Working on these issues at school allows, in fact, to develop objectives such as the concepts of identity and otherness, of relationship and participation.

Therefore, for these reasons, in the context of citizenship education it is essential to know the conception that teachers in service and in training have towards heritage. In fact, knowing these elements allows to have a research perspective aimed at changing teaching practices and strategies.

In order, therefore, to evaluate how historical and heritage education are involved in formal education, a questionnaire on the theme of heritage and on the teaching methodologies linked to it was administered to 167 future teachers, university students belonging to

the Single-cycle Master's Degree course in Primary Education of the University of Bologna in the academic year 2019/2020.

### **1. Methodology: population, sample, research project, information collection and data processing tool**

The total participants were 167, of which 156 (93.4%) were female and 11 (6.6%) were male. Most of the students (80.7%), during the compilation of the questionnaire, declared to be between twenty and twenty-four years old (which means that their date of birth was between 1995 and 1999); therefore, it is assumed that they attended secondary school between 2009 and 2018.

The design involved the implementation of an exploratory quantitative survey-based research. This type of survey was chosen because it is the most suitable for identifying trends in the attitudes, opinions, behaviours or characteristics of a large group of people (McMillan, Schumacher, 2005). This approach is very common in the educational field, it allows to collect a lot of information on different variables; moreover, it is a research method capable of responding to problems both in descriptive terms and in relation to the variables when information is systematically collected, guaranteeing the rigor of the data obtained (Buendía *et al.*, 1998; Creswell, 2012).

In order to collect the information, a tool in the form of a questionnaire was applied. The first part of the tool is dedicated to the detection of some identifying variables of the interviewee, namely gender and age. The second section wants to investigate the students' epistemological conceptions of history; a part is dedicated to the methodologies and strategies that students consider most appropriate for teaching history. The third and fourth sections are aimed at researching the type of teaching and methods of verifying historical learning that trainees received during secondary school.

The items in the questionnaire, except for the first two (sex and age), are characterized by the application of a Likert scale of five values ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree.

The origin of the questionnaire stems from another ongoing survey concerning the training of teachers in service and conducted by the International Center for Didactics of History and Heritage (DiPaSt) of the University of Bologna. The part of the questionnaire dedicated to the experience of teaching history gained by the survey participants during high school, takes inspiration from a research conducted recently in the context of the *Grado en Educación Primaria* of the University of Murcia (Spain) by Cosme J. Gómez Carrasco, Raimundo A. Rodríguez Pérez and Ana Belén Mirete Ruiz (2018).

After configuring a first version of the questionnaire, the content was validated through the judgment of experts, thanks to the participation of three specialists in history teaching from two different universities. This process was made possible thanks to the use of a scale consisting of

four values, capable of collecting information on the validity and relevance of each of the items. At the end of the evaluation process, which also required a qualitative judgment from the experts, the suggestions received were considered and adopted, such as to compose the final questionnaire.

As regards the validity of the construct, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sample adequacy test index and Bartlett's sphericity test confirm the adequacy of the correlation matrix. While the reliability index through Cronbach's alpha describes a good internal consistency and validity of the construct ( $\alpha = .883$ ).

The information and data obtained were processed through the statistical software SPSS v.24.0. For the analysis and interpretation of the results, basic descriptive statistics were created, such as frequencies, means and percentages.

Items 12, 18, 22, 24, 29, 35, 39 and 40 are taken into consideration in order to know the opinions of future teachers about the function of history and its meaning in terms of education for active citizenship; items 58, 59 and 60 were analyzed in order to investigate how heritage was dealt with during their schooling (Table 1).

**TAB. 1.** *Items concerning education for active citizenship through heritage*

Item number	Question
12	History's function is to educate in social and civic values
18	Use key themes of current interest (socially useful topics) to connect past and present
22	Study of concrete historical cases, where pupils must do research and exhibit the results of the research
24	Importance of heritage
29	Importance of museums
35	Importance of festivals and local traditions
39	Field work (gathering information, carrying out exercises) during or following a visit to a museum or other center of historical interest
40	Research of local history
58	During high school the professor used the nearby historical heritage
59	During high school the teacher used legends, music, customs and other cultural elements
60	During high school the professor has made visits to places of historical or cultural interest

Source: Personal elaboration

## 2. Results

As regards the conception of students in training on the goal of history, the answers demonstrate a good degree of awareness of the importance of the subject in the process of civic and social construction of the pupils (Table 2).

**TAB. 2.** *Statistical analysis of the items 12, 18, 22, 24, 29, 35, 39 and 40.*

		12	18	22	24	29	35	39	40
N	Valid	166	166	166	166	166	165	166	166
	Lost	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
Mean		4,53	4,60	4,38	4,29	4,48	3,90	4,36	4,21
Median		5,00	5,00	5,00	4,00	5,00	4,00	4,00	4,00
Mode		5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4
Standard deviation		,719	,582	,767	,739	,639	,973	,722	,729
Range		4	2	3	3	3	4	3	3
Minimum		1	3	2	2	2	1	2	2
Maximum		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Percentiles	25	4,00	4,00	4,00	4,00	4,00	3,00	4,00	4,00
	50	5,00	5,00	5,00	4,00	5,00	4,00	4,00	4,00
	75	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00

Source: Personal elaboration

History is adequate to educate in civic and social values (mean = 4.53; median = 5; mode = 5). At the same time, the analysis of the variability (defined by the standard deviation, the range and the difference between the first and third percentiles) tells of a limited dispersion of the responses, which means that the scores are significantly close to the mean. History serves to educate in social and civic values in 92.8% of cases (Table 3).

**TAB. 3.** *Descriptive analysis of the item 12 'History's function is to educate in social and civic values'.*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulated percentage
Valid	Totally disagree	1	,6	,6	,6
	Partially disagree	3	1,8	1,8	2,4
	Neither agree nor disagree	7	4,2	4,2	6,6
	Partially agree	51	30,5	30,7	37,3
	Totally agree	104	62,3	62,7	100,0
Total		166	99,4	100,0	
Lost		1	,6		
Total		167	100,0		

Source: Personal elaboration

As regards the most suitable methodologies in teaching history, the interviewees considered that almost all the strategies presented in the questionnaire were suitable for application in the classroom, except for the traditional explanations of the teacher and the use of the textbook or manual.

The approach using current keys of interest to connect past and present (mean = 4.60; median = 5; mode = 5; standard deviation = .582) and the use of case studies where students have to do their own research on heritage topics (mean = 4.38; median = 5; mode = 5; standard deviation = .767) are instead considered as suitable methodologies for teaching history. In fact, the two strategies collect respectively 94.6 and 83.2% of the consensus among the interviewees,

contracting only one opinion in disagreement, since it has repercussions in the limited dispersion of the answers (Tables 4 and 5).

**TAB. 4.** *Descriptive analysis of the item 18 'Use key themes of current interest (socially useful topics) to connect past and present'.*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulated percentage
Valid	Neither agree nor disagree	8	4,8	4,8	4,8
	Partially agree	51	30,5	30,7	35,5
	Totally agree	107	64,1	64,5	100,0
	Total	166	99,4	100,0	
Lost		1	,6		
Total		167	100,0		

Source: Personal elaboration

**TAB. 5.** *Descriptive analysis of the item 22 'Study of concrete historical cases, where pupils must do research and exhibit the results of the research'.*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulated percentage
	Partially disagree	1	,6	,6	,6
Valid	Neither agree nor disagree	26	15,6	15,7	16,3
	Partially agree	48	28,7	28,9	45,2
	Totally agree	91	54,5	54,8	100,0
	Total	166	99,4	100,0	
Lost		1	,6		
Total		167	100,0		

Source: Personal elaboration

As regards the most appropriate tools and activities in teaching practice, visits to museums are the most valued indicators. In fact, educational trips to cultural sites (mean = 4.48; median = 5; mode = 5; standard deviation = .639) are considered the most suitable activities for teaching history in 92.8% of cases (Table 6). Recourse to heritage (mean = 4.29; median = 4; mode = 5; standard deviation = .739) is considered suitable in 83.8% of cases (Table 7). The use of the study of festivals and local traditions (mean = 3.90; median = 4; fashion = 4; standard deviation = .973) in 68.2% (Table 8).

**TAB. 6.** *Descriptive analysis of the item 29 'Importance of museums'.*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulated percentage
Valid	Partially disagree	1	,6	,6	,6
	Neither agree nor disagree	10	6,0	6,0	6,6
	Partially agree	64	38,3	38,6	45,2
	Totally agree	91	54,5	54,8	100,0
	Total	166	99,4	100,0	
Lost		1	,6		
Total		167	100,0		

Source: Personal elaboration

**TAB. 7.** *Descriptive analysis of the item 24 'Importance of heritage'.*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulated percentage
Valid	Partially disagree	1	,6	,6	,6
	Neither agree nor disagree	25	15,0	15,1	15,7
	Partially agree	65	38,9	39,2	54,8
	Totally agree	75	44,9	45,2	100,0
	Total	166	99,4	100,0	
Lost		1	,6		
Total		167	100,0		

Source: Personal elaboration

**TAB. 8.** *Descriptive analysis of the item 35 'Importance of festivals and local traditions'.*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulated percentage
Valid	Totally disagree	2	1,2	1,2	1,2
	Partially disagree	13	7,8	7,9	9,1
	Neither agree nor disagree	36	21,6	21,8	30,9
	Partially agree	63	37,7	38,2	69,1
	Totally agree	51	30,5	30,9	100,0
	Total	165	98,8	100,0	
Lost		1	,6		
Total		1	,6		

Source: Personal elaboration

As regards the most suitable tools for verifying pupils' learning, university students believe that fieldwork, such as gathering information or carrying out exercises, during or following a visit to a museum or other center of historical interest (mean = 4.36; median = 4; mode = 5; standard deviation = .722) and local history searches (mean = 4.21; median = 4; mode = 4; standard deviation = .729) are the most appropriate, as confirmed by the results of indicators 39 and 40 which testify an appreciation of the aforementioned verification tools of over 80% (Tables 9 and 10).

**TAB. 9.** *Descriptive analysis of the item 39 'Fieldwork (gathering information, carrying out exercises) during or following a visit to a museum or other center of historical interest'.*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulated percentage
Valid	Partially disagree	1	,6	,6	,6
	Neither agree nor disagree	21	12,6	12,7	13,3
	Partially agree	62	37,1	37,3	50,6
	Totally agree	82	49,1	49,4	100,0
	Total	166	99,4	100,0	
Lost		1	,6		
Total		167	100,0		

Source: Personal elaboration



**TAB. 10.** *Descriptive analysis of the item 40 'Research of local history'.*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulated percentage
Valid	Partially disagree	3	1,8	1,8	1,8
	Neither agree nor disagree	21	12,6	12,7	14,5
	Partially agree	80	47,9	48,2	62,7
	Totally agree	62	37,1	37,3	100,0
	Total	166	99,4	100,0	
Lost		1	,6		
Total		167	100,0		

Source: Personal elaboration

As regards the type of teaching that university students received during the secondary school period, the data collected by the questionnaire describe a fairly compact but varied picture. Even with this premise, the picture that emerges is that of a traditional teaching and anchored to the frontal explanation (Table 11).

**TAB. 11.** *Statistical analysis of the items 58, 59 and 60.*

		58	59	60
N	Valid	166	166	166
	Lost	1	1	1
Mean		2,39	1,98	2,37
Median		2,00	2,00	2,00
Mode		1	1	1
Standard deviation		1,302	1,233	1,322
Range		4	4	4
Minimum		1	1	1
Maximum		5	5	5
Percentiles	25	1,00	1,00	1,00
	50	2,00	2,00	2,00
	75	3,00	3,00	3,00

Source: Personal elaboration

**TAB. 12.** *Descriptive analysis of the item 58 'During high school the professor used the nearby historical heritage'.*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulated percentage
Valid	Totally disagree	54	32,3	32,5	32,5
	Partially disagree	42	25,1	25,3	57,8
	Neither agree nor disagree	38	22,8	22,9	80,7
	Partially agree	15	9,0	9,0	89,8
	Totally agree	17	10,2	10,2	100,0
	Total	166	99,4	100,0	
Lost		1	,6		
Total		167	100,0		

Source: Personal elaboration

Low relevance is associated with the value of heritage, both the monumental one (mean = 2.39; median = 2; mode = 1; standard deviation = 1.302), and the intangible one, such as festivals, local

traditions or legends (mean = 1.98; median = 2; mode = 1; standard deviation = 1.233), and visits to places of historical and cultural interest were limited (mean = 2.37; median = 2; mode = 1; standard deviation = 1.322). These tools and activities were used by the teacher in a percentage ranging from 13.8% to 19.2% (Tables 12, 13 and 14).

**TAB. 13.** *Descriptive analysis of the item 59 'During high school the teacher used legends, music, customs and other cultural elements'.*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulated percentage
Valid	Totally disagree	80	47,9	48,2	48,2
	Partially disagree	44	26,3	26,5	74,7
	Neither agree nor disagree	19	11,4	11,4	86,1
	Partially agree	11	6,6	6,6	92,8
	Totally agree	12	7,2	7,2	100,0
	Total	166	99,4	100,0	
Lost		1	,6		
Total		167	100,0		

Source: Personal elaboration

**TAB. 14.** *Descriptive analysis of the item 60 «During high school the professor has made visits to places of historical or cultural interest».*

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulated percentage
Valid	Totally disagree	58	34,7	34,9	34,9
	Partially disagree	38	22,8	22,9	57,8
	Neither agree nor disagree	39	23,4	23,5	81,3
	Partially agree	13	7,8	7,8	89,2
	Totally agree	18	10,8	10,8	100,0
	Total	166	99,4	100,0	
Lost		1	,6		
Total		167	100,0		

Source: Personal elaboration

## Conclusion

Within the usual teaching practice, the teaching of history, as Miralles Martínez (2009) points out, often continues to respond to the traditional teaching model in which the presentation of historical events is memorized by students without a critical sense. However, as Estepa Giménez (2017) comments, the entry of society into the new millennium and the development of new means of communication through the internet push teachers to change their teaching practice.

For this reason, the introduction of heritage education within the teaching of history is a vital condition for keeping teaching linked to society, in the past, present and future. In fact, heritage teaching presupposes the acquisition of historical and social skills by students in an interdisciplinary space (Prats Cuevas, 2001).

Nonetheless, scholars such as Estepa Giménez (2001) admit that heritage teaching continues to appear as anecdotal both in curricular treatment and in teaching practice; and that this approach is also induced by insufficient university training for future teachers (Cuenca López, 2003). For Estepa Giménez (2001), among the limitations that hinder good teaching practice based on heritage education, there is, first, the narrow conception that teachers have of heritage. Often, in fact, only the monumental elements – palaces, cathedrals, churches, castles, museums or statues – are considered heritages, but other aspects are left aside, such as intangible heritage – traditional customs, language, songs, cultural events -. Sometimes, even natural or landscape heritage – although it is often made up of physical elements created by man – usually does not come under the concept of teachers' heritage.

In the context just outlined, the memories of the students of the single-cycle master's degree in primary education at the University of Bologna – considered not only as mere statistical data, but also a necessary element to analyze teaching methodologies and their impact on the training of future teachers – offer a double view of the teaching of history.

The results obtained from the analysis of the answers to the Questionnaire reveal a series of ambivalent reflections.

On the one hand, most of the interviewees showed that they have a good degree of theoretical and epistemological knowledge on the subject. As regards the purpose of teaching history, future teachers have expressed a strong awareness of the importance of history. In fact, according to their perception, it is of fundamental importance specially to understand the present, to educate in social and civic values and to know the methods of construction and explanation of historical facts.

Among the teaching methodologies, according to the conception of the interviewees, using key themes of current and socially interest to connect past and present and the use of educational heritage represent the strategies that should be put into practice during the teaching of history.

As regards the tools to be adopted in teaching practice, elements of the heritage, including museums are evaluated very positively. Partially appropriate is the study of intangible heritage, such as local festivals and traditions.

In the general context of activation and participation in the formation of critical thinking, university students of primary education argue that the most appropriate methods for verifying the learning objectives of history are strategies that involve causal reasoning, research work, also of local history, according to the principles of the historical method.

In this context, the perception that students have of history, its teaching and methods of verification therefore seem to support the vision of a history anchored to sources, heritage and their interpretation, the purpose of which is to understand the present and

educate to active citizenship. Even if with some epistemological uncertainty, in the vision of future teachers, history will have to be taught through active methodologies, which involve and make the pupils protagonists in the construction of their knowledge through heritage. In this sense, even the methods of verification desired turn out to be those that favour critical thinking and causal reasoning by adopting the historical method also in local history research.

However, despite the ambitions and perceptions inherent in the importance of history, primary education students mostly had to deal with a teaching model that was profoundly different from that conceived and desired during secondary school.

During secondary school, little or no space is left for debate, comparison, interpretation of sources and the discovery of heritage; and the verification test is generally passed by memorizing the contents uncritically.

In conclusion, therefore, these results, which reflect the perception that university students in primary education have of the concept of history and its teaching, allow for some reflection, also highlighting limits and possibilities for future research. Although future teachers have known traditional teaching in their previous experiences, they generally consider history to be of fundamental importance during active teaching practice in order to educate active and aware citizens. This reflection, perhaps arising precisely from the type of teaching that was given in the secondary school, suggests that, on the one hand, there is probably a certain gap between the theory and practice of teaching, between the desire to treat class history in a participatory manner and the various kinds of difficulties that teachers have to face daily in the school context, such as the request to complete the curriculum or the complexities of carrying out integrated teaching with colleagues; on the other hand, the high dispersion of responses inherent to the memories of the school experience suggests that there are very varied situations, ranging from the most classic frontal lesson to the history laboratory. Perhaps, this data could announce a slow awareness of teachers towards less positivist positions and more linked to dialogue, comparison, debate and interpretation of sources and heritage in a participatory and active key.

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## 'We, Food and Our Planet': Tools and Methods for Teaching Civic Education and Sustainable Development through Food

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**ABSTRACT:** *Global citizenship is a broad term supported by three key pillars: global awareness, social responsibility and civic engagement. In a world increasingly interconnected, educating young people to global citizenship is becoming a priority, because new generations need to understand political, economic, social and cultural connections among local, national and global issues in order to make more informed choices. In this context, the food system is a good example for teaching global citizenship. In fact, the way we eat is a common thread for our health and the one of Planet. Healthy and sustainable diets are the base to support effective progress in health, agriculture, inequality, poverty and sustainable development or, ultimately, in the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. 'We, food, our Planet' is an educational project designed to educate global citizenship and provide incentives for innovative ways of teaching food sustainability and the SDGs. The project is part of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Italian Ministry for Education. It aims at providing teachers and students (from primary school to university) with a better understanding of the environmental, economic, social and cultural dynamics of the food systems and their impacts on the Agenda 2030. 'We, food, our Planet' consists of a set of modules, dedicated to different food-related themes (e.g., environment, health, culture, food right and security). Each module provides science-based information, examples and exercises to be transferred in the school context (presence and distance learning). All training materials are available in two languages (Italian and English) and have a strong scientific base and are regularly updated to keep pace with a rapidly evolving reality. With this paper, the authors will present the results achieved after 3 years of the program 'We, Food, Our Planet', and will illustrate the feedbacks collected by the teachers who used the proposed tools. In particular, the focus of the paper will be on the results achieved in relation to the skills and competences needed by teachers to teach civic education and sustainable development at school.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Sustainable development, Environmental education, Food education, Digital education, civic education*

## **Introduction**

Education for food, nutrition and environmental sustainability, agricultural production policies, with a view to ensuring a fair distribution of resources among the inhabitants of the planet, is a founding element of training for active and responsible citizenship.

The UN's 2030 Agenda established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved within the next 9 years. The objectives relate to protecting the environment and natural resources, but also involve the construction of sustainable cities, guaranteeing or providing access to ways of living that are inclusive and respectful of the fundamental rights of people, beginning with health, mental and physical well-being, food security, decent work and protecting the tangible and intangible assets of communities. This core theme fully covers the aspects of health education and environmental protection. In this context, issues related to food, its consumption and production, can be used to describe the resource management processes of our planet, the critical issues of the current system and its effects on the environment and health (FAO, 2018). They are also useful for highlighting cultural diversity and belonging, as well as for stimulating sharing and participation in local life and local communities.

Eating is a primary need, and the implementation of healthy and sustainable diets has positive benefits on people's health and the environment, but it also contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (FAO, WHO, 2019). That was also recognized by the Farm to Fork strategy launched by the European Commission in May 2020 and which is at the heart of the European Green Deal.

### **1. Understanding the role of sustainable diets**

Food affects every aspect of our life: from health, well-being, and longevity to the condition and state of environmental resources, economic development, and social stability. The production and availability of sufficient quantities of good quality food are essential for our survival but, at the same time, the methods used to achieve this until now are responsible for some of the factors that pose the biggest threats to the health of our planet, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity and land degradation. Food production is also responsible for 70% of freshwater withdrawals and feeding the global population currently accounts for 21-37% of total net anthropogenic GHG emissions (IPCC, 2019).

Today, 690 million people lack sufficient food and economic projections suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic may add an additional 83 to 132 million people to the ranks of the undernourished, as the



outbreak has exacerbated the global food flaws and externalities, impacting the most vulnerable populations (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF *et al.*, 2020). Meanwhile, 1.3 billion tons of food are wasted globally each year (FAO, 2020), either lost in the production chain or thrown away at the end of the sales chain or directly from our tables, utilizing 38% of total energy consumption in the global food system (FAO, 2019). This amounts to a third of global food production, a significant figure which would potentially be sufficient to feed the million people in the world who are still hungry today.

Child and adult overweight and obesity are increasing in almost all countries. In particular obesity has nearly tripled since 1975. In 2016, more than 1.9 billion adults were overweight, of these over 650 million were obese. Instead in 2020, 39 million children under the age of 5 were overweight or obese (WHO, 2019). The problems of overweight and obesity are not confined to the individuals concerned but have a global impact with serious socio-economic repercussions. Physical inactivity and increased intake of energy-dense foods, derived from unbalanced diets (defined as those providing excessive energy intake, low in fruits and vegetables, high in saturated fats, refined grains, sugar, salt, and red and processed meat), represent one of the greatest health global burdens (Springmann *et al.* 2020), and diet-related cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and type 2 diabetes have a strong impact on well-being and quality of life, and require costly treatment. If food consumption patterns continue at present rates, diet-related costs due to mortality and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are projected to exceed USD 1.3 trillion per year by 2030, while the cost of greenhouse gas emissions is estimated to reach more than USD 1.7 trillion per year by 2030 (GNR, 2020).

The main reason for this surge in obesity is that our current food systems do not encourage people to follow a healthy diet. Since the latter half of the 20th century, a gradual change in people's eating patterns has developed into a veritable nutrition transition. The most evident aspect, and also potentially the most dangerous as this transition continues, is the significant change in diet and lifestyle towards a reduction in physical activity, an increase in average calorie intake, a reduction in the consumption of legumes, vegetables, cereals and other plant-based products, coupled with an increase in the consumption of animal-based products and foods high in sugar, fat and salt (WHO, 2019).

Proper food consumption patterns have been recognized as a powerful lever to reverse all the aforementioned trends, to improve health, well-being, and longevity, and reduce disability and premature deaths, while remaining within the Earth's safe operating space. Some studies highlighted that healthy and sustainable diets can reduce wildlife loss by up to 46%, premature deaths by at least 20%, and food related GHG emissions by at least 30% (WWF, 2020). Moreover, sustainable diets can accelerate the achievement of poverty reduction

and social inclusion; increasing fairness and equality; ensuring education and health care for all; fostering biodiversity conservation, water security, and climate change adaptation and mitigation are all embodied in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

That scenario portrays a complex net of needs and problems. It reminds that many of the actions necessary to tackle malnutrition and protect the environment go beyond the health and climate portfolio and require coordinated interventions from different sectors and on different levels, including citizens. It is a multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional challenge in which together food and environmental education plays a pivotal role.

## **2. Being an active citizen**

### *2.1. Commitment and competences*

According to UNESCO's experts, multiple tools are needed to achieve sustainability goals. In particular, those related to climate change: ranging from political interventions to economic incentives and technological improvements. However, none of these tools can work without the active involvement of the entire population. Therefore, working with the younger generations becomes a particularly significant social role, because it supports the people who will be able to achieve a positive long-term impact. In fact, education is both an objective in itself and a tool for achieving all the other sustainable development goals, as emerges from a document dated 2017, in which UNESCO set some of the learning objectives for each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2017).

Young people undoubtedly have a key role to play in these 'education for change' processes. This is demonstrated by the fact that increasingly it is they who take initiatives to influence local and national governments on various issues and demonstrate a desire to be an integral part of the change towards achieving sustainability, while admitting that they lack the necessary knowledge to understand how to be truly effective. We need to achieve a transformative and responsible involvement that schools, together with other actors, can help to achieve with the help of technologies and social media, which are very effective tools for change among the younger generations (UNESCO, 2019).

Sustainability education must begin at school. It is no coincidence that one of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals – number 4– is dedicated to quality education, a key tool for overcoming inequalities and achieving sustainability goals. Goal 4.7 in particular says: «By 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence,

global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development» (UN, 2015).

## *2.2. Youth and sustainability: The role of education*

In the last several months, in fact, millions of young people have demonstrated their sensitivity to the issue of sustainability, taking to the streets all over the world to forcefully reaffirm their commitment to fighting climate change. The recent Fridays For Future demonstrations have shown the strong feelings that schoolchildren have about sustainability: an excellent starting point, showing which concepts are now understood and which still need to be further developed. This is why, in 2019, the Barilla Foundation commissioned Ipsos Italia to investigate the relationship between the new generations and Sustainable Development Goals (on a sample of 800 young people between the ages of 14 and 27)

The resulting data highlights the often partial vision that children have concerning sustainability, frequently clear on environmental factors but underestimating the importance of food behavior. The survey shows that the young people interviewed strongly feel the urgency of sustainability challenges and that they are aware that their own personal choices can make a difference. But they tend to see the problem in terms of climate change without fully understanding the role of food sustainability.

Among 14- and 15-year-olds, less than one-third have acquired the concept of sustainability, but the percentage tends to increase in proportion to age, up to just over 50% of the oldest segment (24-27 years old). The percentages drop, on the other hand, when the youth are asked about their familiarity with the SDGs: 55% of the respondents had never heard about them or had never seen the official image of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Agricultural production, the adoption of sustainable diets and the reduction of food waste are too abstract as concepts for young people: only 9% clearly connect these issues to the overall concept of sustainability.

In reality, the adoption of sustainable dietary habits is a crucial aspect that must be implemented in order for SDGs to be achieved. And yet, only two out of five under 27 Italians adopt a Mediterranean diet, which is one of the best examples of a positive eating pattern.

Young Italians seem to be supportive of the fight to reduce the impact of human behavior on climate change, but they are not sufficiently informed on the strategies that can be implemented to achieve lasting results, they are not familiar with the Sustainable Development Goals promoted by the United Nations, and, above all, they do not know the extent to which agricultural production and the food they eat have an impact on sustainability.

Only one in three of the youth who are familiar with the concept of sustainability believes that the welfare of the planet also depends on

what we put on our plates. It is a shame when we think about the fact that agricultural production itself is actually responsible for 21-37% of total net anthropogenic GHG emissions. The youth showed only one area of awareness in this sense: reducing food waste is the most important sustainable behaviour to adopt (more than choosing Zero km food or reducing packaging).

The aim of the study conducted by IPSOS for BCFN Foundation was to measure awareness of the SDGs among young people and investigate the level of depth with which these goals are understood and appropriated. Furthermore, the survey aimed to evaluate whether and to what degree knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals translates into concrete behaviors and into real consciousness. At the conclusion of the analysis, the IPSOS experts highlighted that, based on the results of the survey, the fight against climate change could indeed be the starting point for raising consciousness of the Sustainable Development Goals among young people. Above all, the implications at the personal and social level must be taken into account, with the help of the scholastic institutions and the families.

### **3. Food teaches sustainability**

#### *3.1. We, Food, our Planet*

As a part of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR), 'We, food, our Planet' is an educational project designed and created by the Barilla Foundation to introduce the topic of food sustainability to schools of all levels. The project aims at providing teachers and students with a better understanding of the environmental, economic, social and cultural dynamics of the food systems, in order to help people make better-informed food choices for their own health and the one of the Planet. Topics covered range from healthy eating, malnutrition and food culture to sustainability (e.g., food waste, food and cities, food for climate, food for Agenda 2030). The methodology relays on long-distance learning to train and inform teachers. More specifically, 'We, Food, our Planet' offers teachers a dual possibility: online training on topics and digital teaching tools.

Firstly, as a training establishment recognized by the Italian Ministry of Education, the Barilla Foundation (BCFN) has set up online training course for teachers and educators based on the blended learning model (Ligorio *et al.*, 2006), which combines online and face-to-face learning. The goal is to enhance and promote the professional growth of teachers on a LifeLong Learning path, helping them to deal with food and environmental sustainability through specific and in-depth knowledge of the topics; strengthening planning, evaluation, organizational and relational skills; a more informed use of new technologies.

Secondly, a number of specific training materials, with a strong scientific base (that are regularly updated to keep pace with a rapidly evolving reality), have been created. On a dedicated platform, teacher can find digital teaching tools for their class work, developed for three different age groups and including lab-based activities designed to promote more dynamic and practical learning. The digital world becomes the link between teaching and learning, a chance to create a new relationship between teacher and student that is more fruitful and with shared participation, based on the active engagement of the students and on the teacher regaining the leadership role, thereby also fostering important social changes. The educational activities associated with this type of teaching are generally complementary to traditional school education and focus on topics that teachers of different subjects, including English teachers, can address in synergy with their own subject, using the materials as part of the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) methodology (MIUR, 2014).

In 2020, this program was proposed to support teachers and educators in creating educational activities and teaching civic education. Talking about food culture and sustainable development in class means cultivating new knowledge and active citizenship, and this program is committed to improving understanding of the concept of sustainability and the urgency with which we need to deal with the global paradoxes of food. This is the only possible way to transform our food system in a sustainable way.

During the academic year, several events are organized in order to provide teachers with new stimuli. Among them, it deserves a mention: 'We, food, our Planet: Feeding a sustainable future', an experiential exhibition. Launched on the occasion of Parma 2020 – Italian Capital of Culture – that multimedia path, divided into five themed areas, with paths and workshops for students of all levels, used interactive and immersive methods of involvement to explain to students the paradoxes of food and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, addressing the culture of food, the relationship between food and cities, the value of the Mediterranean diet and the impact of food choices on the environment. Today, due to the Covid situation, the exhibition has been transformed into a digital experience, exploiting the advantages of game-based learning (e.g., Fotaris *et. al.*, 2016; Pellas *et al.*, 2019).

### *3.2. We, Food, our Planet: main findings*

Since its launch in 2018, We, Food, our Planet, carried out a monitoring activity. The digital platform provides BCFN with engagement levels and other valuable statistical information. At present, the platform registered nearly 9500 teachers, from 6400 Italian schools, equivalent to 19000 classes and 475.000 students. Teachers are equally distributed among middle and high schools, followed by primary schools. Qualitative spontaneous feedback from teachers was positive and suggested a broad range of further topics and methodologies to be implemented.

Among the different tools available, three are the most downloaded: the educational guide, its exercise book and Gunter's fable. That could suggest most of the teachers who joined the BCFN program are more likely to use a traditional approach.

According to a recent survey, carried out in May 2021 by BCFN on a sample of 243 teachers, most of the teachers who used the program (72%) were middle-aged women (82% women, average age 53), who teach in high schools, in line with the EU findings (Eurydice, 2021). The majority of the teachers (47%) teach STEM science, followed by the humanities (15%).

Most of the teachers (91%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the educational program *We, Food, our Planet*. Most of the users (72%) enrolled in the years 2020 and 2021. Half of the sample carries out the educational program every year while 40% have done it only once (especially in 2019).

In general, for the majority of the sample (74%) stated that *We, Food, our Planet*, is a program easy to implement, in which: the topics are clear (91%); the learning objectives for each module are clearly defined (84%); it is suitable for interdisciplinary pathways (93%); it is considered suitable for distance learning (80%); there is a balanced relationship between content and exercises (68%).

Almost all (98%) believed that it is important, or very important, to use food as a narrative tool to teach sustainability at school. As regards the issue of skills, to the question: 'What are the 3 main competences to teach the issues related to Sustainable Development in the classroom?' teachers responded in a very heterogeneous way, even if the most recurrent competences were: empathy and learning to learn. However, data highlighted a general lack of technical language. Teachers mixed skills and competences and only few referred to official EU Competences (Caena, Punie, 2019). Mentions to UNESCO competences for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017) were even more rare.

### *3.2. Skilled: Key competences for building sustainability through food*

Skilled is an international Erasmus+ project set up to build a set of certified competences for teaching about food and environmental sustainability. Food, in fact, allows us to talk to the younger generations about many issues, including global citizenship, resource management, cultural diversity and the importance of participation in local communities.

Within this richness of contents and skills, literature says there is no common approach (e.g., MIUR, FEI, 2018). Skilled was created precisely to respond to this need. In particular, in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the didactic action within the school on the theme of sustainability through food, the project aims to qualify the profession of a teacher and provide the tools, procedures and output are able to form in a systematic way, an ever-increasing number of school staff with the goal of ensuring that, over time, a standard of consistent

quality and capable of having a significant impact on the full awareness of the students about the benefits of healthy and sustainable, for their own health and that of our planet.

The project has begun in 2020 and involves 4 partners (BCFN is the lead organization for this project) and 23 teachers of Secondary Education of second degree and over 250 students from Italy, Bulgaria, Spain, Latvia and Greece.

## Conclusion

In this article the role of food in promoting education for sustainable development was presented, through the case study We, Food, Our Planet. The project aims at increasing teaching effectiveness in the field of sustainability through food, but it also aims at increasing awareness on the topic of sustainability on a large scale.

The survey commissioned from Ipsos Italia shows that young people are sensitive and attentive to the issue of sustainability but have limited knowledge of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and are unaware of the link between sustainability and food. This is why it is important to offer young people new stimuli and new tools to understand the complexity of these issues and the role they can play in dealing with global challenges.

In civic education, improving skills and competences in the area of food and environmental sustainability first of all requires adequate knowledge to be provided for people to understand the extent and implications of the nutritional, social, economic and environmental challenges of our time. It is important to note that it is not just a matter of gaining more knowledge, but of using the contents and specific skills gained to develop a series of crossover skills, such as decision-making skills, a systemic, critical and creative approach, transdisciplinary, collaborative and relational skills (empathy-based).

For these reasons, teachers and educators play a pivotal role. Because with their skills and knowledge they are able to help children and young adults to develop the right skills to become responsible adults, as citizens and, possibly, as conscious professionals in the food and environmental sustainability sector.

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## A Global Citizenship Education as an Opportunity for Re-inventing Citizenship. Insights from an Empirical Research Experience in a Multicultural Neighborhood

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper will examine the theory of 'Global Citizenship Education' (GCE) and analyse its theoretical assumptions, showing how both are embedded in the Human Capability Approach and how this theory reveals its strengths especially in relation to vulnerable social contexts. Educational research can support active citizenship by creating participation opportunities through bottom-up empowerment processes and social cohesion movements, starting from the youngest inhabitants. In this approach, girls and boys, who often have recent migration backgrounds, are considered as competent subjects and, moreover, as citizens entitled to have their voice heard. This theoretical framework will be combined with insights emerging from an empirical research experience inside a multicultural neighbourhood. The underlined assumption is that public spaces are endowed with an educational potential in particular in the field of GCE when children can act as competent stakeholders thus expressing their voices about the way they use, represent and re-imagine the place where they live. This becomes even more important when the public space functions as a stimulus to promote experiences of civic engagement and participation that involve the young generations and their families regardless of their cultural background and the legal recognition of their citizenship. The impact of the methodology and tools used during the research project will be discussed as it gives interesting indications for developing innovative and sustainable methods that could be further explored and eventually used by teachers to respond to the challenges of the complex, multicultural and more and more unequal contemporary world.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Global Citizenship Education, Interculturalism, Empowerment, Public Space, Innovative Methods.*

### Introduction

In this paper we will explore the need to rethink the concept of 'citizenship education' within the framework of the Global Citizenship Education to encourage a more situated interpretation of the educational impact of this concept when involving the youngest –

especially minors with immigrant backgrounds – in educational research.

First, we will provide an overview of the main theories regarding the concept of citizenship education within the international scene.

Then, we will discuss an example of research carried out inside a multicultural and multi-problematic Italian suburb.

Finally, we will offer few methodological insights from the above-mentioned research to discuss 'values and potentialities' of educational research in fostering active citizenship processes and civic participation dynamics.

## **1. A conceptual framework on citizenship and citizenship education**

The COVID-19 virus has been defined as a «revealer-generator of diversity» (Contini, 2020, 16), because it exacerbates socioeconomic inequalities, increasing inequities for those already in poor and vulnerable situations (ISTAT, 2020). In Italy, immigrant families represent the majority of poor and marginalized individuals. Those people often have few possibilities to face the current health and economic crisis because they also have limited cultural and social capitals (Ambrosini, 2020).

In this context, as on the one hand the claim of citizenship strongly emerges, on the other hand there is the need to further problematize the issue of citizenship especially when we refer to those who formally do not result as Italian 'citizens'.

It should be said, however, that being formally entitled to citizenship rights does not mean itself behaving as a citizen and being a 'good citizen': someone moves from the condition of 'individual' to the one of 'citizen' only exercising the political responsibility (Mortari, 2008).

For these reasons, the idea of 'citizenship' cannot be considered only from a bureaucratic and legal perspective, but it requires a political and pedagogical framework to be further problematized and understood as a key-perspective to promote children's participation, agency and civic engagement. Coherently, Piero Bertolini suggested that we can move from the mere entitlement of rights to the capacity to exercise civic virtues through the educational practice: in light of this premise, citizenship education is seen as political education (Bertolini, 2003) which enables people to take care of the social bond (Mortari, 2008). Citizenship, therefore, has to do with the rights and the capacity of all citizens to take part, to be active member of a local community and the broader society, to express themselves, to engage and participate.

### *1.1. OECD approach to citizenship education and global competence*

Taking into consideration the document *Transforming our world: The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development* (UN, 2015), it is interesting

to note how the concept of citizenship education is often expressed through the notions of «global citizenship education» and «global competence education». Although the two concepts could appear interchangeable, they are embedded into two different theoretical approaches (Vaccari, Gardinier, 2019).

Organizations with an economic office usually use the expression «global competence education» to refer to the concept of citizenship education. In this case, the term 'competence' is functional to the need of the economic international organizations to measure and compare educational performances between States (OECD, 2018). Within this perspective, human being is seen as a worker who is required to improve his competences to effectively participate to the economic competition on the global market (Vaccari, Gardinier, 2019). Citizenship education is therefore conceptualized as the need to promote one's capacity to contribute to the broader economic competition.

The *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development* exemplifies this approach (ibid.). The OECD theoretical framework, as it is well known, roots in the *Human capital theory* (Schultz, 1963; Becker, 1964), an approach elaborated in the Sixties in which the individual is seen as a sum of competences to be improved (Benasayag, 2015), knowledge is considered as a key production-factor, while education is conceptualized as 'a variable' that must be controlled by economic power (Alessandrini, 2017; Galimberti, 2017).

Citizenship education, once again, is mainly conceptualized under the economic-lens, reducing its meanings and practical impacts to the need of capitalism.

### 1.2. UNESCO Global Citizenship Education

The *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* exemplifies the opposite approach to citizenship education, although this perspective is today powerless than the previous one. From this point of view, «global citizenship does not imply a legal status. It refers more to a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity, promoting a 'global gaze' that links the local to the global and the national to the international» (UNESCO, 2014, 14). The subjects of the Global Citizenship Education are the 'human beings' who hold human rights regardless of their participation to the global market and apart from their entitlement of one State citizenship rights.

UNESCO citizenship education theory has its roots in the «lifelong education» debate (Faure *et al.*, 1972) of the Seventies, when lifelong education started to be claimed from the social movements (Moosung, Friedrich, 2011). Education was seen as a possibility for the human being to realize himself in a communitarian dimension and, as a consequence, the not formal and informal educational fields started to be legitimated (Coombs, Ahmed, 1974). Martha C. Nussbaum brings these issues inside the *Human Capability Approach*, underlining how human dignity should be given priority over mere economic growth

(Nussbaum, 2009). The *Human Capability Approach* – which is the formal theory behind Global Citizenship Education – was born in stark contrast to the Human capital theory and focuses on social justice, interculturalism and human rights (Vaccari, Gardinier, 2019). Accordingly, citizenship education focuses on the development of knowledge, attitudes and values which can promote a more inclusive, equal and sustainable world (UNESCO, 2014).

### *1.3. A pedagogical choice*

Although nowadays the OECD-approach is prevailing, as we have observed above, we argue that it is important to preserve an educational gaze when we consider the need to promote citizenship education since the early years. To some extent, the OECD perspective seems to be reductive and far from the complexity of the pedagogical paradigm (Cambi, 2003).

The economic logic inside the global competence education is identified by Biesta with the word «learnification» (Biesta, 2010), where the educational processes are just an adaptive movement, and the subjects always have to change and update their competences according to what the market needs (Galimberti, 2017).

On the other hand, the pedagogical perspective is able to go out from the single thought of capitalism and utilitarianism, and we think that the GCE proposed by UNESCO is far close to this view.

This theory reveals its value especially in relation to social contexts that are particularly vulnerable. GCE is a not-prescriptive framework in which the meaning of 'citizen' can emerge from the local context, and be valid and legitimate even if the social context is multi-problematic. Global and local are not seen as opposite concepts, but in a continuous dialogue within an equal relationship (UNESCO, 2018).

For this reason, it is possible to foster the sense of being 'global citizens' while supporting the commitment to local contexts. Educational research can promote the «sense of place» (Mortari, 2008) and support active citizenship by creating participation opportunities through bottom-up empowerment processes and social cohesion trends, starting from the youngest inhabitants.

With these premises in mind, in the following paragraphs, we will present some methodological hints emerged from a study that we consider as an example and a promising outcome of citizenship education based on the active engagement of the youngest.

## **2. The research: brief overview of the study**

The research project – entitled *M.O.S.T. of Pioltello – Migration over the Satellite Town of Pioltello - Sperimentare politiche innovative d'integrazione dei minori immigrati tra casa e scuola, gioco e lavoro: un progetto pilota per la periferia metropolitana di Pioltello* – was carried

out in the neighborhood of Pioltello 'Satellite' by a team of interdisciplinary researchers. Funded by Polysocial Award 2017, the research was coordinated by a group of Scholars from Polytechnic University of Milan (PI: Prof. A. Di Giovanni) in partnership with educationalists, psychologists and anthropologists from other Universities (Statal University of Milan, PI: Prof. P. Inghilleri; University of Siena, P.I. Prof. A. Cutolo; University of Milan-Bicocca, PI: Prof. Chiara Bove<sup>1</sup>). The group included other important stakeholders (Città Metropolitana di Milan, Centro Studi PIME, Comune di Pioltello, Save the Children; Camera del Lavoro Metropolitana di Milan).

The main goal of the research was to investigate the physical and social characteristics of Satellite, a highly problematic and multicultural neighborhood with the 80% of the population with more than seventy different nationalities, to design a pilot project of *participatory urban regeneration* of peripheral areas based on the active involvement of children with immigrant backgrounds.

Within this project, our research unit (University of Milan-Bicocca) was responsible for the 'WP3 – *Designing of pilot-site specific projects*' with a focus on designing innovative methods for encouraging the involvement of children and families in a multicultural and multi-vocal process of rethinking and reconceptualizing the means and ends of their everyday lives in the neighborhood.

To do so, we consider of crucial interest the involvement of the local schools as *key public-sites* not only to access the voices of children, but also to promote an experience of 'citizenship education' (Portera *et al.*, 2010) based on a strong collaboration between researchers, teachers, and families. We assumed that the school could played the role of '*pilot site*' to both explore the impact of innovative methods to elicit the voices of children as students but also as citizens, and to reduce the gap between children's lives at schools and their everyday life in the urban-public space (Bove, 2020).

More specifically, main goals were:

- to explore children and adults' representations of public space as 'lived space' (Iori, 1996);
- to promote children's active engagement and participation as *experts* in the public debate on urban spaces;
- to encourage intercultural dialogue on the use and the meaning of public spaces to enhance social cohesion.

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<sup>1</sup> Chiara Bove was the scientific supervisor and coordinator of the Unimib-Unit involved in the MOST study with a main role in the WP3; Alessandra Mussi acted as a researcher in the study and was responsible for the design and implementation of the indoor and outdoor workshops carried out with the students and in strength collaboration with the local schools. We are grateful to all students and teachers who actively participated to the project: without their involvement, this project would have not been possible. A more detailed description of the research can be found in Di Giovanni, 2018 (link: <https://ilgiornaledellarchitettura.com/web/2018/10/03/most-of-pioltello-proposte-per-la-periferia-di-Milan/>).

The assumption was that public spaces are endowed with an educational potential in particular in the field of GCE, especially when children can act as 'competent stakeholders', meaning when they are encouraged and legitimated to express themselves, the tell stories about the how they use the public space, to represent and re-invent/re-imagine the place where they live. This process of combining perspectives, views and voices becomes even more important when the public space functions as a stimulus to promote the construction of experiences of civic engagement and participation that involve the young generations and their families regardless of their cultural background and the legal recognition of their citizenship.

In the next paragraphs, we will illustrate the methods used to meet these goals, discussing their impact as tools to promote experiences of 'civic education' within the school and outside it to respond to the challenges of an increasingly complex and unequal society.

### *2.1. The research: design and methodology*

From a methodological perspective, the research was inscribed in a qualitative/ethnographic paradigm (Denzin, Lincoln, 2011; Caronia, 1997, 2011) and adopted a 'research-training' approach (Asquini, 2018; Bove, 2009; Wells, 2001; Nigris, 1998) aimed at encouraging the active engagement of different participants (teachers, children, parents) as key subjects and co-researchers.

Within this framework, methods drawn from the tradition of sociological studies known as 'Research with Children' (Christensen, James, 2008) were combined with ethnographic walking methods (O'Neill, 2014) to elicit and listen to the voices of children. The assumption was the need to combine multiple tools to promote the active engagement of children not only as 'informants' but also as co-researchers (Mortari, 2009).

The research included two phases: an exploratory phase (phase I: May 2018-March 2019) and a pilot phase (phase II: March-September 2019). In phase I, three focus groups with teachers and five focus groups with parents were conducted with two aims:

- to explore how they represent and use the public spaces and how they orient/supervise their children's everyday lives in the neighborhood;
- to engage them into dialogue on the means and the ends of public space.

At the same time, a co-design process was initiated with the teachers to develop an innovative way to involve children as partners and active actors in the process of re-designing urban spaces and their uses.

As a result, in phase II, three participatory workshops were co-designed and conducted, and 3 different aged-groups of students were involved: pre-schoolers (4-5 years old children); primary school (9 years-old) and lower secondary school (11 years-old). A total number of nine workshops were carried out with 58 children involved. Among them,

two workshops were conducted as 'in-door workshops' and one as 'outdoor' workshop.

The ultimate goal was to elicit children's voice and ideas about their city (Grion, Cook-Sather, 2013), also encouraging their capacity to observe, describe and interpret their neighborhood. Through a 'mosaic' approach (Clark, Moss, 2011), a wide range of expressive channels, tools and languages were used.

A more detailed description of the three workshops is provided in the next paragraphs.

## *2.2. First in-door participatory workshop: representing neighborhoods*

The first in-door participatory workshop took place within each of the three classrooms involved (preschool, primary school, secondary school) in order to explore how children usually 'use' and 'represent' their neighborhood. The workshop includes three steps:

- at first, children were invited to talk about their experiences and daily use of the spaces through drawings, stories and games. They were also asked to draw a map of their neighborhood, indicating the places they would or would not recommend to people who did not know it.
- Then children were asked to put their map into words. They showed their happiness and enthusiasm: they liked being treated as 'expert'.
- Finally, the maps were recomposed into a 'collective map' of the neighborhood and the voices of children were intertwined, generating composite, dynamic and multi-vocal narratives.

The following excerpt is an example drawn from one of the reflexive reports that we wrote during each workshop to keep track of the process. A 9-years old girl is explaining her map:

B: 'Then *I suggest you go near the palace [...], there is a giant tree*' [...] 'There is this giant tree that for me is very beautiful. If you look at it for a while, then peace will come to you. [...] Then I suggest you read Quran, because...because it's much more...it helps in two fields: you will learn a new language and you will understand many things, Pakistan history and a lot of other things. *After school I go directly to that road to read Quran* for an hour. [...] Then *I don't suggest you go to the little park*, at night but also during the day, I never go there because there are some children who say: 'I don't want to play with you'.'

A: 'If you don't go there, where do you usually go?'

B: 'I go to the parks almost never, I only go to read Quran and to school. [...] Sometimes I go out with my dad, I look at the sky, it's very beautiful, otherwise *I go to a park sometimes*. [...] I go there *with my dad or with my brothers*'. (Report of the first in-door workshop, 18/03/19).

This excerpt shows how the workshop was for the children a first citizenship experience, within which the activities stimulated a first «sense of place» (Mortari, 2008) able to connect the local dimension of the neighborhood with the global characteristics of the everyday

practices implemented by the numerous and multicultural families that live there.

### *2.3. Second out-door workshop: exploring neighborhoods through ethnographic walks*

The second out-door workshop was mainly based on narrative ethnographic walks (O'Neill 2014) aimed at exploring the same places that the children have already described during the first workshop. The neighborhood became a real 'open-air classroom' (Guerra, 2015; Monti *et al.* 2019), where the children assumed the role of co-researchers, acting now as guides, now as speakers, now as explorers, now as photographers. In doing this, they were re-discovering already known places and getting to know new ones.

Thanks to the use of photography, a tool in the hands of children, each child was able to observe and document the neighborhood. In the role of photographers, the children had the opportunity to share their perspective, feeling a sense of protagonism and legitimation (Ripamonti, Boniforti, 2020; Wang, 2006). In this way, they not only caught the 'beauty' and the 'ugly' – and their very personal view about them – in the neighborhood, but they also experimented the new role of being 'social actors', sharing impressions, values, perceptions about the place they live in.

At the same time, the walks gave rise to *new and unexpected* discoveries and encounters, which stimulated opportunities for intercultural dialogue, as in this excerpt:

*Children directly ask questions to [the shopkeeper]. S: 'Are you Arabic?'; another child answers they are Pakistani and the shopkeeper points at the child who answer correctly, and he starts talking with him in Urdu language.*

*The child smiles and he seems to be ashamed but also proud of being able to act as a mediator, using his language. Also B. is a mediator. Alessandra encourages children to translate, and B. answers: 'He's asking me if I want to ask him a question'. B. asks a question in Urdu language, and then other children raise their hands to ask other questions.*

*H.: 'Do you have fruit which arrives from (many communities)?'. B. translates and the shopkeeper answers in Urdu language. B. translates the answer: 'Almost from every countries, also from here'. Children seem to be proud of their national origin because they ask to the shopkeepers if they have 'their' products, the Spanish ones, the Russian ones, and so on. A.: 'Also from Russia?'. He answers and B. translates: 'Very few'. R.: 'España?'. 'Yes', she smiles and seems to be satisfied. S.: 'And from Bangladesh?'. (Report of the second out-door workshop, 02/04/19)*

The children explored what was inside the ethnic shops of the neighborhood and talked with the shopkeepers regardless their origin. Yet, they had the opportunity to feel proud while sharing their cultural and language background but also to experiment new habits (the day after an Italian girl brought her mother in the same shop in order to buy and cook the new discovered food).



#### 2.4. Third in-door workshop: re-imagining neighborhoods

The third in-door workshop aimed at helping children to express their desires and needs reimagining the public spaces and their physical and social uses. The children were invited to ideally transform the existing spaces through drawings, manipulation of the photographs and maps, expressing their aspirations for changes.

In the following excerpt, a boy is describing an art-work realized by himself with a class-mate based on a photo taken during the walk. He was suggested to reproduce the photo as it was reflected in a lake, free to modify it as it pleased:

G: 'The reflected image is inverted as it would be a real lake: in the drawing instead of being day it's night and we just add a carousel that would be an underground path, from here to here. Then there are the carousels that were already in the picture, as swings, and *a tree made up of precious stones which represents the ethnic richness of our neighborhood*. (Report of the third in-door workshop, 16/04/19).

Drawings, transforming pictures, plastic models and narrating them were different methodological devices that were developed in order to support the young participants in thinking the 'possible' (Bertin, 1971), a horizon of possibilities not always perceived in the urban suburbs. In this way, children had the opportunity not only to explicate their own wishes and needs, but also to become more aware of them by narrating them to others (Diazzi, 2011). As a result, children experimented a sense of involvement, acting as key protagonists of their own city. In a word, they played the role of active citizens, within a protective, inclusive and democratic 'educational space'.

#### Conclusion and future perspectives

To conclude we will summarize some particularly important results in order to formulate some conclusive reflections.

First, we observe that, although the study was designed as a pilot's one, a significant number of children were actively involved as key-actors not only in a process of urban multicultural planning, but also of co-construction of the meaning of 'citizen' from the ground and the practice (UNESCO, 2018). In this perspective, the research contributed to the promotion of a «sense of place» (Mortari, 2008) that was able to support a sense of *belonging* to the local that at the same time was linked with a global dimension of citizenship. Notably, public space – although highly problematic – played a crucial role as a stimulus for promoting intercultural processes of sharing and negotiating its uses and meanings.

Then, the result was an experience of GCE that promoted inter-agency and connections, reducing the many barriers that often separate school and extra school, indoor and outdoor education, formal, informal

and non-formal education and – moreover – immigrant and non-immigrant children and families.

Finally, although the impact of this process can't be generalized, it flags some important points to be considered:

- the need to co-design a democratic process of sharing and discussing about these issues with the schools and the teachers;
- the value of combining methods, tools and languages to promote authentic and sustainable processes of children's engagement;
- the potential of involving children and teachers in *out-door* experiences that could reduce the gap between children's lives at schools and outside them.

The research took place before the explosion of the COVID-19 Pandemic; after the crisis, as we all know, the situation drastically changed. Many existing difficulties were exacerbated by the pandemic and new challenges emerged. Therefore, new interdisciplinary and inter-sectorial actions – as the ones promoted by a new on-going project in the same area<sup>2</sup> - are required to respond to the new needs of children as 'citizens' in the post-pandemic era.

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<sup>2</sup> The project, named *Abitare Insieme* (FAMI 2014-2020), is coordinated by Prefettura of Milan in partnership with Polytechnic University of Milan (PI: Prof. A. Pavesi), University of Milan (PI: Prof. P. Inghilleri), University of Milan-Bicocca (PI: Prof. Chiara Bove) and Consorzio Brianzia, Pop, Fuori Luoghi, CS&L, Libera Compagnia di Arti & Mestieri Sociali, Progetto Integrazione.

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## **Building Inclusive and Well-Being School Communities and ‘Citizenization’ Through Children’s Active Participation. The ISOTIS Study**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The contribution presents some results and reflections drawn from the international study titled ‘Feel good: Children’s view on inclusion’, led by the authors of this article. Set within the framework provided by EU-funded collaborative project ISOTIS ([www.isotis.org](http://www.isotis.org)), this international qualitative participatory research study in 2018-2019 involved children in pre- and primary school settings and informal after-school contexts in areas characterized by high cultural diversity and social inequality in eight European countries (the Czech Republic, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, and The Netherland). The research was designed to enable a better understanding of children’s experiences, perceptions and opinions about inclusion and well-being at school. Through a multimethod participatory approach, it was aimed at exploring what factors the young participants identified as promoting or undermining well-being and inclusion at school, and at eliciting their suggestions to make school more welcoming and inclusive. The overall research experience was intended as an opportunity for the children involved to be actively and meaningfully engaged, and to experience citizenship and agency. The analysis of the main results along with the educational and formative impacts on children and professionals offers valuable suggestions for promoting democratic and inclusive learning environments and shaping innovative forms of civic education and teachers training.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Participatory Research; Student Voice; Inclusion; Democratic Education; Diversity*

### **Introduction**

Social inclusion, equality and active citizenship have increasingly become key issues and inescapable priorities for the worldwide political agenda and in the academic debate, especially in the field of education (UNESCO, 2005, 2013, 2014; OECD 2018a, 2018b). They are intrinsically linked concepts since an inclusive society «works towards a goal of equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination» (Westfall, 2010, p.8) and makes sure «that all children and adults are able to participate

as valued, respected and contributing members of society» (Omidvar, Richmond, 2003, VIII)

While an ample and well-established research in the field of developmental and social psychology has investigated social inclusion, discrimination, acculturation processes, and the detrimental educational, psychological, and social impact on children's life and wellness of experiencing discrimination and social exclusion (Bottiani *et al.*, 2017; Brown, 2015; Cooper, Sánchez, 2016; Hood *et al.*, 2017), not so many studies have explored what children think on those topics, on their lived experience, and what they think they can do to enhance the contexts where they live. Children play a central role in the social inclusion policy agenda but most initiatives to implement this agenda «were and are still designed, delivered and evaluated by adults» (Hill *et al.*, 2004), even at school. This even though children are acknowledged as active social actors since the early years, eligible for fundamental rights (UN, 1989), acknowledged as key and reliable informants on all the questions and contexts where they live in (O'Keane, 2008).

The study presented gives an original contribution in this field of research, adopting a research approach centered on children's perspective and their involvement in participatory research processes as collaborators and active contributors to enhance their school contexts, as a way of civic and democratic education.

Set within the framework provided by EU-funded collaborative project ISOTIS ([www.isotis.org](http://www.isotis.org)), this international qualitative participatory research study, titled *Feel good: Children's view on inclusion* (led by the authors of this article), in 2018-2019 involved children in pre- and primary school settings and informal after-school contexts in areas characterized by high cultural diversity and social inequality in eight European countries (the Czech Republic, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Norway, Poland, and The Netherland). The research was designed to enable a better understanding of the experiences, perceptions and opinions of very young and young children from native-born low-income families and families with ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds regarding inclusion and well-being at school. It was aimed at exploring what children identified as quality indicators of school well-being and inclusiveness of social, cultural, religious and linguistic differences, and their suggestions to make their school more welcoming and inclusive. Through a multimethod participatory approach, children were invited to express their viewpoint on how they felt that their school supported inclusion, acknowledging and valuing diversity at different levels (cultural diversity; linguistic diversity; social inequalities); what elements contributed to children's well-being, feeling accepted and included at school, and, on the contrary, what elements undermined it; and finally, proposals to make their school (more) inclusive. The 'take action' step represented a key phase privileged in the study, to enhance school inclusive environments through children's active participation and to

empower children in their roles as democratic citizens (e.g., Dürr, 2005; Himmelmann, 2001; Johnny, 2005; Osler, 2000; Osler, Starkey, 2006).

The paper synthetically presents the international study design, the methodological framework and methods (for more details see: Pastori *et al.*, 2019, 2020; Pastori *et al.*, 2019), and a cross-country analysis on the main results on what children identified as the main factors promoting well-being and inclusion, the main factors undermining well-being and inclusion and the transformative factors proposed by children. A final reflection considers the formative impact on the local communities of the research process.

## 1. Methodological framework

Within the international frame of the Children's Rights Convention, the study adopted the paradigm of the «research *with* and *for* Children» (Bessell, 2015; Mayall, 2003; Mortari, 2009;) and the students' voice approach (Grion, Cook-Sather, 2013; Fielding, 2004, 2012; Pastori, Pagani, 2016), involving children in participatory research processes (O'Kane, 2008), in connection to education *through* democracy and active citizenship framework (Gollob *et al.*, 2010; Dürr, 2005; Welty, Lundy, 2013; Moskal, Tyrrell, 2015). All these perspectives emphasize how to truly listen to children's perspectives and to allow children to have meaningful experience within research, giving voice is not enough. It is essential to take their ideas into account and let them experience how their voices can influence the contexts they live in.

## 2. Sample and methods

The study was conducted in (pre)school and after-school social contexts (such as youth centers, spaces for recreational activities and study support, etc.), and overall 306 children were involved as research participants, specifically: 120 pre-schoolers, 139 primary school students, and 47 children attending after-school programs). The sites were selected considering the target groups of native low-income groups, indigenous ethnic-cultural minority groups such as Romani people, and immigrant linguistic minority groups.

Based on an extensive review, the study adopted a participatory research methodology (O'Kane, 2008), balancing children's right to participate with the need to ensure a worthwhile and positive experience by adjusting the adult's and children's roles according to children's ages and competences (Flewitt, 2005), and a multi-method approach (Clark, Moss, 2001). Children were involved in the research process as co-constructors and co-researchers in reflecting on the quality of their (pre)school contexts, on well-being at (pre)school and in proposing innovations. Several different methods and techniques were

proposed, such as focus groups, circle-time discussions, art-based and manipulative activities, virtual photo tours and digital product making. This choice not only met the need for triangulation, but also provided a richer and more comprehensive picture of children's viewpoints, recognizing children's many languages (Edwards *et al.*, 1998) and ensuring that each child had the opportunity to explore and represent their perspective in their own terms.

### **3. Data analysis**

National teams were asked to transcribe (verbatim in the original language and only the most significant excerpts translated into English) children's verbalizations, written comments/productions and discussions during circle-time, focus groups, one-to-one conversations, dialogues during everyday interactions with children and between children relevant to the research. The analysis of verbal data was realized through a thematic analysis approach (Braun, Clarke, 2006; Brooks *et al.*, 2015), using a common coding system with four main thematic codes (diversity, school organization, social relationships, identity) and 20 sub-codes. Code frequency and co-occurrence were also analysed to support the qualitative analysis increasing the understanding of the relevance of the topics addressed by children.

### **4. Ethics**

The national teams were asked to guarantee respect of the European General Data Protection Regulation (Reg. EU 2016/679) and of relevant national legal and ethical requirements. In reference to the involvement of young children as research participants and the delicate topics addressed by the study, several ethical issues were considered in the methodological framework and in the research process, at four main levels cautiously considered: aims and benefits; informed consent; privacy and confidentiality; data collection, storage and use of the data (Pastori *et al.*, 2020).

### **5. Main results**

The thematic areas that children – across countries, contexts and ages – considered particularly relevant for well-being and inclusion – and, thus, they most frequently addressed – dealt mainly with 1) 'School Organization' and 2) 'Social Relationship'.

With respect to 'School organization', the children showed particular attention to the quantity and the quality of spaces, perceived as key mediators of well-being and inclusion. Children reported to favour large



spaces where they were allowed to move more freely (e.g., gyms, gardens) as well as reserved, quiet and relaxing spaces – not always present in school structures – where, on occasion, they could find shelter from crowded and chaotic places. Many of their proposals to change the indoor and outdoor spaces reflected their desire for more spaces. Specifically, inside school they suggested areas for recreational activities, dancing, relaxation in moments of fatigue and outside for plants, sport fields, playgrounds

Moreover, children pointed out their desire to have greater freedom of choice, self-determination and self-regulation, both with respect to the use of spaces and materials (e.g., having autonomous access to materials, using spaces following their own ideas about how it could be allocated), and to the timing of routines and activities during the day at school.

In connection to spaces and materials, children also expressed their desire for more extra-curricular activities and more active, creative, 'non-traditional' activities resulted as a key component of a school environment more welcoming and motivating. Children believed there was a lack of balance between play and work/learning (often considered by adults – especially in primary school – as two opposite entities), and often connoted the latter by negative emotions such as boredom, nervousness, fear and also anxiety and stress, due to exams, grades and homework. The young participants, instead, wanted learning to become more enjoyable and interactive, and activities to be carried out in an active, playful, group and dynamic way, including physically, both inside and outside school. Playing and getting involved in a variety of playful activities in the school context appeared to be important factors for well-being in many contexts and across ages, as well as crucial factors for strengthening inclusion and the well-being of newcomers.

With respect to 'Social relationship', children highlighted the importance of emotional support, and empathy both from teachers and from peers, but the peer group and peer network emerged the most significant factor in dealing with difficulties and in feeling part of the local school community. Children emphasized that the school socio-emotional climate significantly affected their motivation to study, sense of self-efficacy, their trust in being able to succeed at school, their personal and social image of themselves, overall their path of growth, social integration and emancipation from conditions of exclusion or economic-social minority. Many of the children's proposals to make the school a warm, welcoming place on a relational level, towards all differences (from somatic and physical to linguistic, cultural and religious differences), concerned different forms of promoting friendship and emotional support among children from their arrival at school. This could take the form of multiple gestures, some established as rituals and some entrusted to the initiative of individuals: from the simple friendship bracelets proposed by the preschool children, in recalling the sense of disorientation during the first days of school,

underlining the importance of consoling, cuddling, hugging and playing with a newly arrived child, to the assignment of a 'buddy partner' who would be nearby during the first days and present the school, perhaps supported by a multilingual video-tour made by the children, by writing, dances and songs in multiple languages.

In connection to these proposals, children from different contexts have stressed the importance of the enhancement of cultural, linguistic and food traditions, in a balanced way. On the one hand, children stressed the importance of showing to newcomers the majority culture and language and the institutional culture (by introducing newly arrived children to school organization, spaces and rules). On the other hand, children underlined the fact that all of the children's cultures, languages and foods needed to be present in everyday life at school. Not only the prohibition of speaking in one's own language of origin in some school contexts was a factor that strongly undermined children's well-being in the school environment, but also the absence of languages, cultures and foods from the children's origins was seen as a negative aspect in the long-term and their enhancement was present in children's proposals in all contexts.

## **6. Educational and formative impacts**

Most of the children participated in a joyful and lively way, and this was surprising not only for researchers, but also for teachers in several cases. The welcoming, open climate established within the research context and the opportunity to be thoroughly listened to and to assume the role of 'experts' in the eyes of the adults contributed to encourage children's involvement. Even the most shy and bashful pupils or those classes not accustomed to share and discuss their opinions 'inside the school walls' started to actively participate in the activity proposed and freely expressed their ideas after the first few meetings. They proposed many ideas to make their school a better place for *all* children, where all kinds of diversity could be recognized and valued. Therefore, they showed great awareness of the dynamics that can affect well-being at school or promote it and showed that they can play a significant active and proactive role in promoting inclusion and well-being at school.

The proposals made by the children gained visibility (for instance, were presented to other classes, to the teaching body, to their parents, in one case even to the Municipality major) and in several cases were actually implemented. On the one hand, this outcome contributed to showing pupils that their voices were not only listened to, but also taken seriously into account. On the other hand, their ideas actually contributed to changing the (pre)school context, making them more inclusive and welcoming to all children. The opportunity to see their ideas 'made real, concrete' helped children to see their opinions as

valuable, feel empowered and recognize themselves as possible agents of change.

An improvement in the attitude towards diversity was also observed. On the one hand, pupils expressed their interest in knowing other cultures and languages. On the other hand, those pupils with immigrant backgrounds, that at the beginning were shy about speaking their home language and talking about their cultural heritage, gradually started to be prouder about their origins and express their desire to tell their peers about their languages and cultures.

The study had a formative impact also for the professionals involved, representing an opportunity to get to know the children they work with. Professionals got a glimpse on what their pupils think and feel about their school context, and learnt more (in some cases, for the first time ever) about children's cultural and linguistic background. Many of them were surprised to discover how children – even the younger ones – could be competent and proactive interlocutors, who had clear ideas about complex issues such as inclusion and wellbeing and could advance sophisticated proposals to make their school more welcoming. The research experience allowed teachers and educators to think about and often re-consider their view about children and their potential, and even to recognize that they were underestimating the children's abilities to evaluate their school and contribute to its improvement.

Moreover, professionals experienced a participatory methodology involving children that in most cases they had not practiced before. Appreciating its value and noticing pupils' high engagement, many professionals decided to introduce this methodology in their daily educational practices.

Especially for teachers, the study was also an occasion to explore further with their class themes such as multilingualism, multiculturalism, and differences in general. Even though in different countries (for instance, in Czech Republic and Italy) the national educational policy required teachers to address those themes, the professionals who took part in the study lamented the feeling of not having enough space for them due to the pressure to complete the curricular program. The study helped teachers to reconsider how educating children to appreciate differences, rather than a juxtaposition to the 'real' curriculum, could be fruitfully integrated with their regular activities.

The process of building shared proposals to improve the school environment and reception practices, enhanced the socio - emotional climate in promoting empathy among children and between children and teachers, and making all more responsible and creative. It also presented complexities and challenges. In some cases children from minority groups didn't express themselves easily; they felt embarrassed by the novelty of talking within the group of classmates of delicate topics such as feeling discriminated against, feeling judged for your accent, or just making visible their linguistic hidden competencies in

other languages. Slow and long times and the coherent and careful establishment of the conditions to feel free to speak up provided support but not always this was enough. Nevertheless, a large majority of children wanted to contribute. And beyond the richness of children's proposals, the constructive role played by them in the participatory research work leads to gain an increased awareness of the crucial role of participatory pedagogical models that include children's voices from an early age and involve them in the processes of decision making, in shaping pedagogical spaces, activities and times, in reference to both the proposals that can be presented by the children for the improvement of the school, and on the effects on well-being, motivation and the development of skills and abilities for active citizenship that these forms of participation promote.

## **7. Discussion and implications**

The guiding principles of participatory and transformative research are coherent and reinforce a socio-constructivist and active teaching approach, promoting a collaborative social and relational climate, respectful of different points of view, all salient factors in the improvement of children's learning and school motivation. But it is possible to say that they represent a step forward in children's participation, as they embrace the possibility for children to be full-fledged protagonists of the school environment, not only in the learning experiences but in the whole life of the school. From this point of view,

The participatory research experience here presented was meant as an exercise of authentically 'child-friendly' active citizenship. Not only it gave children a 'voice' but allowed them to take part in decision-making processes and to be active social actors, responsible for their environment (in a proportionate manner to their psychological maturity and in cooperation with the professionals involved). From a democratic education perspective, the opportunity given to pupils to analyze their school context and to introduce changes and improvements was an essential cornerstone of the research process.

As a result of children of different ages and with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds participating in this process, an increased sense of belonging to multicultural and multilingual communities and, ultimately, the feeling of shared citizenship – within and beyond individual differences – was achieved.

Therefore, we believe that this research experience contributes to promoting a new image of multilingual and multicultural citizenship starting from school communities and to shaping innovative forms of civic education.

These considerations suggest further investment in these forms of research and urge the development of well-founded skills in conducting research processes with children, paying attention to characteristics in

relation to the phases of child development and to the many challenges and complexities that they present. Teacher training in these forms of participatory research with children from an early age should receive more attention, especially through collaboration and action-research conducted with researchers. The experience of participation in these forms of research can have significant repercussions, not only on children and on the quality of their school experience, but also on the professionalization of teachers, representing a powerful stimulus to review approaches to teaching, ideas regarding the role of children in school and of the school itself in children's lives.

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## **Building Intercultural Citizenship: Participatory Pathways Among Educators of Unaccompanied Minors, School and Territory**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Starting from the idea that nowadays the city is a significant place where citizenship takes shape, and along with the willingness to respond to Sustainable Development Goals, this paper debates active citizenship education with a renewed perspective, by focusing on the collaboration among all the actors (educators, teachers, local community) that face the challenge of the reception and integration for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). Adopting an emancipatory pedagogical perspective, it discusses citizenship education as «right to the city», referring to both UASC, who may overcome a number of cultural and social obstacles to full participation in schools and society, and to educators and teachers, who are required to implement common planning to ensure minors' inclusion and development. In order to investigate what kind of active citizenship education should be promoted to build a more inclusive and intercultural city, this paper presents the «social and integrated mapping» as a resource for creating pathways of participation among all the actors and discusses some findings from a participatory research, which has been developing in the City of Turin, on the pedagogical reception for UASC.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Intercultural city, Educators of unaccompanied minors, Participatory Research, Active citizenship, Partnership network.*

### **Introduction**

City, Living Together and Education are issues at the core of promoting active citizenship in today's multicultural societies. The interrelation of these themes highlights the active role that cities can play from an educational perspective, fostering a better living together and social cohesion: cities may place education as a vector of social transformation and improvement of community life, by constructing pathways where everyone feels represented, respected and heard and where everyone has a space for «living together as equal in dignity» (Council of Europe, 2008).

This article discusses how to build intercultural citizenship, by taking on a renewed perspective that recognizes the actors that are usually on the margin of the school process, such as educators and unaccompanied minors (UASC), and emphasizes the collaboration among educators, teachers, local community, institutions, and minors themselves. It addresses this issue by discussing three main questions: how to rethink active citizenship education in our multicultural cities? How to create shared pathways of participation within one's own territory? How can a research-training project become a space of promotion of intercultural citizenship for all the actors involved? Following these steps, a new paradigm of citizenship education grounded in daily practice in a network within the territory will be argued.

### **1. Citizenship Education as the «Right to the City»**

One of the key strategies for ensuring an equitable, inclusive and sustainable future is to promote the role cities can play as vectors of cultural, social and environmental development. The Agenda 2030 (ONU, 2015) highlights the needs to «enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries» (Goal 11). Cities should guarantee all inhabitants equal access to resources and opportunities for active participation in their living contexts, by promoting the conditions for the development of their full potential and empowering them to contribute to an inclusive and peaceful community without discrimination (Goal 4).

Today the challenge of active citizenship takes place at the local level: it is within local contexts that processes of inclusion and/or exclusion take place and complex social and intercultural dynamics develop. But it is also there that experimenting with creative educational pathways is possible. In fact, it is within local contexts that the game is played out between opportunities for reception, school and family support, socialization and cultural exchange: according to the possibilities to participate in social practices and to the limits or resources available in their own territory, people can construct their representation of reality and shape their personal and professional life projects. For any educational and social design to get success it should take into account that individuals' identity is situated and interdependent with that of the territory and of the other people who inhabit it (see also Pescarmona, 2008). This requires responding to the need to provide with multiple opportunities to meet and build spaces for positive interaction.

The proposal of a «Urban Model of Intercultural Inclusion» (Council of Europe, 2020) addresses this issue, by approaching active citizenship from the perspective of social justice. This model is not so much based on an idea of security or on an action to be carried out only 'on others',

but on these demands: what can the city do to promote equal participation for all? What kind of institutions, networks and competences are needed to generate inclusive dynamics?

In this way, citizenship education can be seen as the «Right to the City». This expression, which was proposed by Henri Lefebvre in the Seventies (Lefebvre, 1978), nowadays finds its meaning in the possibility of citizens *appropriating* of urban space, in its material and immaterial, relational and symbolic dimensions. As he said, this right «manifests itself as a superior form of rights: the right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit» (Lefebvre, 1978, 153). It is conceptualized as a collective rather than an individual right to change the city and shape the process of urbanization, by starting from a critical awareness of urban inequalities, and involving social struggles for appropriating urban spaces and claiming the rights to participation, to urban design, to education, to leisure and so on. This idea of active citizenship is configured not as the acquisition of a formal legal status, but as the practice of belonging to one's own context of life, the exercise of care and responsibility that is expressed in the speech-making processes and the commitment to action for the betterment of the own community (Lazzarini, 2016; Council of Europe, 2020).

This concept directly calls into question the principle of «urban justice» (International Association of Educating cities, 2017), as it focuses on the process of defining the ways to equal access to rights within the city as well as on the construction of *praxis* capable of activating synergies and co-responsibility with different institutions, local administrations, schools, practitioners and all the inhabitants, in order to interpret the needs of the territory and take action for its development. For this reason, building an intercultural city is not just an urban project, but it is properly a *pedagogical project* (Pescarmona, Matera, *in press*), which requires to rethink what methods, approaches and experiences can support this model of citizenship.

## **2. Social and Integrated Mapping of Territory for the Partnership Network**

In order to promote the Educational City, a good methodology is necessary to explore the opportunities of territory. In this perspective, the principal questions are: how to promote Educational City? What does it mean to build partnership? and, why build partnership? A good methodology is also a good answer to these questions.

The principal methodology is Social and Integrated Mapping of Territory (Milani, *in press*) in order to collect data of anthropological, educational, geographical and institutional characteristics of territory. What mean social and integrated? This methodology is social because surveys the social bodies (or communities), educational, cultural and

sports associations, schools, social cooperatives, informal groups or non-profit organizations with which it's possible to collaborate and to build participatory pathways. In this case, mapping will need to be very precise and thorough (Croce, 1995), so that there is a wide range of choice and good networking. No information should be left out, because it could compromise social work on the territory. Thus, an *integrated* reading of the territory is indispensable, with social data and other useful data: geographical, anthropological, anthropic, demographic data and data related to productive settlements. This integration is not trivial because all these data provide insight into the social, educational, and leisure needs of citizens and highlights the risks and criticalities of urban and extra-urban areas. In addition, the mapping is integrated because it collects the 'voices' of privileged witnesses of possible partners and social bodies engaged in path of citizenship and development of community. Mapping work itself promotes empowerment processes for free expression through the meeting with the possible partners for the construction of the partnership. The Social and Integrated Mapping of Territory is not only a mere recording and collection of elements that characterize the territory itself. It is the result of a reading of meaning and a reconstruction of the territory in its specific social scope, innovative, but also discordant, dissident and provocative. Forgetting these 'dissonant voices' or 'rougher words' in the mapping is already depowering the partnership building.

If the Social and Integrated Mapping of the territory has been well conducted, we will have all the elements to identify partners to activate intercultural and citizenship processes in urban or extra-urban contexts for a territory development. In fact, the Educational City is a weave to be built by many 'hands'.

These 'hands' are partners with whom a relationship of co-construction and co-design based on reciprocity must be developed. Partnership, in fact, is based on respect and recognition of the equal dignity of each partner. Promoting partnerships requires mutual appreciation in diversity, competence, and vision towards a common goal. It is necessary to build convergent perspectives without prevarication or forcing. Building partnerships, therefore, certainly has an ethical, responsible and political value (Floris, 1999; Milani, 2021) oriented towards the Common Good and the enhancement of social presences capable of taking care of citizenship and urban spaces. The social partnership is also aimed at building and generating social ties for community empowerment.

### **3. Partnership, Meta-Competencies and Collective Mind for building citizenship in Educational City**

Through partnership, it is possible to generate collective competencies (Milani, 2013) of citizenship also in the perspective of Global Education

(Council of Europe, 2019), in a vision of promotion and development of the local community. In addition, partnership work requires these meta-competencies, such as: «knowing how to cooperate», «wanting to cooperate», «having the power to cooperate» (Le Boterf, 2006) and «having the duty to cooperate» (Milani, 2013), in a dimension of synergistic and synchronous complementarity. A meta-competency constitutes a critical look at the ability to manage, generate, and master skills (Wittorski, 1997). In partnership work, «knowing how to cooperate» means, above all, knowing how to move away from one's own culture of service, without betraying it, in order to meet that of the other, generating complementary views and shared operational scenarios. «Wanting to cooperate», on the other hand, indicates the intention and sustains the ethical commitment to building partnership processes and to be provoked by the meanings imparted by the partners. «Having a duty to cooperate» indicates a willingness to take full responsibility for networking processes and paths and a commitment to fostering equal relationships between partners.

These meta-competencies can sustain the generation of a Collective Mind, which Weick and Roberts define as follows: «Collective mind is conceptualized as a pattern of heedful interrelations of actions in a social system. Actors in the system construct their actions (contributions), understanding that the system consists of connected actions by themselves and others (representation), and interrelate their actions within the system (subordination)» (1993, 357). The form that this Collective Mind takes will determine the contextual and synergic action of the partners and the value of their complementarity (Milani, 2013; 2014; in press) in thinking and feeling synchronic and syntonic, oriented to the ethical dimension, to the Common Good for the construction of the Educational City and full citizenship. In this perspective, spaces and practices generate experiences of community, citizenship and proximity.

#### **4. Rethinking the City from an Intercultural Perspective: Educational Challenges and Pedagogical Responsibilities**

Today, an educational and social challenge for operators, institutions and citizens is the reception of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). In fact, between 2014 and 2020, more than 76,000 unaccompanied minors arrived in Italy by sea, straining the country's legal and educational protection system.

In addition to the large presence of the phenomenon, several factors make the challenge of mutual integration critical (Matera, 2021), including: the prevailing age of arrival of these minors, which for 66.9% is 17 years old (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2020), the proximity to the coming of age of majority and the consequent loss of rights and guarantees of protection provided for minors, the limited

time for the planning of a sustainable integration pathway, the gap between different cultural and symbolic systems and the often compromised ability of self-determination of these minors, who are frequently «agents of family development» (Sbraccia, 2011). Added to these are the continuous changes in the legislative framework<sup>1</sup> and the migration phenomenon<sup>2</sup> and the lack of procedural clarity in the management of reception (Giovannetti, Accorinti, 2018). This last aspect is associated with the high territorial fragmentation of the services and pathways offered to migrant minors among the different regional realities, even among neighboring municipalities. In addition, these projects are often the result of the discretion of individual operators, reception facilities or associations/organizations and are often not sufficiently valued or shared.

For the management of this complexity, educators are asked to see and build, in the city, *spaces of possible training* (Pescarmona and Matera, *in press*) within which the full exercise of democratic citizenship (Dewey, 1916; Milani, 2014; Ulivieri, 2018) is made possible. Therefore, they are required:

- to develop *intercultural competence* – between citizenship challenges and citizenship responsibilities – in order to be open to constructive dialogues both with minors and with other operators of the reception system on possible perspectives, educational cultures and planning for inclusion and development, personal and territorial;
- to assume the *logic of co-responsibility* – which necessarily implies recognition of oneself as a citizen and related feeling of belonging to the community – and a *sense of civic duty* (Council of Europe, 2016), as foundational attitudes of intercultural competence.

The role of the educator, therefore, opens to the city, to find spaces and possibilities for «transformative learning» (Mezirow, 2016), in intercultural dialogue with other professionals and civil society. In this way, he promotes a *project of intercultural citizenship* within which citizens can learn about migration as a complex human, social and educational phenomenon and take responsibility for the development of the community and the territory.

Working in culturally heterogeneous contexts means confronting multiple life and professional histories, opening up to dialogue with

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<sup>1</sup> In recent years, important changes have been introduced to the body of existing legislation on unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy. The latest legislative provision on the subject is Law No. 173, December 18, 2020, which represents the fourth regulatory intervention dedicated to unaccompanied foreign minors since 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Migration is an impossible phenomenon to photograph, as it is subject to constant changes in terms of actors of migration and vulnerability profiles, routes, chains and migration flows, means of control and dynamics of recruitment in trafficking and exploitation, geopolitical conditions of countries of origin and arrival.

different 'experts' of the phenomenon and educational practice, such as the child and other professionals.

In the daily management of educational issues, educators activate networks, elaborate strategies, reconstruct interventions, modify and enrich anthropological and pedagogical visions, and develop contextualized competencies (Milani, 2013). In a word, they train themselves.

## **5. A Research-Training Project as a Space for Education to Intercultural and Democratic Citizenship**

How can research-training project become a space for participation and promotion of intercultural citizenship for all those involved?

Activating the theory-praxis circularity, involving educators in a research-training project, can open up spaces for co-construction of a more complex knowledge about the unaccompanied minors phenomenon and pathways in synergy with the territory. Some reflections from a wider research project (2018-present) are here discussed, in order to analyse the practice of educators working with unaccompanied minors in the City of Turin and their ability to promote virtuous partnerships by outlining shared projects on the territory.

After numerous open interviews with several key informants (educators of different types of structures, cultural mediators, heads of institutions, services and associations of the reception system and school teachers), a participatory research methodology was adopted (Griffiths, 1998; Mortari, Ghirrotto, 2019). The aim was «to empower disempowered groups» (Kara, 2015, 45), specifically educators, which are usually not considered in educational welfare policies, even though crucial to the design of sustainable school integration pathways. In particular, several focus groups were held, in which the analysis of the interviews conducted and, therefore, the researcher's interpretation were discussed with the educators.

Focus groups provided a space for educators to narrate their daily actions, to share their «epistemology of professional practice» (Wenger, 1998) and the implicit knowledge inherent in practice, to give visibility to their work, but also an important opportunity for learning. In fact, the focus group is understood as a *cultural environment* from which new and renewed knowledge emerges, which is fundamental to sustaining and renewing existing projects and developing new ones.

Here, the researcher is part of the process of constructing knowledge and revising the underlying assumptions of educational practice with unaccompanied minors. The focus group is a context of professional growth and training (learning environment) for the researcher: through it, he validates his previous interpretation, triangulates information and makes up for the problem of 'translation', resulting from the dialogue between the linguistic registers of different worlds.

The focus group, in this case, is the concrete expression of training in the field of operators, who constantly activate multidisciplinary networks and synergies with the community, to deal with complex and uncertain situations.

## Conclusion

To conclude, it is possible to state that:

- the promotion of participatory spaces aimed to strengthen educators' sense of belonging to the city, recognizing the social and media 'margin' of educational work as a «place of radical possibility, a space of resistance» (Hooks, 1998, 68) within which 'central' radical perspectives take shape;
- the methodology of participatory research has promoted an intercultural dialogue between educators working in different services, enhancing existing synergies and activating new alliances between various educational services and territory. This methodology has also allowed for a constructive dialogue between different cultural and linguistic registers – those of field workers and those of the academy – in a circular process of revision and mutual enrichment. The underlying perspective is that of *social justice* as a privileged condition for the equal expression of one's views, rights and responsibilities, both ethical and civil;
- the sharing and co-explicitation of interpretative models, in a process supported by critical reflection (Schön, 1983), has allowed for the development of new knowledge, skills and resources to improve educational practice with minors, but has also opened up new spaces for training where one's own identity (personal, professional, social, cultural) can be redefined. In fact, participating in this research allows one to create a network in the territory to implement the dissemination of knowledge, educational philosophies, practices and procedures to create a coherent and shared system of praxis, in order to influence the elaboration of practices, regulations and interventions that are more oriented and de-construct the social imaginary around the unaccompanied minors;
- the project has supported the formation of a Collective Mind (Milani, 2013) within which different intentionalities, experiences and perspectives intersect to form a common educational and planning culture.

The concept of citizenship is thus redefined and transformed in daily practice in a network with the territory, building new multi-cultural identities and a new idea of city and intercultural citizenship for the Common Good.



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## The Role of Experiential Learning In Citizenship Education: Lessons From The Field

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**ABSTRACT:** *Over the past decade, civic education has been at the heart of a significant cultural debate and policy review concerning its purposes, main topics of interest, methodology and practice strategies in school learning. The major driver behind the implementation of citizenship education has been the aspiration to respond to a number of perceived current social problems and concerns about young people's lack of knowledge and confidence in topics related to civic awareness and values, social cohesion as well as duties and obligations to the community. In the absence of these virtues or traits the civic educational mission has been almost totally entrusted to the public school system. Besides family, friends and local communities, school is in fact considered to have a fundamental role in preparing and supporting young people in the acquisition of knowledge and attitudes that will lead them to be truly involved in all the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Nevertheless, citizenship is a multidimensional, dynamic, complex and contested concept. For that reason, teachers, as well as the other members of the educational community, constantly face new challenges in the training of young citizens. However, school is an agent of socialization and a place where transformation, adaptation and developments of citizenship take place, providing an exceptional framework in which new civic knowledge, attitudes and behaviours can be identified, promoted and observed. Multicultural and digital citizenship, both as emerging topics and real conditions, are two examples of this peculiar phenomenon. In this context, a clear need to improve participatory approaches in the training of pupils arises. Since civic education is meant to prepare young people for an active and positive contribution to society, it should not only convey theoretical knowledge but also promote behaviours which are necessary to effectively participate in the civic sphere. This paper aims to describe how empowering practices, as associated with experiential learning with a very particular interest to the context of what young people encounter on a daily basis, can be an effective way to promote youth civic development. The first section introduces the increasing emphasis on citizenship education and the approaches to citizenship education according to national curricula. The second section details the results of the experience Fondaca - Active Citizenship Foundation gained during the last years in conducting workshops for students, teachers' training and in promoting acts of civic engagement. The final section discusses what appears to be happening in terms of approaches to citizenship education in schools and how these insights impact on students in term of learning effects. The evidence base for this paper is drawn from a variety of sources,*

*from Fondaca's studies on citizenship education and from concrete empirical data.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Citizenship Education, Public Education System, Experiential Learning, Participation, Multicultural Citizenship*

### **1. Civic education in Italy: expectations and formative purposes**

Over the past decade, there has been a wide resurgence of interest in questions about civic education and democratic citizenship. Politicians, decision-makers, journalists, scholars, religious leaders, teachers and educators have all expressed their points of view on the necessity of the development of policies concerning civic and citizenship education. The focus of the debate has been on how (civic) education could contribute to solve several pending issues concerning social coexistence, lack of civic-mindedness and practice in the exercise of duties and responsibilities towards one's community, political disaffection (Fondaca, 2018) and even aggressive behaviours such as bullying or violence among young people (Santerini, 2010).

In other words, as Bobbio noted more than thirty years ago, civic education has been accused of being one of the unfulfilled promises of democracy. Since democracy is realized in the democratic practice of citizens, one of the greatest threats to such a system is represented by the 'uneducated citizen', victim of political apathy, disinterest and responsible for vote trading and abstention (Bobbio, 1984).

More specifically, young people have become the main target of governmental (and non-governmental) educational initiatives aimed at countering the perceived tendency of political and social alienation. Young people, in fact, have been seen as the segment of the population mostly characterized as disconnected from politics, with lower levels of knowledge of their country's history and political systems, lack of awareness of civic values, as well as on duties and obligations to the community, and a lower interest and commitment to participation in public and political life (see e.g. Furnham, Gunther 1987; Park 1995; Pirie, Worcester 2000; Putnam 2000; Curtice, Seyd 2003; Euyoupart 2005; Wattenberg 2007; Joint Research Centre 2018).

In the absence of these virtues or traits the civic educational mission has almost totally been entrusted to the public school system. There are several reasons to emphasize the role of schools. First of all, school is one of the most influential places for socialization. At school, students learn how to live together, and which communication strategies can be used to communicate with each other, but it is also the place where young people acquire knowledge and skills, learn to recognize their own rights, and where they can experience a practical sense of duties and respect for common rules. Secondly, there is evidence that civic

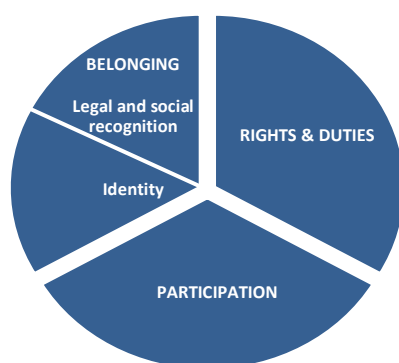
attitudes and values are easier to influence when people are still young. For this reason, school has proved to be a more suitable place than others in educating young citizens (Sherrod *et al.*, 2002). Besides family, friends and local communities, school has therefore been identified as crucial in preparing and supporting young people to acquire the knowledge and attitudes that will lead them to be truly engaged and participate as active, responsible citizens in all decision-making processes that affect their lives (see e.g., Torney-Purta *et al.*, 1999, 2001; Torney-Purta 2002; Corsi, 2004, 2011).

Over the years a relevant number of countries have invested significant resources in civic and citizenship programmes in order to promote understanding of the pillars of democratic governance (Torney-Purta *et al.*, 1999).

The meanings and uses of the terms 'citizenship education' and 'civic education' are widely debated in literature. For the purposes of this article, citizenship is understood as an empirical phenomenon structured in a set of three dimensions: belonging in the political community (considered as legal and social recognition but also as a sense of identification with fellow citizens), rights and duties arising from that belonging, and participation in political and social life. Based on these assumptions' citizenship can be defined as a device: the promotion of inclusion, cohesion and development of the political community are the main functions of the democratic citizenship as a device.

The transformations and developments of citizenship, so determined, can be observed in a number of 'places', namely: in 'constitutional norms' (national law, international treaties, European law etc.); in the 'civic acquis' (i.e. the set of contents of citizenship, based on laws, public policies, administrative acts, judgments, etc., which are much more rapidly changing than constitutional norms); in citizenship practices i.e. the dynamic relations between citizens and the political community, which arise from daily practice (Moro, 2016, 2020).

**FIG. 1.** *The democratic citizenship device*



In democratic societies, civic education is part of a traditional, formal educational framework, aimed at conveying key notions, for example those about the administrative and political organization of a State, about the different forms of government or even about the role of citizens' participation in the context of a democratic system. On the other hand, citizenship education is generally understood as supporting students in becoming informed, active and responsible citizens, capable of effectively and constructively interacting with others, involving not only the teaching and learning of theoretical knowledge, but also practical experiences through activities in the school environment and in wider society (Eurydice, 2017).

The Italian context is characterized by a long tradition of civic education. In Italy civic education has been introduced as a compulsory subject in the national curriculum since 1958 in middle and high schools (students aged 11 to 16) with the aim of interweaving the didactic proposal with the civic one, in order to project students «towards social, juridical and political life, that is to say, towards the principles that rule the community and the forms in which it evolves» (D.P.R. 585, 1958). Since 1958, schools and teachers have been left to decide, almost in complete autonomy, on how to organize and implement the topic of civic education, as well as the methodology and practical strategies to be used. A review of the existing literature reveals that, despite the general agreement on the importance of the topic, civic and citizenship education have achieved mostly modest results, especially in the long run (see e.g., Cavalli. Deiana 1999; Santerini. 2006).

To better understand how and under what conditions civic education was being taught in school, in 2018 Fondaca - Active Citizenship Foundation, conducted a systematic research by analysing the contents in citizenship education programmes and websites of more than 400 Italian upper secondary schools. The results of the study suggest that civic education programmes covered an (excessively) wide and varied range of topics. The approaches to civic education were also found to be various, mainly organized in extra school time, whose effects in terms of learning did not seem to be registered (Fondaca, 2018).

With respect to this analysis, what has changed with the latest legislation on civic education is that Law No. 92/2019 has extended the teaching of this subject to all school cycles (kindergarten, primary and secondary school). The new law also recognizes civic education as 'cross-curricular', so that the principles of civic education are present in all the national curriculum subjects, with a timetable of at least 33 hours per year (1 hour per week). Civic education is subordinated to periodic and final assessments. This framework has been complemented by the Ministry of Education's guidelines, which conceived civic education as divided into three main concepts: knowledge of the Italian Constitution; sustainable development and digital citizenship.

## 2. Civic education beyond crisis: challenges and directions

In the relevant literature there is an increasing recognition that citizenship is a multidimensional, dynamic, controversial, and often contested concept (see e.g., Turner 1993; Crick 2000; Miller 2000; Mackert, Turner 2017; Moro 2020). Citizenship, although portrayed as a natural event (e.g., the process by which a non-citizen of a country may acquire citizenship or nationality of that country is called 'naturalization'), is actually a historical and social product in constant crisis, construction, and evolution. The complex and contested nature of citizenship has led to different ways of approaching it over time. This has also been reflected on how citizenship education has been defined and approached (Kerr, 1999; Torney-Purta *et al.*, 1999).

School is one of the main agents of socialization and a privileged place to observe the transformations of citizenship, providing an exceptional framework in which civic knowledge, attitudes and behaviours can be identified and promoted. In other words, the school is one of the places where not only citizenship education, but citizenship itself, is built. Multicultural and digital citizenship, both as emerging themes and as actual conditions, are two examples of this peculiar phenomenon.

Some scholars have suggested that citizenship is becoming post-national, cosmopolitan, or global (Soysal, 1994; Jacobson, 1996; Norris, 2000). National boundaries have become increasingly porous, for example due to the creation of transnational human rights institutions or even regional institutions such as the European Union (Benhabib, 2004, 2008; Moro, 2020). The advent of globalization, the increase in international migration, the presence of children born or raised in Italy without a document that could testify to their belonging, are all phenomena that demonstrate how the concept of citizenship has undergone important challenges and changes in recent years. In such a society, schools should at the same time embrace and offer a new model of citizenship as a result of the shift from a national level to a more global and inclusive one. This is based on a more fluid concept of identity, promoting social cohesion and developing in students a sense of belonging, as well as duties and obligations to a community and encouraging the active participation of all in society. In other words, citizenship takes into account the multicultural character of the school as much as the school puts effort into instructing young people in civic education from an intercultural perspective.

A similar discourse can be made in respect of 'digital citizenship', to be understood as the ability to participate in the digital environment, which consist in networks powered by information and communication technologies, which allow the exercise of digital activism and political engagement actions (Castells, 1996; Moro, 2013; De Blasio, 2014; Sorice 2014, 2018). It is clear that schools must deal with the process of digitization, accelerated in the course of the global pandemic we are

experiencing. At the same time, school is essential in developing students' digital citizenship skills and in limiting risks due to incorrect or unconstructive use of digital.

### **3. Fondaca's experience with 'democratic citizenship workshops'**

The research conducted by Fondaca shows that the approach to civic education in Italian education system is characterized by the complexity of topics and the variety of activities. On this basis there is a clear need to promote a systematic approach that could be translated into a coherent didactic approach. With this aim in mind, in recent years, Fondaca has designed its *democratic citizenship workshop* which place citizenship, understood as a device consisting of three components, at the centre of its reflection.

The *democratic citizenship workshop* is a theoretical-practical programme that brings student's attention to citizenship in its daily appliances. The programme aims to encourage learning processes that increase civic competencies and promote the development of stances on citizenship, understood as a mechanism for inclusion in society. The methodology used is participatory. A participatory approach favours the use of a range of activities that have normally been excluded from traditional learning methods, such as role-playing, dramatization, problem solving activities etc, which lead students to play an active and influential role in taking decisions that affect their lives. The workshop also aims to fit within the annual teaching programme, with particular reference to civic education in cross-curricular subjects.

Fondaca's *democratic citizenship workshop* consists of five training modules: Introduction to the democratic citizenship device; Belonging to the political community; Rights and Duties; Participation; Formalization of learning

#### *3.1. Introduction to the democratic citizenship device*

As noted in approaching citizenship education, what is needed, first and foremost, is a clear and precise theoretical framework that makes it possible to precisely select the topics and the activities to be proposed and to trace student's outcomes back to a general framework.

In the Fondaca approach the reference framework is represented by the *democratic citizenship device*, which synthesizes all the aspects of the democratic citizenship paradigm and is organized based on a precise thematization of the phenomenon.

The first training module aims to introduce students to the democratic citizenship device and its dimensions, highlighting how citizenship is part of (their) everyday life.

One of the activities of this module in which students are involved is called the 'Citizenship box'. This activity involves the use of a number of objects or images depicting common objects, people or situations that



can be connected to citizenship and its dimensions (flags, dictionaries, banknotes and coins, passports, the text of the Constitution, electoral cards, leaflets or brochures of civic activism associations etc.). Students, divided into teams, are involved in a relay race in which each team member, in order to gain a point, has to reach the place where the objects have been placed, and to select or pick up an object they consider connected to citizenship. At the end of the selection phase, each student is asked to briefly explain why they selected those objects and why they connect them to citizenship. At the end of the game, it can be clarified that each object or image has a link to citizenship.

### *3.2. Belonging to the political community*

As already mentioned, belonging concerns legal and social recognition, i.e., the fact of being formally recognised as a citizen, but also identity, i.e., feeling oneself as a citizen in relation to the community or territory in which one lives, studies or works.

The activities planned by Fondaca in the topic of 'belonging' deal with it with reference to concrete aspects of what students encounter on a daily basis on both a personal level and a social one. Using this method has a dual advantage. On one side, it facilitates students' involvement, who find themselves reflecting on issues that affect them personally. On the other hand, leading students through a path of discovery that starts from an everyday place or situation, allows them to become familiar with the values and principles of the democratic process and to understand the meaning and usefulness of citizenship itself.

It is clear that the development of students' (civic) knowledge is influenced not only by what happens within the school, but also by what happens in the larger society. For this reason, citizenship education should begin in school but should also extend to the local communities, which provide students with meaningful opportunities to be engaged in civic activism.

In the *democratic citizenship workshops* ample space is reserved for visits to one's own neighbourhood or city, to local community institutions and representatives, to civic activism organizations, for mapping activities etc. Collaboration with local entities is always encouraged (third sector associations, non-profit organizations, volunteer groups at local, national and international level, informal networks etc.) in order to strengthen relations and collaboration between the school and the territory.

In relation to identity linked to one's own community and territory, the example of the activity called 'Discovering the neighbourhood' can be given. In this activity, students are accompanied in a visit to the neighbourhood where they live, or where their school is, with the aim of tracing the elements that shape the territorial identity. The observation is guided by the compilation of a template in which students are asked to note the presence and the conditions of some urban elements (e.g. places for socialization, urban furniture, murals, flags, bins for waste

collection, toponymy etc.). When back in the classroom students are called to reconstruct their neighbourhood's identity on the basis of the elements observed.

### *3.3. Rights and duties*

The activities concerning 'rights and duties' within citizenship, aim to make students reflect on their definitions and meanings, to recognize their everyday expressions and to highlight the reciprocal relationship between rights and duties.

With the aim of introducing the first part of the Italian Constitution (on citizen's rights and duties) and associating moments of everyday life with the articles of the Italian Constitution, Fondaca designed the 'Constitution Cards' activity. In this activity two decks of prebuilt cards are used. A first deck containing the text of Articles 13 to 54, in a simplified version, and a second deck containing pictures representing the content of each article. The activity consists of two phases. For the first phase, students are asked to pair the text of each article with its pictures. In the second phase students need to memorize the content of some articles, then they are divided into groups and take part in a 'capture the flag'-like game, whereby students, in order to get a point, have to explain to their peers the content of the article when it is called. A third phase may involve an in-depth analysis of some articles.

### *3.4. Participation*

Participation is the dimension of citizenship primarily associated with the exercise of voting rights, but participation can be also associated with the direct mobilization of citizens in public policies with the aim of promoting or protecting rights, taking care or regenerating urban commons and supporting people in need. The activities proposed aim to make students aware of the presence of active citizenship associations in their area and to stimulate students' participation in tackling real problems.

During *democratic citizenship workshops*, students are usually involved in an activity called 'Micro-planning of civic intervention'. Young people are called to identify a problem, preferably linked to the school context or to 'places' particularly close to their lives, to formulate hypotheses aimed at its resolution, to evaluate the ways in which citizens can act together, to solve the problem identified and thus to contribute to the development of society, and eventually to identify the channels for pursuing them and the third parties to be involved.

In the development of the 'micro-planning' activity, students are helped through the use of some guidelines and tools. However, it is essential that the context and content of the project are chosen by the students themselves, as well as the actions to be carried out, which must be realistic and effective, in balance with reality and with the resources that they have or think they will have, since the project usually ends with its actual implementation.

### *3.5. Formalization of learning*

Fondaca's approach includes a validation of the knowledge acquired and the attitudes assumed by the students with respect to the topics covered. In particular, it can be understood: by knowledge: the increasing or changing in the information acquisition in relation to topics connected to citizenship; by attitudes: the formulation of judgments in relation to notions, people, events and situations related to citizenship.

A fundamental aspect of this approach is the elaboration of outcomes (e.g., texts, artistic or technical products, civic interventions, etc.) that can help students to formalize knowledge and encourage the clarification of individual stances with respect to the issues addressed. As already mentioned, it is not only citizenship that influences citizens, but also the citizens, in their daily actions can shape citizenship. This means that one is a citizen also and above all when they behave as a citizen. To make an example in the development of the 'micro-planning' activity already described, students are called to apply the knowledge they have gained by experiencing real problems and exploring opportunities in their own lives and communities. At the same time, developing a civic activism project allows them to test their skills in the area of civic participation (critical analysis, problem solving, propensity to research and communicate information, discuss common issues, etc.).

On other occasions, to assess the formalization of learning, students were tested on their theoretical knowledge, their attitudes or their participatory inclination toward their community through quizzes or participatory activities. Another example related to this concept may be the creation of 'class rules'. Since a class is identified as a real community when it defines a system of rules and common ways of working, and since one of the aims of the *democratic citizenship workshop* is to allow daily life to be organized in such a way that everyone can be a protagonist, one of the activities often carried out is the definition of 'class rules', in which everyone participates. In a community of practice such as the classroom, the rule, co-constructed and discussed together, becomes understandable as well as shared and requires that everyone take responsibility for respecting it and making others respect it. Any transgression involves a response from the transgressor to the entire group to whom one must explain the reasons for their behaviour (Grion, De Vecchi 2016).

## **4. Lessons learned**

The activities discussed are only a few of more than 30 activities that the Fondaca's working group has designed and tested in different Italian schools. The activities are various, but have some common elements,

which can also be seen as criteria in approaching civic education. These criteria are: to adopt a clear and precise theoretical framework; to focus on topics that are relevant and detectable in student's daily lives; to alternate individual work and work group; to formalize acquired knowledge and attitudes; to incorporate game elements.

## **Conclusion**

In the Italian school system, civic education is declared not only as a cross-curricular subject, but also as one of the fundamental objectives of the school institution as a whole. Although the newest legislation has promoted a rationalization of the subject, to the present day there still seems to be a lack of a systematic approach that could be translated into a coherent teaching method.

In this context, what emerges in particular is the need to improve participatory approaches that arise from the experiences and the contexts of what students encounter on a daily basis on both a personal and a social level. Using this method has a double advantage. On one side, it facilitates students' involvement, who find themselves reflecting on issues that affect them personally. On the other hand, leading students through a path of discovery that start from everyday place or situations, allows them to become familiar with the values and principles of the democratic process and to understand the meaning and usefulness of citizenship itself. In doing so, traditional citizenship education give way to an «education for/through citizenship» (Kerr, 1999; Keating 2009) that aims to equip students with the knowledge, values, and attitudes necessary to effectively participate in the civic sphere, allowing them to be treated as citizens right now, rather than seeing school only as a place of preparation for adulthood. Fondaca's experience reinforces the idea that experiential learning, linked to a precise thematization of citizenship, in which the emphasis is on its daily appliances, could encourage learning processes increasing civic competencies and promoting the development of stances on citizenship.

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## **Evolution of VET systems in Europe between demands for economic recovery and reduction of inequalities**

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## Territorial Dualism and Continuing Vocational Training Supply

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**ABSTRACT:** *The territorial dualism in vocational training is an important component of the wider territorial gap that separates the center-north regions from the southern ones, preventing a convergence of socio-economic indicators that still highlight the presence of inequalities between the different regional contexts. A reflection aimed at identifying possible trajectories and interventions for overcoming the educational dualism that affects our country, and which in times of pandemic emergency risks growing further, cannot but revolve around the concept of human capital, as a set of knowledge, skills and abilities that affect the quality of life, social and working, of each individual. But the enhancement of human capital is also a precondition for the support and optimization of public and private investments necessary for the innovation of the country and to improve its productivity and growth prospects in the medium and long term. The ways in which a different relationship is created between the structuring of the training supply and the growth needs of the production system derive from this territorial dichotomy. Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) has important effects from an economic, political and social point of view. It interacts crucially, strictly speaking, with collective bargaining and industrial relations and, in a broad sense, with other spheres, such as the welfare state and local development. In this institutional context, which requires a structured and continuous dialogue between all the actors involved (State, Regions and Autonomous Provinces, Social Partners), it is of absolute interest to reconstruct the state of the art of the dissemination of training processes in the workplace in a period between the great recession of 2007-09 and the current pandemic. A trend can be outlined, over the last few decades, from a generalist training model to a specialized one, centered on the contingent needs of the company, linked to technological innovations. Above all, it is important to understand to what extent the distribution of training opportunities for employed people is today influenced by a diversified multilevel governance of training policies, characterized by very heterogeneous intervention models from region to region and with a strong differentiation between the center-north and south. This paper aims to analyze the territorial diffusion of continuing vocational training carried out in the companies, with both public and private funding, detected through the latest editions of the INAPP-ISFOL INDACO-CVTS (Survey on knowledge in enterprises) statistical survey. The Surface Measure of Overall Performance (SMOP) methodology will be used for the analysis of territorial gaps*

**KEYWORDS:** *Adult Learning, Continuing Vocational Training, Territorial dualism, Up-Skilling and Re-Skilling, Training systems*

## Introduction

Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) has important effects from an economic, political and social point of view. It interacts in a crucial way, strictly speaking, with collective bargaining and industrial relations and, in a broad sense, with other spheres, such as the welfare state and local development. It is above all important to understand to what extent the distribution of training opportunities for employed people is today influenced by a diversified multilevel governance of training policies, characterized by the use of highly heterogeneous intervention models from region to region and with a marked differentiation between Central and Central North and South of Italy.

The expression 'territorial gaps' in the development of the skills of the employed will mainly refer to the differences between the territories as regards essentially the following aspects: 1) companies with CVT training courses; 2) participation in CVT courses; 3) hours of CVT per employee; 4) CVT costs per employee; 5) access to CVT courses. In addition to focusing on the size class of companies, in this work, the territorial perspective will be privileged in order to show the possible disadvantage, to be ascertained, of some territorial districts compared to others. In fact, the different ways in which a different relationship is created between the structuring of the offer and the growth needs of the production system derive from the territorial dichotomy between the North and the South. Like a typical path-dependent process, a trend can in fact be outlined in recent decades from a more generalist training model to a specialized model centered on the contingent needs of the company, closely linked to technological innovations (Angotti *et al.*, 2021). This model is mainly financed in the internal labour markets of large companies, creating inequalities with small businesses, which must necessarily turn to the regional public offer or managed by the social partners. Finally, the role of the social partners should be relevant in influencing or not the company policies of the CVT and in becoming the spokesperson for a model of training the skills of employees in the direction of a widespread portability of the same and a general empowerment of the spendability of the employees. workers in the labour market.

In this paper we will verify in which districts and regions the continuous training carried out in enterprises is most widespread, with both public and private funding, detected by the INAPP-ISFOL INDACO-Imprese 2019 statistical survey (Survey on knowledge in enterprises). The work will provide a reading of the data at the level of territorial gaps using the Surface Measure of Overall Performance (SMOP) methodology, especially between Central-Northern and Southern Italy in order to provide greater insight at the regional level.

## 1. A reading of the territorial gaps through the INDACO survey and the SMOP analysis

Before analyzing the regional distribution of the phenomenon, it is good to understand how our country is positioned at the European level. With regard to the spread of adult education, the Europe 2020<sup>1</sup> benchmarking indicator on education and training, calculated annually on Eurostat data (Labour force survey, LFS), shows the persistence of an almost stable gap in the medium term compared to other European countries.

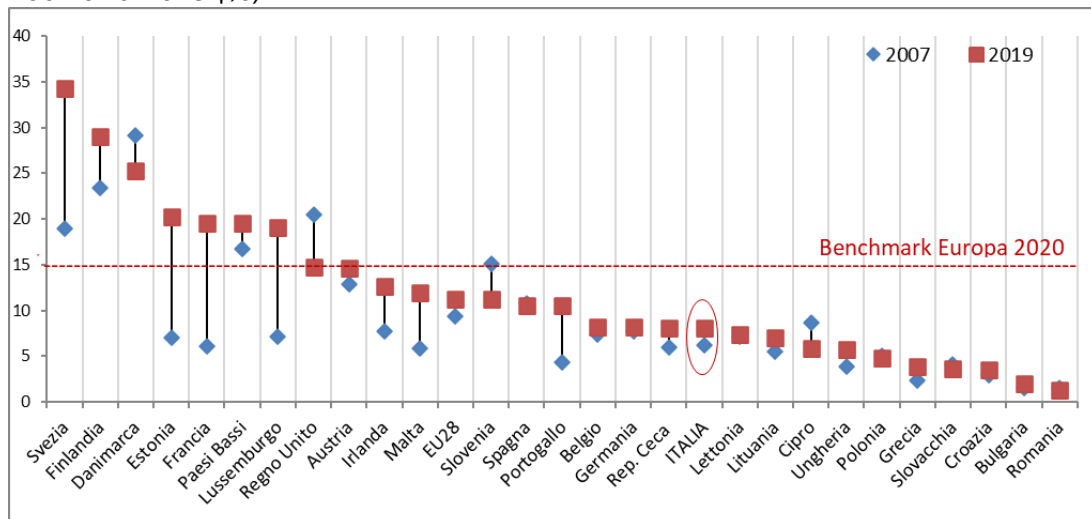
The European picture is very uneven: on average, in 2019, the participation rate stood at 11.3% and there are few countries that in the same year had already reached the target of 15%. Among these, France and Estonia which, in the decade, climbed the European ranking by 12 and 11 positions respectively, far exceeding the benchmark value (France 19.5%, Estonia 20.2%) and reaching the fifth and fourth place; but also Luxembourg, which jumps from thirteenth to seventh in the ranking, with a participation rate of 19.1%. Our country, on the other hand, falls back in the standings by two positions (from sixteenth to eighteenth place). The goal of reaching the 15% threshold for Italy still remains far away, despite the fact that the participation rate of adults in education and training activities has increased, increasing its share by only 2 percentage points and reaching the value of 8%, 1% in 2019.

Through the use of the same statistical source, it is possible to evaluate the distribution of the phenomenon at regional level, with data referring to 2017 (latest Eurostat data available at regional level), when the value of the participation rate in national level was 7.9% (just -0.2 p.p. compared to 2018). With the exception of the case of Sardinia and Piedmont, the gap between North and South is clear: below the national average there are seven southern regions, from Basilicata, with a rate just below the average (7.4%), to Sicily, with a stake of just 5.1%. On the other hand, Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia are close to the European average of 10.9% (respectively, 10.7% and 10.4%).

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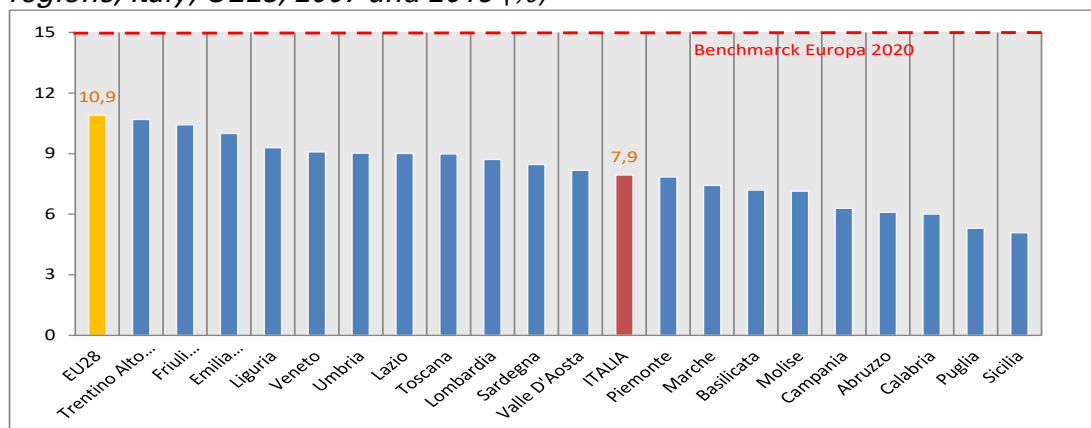
<sup>1</sup> The growth of the level of participation of adults in lifelong learning is one of the objectives set at European level; in particular, by 2020, achieve a benchmark value of 15% of the total adult population aged between 25 and 64 years. Eurostat's Labour Force Survey (in Continuous survey of the workforce) produces the official estimates of the European indicator 'Adult participation in lifelong learning', which is part of the set of indicators defined by the Education and Training Strategy (ET 2020) that Europe has adopted to measure and monitor progress in the field of education and training of European citizens.

**FIG. 1.** Participation rate of the population aged 25-64 in education and training activities in European Union countries compared to the ET 2020 Benchmark. 2007 and 2019 (%)



Source: INAPP processing on Eurostat LFS data

**FIG. 2.** Participation rate of the population aged 25-64 in education and training activities in Italian regions compared to the ET 2020 Benchmark. Italian regions, Italy, UE28, 2007 and 2019 (%)



Source: INAPP processing of ISTAT data, Continuous Labour Force Survey (RCFL)

The persistence of a low rate of educational participation of adults in Italy therefore leads to consider the weight that a low internal cohesion between the regions contributes to fuel the gap with respect to Europe.

To better evaluate this hypothesis, it is advisable to go back to analyzing the phenomenon of the diffusion of training within the Italian production system, once again with the help of European data and from a perspective of comparative analysis between countries. The data processed are those of the third and fifth edition of the CVTS (Continuing Vocational Training Survey), coordinated by Eurostat and carried out at national level by the statistical institutes of the EU Member States (for Italy, by ISTAT in collaboration with ISFOL before and now INAPP), relating to industrial and service companies with at least ten employees. Subsequently the analysis will concern the Italian regional context through the analysis of the data collected from the

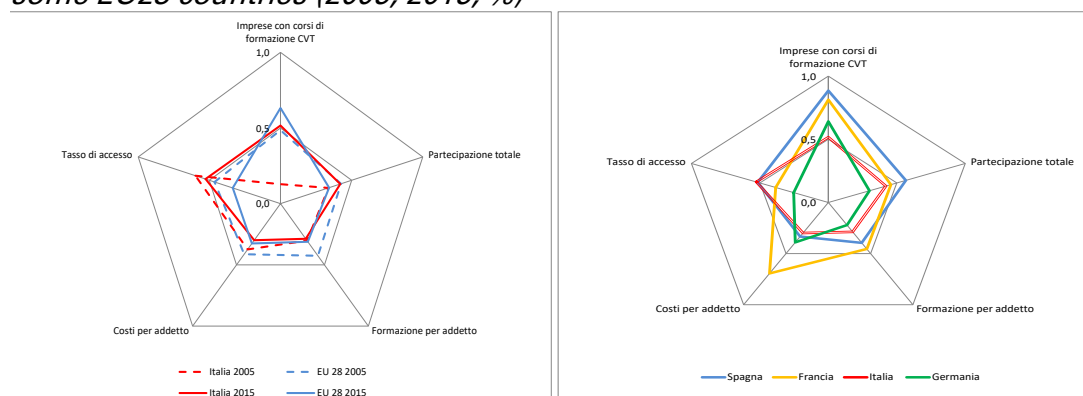
second edition of the INDACO-Enterprises survey (Survey on knowledge in companies), given the full comparability with the CVTS survey, being methodologically harmonized with it (Angotti, 2013).

From 2005 to 2015, the incidence of training companies in non-formal activities increased in almost all European countries, with an average of +12.3 percentage points. Italy, with Spain and Belgium, shows one of the highest growth rates in Europe, going from 26.8% in 2005 to 52.3% in 2015. Despite this important progress, in the European ranking it improves by only 5 positions, reaching eighteenth place and remaining below average. On the contrary, Spain and Belgium climb the rankings reaching the fourth and fifth place, with an advancement of 13 and 9 positions respectively. The Italian production system, despite having finally increased awareness of the importance of stable and systematic investments in the skills of the employed, confirms a serious delay at European level, in a context in which continuing education is now a widespread and stable phenomenon.

To have a multidimensional view of the phenomenon, it was decided to summarize Italy's position in the European context through the SMOP method (Surface Measure of Overall Performance), considering the best performance among the 28 EU countries as a benchmark. The set of indicators chosen and subsequently standardized in order to be able to evaluate the Italian performance within the European productive fabric, are the following: 1) Companies with CVT training courses; 2) Total participation in CVT courses; 3) Hours of CVT per employee; 4) CVT costs per employee; 5) Access to CVT courses.

The Italian value of the synthetic indicator thus calculated (which can vary from a minimum value of zero to a maximum of 1, thus indicating the worst or best performance) in 2015 is equal to 0.1, exactly like the average European countries, while the best performing countries are Luxembourg and the Czech Republic, with an index of 0.4 and 0.3 respectively.

**FIG. 3.** Performance of Italy in the European benchmark. Comparison between some EU28 countries (2005, 2015; %)



Source: INAPP processing on Eurostat CVTS-3, CVTS-5 data

In particular, in the first radar chart (Figure 3), which shows the standardized values of the indicators, it is noted that on average over the decade, against an increase in the share of companies offering training courses, there is a decline of all other indicators. In line with the European average, even in Italy there is a slight decrease in both costs and access and a static nature in relation to the duration indicator; on the other hand, however, there is an improvement both in terms of the incidence of companies that have carried out training courses, but also in terms of the rate of participation in the courses. These improvements, however, do not match the progress made by other European competitors and indeed denote a delay (which could be quantified in about ten years) of our country compared to the European average. The comparison with Germany, Spain and France confirms the backward position of Italy also with respect to the main reference countries, in particular with respect to the number of companies engaged in the implementation of training activities and the economic dimension of the investment, while Italy shows a better position of Germany with respect to the indicators of participation and intensity and greater attention to the principle of inclusion, a primacy it shares with Spain.

Wanting to summarize regional trends in the Italian context, the analysis continues, again through the use of the SMOP methodology, setting the best Italian performance as a benchmark, standardizing the five CVT key indicators used previously and evaluating the performance of the various regions<sup>2</sup>. For this purpose, the data of the second edition of INDACO-Imprese are used, which detected the same CVTS indicators for 2018 on the basis of a harmonized methodology<sup>3</sup>. According to INDACO data, the key indicators differ slightly from what was detected in 2015 with CVTS-5: only the commitment of Italian companies in CVT training courses is greater (equal to 57.5%), training per employee is stable (9.6 hours), costs per employee almost halved (264.4).

**TAB. 1.** Comparison between key indicators of corporate training in INDACO 2019, CVTS-5 (Years 2015, 2018, %)

Indagini	Imprese con corsi di formazione CVT	Partecipazione totale	Ore formazione per addetto	Costi per addetto	Tasso di accesso
CVTS-5	52,3	45,9	9,6	544,0	60,3
INDACO 2019	57,5	43,2	9,6	264,4	57,6
INDACO 2019 (PMI con 6-249 addetti)	57,3	36,8	6,9	205,8	54,5

Source: INAPP processing on INDACO 2019 data (Survey on knowledge in companies) and Eurostat CVTS-5

<sup>2</sup> Molise and Valle d'Aosta were excluded from the analysis due to the low response rate.

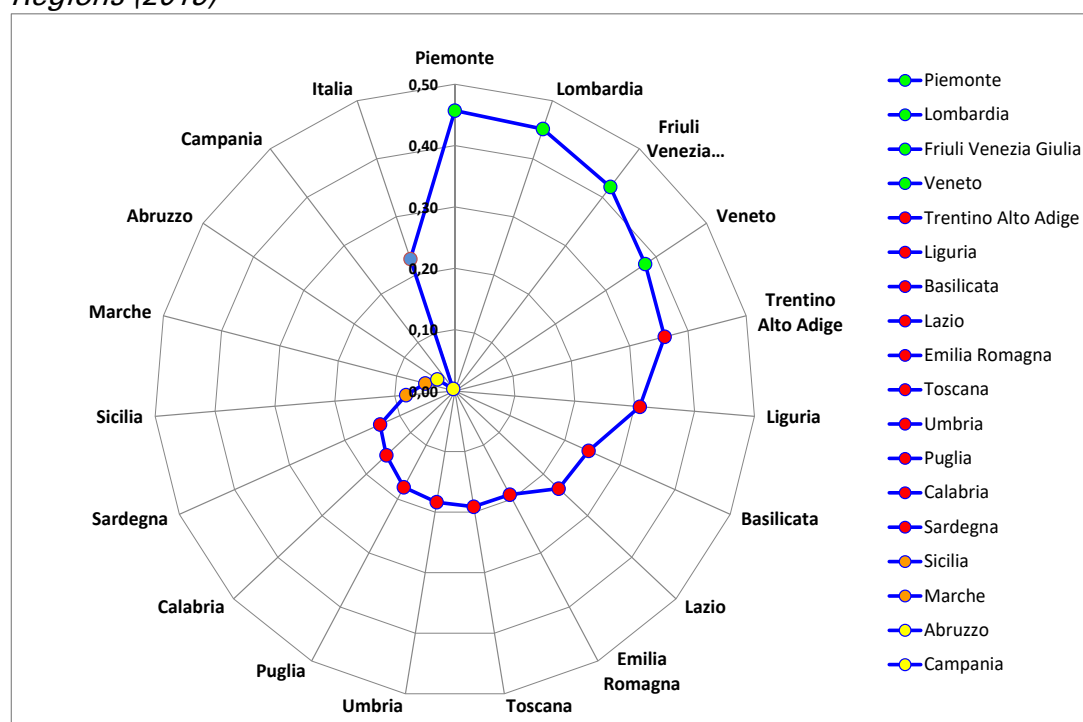
<sup>3</sup> The analysis was focused on small and medium-sized enterprises, with company staff between 6 and 249 employees, thus excluding large companies, to reduce the consequences of multi-location.



Over 88% of companies are SMEs, half of which operate in the service sectors. SMEs are distributed throughout the country, mainly occupying the entire northern area (46%), while 31% are present in the South and 23% in Central Italy.

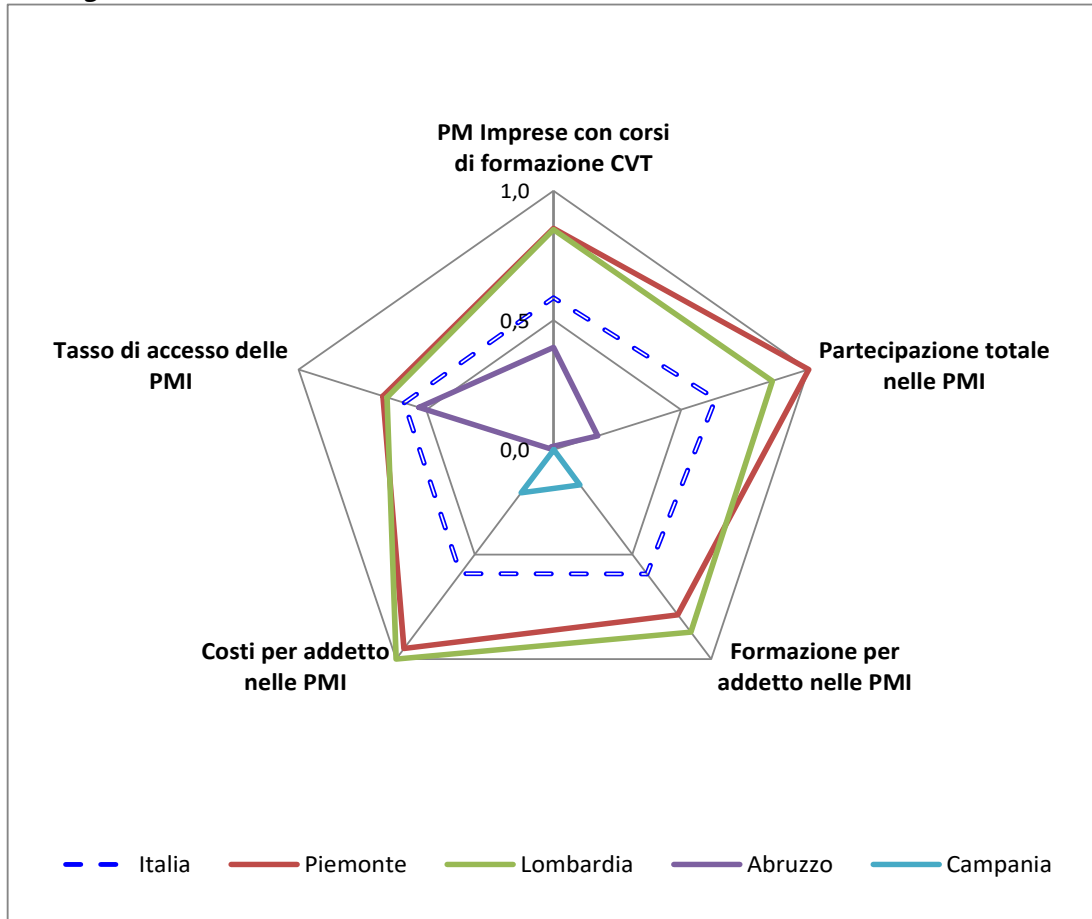
Well over half (57.3%) of SMEs carried out course-type training activities, with a cost per employee of approximately 206 euros. Although they reach an average access rate of 54.5%, the total participation in non-formal training is 37% and the time allocated to it is 7 hours per employee. The synthetic index, which ranks Piedmont and Lombardy at the top (with an index equal to 0.5), and Campania and Abruzzo at the bottom (with SMOP equal to zero), identifies an interesting performance from Basilicata and a little positive one from Marche (Fig. 4).

**FIG. 4-5.** SMOP index on non-formal training of Italian SMEs. Italy and Italian Regions (2019)



Lombardy, but have a higher participation rate. On the other hand, Abruzzo companies contrast, to an average share in the access rate (0.5) and another almost similar incidence, a low participation rate and a level of expenditure and volume equal to the minimum, while Campania behaves exactly the opposite, with considerably lesser incidences.

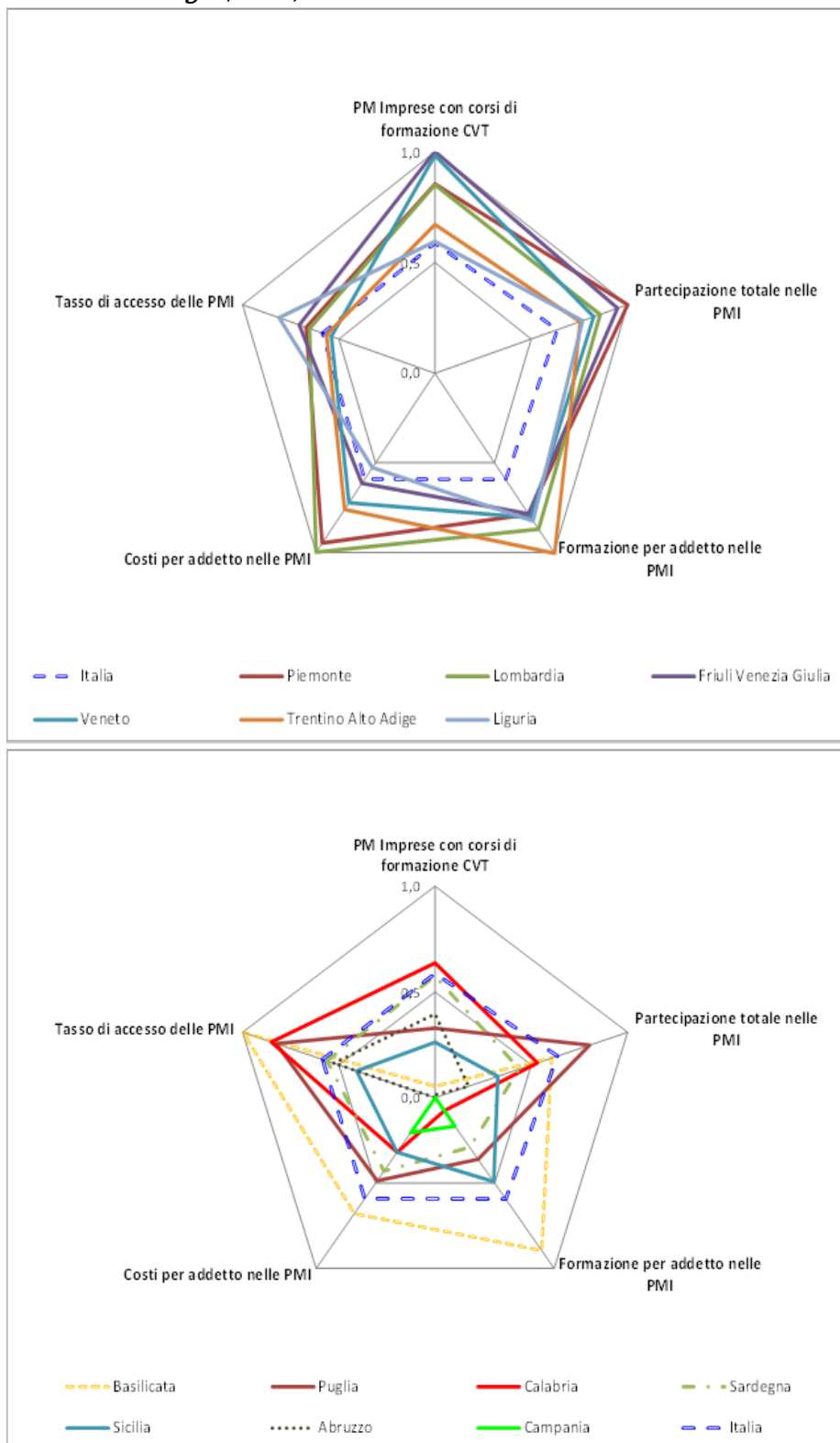
**FIG. 5.** Comparison of the best and worst performing regions and the national average (2018)



Source: INAPP processing on INDACO 2019 data (Survey on knowledge in companies)

Finally, a comparison is first presented between the regions with the best performance and the national average (Fig. 8) and then the performances relative to the seven southern regions (Fig. 9). The comparison between the two SMOPs highlights the main shortcomings found in the southern regions, with some interesting performances, including that of SMEs operating in Basilicata (which however shows a very low incidence), Calabria and Puglia, in a general panorama that shows a situation of strong polarization between, on the one hand, what can be identified as a highly performing territorial model and, on the other, a situation of evident fragmentation not attributable to a single model.

**FIG. 8-9.** Comparison between the best performing regions and the national average and between the performances of the southern regions and the national average (2018)



Source: INAPP processing on INDACO 2019 data (Survey on knowledge in companies)

## Conclusions

The analysis carried out so far confirms a gap between the various territorial districts of the country, i.e., the lower recourse to training by companies with registered offices in the southern and island regions (62.1% against 70% in the North-West and in North-East). How does this general dynamic, at the country level, translate into regional markets? It is not easy to answer this question as the data made available by INDACO 2019 are related only to the district level, so it is possible to make only a comparison between the South and the other districts or the total of Italy. From the reading of these data, it seems that the South, to some extent, in terms of skills training, records values that are substantially similar to those of small and very small businesses (Angotti *et al.*, 2021). This is possible because a majority of these companies may be located there, or economic sectors less inclined to internationalization or export, and many other reasons subject to further investigation, to be carried out in future works. As far as we are concerned here, however, the data remains that of a more traditional training of skills and with a lower level of generality and ABSTRACTness.

In conclusion, the benchmark analysis carried out with the SMOP methodology, on some of the key indicators of continuing training (companies with CVT training courses; total participation in CVT courses; CVT hours per employee; CVT costs per employee; access CVT courses), starting from the European context to arrive at the regional one, also confirms a lower recourse to continuous training by southern companies, with some exceptions relating to a few single indicators. Such a framework makes the need for an extensive policy intervention by the national legislator increasingly unavoidable, in order to promote the enhancement of the development of training practices in small and medium-sized enterprises operating in the regions of Southern Italy. The main objective of this intervention should be to transform the company into a truly innovative environment that allows the development of those skills necessary for greater competitiveness of SMEs in national and international markets, thus promoting their economic growth, with undoubted consequences. also related to territorial rebalancing.

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# Analysis of Experiences and Data to Improve and Rethink the Italian Modelling of Educational and Training Concepts and Practices

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**ABSTRACT:** *The economic crisis characterized the last decade and the negative effects of the current pandemic are recently adding obstacles to the profound segmentation of the Italian labour market. This background contributes to create an unfavourable context for employability, for needy segments of the population, young people and more mature groups. On one side, young people find themselves forced to struggle in a situation of low economic growth, a reduction in public spending and a lack of investments addressed directly to them. Also, future graduates will suffer from a deficit linked to the lower skills acquired due to the pandemic, in the last two school/academic years, which forced education and VET systems to modify and too often to reduce the contents provided in routine pathways. On the other side, more mature workers are faced with an increasingly competitive labour market, the obsolescence of their skills and qualifications and the reduction of jobs availability due to the closure of many enterprises in several sectors after the pandemic. Thus, the situation of the labour market in Italy remains very complicated. The indicators confirm long-established negative trends (i.e., gender gap, regional differences, skills and qualifications mismatch), which testify how deeply the economic system is unable to make the most of human capital. Part of the problem regards VET systems and their inadequate link with labour market requirements. Considering that VET systems have had solid success in some realities (Japan, Singapore and Finland), affected by similar global megatrends, we intend to collect key aspects which may be ideal to improve and rethink the Italian modelling of vet concepts and practices.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Skills, Qualifications, (T)VET, School-to-Work Transition, Social Inclusion.*

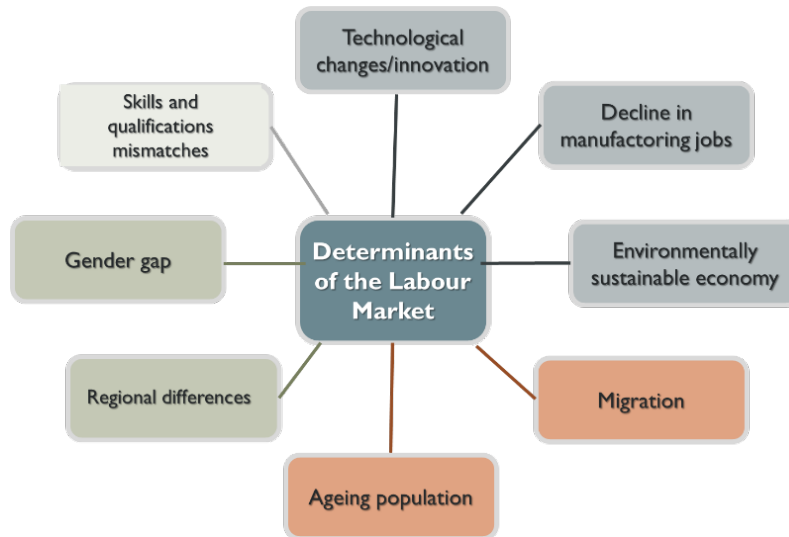
## Introduction

The economic crisis of the last decade and the negative effects of the current pandemic have recently added obstacles to the long-established segmentation of the Italian Labour Market. This background contributes to create an unfavourable context for employability, in particular for needy segments of the population, such as: young people (trying to

enter the Labour Market) and more mature groups (trying to maintain their presence or progress their career pathways).

Thus, the situation of employability in Italy remains very complicated. The indicators confirm long-established negative trends (i.e., gender gap, regional differences, skills and qualifications mismatches, ageing, migration), which testify how deeply the economic system is unable to make the most of human capital. Besides there are many determining factors which affect Labour Markets, such as technological changes leading to the decline of traditional/manufacturing jobs, digital innovation, climate modifications and demographic dynamics.

**FIG. 1.** *Determinants of the Labour Markets*



Moreover, digitalization and automation will increase the demand for technical skills which can facilitate innovation in those occupations or tasks connected to Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics – STEM (Gonzalez, Kuenzi, 2012) in an environmentally sustainable economy. In addition, vocational skills will be required to obtain and maintain (new/renovated) jobs.

New models of education and training practices will be key factors of the development of economic growth for different groups of the population and must become an integral part of education and training systems in order to extend the acquisition of new competences and skills in all learning contexts (Bonacci, 2020).

Part of the problem regards Education and VET (Vocational Education and Training) systems and their inadequate link with labour market requirements.

In fact, on one side, young people find themselves forced to struggle in a situation of low economic growth, a reduction in public spending and a lack of investments addressed directly to them. Also, future graduates will suffer from a deficit linked to the lower skills acquired due to the pandemic, in the last two school/academic years, which forced education and VET systems to modify (and too often to reduce)



the contents provided in routine pathways. The larger use of Distance Learning, episodes of school interruptions – for lockdown periods – or individual quarantines, have become a massive portion of the learning pathways.

On the other side, demographic changes affect Labour Market trends. More mature labour force is faced with increasingly competitive skills requirements, the obsolescence of their skills and qualifications (if not updated) and the reduction of jobs availability due to the closure of many enterprises in several sectors (Tourism, Manufacturing, Automotive, Cinema, etc) because of the pandemic. The workforce is obliged to constantly upgrade its digital and technology-related skills to be able to remain longer in the labour market (ILO, 2018).

The contribution of this paper is twofold: analysing comparatively the school-to-work transition<sup>4</sup> (first section); and collecting key successful experiences concerning VET systems, which could be useful in the Italian context, also for the reintegration of mature workforce into the labour market (second section).

## 1. The skills system and the transition trends

Many strategies will be necessary to adapt Education, VET and Labour Market systems to the new-born needs, such as, new technologies, digital interconnections, more intense opening of international markets, greater European (post Brexit) integration, but also rethink the modelling of concepts and practices.

The objective is to start from understanding macro strategies to boost job creation, expand labour market participation and develop the skilled workforce for the future (required workforce – skills demand), through specific innovations in Education and VET systems which will support these systems in playing their main role: the skills development (potential workforce – skills supply).

Reaching this main purpose might take to the successful matching between skills required and available jobs.

In this section some key indicators derived from the European Skills Index (ESI) developed by CEDEFOP<sup>5</sup> will be analysed. The Index has been developed for the first time in 2018 drawn on annual data till 2016 and a second round has been done in 2020 (data up to 2018). In this

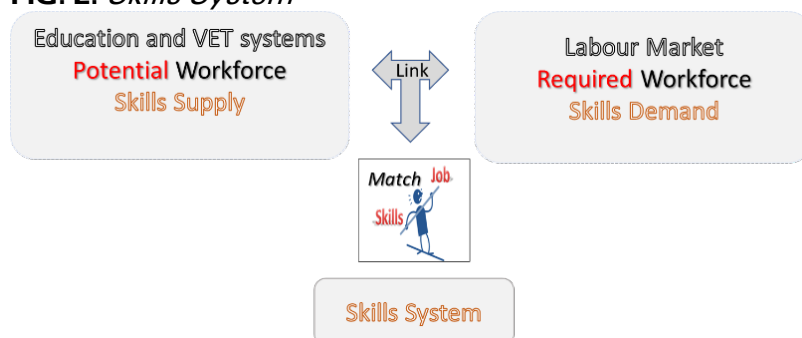
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<sup>4</sup> The process of *transition* may be defined as: the passage of a young person (aged 15 to 29 years) from the end of schooling to the first regular or satisfactory job. Regular employment is defined in terms of duration of contract or expected length of tenure. The contrary is temporary employment, or employment of limited duration. Satisfactory employment is a subjective concept, based on the self-assessment of the job-holder. (ILO, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Web site: <https://www.CEDEFOP.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-visualisations/european-skills-index>

paper data from 2020 are analysed, showing relevant comparisons with the previous year 2018 when significant.

**FIG. 2. Skills System**



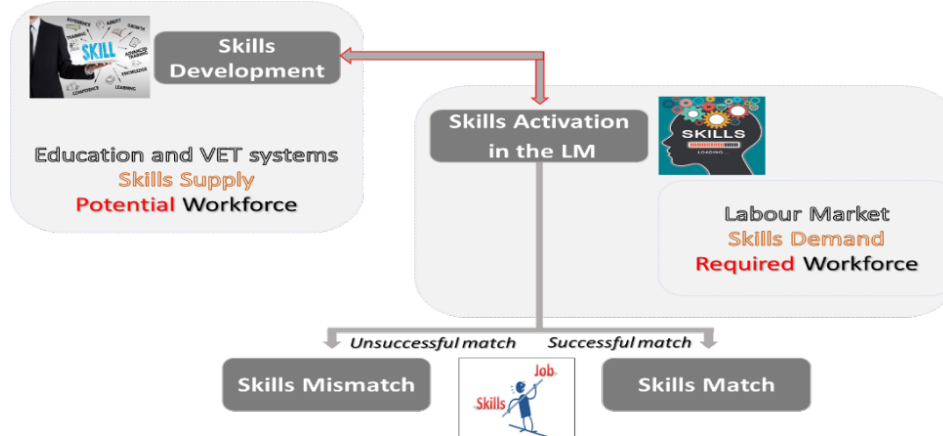
ESI is a composite index, which takes into consideration several set of process components; it measures the different aspects of the skills system of EU member countries (respect to 2020 EU 27+4 countries: Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the UK), matching this system to Education and VET systems and Labour Market requirements.

Even though the Index has a certain level of uncertainty in terms of effectiveness of the indicators chosen, the comparison of scores across dimensions and countries gives policy-makers valuable aspects of good (or poor) cases of matching practices. The interesting characteristic of the Index is that it is able to track the process of a skills system, having as a basis the phases of development, activation and matching of skills.

Within this skills system, on one side of the process there are the Education and VET systems which are in charge of supplying (*potential*) workforce with adequate knowledge, skills and competences (*skills development*). The process of skills development is linked to the Labour Market requirements, the enterprises' demand of specific (technical, vocational, innovative, pioneering ...) skills for their labour force (*required* workforce), in order to face challenges and being competitive in the changing digital markets.

In this sense, skills development influences the way skills are activated (skills activation) in the labour market, thus the participation of different groups of the population to employment supplies, but also the transition pathways (school-to-work, university-to-work) from education and VET systems to employment remain relevant for a successful integration of young people in the labour market. The process could also be the other way round, as in some cases people, by investing in their own qualifications and/or competences, intend to increase the likelihood of achieving employment opportunities (matching skills requirements). If skills are developed and activated effectively, there is a high degree of skills utilisation (*skills matching*) a signal of high performance of the skills system.

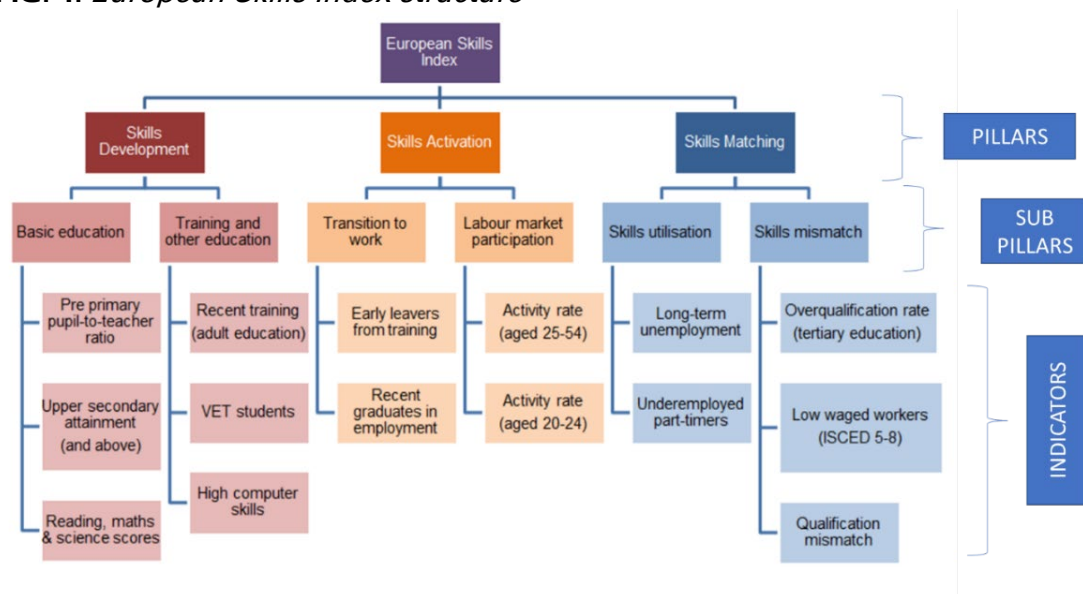
**FIG. 3.** *The process of a skills system*



In this process, Education and VET systems need to interact with the labour market and envisage skills requirements, which are exposed to several changing dynamics, following technological/digital, environmental, demographic and global revolutions.

By looking at changes in the occupational structures as well as educational attainments, many elements should be taken on board in order to improve and rethink models, concepts and practices. The analysis of the components of the European Skills Index (ESI) highlights different aspects of the skills system of EU member countries, and the positioning of specific contexts in order to understand strengths and weaknesses compared to other EU countries. Concretely, ESI index with its structure made up of three pillars and six sub-pillars (containing 15 indicators<sup>6</sup>), covers the above-described process of a skills system.

**FIG. 4.** *European Skills Index structure*

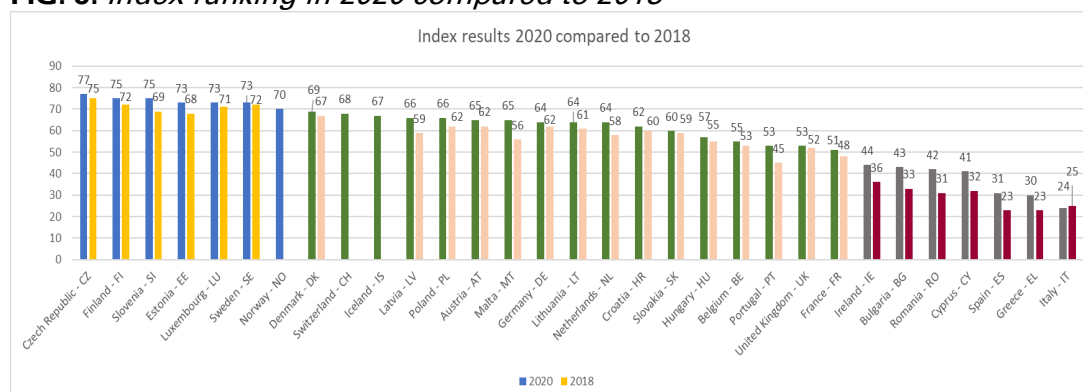


Source: European Skills Index (2020), CEDEFOP

<sup>6</sup> Regarding the development, the characteristics and the methodology used, see the 2018 European Skills Index Technical report (CEDEFOP, 2018) and the 2020 European Skills Index Technical report (CEDEFOP, 2020).

The Index level results (Figure 5) provides an overall picture of the performance of the different skills systems in 2020, compared to 2018.

**FIG. 5. Index ranking in 2020 compared to 2018**



(\*) Sorted from highest score to lowest. Source: Author's elaboration of European Skills Index (2020 and 2018) data.

Analysing data, three clusters of countries may be identified:

- Leader countries: seven top performers with score equal and above 70
- Middle achiever countries: a large group of countries with scores 69-51
- Low achiever countries: seven low performers with scores equal and below 50

In 2020 Czech Republic is ranked highest, while Italy is ranked lowest among 31 participating countries. For three countries (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) 2020 was the first data-collecting year.

Almost all countries have improved their performances from the first round to the second one, but Italy. Its positioning has worsened respect to 2018 when it was the third lowest (25), as Spain and Greece obtained 23 points. In 2020 Italy, overcome by Greece and Spain, descended to the last position.

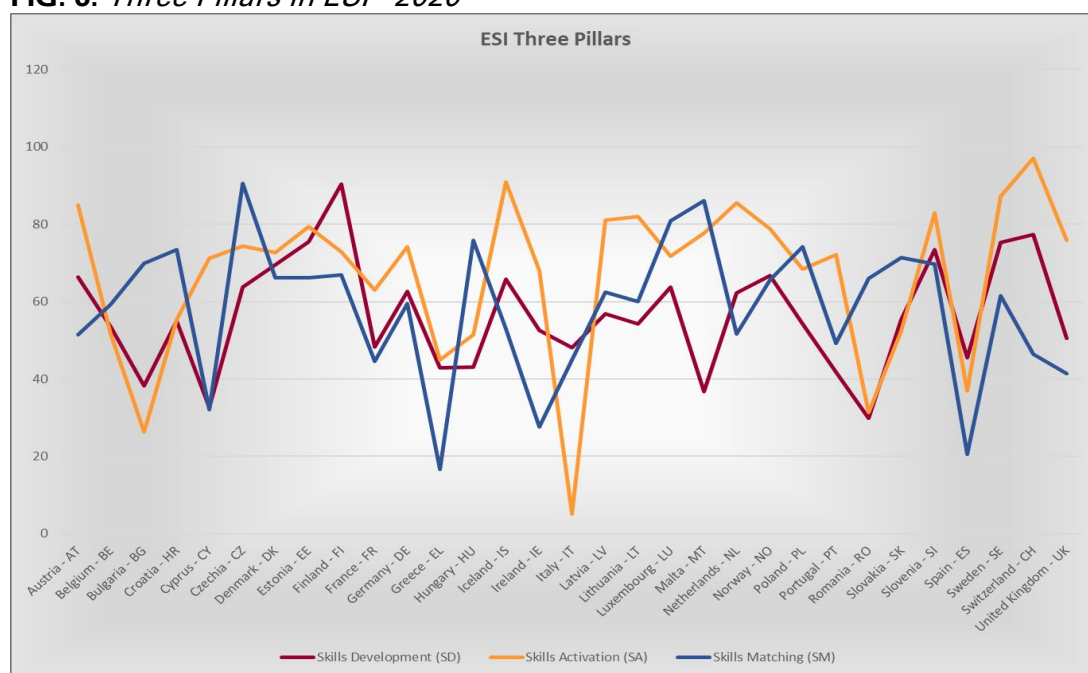
To investigate the phenomena, it is significant to understand details of the different pillars and sub-pillars and detect weaknesses of those low performing systems (such as Italy) and gather information from those high performing countries (such as Czech Republic and Finland for instance). In fact, as highlighted in the Figure below the performance of Italy is never excellent within the three Pillars (confirming results obtained in 2018 after all), and the lowest ranking appear to be Skills Activation.

Overall, we note that no countries achieved more than the top performing score (70 points) in all three pillars, only 8 countries in two pillars (CZ, EE, FI, LU, MT, SI, SE, CH) and 14 countries in one pillar (HR, CY, DK, DE, HU, IS, LV, LT, NL, NO, PL, PT, SK, UK). The remaining 9 countries never reached 70 points (AT, BE, BG, FR, EL, IE, IT, RO, ES).

In the distribution of the Skills Development (SD) pillar (Figure 7) for 2020, the leader country is Finland (90), followed (at a distance,

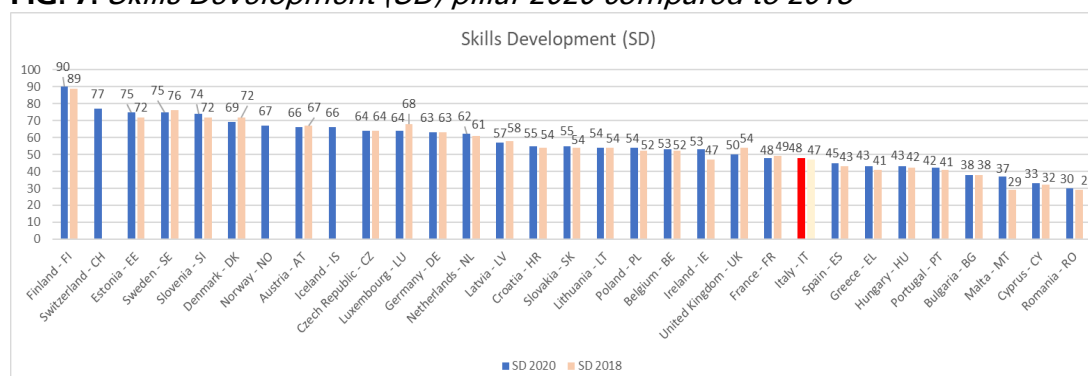
however) by: Switzerland (77), Estonia and Sweden (75) and Slovenia (74).

**FIG. 6. Three Pillars in ESI - 2020**



Source: Author's elaboration of European Skills Index (2020) data.

**FIG. 7. Skills Development (SD) pillar 2020 compared to 2018**



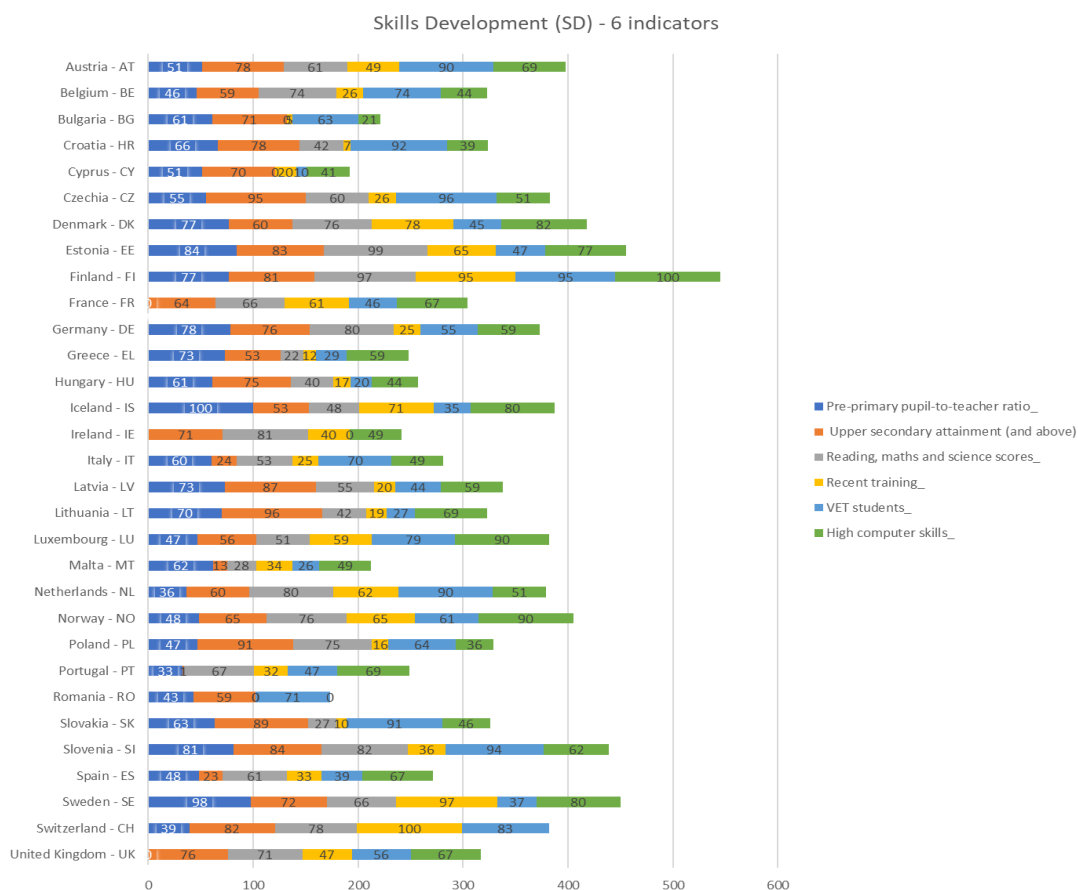
(\*) Sorted from highest score to lowest. Source: Author's elaboration of European Skills Index (2020 and 2018) data.

Compared to the previous round (2018), results are confirmed in most cases. Only few countries achieved scores significantly lower (more than 1 point) than the first round, such as: Denmark, Luxemburg and United Kingdom.

In 2020 Italy scores just below 50 (48) demonstrating difficulties in the skills development and confirming the positioning of the previous round. The results of participating countries in the 6 indicators, developed in this pillar (Figure 8), are quite diverse. The performances are better for Upper secondary attainment (and above): in which 18 countries reached more than 70; and quite low for Recent training (only 5 countries obtained more than 70, one of which – Switzerland –

reached 100); and High computer skills (7 countries obtained more than 70, one of which – Finland – reached 100).

**FIG. 8. Indicators of Skills Development (SD) 2020**



Source: Author's elaboration of European Skills Index (2020) data.

Only Finland achieved in all the 6 indicators a score over 70. Other countries, such as Switzerland, Norway, Estonia performed excellently in some indicators, but lower in others.

Italy reached a good performance only in one indicator (VET students), showing that VET systems are quite well developed, while three indicators are very weak, such as: Upper secondary attainment (and above); Recent training; High computer skills. Thus, weaknesses mainly regard:

- people (15-64) with education attainment levels at least at upper secondary education (ISCED level 3-8);
- people aged 25-64 who receiving formal or non-formal education and training;
- the level of computer skills, which still remains inadequate in Italy.

Essentially, data show that Finland has a valuable education and VET system which is represented here with scores much higher than the other countries (13 points difference with the second ranked country, Switzerland).

Signals outside data suggest that digital skills and Continuing Education Vocational and Training (CVET) are crucial for working-age population, their possibility to be competitive, thus being employable and reducing mismatches between skills possessed and those required by the LM.

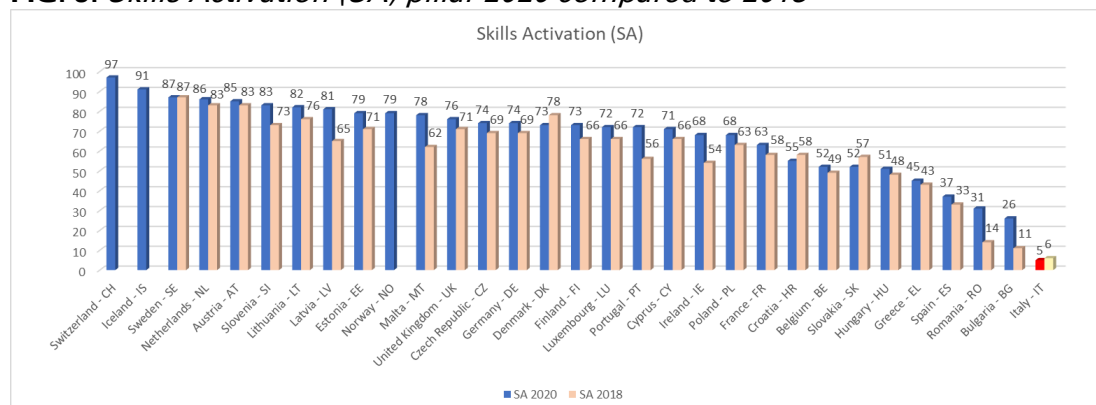
New pathways and outreach actions for new developments are required especially for young people who encounter obstacles when trying to enter the Labour Market, mainly because they usually lack appropriate working experiences.

A first determinant of school-to-work transition is the availability of skills as demanded by the Labour Market. When this dimension is not widely fulfilled data suggest gaps in the cognitive, digital, and technical skills of young people. There is also evidence of skills mismatches, comprising both over- and under-qualification connected to jobs requirements. Some causes of skills gaps and qualifications mismatches include: (a) poor skills foundations in basic and general education; (b) barriers to accessing skills development opportunities in terms of entry requirements; (c) lack of alternative education and/or VET pathways; (d) poor quality of skills development systems; (e) lack of prestige of T(VET) pathways; (f) lack of information and awareness of Labour Market's needs, thus misaligned study choices.

In this context great attention should be given to transition processes, which are detected in the Skills Activation (SA) Pillar.

The Figure below shows the distribution of the Skills Activation (SA) pillar 2020, compared to 2018.

**FIG. 9. Skills Activation (SA) pillar 2020 compared to 2018**



(\*) Sorted from highest score to lowest. Source: Author's elaboration of European Skills Index (2020 and 2018) data.

The first leader countries Switzerland (97) and Iceland (91) were not included in the first round. These two countries are followed by Sweden which was the best performer in 2018 with the same score achieved in 2018 (87).

As shown by the graph above, most countries have highly improved their scoring from last round; few cases worsened, e.g., Croatia, Denmark and Slovenia.



Italy too worsened (1 point less) its performance, which was also very low in 2018, thus descending to the last position, because other countries such as Spain and Greece improved their performance in 2020 in the in the meantime.

Details of the 4 indicators developed in this pillar (Figure 10) show that almost all countries had good performances (over 70) in all indicators, with cases of excellence (countries reaching 100). 6 countries (Austria, Iceland, Latvia, Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland) obtained in all the 6 indicators scores over 70, in some cases reaching very high performances.

Within SA pillar Italy needs to improve all components.

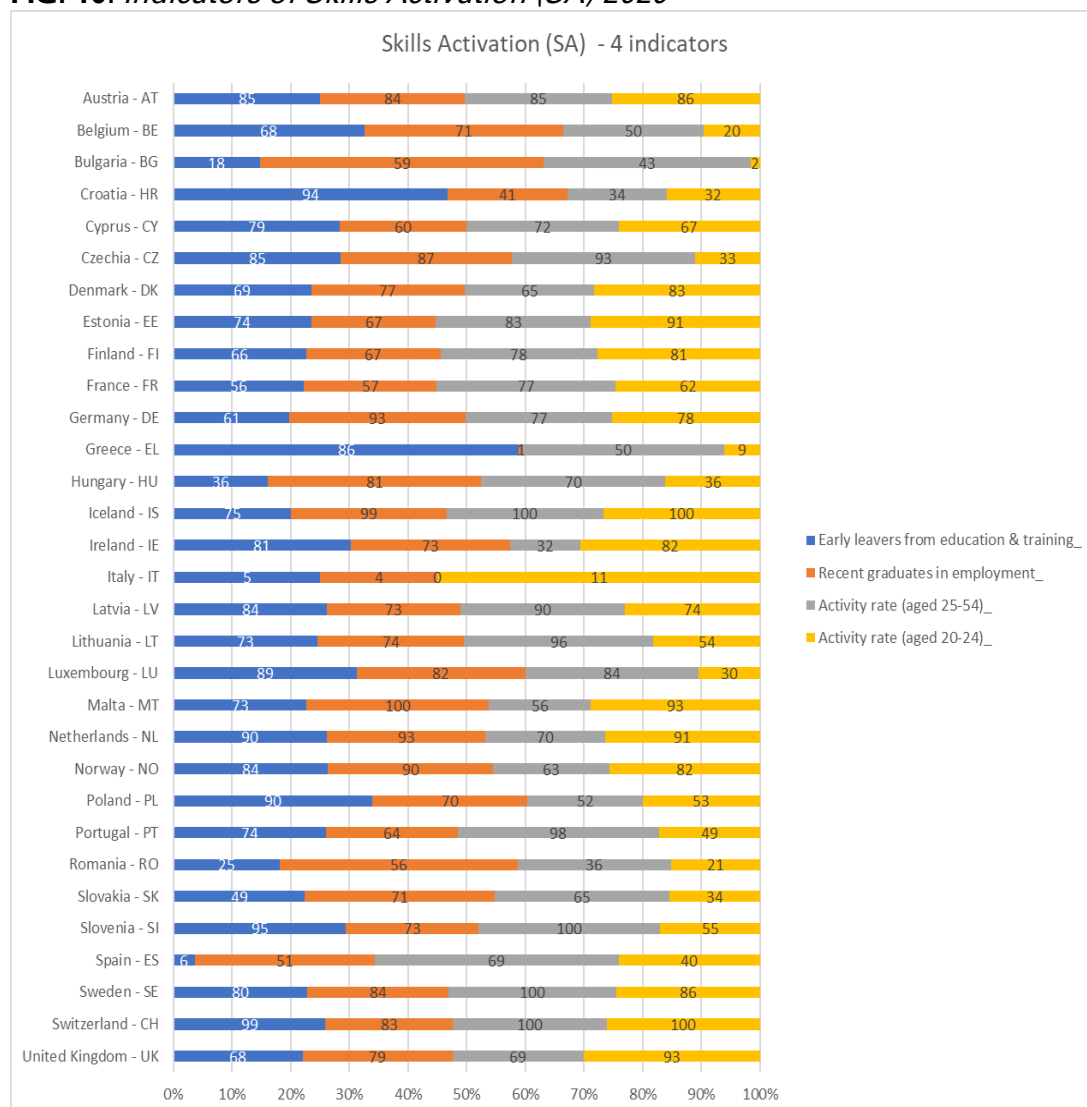
The Italian undesirable scenario impacts negatively on the individuals (young people) concerned and on the economy and society as a whole, both in the short and long term. Young people entering labour market face significant challenges, as they are they less likely (than adult workers) to demonstrate work experience, besides they are less experienced in job search methods and often lack interview and presentation skills.

A second determinant of school-to-work transition is made up of components affecting young people's search to enter the Labour Market. Job search process can be time-long, hard and discouraging. Data from school-to-work transition surveys (e.g.: OECD, ILO, UNICEF) indicate a high share of labour market inactivity among young people (and even more on women). A significant number never enter the workforce after completing their education and despite aspirations to do so. Factors that affect young people in obtaining adequate and decent jobs is their lack of work experience, informal recruitment practices of companies (both big enterprises and SMEs), lack of information and networks connecting jobs demand/supply, inadequate employment services, reduction in public spending and a lack of investments addressed directly to them.

In this sense, policies supporting youth transition from school (or university) to employment are the basis for new developments (UNICEF, 2019).

Skills activations component plays a central role between the development and the effectively matching of skills. If skills are well developed and negatively activated, this situation influence the effectiveness of matching between supply and demand of skills and cases of skills mismatch may be too persistent in the Labour Market. When even the skills development component is not well established the system is very poor. In a poor system a series of phenomena may happen such as: skills mismatches, under-utilisation of skills, under-skilling and/or skills obsolescence.



**FIG. 10: Indicators of Skills Activation (SA) 2020**

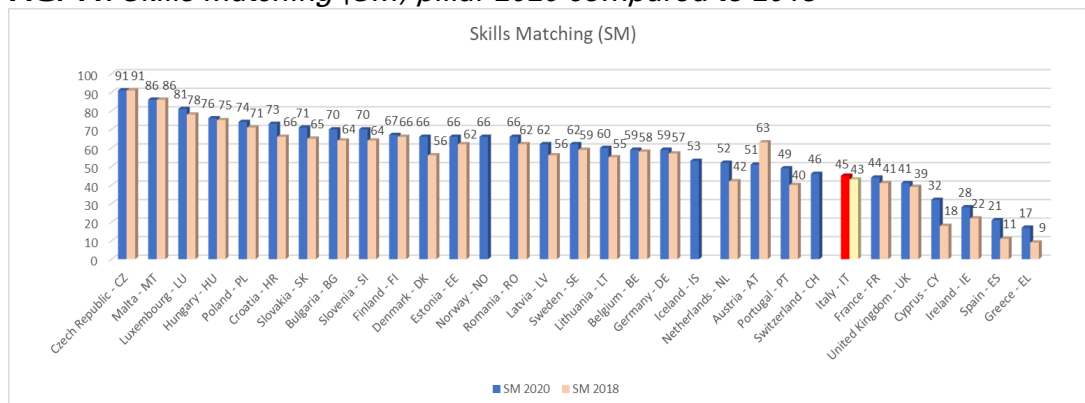
Source: Author's elaboration of European Skills Index (2020) data.

Skills Matching (SM) is also detected in the ESI Index as a Third pillar. In the following Figure the distribution of the country within this pillar in 2020, compared to 2018.

Leader countries are Czech Republic (91) and Malta (86), both countries confirmed their performances respect to the previous round.

Overall, all countries improved their performances, and Cyprus gained 14 points from the previous SA year. Austria is the only country decreasing in this round (-12 points).

Italy has slightly improved (+2 points), but the performance is still very low (45), confirming the national difficulties in terms of long-term unemployment rate, the ineffective use of skills having a high percentage of overqualified people (tertiary education) working in lower skilled jobs, and underqualified workers who need upskilling and naturally qualification mismatch (Figure 12).

**FIG. 11: Skills Matching (SM) pillar 2020 compared to 2018**

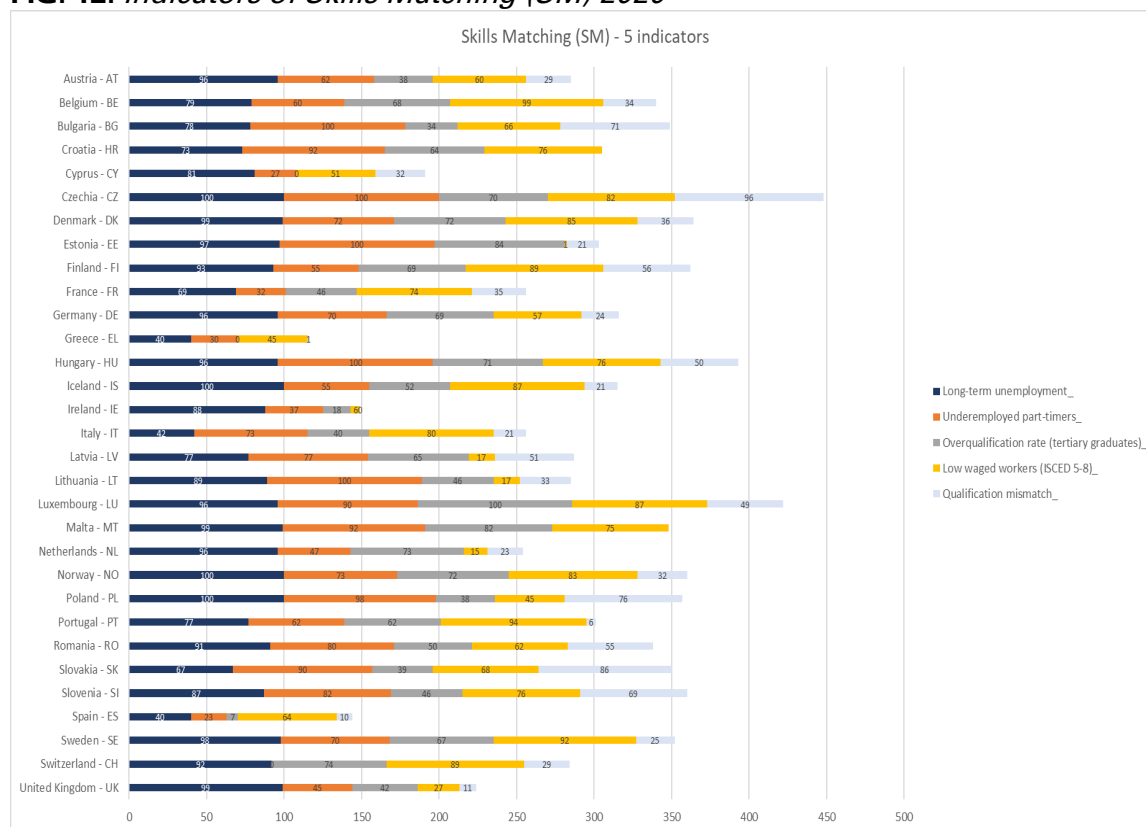
(\*) Sorted from highest score to lowest. Source: Author's elaboration of European Skills Index (2020 and 2018) data.

Within the 5 indicators developed in this pillar, all countries had very good performances. Czechia obtained more than 70 in all 5 indicators. The highest rate was on long term unemployment, while the lowest in Qualification mismatch. This latter indicator informs where mismatches connected to qualifications are detected and the fact that only 4 countries (BG, CZ, PL, SK) obtained more than 70, represent a key alarm for countries to align qualifications issued by Education and VET systems with Labour Market's expectations.

With these results in this Pillar, it is important for Italy to reflect on reform priorities and assess the long-term implications for activation and (re)skilling and (up)skilling policies.

A third determinant of school-to-work (and university-to-work) transition is the number of adequate jobs (in terms of skills matching) the economy may absorb. Changes in technology and labour market structure over time have been leading to an increase in analytical and interpersonal skills use and a decline in routine/manual skills. At the same time, new jobs are not being created fast enough to absorb the increase in new labour market candidates. Growth and productivity of enterprises in innovative sectors will create new jobs in the economy. Technological, climate, demographic and other changes are shaping the future of work and consequently future skills demand. While the impact of these changes will vary depending on country context, the emerging trends in the creation of new jobs in the digital and green economy, increase in non-standard forms of employment (e.g., gig economy), and higher demand for higher, transferable and digital skills. There is some concern that today's jobs will be lost through automation in advanced economies, and there is a real risk that some countries will lose out on jobs that are never created.

The Italian context is still inadequate to face these changes. In Italy stagnation of productivity has been going on for at least 25 years. From 2010 to 2016, only Greece performed worse among OECD countries than Italy (Bastasin, Toniolo, 2020).

**FIG. 12. Indicators of Skills Matching (SM) 2020**

Source: Author's elaboration of European Skills Index (2020) data.

The situation of other advanced economies, which were affected by global trends similar to Italy, but able to develop, over the years, solid T(VET) systems, represent good practices which may be ideal to improve and rethink the Italian modelling of VET concepts and practices.

As highlighted above, in Europe Finland and Czech Republic are positive examples derived from long-term reforms of education and VET provisions. Outside EU, the case of Singapore, analysed in the next paragraph, reveals key aspects which may be considered for future modelling of Education, VET and Labour Market systems.

## 2. Experiences of (C)VET system excellences

In Italy there is undoubtedly a problem of qualifications mismatch and skills mismatch, that is, a misalignment between the areas of study chosen by students and the needs of the labour market and the skills possessed by adults and those required by enterprises. A misunderstanding which is very widespread in Italy.

Moreover, Italian graduates are the victims of Labour Market's deficiencies. When they find work, it is not uncommon for them to have to perform tasks for which they are overqualified. And it happens more frequently to STEMs, which have an occupancy rate of 90%. It means

that a too large part of Italian workers has not made that necessary leap towards more technological and higher value-added productions (IGIER-Bocconi, 2017).

The VET systems in Italy have revealed structural long-term gaps and even the targeted reforms have not led to better results. However, VET systems have many important purposes, related to the social impact (in terms of integration and inclusion of disadvantaged groups), but also it is supposed to contribute to the growth of the economy and creation of employment (UNESCO, 2011). Considering that VET systems have had solid success in some realities (Japan, Singapore and Finland), affected by similar global megatrends, we intend to collect key aspects which may be ideal to improve and rethink the Italian modelling of VET concepts and practices.

### *2.1 The case of Singapore*

Singapore Education and VET system is quite recent, being governed by the British, who were running Singapore as a trade centre. As soon as it become self-governing (1959) they created their own system and chose to concentrate on economic development in order to meet the urgent needs of the people. The different stages of development of VET system directly followed the stages of economic development.

Today, Singapore is still a small country of around 5 million persons and it is one of the most successful economies with the third-highest GDP per capita and a stable economy. It is the reference point in Southeast Asia for many of the world's largest firms, a world leader in digital and electronics manufacturing, and an excellence in pharmaceutical and biomedical manufacturing. Besides, for decades, Singapore has had one of the lowest unemployment rates and lowest inflation rates of any country in the developed world (Tucker, 2016).

Singapore obtained many remarkable results in the economy; the development of Education and VET systems played an important role over the years. The policies were oriented from the beginning (from the 70s) to develop an Education and VET system able to support industrial development in high technology.

Technicians were required to substantially lower unemployment and improve economy. To strengthen the quality of students opting for VET pathways (and decide on a technical career as a results), polytechnics were developed with a very close level of collaboration with industry. Many reforms were implemented, following changes of the economy globally, and based on the awareness that innovation and creativeness in products and services would have been in demand worldwide.

Thus, the main objective of the development of education and VET systems was to train people who could lead global international firms, to develop new skills, without lowering standards, but mainly to be able to be rapidly adaptable to evolving changes of economy development (i.e., from agriculture to high tech manufacturing, when automatized,

from manufactory to services). In following this purpose strategies were designed and implemented to:

- Analyse strengths and weaknesses of models of Education and VET systems all over the world: United States, United Kingdom (polytechnics), Germany (Dual system), Switzerland (apprenticeship), France and Japan.
- Each development in the Education and VET systems was coherent and aligned with needs of the evolving Singaporean economy (UNESCO, 2020).
- The links between economic development policy and Education and VET policy is granted by institutions (or boards) created on purpose.
- A strong compulsory education system – the skills and knowledge of those students achieving lowest results when graduating, and possibly entering VET pathways, measured above the median of the skills of OECD student population (OECD, 2019), – a combination of meritocracy and support. A great effort was also granted to those students achieving lowest results, on these tracks the best teachers were allocated, thus those lowest students in Singapore were scoring higher than the average students in developed countries.
- Establish curriculum and assessment system to develop creative thinking skills and the ability and desire for lifelong learning (by doing things differently, not by replicating what has been done before) to support an economy based on creativity, innovation, research and development.
- Introduce standardized curriculum (higher standards) emphasizing English (which was chosen to be the first teaching language at the beginning, to avoid choosing one of the different languages used nationally) mathematics, science and technical subjects, along with an appropriate examination structure.
- A strong link between the VET system and business.
- Increase the quality of VET pathways (and therefore the quality of students who decide on a technical career as a results) through polytechnics with a very close level of collaboration with private industry.
- New vision of VET – need to change the status of VET compared to other forms of education – new possibilities for young people (even those who have shown less academic ability, in order to use whatever talents, they may have).
- Develop the experience of ‘teaching factories’, a learning environment as much like a factory as possible, a new form of post-secondary school (best vocational schools) in collaboration with many big international enterprises.

This latter experience, the ‘factory school’ is a very interesting practice. It is a new form of post-secondary school (a two-year program of studies) in collaboration with many big international enterprises. It

implied the implementation of 'experiential learning', for VET students, as the learning environment is as similar to a factory as possible, in terms of both the physical environment and the way students were treated. An environment in which young people (with low academic skills) could flourish, learning by doing rather than on books, was created. It enabled Singapore to

- to train its workforce to state-of-the-art standards;
- to engage industry as a close partner in training;
- to enable students to train in an environment that is designed for training, but which, at the same time, is similar enough to the real thing;
- to present challenges for the students very much like those they will face in the workplace.

As a result, in 1995 Singapore students scored right at the top of the distribution worldwide.

What we can learn from Singapore's strategy is that they understood the importance of training and vocational and technical subjects as the key to the ambitious economic developments plans to improve the lives of their own people. It is interesting to be considered not just for its high competence, but for its creativity and innovative capacity as well.

## Conclusion

The contribution of this paper detected the school-to-work transition as a lever to improve the inclusion of young people in the labour market. Besides the key successful experience in Japan, concerning VET systems, may be useful in the Italian context, also for the reintegration of mature workforce into the labour market.

For the analysis of the transition, the European Skills Index (ESI) developed by CEDEFOP, reflect the situation of Italy and all the difficulties at national and regional level. The VET systems in Italy have revealed structural long-term gaps and even the targeted reforms have not led to better results. However, VET systems have many important purposes, related to the social impact (in terms of integration and inclusion of disadvantaged groups), but also it is supposed to contribute to the growth of the economy and creation of employment.

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## Individualization of Teaching and WBL, Real Opportunities for Disadvantaged Students

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**ABSTRACT:** *Inclusive education is one of the most important educational imperatives for the development of quality and equity in the training systems. Despite that, in Europe not all young students may access or complete secondary education, testing a lot of disadvantages in the adult life; they are, in particular, those who come to marginalized groups or young students with disability and/or special education needs (SEN): students with disability, students with specific disorders in the evolutive age, students with socio-economic, socio-cultural disadvantage or with language problems. For this vulnerable group of students – still excluded in an excessive way from training systems and labour market – the offer of alternative programmes in the training systems, most innovative and calibrated on their particular needs, shows to be an effective prevention intervention against early school leaving, youth unemployment and social exclusion. Students with SEN need not only compensatory tools and dispensation measures but also a personalized learning and, first of all, most work-based learning experiences (WBL), in all the forms forecast at European level: work-school/apprenticeship pathways – WBL experiences – WBL integrated in an upper secondary school programme. Practical training in a real workplace, focusing on the acquisition of learning ability and results as starting point for the acknowledgement and certification of skills needed for a job, is a real opportunity for students with SEN to combating educational failure and simplifying the transition from school to work. The WBL experiences represent an integral part of the learning process; this is more essential if we consider students with SEN, who cause to their disability, or their social or cultural context, not should be able to acquire theoretical concepts or detailed study programmes but seem motivated to be involved in alternative approaches for the acquisition of practical skills useful in the labour market.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Special Education Need, Inclusive Education, WBL, Practical Skills, Personalized Learning.*

### Introduction

Inclusive education is one of the most important educational imperatives for the development of quality and equity in the training systems. Promoting active inclusion of disadvantaged persons is a

prevalent issue in several European strategies, such as Education and Training 2020, European Initiative on Upskilling Pathways 2016, European Pillar of Social Rights 2017, European Skills Agenda 2016/2020, European Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2010-2020/2021-2030 and with the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Moreover, respond to SEN students' needs, improving their education completion rate and encouraging their access in the labour market, is also the aim of the Sustainable Development Goal on education (Goal 4.5) of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This paper summarises the main European policies on learners with special education needs and/or disabilities, with a particular emphasis on the opportunities offering to disadvantaged students by work based learning experiences (WBL).

## **1. An overview of European strategies on inclusive education**

### *1.1. European Council Recommendation on policies to reduce Early School Leaving*

In 2011, European Council draws attention of Member States on the need to include in the educational, VET and labour systems, also disadvantaged persons, using innovative and personalized methodologies in the prevention interventions against ESL, unemployment and social exclusion.

### *1.2. 2015 Joint Report 'New priorities for European cooperation in education and training'*

The Joint Report of the European Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET, 2020), prioritised in the area of adult learning, inter alia, the provision of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and of sufficient second-chance opportunities leading to a recognised EQF qualification for those without EQF level 4. The Report also includes medium-term deliverables for vocational education and training ('VET'), including enhancing access to qualifications for all through more flexible and permeable VET systems, in particular by offering efficient and integrated guidance services and making available validation of non-formal and informal learning.

### *1.3. European Initiative on Upskilling Pathways, 2016*

It aims to help adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills and/or acquire a broader set of skills by progressing towards an upper secondary qualification or equivalent. Upskilling pathways targets adults with a low level of skills, e.g., those without upper secondary education and who are not eligible for Youth

Guarantee support. They may be in employment, unemployed or economically inactive, with a need to strengthen basic skills. The Upskilling pathways initiative is a key building block of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

#### *1.4. European Pillar of Social Rights, 2017*

It promotes participation of adults with disabilities in learning, with a view to increasing their completion rate, adopting targeted measures and flexible training formats in order to ensure equal rights to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning and support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems.

#### *1.5. European Skills Agenda 2020*

Having the right skills and qualifications is a prerequisite for accessing and succeeding in the labour market. As set in the European Skills Agenda, this requires national skills strategies that should also cover the specific needs of persons with disabilities. Equal access to education and labour-market oriented training at all levels has to be ensured. Member States are responsible to adapt education and training policies to the needs of persons with disabilities in a manner consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)\*\*\*\*\*.

#### *1.6. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006*

Member States recognize the right to education of persons with disabilities. In order to realize this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunities, they guarantee an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning for all, aimed at the full development of human potential, dignity and self-esteem and the strengthening respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity.

#### *1.7. European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2030*

Member States are called to establish, by 2024, targets for increasing the employment rate of persons with disabilities and reducing employment rate gaps between persons with and without disabilities; strengthening the capacities of employment services for persons with disabilities, as well as enhancing work with social partners and

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\*\*\*\*\* Despite the right to access mainstream vocational education and training, the proportion of young persons with disabilities being referred to special vocational schools is high. This is often due to the general lack of accessibility and reasonable accommodation and insufficient support provided to learners with disabilities in mainstream vocational training settings. The transition to the open labour market is more difficult than from mainstream educational settings. Moreover, participation of persons with disabilities in adult learning is lower compared to persons without disabilities.

organisations of persons with disabilities to that end; facilitating self-employment and entrepreneurship, including for persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.

In the coming years, the European Commission will work to make sure that persons with disabilities can: take part in trainings and learn new skills; get a job and be independent.

### *Access to education*

All people have the right to go to school and university, learn new things and grow their skills. Sadly, many young persons with disabilities do not have the chance to finish school or go to university. Many things are not accessible for them and they may be left out. Often, children with disabilities have to go to special schools only for children with disabilities. They may not be allowed to go to school with all other children. In the coming years, the European Commission will work with all countries in the European Union to make sure that more children with disabilities can go to school together with all other children

### *Access to work*

All people should have the chance to work and earn their own money. Sadly, too many persons with disabilities do not have work. This may be because:

- Offices, streets, transport and other things are not accessible and persons with disabilities cannot use them like other people.
- Many persons with disabilities do not have the chance to take part in trainings and learn new skills that are necessary to get a job. Without a job, persons with disabilities are more likely to be poor and left out.

### *1.8. UNESCO 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization promotes a rights-based approach to education, towards a wide reform of educational and VET systems, that includes programs, teacher training systems, teaching materials, learning environments, methodologies as well as resource allocation.

In particular, one of the Sustainable Development Goals on Education, the Goal 4.5, aims to: respond to SEN students' needs; improving their education completion rate; encouraging their access in the labour market.

### *1.9. EU Education Area*

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In 2024, there will be a report about the work that the European Commission has done to make the Strategy for Persons with Disabilities happen. The report will say what things went well and what the European Commission could do better.

Inclusive education has been put high on the Education Agenda. One of the six axes of the European Education Area is dedicated to inclusive education and lifelong learning for all, with a focus on groups at risk, such as students with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN): Quality; Inclusion and gender equality; Green and digital transitions; Teachers and trainers; Higher education; Geopolitical dimension.

### *1.10. EU Council Recommendation on VET, 2020*

In 2020, the Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience underlines the importance for the Member States to adopt targeted measures and flexible training formats to ensure inclusive and accessible VET programmes for vulnerable groups, such as persons with SEN or disabilities.

## **2. Special Education Need (SEN)**

Despite today there isn't yet a common definition of special education need, in European policies the area of Special Education Need (SEN)\*\*\*\*\* – consists of three categories: disability, specific disorders of evolutive age;+++++ socio-economic, linguistic and cultural disadvantage.

Students with SEN or disability have a major risk of early school leaving and a major risk of social exclusion. In 2017, in fact, the European Commission put them between the target groups most vulnerable at risk of exclusion:

- Those coming from a low socio-economic background.
- Migrants and people with language barriers.
- Special Education Needs Students.
- Students with a long-term illness.
- Child coming from a minority ethnic group.
- Rom students.
- Child coming from monoparental families.
- Single mothers' sons.
- Students coming from public health centres.
- Students coming from violent families.

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<sup>3</sup> The term SEN, Special Education Need, was introduced for the first time in the Warnock Report (Great Britain 1978), suggesting the need to integrate pupils traditionally considered different through an inclusive approach based on the identification of educational objectives common to all pupils, regardless of their abilities or disability.

<sup>4</sup> Neurodevelopmental disorders include: SLD - Specific Learning Disorders (dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, dysorthography), language deficits, non-verbal skill deficits, motor coordination deficits, attention deficit and hyperactivity.

All students of these vulnerable groups, cause to their disability or their social or cultural background, have the same risk to drop out from official VET programmes, so all of them need a special education need in order to complete and develop individual transition plans for job recruitment and independent life. Therefore, it would be not wrong to consider SEN students all students become from one of the vulnerable groups reported in the 2017 European Commission Communication *School development and excellent teaching for a great start in life*.

SEN students need individual guidance and individual training pathways in order to not become future NEET, destined to be marginalized from society, with greater costs for the society and the economy. Nevertheless, there is still a considerable gap between persons with and without SEN or disabilities in the access to education, training and labour market. While the EU Employment Equality Directive is contributing significantly to promoting equal rights of persons with SEN or disabilities in employment, more needs to be done to ensure them better VET opportunities.

Data published on march 2021 by European Commission highlight that the 20.3% of students with a special education need or disability leave school early compared to 9.8% of those without disabilities and only 29.4% attain a tertiary degree compared to 43.8% of those without disabilities; moreover 37.6% of persons with disabilities are inactive compared to 17.6% of persons without disabilities; 50.8% of persons with disabilities are in employment compared to 75% of persons without disabilities; 28.4% of persons with disabilities are at risk of poverty and social exclusion compared to 18.4% of persons without disabilities.

Having the right skills and qualifications is a prerequisite for accessing and succeeding in the labour market and for disadvantaged students – with SEN or disability – the offer of alternative programmes in the training systems, most innovative and calibrated on their particular needs, shows to be an effective prevention intervention against early school leaving, youth unemployment and social exclusion. Moreover, «increasing the use of personalised approaches, including individualised learning plans and harnessing assessment to support the learning process, providing teachers with skills to manage and benefit from diversity, promoting the use of co-operative teaching and learning, and widening access and participation, are ways of increasing quality for all» (European Council Conclusions on the social dimension of education, training, 2010, 7). Students with SEN need not only compensatory tools and dispensation measures but also a personalized learning and, first of all, most work-based learning experiences (WBL), in all the forms forecast at European level: work-school/apprenticeship pathways – WBL experiences – WBL integrated in an upper secondary school programme, as European Commission underlined in the Bruges Communiqué:

### *Apprenticeships*

Apprenticeships formally combine and alternate company-based training (periods of practical work experience at a workplace) with school-based education (periods of theoretical/ practical education followed in a school or training centre), and lead to nationally recognised qualification upon successful completion. Most often there is a contractual relationship between the employer and the apprentice, with the apprentice being paid for his/her work.

### *School-based VET with on-the-job-training*

This second form of WBL includes on the-job training periods in companies. These periods vary in length and typically cover shorter internships, work placements or traineeships that are incorporated as a compulsory or optional element of VET programmes leading to formal qualifications.

### *Work-based learning in school*

WBL can also be integrated in a school-based programme through on-site labs, workshops, kitchens, restaurants, junior or practice firms, simulations or real business/industry project assignments. The aim is to create 'real life' work environments, establish contacts and/or cooperation with real companies or clients, and develop entrepreneurship competences.

## **3. Work Based Learning as emerging positive measure for SEN students**

Practical training in a real workplace, focusing on the acquisition of learning ability and results as starting point for the acknowledgement and certification of skills needed for a job, is a real opportunity for students with SEN to combating educational failure and simplifying the transition from school to work. At European level, the renewed European Alliance for Apprenticeships 2020 (EAfA), that unites governments and key stakeholders with the aim of strengthening the quality, supply and overall image of apprenticeships across Europe, will contribute to sharing knowledge on how apprenticeships – as a major type of work-based learning – can be used as a tool for social inclusion.

The WBL experiences represent an integral part of the learning process; this is more essential if we consider students with SEN, who are not able to attend official study programmes, focused on theoretical concepts but seem motivated to be involved in alternative approaches for the acquisition of practical skills useful in the labour market. Practitioners and educators report that work-based learning is a service that is considered to be a 'best practice' for a successful transition into adult life and the world of work for youth with SEN. Employers, parents, and schools recognize that when youth with and without disabilities

understand the nature of work and the opportunities available to them, they are more likely to become more productive, responsible members of the community. Additionally, the business-school support for a work-based learning programme helps to create a community-wide environment of collaboration and cooperation.

Despite at European level, the interest and the participation in WBL experiences has increased in the last years, WBL is not yet recognised as an emerging positive measure struggling ESL and youth unemployment, especially of those with SEN. For these students, a WBL experience, first of all those integrated in school-based programme, is the unique opportunity to acquire technical skills and obtain a vocational qualification. The students with SEN/disabilities can successfully learning in real work environments, where they can gain competences through practical job experiences and not official programmes, that could sometimes amplify their differences and not enhance their needs. Moreover, in WBL experiences SEN students can establishing contacts and/or cooperation with colleagues and others outside their family, so to enhance their self-respect, wellness and social inclusion.

SEN students need an individual transition plan since the beginning of their pathways. In order to address them to an appropriate job, in fact, students with SEN need practical experience also in the career guidance through on-site labs, workshops, simulations of project assignments. They need to test different job settings before choose the most suitable on the basis of personal possibilities.

To be a successful WBL experience, enterprise trainers/mentors and staff need specific training before and during their experience with students with SEN/disabilities. They need to acquire new skills related to diversity, such as adaptability, resolution of uncertainty, behavioral disfunction or anxiety management. Also the work-place need to be adapted to SEN students so that the work environment could be more comfortable and secure, considering the difficulties and the situations to avoid (noises, lights, queue, etc.) for each student involved.

Validation of skills gained in a work environment is a crucial issue for students with SEN/disabilities. Sadly, there is not yet a common legal framework for the certification of skills acquired in a WBL experience, so that WBL policies and practices are highly diverse across all countries in Europe. Member States should identify minimum requirements for a specific job-related WBL, both in terms of competences and in terms of terminology to attain for a job position. The aim is the acknowledgement of job skills acquired, in order to attain a valid qualification for labour market access.

#### *European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education*

In 2017 the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, an independent and self-governing organization, supported by the European Parliament and co-funded by the EU Ministries of Education,



analyzed VET systems of 26 Member States with a focus on SEN students. The Agency confirms WBL as best practice to struggle ESL and youth unemployment, remarking that all practices and actions that are good for SEN students are good for all students involved in the VET systems:

- Better quality of VET programmes and of learning outcomes
- Positive effect on teaching staff competences and development
- Better co operation between VET schools and employers
- Positive contribution to youth employment
- Strengthen social inclusion and improve equal opportunities

Sadly, limited researches has been conducted on work-based learning; research needs to monitoring and evaluating WBL experiences as driver of qualified and inclusive VET systems.

### *Priority interventions*

The following priority issues have to be developed in order to facilitate the access of SEN students in VET systems and labour market:

- Building a Common Framework to promote access of SEN students in VET systems through individual programmes and individual transition plans.
- Developing innovative and flexible approaches, connecting formal VET pathways with WBL experiences for SEN students.
- Developing a Legal Framework for the validation and certification of skills acquired in WBL.
- Strengthening the partnerships between educational and training centres-employment services-institutions and associations to develop a Common Legal Framework for career guidance, WBL and job transition plan for SEN students/vulnerable groups.
- Planning training support to preparing teachers, entrepreneurs and their staff to work better with SEN students.
- Developing indicators to monitoring and evaluating quality and inclusivity of WBL.

## **Conclusion**

Unlocking the potential and talents of persons with SEN or disabilities will be for the benefit of the individuals, the economy and for the cohesion of the society as a whole.

In the coming years Member States are called to increasing the participation of vulnerable group in the VET systems and labour market, ensuring that national strategies meet the need of disadvantaged persons.

WBL, focusing on the acquisition of learning ability as starting point for the acknowledgement and certification of skills needed for a job, is a real opportunity for SEN students and a driver for social inclusion.

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## The Key Role of Vocational Education and Training Systems in the Digital Transition. Recovery and Resilience of Vet Post COVID-19

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**ABSTRACT:** *The COVID-19 outbreak has brought to the fore in Europe the difficulties and challenges of Education and Training (VET) systems and made possible a marked acceleration in the adoption of innovation measures in all sectors to overcome the digital divide. This is even more evident in Italy, which for a decade has been ranked at the bottom for digital innovation and use of new technologies, as well as for the digital skills of citizens. Amidst so many critical issues, it seems that the challenge of digital transformation has been taken up and will play a key role in post-emergency management as well, building on the new interactive modalities tested during the COVID-19 pandemic. These modalities will have to be implemented, giving them an organic character that will make them usable also after the crisis. The 2020 Coronavirus emergency in Italy did not in fact catch society, the public administration, the business world, the school and, the training world completely unprepared, as they demonstrated an extraordinary capacity to adapt by making massive and sudden use of distance learning and remote working. The reactivity of the training system, which has opened up to innovation and the use of networked services and platforms, has also made it possible to relaunch and implement the lifelong learning paradigm through various methods, including customisable ones, which were already the ones that best expressed demand. Innovation and digitalisation in VET play a key role in the broader green and digital transitions, as well as in the recovery and resilience of a post-COVID-19 Europe, confirming the results of studies carried out by the European Commission in recent years, which have been the starting point for a whole series of initiatives in this sense. Through an analysis of European policies for recovery and resilience, a reflection is proposed on the response of training systems to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 emergency and on the future of training systems. In particular, critical issues related to infrastructures, practical aspects of training, lack of e-skills and, digital devices will be identified and analysed. After this large-scale forced experimentation, distance learning carried out in synchronous mode could move from an extraordinary and limited use to ordinary and structured use for the provision of training, in particular continuous training, enriched with new technologies that would also make it possible to overcome the criticalities currently encountered. The main forms of distance learning and the trends for the near future, as identified by the European Commission in the new 'Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 Rethinking Education and Training for the Digital Age', point to a new era for training. Education thus becomes the driving force for Europe's digital transformation that can no longer be*

*postponed, fully based on the UN Charter and respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and open to a broader coalition of international partners sharing the same European vision to develop the rules of a human-centric digital transformation.*

**KEYWORDS:** *VET, Innovation, Digitalisation, Recovery, Training, Learning, Digital*

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has given an unmistakable signal of confirmation and evolution of the role and perception of digitisation in education and training systems in Europe.

Innovation and digitisation in vocational education and training (VET) play a key role in the broader green and digital transitions, as well as in the recovery and resilience of a post-COVID-19 Europe, confirming the results of studies carried out by the European Commission in recent years. Particularly significant has been the *European Commission's ET 2020 working group* which has been questioning, with meetings and studies since 2018, the role of innovation and digitisation to boost high-quality VET and Higher VET.

The vision of a proactive education system, with smarter policy choices, capable of anticipating innovation and supporting the process of digitalisation, has been leading European policies in the last 10 years. Considering the impact on VET, innovation could trigger a virtuous circle leading to the adoption of more and more advanced technologies and methodologies.

But innovation also needs a new approach to teaching and training through collaborative platforms, new hybrid professional models.

The *coronavirus* emergency has therefore called for disruptive innovation and an acceleration of the policy reform agenda in the area of digitisation, with a series of extraordinary financial instruments combined with cohesion programmes, to overcome vulnerabilities in the availability of technology and infrastructure and low levels of e-skills.

## **1. Paving the way to the Digital Transition of VET Systems**

The concept of widespread digital deployment, already present in the *2019 European Green Deal* (based on the *Sustainable Development Goals -SDGs of the UN 2030 Agenda*), was reinforced in the subsequent February 2020 *Action Plan for Europe's Digital Future*, giving a strong political impetus to digital transformation, well before the arrival of the pandemic.

The trend towards innovation and digitisation has been confirmed by the new policies put in place by the European Union, which have accelerated their implementation following COVID-19.

The EU Commission's *SURE Initiative*, launched in April 2020 (establishing a European temporary support instrument to mitigate the risks of unemployment in an emergency following the COVID-19 pandemic), also includes a focus on training, including training for laid-off workers as a company and individual investment.

On 26 June 2020, the Council called for accelerating the digital transformation of education and training systems and strengthening the digital capacity of education and training institutions to reduce the digital divide, paying attention to equal access opportunities, ensuring quality and encouraging validation and recognition of learning outcomes. Subsequently, the European Commission launched a new *Digital Education and Training Action Plan*, inviting Member States to build on the experience of the emergency to develop better quality, more accessible and inclusive digital teaching, learning and assessment as a key element of Europe's transition, using the EU *Recovery and Resilience Facility* with national NRRPs.

The Plan foresees two strategic priorities: on the one hand the promotion of a new digital education and training system (infrastructures, connectivity, digital devices, development of digital organisational capacities, improvement of digital competences of staff involved in training and education, high-quality learning content with accessible tools and secure platforms). On the other hand, developing the digital competences and skills needed for digital transformation.

The Council, in November 2020, then called on all Member States to strengthen distance learning and skills upgrading, indicating that VET can be an attractive option if based on modern and digitised training/competence provision. Encourage the development of open, digital and participative learning environments in VET programmes, supported by accessible and efficient advanced technology infrastructure and equipment (including ICT-based simulators and augmented reality) which increase the accessibility and efficiency of training also for SMEs. Vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, is the core of the Council Recommendation of 30 November defined key principles for ensuring and agile vocational education and training capable of adapting swiftly to labour market needs, providing quality learning opportunities for young people and adults. The Recommendation focus on increased flexibility of vocational education and training, reinforced opportunities for work-based learning and apprenticeships and improved quality assurance, replacing the *European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training Recommendation* and including an updated *EQAVET Framework* with quality indicators and descriptors.

The subsequent *Osnabrück Declaration* of 30 November 2020 on vocational education and training as a key to recovery and a just

transition to a green and digital economy outlines four objectives to be achieved through measures at a national and EU level: promoting resilience and excellence through quality, inclusive and flexible VET; creating a new culture of lifelong learning that adapts to digitalisation; including sustainability and eco-sustainability in VET; strengthening the international dimension of VET and a European area of education and training.

## **2. The Digital Decade: a new era for training**

The main forms of eLearning and the trends for the near future as identified by the European Commission in the new *Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 Rethinking Education and Training for the Digital Age* hint at a new era for education.

The Plan for the *Digital Decade 2021-2030* adopted on 9 March 2021 by the European Commission effectively integrates the activities already launched by the Commission during 2020, which are reorganised and reformulated into a framework of actions setting specific targets for 2030, as requested by the Council of the EU. The plan's approach reflects the experience of the pandemic, and the impetus it has given to digital deployment and its accelerated field testing and fits into the *Next Generation Eu* perspective.

The Commission organises the logic of the plan with a «Compass» to map Europe's trajectory, called the *Digital Compass 2030: the European model for the digital decade*. Based on four main themes, the four cardinal points of the «Digital Compass» – skills, infrastructure, business and public administration – aims to achieve the goal of Europe's digital transformation. The «Compass» defines a solid common governance structure with the Member States, based on a monitoring system with annual reports using a «traffic light» system.

For skills, the reference remains the *Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027* and the *European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan*, which sets the target that at least 80% of people aged 16-74 should have basic digital skills. The Commission also adds the target of having 20 million ICT specialists by 2030 with convergence between men and women. With the adoption of this act, the principle is established that the possession of basic digital competences is a right for all European citizens, and that lifelong adult learning must become a reality. These principles, identified as an integral part of the *EU Digital Principles*, will be enshrined, after a consultation process with the Member States, in an *Inter-institutional Solemn Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission*, which will see the light of day by 2021, complementing the principles already affirmed in the *European Pillar of Social Rights*.

Member States' digital transformation performance will also be monitored by the DESI (*Digital Economy and Society Index*). The latest

data collected by the European Commission in 2020, in the context of the digitisation of the Member States, see Italy, concerning the DESI, in 25th place among the 28 Member States. The low level of e-skills among the general population, which also indirectly affects the state of digitalisation of online public services, due to the still too low level of use by citizens, stresses the implementation of initial, continuous and lifelong training strategies dedicated to e-skills even more urgent.

The financial instrument of the *Recovery and Resilience Facility*, approved by the European Parliament in February 2021, provides for the elaboration by the States of PNRR, plans of investment and reforms in 7 'flagship areas'. Training is included in the *Reskill and Upskill* flagship, which calls for reskilling and upskilling, with the adaptation of VET systems to support e-skills and vocational education and training for all ages. In a comprehensive vision of developing the VET system as a whole, the *Commission Recommendation on effective active employment support (EASE)* presented together with this action plan can also facilitate investment and reforms in this area.

Member States will also benefit from *ESF+*, *Erasmus+* and the *European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)* to support training infrastructure and equipment to create inclusive strategies for adult learning and retraining, to design certification and validation systems and to promote continuity of learning and mobility between VET providers. To facilitate access to funding for recovery and resilience, within the broader *Next Generation EU Facility*, a *Technical Support Facility* has also been put in place to assist national authorities in preparing, amending, implementing and reviewing national plans (NRPs), which must include a coherent package of reforms and public investment projects to be implemented by 2026, outlining reforms and investments to address the challenges identified in the context of the European Semester, in particular in the country-specific recommendations adopted by the Council, including the digitisation of administrative structures and public services as one of the key actions.

The implementation of the principles of the social pillar and the challenges identified in the country-specific recommendations adopted in the context of the *European Semester* will provide the basis for Member States to prepare their *ESF+* operational programmes.

### **3. Challenges and Opportunities for Digitalisation in VET**

In the *Italy 2020 Country Report* of 26 February 2020, the European Commission noted that Italy has made limited progress and that no significant measures have been taken, beyond the recruitment of new teachers (with an extremely limited number of hires of digitally literate teachers). *Recommendation 2* called on Italy to take action in 2019 and 2020 to, inter alia, improve educational outcomes, including through targeted investments, and promote skills upgrading, in particular by

strengthening digital competences. *Recommendation 19* underlined that the attainment of basic skills varies considerably across regions and that the rate of early school leavers is well above the EU average (13,5% compared to 10,3% in 2019), in particular for students not born in the EU (33%). Data on lifelong learning also show that companies invest too little in ICT training for their employees. The low participation rate of low-skilled adults in training is also worrying, given the decline in jobs requiring low qualifications. In turn, *No 20* stressed that tertiary education suffers from a lack of funding and staff shortages, that the proportion of graduates remains low, particularly in the scientific and technical fields, and that vocational tertiary education is limited. Concerning the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), the Commission pointed out that the achievement of *Goal 4* – devoted to quality education and divided into 10 targets – requires further efforts in all the areas concerned: basic education, tertiary education and adult learning.

The digital transition of education and training systems is part of the transition from the fourth industrial revolution, which we entered only in 2011, to the fifth, characterised by a business model in which the role of man and his collaboration with machines and artificial intelligence (co-robots or cobots) in production processes (Collaborative Industry) will be redefined, bringing research strategies (research factory) to the fore.

These factors have become predominant for the recovery from the Covid pandemic, which has made evident with its disruptive aspect, the unpreparedness of the work and VET systems, which have succeeded in a massive shift to remote working and learning, with difficulties and problems related to infrastructure, skills and inclusiveness to resist. With millions of workers and learners across the EU affected by the physical closure of workplaces and education institutions, venues, 2020 has been an unprecedented year of challenge and disruption. This has raised significant challenges in terms of quality, equity, connectivity, infrastructure and capacity for rolling out key digital skills on a huge scale.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown how important it is to increase the availability of digital solutions for teaching and learning in Europe and has made weaknesses evident. The switching of scheduled courses from face-to-face to e-learning has highlighted the bureaucratic obstacles of the system and the more general criticalities of the delays in the country's digitalisation: lack of connectivity (uneven diffusion of ultra-wide bandwidth) and lack of digital skills with negative repercussions on the use of digital devices and services, which in turn are not widely present in society. The *European Commission's DESI 2020 index* (referring to 2019 data) has again recorded very low values for the 'Human Capital' indicator, as well as the *OECD (TALIS, 2018)* findings that, despite the use of ICT being included in teacher training, only 36.6% were prepared to use it effectively in teaching at the end of



2019. Moreover, investments in digital infrastructure and tools have not always been adequately accompanied by proper teacher training and have not been homogeneous across European countries.

Concerning the digital competences of young learners, contrary to popular belief, they are not innate. Although it is commonly believed that today's young generations are digital natives, the results of the *International Computer and Information Literacy Study* (ICILS) indicate that young people do not simply use digital devices while growing up to develop sophisticated digital skills. Underachievement, in the sense of an inability to understand and perform even the most basic computer tasks, is widespread in the EU. In 2018, as many as 62.7% of Italian pupils failed to pass the sufficiency threshold. The same applies to 50.6% of pupils in Luxembourg, 43.5% in France, 33.5% in Portugal, 33.2% in Germany, 27.3% in Finland and 16.2% in Denmark.

The difficulties related to *Work-Based Learning* in remote training can be overcome by smartly integrating digitalisation (use of immersive technologies through virtual and augmented reality and artificial intelligence).

Adult learners, especially low-skilled ones, sometimes lack the digital skills needed to benefit from digital learning, which can affect their opportunities to improve their skills levels and retrain.

Adaptation to the crisis has thus been easier for the most advanced Member States in digital education and training thanks to the recent implementation of comprehensive national strategies (e.g. Finland, Denmark and Estonia). This demonstrates the importance of making investments an integral part of comprehensive digital education policies covering everything from digital equipment to skills development, from pedagogical content to an adequate support mechanism.

Concerning lifelong learning, despite some innovative excellences that are being experimented with especially in the field of corporate training (experiential learning of collaborative methods based on the application of artificial intelligence, augmented reality with immersive virtual reality technologies for simulation learning, the use of big data for training evaluation using data collected from digital learning systems, mobile learning, virtual tutors elearning chatbots), and partly in the field of initial training (IVET) (mixed models of digital integrated with analogue in presence, such as the *flipped classroom*, with learning based on videos replacing textual or in-presence instructions), the difficulty linked to practical training activities remains, especially for dual learning and in VET.

Carrying out the practical parts of the curricula is particularly challenging in the context of distance learning. This is particularly relevant in VET, where practical learning forms a large part of the curricula.

Another major challenge has been the management of assessments and grades: this is linked to the challenge of efficiently organising the end of the school and academic year, which is particularly important in

the context of school-leaving examinations and final diplomas as it has an effect on enrolment in the various levels of education and training.

The crisis has thus triggered an irreversible process of innovation but has also made tangible the inadequacies and inequalities sometimes present in education systems, bringing to the fore not only the need for action on infrastructure and skills but also attention to equity and the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups.

During the suspension of face-to-face training, many measures were taken, at a national and regional level, to ensure the protection of vulnerable groups of learners and their access to distance activities. Access to online learning, as reiterated by the European Commission (EU, 2020) must be guaranteed for all, and can also facilitate (OECD, 2020) the acquisition of some of the key competences of the 21st century, such as collaboration, communication, independent research and higher-order cognitive skills, as well as digital skills.

There are also learners with special educational needs who require additional advice and support while learning. Closure of education and training institutions was particularly problematic for socio-economically disadvantaged learners, who are more likely to live in family environments that are not conducive to studying at home, or who are usually entitled to free school meals, as well as for learners at risk of dropping out. The need for greater cooperation between the learners' families on the one hand and teachers and trainers, on the other hand, emerged, as well as the need for stronger efforts to make distance learning possible.

The pandemic has also had considerable consequences for learning mobility opportunities at the European and international level.

## **Conclusion**

The digitisation processes, which the European Commission has increasingly linked in recent years to continuing education and training with new technologies, can have a beneficial effect on VET systems, also amplifying innovation for companies. The training and development of human resources and the organisation of companies are the basis for dealing with digital transformation. The advent of technological innovation and the development of the Internet require the central element of the person to multiply the effects of growth.

Training, therefore, plays a decisive role in the transition to digitalisation, triggering a virtuous circle and multiplying opportunities for growth by combining innovation with transformation. Digital training can be an opportunity to get to grips with digital thinking and, first and foremost, with the necessary corrections and special implications, it can help, if well managed, not to marginalise certain generations.

Training thus becomes the driving force for Europe's digital transformation that can no longer be postponed, based fully on the *UN Charter* and respect for the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and open to a broader coalition of international partners who share the same European vision, aimed at developing the rules of a «human-centred» digital transformation.

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## Innovative Strategies for Adult Education and Lifelong Learning between Personalization and Digitization

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**ABSTRACT:** *Innovation is a crucial issue concerning current pedagogical proposes and prospects about education and learning for the near and long-term future. Innovation in pedagogical and educational strategies must involve all types of education (formal, non-formal and informal) and all ages, especially adult education in the perspective of lifelong, lifewide and lifedeeep learning. The challenge is very complex as there are many variables (age, gender, culture, educational experiences, work activity, etc.) to be taken into consideration in order to design personalized, effective, in-depth educational projects. Innovation has become even more necessary since the persistence of the pandemic has forced people in almost every region of the earth and condition to reshape every aspect of life: from work to school, to university, to interpersonal and social relationships, to economy, to use of technology, to lifestyles and times of life. As we well know from having lived it on our skin, our life was suddenly turned upside down and we found ourselves locked up in our homes, alone or with our relatives. Our home has suddenly become our whole world, with very little chance of physically going outside its walls. Our home, from a place of intimacy and family relationships, among other things already put to the test by the countless activities and multiplicity of roles that we were pushed to play outside the home in contemporary societies, on the one hand stimulating but on the other often destabilizing if not alienating, it has become the core of everything. We had to transform and reshape the home life places into professional or studying places to carry out remote work in smart working, or to attend classes, to maintain friendships, often at the same time and in a mix of difficult management. Although the problems have been many and of various kinds, a new way of living, studying, working has begun. Technology, which had already become indispensable for our daily activities, has become even more so and required greater and broader knowledge and skills. From an educational point of view, e-learning platforms have had a great development and use. From those premises, we are proposing a pedagogical strategy using tools (autobiographical methods, coding) aimed at emphasizing and promoting awareness of personal and social identity, of one's own educational and life experiences with a view to enhancing flexibility, sustainability and personalization useful for knowledge and skills for the workplace but also for life as a whole. According to the perspective underlined in LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal,*

*Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence (2019), the focus is on personal but also social development, at work but also on life based on learning to learn as a key to lifelong, lifewide and lifedeeep learning, strategic for an educating, inclusive society aimed at the well-being of people one and the companies. The methodology used for data analysis is mixed: quantitative/qualitative. As for the qualitative analysis, the used method starts from the Grounded Theory by Glaser and Strauss (2009).*

**KEYWORDS:** *Innovation, Adult Education, Lifelong Learning.*

## **Introduction**

Innovation has now become almost a word/mantra and a crucial objective in all fields, starting from the technological and economic one, together with digitization, sustainability, creativity, skills, person/s.

The need for technological and digital innovation is now intrinsic to the needs inherent in today's societies, where change to adapt to the ever faster discoveries and advances in knowledge requires a widespread and efficient network and digital infrastructures and the acquisition of adequate skills and tools by citizens, also with a view to implementing and disseminating democracy, equality, equity, justice and inclusion for sustainable development and growth with whole respect for people, the environment and the planet.

These objectives are also essential to seize the opportunities offered by industry 4.0 while at the same time having firmly established, we reiterate, the principles of sustainability, democracy and inclusion. Both the European Union and Italy have become aware of the importance of a shared strategy towards a future marked by innovation, which needs technological and digital development.

Even though automation is on the one hand expanding inexorably in the economic and work field, the contribution of the human being remains fundamental and irreplaceable in many occupational fields, requiring increasingly higher knowledge and hard and soft skills.

The 2019 Deloitte survey analyzed how European companies have used technological and digital development and how this can be made usable by workers to develop a culture of innovation. 92% of the companies that participated in the survey argue that the main driving force for innovation is progress in the technological field. Therefore, the results confirm that major investments in technological and digital infrastructure are needed. 49% of companies then stated that they plan to invest in training in new technologies and in leadership development (45%) to improve the skills of their employees.

On the other hand, it raises reflections that a third of companies have identified cultural resistance as the main obstacle to the diffusion and development of innovation. The path is therefore still long and widespread awareness is still needed, but there are good premises.

The European Parliament in May 2021 allocated almost 100 billion euros for a multi-year plan, which will last until 2027, called Horizon Europe research. The plan has, among the objectives, that of being able to fight any future pandemics, address the problems related to climate change, promote research and innovation, while protecting their freedom.

Italy, too, through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, has allocated 6.71 billion euros to ultra-fast networks and 6.74 billion euros for the digitization of public administrations, which together reach 27% of the total resources of the Plan, to be implemented by 2026. The Plan is further divided into various areas (see Figure 1):

**FIG. 1.** *Areas of intervention of the Digital Italy Plan 2026.*



Source: Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF).

Ambitious goals were also set, such as: Spreading digital identity, ensuring that it is used by 70% of the population by 2026; Bridging the digital skills gap, with at least 70% of the population being digitally capable; Bring about 75% of Italian Public Administrations to use cloud services by 2026; Achieve at least 80% of essential public services provided online by 2026; Reach 100% of Italian households and businesses with ultra-broadband networks by 2026; improve Cybersecurity.

According to this scenario, then, we find that a deep awareness has finally been reached by political decision makers, both in the European Union and in Italy, of the importance of the diffusion of digital technologies to foster innovation in various fields, for economic but also social purposes, and therefore, as we have seen, considerable economic resources have been allocated to implement strategic plans within the next five/six years.

However, the achievement of the set objectives is difficult and complex, it requires systemic and integrated strategies, which need

coordination and collaboration among all the institutions and actors involved, active participation and extended times to affect the culture and make deep and significant changes. Such plans at a European and national level are therefore very important and fall within the top-down type of interventions, but, at the same time, they must necessarily take into account all the variables and problems in progress, not only of an infrastructural type and, among these, the digital divide and the various forms of poverty that involve an increasingly large part of the population that is threatened with remaining marginalized and at risk of exclusion.

Innovation also involves and concerns pedagogy, which is called to a profound rethinking of training and educational theories and practices in the perspective of Lifelong, Lifewide and Lifedeeep Learning, as it has come to the awareness that it is fundamental for human beings to live in an active, supportive, aware, updated and creative way.

In a Learning Society, as today's society is also called, education has recognized as a crucial element for growth and well-being. It is a dynamic society, in which reflexivity and reciprocity are widespread. Learning and education become the foundations of the social, cultural and economic context, allowing for adequate human development, a key factor for increasing and improving not only the economy but also the general well-being of persons and societies.

A lifelong, lifewide and lifedeeep learning perspective in a learning society has to provide effective educational strategies also for adults, offering educational opportunities in many contexts and dimensions of life, thus understanding and enhancing formal, non-formal and informal education. «We must take into account the concept of lifelong learning, which currently plays an important role in the educational fields, as emphasized in various documents of the European Union» (Bernad, 2021, 178) and considered in its broadest sense of meanings and activities.

According to such scenario, LifeComp (2019), the European framework for personal, social and learning to learn key competences, which is the first and main competence for lifelong education, was proposed. LifeComp therefore identifies a set of skills useful for various life contexts that can be acquired, we reiterate, in all educational areas.

Adult education is, as Duccio Demetrio also stated, «a pragmatic declination of lifelong learning, which provides its theoretical dimension, and defines it as the set of areas in which adults are engaged in activities and situations of learning for different purposes. It is a discipline and a practice that are intentionally predisposed to facilitate the assumption of tasks, acquisition of knowledge, maximum exercise of different responsibilities (towards oneself and towards others)» (Demetrio, 1996, 32) which typically they belong to adulthood.

Lifelong learning helps to make people more aware, responsible and to participate more actively in social life. «Education must facilitate the ability to adapt to new contexts in order to actively participate in the



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Knowledge Society and act responsibly and ethically in local settings in a globalized world» (Llevot, 2021, 120).

The educational action must take into account the person as the protagonist of his life path and experiences, which must be elaborated in a critical way to give him teachings and further resilience skills and to face even the unexpected in life.

We recall, among all, one of the pioneers of lifelong education, Lengrand, who, since 1976, has highlighted the crucial objective of lifelong education understood in the fullness of its concept, as well as the importance of a good educational and scholastic system, as it allows to provide the fundamental interpretative keys of the past and memory, very useful for learning and training.

It is important to take into consideration, then, the generative potential (in the meaning developed by Erikson) that adults and the elderly keep, especially in a reminiscent key, as actors of a past from which we can always draw precious teachings and educational opportunities, despite the changing world. We must not only preserve and enhance past experiences, but also share them as much as possible with the younger generations, as intergenerational and transgenerational education.

Taking up the reflections on the concept of innovation in pedagogy, this must always be taken into consideration as the educational processes are in close contact with what happens, changes and evolves (positively or, conversely, negatively) within the society(s) and of the culture(s).

Pedagogical innovation must be understood as aimed at improving conditions, processes and educational results and, increasingly today, makes use of technologies and theories and technologies for e-learning to expand spaces, times, methods, opportunities, personalization of learning and education.

Pedagogical innovation is, therefore, lifelong education and for the life of each person. It can allow you to design, plan and project yourself into the future with the most up-to-date and effective tools and in a flexible way.

The current concept of e-learning, understood as third-generation distance learning, is the result of reflections and pedagogical studies that began a long time ago and evolved with the advancement of technological, multimedia and digital knowledge and innovations.

The concept of e-learning that we adopt concerns education that uses technology to allow the physical distance between teacher and student, the release from the contemporaneity between delivery and use, a structured organization of the lesson, but at the same time flexibility, also providing the possibility of updating the contents and the development of learning communities (Calvani, 2005).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, in Italy, e-learning was not widely used, but above all in telematic universities, in some university courses and in professional training for adults. But due to the spread and

persistence of the health emergency and the related anti-aggregation restrictions, distance learning, education and training have suddenly and abruptly become the answer and the ideal solution for all educational issues in all contexts.

Significant processes of mobilization have therefore been activated: the home, until then place for home life, intimacy, family relationships and rest, has been transformed into a workplace for adults, including teachers, and to attend classes for students, involving parents, especially for the kids. The difficulties and criticalities, especially at the beginning, were many, as regards both digital infrastructures and IT tools, platforms and the skills to use them by teachers and students (and parents).

Furthermore, it was necessary to rethink the strategies and educational processes in the light of the problems, old and new, especially of inclusion/exclusion.

These innovations also required further acquisition of knowledge, skills, new habits and behaviours both to adapt to the new needs of study, work, daily life and relationships and to be able not to passively suffer them but to anticipate and govern them to continue own personal growth path in a conscious and active way.

E-learning has to be rethought and redesigned always taking into account the importance of establishing a circular relationship between teacher and students by stimulating active participation, communication, autonomous and critical personal reflection, and problem solving, going to fit into the stream of constructivism and also configuring itself as a valid opportunity, also in an integrated dimension, for the purposes of lifelong, lifewide and lifedep learning and education due to its prerogative of allowing a mostly autonomous management of tools, times and spaces for education and learning (Trentin, 2001, 2004; Bonaiuti, 2006; Calvani, 2005) proving to be useful especially in adulthood. It is also fundamental to develop new relational modalities and processes, exchanges of materials and contents, professional networks and new communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Trentin, 2004, 2008).

In educational processes through e-learning it is essential for the teacher to keep motivation, interest, active and interactive participation even higher, and a careful and conscious involvement of emotions and empathy. New technologies involve new ways of knowledge organization, which can respond flexibly and effectively to the needs of each student, making educational personalization effective.

Another in vogue method today, in times of pandemics, is blended education. However, with regard both to e-learning and to blended education, too often we can find meanings that are, to say the least, reductive if not incorrect, resulting in mechanical transpositions of the lessons in presence in remote lessons or at the same time (mystifying and «mortifying» the meaning of blended, which instead means an integrated educational approach between the specific opportunities

offered by e-learning in all its forms and those of the face-to-face lesson), not having the awareness and, then, the forethought and the commitment to rethink educational strategies in consideration of the different context, environment (virtual or in presence), tools, processes, etc. I would like to emphasize, therefore, that it is not correct to think of carrying out, or having carried out, face-to-face and remote and/or recorded lessons at the same time, as these are different environments that require different strategies, organization, design and, also, realization. Therefore, it is essential to take into account the reflections set out above to keep in mind the specific contributions of the various modalities and environments, to be used according to whether the educational processes are carried out at a distance and/or face-to-face, in order to be able to project ourselves effectively in what is defined as «5.0 society» (Ruffinoni, 2020), realize wide-ranging lifelong, lifewide and lifedeeep learning and education (Rikke Ørngreen, Bente Meyer, Mie Buhl, 2019) and an innovation pedagogy aimed at implementing the always new devices and tools for educational purposes and in professional training, but always in a reflective and critical way.

Certainly, however, we cannot fail to take into account the «physiological» differences between face-to-face and distance education, which in any case lead to the former due to its richness and integrity of the human/educational experience.

### **1. Tools for innovation and lifelong, lifewide and lifedeeep learning**

We are living in hyper-connected and increasingly knowledge-based societies, where citizens need ever higher and deeper skills and knowledge to be acquired lifelong. Several recent international surveys agree that what people know, what people know they know and how they can effectively and profitably use what they know are crucial and strategic not only to work, but also to live and improve their life opportunities, in earnings and employment, in relationships and personal and social well-being. In such scenario, autobiographical methods represent an effective research and also educational and self-educational tool (as well as coding) that stimulates reflexivity, logical reasoning, analysis, problem solving and, also, creativity.

Autobiographical methods are idiographic methods therefore allow for a bottom-up perspective.

Dialoguing with oneself, but also with others, it represents an opportunity for reflection on one's life path. The relationships that develop between the actors involved in the process of building one's own identity are fundamental to deepen the experiences and dynamics inherent in the life of the subject. Autobiographical methods are among the pedagogical approaches that best substantiate and develop knowledge of oneself and also that of others (Aleandri, 2017), of the

context and the environment, of personal, professional and social identity, in a dialogue between the past, present and future.

Autobiographical methods respond to the needs of all people, including those who find themselves in a situation of hardship and suffering, in periods of transition, in difficult contexts, who therefore have a greater need to orient themselves and relate to others, until reaching a more authentic vision of oneself and of the reality that surrounds them, starting with the family, city or community fabric (Aleandri, 2017).

The autobiographical methods therefore allow to analyse in depth the specific experiences lived, as well as all the interpersonal relationships and the social and cultural aspects that have been «significant», managing to give them new or unexpected meanings. Autobiographical writing, therefore, is an opportunity for autobiographical and reflective learning. This tool can be administered to a large sample to identify relevant categories, that is, the social aspects beyond the contingency of individual cases.

Autobiographical methods are «a real educational device as a technology of the self, it presents itself as a set of technologies capable of functioning as tools of self-construction and control» (Alberici, 2000, 11).

In adult education, the autobiographical approach is of fundamental importance, since by its nature it allows reflection on one's life path and the implementation of change strategies. It is based on three fundamental aspects: *i)* Increase self-reflection, self-awareness, relationality. In concrete terms, moreover, autobiographical methods assume importance in orientation activities as regards the recovery and continuation of all-round training such as lifelong, lifewide and lifedep learning; *ii)* Detection of the educational needs of the subjects in a specific context/territory allowing targeted actions and interventions; *iii)* By analysing their own lived experiences, each person can bring out their potential, to positively promote their person in a dimension of continuous active growth.

Autobiographical writing is a means of taking care of oneself and others (Demetrio, 1996). Among the main objectives is to make people aware of their potential and to understand how much they can give to society, to others and to themselves.

The person is the protagonist of the writing activity and enjoys maximum freedom of expression. Among the objectives: to understand and analyse the associations that subjects describe between perception of memories and life experiences, to become aware of being the architects of their own life path and to increase their social skills. It is all those abilities to interact and freely communicate one's emotions, ideas, experiences and impressions to other people. Taking responsibility, making decisions and mobilizing resources are activities that will promote the integration of knowledge and cognitive and emotional processes that characterize a competent and active person.

Coding is fully part of the theoretical framework outlined and can be easily used in an integrated way with autobiographical methods. Coding can be proposed in many educational contexts and at any age. It is based on computational thinking, can make use of technology (e.g., Scratch), activates logical, reflective thinking, the ability to articulate into subproblems, collaboration and creativity to achieve goals and for problem solving. It fits into the constructionist current. Both autobiographical methods and coding aim at a mobilization of the person from the metacognitive and meta-reflective point of view. They will thus enhance the transversal skills, in order to create the conditions for a harmonious development of the person in an inclusive perspective, and to consider her as a dynamic heritage of memories and knowledge that lives in an active and socializing way.

## 2. Project, methodologies and tools

This paper presents some results of two research projects using autobiographical methods, carried out in some Provincial Adult Education Centers (CPIA) in the Marche (before the pandemic) and in Lazio (before and during the pandemic) in which migrants participated, enrolled in different courses and of different nationalities.

The first group is made up of 40 immigrant adults in Italy; 60% are men and 40% women, aged between 20 and 40, who arrived in Italy 9 to 18 months earlier. They came from: China, Albania, India, Morocco, Romania, Poland, Senegal.

The second group consists of two subgroups. The first is of 9 students, coming from different countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Ghana, Mali. Men are 77,8%, while women are just over 20%. The average age is 23 years. The second subgroup is of 14 students coming from Bangladesh, Burma, the Philippines, Turkey, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan. Women are 64,3 %, men are 35,7%. The average age is 36 years, although mostly people are between 20 and 29 years old.

Within the first subgroup, 34% achieved a first level education, 22% a lower secondary level, 22% an upper secondary level. About the second subgroup, the level of education is heterogeneous and 28% achieved tertiary education level. The methodology used for the analysis of data obtained from research and educational/self-educational projects carried out through autobiographical methods is mixed: quantitative/qualitative. As for the qualitative analysis, the method used comes from the Grounded Theory by Glaser and Strauss (2009) and originally reworked.

As a tool, an autobiographical writing format was developed, titled *Writings of a Life. Writings for...* The format is typically composed of five cards that constitute as many stages in life: childhood, adolescence, the present, the first work experiences and the future. Each card

contains items that guide you in recalling memories, while allowing the person full freedom of expression. The items stimulate exploring various aspects of life: cognitive, affective, emotional, relational ones, etc.

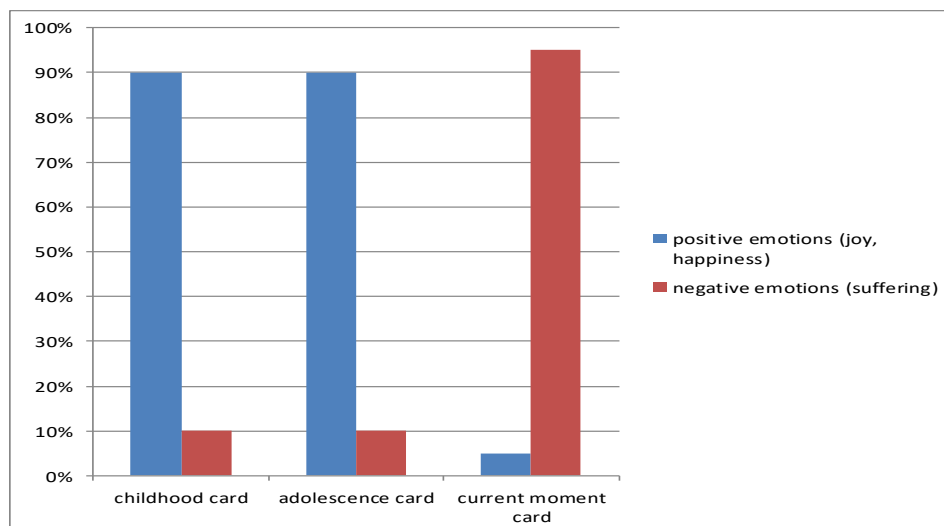
The second subgroup was also suggested to draw to be able to express themselves better, due to linguistic difficulties in Italian and considering that, for the pandemic, the courses have moved online and there was no more the in-presence support by teachers and researchers. After completing the autobiographical format, the participants answered a final cognitive questionnaire in which they expressed their degree of appreciation of the autobiographical experience lived.

### 3. Main results

Due to the reflections prompted by the autobiographical format, 62% of the participants wrote that they wanted to continue their studies at the end of compulsory school and many in scientific fields.

Regarding the work they would like to undertake in Italy, the answers were very different: pharmacist, nurse, typographer, teacher, engineer, photographer, stylist, waiter, IT technician or working in trade or tourism. For almost everyone, the most significant experience was the journey from their country of origin to Italy and this taught them the importance of the value of peace, respect for others and the richness of living with people from different cultures. Sometimes they think about their past and in almost all cases about family and parents, especially the mother. 90% of the sample said that the stimuli on the childhood and adolescence cards have prompt memories and pleasant emotions. Instead, the card relates to the present showed emotions of pain and suffering because it brought back the experience of immigration (Figure 2).

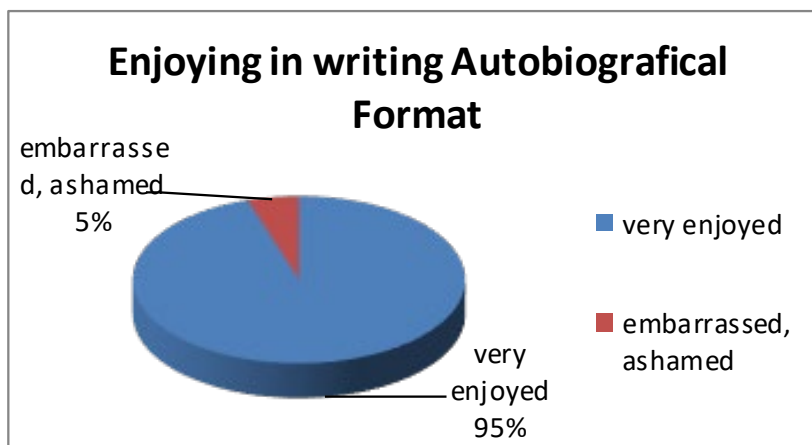
**FIG. 2. Emotions.**



Among the other main results, we can highlight:

- Greater confidence in relating to Italian citizens.
- Improvement and expansion of the network of social interaction.
- Achieved awareness of the opportunity to start a new life in another country.
- Build new learning that can be internalized in depth and prove significant, it is crucial starting from own each lived story, knowledge and paths and experiences of learner.
- With foreign students it is necessary to take account of the great social and cultural changes that each of them has experienced.
- Developing in autobiographical writers greater awareness, guidance and self-guidance, and motivation to want to put themselves along a perspective of lifelong and lifewide learning and education.
- Experiencing the paths of biographical writing with thoughtful purpose and guidance to support progressive development of skills for self-guidance is therefore beneficial.
- Biographical reflections have been implemented within the European models of recognition, certification and validation of non-formal and informal learning (Di Rienzo, 2010).
- The migrant status is a condition of life particularly difficult also from the point of view of the identity, which can benefit from autobiographical methods.
- Regarding the final questionnaire, 95% said they have been interested in and have enjoyed the autobiographical writing. On the other hand, only 5 % felt embarrassed to talk about himself because not common in her/his culture.

**FIG. 3.** *Enjoying in writing Autobiographical Format.*



## Conclusions

From writings we can argue that leaving own land was a painful experience especially for those without family in Italy. Social inclusion was particularly difficult due to distress, isolation and discrimination

experienced especially by older aged individuals. Cultural differences emerged referred to religious and civil cults, food, and the woman role.

Autobiographical writing is a particularly useful method for building one's identity, particularly in a multicultural context. The identity condition of the migrant, in fact, is rather complex and difficult, following the theory of the marginal man, conceived within the Chicago School. People of the host country often has a stereotyped image of immigrants. To overcome stereotypes, a narrative activity allows people to tell their life stories through the autobiographical writing.

According to the responses of the participants, the autobiographical format proved to be an effective tool for developing a greater awareness of oneself, of others and of the socio-cultural context. Furthermore, this has allowed them to interact, to confront and participate in educational processes in a more active way, thus improving interpersonal skills.

In educational contexts, including CPIAs, the autobiographical format can facilitate communication and help improve teaching-learning processes both face-to-face and e-learning using digital technologies.

To conclude and open to future perspectives for pedagogy, I therefore promote the importance of the enhancement of educational strategies that enhance personalization in education and the active and competent use of technology for a concept of innovation that feeds on reflection, creativity, and a careful analysis of the needs of the person, of the context and of the society, and of the aspirations of the person, in a balanced consideration between personalization and digitalization.

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# **Lifelong Learning And Continuing Education As A Complex And Interdisciplinary Framework For The 21st Century**

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## Lifelong Learning and Continuing Education as a Complex and Interdisciplinary Framework for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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**KEYWORDS:** *Lifelong learning, Continuing vocational education and training, Capability approach, Work based learning, Reskilling and upskilling.*

### Introduction

The adult education movement was able to define its aims thanks to the discussion work in the field of some international conferences promoted by UNESCO in the second half of the twentieth century: starting with the Elsenour conference in 1949, then in Montreal in 1960 and in Tokyo in 1972, international meetings attended by up to seventy-nine states. The goal of adult education was essentially seen as the massive literacy of populations, as one of the fundamental areas of post-war reconstruction and the development of democracy. Already in the history of pedagogy, from humanism to the tenth ninth century, thanks above all to the work of some 'enlightened' pedagogists (Erasmus of Rotterdam, Comenius, Montaigne and Rousseau), and to educational movements of some philanthropic groups (Don Giovanni Bosco, Fourier and others), the sensitivity to the subject was forged above all as a work of a humanitarian approach and care for the opportunities for liberation of the peasant and proletarian population.

In Italy, since the 2000s, adult education has been the subject of several studies and research, also in connection with the establishment of centers for lifelong learning and the training of educators working in these centers (Alberici, 2002; Di Rienzo, 2009).

The discussion around the theme of adult education developed in the twentieth century has seen above all two dimensions: the first as a preparation for working life, the second as a possibility of development of the individual in himself, or as a possibility of opening adult people with spiritual and cultural dimensions, and growth of self-awareness. Both approaches, over the years, have been emphasized on the one hand by the growth in skills needs deriving from technological

development and, on the other, by the consolidation of cultural and scientific movements of adult education which have placed support for education/training at the center of human development as a desirable dimension throughout the person's entire life, also as a guarantee of a better quality of life.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century connected knowledge workers and citizen, global markets and blended cultural traditions requires individuals that can create knowledge and enhance human capabilities in work agile transition.

Conclusions of UNESCO Conference in Hamburg (1996) affirm that education is characterized by various activities that allow the person, from childhood to old age, to acquire a dynamic knowledge of the world, of others and of himself, as underlined today new LifeComp European framework (2019) of personal, social and learning to learning key competences.

According to Umberto Margiotta, «[t]he formative interpretation of lifelong learning brings with it a temporal conception of a complex nature which, having abandoned the linear vision, projects subjects and organizations into an ecological, historical-evolutionary dimension and is expressed in the cyclical idea of time» (2015, 247).

We always learn, during life through a tangle of intentional and non-visible and invisible relationships – therefore – this is the conviction of Umberto Margiotta who refers in his writings to specific literature and its authors. Here we introduce a dimension of construction and reconstruction of meanings for the person who identifies himself in his development process in a transformative key.

The lifelong learning process is, therefore, a vital process centered on the construct of learning to learn understood as a heuristic principle (ivi, 146-147).

The link between a good society and a happy work and sustainable development is becoming increasingly evident. In Italy the ISTAT Report, on fair-sustainable well-being specify how work constitutes the basic activity both of material support and of realization of individual aspirations.

That of happy and 'decent' work, as defined by the International Labour Organization, can only be a paradigm with a high pedagogical caliber that brings with it alongside instances of self-realization and emancipation and 'material' ones.

The Observatory on Happiness established in 2021 by the *Happiness Research Association* conducted a research that involved 1,314 people (72.3% employees and 27.7% freelancers) from which emerged the perception of a lack of alignment of values between workers and companies.

It is indeed necessary to rethink and safeguard a 'happy work' in which technical efficiency, results, profitability and turnover are as important as those intangible assets that concern the defense of the

integrity of the person at work and the cultivation of his emotional, moral and ethical intelligence.

Where sustainability is a direction (not so much a goal) capable of generating a radical change in the subject's attitude towards himself, towards the environment in which he lives and towards his economic, social and professional practices.

The issue of sustainability is also central to the development of adult education as discussed during the meeting with panelists. The 2030 Agenda since 2015 has engaged governments and all civil society towards the realization of a sustainable development model. The rationale of the Agenda is to address the problems and the necessary change of perspective from a systemic and interrelated angle for a defense of the future of living beings. With regard to the issue of education quality (i.e. Goal 4), we read that by 2030 the number of young people and adults with relevant skills including technical and professional skills necessary for the job must be increased. By 2030, the United Nations also aims to ensure that all people, women and men, have the possibility of achieving full literacy and numeracy. Goal 8 of the Agenda, in particular, is indicated as «Encouraging lasting, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all» ([www.asvis.it/goal8](http://www.asvis.it/goal8)).

Reflexivity, centrality of the human subject, inclusion, assessment of competences: these are some keywords that characterize the right approach to lifelong learning. This concept has also been related with pedagogical approach about the meaning of work and employability for the individuals.

A multidimensional vision of lifelong education is also clear in the integration between the formal, informal and non-formal dimensions. The right of access to this form of education not only has a compensatory function, but concerns all adults, in order to prepare them for change of skills and for competences to live as fully responsible subjects in society in transformation. Finally, the area of adult education has been increasingly connected to issue of citizenship education.

The field of VET key-studies are also considered very relevant and also the studies on the capability approach as paradigm for education lifelong learning.

The topics argued from panelists are as follows five point.

### **1. Pedagogical questions related to knowledge creation in the work's environment also beyond digital innovation**

The new digital ecosystem, IA, robot and the new way of interacting man-machine are changing life and working action sense making process. As emphasized from Costa, society, including the education and work, is evolving, and incorporating digital technology and

simultaneously requiring new dimensions of competence development of new dimensions. Artificial intelligence has overcome some of previous technologies limitations. Especially, problem solving skills, logical reasoning and perception of IA mean that automation of some non-routine cognitive tasks is now possible (Lane, Saint Martin, 2021). These changes redefine work processes, professional models, but also impact on employee's well-being and their relationships. In Costa's opinion is very important to enhance not only digital skills but also to agency's competence of people to act critically and entrepreneurially, to answer to the new digital ecosystem characteristic transformation (Van Lear, 2017). This translates both by acquiring IA-related skills and enhancing human capability by promoting creative and social intelligence, cognitive and emotive skills for anticipate, choice, act, reflect.

As Aleandri, Cavero and Calvet wrote in conference's abstract: «Technology, which had already become indispensable for our daily activities, has become even more so and required greater and broader knowledge and skills». From an educational point of view, e-learning platforms have had a great development and use. From those premises, Authors proposing a 'pedagogical strategy' using tools (autobiographical methods, coding) aimed at emphasizing and promoting awareness of personal and social identity, of one's own educational and life experiences with a view to enhancing flexibility, sustainability and personalization useful for knowledge and skills for the workplace but also for life as a whole. According to the perspective underlined in LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence (2019), the focus is on personal but also social development, at work but also on life based on learning to learn as a key to lifelong, life wide and life deep learning, strategic for an inclusive educating for the society of future.

## **2. Vocational processes, work based learning and dual systems: best practices and empirical research**

As written by Marcone in his speech, the theme is therefore to rethink, starting from initial training, flexible and sustainable dual learning paths to train young people capable of facing green and digital transitions from the perspective of the sustainability paradigm.

The relevance of the topic correlates with some questions on which the pedagogy of work and adult education questions itself, among which we recall: how to reduce the skills deficit between job supply and demand or between the educational and productive worlds through the recognition and certification of skills? How to tackle the conditions that generate unemployment, especially youth unemployment (for example the persistence of a significant percentage of NEET)? How to apply the key principles of the Work Based Learning in the context of lifelong

learning with particular regard to the processes of 're-entry' of adults in work contexts, of the 'reskilling or upskilling' processes of adults participating in training initiatives? What are the practices of recognition, validation and certification of the skills acquired in informal and non-formal contexts?

As outlined by Angotti, we have to reflect about the implications for social and labour-market dynamics, in terms of effective and widespread upskilling and reskilling processes. It argues that the system does not respond adequately to emerging needs in the recovery scenario and that the recognition of an individual right to training is also needed. In this light, the paper advocates for a revalorization of Law 53/2000 that foresees periods of leave to be on offer to workers for training purposes. This tool could effectively complement the training provision designed by firms and significantly improve the employability of workers. The individual right, particularly, could act on two crucial aspects: the all-pervasive spread of adequate competencies into the workforce, and - not to be underestimated - a significant extension of the range of skills including, more massively, digital and soft ones.

### **3. International debate about the relationship from lifelong learning and sustainability as the issue of new approach to welfare**

The idea of a happy work – this is the opinion of Daniela Dato – is part of the theoretical framework of the numerous studies that are being directed towards the development of the Science of Happiness (Seligman, Natoli, Sen, Formica, etc.), a 'new' science and transdisciplinary oriented to demonstrate that happiness is not an emotion, it is not a destiny but a competence that can be. And to scientifically validate the hypothesis, disciplines such as pedagogy, psychology, but also neuroscience, molecular biology, quantum physics, economics, sociology, integrated medicine, philosophy that helped define the construct of designing happiness, or the possibility of the individual, the organizations, the communities all build, design happy development design.

Communities and organizational contexts, opening up to a new instance of happiness can then contribute to the construction of a new humanism because they offer new looks, new frames of meaning and new formative practices that bring back to the center the dignity and the right to a happy work and the idea of a more human economy oriented to promote well-being and ability to aspire.

In this sense, organizations can also be said to be sustainable if they «put at the heart of the concerns and care the subjects who, evidently, promote this development and who benefit from this» (Annacontini, 2014, 190). It will be enough to scroll, in addition to the objectives of the 2030 Agenda, the 12 points of the Manifesto of the Growth (2016) to claim a pedagogical primacy in every discussion aimed at orienting and

giving meaning to contemporary forms of sustainable development also in organizations.

#### **4. Capability approach and education to critical thinking for adult education**

The capability approach tout court calls into question two internal reasons for the pedagogical argument: the theme of human educability and the theme of development and growth as self-realization. So it was not difficult to glimpse the pedagogical device tout court in the theory of the Chicago philosopher.

The point is the critical awareness of the risks of a utilitarian worldview which, throughout the twenty-eighty-two thousand years, seemed to triumph in the Western world.

In the light of the latest events determined by the pandemic crisis that has upset the socio-economic assets on a planetary level, the utilitarian *Weltanschauung* has loosened the ropes: the awareness of the fragility of a neoliberal economic model has opened a breach right on the front of the idea the limits of development and the need for a new paradigm, that of sustainable development (Alessandrini, 2019; Riva, 2018). In Sen and Nussbaum's terminology – as underlined by Alessandrini – capability is the real potential upon which 'human flourishing' is built. People's wellbeing goes far beyond their wealth, for it involves the opportunity to develop their life plan in accordance with their capability.

By developing 'educational capital', people empowerment is the first step towards «substantial freedom» that is – to use Sen's words – «a kind of freedom which involves the capability to convert available goods and resources into freedom to pursue one's objectives and goals, conduct alternative lifestyles and develop one's life plan according to individual values».

Capabilities are thus essential rights that, yet differently, need to be safeguarded and granted to all citizens. The theoretical framework underlying the capability approach was already formulated by Sen in the mid-1980s. Recently, the original frame of reference was expanded by a number of authors to consider such aspects as public policy and to investigate issues such as law and ethics from different perspectives. Protecting human dignity calls for high levels of capabilities on the part of citizens. According to Nussbaum, ten capabilities are necessary to accomplish social justice, which can be classed in internal capabilities (personal traits, intellectual and emotional capabilities, capabilities in terms of perception and movement) and combined capabilities (resulting from interaction with environmental factors) and might result in certain 'functioning'.

Also for d'Aniello in his speech, the perspective of a capability approach and in contrast to the theory of human capital. As focalized by De Blasis, it is growing the demand for skills related to innovation,



technology design and programming, analysis and evaluation of systems and content and complex problem solving, since the so-called fourth industrial revolution is reshaping the way people work, interact and live. In fact, the fourth industrial revolution, as Schwab says, does not only change what we do, but also what we are and those who do not embrace change are likely to come out defeated (Schwab, 2016).

De Blasis also underlines the importance of media literacy, with its critical and expressive functions. A literacy that includes not only the ways to understand and critically interpret media, but also the tools for widespread and correct online participation, through creative and social expression and a fair and conscious approach to research and web surfing (Buckingham, 2008). For a learning that is lifelong and not only linked to formal contexts, collaborative and problem-solving oriented, accessible and inclusive, transversal competences become 'strategic' for directing oneself in study, work (Pellerey, 2006) and, more generally, in life. Strategic skills, in fact, represent paramount individual capabilities for personal, interpersonal and professional adaptation. They allow people to live in a more positive way the relationships with others and with the context, becoming able to deal with the various tasks to be performed.

## **5. New competences and skills for labour's environment and society**

As d'Aniello argues in his speech, the lean post-Fordism approach, and the so-called knowledge economy or the economy of the immaterial have already underlined its importance and incorporated it in the creation of value. «Unlike Fordism, which considered it a disturbing and unproductive element. However, the real novelty consists in the emerging and increasingly extended criticism to that neoliberal rationality, which permeated the post-Fordism model». This pedagogical paper, as written in his abstract, with a critical-argumentative methodological approach, analyze the neoliberal impact on relational dynamics in environment of work and indicate some useful trajectories in order to enhancing relationality for the purposes of a human development. As underlined from Costa, it is crucial to ensure availability of adequate skills throughout society to meet citizen needs, unleash the potential brought by digital age and assure that digital transformation would be an opportunity for empowerment and inclusion for all peoples (OECD, 2019a). This makes it essential in the work market to overcome the trap of low skill equilibrium, to enhance not only digital skills but also to qualify the agency of worker competence development, to act critically and entrepreneurially, to answer to the new digital ecosystem characteristic transformation (Van Lear, 2017).

The debate showed the complexity and the richness of the themes relating to adult education in modern terms. A lot of issue concerning this argument. For example:

- Widening the idea of innovation, not only seen from the functionalistic and technical point of view, but also as social participated dimension for adult's inclusion;
- Focusing on the idea of social responsibility of educational educators as a leverage for a shared and effective process of growth of opportunities for adults (upskilling and inclusion).
- How work's pedagogy can focus on the anthropological issues such as individuals' wellbeing, freedom and development of their potential rather than productivity and economy of human capital;
- How is possible overcoming the economic individualism centred on instrumental rationality, and enlarging the horizon on the person's value and dignity (decent work);
- How we can concentrate on a formative welfare concerned not only with the conditions for employability, but also the defence and promotion of the individual's opportunities for development.

As suggestions for further research, panellists would like to stress that adult education not only have to create also employability but also active citizen able to reach their potential aspirations and capacity of thinking as member of democratic community. The role of adult education is very crucial to create a condition to realize an educational justice and the mindset to nourish democracy in the society of tomorrow.

The theme of lifelong learning is also currently of great relevance for the mission 4 of the PNRR (National Plan of Recovery and Resilience). The PNRR is the Italian Government tool that outlines the objectives, reforms and investments that Italy intends to implement through the use of Next Generation EU funds, to mitigate the economic and social impact of the pandemic and make the country fairer and more inclusive, with a more competitive, dynamic and innovative economy. The Plan defines six missions: 1) digitalisation, innovation, competitiveness, culture and tourism; 2) green revolution and ecological transition; 3) infrastructure for sustainable mobility; 4) education and research; 5) inclusion and cohesion; 6) health.

The educational-training dimension, as a fundamental component of the development that accompanies the whole of an individual's life, should be the subject of support activities both in terms of training the trainers and as an upskilling and reskilling path of each person's competences.

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## Educational (R)evolution. The Reality and Challenges of Lifelong Learning In Catalonia

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**ABSTRACT:** *This conference focuses on adult education, especially in the non-formal field and with an emphasis on actions about people of immigrant origin. Adult education is contextualized in the Autonomous Community of Catalonia (Spain), and the different modalities are explained. Then, we will start from two studies carried out by our research group 'Social and Educational Analysis' (GR.ASE), the Project 'Immigration and Adult Education: Dynamics of Integration and Exclusion', funded by the Cooperation Centre of the University of Lleida (Spain). And the Recercaixa project 'Cultural diversity and equal opportunities at school', funded by the La Caixa Foundation. We will mention two practical experiences of literacy: the 'Literacy course in the African Association of Lleida and province', and 'the project of Catalan classes for immigrant mothers', implemented in several schools with the support of volunteers. Finally, due to the rapid and continuous changes that characterise contemporary societies, lifelong learning and education are considered indispensable for the capacity of reflection and critical thinking, in a perspective of peaceful coexistence and global citizenship.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Lifelong learning, Adults education, Literacy, Immigrants, Social inclusion*

La pandemia de Covid-19 que ha afectado a todo el planeta, ha demostrado ser desde el principio no sólo una emergencia sanitaria, sino también una emergencia educativa y de formación. De hecho, ha puesto en evidencia las necesidades de formación adicional, que se han vuelto más cruciales, como por ejemplo que la formación lifelong y lifewide sea cada vez más especializada en las TIC (Tecnologías de la Información y de la Comunicación)

(Aleandri, 2021, 73)

### Introduction

This text focuses on adult education, especially in the non-formal sphere and with emphasis on actions aimed at people with an

immigrant background. Adult education is defined, contextualised in the Autonomous Community of Catalonia (Spain), and the different modalities that currently exist and the main organisations and entities that provide them are explained.

Next, focusing on people of immigrant origin and based on various studies carried out by our research group 'Social and Educational Analysis' (GR.ASE), various experiences and projects are explained. Based on the results of the project 'Immigration and adult education: Dynamics of integration and exclusion', financed by the Centre for Cooperation of the University of Lleida (Spain), the vision of adult education centres and teachers in the province of Lleida on the subject in question is explained. And based on the Recercaixa Project 'Cultural diversity and equal opportunities at school', financed by the La Caixa Foundation, it explains the work carried out in primary schools in Catalonia with a high percentage of pupils of foreign origin and ethnic minorities, to improve parental competences and the command of the Catalan language of immigrant families and to favour their socio-educational inclusion. The text ends by showing two practical literacy experiences: the 'Literacy course in the African Association of Lleida and province', and 'the project of Catalan classes for immigrant mothers', carried out in several schools with the support of volunteers.

## **1. Concepts and Terminology in Adult Education**

Today, the concept of education is widely accepted in the educational community as an unfinished process which begins at birth and lasts a lifetime, with learning processes taking place in a multiplicity of contexts and situations, hence the concepts of 'lifelong learning' and 'lifewide education', terms which are common in our contemporary societies.

Adult education goes beyond the so-called literacy courses and comprises a wide spectrum of activities encompassing so-called formal, non-formal and informal education. Trillas (2003) explain the difference between the three types of education.

Informal education is unplanned, unstructured and unregulated; it is learning that is obtained in a casual way, as a result of daily interaction in the everyday environment. Formal education, on the other hand, has a structured and regulated character, is intentional, regulated and planned, and is provided in educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities and other training centres), concluding with an official certification. Finally, non-formal education is also intentional and planned and, like formal education, can also be structured in terms of objectives, contents, etc., in a process leading to some level of learning. However, it is not formal and therefore does not lead to any academic qualification. Finally, we would like to recall that, in all three cases, there are different types of learning, valid and complementary (European

Commission, 2001), although each takes place in a particular context and has its own particular purpose.

Moreover, we must take into account the concept of lifelong or lifewide learning, which now occupies an important place in the educational space, as emphasised in various European Union documents: 'Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality' (Communication from the Commission of the European Communities, 2001), 'European benchmarks in education and training: Follow-up to the Lisbon European Council' (Communication from the Commission of the European Communities, 2002) and 'Education and training in Europe: diverse systems, shared objectives for 2010' (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2002), among others.

Adult Education would also fall under the so-called lifelong learning perspective of Lifelong Learning (Aleandri, 2011), comprising a broad spectrum of learning activities that go beyond formal education.

Adult education or lifelong learning comprises learning activities that enable adults to develop skills, enrich knowledge and improve technical and vocational competences. This involves people with different objectives, such as obtaining a qualification, catching up or extending knowledge (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2021, 1).

## **2. Adult Education: A Crossroads in Catalonia**

In Catalonia, adult education or lifelong learning includes learning activities which, in the context of lifelong learning, enable adults to develop skills and abilities, enrich knowledge and improve technical and professional competences.

Adult education is implemented by different official institutions dependent on the *Generalitat de Catalunya* (autonomous government) and by foundations, associations, and civil society organisations. We will see briefly the actions carried out in some of them.

Currently, adult education (in the formal sphere) depends on the Department of Education of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, as do regulated education in the stages of pre-school, primary, compulsory, and post-compulsory secondary education. One of the main objectives is to promote re-entry into the education system and the training of the future (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2021) and three modalities are offered: face-to-face, blended and distance (on-line). In accordance with current regulations, adult education is aimed at people over 18 years of age and people over 16 years of age (or who will be 16 years of age in the calendar year in which the training begins), who meet certain requirements.

### *2.1. Adult Education Centres*

The face-to-face modality is mainly carried out in the adult training centres and classrooms (CFA), which are centres belonging to or collaborating with the Department of Education of the *Generalitat de Catalunya* and offer training courses that could be included in the formal and non-formal spheres.

To be able to teach basic education, teachers must have a university degree in primary education (teaching diploma or degree in primary education) and for secondary education graduates, a bachelor's degree (5-year university degree) or a degree (4-year university degree) in the corresponding speciality and a master's degree in secondary education (which qualifies them to teach this type of education). In addition, a master's degree in adult education is required. Teachers are civil servants and must have passed a competitive examination.

#### Instrumental Training Cycle

The aim of these studies is for adult pupils to learn to read, write and do elementary arithmetic. This training lasts approximately 1,100 hours and, on completion, students are awarded the Certificate of Instrumental Training. Access to these studies is open to people over 18 years of age or those who reach the age of 18 during the calendar year in which they begin the training. In accordance with Decree 213/2002, of 1 August, which establishes the curricular organisation of basic training for adults (DOGC no. 3694, of 7/08/2002), the contents are organised into three levels, which include three areas of knowledge (language, mathematics, and social and natural sciences).

#### Graduate in Compulsory Secondary Education for Adults (GESO)

These studies, which have a duration of 1,190 hours, are aimed at enabling adult students to complete basic studies and obtain the Compulsory Secondary Education Graduate (ESO). In general, access to these studies is open to people over 18 years of age (or who will be 18 years of age during the year in which they begin the training), and to people over 16 years of age in some cases.

The contents are organised into 34 modules with a teaching load of 35 hours each. The modules include three areas of knowledge: communication, scientific-technological and social.

### *2.2. Courses and Programmes for People of Foreign Origin*

Adult education centres offer courses specifically aimed at people of foreign origin, in which language teaching plays a key role, on the understanding that fluency in the languages spoken in our territory is an important factor in favouring inclusion in our society. For example, courses are offered in Catalan and Spanish for foreigners.

And in some adult education centres, depending on the Barcelona Education Consortium, an innovative experience is being carried out called 'New Opportunities Modules', a language programme aimed at



young people aged between 16 and 18, with non-Romanic languages, who have been schooled in their country of origin and who have been living in Catalonia for a very short time.

### *2.3 Distance learning*

On the other hand, distance learning is also possible in adult education. Some courses depend directly on the Spanish Ministry of Education, such as the mentor classrooms, for example. Others depend on the Department of Education of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*. For example, the Graduate in Compulsory Secondary Education for adults can be taken in adult education centres and classrooms that collaborate with the IOC (Institut Obert de Catalunya) and the High school can also be taken by distance learning through the IOC.

### *2.4 Other training offers*

In addition to the Department of Education, there are other Departments of the *Generalitat de Catalunya* which, through their collaborating centres, offer various courses in the field of non-formal education, whether they are occupational training courses (aimed mainly at the unemployed), courses to improve the professional skills of active workers or courses for personal development. They can be face-to-face, tele-training, blended training courses, etc.

For example, the Department of Employment of the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, in collaboration with some collaborating centres, offers various occupational training courses, aimed at unemployed people, or for the improvement of employment (lifelong learning courses), aimed at employed people, whether in the public or private sector. This Department also organises courses subsidised by the European Social Action Fund and programmes various training actions within special programmes.

The Department of Culture of the *Generalitat de Catalunya* also offers Catalan courses through the Consortium for Linguistic Normalisation. In accordance with the CEFR, the courses are divided into different levels, and after passing them, official certificates are awarded certifying knowledge of the Catalan language. Finally, the Department of Welfare and Family Affairs organises, generally through the Civic Centres (located in the neighbourhoods of the cities or in the municipalities), various training activities aimed at all citizens, for example, talks and conferences, courses and workshops on well-being and personal development, etc.

On the other hand, we also observe a diversity of training courses in the non-formal sphere that come from the Municipal Institutes of Education (dependent on the town councils), from County Councils, from associations, from foundations, etc. These entities, through European funds, transversal programmes, subsidies from public or private bodies, etc., offer occupational training courses, courses to improve professional qualifications and personal development.

### 3. Adult Education: Praxis with Migrant People

Having drawn the general map of adult education in Catalonia, in this section we will focus on the education of immigrant adults. We will mainly start from the results of the research project 'Immigration and adult education: dynamics of integration and exclusion', financed by the Centre for Cooperation of the University of Lleida. funded by the Centre for Cooperation of the University of Lleida and directed by Dr. Núria Llevot, lecturer-researcher of the research group Social and Educational Analysis (GR.ASE) of the University of Lleida (Catalonia). And also, the results of the Recercaixa Project 'Cultural diversity at school', directed by Jordi Garreta, professor and researcher at the University of Lleida, which analysed how cultural diversity and equal opportunities are dealt with and worked on in schools in Catalonia. Among the actions carried out, those aimed at the families of pupils of immigrant origin stand out, among others, the Catalan classes for parents, which we will explain in this chapter.

Two of the objectives of the first project, which are of special interest for this chapter, were: to know the situation of adult immigrant education in Lleida; and to draw the main characteristics of the institutions/associations in which adult literacy programmes are carried out (Llevot et al., 2007).

Based on a survey of organisations in the province of Lleida that carry out adult education activities, the study examined the data from two perspectives: that of the centres where these programmes are implemented, and, on the other hand, that of the teachers who carry out these tasks. The results obtained because of this triangulation are particularly relevant and outline future lines of action.

Regarding the profile of the centres, we observe that, out of every 10 centres, 4 are linked to the autonomous administration (i.e. the *Generalitat de Catalunya*), 1 to the local and/or county administration, 4 to other institutions and 1 responds to voluntary initiatives. In this last group we find the immigrant associations, which carry out training activities with the collaboration of volunteers. We will then explain, as an example, the experience of a literacy course carried out in the African Association of Lleida and province.

Although Catalonia, throughout the 20th century, had welcomed immigrant populations from other regions of Spain, from the 1990s onwards, people from other countries arrived, mostly from developing countries (Domingo y Bernad, 2017).

In 2015, 21.7% of Spanish immigration was concentrated in the autonomous community of Catalonia. This phenomenon is new, and Catalonia has to face the challenges of a new reality (Torrelles, 2021).

And education is no stranger to this paradigm shift. Since 2000, the profile of students in compulsory education has changed substantially with the entry of students of foreign origin into the classroom.

The presence of students of foreign origin in adult education classrooms, although not a majority in absolute terms, is also significant. The study carried out by Llevot, Garreta and Lapresta (2007) shows that half of all students are of immigrant origin, being present in 9 out of 10 centres.

### *3.1 A practical experience: the literacy training of pupils from the African Association of Lleida and the surrounding area<sup>1</sup>*

With the arrival of immigrants from other countries, new non-formal educational situations arise that are taken on, at least initially, by social initiative groups. The aim of these initiatives is to be able to offer training that is more adapted and accepted by the new citizens, which contributes to their social and labour integration and can also provide them with a better quality of life (Llevot, López, 2018, 2016), and to this finality specific methodologies and materials are used.

With regard to the initiatives of the immigrant groups themselves, there are associations that are created and evolve as the first immigrants settle in the new country and encourage their compatriots and relatives to join them (on this subject we recommend consulting the monograph directed by Garreta in the *International Journal of Sociology* 2013, volume 71; and also: Llevot, Garreta, 2015; Llevot, López, 2018, 2016; Garreta, Llevot, 2013, 2015).

The African Association of Lleida and province was founded in 1996 and had around 200 members in 2000, the year in which the experience we are going to explain below began. The members ask for Spanish classes to be held at the association's headquarters, as they cannot find Spanish language courses in the locality that meet their needs, most of them are in an irregular situation and therefore socially and occupationally precarious. In fact, they explicitly demand Spanish language teaching because mastery of the Spanish language can open job opportunities for them in the rest of Spain.

The president at the time contacted Professor Núria Llevot of the University of Lleida, with whom he had collaborated on other occasions, to organise the course. And so, with the collaboration of students from the Diploma in Social Education and three students from the degree in Psychopedagogy, who came as part-time volunteers in a totally altruistic way, the experience was set in motion. A Spanish language course was organised for students with different levels of education and knowledge of the language. As can be seen from the profile of the association (African association), immigrant students of all ages, members, and non-members, mostly young (under 30) and male, come from African countries and with different educational levels. There are students who have studied at university in their own country, others who have studied secondary or elementary education, and others who have not been to school and are illiterate.

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<sup>1</sup> See: Bernad et al., 2005.

With enough volunteers, small groups of pupils are organised according to their level of knowledge of Romance languages and their level of schooling (some have been educated in European languages such as French, others in Arabic or their mother tongue, and others have never been to school). Some activities are carried out within the same assigned group and others in inter-level and heterogeneous groups.

Through these language classes, in addition to facilitating the learning of Spanish (and later Catalan), an intercultural climate of mutual knowledge and help is created, which favours the inclusion of immigrants in the new host society.

Garreta and Llevot (2015) point out that immigrant associations, and other organisations as well, in addition to offering training, carry out functions, such as reception and orientation, which, although they are not their direct responsibility, are useful for these immigrants who have just arrived at their destination. These actions facilitate the accommodation of immigrants through information, support, encouragement, etc. Not to mention the role of teaching the languages of the host country, which can be a good way to promote intercultural dialogue (Llevot, 2014).

Language teaching involves teaching the culture of the country. The learning process itself involves a process of internalisation, understanding of the environment and socialisation. Through this process, mechanisms, and strategies for integration in 'conflicting' aspects are created. (Formariz et al., 2003, 37).

These language classes are based on a functional conception of language based on the needs of the pupils, following Paulo Freire. Priority is given to the acquisition of language skills and abilities, which are necessary in everyday situations (Bernad et al., 2005).

As basic material, especially in literacy classes, the model of programming oral language courses for non-literate immigrants is used (Miquel, 1998). In addition, other materials are adapted (Spanish language textbooks for adults, schoolbooks, reading books, etc.), and also materials are developed for the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language (Miquel, 1998).

In addition, other materials are adapted (Spanish language textbooks for adults, schoolbooks, reading books, etc.), and the school also produces its own material from books, magazines, newspapers, etc. (Bernad et al., 2005).

### *3.2 Second practical experience: Catalan classes for immigrant mothers in schools*

In a diverse and changing society, schools face multiple challenges, including responding to the needs of pupils and their families. One of these challenges is to work with the cultural and religious diversity that characterises many schools (Garreta, Torrelles, 2020; Llevot, Bernad, 2020, 2019). As can be seen in graph 10 above, the percentage of pupils

of foreign origin has grown exponentially in our schools, pupils from different countries, although the majority are of Moroccan and Romanian origin. Many of these families do not know Catalan and/or Spanish, the vehicular languages in schools in Catalonia, which means that the linguistic difficulties of the families constitute one of the main barriers in the family-school relationship. This obstacle is compounded by difficulties derived from precarious living conditions, low socio-educational levels, lack of knowledge of the Spanish educational system, etc. Among others, as the results of the Recercaixa Project 'Cultural Diversity and Equal Opportunities at School' indicate schools have undertaken various training actions in informal (collective meetings and tutorials, forums, intercultural festivals and other celebrations) and non-formal (language courses, workshops, parents' schools, etc.) spheres to overcome these barriers, improve positive parental skills and parental involvement in the education of their children and favour the social inclusion of these families (Llevot, 2021; Bernad, 2021). For the purposes of this text, we will focus on the Catalan classes for mothers and fathers.

During the Recercaixa Project, an ethnography (observations and interviews with teachers and families) was carried out in 10 schools with a high percentage of pupils of foreign origin in Catalonia. And in all the centres studied, Catalan classes for parents are held during school hours, although women's attendance is favoured. In schools in Catalonia, Catalan is the vehicular language of learning (as some of the interviewees pointed out, 'it is the language of the school') and one of the demands made on families is the school monitoring of their children, which includes among other tasks the supervision of homework (reinforcement homework that pupils have to do at home) and which usually falls mainly on women (Bernad, 2016). Let us recall that the establishment of a good family-school relationship is one of the main factors affecting children's success at school (Bernad, 2018; Garreta, Llevot, 2015; Llevot, Bernad, 2020, 2016, 2015; Sanuy et al., 2017). On the other hand, knowledge of the Catalan language also favours inclusion in the host society and allows for greater autonomy, greater job opportunities and social relations. However, especially among immigrant women, a greater lack of knowledge of the language is observed. For all these reasons, and as we have just mentioned, in most schools that cater for pupils of foreign origin, Catalan classes are offered during school hours to encourage mothers to attend while their children are in class. We find a diversity of proposals adapted to the context of each centre, although as a common point, in all of them priority is given to the functional acquisition of communicative competence.

#### 4. Discussion and Prospective

Today's societies are characterised by complexity and incessant changes at a dizzying pace in the economy, technology, politics, social relations and responding to new educational needs that arise in unpredictable and kaleidoscopic contexts. In particular, the impact of technologies and the acceleration of migration processes represent two challenges that must not be neglected (Garreta et al., 2021). On the other hand, the arrival of new population contingents from different countries and continents has led to the transformation of traditional societies into multicultural societies, a crossroads of cultures and religions which becomes a challenge for coexistence and social cohesion (Aleandri, 2021). In this complex scenario, against the backdrop of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, some of these experiences and initiatives have emerged.

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## Adult Competencies in Italy between Company's Responsibility and Individual Right to Training

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**ABSTRACT:** *The post-covid era will make the issue of adults up-skilling and re-skilling even more urgent: the digital turn in the so-called 4.0 industry process will require a diffuse and pervasive upgrading of skills and competencies of the workforce. In Italy, the structure of the industrial sector largely based on SMEs makes the recovery process in the post-Covid phase even more challenging. The paper is structured into three sections. It first proposes a periodization of main policy developments in the field of continuing vocational training in Italy based on three key factors: a) weak/strong impact on the universality of the beneficiaries; b) standardization/individualization of training opportunities; c) strong/weak impact on labour contracts. Second, the paper presents an analysis of the Italian case, based on original quantitative data gathered in the context of several broad surveys on the working of the systems of continuing vocational training in Italy carried out by the INAPP (Italian National Institute for Public Policy Analysis). Third, based on the empirical evidence presented in section two, the paper proposes a reflection on the implications for social and labour-market dynamics, in terms of effective and widespread upskilling and reskilling processes.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Adult Learning, Continuing Vocational Training, Up-Skilling And Re-Skilling, Human Capital, Individual Right to Training.*

### Introduction

With respect to the vast field of analysis represented by adult education, the paper focuses on one of its delimited and specific components, represented by continuing company training. The aim is to explore, through the use of primary sources deriving from recent research carried out by INAPP, the ability of the Italian Continuing Education system to intervene effectively in the reskilling and upskilling of low skilled workers.

The advent of the fourth industrial revolution has led to a radical digital transformation that will increasingly involve a change in business processes, which become able to exploit, in business activities, the intelligence introduced by digital technologies. The transformation processes question consolidated paradigms and practices, therefore it is

necessary – from a proactive point of view – that they are accompanied by the introduction of tools that allow a gradual transition to the adoption of new digital technologies, especially in SMEs (CEDEFOP, 2020a, 2020b; Camera dei Deputati, 2020). These represent the substantial part of the Italian industrial and tertiary base, however they often do not have the relational, human and/or technical resources to enter the networks of technological innovation, as is the case with large companies, more easily involved in agglomerations of technological innovation.

If we consider the necessary requalification of the so-called low skilled, on 19 December 2016 the Council of the European Union (2016) adopted the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults<sup>2</sup>. The Recommendation invites Member States to offer adults with a low level of skills, knowledge and skills access to upskilling paths, as improving training.

Faced with the scenario represented so far, we will question the capacity shown by today's policies in favour of continuing training aimed at employees to cover the skills needs affecting the human capital present in the company in the most widespread and homogeneous form. Further policies and measures relating to adult education tout court will be left in the background, recalling only some data in the introduction to the section on the Italian framework.

The paper is structured in three sections. The first proposes a classification of the main sector policies, on the basis of their relationship with some factors considered crucial. In the second part we will focus on some specificities of the Italian case, presenting some critical issues emerging from the results of recent investigations promoted by INAPP. Finally, particular emphasis will be placed on the subjective right to training of workers, understood as an appropriate approach to support the upskilling and reskilling processes currently in place within the company, to be understood as complementary to continuing company training.

## **1. A classification of company continuing education policies**

Since the mid-nineties in Italy there have been various legislative initiatives on the subject of continuing company training. The main ones will be recalled below. To outline some constitutive elements useful for the analysis, we intend to resort to a set of oppositional conceptual pairs, so as to define, albeit briefly, their qualifying characteristics and evolutionary trends. Couples are structured on the following polarities:

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<sup>2</sup> The Recommendation adopts a definition of low-skilled adults that goes beyond the level of education, to understand the different dimensions that make up the overall skills of an adult, divided into three distinct dimensions: level of education, IT and digital skills and cognitive skills (literacy and numeracy).

a) weak/strong impact on the universality of the beneficiaries; b) standardization/individualization of training opportunities; c) strong/weak impact on national collective bargaining agreements. It is possible to reconstruct some trend lines of policy development by proceeding, in diversified form, from one pole to another of the aforementioned oppositions.

The development of legislation on continuing training finds its starting point following the Agreement on labour costs of 1993 when, through Law 236 (Article 9), a financing instrument specifically aimed at continuing training is launched. The new funding channel introduced – among other things – the possibility for the worker to express an 'individual request for training', through the provision of 'vouchers' by the Regions/Public Administrations. The implementation of training devices on individual demand immediately highlighted the difficulty of reaching the weaker groups of workers.

Law 53/2000, in art. 5, introduces 'training leave' providing that public or private employees, with at least five years of service in the same company or administration, can request a suspension of the employment relationship for training leave for a period not more than eleven months, continuous or split, over the entire working life. By 'training leave' we mean that aimed at «completing compulsory schooling, obtaining a second-degree qualification, university degree or degree, participation in training activities other than those implemented or financed by the employer». With art. 6 of the same law, «leave for continuing training» is introduced for workers, employed and unemployed, for which the right to continue training courses throughout their life is recognized, to increase knowledge and skills professional. The training can correspond to the independent choice of the worker or be prepared by the company, through the company or territorial training plans agreed between the Social Partners.

Already at the start of the new millennium we are therefore witnessing a change of perspective compared to the past, with an emphasis on the universality of use – at least within the category of workers – the importance of individualized training on needs and the impact of the device on collective bargaining processes<sup>3</sup>.

Among the various public funding channels currently available, those coming from the Interprofessional Joint Funds for continuing training are among the most used by companies today. These are associative bodies promoted by the representative organizations of the Social Partners through specific Interconfederal Agreements stipulated by the most representative trade unions of employers and workers at the national level (Article 118 of Law 388/2000).

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<sup>3</sup> At the same time, on the side of adult learning, the establishment of permanent territorial centers for adult education (CTP) began in 1997, replaced in 2012 by the provincial centers for adult education (CPIA).

Overall, the types of recipients are limited: being aimed mainly at private employees, they almost never intercept self-employed workers but on the other hand include seasonal workers, apprenticeship workers, workers suspended in layoff.

In the case of the Funds, which currently represent by far the most prevalent device in companies, we therefore have to deal with an intermediate formula between the two policy lines mentioned above: in the face of a potential marked individualization of training and an impact on the contractual level, we are witnessing a regressive trend in terms of effective use by the universality of workers.

In addition to the picture outlined so far, the role played by the regional administrations and the Autonomous Provinces, where the ESF resources are available, should also be mentioned<sup>4</sup>.

The analysis of the regional planning of continuing training interventions funded by the Regions/Public Administration relating to 2018-2019, carried out by INAPP with the research group *Continuing Education and Learning for Adults* (previously called *Surveys and research on continuing education*), has highlighted how in recent years regional calls are increasingly reaching also categories such as the unemployed, involved in a training perspective for upskilling, reskilling and reintegration into the labour market.

In the case of the measures promoted by decentralized public administrations, for the purposes of the analysis that is being conducted, it is therefore possible to emphasize the function of potential expansion of the number of workers who, to a greater extent, remain excluded from the use of training within the company.

Among the most recent policy measures, it should be remembered what was defined with the tax credit measure introduced with the Law of 27 December 2017, no. 205 (budget law 2018) where in art. 1 (paragraphs 46-56) a new automatic tax incentive is established in favour of investments made by companies for the training of employees in matters relating to 'enabling technologies', as technologies that are generally relevant to the process of technological transformation and digital of companies as required by the 'National Business Plan 4.0'. Subsequently, with the Interministerial Decree of 4 May 2018, the necessary provisions were issued for the application of the tax credit for training costs.

Concluding the analysis of policy measures, it should be noted that some significant initiatives have recently taken place in the context of collective bargaining, as evidenced by the introduction of the subjective right to training in national collective agreements for companies in the engineering sector. The agreement (CCNL of 26 November 2016)

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<sup>4</sup> During the two-year period 2018-2019, the Regions published 65 calls, for a total funding of over 344 million euros, mainly from the European Social Fund and, in part, from state resources (Revolving Fund, residual Law 236/93 and Law 53/2000) and regional ones (INAPP data 2021).

recognizes the worker a 'subjective right to training' which corresponds to a training course lasting a total of 24 hours, which can be used by the worker over the three-year period of reference to acquire technical and managerial skills, transversal, linguistic or IT.

## 2. Specificity of the Italian framework

In the Italian panorama, the share of the active population characterized by low levels of competence represents a particularly alarming element. Adults who participated in education and training activities in 2019 were 8.1%, compared to an EU-28 average of 11.3%. In this way, Italy is in seventeenth place in the European ranking (Eurostat LFS, year: 2019).

Based on the findings of the OECD/PIAAC survey (OECD, 2013)<sup>5</sup>, the data takes on an even more worrying meaning if the analysis is conducted in terms of the gender of the skills examined. Regarding language skills (literacy), 27.7% of adults can be classified as low skilled (level 1 or lower), against a European average of 19.9%. In the field of numeracy logic, low skilled people account for 31.7% of adults, compared to a European average of 23.6%. Finally, when looking at basic digital skills, it appears that 57% of adults lack basic digital skills, compared to an EU average of 31%.

In Italy, adults with the need for upskilling, i.e., skills retraining, are estimated between 17.5 and 19.5 million, between 53% and 59% of the adult population aged 25-64. The incidence of low-skilled adults is higher than the average among the over 55, in particular employed and non-employed, and among the unemployed and inactive in the 35-54 age group<sup>6</sup>.

Among the main factors that may affect the individual's ability to access training opportunities, age is first of all noted (Fig. 1). In fact, it is the younger, educated and employed groups of the population that participate most in learning paths, while among those who are poorly educated, have over 45 years of age and have a low-skilled job, the opportunity to be involved educational activity decreases. Eleven percentage points separate the participation rate of the high-skilled

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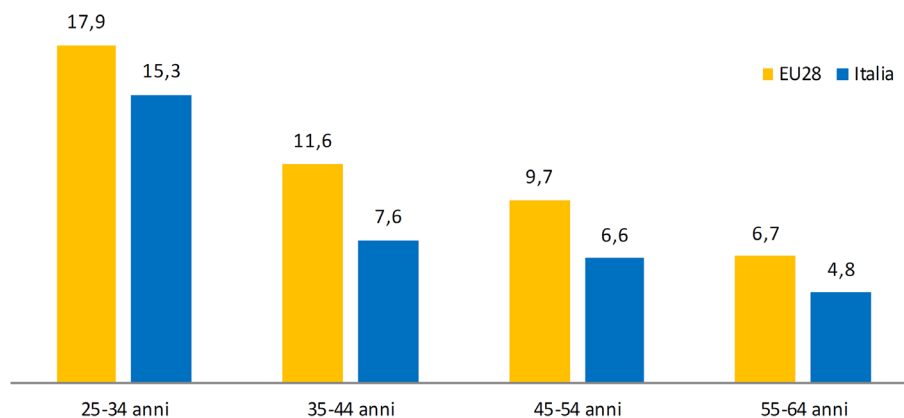
<sup>5</sup> PIAAC (Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) is aimed at assessing the skills of the adult population, promoted by the OECD. The survey measures the skills possessed by adults between 16 and 65 and collects information on how adults use their skills at work and in daily life. The competences possessed by adults are measured through cognitive tests on the domains of literacy, numeracy and problem solving. ISFOL oversaw the part of the international survey relating to Italy during the first survey (ISFOL, 2015). Currently the research for the Italian part is carried out by INAPP. The term low skilled is used here with a different meaning from that adopted in the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 2016 on the paths to improve the level of skills (Council of the European Union, 2016)

<sup>6</sup> The term 'low skilled' is used here with a different meaning from that adopted in the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 2016 on the paths to improve the level of skills (Council of the European Union, 2016).

(15%) from that of the low-skilled (3.9%). The gap with respect to the European average is present for each age group and is more evident in the 35 - 44 age group. The gap is also present for each professional group.

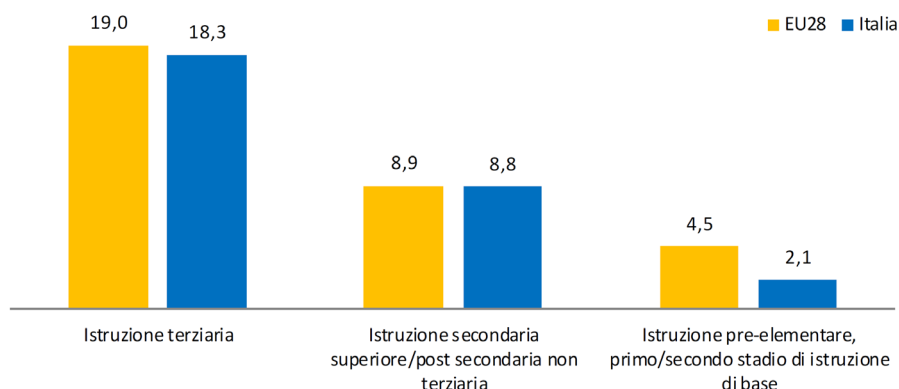
The individual's ability to access learning opportunities is also highly dependent on the level of education possessed (Fig. 2).

**FIG. 1.** *Participation rate of the population aged 25-64 in education and training activities by age group - EU28 and Italy, Year 2019 (% val.)*



Source: EUROSTAT data, Labour Force Survey (LFS), elaboration by INAPP.

**FIG. 2.** *Participation rate of the population aged 25-64 in education and training activities according to the level of education - EU28 and Italy, Year 2019 (% val.)*



Source: EUROSTAT data, Labour Force Survey (LFS), elaboration by INAPP. Notes: *Istruzione terziaria*: tertiary education. *Istruzione secondaria superiore/post secondaria e non terziaria*: upper secondary education/post secondary not tertiary education. *Istruzione pre-elementare*: pre-primary education.

In Italy, the weight of this factor is very accentuated: the indicator has remained at the same levels for years and remains below the European average, with a share of graduate and post-graduate participants in training which has remained at 18.3 for three years. % (in 2016 they were 19.2%), almost the equivalent of the share of low educated adults residing in Denmark; this group in Italy is heavily penalized with just 2% of formats.

### *2.1. Adults in the company continuing education system Strong segmentation in the propensity of companies to invest in training*

Training represents a very complex phenomenon to be detected and measured statistically. Therefore, in order to rigorously detect its dissemination at national and EU level, the European institutions and EUROSTAT developed in the early nineties a statistical survey model called Continuing Vocational Training Survey - CVTS (European Parliament, Council, 2005). The survey, coordinated by EUROSTAT and carried out at national level by the statistical institutes of the EU Member States (for Italy, by ISTAT in collaboration with INAPP), allows not only to estimate the evolution of the diffusion of the phenomenon within of each Member State but also to measure the positioning of each country in Europe.

In a European comparison in Italy, the incidence rate of training companies on the total number of companies reaches the highest value in the historical series of the surveys carried out since 1993, through the CVTS, INDACO and Intangible Assets Survey (Angotti, 2017)<sup>7</sup>. However, this did not make it possible to recover positions in respect of the Community partners. If in 2010 Italy occupied the 19th position in the European ranking, in 2015 it was 22nd out of twenty-eight countries, with 60.2%, compared to 93.1% for Sweden, 86% for Spain, 85.7% for the United Kingdom, 78.3% for France and 77.3% for Germany. The Italian figure, the result of a long-term trend, already showed a growth that has been further consolidated, but the position in the European ranking is influenced by the progress of the partners: continuing training has spread further over time not only in Northern Europe but also in several countries of Southern and Eastern Europe.

Turning attention to the national context, it is noted how the critical issues identified by the international comparison have also re-proposed in the years following 2015. In 2018, 67.8% of Italian companies were active in training in favour of development and updating of the knowledge of its employees (INAPP, INDACO Imprese-CVTS, being published)<sup>8</sup>. This propensity shows a net average increase compared to 2015, but must be considered in the presence of a jagged and diversified landscape, depending on the variables considered from time to time. First, the high heterogeneity within the system is closely related

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<sup>7</sup> Intangible Assets Survey provides a measure of the intangible investments of Italian companies by simultaneously detecting, for each company interviewed, the various factors that contribute to the development of intangible capital and their duration. The survey is carried out in collaboration with ISTAT, as part of the collaboration provided for under the ISTAT-INAPP Memorandum of Understanding

<sup>8</sup> The survey detects information on training activities provided by companies with more than five employees, on the levels of training participation of employees, on the organization of work and company training. It also highlights the corporate training strategies. The survey is carried out in collaboration with ISTAT, as part of the collaboration provided for under the ISTAT-INAPP Memorandum of Understanding.

to the size class of the companies. Indicatively, the larger the company, the higher the probability that it invests in continuing training (Tab. 1).

**TAB. 1.** *Companies with 6 employees or more who have carried out non-formal training activities, by size class and territorial distribution. Year 2018 (a.v. and %)*

	v.a.	%
<b>Classe dimensionale</b>		
6-9	96,352	51.4
10-49	103,852	60.8
50-249	16,052	82.5
250 e oltre	2,721	93.9
<b>Ripartizione territoriale</b>		
Nord-Ovest	45,794	62.8
Nord-Est	64,528	62.9
Centro	47,692	55.1
Sud e Isole	60,962	51.5
<b>TOTALE</b>	<b>218,976</b>	<b>57.5</b>

Source: INAPP

In particular, it should be emphasized that in the micro-enterprises (6-9 employees) in 2018 a value of just over 50% was recorded, while in the larger ones the lack of training commitment is almost residual (6.1%). Analysing the state of the art without distinguishing between course activities and further informal training activities, such as workshops, rotation, on-the-job coaching, etc., a difference of 10.4 percentage points emerges between the value recorded in the North-East and that relating to the South and Islands.

It should be noted that in the central regions the percentage of enterprises engaged in training is greater than that recorded in the southern and island division.

## *2.2. Differentiation in rates of opportunity, participation, access to training and gender gap*

If the panorama of continuing training promoted by companies shows, as has been observed, considerable internal differentiations, a similar heterogeneity and variability on a geographical, dimensional and sectoral basis can be seen even if further aspects relating to participation and effective access to training opportunities.

With regard to employees present in companies who have carried out training courses, it is appropriate to focus attention on some specific indicators. We refer to the rate:

- participation, which measures the proportion of participants out of the total number of employees present in all companies;
- access, which quantifies the share of employees who have participated in training courses out of the total number of employees of companies that have carried out training courses.

The participation rate is of particular importance as it highlights how many employees actually participate in training courses out of the total number of employees present in the Italian companies. Employees who



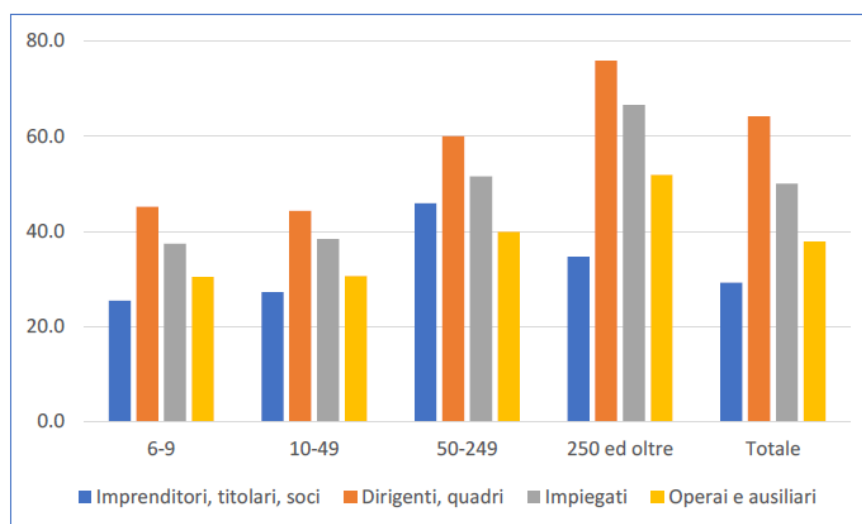
attended course-type training activities in 2018 represent 43.2% of the total, with a value that grows as the size class increases. It starts from about 33% for micro and small enterprises, to pass to a value that tends to almost double for larger ones.

As to the territorial variable, the North-West, which shows a value of +6.4 percentage points, on the one hand, and the South and Islands, which scores -9.2 percentage points, on the other below average.

With regard to the professional categories most involved in training (Fig. 3), the lowest incidence is observed among entrepreneurs, owners and partners, (29.2%), while the highest percentage is for executives and middle managers with 64.1%. Blue collars/auxiliaries are in an intermediate position (37.8%), below clerical workers (50%). An analysis by company size class, executives/middle managers again represent the category that has the highest participation rate, followed by employees. In companies with 50-249 employees, unlike the others, it is the entrepreneurs/owners/shareholders who can boast a greater participation in training courses, much higher than that recorded for workers/auxiliaries (respectively 45.9% and 39.9%).

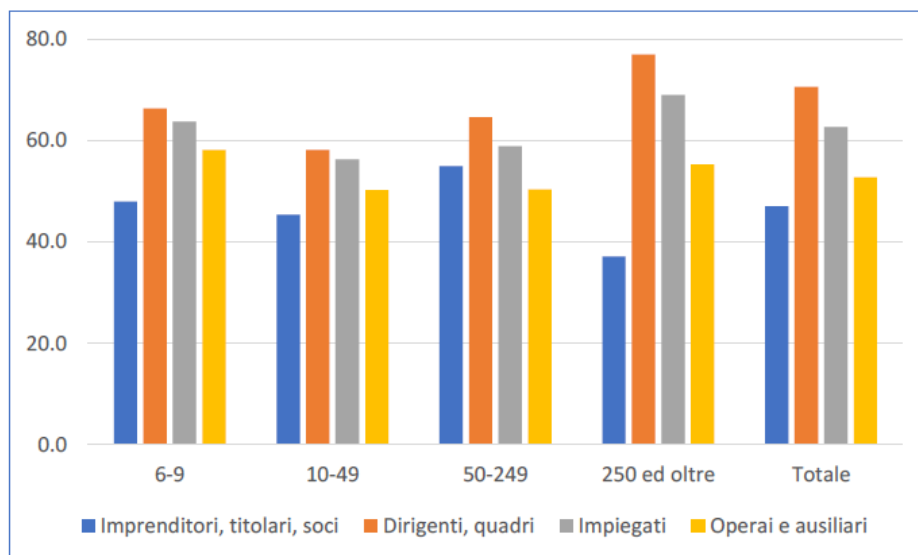
The access rate quantifies the share of employees who participated in training courses out of the total number of employees of companies that have carried out training courses. It varies significantly depending on the economic sector of the company. The absolute highest value is recorded for financial services, insurance and pension funds with 88.7%. In two other cases, namely chemical, pharmaceutical, rubber, plastic industry and supply of electricity, gas, water, etc., the threshold of 60% is exceeded, while for construction, means of transport, transport activities, warehousing and post, telecommunications, publishing, information technology, it is slightly below.

**FIG. 3.** *Participants in non-formal training activities in companies with 6 employees or more, depending on the professional qualification, by size class. Year 2018 (as a % of employees of all companies)*



Source: INAPP

**FIG. 4.** *Participants in non-formal training activities in companies with 6 employees or more, depending on the professional qualification, by size class. Year 2018 (as a % of employees of companies that have carried out non-formal training activities).*



Source: INAPP

Overall, women appear disadvantaged in terms of effective access to training (55.1% against 59%). The negative difference between the male and female access rate is confirmed in all the size classes considered, however, it becomes particularly significant in relation to larger companies (-7.1 percentage points). At the territorial level, the gender gap to the detriment of women is around -3 percentage points in the north of the country and increases to -4.5 percentage points in the center. In the southern and island areas, the lesser probability of women to access courses becomes even more consistent, marking a distance of 9 percentage points.

Also, in relation to access, the lowest figure is recorded for the category of entrepreneurs/owners/shareholders, with 47.1% (Fig. 4). The distance between managers/middle managers and employees on the one hand and workers/auxiliaries on the other is constant and becomes significant especially in companies with over 250 employees.

### *2.3. Training for digital skills and soft skills*

Up to now we have mentioned the profound differentiations that mark the effective possibilities of human resources present in Italian companies to access continuing company training. Actual opportunities, in fact, vary according to the geographical area in which the company is located, its size class, the gender gap and the type of professional qualification involved in the training courses, as well as the age and level of education.

To complete the analysis, we will now deal, in synthetic and purely indicative terms, with the presence in the training courses promoted by companies of some key skills, invoked today as determinants in an

upskilling and reskilling perspective of the active population present in the labour market (Council of the European Union, 2016). On the one hand, the focus will be on digital skills, of which the low degree of mastery among the Italian adult population in general was previously emphasized. In addition, the so-called soft skills will be included in the analysis, as the non-specific, cross-cutting skills.

The companies participating in the INDACO Imprese-CVTS survey were asked what were the skills they intended to develop or update in 2018 with the help of the course activities held in 2018. In order to grasp the general picture, it should be emphasized that more than 44% of companies stated that they want to develop technical-operational skills or in any case specific to the type of production performed. Relational skills are close at hand (43.8%), followed by team working (32.3%) and problem solving (25.7%). Managerial skills rank at 22.3%, and basic IT skills follow (22%), while foreign language skills are less important (13.4%). Only a residual percentage of companies declare that they intend to develop numeracy and literacy skills.

### **3. Upskilling, reskilling and subjective right to training of workers**

In the analysis conducted so far, the limits of the current company continuing training system have been stressed, showing the main inequalities in the effective access of workers to course activities. In this regard, it should be remembered that the levels of participation in education and training activities of employees are strongly conditioned by socio-economic factors such as age, gender, educational qualification, social status (for example, graduates participate twice more than non-graduates, and six times more than non-graduates). To this must be added that the actual opportunities vary by geographical area of location of the company, by size class, and by type of professional qualification involved in the training courses.

In today's phase, the tendency to concentrate mainly within the perimeter of the company the choices regarding the profiles, age groups, gender and further socio-economic characteristics of the subjects who most need to be involved in structured training actions shows its limits.

At the same time, the start of a new season marked by policy initiatives agreed between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education and the Coordination of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces, has placed the issue of the skills of the adults, including adult workers. The national strategic plan for the development of skills of the adult population represents a first and significant effort of convergent and concerted action to effectively tackle the problem of low skilled people.

In the new landscape that is emerging, the conditions for a desirable renewed recognition of the individual right to training for those who work in the business world seem to have been determined.

By 'individual right to training' we mean here the condition of the possibility recognized by law for the worker, within defined limits, to establish autonomously with respect to the company, some training needs deemed crucial for the maintenance of their degree of employability or in view of career development, and consequently being able to access specific training.

Among the most appropriate regulatory devices to open up this policy perspective, a reference to Law 53/2000 seems particularly suitable, in the terms in which it was described in the first part of the analysis provided in paragraph 4 of art. 6 «a share, equal to 30 billion lire per year, of the Employment Fund referred to in Article 1, paragraph 7, of the decree-law of 20 May 1993, no. 148, converted, with modifications, by the law of 19 July 1993, n. 236. The Minister of Labour and Social Security, in agreement with the Minister of the Treasury, Budget and Economic Planning, annually allocates the aforementioned quota among the regions, after consulting the Permanent Conference for relations between the State, the regions and the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano».

Law 53/2000, still in force, was partially revised with Legislative Decree n. 150/2015 and subsequent amendments which, by repealing paragraph 4 of art. 6, established that the resources originally destined to the Regions to finance training projects presented directly by the workers, remained at the expense of the Social Employment and Training Fund and flowed to the management plan for the financing of active employment policies.

A policy perspective could therefore go in the direction of relaunching the only national law that finances the individual right to training, enshrined in law 300/1970. In this sense, paragraph 4 of Article 6 of Law 53/2000, which finances leave for continuing education, should be reinstated.

Furthermore, as regards the activation of public policies aimed at supporting the training participation of employees, it is equally desirable that, it is necessary to link the regulatory interventions to collective bargaining, in line with the experiences of the national collective labour agreements in the electricity and metalworking sector mentioned above, in agreement with the Regions and Public Administrations and with the possible support of the Interprofessional Joint Funds.

Likewise, it is clear that policy measures of this approach require at the same time the development of the network of territorial services directly usable by individuals, a direction towards which the National Strategic Plan for the development of skills of the adult population pushes. In this sense, the evidence shows the need to implement and strengthen the accompanying services to the individual demand for

training through specific measures, including the strengthening of guidance and skills assessment services, the definition of customized training projects and the certification of acquired skills.

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## Work Evolution and Relation Dimension: Pedagogical and Training Trajectories for Human Development

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**ABSTRACT:** *Fourth industrial revolution, Nano-Bio-Info-Cognitive Science and Technology, Industry 4.0, artificial intelligence, digital economy. All these terms indicate a metamorphosis, an evolution of work, organization and production. Current work has already changed, outlining its future. And the relational dimension seems to be a central and unavoidable dimension in this change. This is not an absolute novelty. Post-Fordism, in particular the lean post-Fordism, and the so-called knowledge economy or the economy of the immaterial have already underlined its importance and incorporated it in the creation of value. Unlike Fordism, which considered it a disturbing and unproductive element. However, the real novelty consists in the emerging and increasingly extended criticism to that neoliberal rationality, which permeated the post-Fordism model. The solution of continuity lies in the incipient demarcation from this rationality and its substantially functionalistic and productively instrumental conception of the relational field, revealing a new educational possibility. This pedagogical paper, which is written with a critical-argumentative methodological approach, intends to analyze the neoliberal impact on relational dynamics at work and to indicate some useful trajectories in order to translate the above-mentioned possibility into action, enhancing relationality for the purposes of a human development, in addition to a purely economic-productive one, in the light of the signs of a probable anthropological turning point, coming from several directions. The paper begins by highlighting the current working changes and its related relational needs, before moving to describe the post-Fordism openness and to dwell upon the bio-economic conception of the cooperative and relational variable. Then, the paper moves on the quoted trajectories, especially focusing on the topic of acting relationality conceived in an ethical and educational way, according to the perspective of a capability approach and in contrast to the theory of human capital which becomes an enterprise-unit. Secondly, it focuses on the dichotomy between the neoliberal performing-enjoying link and the acting-desiring one, as well as on the reflective, biographical and emotional-affective aspects of adult training for acting and desiring relationality. Therefore, the aim is to overcome a reductive and only performative point of view of the human factor for the benefit of an inclusive point of view, which is able to combine the demands of personal growth related to being-in-relationship with the demands of work innovation.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Pedagogy of Work, Relational Dimension, Neoliberal Rationality, Human Development, Training*

### **Premise: a new possibility of education in a change**

Human being «is change; lives in change»; lives on change». Change is «the condition for a possibility of education» (Nosari, 2013, 5-6).

Especially in this first part of the century, those who deal with pedagogy of work know well how they cannot ignore this last statement, just as they perfectly know that the changes, which suddenly follow one another in the world of work, are pain and delight of their own reflections. Delight, because the dynamism of the substance is always heralding new stimuli and it does not certainly throw researchers down a state of immutable monotony; and because it is precisely in the variation that it is probable to observe original conditions of educability. Instead, pain, because it is not easy to orient oneself within a context animated by a continuous renewal with what should be a due ponderation; because the speed of the changes makes difficult to have a deep knowledge of their cause and, above all, their effect; because, consequently, it is pedagogically arduous to decipher and to adequately meet the challenges, which are incessantly running after each other under the sign of an increasing metamorphosis and complexity.

That being stated, with regard to challenges and new stimuli, it must be outlined that the latest work changes have at least a certain continuity with the previous ones, allowing us not to deviate from a topic which is considered central not only by the writer, but also consensually unavoidable for the general pedagogy applied to work: the topic of relationality at work. In fact, if post-Fordism and, even more, the lean post-Fordism (Bonazzi, 1997) paved the way for an unprecedented enhancement of the relational dimension on the one hand, the advent of the fourth industrial revolution (Schwab, 2016) clearly seems to reiterate its cruciality and to facilitate the course of its affirmation, together with the perspectives about the 2030 Agenda sustainability (UN, 2015), which converge on the same dimension as an aspect to be cultivated for the purpose of a decent, dignified quality work on the other hand. Despite the mutability of the scenarios, the relational one is, therefore, a common and stable aspect. It comes to understanding the differences and sound a new 'possibility of education' in changes, that is, the liberation of human potential.

### **1. Renewed relational needs, neoliberal rationality and fears for a life subsumption**

Beyond the later re-dimensioned expectations (Arntz *et al.*, 2016; Brynjolfsson *et al.*, 2017) about a near future, strongly deprived of a mechanically substituted human work, the co-invention between high



technology and organization-management-production, typical of the «second age of machines» (Brynjolfsson, McAfee, 2015), urges on acting together with machines and acting more and more together *tout court*, devoting to the purpose of creative innovation by means of interpersonal plots, which are significantly nourished within self-organized learning environments in constant dialogue with intelligent machines.

Nano-Bio-Info-Cognitive Science and Technology development, which gave rise to the Industry 4.0 paradigm upsetting the methods of organization and the same interpretation of work, stimulates cooperation in disintermediated work groups, who are animated by the «principle of interdependence» (Ellerani, 2020, 133).

Artificial intelligence and digital economy in general make it possible to redefine the boundaries of operating within the eco-systemic perimeter of an inseparable synergy between thought and action, which is fed by processes of inter-subjective signification (Costa, 2019a), calling into question «a pedagogical relational ethics» (Costa, 2019b, 95).

Those just reviewed are only some examples of a pedagogical reflection and not, which lingers over the changes taking place, turning to the need to strengthen individual relational dispositions. One might say, nothing new under the sun. As anticipated, we have already witnessed the acceptance of these dispositions within a new framework during the post-Fordism auroral phase, in particular with what is defined as the «feminization of work» in the face of the 1968 feminist protest against factory work, that is, the abdication of a male Fordism hyper-rationality in favor of an organizational-productive integration of the feminine «moving subjectivity», made up of intuition, creativity, relationships, and so on (Revelli, 2001). Together with other joint causes, which decree the end of a model, technological evolution requires new approaches at work and the relational variable is consequently credited. Moreover, starting from the 1990s, when JIT (the just in time Japanese production system) and lean production (Bonazzi and La Rosa, 1994; Monden, 1986; Womack *et al.*, 1991) have found a way into the West, by invoking a greater involvement of workers in the effects of total quality and *kaizen* (continuous improvement), and a polycompetent group work also begins to proliferate from a few autonomous teams with related needs of horizontal coordination (Aoki, 1991), the same relational dispositions experience a surge in popularity up to their celebration with the knowledge economy (Moulier Boutang, 2012; Rullani, 2004) or the economy of the immaterial (Gorz, 2003).

So, where is the news? It has been for some time that the relational sphere, and everything is with it, is no longer considered a disturbing element and is incorporated in the creation of value. The novelty lies in the emerging and increasingly widespread criticism to that neoliberal rationality (Dardot, Laval, 2013) which permeated the post-Fordism model, entered into crisis after the fateful 2008 and the above-sketched

umpteenth technological acceleration, a substratum of the above-mentioned fourth industrial revolution. The novelty lies in the incipient demarcation from this rationality and its essentially functionalistic and productively instrumental conception of the relational field (Cegolon, 2019).

In fact, according to the bio-economic perspective of the neoliberal *ratio* at work, appealing to the activation and the mobilization of relational dynamics allows to trigger off and to keep alive the «communication-cooperation-self-control (social control) dialectic», based on the performing self-adaptation in terms of constant increase and optimization by means of emulation and competitiveness, in addition to satisfying production needs. Definitely, «the valorization process works by exploiting the capabilities of learning, relationship, and social (re)production of human beings. It is in effect a kind of primitive accumulation, which is able to put to labour and to value those activities that in the Fordism-Taylorism paradigm were considered unproductive». In other words, what was previously unproductive, it later becomes indispensable, as long as it is confined within the economic code of exchange and 'valorisation' of personal qualities («life subsumption») (Fumagalli, 2015, 8-11). Gorz (2003, 14) also refers to the life subsumption when he stresses that the post-Fordism workers' relational wealth, which was above all acquired outside work (in games, sports, theatrical activities, hobbies, etc.), enters the production process simply because it is useful and not because it is to be further enriched also for their 'humanization' and integral realization: very *tranchant*, «the post-Fordism enterprise puts to work and exploits their vernacular knowledge». Similarly, Bazzicalupo (2013, 140) notes the only functionality of relationship, deprived of a sincere attention for what it should involve in terms of authentically human exchange: «there is no sympathy, nor co-existence, because it is not 'useful', as they enter the relationships in a functional way to the utilitarian calculation: in case, these affectivities can be an aim at always pursuing with an 'economic' logic. [...]. This perspective revolution can be dated to the marginalism in the nineteenth century, but its fulfilment is today, in the last thirty years».

That is clear, talking about an emerging criticism or an incipient demarcation does not mean that the rationality in question and the economization of the existence to which it is devoted came to an end. In fact, there are not a few pedagogical fears that even current work changes may fall into the trap of a purely economic-productive undue influence of human resources and behaviors. For example, Cegolon (2019, 79 and 144) wonders whether the digital worry for the strengthening of relational capital and soft skills in general demonstrates a real concern for their «value *in themselves*» (educationally and formatively speaking) or their «value *for*», which is neoliberally attributable to the «spirit of a techno-nihilist capitalism». Ellerani (2020, 136) questions the possibility of finding ourselves into

the presence of a «new humanism of work», or a «human reduction empowered as a non-negotiable competitive advantage». Dealing with a renewed attention to relational and well-being propensities for work *lato sensu*, Dato (2018) does not hide the hypothesis of purely efficiency and functionalistic implications, but she hopes for a decisive convergence of economic interests and human development. Moreover, pedagogy of work has always focused on this convergence (Bocca, 1999).

Nevertheless, despite legitimate fears, there are signs of a possible anthropological turning point. Not only the increasingly extended multidisciplinary criticisms – a sign of an overall cultural remodeling – even by our local pedagogy – which was previously quite uncritical, as Xodo (2018) and Ellerani (2020) remarked –, but also the recursive stress recently laid by international and national organizations on the quality and the dignity of work (WHO, ILO, OECD, ISTAT); the above-mentioned 2030 Agenda call (UN, 2015) to a humanly sustainable and inclusive work; the apparent change in EU economic policy after the pandemic event; the considerable growth of companies, who decided to focus on the «exchange ‘work-well-being’» – rather than just work-pay – and pedagogical-emancipatory programs of «*people care*» (Dato, 2018, 28); the return of thoughtfulness for an ‘educational’ diversity management (Alessandrini, Mallen, 2020). So, let us focus on the turning point, exploiting the conjuncture among various change factors, and let us move on highlighting the contribution of a pedagogical reflection on it.

## **2. Change trajectories: responsible relationality and ethical commitment for human development**

Below we indicate some trajectories it seems appropriate to follow. First of all, it seems that the time has come to recognize the reductionism in the point of view of adult training, which is weighed down on the implementation of competences subordinated to employability and the performance improvement and to move on to the «same expansion of an idea of competence» (Alessandrini, 2019, 27) in a capacitive and, therefore, agentic sense. It implies supporting an internal individual development – therefore, not only responding to ‘external’ needs – not addressed to an objective attestation of having learned to do, but to an extension of the opportunities to be and to do, in order to act with substantial freedom both in a work and life context, giving shape to a desirable existence, which transcends the pursuit of one’s own interest (within the satisfaction of the economic interest) and is based on the faculty to act with ethical «commitment» (Sen, 2001, 269) or «obligation» (Sen, 2006, 61) towards the others. In this perspective, training in support of relational capacities is projected towards the widening of the information, cultural, evaluation and value bases, which are able to legitimize and to increase an agentic power in interdependence. That is starting from to the mutual recognition of the

common essence, everyone's value/goal in itself, the instances of meaning and realization, as well as in view of the common good, where good primarily coincides with human development according to the ethical criteria of co-educating 'respons-ability'. Then, as Sen (2001) proposes, it is a question of going beyond the theory of human capital in favor of human capability, aimed at replacing learning drive for work and a remunerative increase – Foucault (2005, 185) would talk about «diversified flows of income» – with the right to learn and to 'educate oneself' and the effective possibilities to exercise that right, with which one can cultivate with the others and with respect for the others those combinations of functionings which allow one to act, in order to one's own growth in humanity. It is a question of replacing neoliberal individualism, loneliness and 'competitive cooperation' with «moral deontology» and «universalism of relational responsibility» in capability approach (Abbate, 2019, 80-81).

The neoliberal discourse assigns each individual the responsibility for one's own success, egocentrically substantiated by the maximization of the individual utility and an *eudaimonia*, which coincides with giving free rein to the desiring *bios* within the economic truth of production-consumption (Bazzicalupo, 2013). The satisfaction of the *homo oeconomicus* is consistently achieved in two ways at work and through work: *i*) becoming an enterprise-unit (Foucault, 2005), in constant competition with itself in the effort of self-alienation, putting to use its human capital without solution of continuity, and in competition with other units to maintain employment in the era of a mobilizing precariousness (Fumagalli, 2011); *ii*) obtaining that 'income' from a self-investment which allows to find an intimate happiness in the consumerist fusion with object-goods (Foucault, 2005; Lipovetsky, 2007). This satisfaction is also showed in the joyful passions, which may be aroused by the management performative recognition, and sticks to the possibility of setting oneself up on the others to meet the «employer's love» (Lordon, 2015, 95). Consequently, the responsibility breaks with the otherness – with which one interacts with only «superficial» and «short-term» relationships, so as not to re-emerge the Fordism group solidarity (Sennett, 2012, 18) – and is uniquely calibrated on the «accountability» of operational effectiveness (Dardot, Laval, 2013, 442), as well as being closely linked to the fear for not adequately capitalizing (Lordon, 2015). On the contrary, the capability approach assigns the context of social practices, socio-collaborative groups and collective responsibility the success for an extension of capabilities for human development. The aim is not the maximization of individual utility, nor one's own exclusive well-being, and the freedom to act is both a negative freedom from oppressive economic influences and a positive freedom, connected with a life planning beyond the economic truth (Sen, 1997; Ricoeur, 2005), in turn connected with the capability to implement what Mencarelli (1986, 34) would define the «*right to be*» and to «live with human fullness». Transposed into work, from a

pedagogical point of view, the above-mentioned commitment or obligation refer to the ability to respond to the other (*respondere habilis* > responsibility) in action by taking the other's care, building up with this one, and through the significance of the meeting with the other, a space of liberation of human potential, which makes working action a properly co-educational action. Therefore, they refer to the implementation of ethical-educational relationships, thanks to which 'produce oneself' for work (Moulier Boutang, 2000) gives way to 'co-produce oneself' in a proactive comparison for an integral explanation of human functions and in support of cognitive plasticity, the heart of the capability to act. This plasticity is formatively supported by the focus on a circular dynamic among acting processuality, collegial reflexivity and cognitive mediation (Costa, 2014), which is able to give birth to learnings for personal/interpersonal evolution, in addition to technical-productive purposes, and to confer extra-economic value and human meanings to the same learning and acting processuality in the inclusive negotiation of complete responses with respect to emerging knowledge, finding in it the non-negligible core of a rich inter-subjective experience regarding the general identity and maturation progress. Always starting from the above-mentioned practice of mutual recognition, working relationships can be thus changed into relationships of educational gift (Labate, 2004), nourished by interest, but for the other, so it is an *inter-est* (Caillé, 1998).

### **3. Change trajectories: ideas for acting and desiring relationality**

In continuity with the first one, the second suggested trajectory is to promote the marginalization of the binomial performing-enjoying to the advantage of the acting-desiring one. Distancing ourselves from the neoliberally delineated individual, folded into him/herself, «self-entrepreneur» (Foucault, 2005, 186), called to perform at work and in life (Chicchi, Simone, 2017), to inexorably suffer from performative pathologies (Ehrenberg, 2010; Han, 2012) and to enjoy consumption and his/her own self-entrepreneurship, moving on referring to desire means lacanically recognizing in the other and in his/her (physical or virtual) presence a limit to enjoyment, generating educationally significant relationships aimed at a realizable planning which does not end in the production-consumption short-circuit at all (d'Aniello, 2019). The performance and consumer enjoyment is also the result of a social untying at work and reflects in both cases a situation of dependence: from the longed-for love of the employer and from that object of consumption, where one can see an identity denied by instrumental relationships. Moreover, it reflects the bogging down in an insane aesthetic tension: adherence to the imaginary of a self-entrepreneur, a self-made man with an illusory unlimited freedom, and the homologated imaginary of consumerism; this tension relishes an

eternal present: the recurrent and indefinite optimization of performance and 'consume today because there is no certainty of tomorrow in the precariousness'. Finally, all things considered, it reflects the incapacity/impracticability to educationally throw one's life forward and, therefore, to grow up. Instead, desire is educationally planning and oriented towards future, it lives on ethical tension, it cultivates independence by means of an autonomy gained in healthy interdependence and it precisely has the opportunity to accompany working action with the establishment of supportive and educationally significant relationships. From this point of view, listening to the people's «desirable», about which Rossi (2012, 88) talks, takes on a meaning which goes beyond well-being and happiness.

Third trajectory: training acting and desiring relationality also means being aware that the risk of injury, which is made possible by the implicit vulnerability in an ontological openness, is always potential in exposing oneself to the others (Bruni, 2007). Therefore, adult training cannot focus only on inter-subjective reflexivity for an autonomous and responsible agentivity. Nevertheless, it should consider the emotional-affective dimension (in an introspective and empathic sense) (Rossi, 2010), 'biographically' favoring feeling and self-awareness and, hence, hermeneutic awareness as a prerequisite for the flourishing of a moral conscience (Chionna, 2014; Serafini, 1986). «Defence, collusion and hostility in working relationships» can occur even working with intelligent machines, causing a «great subjective fatigue» and «disturbance, impediment, bewilderment» (Quaglino, 2004, 399). Nonetheless, alternating moments of «presence» and «psychological absence» (Avallone, 2011, 204 and 206) or executive automatisms and routines, which bring back the dimension of «ponos/labor» in place of «ergon/opus», may occur (Bertagna, 2017, 50 and 55). So, the just outlined training is designed to promote a relational well-being and a positive organizational climate (Zini, 2012), but also to support a vigilant self-presence, avoiding that the ego does not lose the confidence in one's own autonomous powers, the sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy and the awareness of the relation means-goals of the action in relationship in a more or less prolonged parenthesis of ponos/labor or absence.

Finally, the fourth and final trajectory: the training of an acting and desiring relationality cannot be relegated to the working context. It is necessary to recover the possible utopia of an educating community: by integrating non-formal and informal opportunities in adult personal/professional training; by returning to rediscover the relational function of cities and the meeting-confrontation culture with pedagogical care and stimulation (d'Aniello, 2021); by making the territory a co-responsible environment for relational learning, favoured by good «boundary crossing» practises (Engeström *et al.*, 1995). Basically, as Loiodice (2017) states, «today innovation characterizing work and its development is precisely based on the social dimension,

the capacity to create networks inside and outside organization, the possibility of really giving space and recognition to an intersubjective dimension».

In conclusion, it is believed that following these trajectories is congenial not only to be useful to the cause of strong relational digital ecosystems (Costa, 2019a), but also to revitalize the sense of being-in-relationship, in order to give human potential back the 'e-educational' opening which it deserves, even at work. Work is for people, not vice versa. Borrowing from Devaud (1951, 32) and distancing ourselves from his reflections on school,

work could not be a reason to live, since it is only a means; one does not live to work, but one works to live. [Thanks to training, one] must know how to remain a person by working and how one better becomes a person by working. Production in itself could not be the aim of a human activity; one was born for something better. [...]. The cause of work is lost if [the worker] does not measure his/her happiness and value of existence other than by the days of rest.

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## Innovative, Media, Strategic: which Skills for the New Complexities?

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**ABSTRACT:** *Skills are an actual 'pass' to the future and, in recent years, have increasingly represented an issue of strategic importance for employability and citizenship rights. Since the digital transformation is reshaping the way people work, interact and live, there is an increasing attention to the skills they need. This paper aims at examining the skills required in the current work (and not only) scenarios, also presenting some data, analysed during a PhD research, which 'snapshot' the perception of one's own strategic competences in a sample of 180 'digital natives'.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Media Literacy, Strategic Skills, Fourth Industrial Revolution, QPCS.*

### Introduction. Skills: a bridging concept

Within the pedagogical debate, the issue of skills has increasingly taken on a strategic value, in terms of employability and citizenship rights (Alessandrini, 2016). As a 'pass' to the future (ibid.), skills are mainly understood as the ability to act and perform effectively, implying knowledge and abilities, but also a correct professional attitude. Among these arguments, the context plays a fundamental role too, as a key word indicating one's ability to manage their potential in a situation (Fioretti, 2016). In their notion of 'polysemic' character (Alessandrini, 2016), they are indeed connected to effective performance, but they also represent intrinsic individual characteristics as an integral and lasting part of an individual's personality, whose behaviour they can predict in different situations (ibid.). We can therefore speak of a 'combinatorial knowledge' in which theoretical, technical, procedural knowledge is combined with operational and relational skills that allow each individual to act in ever different contexts (Alessandrini, De Natale, 2015).

In such a rapidly evolving scenario – such as today's one with fast digital and technological changes – the ability to 'anticipate' skill needs is essential in order to fully seize the opportunities offered by current trends and 'mitigate' the most disruptive and worrying outcomes. Indeed, these kinds of changes translate almost simultaneously, or at

least with a minimal delay, into a ‘disruption’ of skill sets for both current and emerging jobs (WEF, 2016). Even activities that seem to be less directly affected by such changes may actually require different skills as the ‘ecosystems’ within which they are performed change. It is therefore essential to reduce the so-called skill mismatch, which, like the skill shortage, is not only an economic problem but also a cultural one. Finally, it also has a psychological impact on the new generations (Mele, Nardi, 2017) in terms of insecurity and doubts choosing the school and the career paths to pursue.

From this point of view, the concept of skills can be understood as a ‘bridging concept’, a link in which the idea of training we choose to put in place becomes strategic together with the relative ‘educational sensitivities’ and ‘pedagogical reasons’ on which we intend to leverage (Sandrone, 2018).

## 1. Which skills?

### 1.1. Innovative

Nowadays, more than in the past, digital transformation is reshaping the way people work, interact and live, and consequently the skills they need. Since the most disruptive changes concern new technologies, the greatest demand is linked to this sector. The labour market is in fact seeing a growth in the search for IT professionals and digitally specialized workers. According to the European Commission (2019), since 2010 the demand has been significantly exceeding the supply of these skills, which will be much more in short supply in the coming years’ workforce.

**FIG. 1.** *Top emerging jobs in the US*



Source: World Economic Forum (2019: 3)

The highest needs seem to occur precisely in services and in segments with a higher ‘technological intensity’ (Franceschetti *et al.*, 2019). The inclusion of new technologies, in fact, can give rise to new jobs and

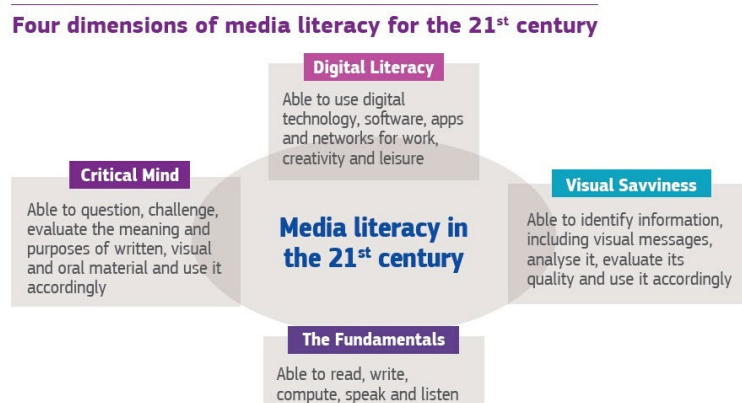
redefine the tasks of many others. It is no coincidence that the 'top ten' emerging jobs in the US (Fig. 1) mainly include professions related to the new industrial revolution (Big Data Architects, Automation Technicians, Renewable Energy Engineers, Automation Engineers, Organisational Development Specialists, New Technology Specialists, IT Administrators, Digital Transformation Specialists, IT Project Managers, Data Analysts) (WEF, 2019). Therefore, there is a growing demand for skills related to innovation, technology design and programming, systems and content analysis and evaluation, and complex problem solving.

### 1.2. Media

Another 'bulwark' of the essential skills for the new scenarios is represented by media literacy, with its critical and expressive functions. A literacy that implies not only the ways to understand and critically interpret the media, but also the tools for a widespread and correct online participation, through creative and social expression and a fair and conscious approach to research and web surfing (Buckingham, 2008).

The European Commission has identified four dimensions that should characterise media literacy in the 21st century and speaks about Fundamentals, Digital literacy, Visual Savviness and Critical Mind (Fig. 2).

**FIG. 2.** *Four dimensions of media literacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*



Source: European Commission (2017: 8)

The term media literacy, as argued by Rivoltella (2017), refers to the set of skills to be possessed by a person who is adequately trained in media languages. It can be thought of as the result of media education, although today's media skills are not only the outcome of school-based education and they can also be developed in non-formal and informal contexts: «we learn to use media... by using them» (ivi, 19).

Jenkins (2010), instead, speaks of new media literacies referring to a set of cultural competences and social skills that new generations would

need in order to navigate the world of media culture and participation. Participatory culture would shift the axis of skills building from the 'individual expression' level to the 'involvement in the community' one, implying social skills developed through networking. These are, according to Jenkins, new skills based on more traditional competences and on technical and critical ones, which should help students to fully participate in their social life.

In terms of the media education contents, three levels can be traced (Rivoltella, Ferrari, 2010), with reference to: *i*) Technical and language skills, since media literates must be familiar with the media, know how to use them and be able to develop increasingly 'sophisticated' skills related to their languages. *ii*) Awareness and critical reflection, since facing with the messages transmitted by the media it is necessary not to let oneself be conditioned, but, on the contrary, to have autonomy of judgement, even facing with images. *iii*) Expressive function, since students need to learn to be responsible authors of their own messages entrusted to media contents.

### *1.3. Strategic*

In the white paper 'Schools of the Future. Defining New Models of Education for the Fourth Industrial Revolution', with reference to an 'Education 4.0', the World Economic Forum identifies a set of eight key characteristics for high quality learning content and experiences in the scenarios of the near future. It is interesting to note that not only the so-called technology skills are described, but attention is also paid to skills linked to global citizenship, in terms of building awareness and active participation in the world community; to innovation and creativity; to personalised rather than standardised learning; to lifelong learning not related only to formal contexts. A kind of learning that should be collaborative and problem-solving oriented, accessible and inclusive. There are also some indications for interpersonal competences, which include contents on emotional intelligence, cooperation, negotiation, leadership and social awareness (Figure 3).

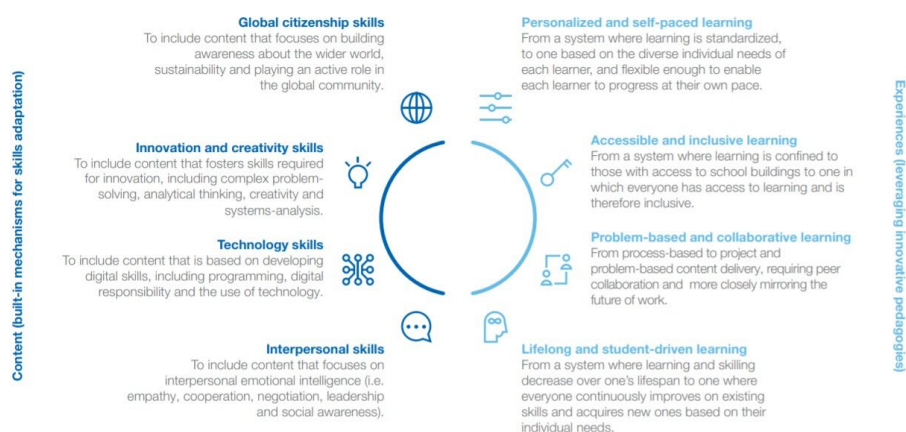
The WEF framework presents a type of education that not only aims at guarantying indispensable knowledge and skills for future work contexts, but also sheds light on the need to educate students who know how to consciously and fully inhabit the complexity of reality.

The so-called transversal competences can be considered 'strategic' for directing oneself in study, work (Pellerey, 2006) and, more generally, in life. They combine, in a dynamic way, cognitive and metacognitive, emotional, social, intellectual, interpersonal and relational skills, together with practices that help to accept, live with and decipher possible ambiguities, allow to manage dilemmas and solve problems and uncertainties, make able to translate thoughts into actions through reflective and reasoned processes. These are soft skills that enable students to improve their performance in studying and, subsequently,

they will allow them to effectively face the challenges of their professional and daily lives (La Marca, Longo, 2019).

**FIG. 3.** *The World Economic Forum Education 4.0 Framework*

The World Economic Forum Education 4.0 Framework



Source: World Economic Forum (2020: 7)

The development of these skills makes it possible to solve complex problems, to work profitably in a team, to come to important decisions, even under pressure, to manage stress, to organize work independently and efficiently and to be flexible, creative and critical (Ricchiardi, Emanuel, 2018).

According to Pellerey, strategic skills represent 'precious' individual capabilities for personal, interpersonal and professional adaptation. They allow not only to experience subjective well-being, but also to live in a more positive way the relationships with others and with the life context, being able to cope effectively with the various tasks to be performed (Pellerey *et al.*, 2010).

## 2. QPCS: the questionnaire and some data

The QPCS – Questionnaire on the perception of one's own strategic competences (ibid.) – is a self-assessment tool designed to help students, at the end of their secondary education and/or entering the University, to reflect on their self-image and how they deal with certain learning and professional situations.

This survey instrument, as explained by the authors, represents an aid to determine the quality of the training activity and, consequently, to improve possible future interventions. On the other hand, students involved can draw up a balance of their competences and find out how prepared they are for entering the world of work or continuing their studies. The application of the QPCS can also help young learners to acquire the right awareness of some educational objectives that should

accompany their professional, social, cultural and personal learning (ibid.).

The questionnaire takes into account two dimensions, divided into six factors, for a total of 55 items and has been validated on a sample of about 3 thousand Italian and Polish students (Epifani *et al.*, 2017).

The first of the two dimensions of the framework is divided into three domains: a) Strategic competences referring to the self; b) Strategic competences referring to social life, in particular relational and communicative competences; c) Strategic competences referring to the learning and/or professional tasks.

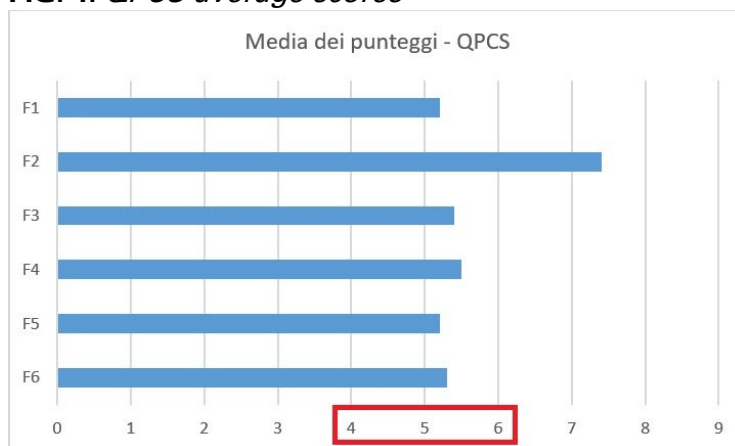
The second dimension refers instead to competences concerning the management of processes: a) cognitive and metacognitive, b) affective and motivational, c) wilful and conative.

The strategic competences considered in the QPCS are:

- F1 - Strategic skill in collaborating with others for work and learning;
- F2 - Strategic skill in managing heightened forms of anxiety;
- F3 - Strategic skill in managing oneself in work and learning: self-regulation and volition;
- F4 - Strategic metacognitive skill in managing reflective processes;
- F5 - Strategic skill in giving meaning and perspective to one's own human and working existence;
- F6 - Strategic skill in the motivational field (perception of competence).

As part of a PhD research project, we administered the QPCS to a non-probabilistic sample (Trincherò, 2004) of 180 young students involved in the fourth and fifth years of secondary school.

**FIG. 4.** *QPCS average scores*



Source: Author's personal

Regarding the results, the sample obtained average scores (between 4 and 6 on a stanine scale, Fig. 4) on five strategic skills. Only in F2 – Strategic skill in managing heightened forms of anxiety – the results are



in the upper range (7,4). The students interviewed, therefore, perceive themselves as being well able to control, regulate and, if necessary, enhance what the authors of the questionnaire call 'emotional tensions'. Commenting on this dimension, they point out how easy it is to ascertain, even in occasional observations, how each person has very individual and different emotional reactions to situations or events. In addition to the biological component – they argue – the cause is to be found above all in the cultural and educational dimensions. Emotional reactions, in fact, acquire a positive or negative value according to our personal interpretation. They also emphasize the possibility of 'channelling', in a positive and fruitful way, the tendency to «heightened emotional reactivity» (Pellerey *et al.*, 2010, 17), by developing specific skills that control and enhance one's emotionality.

Since the research project had as its object/subject the so-called 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001) – grown up using a wide variety of technological devices since early childhood, they may have acquired particular skills, abilities and, consequently, possible new learning strategies –, the six strategic competences were correlated, through Spearman's coefficient, with the daily hours that the research sample spends on the Internet (on average 5 hours a day). As can be seen from the table below (Tab. 1), the only statistically significant correlation ( $p$ -value $<0.05$ ) is with F2.

**TAB.1.** Correlation between QPCS factors and average daily hours on Internet

Spearman's rho			Average daily hours spent surfing the Internet
QPCS	F1	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	,039 ,609
	<b>F2</b>	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	<b>-,161*</b> <b>,034</b>
	F3	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	-,030 ,699
	F4	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	-,024 ,753
	F5	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	,037 ,627
	F6	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	,036 ,642

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Source: SPSS Output

This is a negative correlation, so that when the number of hours spent surfing the web increases, the perception of competence in the management of one's own emotional reactions decreases and, vice versa, when the score of this factor increases, the average number of hours that the sample spends on the Internet is lower. The correlation is applied to verify the presence or absence of a linear relationship between the variables, without assuming a causal link between them. Even in the multiple linear regression, useful to verify the extent to which one or more variables, called independents, can explain a dependent one, however, we find statistical significance between the

independent variable 'daily hours spent surfing the Internet' and the dependent variable F2. With the same values of the other variables, in the transition from one class to the next of hours of surfing the web, there is a decrease of 0.272 in the score of the variable F2. Although it is not possible to determine cause-effect relationships definitively, the regression can help us to 'weigh' the relevance of the independent variable on the dependent one.

In the above-mentioned doctoral research, dedicated to the critical thinking of digital natives, the results of the QPCS, understood as adequate tools to provide valid 'fact-finding elements', were correlated (together with the items of two other questionnaires) to ten habits of critical thinking, described in an original taxonomy elaborated *ad hoc*. The identified habits, understood as dispositional states, possession of a way of being and disposition to act, are: analysis, dialectical approach, attention to sources, self-correction, cognitive and emotional self-regulation, curiosity, empathy, imagination and open mind, reflexivity, respect.

The students in the sample possess on average the dispositions listed above, although they are sometimes impulsive and not always inclined to consider the various contexts in which they act and speak, as well as the people in front of them. They also seem to be not so curious and interested about what they are studying and how their schooling might be useful for their future. They certainly have a massive and widespread digital 'attitude', which translates into a continuous availability of digital tools (especially smartphones) and into their constant daily use, mainly linked to leisure experiences and communication with others and about themselves. In terms of learning, on the other hand, the digital experience does not yet seem to be an 'mandatory' step, but rather a useful support<sup>1</sup>.

Although, therefore, technology helps to tackle problems and provides immediate solutions, education is once again left with the 'strategic' task of generating awareness, both of oneself and of the tools at one's disposal.

The promotion of the skills necessary for the new contexts, not only in terms of digital skills, becomes a paramount step for an education that helps the students of the 'Z Generation' to orient themselves in their learning and social habitats so that these could become generative and enabling contexts in which they are not prescribed life choices, but experiences/opportunities are organised to train themselves to 'function well' in view of their own choices to which give value (Ellerani, 2014).

## Conclusion

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<sup>1</sup> We believe it is important to stress that the field research was carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic, thus students interviewed had not yet been involved in 'DAD' and 'DDI' (distance learning and integrated digital education) experiences carried out during the lockdown periods.

Through the brief reflections above, we wanted to highlight some elements that lead us to share the need for an idea of education that works for an understanding and intelligent use of media languages (Dato, 2018), as well as the media themselves. An education that, alongside the indispensable enhancement of skills related to technology and computer systems, invests in transversal or soft skills, whose value is increasingly associated with new 'semantic universes' (Alessandrini, 2019).

As a discipline and practice open to change, through elaborations and theoretical approaches, it is in fact called upon, in the complexity of the present, to provide the keys to interpreting the present, assuming that no issue can remain an isolated event, but connecting and contextualising knowledge and information, in order to make sense of them in every environment (be it virtual or real).

Educational pathways are called upon to foster learning processes that are able to give the younger generations a set of tools – personal, social and cognitive – that will enable them not only to face the challenges of the 'second machine age' (Brynjolfsson, McAfee, 2015), but also to seize its opportunities.

Thus, education and training institutions have the fundamental task of supporting, in the younger generations, those skills, knowledge and attitudes that are essential not only in terms of employability, but also in terms of education and society, as also recalled by the OECD:

Education has a vital role to play in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable people to contribute to and benefit from an inclusive and sustainable future. Learning to form clear and purposeful goals, work with others with different perspectives, find untapped opportunities and identify multiple solutions to big problems will be essential in the coming years. Education needs to aim to do more than prepare young people for the world of work; it needs to equip students with the skills they need to become active, responsible and engaged citizens (OECD, 2018, 4).

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**Networks of Practice: Informal Learning and  
the 'Employability' Policy/Curriculum  
Discourse in STEMP**

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# The practice architectures of Technological Enhanced Learning Environments

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**ABSTRACT:** *Technologically Enhanced Learning Environments (TELEs) have become a physical embodiment of the increased focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Despite the promotion of these spaces as conduits for innovative teaching of 21st century skills, few studies indicate pedagogical change. This paper uses Kemmis' concept of practice architectures to explore how three teaching spaces, a regular science classroom and two newly built innovative learning spaces, influenced the teachers' practice and the students' interaction with the subject matter. Practice architectures helped to highlight the way teachers' practices, enabled by the environment, produced lessons which used either the teacher, the student cohort or the device as the source of knowledge. As such the importance of the design behind the learning takes on a more prominent role than the physical features of the innovative learning space.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Technologically Enhanced Learning Environments, STEM, Practice Architectures*

## Introduction

Innovative learning spaces are consistently identified as catalysts for pedagogical innovation and enhanced student learning (Brooks, 2011; Campbell, 2020; Carneiro *et al.*, 2011). Often these more flexible and connected learning spaces are hailed for the socio-constructivist considerations in their construction and their propensity for promoting 21st century skills (Campbell, 2020; Magen-Nagar, Steinberger, 2017). Building from this conceptualisation of enriched learning settings, the addition of digital tools has resulted in the creation of Technologically Enhanced Learning Environments (TELEs) which have the specific aim of addressing skills acquisition in the subjects of Science, Mathematics, Engineering and Technology (STEM).

STEM centres have become particularly prevalent in larger colleges in Australia in response to the 'Building the Education Revolution' funds provided as a response to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (Newton, 2016). Whilst some schools opted for gymnasiums, science labs or upgrading existing infrastructure, the injection of income from the government led many schools to building large open plan areas with

flexible furniture in hopes that teachers would embrace this change and adapt their pedagogy. Following this accelerated rate of building, independent schools began to recognise that to remain competitive in the market for fee paying students they would require the construction of their own innovative learning spaces. The neoliberal agenda has hence produced some impressive structures with little actual evidence of improved learning.

The idea of architecture driving learning improvement is not new. Following developments in the USA more flexible and non-traditional, open plan classrooms were introduced to Australia in the later 1970s and early 1980s (Saltmarsh *et al.*, 2015). More learner directed, less transmissive teaching was expected to eventuate from giving the students and teachers adaptable spaces, but this eventually fell out of favour, often due to the excessive amount of noise distracting students (Hutchison, 2004; Mahat *et al.*, 2018). In countries such as Finland (Niemi, 2020) there has been a resurgence in open planned learning spaces in response to improved understandings of acoustics, but fluid configurations, which allow the adaptation of the space to activity, are becoming the norm for newly established innovative learning spaces (Mahat *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, particular technologies such as podcasting or VR require different sized spaces to maximise their use. TELEs consequently tend to avoid the one size fits all approach common to traditional classroom by providing different sized rooms for different purposes and including adaptations such as large sliding glass doors to section off areas when quiet times are needed.

This flexibility has been portrayed as moving away from the transmissive pedagogies promoted during the industrial revolution (Rabinowitz, 1974) towards more effective use of innovative pedagogical clusters suggested by the OECD such as blended learning, computational thinking, embodied learning, gamification, multiliteracies and experiential learning (Istance, Paniagua, 2019). Teaching using these methods aims to prepare students for a connected but unpredictable world where skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity will be paramount (Campbell, 2020; Magen-Nagar, Steinberger, 2017; Niess, Gillow-Wiles, 2017).

As such it is important to investigate whether teachers actually adapt their pedagogies to this space. Whilst some researchers identify the significant impact of ILSs on teacher pedagogical choice (e.g. Byers *et al.*, 2018; Mahat *et al.*, 2018) others have questioned whether spaces such as TELEs can act as a determinant of behaviour without considering contextual factors such as culture, governance and epistemology (Tsai, 2017). A particularly confounding variable common to current studies of ILSs is the use of questionnaires to gauge pedagogical change which often ignore teachers' propensity to rate more socially desirable ideas as representative of their beliefs, resulting in a dichotomy between identified beliefs and enacted actions (Safardiannur, Rott, 2019).



## 1. Kemmis' practice architecture theory

This study uses direct coding of video from STEM lessons in TELEs and a regular classroom to identify differences in teachers' pedagogical practices whilst teaching in different learning environments. These distinct actions were analysed using the theoretical conceptualisation of practice provide by Kemmis and colleagues. Kemmis' theory of practice is interested in situated, social and relational practices evident in the real world. It rejects dualisms such as cognition and action or mind and body and attempts to catch events as they happen (Schatzki, 2006) through the categories of doings, sayings and relating (Kemmis, 2019). These practices do not happen in a vacuum however, and contextuality remains an important consideration. With a new practice landscape developing with the widespread acceptance of TELEs, this study begins to explore the emerging teaching practices and the enablers and constraints which guide them. Kemmis calls these channels of doing, saying and relating «practice architectures» (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014) and they are key to understanding how TELEs may influence pedagogy.

Kemmis identifies three major practice architectures; cultural-discursive arrangements in semantic space; social-political arrangements in social space; and material-economic arrangements in physical space and time (Mahon *et al.*, 2017). Cultural discursive arrangements are evident in the patterns of discourse developed over time and for different purposes. For example, the use of rhetorical questions, the level of sophistication in the language and the phrasing of instruction will differ markedly between a Yr 1 classroom in Australia and a Yr 9 classroom in Kenya.

Social political arrangements are similarly entrenched by habitual patterns. These shape how students and teachers relate to each other and non-human objects such as laptops (Mahon *et al.*, 2017). This type of practice architecture determines such factors as who belongs, who has agency, who dictates the path of learning and how individuals relate to each other (Kemmis, Grootenboer, 2008).

The last of these practice architectures, material-economic arrangements are positioned in the physical learning environment and the tools of learning. They relate to aspects such as desk arrangements, the positioning of the instructional device, the variety of areas in which to study and the size and shape of the room. This appears to be of central interest to the study of TELEs but the interconnected nature of practices means that each requires careful consideration. Practice architectures not only direct practices, but they are also formed by these processes and hence it is often difficult to disrupt traditional behaviours. Meta-practices such as curriculum, teacher education and governance can further entrench habitual actions (Kemmis, Grootenboer, 2008). The change in practice landscape, where students are taught in new surroundings enhanced for STEM education, may however help

develop practice architectures which are more aligned with the innovative pedagogical clusters promoted by the OECD.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Case study school*

The participant school was a large multi campus co-educational K-12 college in northern Adelaide. Students derive from the local area and have a largely mixed demographic similar to many Australian schools. Each of the campuses shares facilities such as a swimming centre, ovals and the recently built TELE. The school has begun experimentation into the most effective way to engage students in the new space. The TELE has a director and a number of teachers who are familiar with the technological affordances of the learning space. Other teachers are often encouraged to use the space and learn about the digital tools available with the aim of building teacher self-efficacy when using digitally mediated technologies, a key determinant in teacher's technological integration (Backfisch *et al.*, 2021).

### *2.2. Participants*

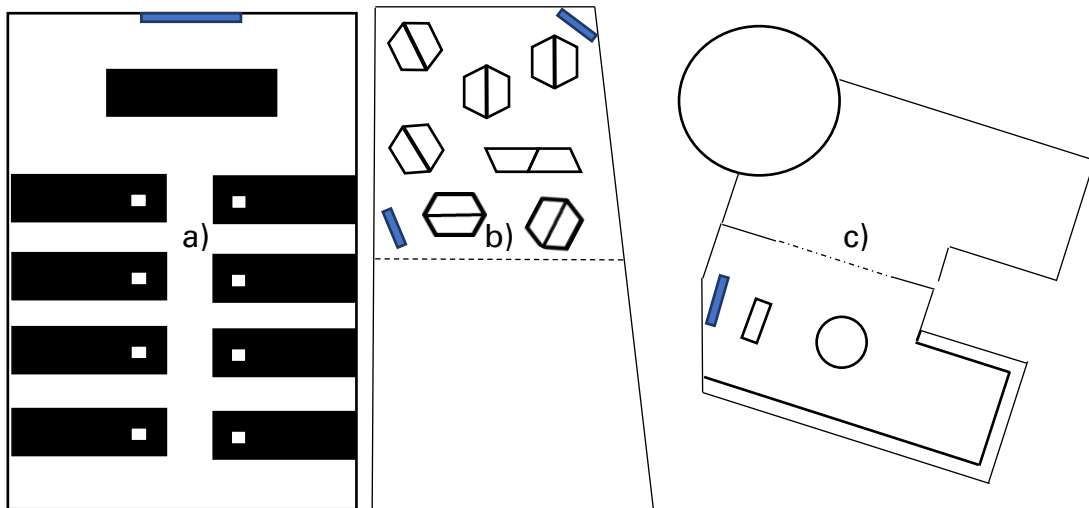
Classes of between 15 and 25 Year 7 and 8 (12–14-year-olds) students were involved with the lessons. The visit to the TELE was conducted over one week but the case study was drawn from only the first day. The regular science lesson was conducted during normal school hours and included a mixture of the two groups who attended the TELE.

The teachers delivering the lessons were experienced in teaching in their respective environments and identified by the school as being particularly innovative in their use of technology.

### *2.3. Learning spaces*

There are a range of classrooms used for teaching in the TELE including forum type areas for instruction and discussion; standard classrooms separated by moveable walls and flexible table arrangements; focused computer labs; podcasting studios; meeting rooms; 360° projector spaces; art studios and other assorted learning space. The three spaces used for teaching in the current study are shown below in figure 1 and include a) science lab, b) flexible space c) robotics room.

**FIG. 1.** *Learning spaces*



### *2.3.1. Science lab (a)*

The children sat in rows on lab desks that supply water, and gas for Bunsen burners. The whiteboard and a large digital display were positioned at the front of the room. All chairs faced this screen.

### *2.3.2. Flexible space (b)*

This area was used for students to design spinning tops using Computer Aided Design (CAD) software. A divider (demarcated by the dashed line) separated the two areas but only the top area was used. Two mirrored digital displays were used so that students could see from any angle. Students sat in groups of 4-6. In the studied lesson, students also spread out into other areas for experimentation and to watch the 3D printing.

### *2.3.3. Robotics lab (c)*

A majority of the lesson was in the bottom portion of Figure 1c. Computers were positioned around the wall on inbuilt benches. A circular island bench in the centre of the classroom had four computers. A large digital display was positioned near the front of the room, behind the teacher's desk. When the students were experimenting with the robots, they spread into the room in the top of figure 1c. A glass door (demarcated by a dot dash line in the figure) was closed when students were being given instructions to minimise distraction. The circular area in the top left is a 360o room not used in this study.

## *2.4. Lesson Focus*

### *2.4.1. Plant cells*

In the science lab (a) a lesson was conducted on the features of plant cells.

#### 2.4.2. 3D modelling

In the flexible space (b) students explored the features of spinning tops that led to the longest spin, used a CAD program to design improved tops, 3D printed the tops and compared their results to the initial tops.

#### 2.4.3. Robotics Engineering

In the robotics lab (c) students trialled different codes to direct their mBot to follow certain paths, change colours, make noises, avoid obstacles and stop on specified tilts.

#### 2.5. Video

Video of the participants in the TELE was taken with consent as part of an investigation into spatial reasoning (Fowler *et al.*, 2021). A later video with the same cohort was conducted in a traditional science classroom on one of the campuses of college. Each video was approximately 1 hour long.

#### 2.6. Instrument

In order to identify practices evident in each environment, a coding protocol was developed from Smith *et al.*'s (2013) *Classroom Observation Protocol for Undergraduate STEM*. Further codes were required as teaching techniques in middle school settings differ markedly from undergraduate courses. These codes were then categorised into doings, saying and relating in order to explore the practice architectures evident in each space.

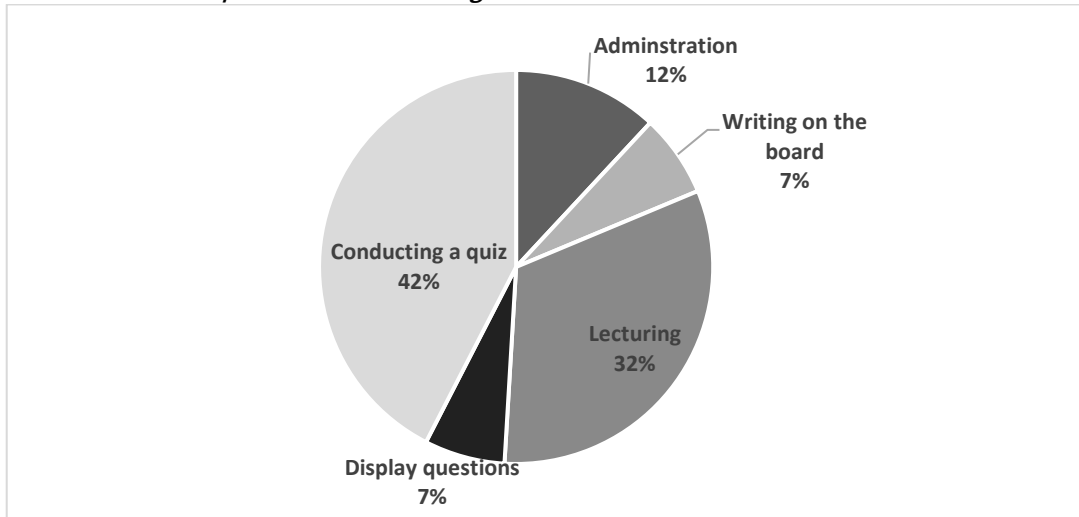
### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Teacher practices

In the regular science lesson, the teacher's focus was on transmission of knowledge through practices such as lecturing and guiding of notes using diagrams on the whiteboard (see figure 2). The second half of the lesson involved testing the students' memory of concepts using a multiple choice 'kahoot' quiz. A question would be displayed on the board and the children would choose an answer from the four supplied on their own device. Results would be shown on the board including a leader board of the most successful responders. Display questions which mirrored the later multiple-choice questions were also used to assess knowledge.

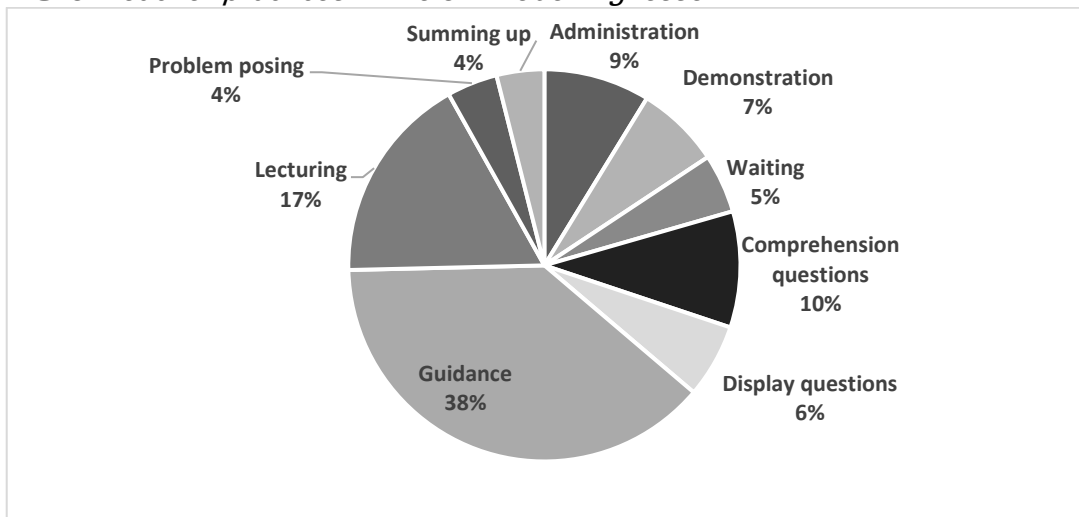
The teacher spent the first half of the lesson at the front but moved around during the quiz time.

**FIG. 2.** *Teacher practices in the regular science lesson*

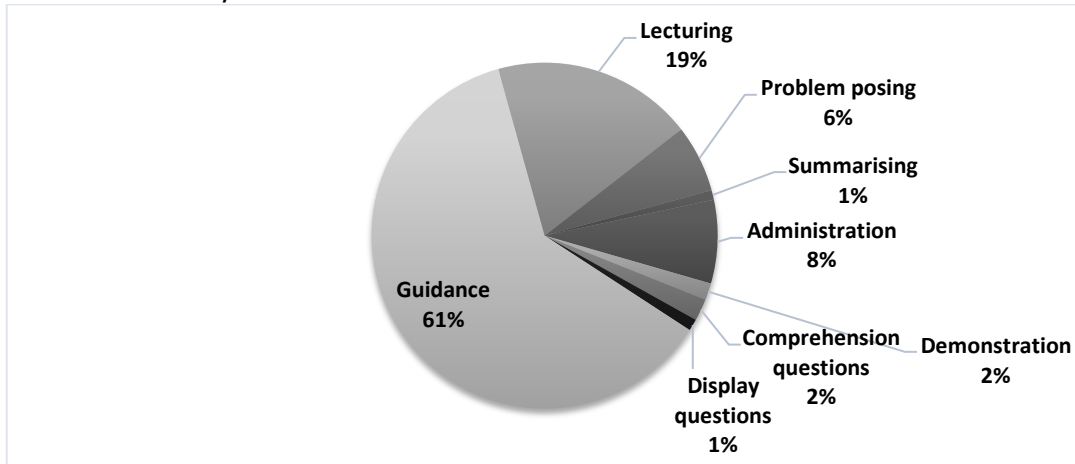


In the 3D modelling lesson, the teacher explained the problem through demonstration and lecturing before allowing the program to lead the students (see figure 3 for further elaboration). He then spent a majority of the rest of the time circulating around the groups to help with computer troubleshooting or asking questions to get the students back on track.

**FIG. 3.** *Teacher practices in the 3D modelling lesson*

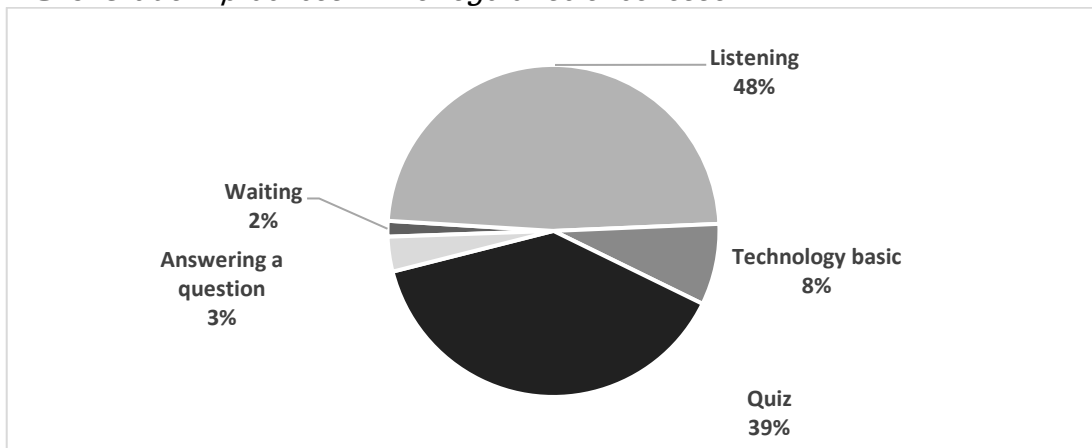


In the Robotics lesson (practices shown in figure 4) the teacher spent some of the lesson providing instructions for the task, talking about the importance of specific blocks of code and framing the problem for the students in order to give them starting point. Metacognitive questions were also used but this was delivered as part of the guidance to individual students. The teacher spent little time talking to the group and most of the time directing students and adjusting the challenge for individuals through scaffolding and problem posing.

**FIG. 4.** *Teacher practices in the Robotics lesson*

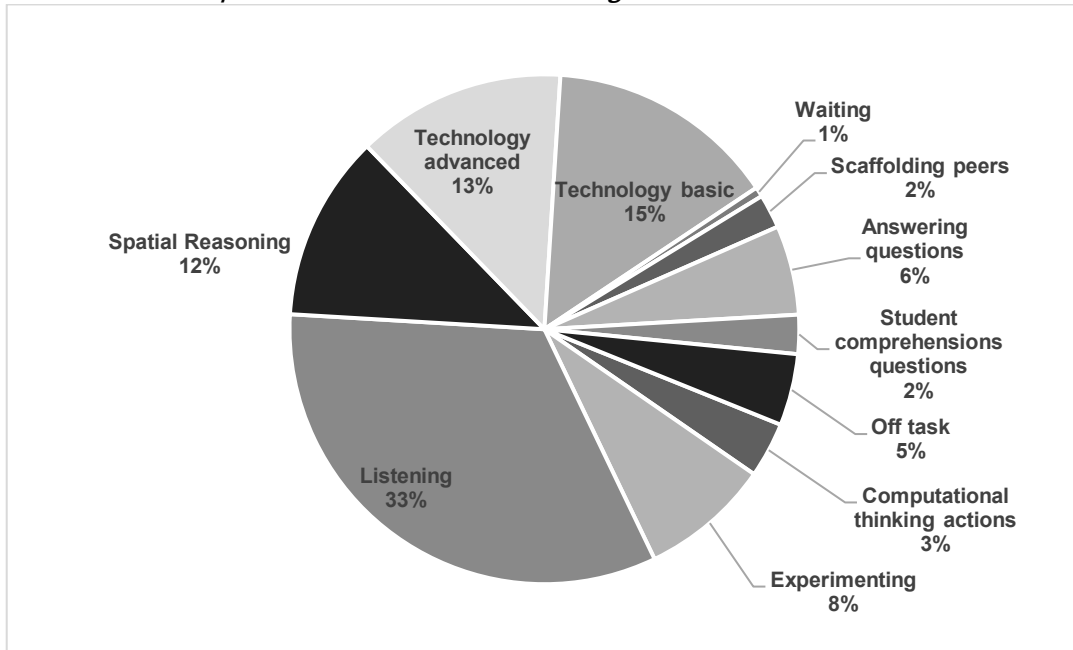
### 3.2. Student practices

As shown in figure 5, students in the regular science lesson spent little time interacting and much of their learning was passive. Even in the quiz phase they only listened, read and chose their answer on their device.

**FIG. 5.** *Student practices in the regular science lesson*

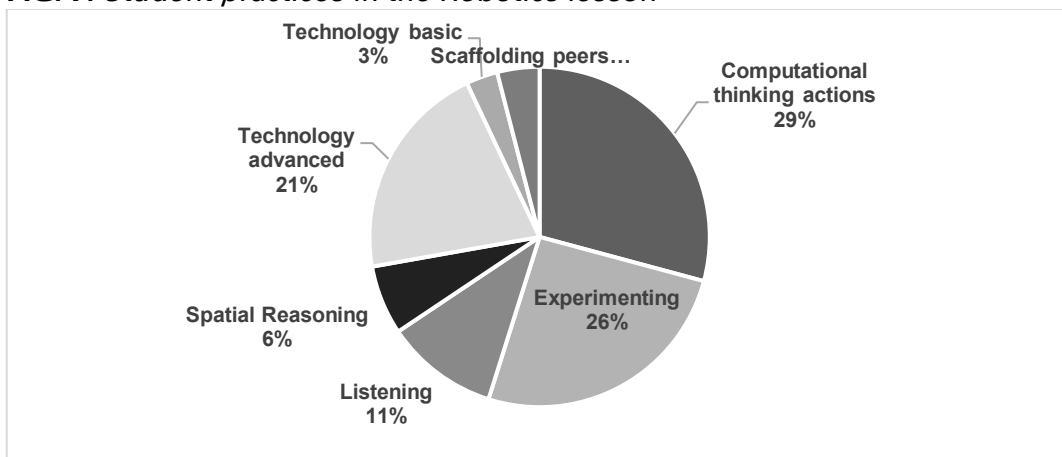
There was a greater variety of actions in the 3D Modelling lesson as shown in figure 6. There was a propensity for more off task behaviour due to the structure of the lesson but there was also a significantly higher rate of relatings when students were experimenting in groups, scaffolding their peers and answering questions. Students also went beyond basic computer tasks, such as accessing and saving resources, to more advanced levels of computer use which required higher levels of cognitive engagement, such as adapting 3D objects to include important features and using the coding capabilities of the CAD program to form perfect curves. Throughout the course of the activity students spent less time listening to the teacher and more time taking directions from the program they were trying to use.

**FIG. 6.** *Student practices in the 3D modelling lesson*



Student practices in the robotics lesson tended to engage higher level capabilities such as spatial reasoning and computational thinking through inquiry learning. Students spent most of the time coding their robots, testing the results and debugging both their own and other students' programming. In comparison to the other lessons, little time was spent on group interactions with the teacher but individual interactions with the teacher often provided them the scaffolding needed to achieve the task or improve the efficiency of their code.

**FIG. 7.** *Student practices in the Robotics lesson*



## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. Material economic practice architectures

All rooms had screens that orchestrated the students' attention towards a central point and reinforced the teacher's role as the administrator of the learning environment. Likewise, each used individual computers as

the main point of interaction with the task. Movement was inhibited in the regular science lab but was encouraged at times in the TELE lessons. This was aided by more flexible floor spaces and breakout areas.

The chance for students to work collaboratively was minimal in the regular science classroom due to the structured nature of the lab desks but it can be seen in the robotics classroom that it is possible to enable interaction even when they are restricted by inbuilt desks. Alternately, the 3D modelling classroom's desk arrangement encouraged collaboration and the screens on opposite walls meant that students' attention could shift and yet they would remain clear of the task. This configuration promoted discussion, both on and off-task.

#### *4.2. Cultural discursive practice architectures*

Whilst a large proportion of the discourse in the regular science classroom was dominated by the teacher (93%), the other lessons tended to have small phases of instructions followed by extended periods of individual guidance. Class discussions were encouraged in the two TELE lessons, but they differed in their use. The 3D modelling tended to focus on clarification of the task and assessment of comprehension whilst the robotics class involved discussing the results of particular lines of code and identifying student reasoning that could be used by their peers.

Much of the patterns of relating through language in the regular science classroom had been set through the year's lessons and students had a clear understanding of when and how they should speak. The lessons in the TELE however were a novelty and whilst the students had encountered their teachers before, they were not familiar to them. This meant that it took a while for the students to become involved in class discussions but also that the greater interactivity of the lesson meant that they often scaffolded each other.

#### *4.3. Socio-political architecture*

The roles of power in each classroom varied quite markedly. Whilst it was clear that in the science classroom the teacher was the expert and the students the passive receivers, the robotics lesson encouraged students to find their own paths to knowing with guidance from the teacher. The 3D modelling class started as quite teacher centric but over the course of the activity the students began taking greater instruction from the actual program. This may be portrayed as allowing students to guide their own learning, but the rigid nature of the task and the constraints of the program actually led to the learning becoming device centric therefore reducing student agency. The teacher was also constrained as they spent more time troubleshooting technological problems than driving the students' higher order thinking.

The assessment of the learning had the potential to impact the students' sense of power. The use of a computer program with a leader



board in the regular science lesson meant that students who were struggling with the content or simply not quick to recall taught facts were not recognised and had the potential to become disengaged. In the robotics lesson on the other hand, students were assessed on not only their ability to direct their robot effectively but with the efficiency of their coding. Students were learning together and helping each other to achieve authentic goals. Despite the lowered levels of agency in the 3D modelling lesson students could see and test the products of their investigation. Unfortunately, the long print times of 3D printing restricted iterative development.

## 5. Discussion

Even though only two lessons were conducted in the TELE it is evident that technology is becoming increasingly integrated into middle school classrooms. However, the positioning of this technology determines many of the evident practices. As seen by these case studies, the device can be portrayed as reinforcing the expert status of the teacher, acting as a restrictive structure to lead inquiry or as a conduit to higher order thinking. These teacher choices have implications of the students' sense of agency and the types of capabilities educators develop in their students.

Similarly, how we use innovative learning spaces like TELE can lead to pedagogical innovation, but it depends on how we design the learning. As Goodyear (2021) asserts «a technology becomes educational by virtue of its relation to emerging activity, rather than because of any intrinsic physical properties» and by extension an environment enhanced by technology becomes an effective learning environment not due to its technological features but by the emergent activities it enables. The environment can restrict particular sayings, doings and relatings but rarely does it prevent clever lesson design from engaging students in their learning. The robotics class for example had to contend with built in desks facing the students away from each other but this did not stop the students from discussing the problem on the floor or debugging each other's codes.

Intended use of space was also a determinant of action. TELEs and other STEM centres are often portrayed as learning areas to engage transdisciplinary skills through inquiry learning. Regular middle school classrooms however are still subject to the restrictions of a curriculum that ultimately deals with discrete subjects and are required to deal with the concerns over the dilution of discipline knowledge (English, 2016). The inquiry learning promoted in TELEs therefore is not only reinforced by the physical affordances of the building but the political expectations of those that are paying for the spaces. Inquiry learning tasks have been demonstrated to be more learner centric, effective in scaffolding STEM practices, engaging to learners and adaptable to the varying needs of

the students (Duncan *et al.*, 2021). It is therefore unsurprising that lessons in these areas displayed higher levels of higher order thinking.

No matter whether it is the space or the expectations of the types of teaching to take place in the TELE, these kinds of ILSs have the propensity to challenge established practice architectures. By providing flexible spaces with new ways of engaging with students and alternative methods for developing their skills, knowledge and dispositions, TELEs enable change. The research community now needs to support the capacity of these institutions by providing practical models for teachers on how they can utilise the affordances of TELEs to deliver the OECD's innovative pedagogical clusters.

## **6. Limitations**

This case study was limited in its scope but provides effective analytic tools for larger studies which utilise more congruent subject matter, different types of innovative learning space and longer periods of time. It is also important that future studies explore the same teacher in multiple teaching spaces to eliminate the variable of divergent teacher pedagogical reasoning. It must be noted however that teachers own levels of self-efficacy with technology, attitudes, pedagogical beliefs and openness to change will influence how they use spaces which afford them more technological features (Ottenbreit-Leftwich *et al.*, 2018). Teachers who are more comfortable in these spaces will experiment with less restrictive, more student centric pedagogies which support successful technology orchestration than those who aren't (Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2013; Inan, Lowther, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

The use of practice architectures in this study has highlighted that TELEs can fulfil a role beyond simply attracting clients or improving test scores. They have the potential to facilitate the types of teacher practice and student thinking that can be restricted by conventional classrooms. However, this possibility of improved learning outcomes will only become a reality if we develop teachers' capacity to use these spaces effectively. The learning design will always be more important than the space, but the space can enable more efficient and possibly effective implementation of the activity.

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## **Re-Entry to School Rethinking Adult Education in the CPIA**

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## Teaching Methods, Teaching Training and Adult Education. A Survey in the Molise Region

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**ABSTRACT:** *In adult education, the initial and in-service training of teachers appears to be a potential issue. The survey presented here involved the teachers of the Centers for Adult Education (CPIA) in Molise, a region in southern Italy. Teachers filled a questionnaire structured in five sections. The first section is related to previous experiences and motivation that led them to work in adult education, the second on their training, the third on the methodologies, the fifth on collaboration among colleagues, the sixth is related to desires and expectations. The results highlighted several positive elements and some critical issues, offering insights on possible actions to support them. The main positive result is the high motivation of teachers that choose to work in adult education, often gained from prior experience. On the other hand, a negative element emerged: the gaps in initial training. The results allow us to offer suggestions for interventions to support teachers: digital literacy and support to create professional communities of practice.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Teaching methods, Adult Education, CPIA, Digital Literacy, Communities of Practice.*

### Introduction: Teachers' professional practices

In recent decades much attention has been paid to the issue of schools and education systems. In the Italian context, a series of reforms by governments of different parties is evidence of the need for change. It is remembering, however, that in the effectiveness of teaching/learning processes, the regulatory framework and the financial and instrumental resources are the *conditio sine qua non*, even not sufficient. Well-prepared, motivated teachers with adequate professional skills are a prerequisite for educational success.

Professional skills take a long time to acquire plus teaching practices change slowly. Understanding their level, grasping their articulation is an aspect on which shared procedures have not been consolidated. Often teachers themselves are not fully aware of their capacities. Teachers' competencies remain at an implicit level; it becomes difficult to describe and grasp the difference between a novice and an experienced teacher. The difference is perceived, but it is not easy to

focus and analyse it. The work on tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966) and its application in the business environment (Nonaka, Takeuchi, 1995) has been known for a long. The problem also arises in the school context: bringing out tacit knowledge, making it explicit and turning it into a shared heritage functional to the training of new teachers is still an open problem. From a theoretical point of view, the idea of a transition from what is only indirectly accessible through observation to what can be acquired through questionnaires, interviews and fieldwork is now accepted, in order to finally arrive at shared knowledge, modelled and recognised by the scientific community. Engeström theory of the expansive cycle highlighted in progression: questioning, context analysis, modelling, model testing and subsequent implementation, reflection and evaluation, and then cyclically starting again (Engeström, 1987).

From the point of view of practices, it should be investigated how widespread these procedures are: the impression is that teachers, even today, are not adequately trained in reflective procedures and that even the description/narration of professional practices is not particularly widespread and encouraged. The idea that the teacher performs an applicative function, of a clerical type, is still widespread: those who move in such a perspective remain tied to the definition of indications and procedures that are simply to be applied, rather than to the emergence of professional knowledge. Conceiving the teacher as a professional (e.g., for the Italian context Damiano, 2004) or at least as a craftsman (Sennet, 2008) implies understanding the importance of practices in the search for the effectiveness of teaching/learning processes. The premise for making a reflection on practices sensible and functional for the improvement of teaching and learning (Mezirow, 1991) is to concretely accept the idea of a reflective professional teacher as revealed by research for over thirty years (Schön, 1983; 1987).

### **1. The research at the CPIA of Molise: The goals**

The survey was born by the collaboration between the CPIA of Molise and the University of Molise. The acronym CPIA stands for Centro per l'Istruzione degli Adulti (Centre for Adult Education) which in Molise operates in Campobasso, Isernia, Termoli and in the prisons of Campobasso and Larino. In the Italian context, CPIAs are structures of the Ministry of Education that offer training to adults and young people aged 16 years and over who have not completed their compulsory education. The research from the initial stages was co-designed and constructed with the manager and the teachers, in a logic of co-design (Laurillard, 2012). It aims to bring out teaching practices, defining approaches and methodologies used by teachers and recovering national and international attention (e.g., Demetrio, 2003; Brocket, 2015) on teaching methodologies within adult education. The second is to



understand the training pathway of teachers by trying to identify their training needs. In general, identifying and documenting good practices would encourage the creation of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) to promote forms of collaboration between novice and experienced teachers so that a wealth of experience and expertise would document and share.

## **2. The research at the CPIA of Molise: The questionnaire and the sample**

The first step proposed was a questionnaire followed by a series of focus groups and then the documentation and sharing of teaching practices. In this paper, we present the data from the questionnaire.

The questionnaire has five areas:

- previous experiences and motivation: to understand the reasons for the choice to work in adult education;
- training path: both initial and in-service;
- methodologies and didactic approaches used;
- collaboration among colleagues: to understand the potentialities related to the activation of communities of practices;
- desires and expectations: to understand the training needs and the needs for professional growth.

The sample is quantitatively small. Almost all the CPIA's teachers answered: we had thirty answers, most by women (80%) with an average age of 49 years; it is a limited but significant sample concerning a small region in the south of Italy, mostly hilly and mountainous.

## **3. Research at the CPIA in Molise: The data that emerged**

### *3.1. Previous experience and motivation*

An aspect that often characterizes the teaching staff of CPIAs is the high turnover. Often the choice to teach adults comes from contingent needs and not from a declared and conscious interest. That implies a lack of motivation and the desire to change as soon as the opportunity arises. The research pointed out that in the CPIA of Molise the situation is slightly different. When asked if their choice of the CPIA came from the desire to teach adults, the majority gave a positive answer (83%); only a minority expressed a negative opinion (17%). It is certainly relevant that 50% of teachers stated that they had had teaching experience with adults, also in non-formal and informal contexts, before working at the CPIA.

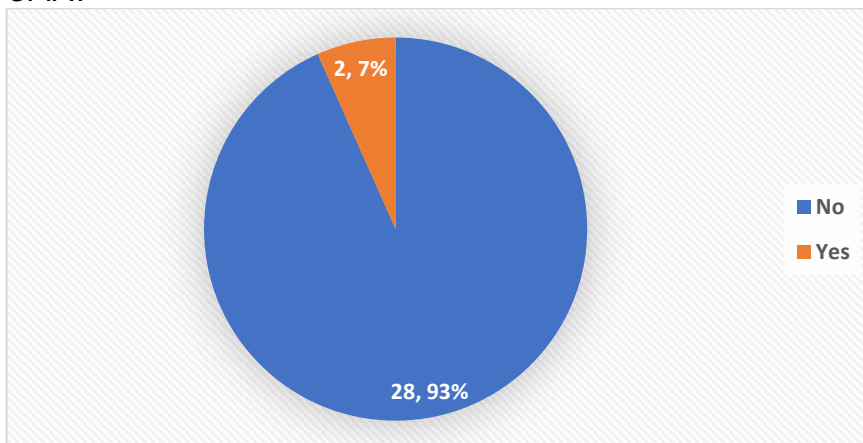
### *3.2. Training pathway*

The first piece of data is the percentage of graduates and of those who got their teaching qualification. Graduates account for 70% and qualified

teachers for 87%. A comparison with the national context of the CPIAs would be useful and in the focus groups, the reasons for these percentages will be explored.

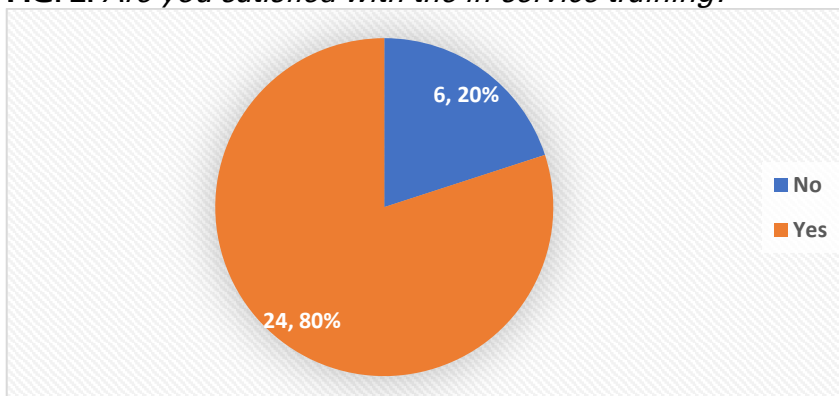
Another interesting fact is the average years of teaching at the CPIA: 5.4 years. It is not a high average; above all, it is the balance of two types of teachers. Three teachers have experience of 20 years or more. Eight teachers have just one year's experience. The problem of how to foster the training of a larger group of experienced teachers with a consolidated teaching experience in adult education emerges clearly.

**FIG. 1.** *Did you receive specific training in adult education before teaching at CPIA?*



In relation to training, the data are very clear: specific training on adult education before teaching in the CPIA, is almost absent (Fig. 1). The data improves when we move on to in-service training: when asked if there has been specific in-service training, the negative answers lower to 60% and the in-service training provided generates decidedly high levels of satisfaction (80%) (Fig. 2).

**FIG. 2.** *Are you satisfied with the in-service training?*



### *3.3. Teaching approaches and methodologies*

The teaching approaches and methods used are fundamental aspects. In the presence of well-socialised and motivated homogeneous groups, adequately integrated into the social context, it is possible to use traditional transmissive teaching methods. Adult education has

promoted specific approaches to teaching that also add value to all the elements linked to pedagogy and intercultural didactics. The adult student is often also a foreigner; behind/together with the demand for basic literacy, there is the need for a broader process of acceptance and inclusion (Allan, 2008). In this sense, active methodologies, individualization and personalization have characterized teaching practices in adult education.

A further question that arises is the contribution offered by digital technologies, which in themselves are a tool and not a method. The questionnaire went before the spread of the pandemic that prompted the massive use of distance learning. Even before the pandemic, technologies like smartphones brought changes in the way we communicate and relate to each other, and therefore also in learning processes.

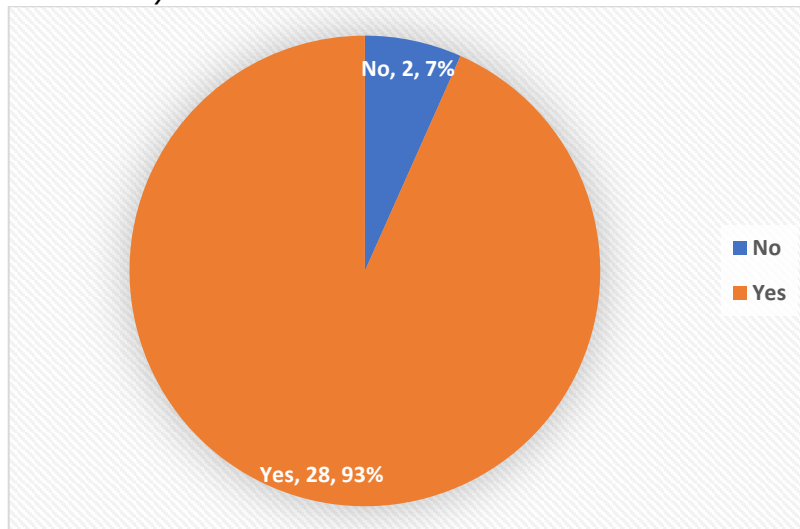
**TAB. 1.** *Teaching methods and approaches*

Teaching methods	Percentage of use
Lesson	67
Teaching sheets	51
Discussion in the large group	48
Playful activities	35
Group work	29
Cooperative learning	22,6
Peer tutoring	22,6
Authentic tasks	19, 4
Social network activities	12,9
Workshop activity	12,9
Self-assessment	9,7
Computer lab	6,5
Use of e-learning platforms	6,5
Mobile learning	3,2
Project work	3,2
Flipped classroom	3,2
Debate	3,2
Project-based teaching	3,2
Visits and field trips	0
Robotics and coding	0
Remote work with other schools	0
Portfolio	0

From the data, we found that traditional methodologies like the transmissive lesson continue to be mainly used, also with success. Then follow, with significant percentages, more active methods and approaches, with higher levels of involvement and interaction: discussion, albeit within the class group, various types of playful activities, group work such as cooperative learning and peer tutoring with particular attention to socialisation processes. Approaches involving hands-on activities receive even less consensus: workshop activities, also with digital skills, project-based teaching, project work or also simply visits and outings in the area are not commons. Finally, the

approaches linked to the use of digital resources are present but to a limited extent: activities in presence clearly prevail and online has a marginal and supporting function. It would be interesting to repeat the questionnaire to understand how much the pandemic has changed the picture.

**FIG. 3.** *Do you use videos in the classroom?*



A more in-depth examination of the use of videos in teaching should be of some interest. A very high percentage of teachers (87.1) declares that they search/find resources on the web, including videos, for their lessons. In classroom activities, 93% of teachers use videos (Fig. 3).

However, strong differences emerge in terms of both production and use. Only a small percentage of teachers (10.3%) produce videos for their teaching activities when most select online content to propose them in class. Only 7.4% state that they create specific teaching videos for their own needs. A small percentage use videos in the logic of the flipped classroom (3.7%). Students' involvement as video makers is also limited: there are some forms of analysis and re-elaboration but no production of videos (Tab. 2).

**TAB. 2.** *Educational use of videos*

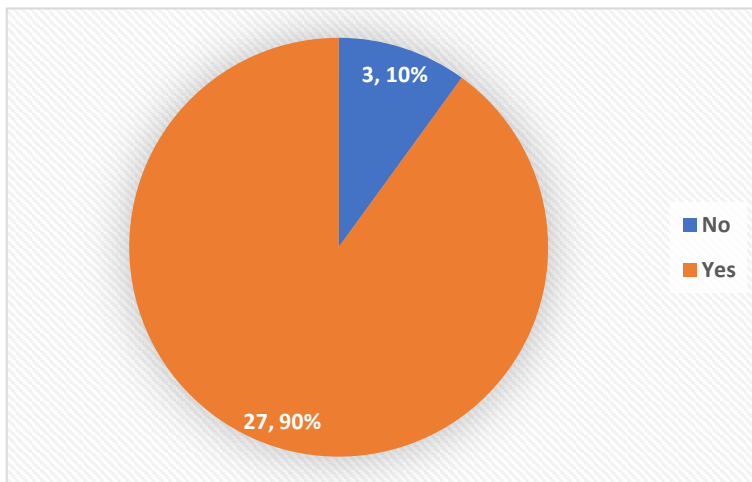
Types of educational use of videos	% of use
Selecting online content to use in the classroom	85,2
Making instructional videos for my specific teaching needs	7,4
Selecting online content and assigning it as homework	3,7
Students reworking videos from existing content	3,7
Students making new videos of an educational nature	0

### *3.4. Collaboration among colleagues*

In promoting and supporting professional communities of practice, the level of collaboration between teachers is of fundamental importance. In pre-primary and primary schools' teachers are more used to co-operation than in secondary ones. That can lead to negative influences

on both frequent teacher turnover and context-specific situations. When asked to evaluate the level of cooperation in the class using a scale from one (insufficient) to five (excellent), 3.2% of the CPIA teachers reported an insufficient level, and 35.5% an excellent level, the remaining part of the teachers placed themselves at intermediate levels: overall a good result that leaves room for improvement. In particular, to underline the growth potential emerged a high willingness to produce and share digital teaching materials (90%) (Fig. 4).

**FIG. 4.** *Are you interested or at least willing to create and share digital learning materials?*



### 3.5. Desires and expectations

The last section is about motivation and training needs and demands. Teachers have a high level of motivation: 93% do not consider teaching at the CPIA as a temporary interlude, although only 61.3% imagine ending their working career there. Concerning the favourite kind of training, a minority demand training linked to the disciplinary field or professional skills. The majority require transversal training: planning, methodologies, assessment in adult education. Significant is also the request (36,7%) for training linked to digital skills with specific reference to the creation of digital objects like videos. In light of what happened with the activation of distance learning during the pandemic, it would be interesting to propose the question again.

**TAB. 3.** *Preferred types of training*

Type of training	% of preference
In-service training focusing on transversal methodologies, design, evaluation, adult education	43,3
In-service training focusing on the use of digital resources (production and use of videos, creation of digital resources)	36,7
In-service training focused on disciplinary teaching	10
A systematic and recursive survey of teachers' professional development needs	10

## Conclusion

The results of this research cannot be considered statistically significant, due to its limited dimension; however, thanks to the involvement of teachers working in a well-defined territorial context, it offers specific and targeted data. The strengths can be summarised as follows:

- A high motivation: most of the teachers consciously chose to work in adult education thanks to previous experiences in the field. Although the core of teachers with the same or more experience is small, they declare their position stable.
- Good familiarity with digital skills: even before the pandemic, the use of digital resources in teaching practices is wide
- High use of images and videos: almost all the teachers use videos to enhance the lesson effectiveness.
- A widespread desire to continue the professional career in adult education: although the core of teachers with 20 years or more experience is small, they declare their position as stable.
- A high level of satisfaction for the learning outcomes achieved.
- A great attitude to produce and share teaching materials: a starting point to create communities of professional practice.

The areas where it would be opportune either to intervene or to deepen the research, are the following:

- Lack of initial training: this should be compared to the national level and is a situation in which limited action can be taken by compensating with in-service training methods. It would be desirable to intervene to give adult education a place in university training courses.
- Difficulties in finding a balance between traditional and mainly passive methodologies (such as the lecture) and active methodologies (such as cooperative learning): on the one hand, the current mixture, as declared by the teachers, seems to be effective. It would be interesting to understand with which specific groups and types of students use the different methodologies
- Not high levels of video production: video production could be promoted and supported by making teachers autonomous and promoting forms of involvement of students who belong to a generation in which video production is a widespread practice.
- Spaces to improve the collaboration between colleagues: it would be interesting to see how much the initial training impact in promoting forms of higher collaboration to achieve better levels of learning.

We have underlined mainly local features, linked to the CPIA of an Italian region; the next step should be to focus on the national context to promote a wider reflection on adult education in Italy. Open questions are: How can we make CPIA teachers protagonists and aware of their role? How can they be involved in research activities? Without

the involvement of teachers, there is a risk that any kind of intervention will be much less effective. Which national data are available and easily accessible about CPIAs? How can managers and teachers be supported in the creation of communities of practice? How to intervene in initial teacher training to promote adult education?

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## Social Innovation and Governance of Networks in Lifelong Learning Programs

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper describes the activities concerning the ScuolaViva program, an intervention by the Campania Region destined to school institutes against early school leaving in the aim of social innovation. Operationally, the program provides for the formation of networks made up of teachers, families, institutions and local operators; the agreements must favor the processes of democratic participation and increase the cultural level. In this perspective, schools and adult school centers must plan the interventions and coordinate the structures, the social actors and the resources of the territory in the planning and implementation of the interventions. ScuolaViva is one of the most interesting programs of the last years because schools, families, students and adult learners can work together to avoid and combat school drop-out. The target is to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of ScuolaViva by describing the experiences of the networks in the first two years. For this reason we intend to compare the experiences of schools in the areas of Campania at risk by analyzing the types of projects activated by the adult school centers (laboratories and learning paths for basic skills, technical / professional laboratories, thematic workshops, consultancy for choices of training paths, family projects). Outcomes expected: the first one, the network guarantees a correct analysis of the needs of the territory and promotes a targeted planning of the interventions; the second is the idea that school dropout should be countered even outside the school by also intervening on those who have definitively left the training circuit; the third strong point is the duration within which it is possible to develop, implement and evaluate a project.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Social innovation; Lifelong learning; Governance; Networks; Practices.*

### Introduction

Collaborative and digital economy, hybridization with the advanced tertiary sector: these are some of the new forms of rearticulation of the productive fabric that emerged from the post-covid scene. It is no coincidence that social innovation can be defined as «the creation and implementation of new solutions to social problems, with the benefits of these solutions shared beyond the confines of the innovators»

(Tracey, Stott, 2017, 51). Social innovators with professional experiences across the profit and non-profit sector, aim to combine economic impact with environmental sustainability and responsibility (Barbera, Parisi, 2019) towards the local area and society, questioning politics and public action in an unconventional way.

It is an emerging research field also in the educational field (Rasmussen, 2019; Schröder, Krüger, 2019), as innovative educational institutions can be desired, changed, shaped by social actors. The agency of decision makers and operators, for whom civic values, trust and cultural capital represent qualifying dimensions, becomes the engine of change through «the generation and implementation of new ideas about social relationships and social organization» (Mumford, 2002, 253).

Within the same stream the *ScuolaViva* program kicked off in 2016 and has so far involved 450 schools and 400.000 students (Fortini, Trezza, 2019). It was founded on European and national policies for lifelong learning, innovation and digital governance of education (Pitzalis, 2016; Landri, 2018): schools in the areas of South Italy where there is social hardship and economic and cultural poverty, can plan actions to promote social inclusion, reduce early school leaving and social inequality (Colombo, 2015).

The centrality of the fight against early school leaving within the framework of the objectives of the European Union has had the effect, especially in the last twenty years, of the proliferation of reflections and studies to identify interpretative models and school policy intervention that are as shared as possible (Alistair, Leathwood, 2013). Interest in the phenomenon stems from the awareness that the spread of education means supporting the development of society and the economy, it means reducing disparities and inequalities. For this reason, counteracting dispersion does not only mean ensuring the dissemination of education, but it means promoting both the development of human resources and the economic and technological development of a society that is legitimately a knowledge society. Each citizen, having learned to learn, is able to enhance his human capital by making his skills, knowledge and abilities available to the community in a constructive way. Early school leaving therefore has negative effects on the social system in the immediate and long term. Immediately because it inhibits the growth of the human capital of individuals and their ability to train and place themselves in the labor market, thus fueling the phenomenon of 'Not in Employment, not in Education and not in Training' (and it has been shown that a country's education rate is inversely proportional to that of NEET (Lotti, Pedani, 2016). In the long term it has negative effects because it dissipates intelligence, resources and potentialities useful for the growth of a country (Ghione, 2004). In fact, from all the analyzes conducted by international organizations, the links between the levels of education and training and the data on employment, poverty, the phenomena of marginalization, crime and

social exclusion have become increasingly evident. This explains why for at least two decades the phenomenon of early school leaving has been at the center of education and training policies promoted by the European Union and why it has been identified as one of the benchmarks for evaluating the improvement of education systems. education and training.

### **1. System actions and innovation networks against early school leaving**

When we talk about dispersion, we almost always refer to young people under the age of 16, or how many are (or should be) still in the compulsory education circuit. In reality it is a wider phenomenon that also affects those who have already voluntarily and prematurely left the training circuit. There are therefore recovery actions which have young adults as protagonists and which essentially involve professional qualification and/or active citizenship actions. It is therefore possible to identify three types of actions in the fight against early school leaving, prevention, intervention and compensation. Prevention measures focus on structural problems and risk factors that can cause early leaving and therefore affect young people at risk of dispersion, in these cases the interventions concern learning environments, curricula, teacher training and the systems of connection between the world of school and the world of work; the intervention measures, like the previous ones, respond to the first signs of early school leaving, and concern the development of actions to improve the quality of education and training and offer targeted support to the difficulties encountered by students; finally, the compensation measures, on the other hand, aim to recover those who have left the education and training course prematurely and definitively with the aim of creating new opportunities to obtain a qualification that can also be used in the labor market.

But why is it so important to act on missing adults too? As is known, Lifelong learning, especially in the last decade, has become a key word in the new welfare policies of the European Union, the reason lies in the fact that at a macro level it is recognized that Adult education represents a tool to guarantee growth of a country and, at a micro level, a way to combat the different forms of social exclusion; we are therefore witnessing a transformation of the European social model from 'Welfare' to 'Workfare' or, alternatively, to 'Learnfare' (De Luca Picione, 2014).

The model adopted by the Italian school to combat dispersion was oriented towards social inclusion and the right and duty of education and training. The first interventions of a systemic nature were carried out with the National Operational Plan managed by the Ministry of Development, which has set as its goal academic success, equal opportunities and social inclusion in the Southern Regions. In the Action

plans for the improvement of public services the *F3 Action* was developed for the creation of networks against early school leaving and the creation of innovative prototypes.

Through different paths and modules, 200 networks have been activated consisting of schools of all levels and public and private social subjects located in areas of serious social and cultural exclusion of the same territory. The idea is to bring out bottom-up intervention models and the subsequent modeling of a prototype that could possibly be exported to similar territorial and social contexts. Beyond the territorial specificities, it is necessary to underline the aspects of social innovation, also attributable to the attempt to adopt a systemic interpretative model 'ex ante' and to identify one 'ex post' with the development of a prototype of intervention.

All the actors who contribute to discourage endogenous and exogenous causes and therefore students, the school, the family, the peer group, the local associations have been included in the design. With a view not only to prevention but also to recovery, the projects and actions have been organized in such a way as to also intervene on those who have left the training and education circuit as young adults in prisons and 'drop outs' This has allowed laboratory actions, assisted study, but also professional retraining aimed at young adults through counseling, orientation and concrete experiences with artisans and companies.

The 'ex post' phase saw the development of an intervention prototype based on the evaluation of the projects carried out by the networks. The prototype of intervention to combat early school leaving is made up of ten points considered essential for a project to be considered effective, regardless of the context (Caputo, 2016). The presence of a network between schools of different grades thus becomes relevant with the involvement of the territory and especially of families, the training of teachers, extracurricular activities supporting the school ones, the result indicators. These elements, by virtue of what has been argued, then become fundamental elements for sharing a systemic and multidimensional model of intervention, in a perspective that sees these elements as indicators that interact with more than one levels in the school and extracurricular context.

## **2. Adult education in *ScuolaViva* program**

As part of the actions to combat dispersion activated in recent years, *ScuolaViva* is among the most interesting programs because it is based precisely on an idea of systemic intervention. Wanted by the Campania Region and activated with the resources of the European Social Fund, the three-year program started in the 2016-2017 school year. Schools that operate in areas characterized by social hardship and risk of marginalization, have the possibility - in line with European and national

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policies for Lifelong learning - to structure courses to strengthen the training offer capable of promoting inclusion and to inhibit early school leaving and social inequalities.

From an operational point of view, the program provides for the formation of networks made up of schools, families, institutions and local operators, whose task is to favor the processes of democratic participation and cultural growth. In this perspective, schools are called upon to perform the most important function that of planning interventions and coordinating the cultural and social structures and resources of the area in the design and implementation of the interventions themselves.

What do these activities consist of? The project proposals provided for an expansion of the school's training offer through the implementation of different types of intervention identified on the basis of the needs of the area. The actions proposed and activated by school networks can be summarized in six types: laboratories, open to the territory for the deepening of basic linguistic, expressive and logical/mathematical skills; professional workshops with the involvement of artisans, companies; thematic workshops (art, sport, foreign languages, environmental culture, active citizenship); cultural and recreational activities within the neighborhood (theatrical, musical, sporting); psychological counseling courses, guidance actions, continuity and support for the choices of training courses; initiatives for the direct and active involvement of parents in school life; educational courses (formal, informal and non-formal) aimed at the acquisition and enhancement of skills.

It is implicit that, while intervening on children at risk of dispersion can be a more direct way when the projects are effective, bringing young and missing young adults back into the training circuit can be more difficult. The projects also included educational activities aimed at young adults, including migrants, who have abandoned their studies and come from family and social backgrounds at risk to encourage re-entry into training, encourage the acquisition of new skills and obtain formal qualifications.

As part of the Adult school centers, four projects aimed at adults have been activated, one in Salerno, one in Caserta and two in Naples, divided into a series of modules to combat early school leaving and the reintegration of young people and adults into work.

The construction of the data presented here was made possible thanks to the information sheets on the *Scuola Viva* project (1st and 2nd year) compiled by the Adult school centers involved. The information requested was of a socio-personal nature (Institution, Name of the project, Year, Form Name, Number and Nationality of the Participants) and content (Objectives and Contents). The latter, being open-ended, were appropriately codified ex-post. For the objectives, reference was made to the enhancement of key skills for Lifelong learning and the enhancement of basic skills; the operative definition adopted for the

didactic contents, on the other hand, referred to the disciplinary sectors traditionally recognized by the Ministry of Education.

Table 1 shows us simultaneously the quantitative information on projects, modules and the number of participants, divided by year. In addition, the table also gives us the name of each project. A first comparison on the two annuities - relative to this type of data - highlights how it remains substantially unchanged for each project. This is probably linked to a theme of thematic continuity to which the Institutes have decided to adhere over the two-year program.

The Centers produced a total of 7 projects and 47 modules (almost 7 modules per project) involving 1108 participants, or an average of almost 24 students for each module. The difference in the numbers between the two annuities can only be found in absolute value since, we repeat, the second annuity is affected by the renunciation of the Adult school center of Caserta. In fact, if the data are normalized, it is possible to observe how the gaps are contained: in the second year, the average number of participants per project is substantially similar, however, in the face of a wider training offer (the average of modules per project increases: +0.5). If we look at the data on the individual Centers and therefore on the projects, no important differences emerge: the total number of modules developed is, in fact, almost the same for the 3 Institutes. The only substantial difference emerges with the average number of participants per module, with the modules of the Napoli 2 Center which, on average, are the most numerous. As anticipated in the methodological note, the only information available on the participants, not shown in the table, is their nationality (foreign and non-foreign). Well, out of 1108 participants, only 473 (43%) are foreigners: this would be an important deviation from the total number of members in the Campania Centers, in which foreigners are a massive presence (almost 72%) in the academic year 2016/2017, (De Luca Picione, Madonia, 2017).

The information on the modular activities carried out was collected in free form. The outline asked, in fact, to list the aims and contents of the activities for each module. Therefore, it proved necessary to carry out a posteriori coding on the responses. The answers of the compilers recalled easily recognizable common elements. With regard to the objectives, in fact, the reference to the enhancement of the 8 European competences, or to those transversal competences that are indispensable in Lifelong learning processes, appeared quite evident. In order to obtain a clearer picture of the objectives, it was also preferred to adopt a further operational variation through the 4 basic skills defined by the Italian training system. Finally, the operational definition of the contents returned 15 categories: despite the presence of some semantic contiguities and marginal frequencies, it was deemed appropriate not to make any aggregation in order to make visible the educational richness that has characterized the *Scuola Viva* activities of the Adult school centers .

Given that it would be a stretch to argue that the modules have only referred to a single competence / content (also because some are closely related to each other), here it was necessary to attribute the prevailing one for practical reasons of analysis. Reading the data, it emerges that most of the modules respond to the need to promote those skills that are useful for stimulating forms of behavior that allow people to participate effectively and constructively in social and working life (Social and civic competences - 9 modules) and to raise awareness of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a wide variety of media, including music, performing arts, literature and the visual arts (Cultural awareness and expression - 9 mod.). Furthermore, considering the disadvantage of many participants (foreigners, unemployed, unemployed, etc.), a large part of the activities (8 mod.) were dedicated to the enhancement of the Italian language (Communication in the mother tongue) and to activities useful for insertion professional in the world of work (spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship), in order to create important prerequisites for the social inclusion of individuals.

The strengthening of basic skills reinforces what has already been expressed regarding the importance of communication as the main tool to better face everyday life: in fact, the language axis that recognizes the importance not only of the correct use of the Italian linguistic heritage but also of the fundamental tools for a conscious use of the artistic and literary heritage, involved as many as 28 modules (about 60%).

The description of the contents of the modules allowed us an 'empirical translation' of the objectives mentioned above. 8 modules were mainly dedicated to professional and entrepreneurial activities. On the other hand, 12 modules, with reference to what has already been expressed on the importance of communication and language skills, have implemented the activities on the Italian language, divided into creative writing (6) and grammar of the Italian language (6).

### **3. Strategies for social innovation**

It is interesting to focus on the project articulation related to the four interventions aimed at providing participants with the basic skills to enter the labor market in an unconventional way. We refer to the projects *Healty mind in healty body*, *Whit heart and mind*, *Job Placement* and *Lerning by doing*. The project *Movie for education* proposed by the Adult School Center Naples City 2 contains within it actions related to sports, dance, music and cinema carried out by associations in the area with the aim of stimulating group collaboration in addition to the acquisition of technical skills. The module, moving from the belief in the educational, didactic and pedagogical potential of cinema in the formation of citizens, has created a film festival on the themes of active citizenship in order to raise awareness among

participants on the subject, while *United colors of sport* project has provided sports activities to promote the well-being and socialization of young people. Ensemble *music* and *dance* organized music lessons, ranging from theory to the practical use of musical instruments, and dance workshops with particular attention to local and ethnic music and dances from southern Italy.

Music is also a central theme in *Creativity 2.0*, an action within the *Learning by doing* project proposed by the Adult School Center of Caserta, in which a workshop was created to provide technical skills for the creation of video products and the creation and recording of music with the aim of promoting socialization and stimulating the creativity of participants. Creativity and learning are stimulated in various ways, both through logic games and the use of computer tools within the module Infonumeracy: playing with math and computer science, and through various creative writing workshops that have fostered the development of literacy skills through creative reading and writing games in order to build personal and original stories in the module *Con le mie parole*. Through the use of comics, in the module Balloon or even writing workshops for the creation of texts relevant to different media (TV, radio, press, advertising) in the action Creative Writing for language enhancement within the broader project *Whit heart and mind* proposed by the Adult School Center Naples City 1.

Some interventions were aimed exclusively at foreign students already in upper secondary education or interested in starting a new one, such as the modules Italian for study proposed by the Adult School Center of Naples City 2 and Italian for foreigners L2 of the Adult School Center of Caserta, creating a path of language enhancement focused on the development of grammatical, lexical and expressive skills of young immigrants.

In addition to the modules that provided for the direct involvement of subjects in practical activities, the action called the Listening Desk is more aimed at enhancing the individual as a whole, to stimulate both cognitive and emotional growth, and to improve communication between parents and children.

Other initiatives, however, have provided for the creation of laboratories and didactic lessons more closely aimed at the acquisition of technical skills spendable on the labor market, in particular the learning of the most important programming languages in *Coding* and graphic techniques for the creation of lay-outs of websites in *Web Marketing: Communication strategy* within the Adult School Center Naples City 1. In this area are also the actions conducted by the Adult School Center of Caserta orienting skills, structured on a series of frontal interviews in order to make young people acquire a greater awareness of their professional skills and the creation of simulations useful to reconstruct the mode of operation of a working environment, while the module *Working* organized in frontal lessons on the theme of self-entrepreneurship, was more focused on the acquisition of technical-



scientific and economic skills aimed at developing a concrete attitude to enterprise. These activities recall in topic and purpose those foreseen in the *Job Placement* project that involved the Adult School Center of the province of Salerno, whose modules are closely interconnected and shared the objective of providing and strengthening the key skills for the next segment of higher education and professional qualification or retraining. The module *Future is now* has provided a series of face-to-face meetings structured in three phases, skills assessment, offers of the world of work and preparation for a subsequent insertion, in order to develop the capacity for empowerment, that is, the set of knowledge, skills and ways of relating that put an individual in a position to acquire greater control over his life and a more defined picture of his aspirations. An integral part of the actions of orientation and support to the choices of work and professional paths was the multicultural eno-gastronomic laboratory promoted by the *Street food and beverage*, organizing both didactic lessons on food and in particular on local wines and street food as a resource of gastro-nomic-cultural heritage, and activities of preparation in the kitchen and operational-management type in the dining room and in the approach to the client.

Interventions in formal and informal learning have seen the participation of both Italians and foreigners, focusing on the theme of enhancing the territory through cultural exchange with immigrants. In addition to the enhancement of skills spendable in the world of work and the acquisition of technical skills for the eno-gastronomic sector, *Making business* aimed to encourage the birth of innovative startups and the promotion of the local production system oriented towards innovation, welcoming new market trends that reflect the integration of non-EU citizens; young Italians and foreigners were involved in four educational sections that dealt with legal and tax issues, web marketing, business financing to conclude with the economic and financial planning of the new business.

## **Conclusion**

Lifelong learning represents the instrument for guaranteeing the economic and technological development of a country and the creation of a knowledge-based society with a view to active citizenship. The need for the EU to prioritize the fight against early school leavers and the prevention of early school leaving is due not only to the condition of Europe in general, but also to the significant territorial inequalities that characterize the member countries, which have committed themselves to reducing the percentage of young people who leave school and training early to below 10% by 2020. In recent years, thanks to the policies implemented to combat early school leaving, the share of early school leavers in the European Union has decreased by 11 percentage points in 12 years from 17.0% in 2002 to 10.7% in 2016 (Eurostat, 2017).

While still far from the European objectives, Italy has also recorded a steady decrease in the rate of early school leavers from 20.4% in 2006 to the current 13.8%, although significant territorial gaps persist (both at macro and micro level) and gender (women around 12%, men over 16%). This positive trend is partly attributable to the progressive extension of compulsory schooling but, above all, to the actions implemented in recent years to combat early school leaving in terms of prevention, intervention and compensation. Among these, as we have seen, *F3Action* at the national level and *ScuolaViva* program at the local level.

Specifically, *ScuolaViva* has as its strong point the network approach since, conceived in this way, it guarantees a correct analysis of the needs of the territory and favors a targeted planning of interventions. An innovative aspect is the idea that dispersion must also be countered outside the school by trying to intervene even on those who have left the educational circuit for good. Therefore, in the planning it is possible to foresee activities aimed not only at students, but also at young people up to 25 years of age and adults in general, Italians and foreigners, allowing a wider involvement of different population groups. A further strong point is the three-year duration within which it is possible to develop, implement and evaluate a project: the Adult school centers, after evaluating the impact of the project developed within the network, have had the opportunity to rethink the activities carried out during the first two years of the program, through a reformulation of the modules that did not meet the objectives or a further proposal of those that were of interest to the recipients. Beyond the general objectives of the program, *ScuolaViva* has distinguished itself for a series of actions aimed at the educational recovery of adults and young adults who have left the educational circuit in the past. The goals of the program have certainly represented an opportunity for the world of Adult school centers to take advantage of in order to strengthen their recovery actions through greater resources and the possibility of implementing a more varied educational offer. It is no coincidence, in fact, that 4 of the 7 centers active in Campania in 2016 initially joined the program. Beyond this strong participation, two issues clearly emerge. Firstly, a greater involvement of Italian adults in the project activities has been observed: this undoubtedly represents an element of strength with respect to the strong imbalance existing between foreigners and Italians in the Adult school centers with interesting implications in terms of cultural integration. Another concerns the educational richness that has characterized the project interventions over the two-year period. We have had the opportunity to observe how almost all the activities have been conceived to enhance, consistently with the nature of the Adult school center, the key competencies for Lifelong learning. From a strongly inclusive point of view, a good part of the modules developed activities dedicated to marketing, entrepreneurship and food and wine in order to build pathways to professional insertion; at the same time,

we observed a strong attention to all those activities useful for the strengthening of communication skills: if on the one hand this result may seem obvious given the high presence of foreigners, on the other hand it is not if we take into account that these modules include those that have developed not only the teaching of Italian, but also writing, reading, narrative etc., that is, the disciplinary fields that stimulate the creativity of individuals. Therefore, in our opinion, the Centers with the *Scuola Viva* project have experimented and - in view of the next years - have laid the foundations for new training paths, combining the aims related to social integration with the recovery of adults in the training circuit.

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# The Refugees Welcome Reception Model as an Exercise of Active Citizenship for Social Inclusion

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**ABSTRACT:** *In recent years a narrative has developed around the migratory phenomena which has emphasized the refugee emergency and led to the fragmentation of the migrant's identity into a thousand images. Standing out in this scenario is the Refugees Welcome Association and its focus on the concept of active citizenship. Here we want to break from convention in our investigation of the phenomenon of social integration and concentrate on the inclusive model proposed by digital collaborative platforms and stimulated by an active citizenship model, so we are able to go beyond the «géologique des réfugiés» (Agier, 2012).*

**KEYWORDS:** *Social Inclusion, Active Citizenship, Digital Collaborative Platform, Refugees*

## Introduction

The various issues covered by the broad-reaching educational dimension include the topic of inclusion for educational purposes pertinent to a global society.

In recent years Europe has emphasized the dimension of integration with the goal of constructing a fairer and more equal society. In this essay we will seek to analyze the contribution that sociology can make to the topic of inclusion, focusing in particular on the correlation between citizenship, migration and integration. We will examine the issue of education in its broadest meaning, i.e., that of *e-ducating*, providing instruction on the exercising of active social citizenship. We will ask whether this dimension contributes in any way to the genuine integration of individuals or if the notion of citizenship is detached from the sense of belonging to a community. We will also briefly consider some of the data resulting from the research carried out in the field in 2020 which aimed to explore the Italian association panorama with specific focus on the Refugees Welcome Italia association.

## 1. Citizenship as the key for interpreting contemporary society

The concept of 'citizenship' became increasingly established in the social sciences between the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Though by no means a new area of analysis for sociology, it is only in recent decades that it has become a genuine lens through which to interpret the global scenario: it enables us to analyze the quality of the public and private life of citizens; it considers the topic of subjective rights from a single perspective; it provides a theoretical space for reflection on the rights of individuals and globalization (Zolo, 1994).

Just as citizenship increasingly represents a key for interpreting the present, participation in the social and political life of the State is becoming an extremely important issue. In this essay we will therefore ask whether education can represent a tool for stimulating the active citizenship and social integration of migrants and if the citizenship model developed until now is able to meet individual demands for social and civil expression.

The term 'citizenship', concept and institution, can be found in the vocabularies of many human sciences: its multitude of meanings and multidimensionality is well known (Baglioni, Vitale, 2016).

The attributes associated with citizenship belong to an active, identity-related, material and formal sphere in a constant relationship between individual and society, unequivocally highlighting how the citizen and State are the two main parties in the 'democratic contract'.

If active and identity-based citizenship pose a symbolic question, material and formal citizenship place the accent on more analytical questions. Indeed, while 'active citizenship' is essentially connected with the idea of participation and, to some degree, the desire to belong, the rationale behind material and formal citizenship is more heuristic.

What sociology can do, in our opinion, is to stand out in terms of the reflection on education, integration and migration, focusing particular attention on the life chances that every State is able to offer natives and migrants: reflecting on inequalities; on the complexity of a European community made up of lots of different Nation States; of numerous different institutional levels, different cultural contexts; of multiple private and public actors; as well as a heterogeneous society.

We are also witnessing the renewed debate on participation as a certain form of citizenship, as part of a rediscovery of a «wide range of structures and intermediate bodies of collective life» (Codres, 2000, 25) to stimulate the need for human promotion and satisfy people's fundamental rights (Lazzari, 1994, 49). Citizen committees have been created in the various European countries and the right to vote has been extended to immigrants.

The transformations taking place have legitimised new ways of interpreting citizenship (Kazepov, Procacci, 1998, 1). We are familiar with 'transnational citizenship' (Bauböck, 1994), i.e. a form of citizenship that transcends national borders and expresses lasting bonds between people, networks and organisations that extend across the boundaries of Nation States (Faist, 2000; Laguerre, 1998).

The idea of 'active citizenship' and 'national self-determination' has spread as a vertex of the world order of Nation States (Wimmer, Glick-Schiller, 2002). We can find references in international literature to 'flexible citizenship', a formal kind of citizenship of a country different to the individual's nation of birth for business or trade reasons (Ong, 1999,123). This is an elite form of citizenship, not open to everyone and largely pursued by those that view globalization as an opportunity for material enrichment. Other researchers talk about «multicultural citizenship» (Kymlicka, 1999,25); «differentiated citizenship» (Young, 1989,255); and «cultural citizenship» (Turner, 1994,157).

In addition to the numerous forms identified in scientific literature, at least two types of citizenship can be distinguished:

- formal citizenship.
- material citizenship.

The origins of this distinction lie in the history of modern states. In the first case, formal citizenship, the emphasis is on membership of a community (Baglioni, 2009,44-45) through birthright or residence; in the second case the distinguishing element is the concrete activation of citizenship, in other words the ability of the individual to actively participate and integrate in the community on a daily basis via social and economic inclusion mechanisms.

Citizenship is expressed on a daily basis, becoming a flow of conduct (Giddens, 1979,55): it is in this dimension of activity that sociology finds space for its investigations. As such, the sociology of citizenship becomes a 'practical', 'inclusive' and 'educational' dimension. Following this line of enquiry, we begin exploring the various aspects of 'quality of life', of the interaction between individuals and the correlation between social networks: this relationship becomes the basis of the exploration of sociality and integration education. Citizenship brings institutions, communities and individuals into contact.

We can therefore understand how citizenship is based more on privilege than equality. In addition, there is also the ongoing complication of relationships caused by globalization processes which has invested the individual *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1982), changing the form and content of rights.

## 2. Citizenship and education

The educational dimension demonstrates its connection with citizenship in inclusive or exclusive terms depending on whether citizens enjoy such status or not. We know that exclusion from citizenship often coincides with socioeconomic exclusion and that this can often lead to racism, xenophobia, absenteeism from school and social marginalisation (Kavya *et al.*, 2018). Bourdieu argued that our support for the State has political roots that we struggle to trace because of the *effet d'universel* and that benefit the interests of a category which over

the decades has established itself as the State «nobility» (Bourdieu, 1994, 130).

Therefore, rethinking the concept of citizenship from an educational and polysemous perspective so that it more accurately represents the multitude of identities that characterize contemporary society, appears even more urgent: we need to emphasize diversity in order to consolidate or rediscover the rights of individuals (Dahrendorf, 1994). Non-Eurocentric and polycultural universalism must pursue inclusive citizenship (Rivera, 2002), while today we are increasingly witnessing the disintegration of the universalistic concept of citizenship (Mezzadra, 2001) which makes a distinction between 'first class' and 'second class' citizens.

Citizenship tends to have a universalistic dimension, but it also needs a local dimension in which the city and the community play a central role.

In the last few decades, we have seen more assimilationist than assimilation policies (Perocco, 2003; Però, 2002), which marginalize migrants and materially and symbolically weaken immigrants. Italian policies over the years have shaped solidarity and association processes on the basis of an inward-looking model mainly focused on recreational and cultural actions, abandoning the sphere of political struggle and the defence of social rights. Participation has also often been mediated by the voluntary sector (Caponio, 2005) which has mainly emphasized the symbolic side of citizenship while being less encouraging of its material aspects.

The lack of recognition by civil society and interiorization processes have also had consequences on solidarity processes between natives and immigrants, generating an «Italian-style apartheid» model (Perocco, 2003,86).

### **3. Citizenship: between social inclusion and exclusion**

Today, the concept of citizenship is afflicted by an ongoing and lacerating tension between its «intension» and «extension»<sup>1</sup> (Bally, Sachehaye, 2009, 55). By extension of citizenship we mean the subjects that can access it; by 'intension of citizenship' we mean the numerous rights which can be associated with this dimension. So, as the number of properties attributable to the citizenship dimension increases, the number of subjects that can access this same dimension reduces in proportion.

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<sup>1</sup> By 'extension' we mean the term that refers to the object, maintaining the variable of applicability of the various different meanings to the term in question. With 'intension', more so than the denoted object we mean the way we refer to it. By increasing the number of properties attributable to an object we proportionately reduce the number of people that can access the object (C. Bally and A. Sachehaye, *Cours de linguistique générale*, Lausanne-Paris, Payot, Lausanne-Paris, 1916).



The period we are living, more so than any other in history, is also characterized by mobility (Umukoro, 2020), which brings inclusion and exclusion processes into play because by moving from one geographical location to another, or even from one social location to another, we can be included to different degrees. The history of citizenship is permeated by exclusion and inclusion processes but globalization and territorial mobility have taken them to a whole new level today.

As such, when we reflect on citizenship, migration and integration, it is necessary to analyse the extent of the mobility and globalisation process taking place. Globalization has created problems for citizenship, its plural dimensions and models of integration and participation in community life.

The terms mobility and integration are not just subject to study and reflection but also a method for working on European societies (Baglioni, Vitale, 2016).

In this scenario emerges one of the most pressing paradoxes: on one hand the universalistic values of citizenship are emphasized in the quest for equal and inclusive policies, and individuals are encouraged to move around; on the other, Europe is struggling to prioritise social integration and the extension of the material rights of citizenship. This paradox partly stems from the tension between mobility and globalization in as much as the former drives territorial transition processes while the latter minimizes times, spaces and action areas, and frees social action from traditional territorial boundaries. Whereas mobility requires the territorial dimension with its symbolic and material meanings, the latter demands «liquid borders» and loose territorial limits (Ferrari, 2020, 76).

Mobility is a generative act carried out by individuals to fulfil their need for exploration but can in some cases coincide with 'enforced mobility', which transforms the migratory action into a creative way of dealing with circumstances that threaten their survival or wellbeing: in our opinion it is ostensibly a transformation process carried out by individuals or groups. Mobility should therefore be regarded as a resource (Lubkemann, 2008; Bakewell, 2008).

The dimension of mobility impacts and involves other wider questions, such as the interaction between local and translocal identities (Haddad, Ahmed, 2003); citizenship, as highlighted above; belonging (Hallegatte, *et al.*, 2018), the economic dimension; territorial perception, as well as the exercising of power via a government structure (Magsamen, Dillon, 2020).

#### **4. Migrant education: globalization and control policies**

Migration should be regarded as a flexible resource (McCollum, Findlay, 2017) and not stigmatised. When talking about migration we often associate it with dramatic existential episodes; it is hardly ever spoken

about in terms of the natural inclination to move around that has always shaped human activity, and even less often is it regarded as a flexible resource. In the history of the human condition sedentary periods have alternated with migratory periods in relation to times, objects and places (Sassen, 2018; Olivieri, 2007) that have highlighted imbalances and reconstructed the social sphere.

In post-war literature on mobility (Malkki, 1985) the migrant has often been associated with a threat to the established order, with a problem that must be addressed with more effective policies, with questions of national and international security that must be managed and, finally, with humanitarian problems. Meanwhile, the migratory phenomenon, not unlike other forms of territorial action (Turco, Camara, 2019), is a social construct whose forms and types are frequently present in comparative analyses (Faia, 2007; Baker, Aina, 1995).

The migratory act presupposes that the actor – the migrant – has an inclination and a desire to move, as well as some expertise in these movements (Sayad, 2002). This act only partially coincides with the reality of migration, a social construct correlated with the socio-territorial context and the cultural fabric (Ferrari, 2020).

The gap between the migrant and the reality of migration is bridged by education which, by acting culturally on the concepts of belonging and citizenship, is able to stimulate inclusion when the goal of the education is social integration. The culture of migration can therefore be defined according to different emergency or control policy aspects.

We could argue that migrant education is connected with the historic traditions, the social models, the economic components and the technical and technological expertise, as well as the practices, religious beliefs and regulatory institutions that inform it and shape its execution and narration (Cohen, Sirkeci, 2011; Cohen, 1994). Because of its varied nature the migratory culture elaborates its codes and ideologies which are more closely connected with the territorial dimension than any other factor because migration always involves the movement from one place to another. It is here, in its territorial aspect, that migration, as a global process, meets the dimension of citizenship and globalization. Globalization impacts on the educational dimension and on migratory flows; it changes national immigration policies; and transforms social cohabitation models in nation states; it changes lifestyles (Castells *et al.*, 2007; Castles, Miller, 2003) and treatment methods.

## **5. Schools and the ethnicization of work**

Schools become central in these processes, and with them formal and informal education, because schools, like the work environment, stimulate integration processes (Santagati, 2020).

As already mentioned, we are currently witnessing both the globalization of the markets and cultures and, at the same time, 'ethnic confinement' practices in neighbourhoods and geographical areas, identified and tasked with the goal of implementing social control: the tendency is to focus more on control than the management of migratory flows (Olivieri, 2007).

It is in the ongoing globalization process, where there aren't enough resources for everyone, that the control of mobility, borders and the legal system, as well as the political and economic system, makes it possible in some degree to oversee access to the labour market, which as we know is one of the key premises for social integration.

The control of migratory flows and labour and welfare policies legitimizes a political and social hierarchy that pushes non-citizens, second-class citizens, to the edge (Balibar, Wallerstein, 1988). The ethnicisation of work is one of the answers to the maintenance of hierarchies and the control of conflict. Globalisation makes this order of structures more complex; it stimulates the growth of migratory flows; it encourages migrants to seek redemption; it multiplies the number of actors in play, it creates competition for material citizenship, inevitably creating conflict between those who have citizenship and those who don't.

It will be necessary to invent new political frameworks and new spaces for social initiatives and organisations, not necessarily connected with one political or religious credo over another but founded on the concept of free association and focused on the creation of fairer trade, a fairer labour market and the more equal redistribution of resources.

Finally, it will be essential to go beyond the idea that migrants are a strategy for increasing the population and a workforce ready to do jobs than are no longer in keeping with the ambitions of natives. This Economist vision (Zanfrini, 2020) of migratory flows must be superseded by democratic freedom of global movement and the real extension of citizenship and social inclusion rights. And in this context education plays a priority role (Fulantelli, Pipitone, 2017).

We know that an inclusion process requires socialization practices and the recognition of one's own identity and the identity of others; it brings educational and social expertise into play and necessitates broad, continuous and diverse socialization processes (Besozzi, 2016; Santagati, 2004; Durkheim, 1973). The education/immigration pairing appears unavoidable in migration practices, whether these be informal or formal (Foucault, 1978).

Another factor deserving of consideration is the relationship between technology and migratory processes (Leung, 2011), particularly with regard to the 'enabling power' of ICT in shaping migratory processes.

Various studies (Codagnone, Kluzer, 2011; Borkert *et al.*, 2009; Hamel 2009) argue that ICT is able to: diversify and increase expatriation opportunities, facilitate movement and drive new forms of immigration

and integration. By increasing accessibility, pervasive connectivity changes the way in which migration is undertaken and perceived (Collin, Karsenti, 2012) and the migrant is no longer an uprooted subject but a connected one (Diminescu, 2007). Digital applications and platforms facilitate these processes. The most famous applications include: InfoAid<sup>2</sup>; Refugermany<sup>3</sup>; Refugeeinfo.org<sup>4</sup> and RefAid<sup>5</sup>.

By matching supply and demand between equals, the digital platforms make it possible to put underused resources back into circulation (Schor, 2016; Hamari *et al.*, 2015; Botsman, Roger, 2010).

## 6. Technology for supporting education and social inclusion processes

A first Declaration on promoting citizenship was drafted at the Paris meeting of 2015<sup>6</sup> and is founded on the principles of freedom, tolerance and education: for the first time, the Declaration states the importance of transmitting civic and intercultural competences through education, also via the use of social media, without neglecting the linguistic dimension, one of the biggest obstacles to genuine integration. For the first time explicit reference is made to the role of technology in supporting teaching processes that pursue inclusive goals.

It is acknowledged that national limits must be overcome when it comes to migratory flows in order to adopt a transnational perspective that can help with the education of new migrants.

As such, instruction can be viewed as the classic investment with positive externalities which go beyond individual interests and encourage a form of education that is permeated by a multicultural approach.

In recent years technology has often been used for educating migrants particularly in language disciplines that support integration policies. (Godwin-Jones, 2016; Levy 2009; Liu Moore, Graham, Lee, 2002). We mustn't make the mistake of regarding technology as a panacea for the numerous evils that derive from social exclusion: in fact, we know that the social and cultural vulnerability of migrants, as well as their transit across the different territories of the European Union, makes the situation very complex.

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<sup>2</sup> Provides information to those crossing borders (weather conditions, forms of transport...).

<sup>3</sup> Provides support for asylum requests; searching for accommodation and opening bank/postal accounts.

<sup>4</sup> Provides information on asylum requests, education, accommodation, and transport.

<sup>5</sup> Uses simple maps to show migrants and refugees where services are located.

<sup>6</sup> See *Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education*: [http://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/cwt/files/dp\\_mobilisation\\_europeenne\\_20150317](http://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/cwt/files/dp_mobilisation_europeenne_20150317)

Let's not forget that technology amplifies the migratory phenomenon and its emergency aspects, resulting in the «atomisation of the social actor» (Ferrari, 2020, 115).

Technologies on their own do not guarantee social integration but because of the renewed complexity of mobility contexts technology must be redefined as one of the most important disciplines.

This definition has been given further impetus by the pandemic, which has highlighted the critical aspects of schools and integration (Lowenhaupt, Hopkins, 2020). I would say, rather, that technologies must be reconsidered as natural allies of the educational process but not identified as priority elements to which integration processes must be delegated in whole.

The most pressing questions include the problem of educational continuity and the long-standing and unresolved recognition of school qualifications, and the problem of digital illiteracy, which in Italy prevents our teachers from fully expressing their potential. We have also noted how the framework of formal and non-formal post-compulsory education changes from region to region, making it impossible to adopt a single approach at least at national level. Finally, we have identified the question of the evaluation of bilingual students on the basis of a multilingual approach (Aida, 2013).

These are just some of the criticalities facing migrants that plan to attend compulsory and post-compulsory schools. It is necessary to rethink school education from a pluricultural perspective and to work on the problems that have dogged Italian schools for decades in order to ensure that they are an optimum setting for social integration processes.

## **7. Research in the field: the Refugees Welcome integrated model**

This is the perspective we take when examining the Refugees Welcome Association (hereinafter RW), which contributed to launching the *Open Homes* programme in Milan together with the Municipality and Community of Sant'Egidio, and now makes it possible in Italy to bring together 'volunteers, activists, guests and immigrants' in the immigration and social inclusion programme, implicitly stimulating demand for material citizenship. In particular, RW has stood out over the years for its ability to match supply with demand, and to promote the creation of social capital.

With this in mind, in this essay we provide a few results from the in-depth research carried on immigration platforms dedicated to migrants, and more specifically the platform developed by RW which provides us with a rough overview of the active citizenship exercised today by natives and migrants.

Refugees Welcome is a non-party political association that uses information technologies adopted by the sharing economy: it was

founded in Italy in 2015 and is present in 15 countries across Europe. It was set up by a group of professionals with multidisciplinary skills to promote alternative immigration processes to those in place at institutional level; encourage demonstrations of solidarity and integration; promote human capital and exercise citizenship.

According to our macro-level analysis there are 3 steps to the RW approach:

- the registration of guests and hosts on the platform;
- the matching of supply with demand, which makes the transition from observational-analytical theoretical methodology to experience in the field a possibility;
- real-life cohabitation, which encourages the independence projects targeted at guests.

At meso level, we can identify various social actors in the immigration model which respond to lots of structured social needs: 'the host'; 'the guest'; 'the volunteers'; and 'the activists'.

The adherence to a programme and a way of behavior constitutes the glue of the collective action that makes up the ideology of the programme. The activists, who contribute to forming a 'new narrative' around the figure of the migrant, introduce complex training, behaviors and actions to deal with difficult situations and distress (Althusser, 1970).

The fulfilment of requirements encourages social action, change and social renewal. Though the data available to us is quite abundant, we do not yet have a complete grasp of the phenomenon under analysis (Stake, 1995); on the contrary, we are aware that we have only just sketched out an exploratory investigation into this process. The nature of the data available to us forced us to adopt a mixed research methodology: i.e. a qualitative approach (Fischer, 2006; Park, Burgess, 1921) to get as close as possible to understanding the perspective of the social actor; and a quantitative approach to summarise the numerical dimension of the immigration model. At micro level particular attention was focused on codification and terminological interpretation through text mining with NVIVO.

Other dimensions analyzed were: age, origin, reason for migration or reception, skills possessed and languages known. The 4-year period under examination is that of 2016-2019.

'*Hosts*' are represented by 1675 respondents; the 'host' is the individual social actor or family that decides to exercise their active citizenship right by hosting migrants that have applied for refuge. 70% of hosts are approximately between 40 and 60 years old. 50% are over 50 years of age. We can define the hospitality 'model as integrated' because it integrates various levels of social status in a community that works according to a social cooperative scheme aimed at social equality; it integrates individuals in the definition of the planned goals as they are 'hosts/activists' and 'migrants/guests'; it integrates social

narrative levels that reflect independent historical and geographical variables; finally, it integrates the motivational and behavioural structures of individuals defining democratic citizenship tasks (Ferrari 2020).

The majority of 'hosts' live in Lazio (15%); Lombardy (12%); Piedmont (9%), Veneto (6%) and Emilia Romagna (6%). Basilicata (1%); Trentino Alto Adige (1%); Friuli Venezia Giulia (1%); Valle d'Aosta (0%) and Molise (0%) are at the bottom of the list in terms of immigrant hospitality. Out of 57 cities, the most active urban centres in hosting immigrants are Rome (21%); Turin (9%); and Milan (8%).

68% of the sample speak 2 languages; 24% speak 3 languages and 8% speak 4 languages. Language skills are therefore extremely high and provide further social guarantees in terms of inclusion and integration.

The 'hosts' are further defined by the skills they have declared, which have been grouped into similar categories in the analytical work: 20% state they have 'skills in the educational sphere'; 17% in 'economics and art and cultural heritage'. As such, many hosts are connected with the sector of human sciences. More investigation is needed to discover whether there is any correlation between educational background and the inclination to host immigrants and exercise active citizenship with particular focus on the aspect of social inclusion. The data in our possession does not enable us to establish any specific correlation.

Contrary to what we might have thought technological expertise is low with just 4% of the sample saying they have knowledge of advanced technologies. The platform is clearly easy to use and a high level of computer literacy is not required.

The professions cover a wide range of production activities and are connected with a broad array of services. 17% are related with office work; 12% with the socio-educational sphere and 9% with freelance professions: a social fabric which can therefore be associated with the middle and middle-upper classes, ready to host immigrants and try new experiences.

1510 'migrants' signed up to the immigration programme replied to the questionnaire. 20% of the sample come from Gambia; 13% from Nigeria; 9% from Mali and Senegal; these are followed by the Ivory Coast (7%) and Pakistan (5%).

10% claim to be of legal age. 7% are 19, 4% are 20. Likewise, another 4% claim to be 21, 22 and 23 years of age. The ages of the rest of the sample are equally distributed between 24 and 45 years of age.

17% live in Lazio; 16% in Lombardy and 10% in Piedmont: these figures correlate perfectly with the percentage of host actors. Rome (21%), Milan (13%), and Turin (10%), together with the smaller Genoa (8%) and Catania (7%), are the most popular cities chosen by migrants for shorter or longer periods.

To the question on the 'description of the strengths' expressed by migrants, 19% express a 'need for help' in the integration process; this is followed by the definition of 'academic' (11%); and then those of

'worker' (10%) and 'sociable' (10%). Part of the sample is seeking employment and describes itself as a 'motivated and determined worker' (14%). The dimensions of help and support for social inclusion, together with the desire to come across as positive individuals seeking employment, are regarded as priority and urgent.

1515 '*volunteers*' responded. The majority of the target (65%) prefers not to answer the question on their age. The remainder are distributed between 29 and 38 years of age (11%); between 39 and 48 (7%); and between 19 and 28 (7%). The volunteers in the sample are very active in Lombardy (16%) and Lazio (15%). The skills declared relate to the area of human sciences with specific interest in 'art and cultural and landscape heritage' (40%) and 'music' (20%); there is no specific interest in education as there was among the 'hosts'.

To the question on the reason that led them to work with RW, 51% of the sample replied that they 'want to be useful and helpful to those that need support'; and 29% said that they 'want to help those who have fled from war and hunger'.

The dimension of solidarity and the perception that migrants seek help because they are political refugees or have survived tragedies are dominant.

## **Conclusion**

Migration has become one of the key topics of our time: minorities and majorities clash over numerous issues, such as civil and social rights; political representation; the right to education; the right to work and many other questions that impact on social inclusion and individual wellbeing.

In recent decades the acceleration in the pace of life and the pervasiveness of technology have also demonstrated their impact on the phenomenon of migration.

Analyzing the need for citizenship, as well as the parties that express this need, means not only forming a more in-depth understanding of the new meanings of the term but also better understanding the complexity of the different identities that request citizenship, such as migrants for example.

In this research paper we have asked whether it is necessary to rethink immigration policies; whether creating new organizational structures for immigration is the solution; and if cultural diversity, a source of social wealth, can in some way be preserved by monocultural narrative practices, which often transcend the uniqueness of the individual in favor of a standardized social narrative. If, in other words, cultural disarmament is necessary in order to truly access the migrant experience (Panikkar, 2003).

By offering the potential opportunity for more democratic social and economic development, globalization has also contributed to the



archetypal construction of «traditional and modern societies» as opposed to «archaic and backwards» societies (Luhmann, 1977, 36): considering the former as the 'correct' model for global development and the latter as lacking knowledge. Technology has also often helped to drive this archetype and cultural colonization. Globalization; the segmentation of the workforce (Colatrella, 2001); the media criminalization campaigns and the closure of borders have contributed to worsening the situation of migrants and minimizing their desire for social integration.

The marginality of immigrants in Italy today not only regards material aspects but also symbolic aspects, and the separation between immigrant and citizen is increasingly marked, as if migrants were 'ontologically out of place'. We often witness attempts at inclusion in which integration is regarded as a one-way process, where the monocultural vision of natives takes precedence over that of the immigrants, forgetting the multicultural approach.

Today we can observe a dual crisis regarding the connection between material and symbolic citizenship and nationality: frequently, those who enjoy the former express a sense of territorial belonging while those that possess the latter can't always boast a sense of territorial belonging or access social inclusion programmes.

Through technology the marginal positions expressed by migrants can be redefined and symbolic citizenship can take on a new guise, minimising the perception of exclusion.

The RW model shows that rather than technology it is 'colonising' countries that generate and sustain monoculturalism. The aim over the next few years will be to promote the human capital of immigrants without wasting the opportunity for the experiential enrichment of the individuals involved in the immigration process. The implicit benefits of this model lie in the cultural change in the ways of integrating immigrants; in the desire to change the narrative around the figure of the migrant; in the ability to positively impact on prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination; and in the goal of pursuing the objective of active citizenship, directly involving both natives and migrants (Ferrari, 2020).

RW model therefore goes beyond the artificial division of the world into colonisers/colonised; developed/underdeveloped (Rist, 1997) to emphasise the value of individuals and different biographical experiences, learning from them and revealing in everybody's life path an exceptional amalgam of existential experiences which in any case represent a form of cultural wealth and a social asset to share regardless of geographical origin or social status.

Education on immigration and the exercising of citizenship incentivise aggregative social processes in which inclusion can fully develop its potential and enable natives and immigrants to engage and integrate. As such, the first step in welcoming, integrating and educating about citizenship is cultural disarmament (Pannikar, 2003).

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## New Profiles of Adults in Education. Clustering Students to Rethink Innovative Targeting Strategies of CPIAs

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**ABSTRACT:** *The reforms of adult education in Italy are beginning to be effective after almost a decade (De Luca Picione, Madonia 2017, INDIRE, 2018). A significant consequence of the reorganization of CPIAs seems to be the differentiation of targets, which was not expected until some time ago. MIUR data (2020) suggests they are predominantly non-EU adults and youth, whereas Italian adults have become a minority. This would have increased the social representation of CPIAs as 'schools for foreigners' (De Luca Picione and Madonia 2017) resulting in the gap between courses for foreigners and Italians (e.g. early-school leavers). Therefore, understanding the current profile of CPIA students is central to rethinking new strategies of adult education. On this basis, the paper aims to answer these questions: who are the people studying in CPIAs? How do they are similar and different? Is it because of age, nationality, or something else? The authors examine the students who joined CPIAs in Campania in the 2016/2017 school year, exploring their main socio-demographic characteristics and training backgrounds. Through a clustering analysis of participants, a varied scenario emerges compared to the common (and simplistic) dichotomy of 'foreign students vs. Italian adults'. On the other hand, in the largest cluster, nationality is not a relevant discriminant. Indeed, there are features with more weight, such as educational content and experimentation with new learning purposes e.g., inclusion and adult re-entry needs. This empirical evidence suggest that rethinking adult education policies also could mean thinking about CPIA targeting policies.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Adult Education, CPIA, Clustering, Students*

### Introduction

This contribution is part of a broader research framework coordinated by the Regional Observatory on Adult Education of the Federico II University and with the collaboration of the Regional Center for Research Experimentation and Development (RCRED).

This research team with the 'territorial service network' of *Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti* (CPIA, Provincial Center for Adult

Education) initiated an exploratory survey on 'The social base of adult education in Campania' from the 2014/2015 school year.

The paper develops a secondary analysis of enrollment data for CPIAs in Campania. Exploring the social base of enrollees also means understanding what implications the evolution of adult education policies in Italy has with the 2012 reform (De Luca Picione, 2015; De Luca Picione, Madonia, 2017), and perhaps may represent evidence for rethinking adult education and rethinking lifelong learning policies.

The research takes a snapshot of the local situation of CPIAs in 2017 by framing the decade of lifelong learning policy reforms in Europe and Italy. The research takes a snapshot of the local situation of CPIAs in 2017 by framing the decade of lifelong learning policy reforms in Europe and Italy. What has happened during this decade? Who are the people involved in lifelong learning activities?

There are eight CPIAs that make up the regional and provincial network of adult education in Campania. The survey began with the construction of a comprehensive database with background information on the characteristics of users, collected at the individual points of service delivery to be analyzed with multivariate techniques in relation to their distribution by gender, age, type of course, nationality, level of previous education and other standard indicators. The goal is to reconstruct the social background of individuals who have resumed or begun their studies.

The paper attempts to answer these questions through five paragraphs. The first frames the issue through a broader scenario analysis that investigates the gaps regarding some possible targets of adult education in macro and micro contexts. The second introduces the case study with an analysis of those enrolled in the eight CPIAs in the Campania Region in the 2016/2017 school year. The third explores the methods of construction and analysis of the data, The fourth presents the results, with descriptive statistics and multidimensional data analysis for the definition of clusters of enrolled students. Finally, the conclusions offer some insights into how to rethink adult education policies because of the new emerging targets in CPIAs.

## **1. An overview of Lifelong Learning Targets: Gaps Permain**

The CPIAs are part of the lifelong learning strategies. Lifelong Learning (LL) began to be talked about in the 1930s, when the need was to educate the workforce with the aim of stimulating production. Over the years, it has taken on a very different meaning, becoming an innovative element in the framework of the individual's learning systems (Longworth, 2003). In fact, it is based on the assumption that the education of the individual should not end with basic or higher education, but should be continuous and aimed at updating and



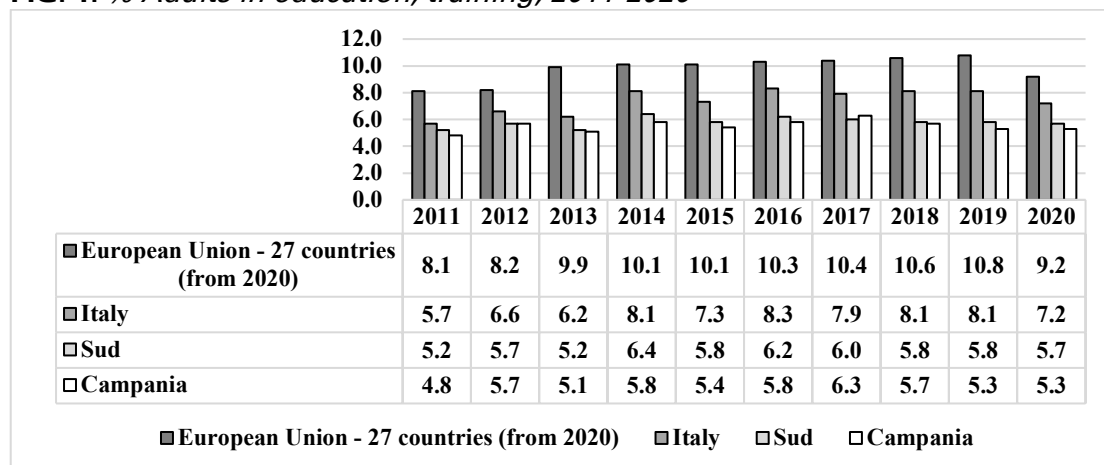
continuing training of the individual, especially in the context of actions aimed at the formative recovery of the student in need.

LL is a strategy that is very applicable to people in conditions of hardship, because they are assumed to be the ones with a large learning gap with implications for their economic, social and cultural lives. The European normative guidelines on LL<sup>1</sup> have guided national and local regulations, conditioning the targeting of adult education. Among the objectives of the European recommendation was that LL should be an instrument not only of adult learning, but above all of inclusiveness and social cohesion.

In Italy this has found a concrete implementation with the creation of territorial networks for adult learning, first with the *Centri Territoriali Permanenti* (CTP) and then with the 2012 reform with the CPIAs<sup>2</sup>. Through CPIAs adult education became an important point not only for educational policies but also for those of social inclusion. For example, at the regional level, the involvement in LL policies of institutions such as prisons certainly offered a lot of space for this type of objective. This has had important implications for the nature of the users of CPIAs, which, as we shall see, are in a phase of strong change. It is worth noting what trends have occurred over the past 10 years regarding adults engaged in education.

Looking at the statistics on adults in education and learning and on some specific vulnerable targets, there are contexts at different speeds. Fig. 1 shows the trend over the past 10 years in relation to the percentage of adults engaged in training. There are some elements to highlight. The first is that in all contexts, there is a positive trend even if with different speeds, except for 2020 (probably the cause is the pandemic). The second is that there is a significant gap between the supra-national, national and regional levels.

**FIG. 1.** % Adults in education, training, 2011-2020



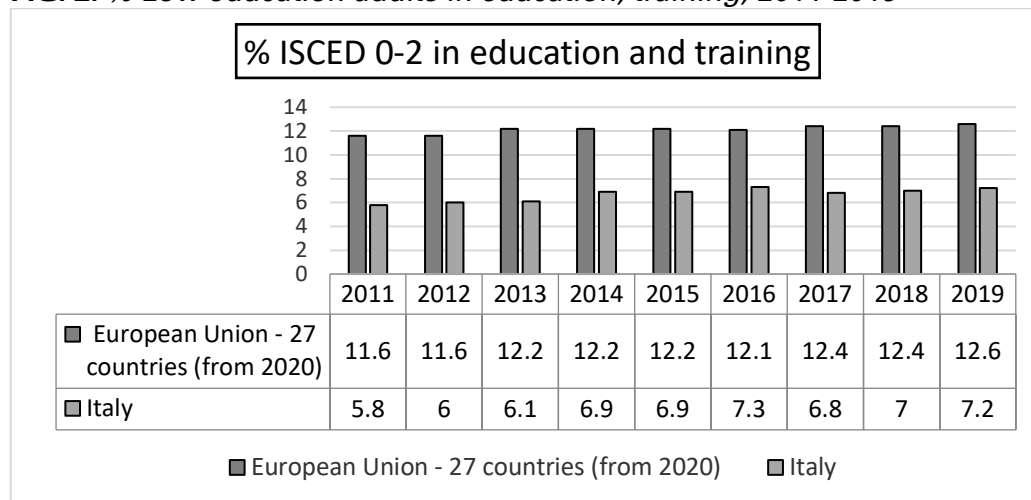
Source: Our elaboration on Eurostat data.

<sup>1</sup> Council Resolution on a renewed European agenda for adult learning OJ C 372, 20.12.2011, 1–6

<sup>2</sup> Presidential Decree of 29 October 2012 n. 263

If we consider three possible targets of LL, that is, people with low levels of education, the unemployed and foreigners in the twenty-five to sixty-four age group, we find a gap between the European, Italian and regional situations.

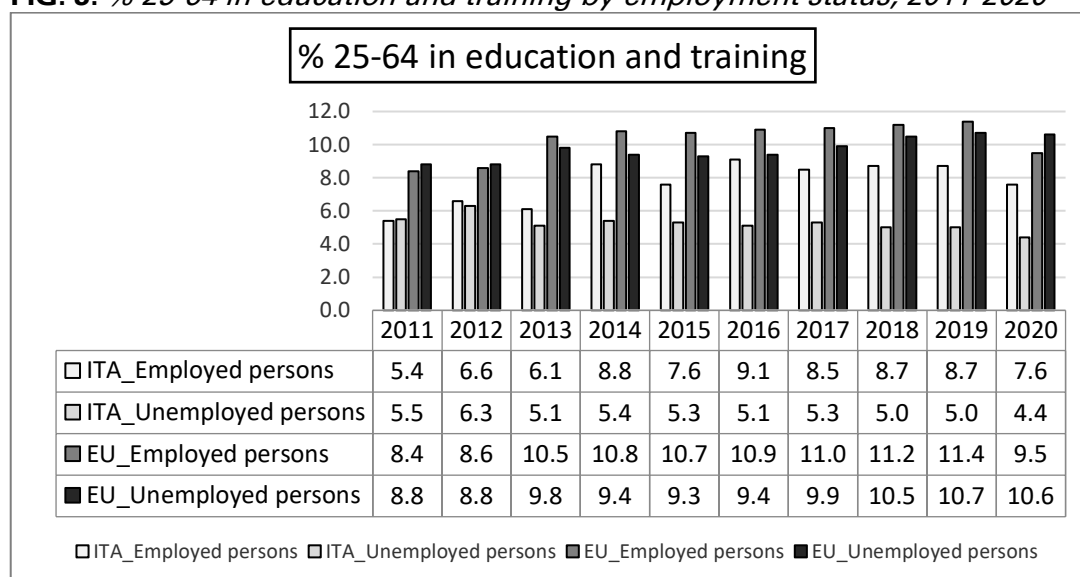
**FIG. 2.** % Low education adults in education, training, 2011-2019



Source: Our elaboration on Eurostat data

One of the targets of LL is certainly the individual with low levels of education or early-leaver. Fig. 2 shows the percentage of those with a low level of education (ISCED 0-2) engaged in training and the comparison between Italy and the EU. Since 2011 the percentage of low education adults engaged in training has increased overall by about one point. However, in Italy the proportion of adults with low education engaged in training is still low. In fact, there is a constant gap with the EU of about 5 percentage points.

**FIG. 3.** % 25-64 in education and training by employment status, 2011-2020

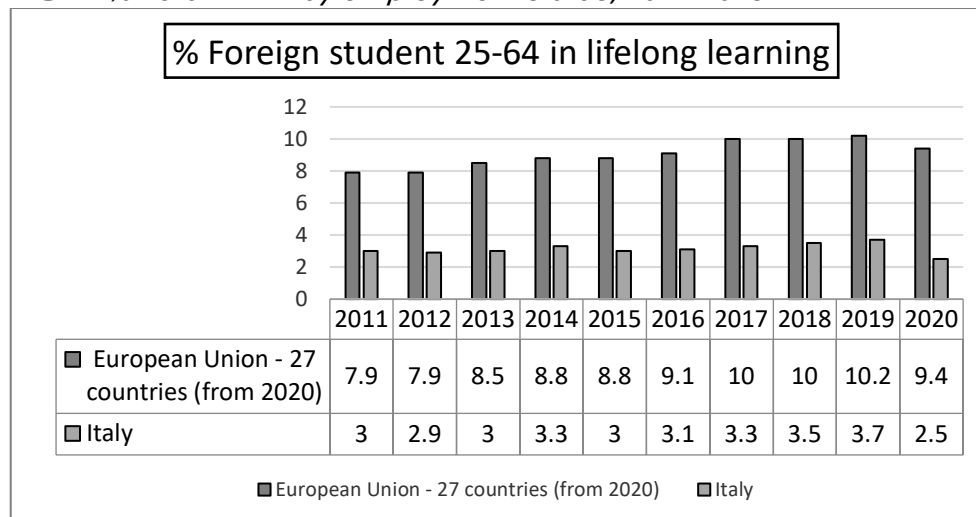


Source: Our elaboration on Eurostat data.

As a way to be successful in the job search, LL could also be framed as a sound strategy for vocational training. Fig. 3 takes into account the employment condition in the European and national context over the last 10 years. In Italy it can be seen that the gap between the employed and the unemployed has increased. While the percentage of the former engaged in training has increased, that of the latter has actually decreased. In the EU, on the other hand, the difference between the two conditions has never been significant, and in the last year (2020) the non-employed in lifelong learning exceeded the employed.

LL activities are very important for the foreign population because they represent an opportunity for good social inclusion, for cultural integration, to reduce the risk of social and economic marginalization. How many foreigners are involved in education and training? In Europe, from almost 8% in 2011, they have reached 9.4% in 2020 (in 2019 they were more than 10%). In this case, too, there is a large gap with Italy, which in the same period of time has seen the percentage decrease (from 3 to 2.5) (Fig. 4).

**FIG. 4.** % 25-64 in LL by employment status, 2011-2019



Source: Our elaboration on Eurostat data

These data outline a scenario that is certainly a wake-up call on priorities regarding strategies for targeting adults in training. This is especially true in the national and regional contexts, which still suffer from a significant gap with European benchmarks. The case study of the CPIA student profiles in Campania, in next par., is a local look that could help guide National and European policies in the area of adult education.

## 2. Case study. The profile of CPIA students in Campania

As of 2017, the territorial network of Adult Education in Campania, Southern Italy, was divided into 8 CPIAs distributed in the five provinces

of Campania (Tab.1). The interest of this research was purely exploratory. The opportunity to have at our disposal micro data of those enrolled in Campania's CPIAs from the 2016/2017 school year allowed us a first snapshot of adults in training, a target audience still little explored by scholarly research (Bochicchio, 2021; De Luca Picione, Madonia, 2017; Foley, 2020). Starting with the 2016/17 screenshot, we were intent on understanding what the socio-anagraphic base of the CPIA student population was.

The availability of micro-level data also allowed us to perform a clustering of enrollees, that is, to define partitions of students based on their social characteristics and learning trajectories. There are also substantive curiosities underlying this analysis. We mentioned that the research is still in its early stages in terms of in-depth study of adults in education. Research and official data (MIUR-ANPAL, 2020) tell us that CPIAs are often perceived as 'schools of foreigners' (De Luca Picione, Madonia, 2017).

The definition of some specific training paths dedicated to foreign users (e.g., Italian language courses) would have created a strong demand from the non-Italian target. However, if we want to understand how CPIA users are articulated, it is useful to describe their profiles and especially to identify the latent relationships between training trajectories and their social characteristics. It is also interesting to take into account the territory to the extent that there are centers where the CPIA audience changes. To answer these questions, we carried out a secondary analysis of the data from the eight CPIAs in Campania using a basket of indicators taken from the CRSS archive that built the Centers' network databases. Since these were different actors, data construction was not easy. The data did not always meet predefined and standard criteria, and many data were also missing.

### **3. Data and Methods**

#### *3.1. Data collection and limits*

The construction of the database of CPIA students in Campania, in the school year 2016/17, has been strongly affected by the lack of a single and harmonized system of data collection and management. Each CPIA, in fact, in the absence of specific guidelines for data collection, adopted entirely personal solutions often making it impossible to compare the different CPIAs with respect to some characteristics of the users.

It is mainly for this reason that the data presented will refer exclusively to very general aspects such as the number of enrolled students, the sex and age of the users, their citizenship (simplified in a dichotomy between Italians and foreigners), the nationality and the type of course followed. It was not possible, in fact, to investigate in depth and in a generalized manner for all CPIAs other socio-demographic characteristics of the users such as levels of education, working

conditions, characteristics of the family they belong to and the type of contact through which they became aware of the services offered by this institution. For the same reason, even the data regarding the outcomes of the 2016/17 school year will only be able to contemplate the type of certification achieved, since other socio-demographic variables have not always been made available.

**TAB. 1.** *CPIAs of Campania Region*

1	CPIA Avellino
2	CPIA Benevento
3	CPIA Caserta
4	CPIA Naples città 1
5	CPIA Naples città 2
6	CPIA Naples prov.1
7	CPIA Naples prov.2
8	CPIA Salerno

### *3.2. Data analysis techniques and tools*

Analyses have been performed following a quantitative perspective only. Secondary analysis of the social base of CPIA students has been performed through common descriptive statistical techniques (frequency tables, contingency tables, and measures of central tendency such as median, mean, and fashion and measures of dispersion such as standard deviation, used only for age).

Multidimensional analysis of the variables has been performed using Multiple Correspondence Analysis (Gherghi, Lauro, 2008). It is a technique for analysing categorical variables and it is a form of factor analysis for categorical data. MCA is very important to understand how categorical variables are related. In our case, it proved useful in identifying the latent dimensions underlying the relationships between the characteristics of the student population, identifying the factors that synthesize the variables considered.

On the factors identified by the MCA was applied the cluster analysis through Hierarchical clustering (Blashfield, Aldenderfer, 1978). The Hierarchical Clustering is the most common type of hierarchical clustering used to group objects in clusters based on their similarity. We could define it as a 'bottom-up' approach: each observation starts in its own cluster, and pairs of clusters are merged as one moves up the hierarchy. Descriptive analysis and tabular representation have been performed using Excel 2019 software. The application of Clustering Analysis and MCA has been performed via version 6.0 of SPAD statistical analysis software.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. The description of the 'potential' social base of CPIA student

The number of enrollees in Campania's CPIAs during the 2016/17 school year of which we have counted is 11.274 units (Tab. 1) not equally distributed among the eight CPIAs. If the CPIAs of Avellino and Benevento, in fact account for a total of 21.7% of enrollments compared to the total, the other CPIAs stand at an average lower share between 6.2% of the CPIA Naples prov.1 and 17.4% of the CPIA Naples prov. 2 (Tab.2)

**TAB. 2.** *CPIA students by CPIA, 2016/17 s.y.*

	<i>n.</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Avellino	1.066	9,5
Benevento	1.373	12,2
Caserta	1.541	13,7
Naples Città 1	1.637	14,5
Naples Città 2	1.310	11,6
Naples provincia 1	698	6,2
Naples provincia 2	1.964	17,4
Salerno	1.685	14,9
<b>Total</b>	<b>11.274</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Our elaboration

We mentioned earlier the perception of the CPIAs as 'foreigner schools'. The data actually show us a strong foreign presence in the CPIAs of Campania. More than 71% are non-Italian enrolled. Some measures of central tendency have been calculated taking into account gender and citizenship. There are significant differences. As we observe in Table 3 overall, the median age of those enrolled is 27 years (average 31.2). Males are much younger than females (median 24 for the former, 40 for the latter). The other factor considered, citizenship, is likely related to the previous characteristic. We find a difference in the median age which is almost similar (39 Italians, 25 Foreigners). This descriptive evidence leads us to think of a connection between Italian-female and foreigner-man. It is a relationship that we will explore further with cluster analysis.

**TAB. 3.** *Average, median and mode of student age, by sex and citizenship*

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Italians</b>	<b>Foreigners</b>
Average	31,2	27,6	39,7	38,9	28,2
Median	27	24	40	39	25
Mode	18	18	43	17	18
St. Dev.	13,746	11,555	14,791	15,919	11,415

Source: Our elaboration

Another important element useful to describe the students of the CPIAs in Campania is the training course formally followed. It has been categorized into six classes:

- Literacy A2 First Level – is the course for learning the Italian language.
- First Level – I period (Secondary school License) – is the first level course that provides for the achievement of the secondary school license
- First Level - II period (825 hours) – extends the first level course to the acquisition of basic skills related to basic education.
- IT – is the course for the knowledge of information technology and new technologies.
- English – is the course for the knowledge of information technology and new technologies.
- Other language – is the course that involves learning other languages.
- Other course – other specific courses.

Table 4 compares this information with the citizenship of the student. It emerges that the large number of foreigners is oriented, above all, towards courses that enable them to learn the Italian language (68.9% of the foreigners enrolled) and towards first level courses for the achievement of the secondary school license (25.4%). In the other courses, the number of foreigners is small. The majority of Italian enrolled students (more than 66%) follow a first level course. The remaining part is divided in a more or less balanced manner between computer courses (9.8%), English (9.2%) and other courses (8.5%).

**TAB. 4.** *Enrolled in CPIAs in Campania, by course, and citizenship, a.a. 2016/17*

	Italian		Foreigner		Citizenship Tot.	
	n.	(%)	n.	(%)	n.	(%)
Literacy A2	164	5,4	4.965	68,9	5.129	50,2
First Level – I period (Secondary school License)	1.192	39,5	1.829	25,4	3.021	29,5
First Level - II period (825 hours)	820	27,2	279	3,9	1.099	10,7
IT	296	9,8	28	0,4	324	3,2
English	278	9,2	74	1,0	352	3,4
Other language	10	0,3	0	0,0	10	0,1
Other course	256	8,5	35	0,5	291	2,8
<b>Tot. valid</b>	<b>3.016</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>7.210</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>10.226</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Our elaboration

At this point it is interesting to understand where the students come from, and which countries are most represented. Table 5 allows us to observe the data on the macro-areas of origin, even if there are more than 2000 missing due to the limitations of the data that we previously underlined. Almost 40% of the students enrolled come from the sub-Saharan zone. This percentage is also higher than that of Italian students, 27.6%. Another significant percentage comes from Asia (15%) and Eastern Europe (9.3%). This is followed by students from North

Africa, who make up almost 6%. The remaining 2.7% is divided between South and Central America, the Middle East, Western Europe and North America.

**TAB. 5.** *CPIA students, geographic area, n. and %*

	n.	%
Sub-Saharan Africa	3667	39,6
Italy	2552	27,6
Asia	1387	15
Eastern Europe	859	9,3
North Africa	544	5,9
South America	150	1,6
Central America	55	0,6
Middle East	28	0,3
Western Europe	18	0,2
North America	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9262</b>	<b>100</b>
Missing	2010	

Source: Our elaboration

#### *4.2. Young and foreigners. The modale profile*

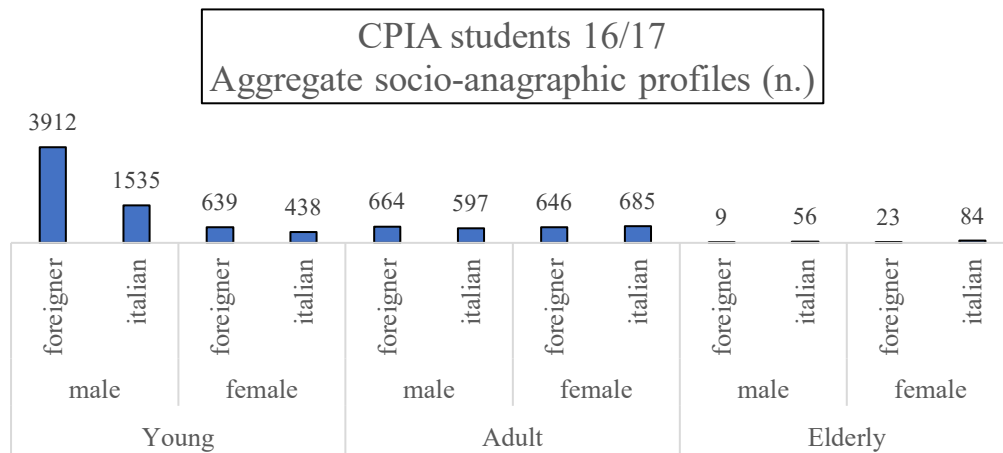
In order to understand what relationships, emerge between the characteristics of CPIA students, we considered three different variables: gender (male/female), nationality (Italian/foreign), and age group (young, up to 35/adult 36 -65/elderly +65). The combination of the respective categories has allowed us to construct a typology of twelve possible socio-anagraphic profiles of those enrolled (Fig.5).

The modal profile is that of the young male foreigner, 3912 enrolled, or 2 out of 5 enrollees. Despite the advanced age target of the CPIAs, there are very few elderly enrollees, especially elderly foreign males, present in a very small way (9). It should be noted that there is a substantial balance in the adult 'cluster', where Italian women prevail marginally (7.4% of the total).

Moreover, it is interesting to note that this profile (adult Italian woman) is the one most frequently found among the women enrolled. This confirms the gender difference that emerges in the data between young enrollees (predominantly male) and older enrollees (tendentially female). The CPIA paradoxically represents a learning center for young people who, beyond their nationality, have the desire to re-enter the educational and training circuit of the school system.



**FIG. 5.** *Nr of CPIA student by aggregate socio-anagraphic profiles*

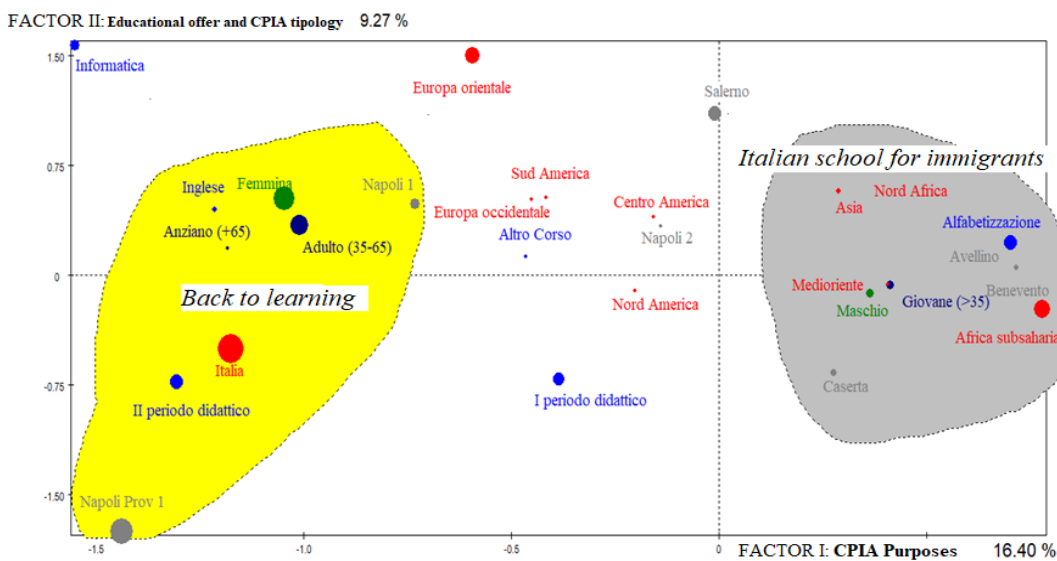


Source: Our elaboration

**4.3. Back to learning vs. Italian school for immigrants**

The MCA applied to the variables we have considered so far calculates new factors that summarize the characteristics of students. The intersection of the first two factors<sup>3</sup> brings out two opposing clouds of points, which we have circumscribed with two colored shapes to highlight a radically different user base, both from the social and anagraphic point of view, and in terms of training needs. In fact, the group in yellow, which we have called 'Back to learning', is made up of the modalities that construct the profile of the no-longer-young, Italian user (tending to be female) who enrolls at the CPIA to finish the years of obligatory schooling (second school period).

**FIG. 6.** *Cartesian plane and the two emerged dimensions*



Source: Our elaboration on SPAD 6.0

<sup>3</sup> For summary purposes, we do not report the contributions of each mode. We have recognized *CPIA purposes* in the first factor, and *Educational offer and CPIA Typology* in the second.

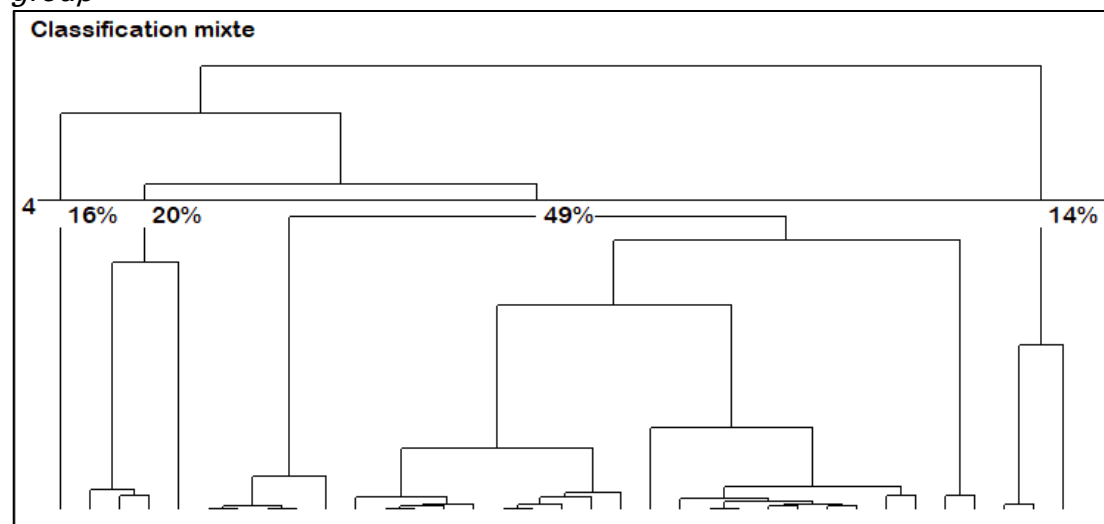
This is a type of user that finds space above all in the CPIAs in the Naples area (Naples I and Naples prov.I). The other cloud ('Italian school for immigrants') groups the modalities referring to the profile of immigrant students, whose experience with this type of school is configured with the learning of the Italian language. It is reasonable to think that these are subjects who have lived in Italy for a short time and for whom the CPIA represents, in all probability, a first contact with Italian institutions.

#### 4.3. New profiles of adult education. Beyond a consolidated dichotomy

To explore this issue in depth, this time leaving out the relationships between variables to focus on the cases of our matrix, we apply the clustering technique to the factorial values of the MCA, through the hierarchical agglomerative method.

Following Ward's method of aggregation<sup>4</sup>, the dendrogram seems to suggest a 4-group cutoff ensuring a good balance of within and between groups variability (Fig.7). The percentages of variability in the four groups (16%, 20%, 49%, and 14%) suggest to us a good proportion.

**FIG. 7.** Dendrogram with 4-group cutoff and percentage of variability for each group



Source: Our elaboration on SPAD 6.0

The four clusters (Integration and mixte learning, Young foreign men and social inclusion, Italian adults and back to learning, Young foreign women and LL) overcome and deepen the dichotomy foreign students/Italians on which official statistics and literature have often insisted referring to the world of CPIA and adult education. In order to describe the clusters, we relied on the modes with a v.test greater than 2.2, that is, statistically significant association values. Below we can see a description of the clusters and their modalities.

<sup>4</sup> Ward's method is an agglomerative method of groups which consists in minimizing the variance within groups and maximizing the variance between groups.

Young foreign women and LL (18,1%) – It is the cluster characterized above all by young foreign women who are not placed in specific training paths. Of this group, belonging to the CPIA Salerno is very characteristic. (v. test = 93.57) (Table 6).

**TAB. 6.** *Cluster 'Young foreign women and LL', class and v.test*

Young foreign women and LL (18,1%)		
	<i>class</i>	<i>v.test</i>
CPIA Salerno		93.57
North Africa		8.61
Asia		5.59
Female		4.03
Eastern Europe		2.81
Young		2.48

Source: Our elaboration

Young foreign men and social inclusion (33,6%) – It is the group characterized by the presence of young foreigners enrolled at the CPIA to learn the Italian language. They are, for the most part, male immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa who attend the CPIAs in Avellino, Benevento and Naples 2. This is the second largest group and underscores the fact that foreigners are an increasingly important target group for CPIAs and adult education policies (Table 7).

**TAB. 7.** *Cluster 'Young foreign men and social inclusion, class and v.test*

Young foreign men and social inclusion (33,6%)		
	<i>class</i>	<i>v.test</i>
A2 Literacy		67.16
Sub-Saharan Africa		57.93
Benevento CPIA		44.65
Young		42.31
Male		34.24
Avellino CPIA		32.84
Naples 2 CPIA		7.93

Source: Our elaboration

Integration and mixte learning (33,9%) - It is the largest group, likely the one that represents the average group, useful for describing the current condition of CPIA students. The average profile of this group shows us the figure of the adult enrolled who has rather mixed educational interests ranging from first level certification to computer courses. It is interesting to note that in this group both Italian and foreigners coexist: it is no coincidence that the CPIAs most representative of this group are those of a multi-ethnic reality such as Naples (Naples 1 and Naples 2) (Table 8).

**TAB. 8.** Cluster 'Integration and mixte learning', class and v.test

Integration and mixte learning (33,9%)	
class	v.test
I period	38.9
Naples 1	38.3
Caserta	28.3
Adult	23.4
IT	16.1
Eastern Europe	14.6
Female	13.4
North Africa	12.2
Italy	12.1
Naples 2	11.9
Asia	10.5

Source: Our elaboration

*Italian adults and back to learning* (14,4%) – It is the least numerous cluster. It is mainly composed of Italian adults (above all women) who decide to re-enter the training circuit in order to obtain I and II level certifications. It is a group in which the foreign presence is very marginal. Very relevant for this cluster are the CPIA of Naples Prov. 1 and Naples 1 (Tab. 9)

**TAB. 9.** Cluster 'Italian adults and back to learning', class and v.test

Italian adults and back to learning (14,4%)	
class	v.test
II period	93.57
Naples Prov.1 CPIA	8.61
Italy	5.59
Female	4.03
Adult	2.81
I period	2.48
Naples 1 CPIA	2.48

Source: Our elaboration

The results of the clustering of CPIA Campania students in 2016/2017 tells us that the target of these schools is changing and the audience of students is not made of closed compartments (Italians and foreigners) with their predefined educational paths (e.g. literacy for foreigners). There is, in fact, a large group characterized by mixed courses that involve both foreigners and Italians and that, therefore, exceed situations of ghettoization risk and instead promote shared spaces of learning.

## Conclusion. Rethinking CPIAs to strengthen the 'gray zone' of learning

Although the construction of the data on CPIAs in Campania had many limitations, we were able to produce a description of the profiles of CPIA students enrolled, highlighting, moreover, some interesting aspects related to their registry condition and their specific training paths. Until 2017, in the Centers of Campania, the imbalance between foreign and Italian participants was quite significant (in some Centers the ratio between foreigners and Italians is 9 to 1), feeding the representation of CPIAs as 'schools for foreigners' (De Luca Picione, Madonia, 2017).

It is not difficult to imagine how this perceptual bias can have no small effects on the creation of ghetto-schools with negative consequences compared to the need to build paths of social integration for immigrants (De Luca Picione, Madonia, 2017). Similarly, there is a cluster of Italian students who are concentrated in a few provincial centers and are involved mainly in return training courses for Level I certification.

Beyond this division between foreigners and Italians, however, there is another 'reality'. It is less definite and vaguer, in which it is possible to find a teaching experimentation dedicated to a heterogeneous audience in terms of social characteristics and educational needs. The main actors of these new mixed experiments are the CPIAs in vulnerable areas for migratory phenomena. What is emerging is that there is a grey area, and this could be the sign of a change, at least at the local level, in the policies of reception of CPIA students.

The limited data did not allow us to go into greater depth. However, we believe that this work can be a reasonable starting point to investigate in the future all the aspects that have emerged on the characteristics of the users of the CPIAs in Campania. In the context of the increasing importance of lifelong learning in Europe, and with a view to understanding the outcomes of the latest reforms in Italy, we believe that further cognitive efforts on this issue are an absolute priority. It would be convenient to follow a mixed research approach in order to provide evidence-based support to future policies and interventions on lifelong learning and adult learning pathways, in Italy and especially in Campania.

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## For a Creative Counterculture. The Hegemonic Power of (Adult) Education

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**ABSTRACT:** *Since the 1970s, the need to legitimize the consolidation of anti-welfarist economic policies led capitalism to promote the idea of self-responsibility, according to which welfare policies began to be considered the cause of a lack of individual responsibility. The basic idea is that it was precisely the security provided by the welfare State that deterred individuals from improving their own living conditions, thus inhibiting the development of their own creative skills. Since that period, action was concentrated on rejecting the accepted doxa, promoting instead the idea that the individual, far from being a 'product' of the surrounding environment, is responsible for his or her own destiny, and any activity is guided by a spirit of competition. The protagonist of this new society is not the classic homo oeconomicus, but rather the entrepreneur, continually driven to maximise profit and performance. A concept of individual and society also consolidated over time due to an education system modified by a regulatory framework which, starting in the 1990s, encourages employability, competition and self-entrepreneurship from an individualistic perspective, aimed at the survival of each individual within the economic game. Hence, the idea of opposing this model to Antonio Gramsci's creative school, which can be mainly implemented in the field of adult education and is able to resist the processes of incorporation of dominant values using three main elements. First, there is the conception of the individual; while for the neoliberal approach the individual is congenitally endowed with capacity, morals and freedom, in Gramsci's creative approach the individual is a social product. Hence the idea that the school, far from acting as an impartial arbiter who supervises and makes possible the manifestation of innate skills, should be configured as an active institution, capable of paying special attention to the disadvantaged and who, in other words, cannot win in competitive and economic game; second, educational autonomy, which has increasingly become the target of recent attacks from national and supranational education policies. From the Gramscian point of view, the teacher, in the same manner as the organic intellectual, has the role of elevating the learner through a hegemonic relationship and making them emancipated and capable of building a new historical action; finally, to achieve this goal it is necessary that knowledge is not instrumental, but 'critical', to deconstruct the status quo and build new imaginaries.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Neoliberalism, Self-Responsibility, Employability, Gramsci, Creativity*

## Introduction

Although since the 1970s the neoliberal paradigm has profoundly changed the relationship between State and economy by decreeing the primacy of the latter, we cannot – at least in our opinion – disregard the fundamental role that the State continues to play in the cultural reproduction of capitalist values. As Michel Foucault (2008, 145) argued already in 1979, on the occasion of the Lectures held at the Collège de France: «[neoliberal] government must not form a counterpoint or a screen, as it were, between society and economic processes [...] it has to intervene on society so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society and by intervening in this way its objective will become possible, that is to say, a general regulation of society by the market». The study of the State institutions within which the reproduction of dominant values takes place is therefore fundamental for understanding the nature of the promoted values and the way in which they take root in contemporary societies. Among these, the state educational system certainly stands out, as it is continuously remodeled by national and European policies which have finally made it an excellent repeater of the neoliberal 'mantra'.

To understand how it is used in order to create and disseminate specific values and subjectivities and if, in addition to a purely critical evaluation, one seeks to devise new scholastic and corporate models to contrast with the existing ones, we believe it is essential to recover the Gramscian theoretical approach (see also Allman, 2002; Buttigieg, 2002; Borg, Mayo, 2002; Mayo, 1999, 2010, 2014, 2015; Morgan, 1987). While most Marxist scholars who have operated conscious of the failure of the values that guided the Bolshevik Revolution and of the economic changes that have occurred in the meantime have dedicated themselves to the study of superstructures using the best-known interpretation of the Marxian concept of ideology, the one understood as 'false consciousness', Antonio Gramsci managed to employ a double value of the concept. From the Gramscian perspective, ideology takes on a 'negative' meaning when it imposes itself on the subordinate class as absolute and eternal, acquiring the well-known meaning of 'false consciousness' and 'positive' when it poses itself as an element of contradiction and raises this moment to the factor of constitution of historical action.

By combining these two interpretations, Gramsci was able to understand the determining role of superstructures which, starting from this perspective, can be configured as a tool both in the hands of the ruling classes to reproduce capitalist values, and in those of the subordinate class to create new conceptions of the world. Specifically, by promoting a particular type of culture, all oriented towards the acquisition of critical awareness and the cultural enhancement of the



subordinate masses, Gramsci considered adult education an excellent means of accelerating the much-needed transformative process of societies.

### 1. Neoliberalism, Market and Creativity

With the advent of neoliberalism, a new theory of State took hold according to which the State not only must not intervene to limit the action of the market, but must also take action in favor of it. An ideological process that has been built over time and that has found a systematisation starting from the Thirties with the theories of von Mises and von Hayek, *ante-litteram* supporters of the current neoliberal model and of the principle of self-responsibility (Lamattina, 2016). This principle has been extending extensively since the Seventies when welfare policies began to be considered the cause of individuals' de-responsibilization (Fraser, 2017; Fukuyama, 1992; Putnam, 2000; Streeck, 2013). The proponents of neoliberal thinking who first promoted it were convinced, and still are, that there was a close relationship between the security offered to individuals and the loss of a sense of responsibility. Specifically, they believed that it was precisely the security produced by the welfare State that dissuaded individuals from improving their living conditions (Dardot, Laval, 2013). From then on, a close action of overturning the current *doxa* begins such that the individual, far from being considered a 'product' of the surrounding environment, is rather held solely responsible for his own fate and all his activities guided by a competitive spirit (Beck, 1992; Gilbert, 2002; Sennett, 1998, 2003). At the core of this belief there is a specific conception of the individual. According to the liberal approach first and then neoliberal, the individual is originally a being already free, with congenital, or pre-social, rights that society can at most shape but never create. Precisely in consideration of this, the supporters of liberalism imagine as an ideal socio-political arrangement one in which the functions of the State are strictly limited. Since the individual is for them congenitally endowed with morality, rights and freedoms, the role of the State must not be to promote further rights or freedoms, but to defend those that already exist, producing an essentially 'negative' freedom. In other words, for the theorists of neoliberalism as guarantor of welfare, the State must transform itself into the handmaid of the market and, for this reason, they deem it necessary to redefine its competences and particularly what concerns its relationship with the economy. However, this does not mean the disappearance of the state, nor does it imply a reduction in public intervention. Rather, it means that the State must support market policies (often 'financial') through a system of adequate rules (see Friedman, 1962; Friedman, Friedman, 1980; Hayek, 2006). A State, in other words, which itself becomes neoliberal, that is, an organism that receives legitimacy from taking the protection of the free market as

its goal (Dardot, Laval, 2013; Gallino, 2015; Harvey, 2007). In this perspective, the preservation of the free market is necessary to guarantee everyone to express themselves and exercise their 'freedom to act'. For the theorists of neoliberalism, it is only thanks to the market that the spirit of enterprise, or 'entrepreneurship', is produced in the subject, which is then a form of self-government, thanks to which the individual can give free rein to his entrepreneurial side. In this order of things, freedom of action becomes the possibility of experimenting, correcting, learning and adapting within the market. It is no coincidence that the exponents of the Austrian School of Economics, Kirzner and von Mises in particular, considered the market to be the place where the self is constituted (Kirzner, 1973; Mises, 1998). In other words, from this perspective, individual creativity comes together with the ability to extricate oneself within the economic game and results in the continuous attempt to survive in a market system. The promotion of this new logic also passes through the educational training system, profoundly modified since the 1990s, when governments and institutions of European Union intervened with the aim of making it an organisation similar to a business whose purpose is not at all to create conscious citizens, but rather individuals who conceive themselves as entrepreneurs of themselves (Gallino, 2015, 122). Self-entrepreneurship, economic revitalisation, competition and employability have not by chance become the key terms of the European strategies of the last decades. The risk that the school becomes a place aimed solely at the acquisition of qualities that can be spent on the market is high. Precisely for this reason, we believe it is important to reflect on the possibility of devising new educational models in which creativity is not a mere synonym of 'entrepreneurship' and knowledge is configured as a valid tool for imagining new corporate models.

### **3. The positive value of the concept of ideology in Gramsci**

The changes made to State educational systems in recent years are the product of today's specific technical-rational framework oriented towards 'saleability' rather than social justice, in which traditionally public goods now become consumer goods.

These certainly include the field of adult education. According to Peter Mayo (1999), for decades adult education has been the victim of the capitalist ability to appropriate a concept of opposition, dilute it and finally make it an integral part of its dominant ideology. For example, this is the case of concepts such as 'empowerment' and 'active democratic citizenship', widely used in the field of adult education. These concepts only theoretically allude to participation processes, but in reality they are part of a dominant language that uses them with the aim of discharging social responsibilities onto the family, the individual and the community. The field of adult education has therefore not

remained untouched by the overwhelming force of neoliberalism. However, in this paper we intend rather to question the capacity of this specific field of education to potentially make itself capable of escaping the neoliberal logic. To do this, we consider adult education as a field made up of a dual nature: it is at the same time a 'passive object' that, trapped as it is in the larger state structure, shapes itself according to the dominant values it is constrained by to incorporate and potential 'active subject', due to its possible ability to resist such processes of incorporation. This theory emerges – at least according to our interpretation – from the writings of Antonio Gramsci, for whom educational processes are at the same time excellent vehicles for transmitting both dominant values but also, potentially, new conceptions of the world to be opposed.

Underlying this belief is Gramsci's interpretation of the Marxian concept of ideology and historical materialism, using which he managed to grasp the positive nuances of the Marxian conception of ideology, considered in this perspective not only 'false consciousness', but also a factor of the constitution of historical action. This interpretation of the Marxian concept of ideology makes Gramsci an innovator with respect to all those Marxist scholars who, aware of the failure of the ideals that had guided the Bolshevik Revolution and of the economic changes that have occurred in the meantime, have devoted themselves to the study of superstructures. Most of these scholars have focused their attention on ideology understood as 'false consciousness'. This allowed them to 'unmask' the ideological relationships that make up the social structures as a whole, but at the same time made them unable to promote the construction of new social imaginaries to complement or contrast with the dominant ones. Gramsci himself makes use of this interpretation when he recognises the determining role of the various state institutions for the spread of capitalist rationality. However, the strong interest in the theory of the specific efficacy of superstructures led Gramsci to combine this with a further interpretation, intercepting a double value of the concept of ideology (Liguori, 2004). Situating himself against a certain 'reductionism' advocated mainly by Croce, Einaudi and Loria, according to whom the superstructure is only an illusion for Marx, Gramsci reiterated the decisive function of ideology in the Marxian theoretical framework. An attempt that Engels had already made when, in a letter sent to Borgius in 1894, he had confirmed that political, juridical, philosophical, religious, literary, and artistic evolution rests on economic evolution, but also clarified that this does not mean that the economic situation is to be considered the only active cause and all the rest nothing but passive effect (Engels, 1986, 196). On the contrary, there is a reciprocal action on the basis of economic necessity which, in the last resort, always imposes itself (*ibid.*). According to this interpretation shared by Gramsci, Marx could never have considered ideologies appearances and illusions because individuals become aware of their social tasks due

to ideology and superstructures (Gramsci, 1977, Vol. I, 436-437). This means that even Marxian theory wants to make a *certain* social group aware of its own tasks, of its own strength, of its own becoming, stands as a partial theory associated with a specific social group. While in the classic negative connotation ideology produces truths that claim to impose themselves as absolute and eternal, in the positive one identified by Gramsci, ideology is used to promote the awareness of the partial nature of one's point of view. To be real, in fact, a philosophy must confront the fact that it is not real. Only when philosophy perceives itself as ideology can it draw as much as possible from the truth (Gramsci, 1977 [1928-1932], Q. 4, 15, Vol. I, 471). It follows, therefore, that for Gramsci ideology is the only place in which the discourse on truth and objectivity can be articulated; that there is no truth except within those 'forms of awareness', always determined (and practically, that is, politically, conditioned), because of which men act and transform reality; and this is because there is no 'reality' (to which the truth can be commensurate) except in the practical process of its social transformation (Frosini, 2001, 53).

This is extremely important for understanding the decisive function that Gramsci attributes to education, in particular to that of adults. Only starting from the theoretical framework just outlined will we be able, in fact, to consider the educational field as the central pivot of a system capable of producing new conceptions of the world.

#### **4. For a 'creative' school**

Starting from the theoretical framework just outlined, it is possible to outline the characteristics of the school imagined by Gramsci, whose 'creative' phase (dedicated to older children) is entirely aimed at the acquisition of critical awareness and is characterized by the following elements: 1) individual conceived as a historical product; 2) the fundamental role of the teacher; 3) critical knowledge.

While liberalism first and neoliberalism subsequently conceived of the individual as a being congenitally endowed with skills, values and freedom and, precisely for this reason, the school is configured as an organism capable of bringing out these innate gifts or 'punishing' those who do not possess, in the Gramscian perspective, the individual is a historical product deeply conditioned by socio-economic conditions.

This is a fact that the school cannot fail to take into account. What Gramsci is convinced of is that there is a connection between the different generations of individuals who enter into relationships: the later generations are conditioned by the previous ones because their internal relationships are determined precisely by the productive forces and the relationships accumulated by the latter. Individual characteristics therefore have a historical origin so that the developmental capacity of children is conditioned by that of their

parents. In his reflections on education and the Gentile Reform against which he lashes out, Gramsci helps us to deepen this interesting aspect of the State educational institution. Reflecting on the concept of 'spontaneity' at a certain point, Gramsci observes that one almost imagines that in the child the brain is like a ball that the teacher helps to untwist. Actually, on the contrary, individual is the product of the education to which he is subjected from birth (Gramsci, 1977, Vol. I, 114).

Therefore, there is no conscience in itself; in fact, the conscience of the child is nothing other than the reflection of the fraction of civil society in which the child participates, of the social relationships which are knotted in the family, neighbourhood, village, and so forth (Gramsci, 1977, Vol. III, 1542). When the child enters the school, he is therefore already permeated with a more or less conventional culture depending on the class to which he belongs. The boy who comes from a family of intellectuals has a culture more similar to that transmitted within the scholastic institution and will overcome the process of psycho-physical adaptation to school much more easily than the son of a worker, since already entering for the first time in class he has several points of advantage over other schoolchildren, he has an already acquired setting for family habits (Gramsci, 1977, Vol. I, 502); that is, he learns «in air» a whole quantity of notions and attitudes that facilitate the school career (ivi, p.486). This is due to the traditional separation between intellectual and manual labor: in fact, the school confronts work as non-work, while work confronts school as non-school (Manacorda, 1976, 99). Configuring itself as a structure intended solely for the training of landowners, the school remained for years a place reserved for the wealthy classes and completely non-existent for the other classes. Only with the advent of the Industrial Revolution did education begin to become 'everyone's thing', without however changing its classist character. This special character is given not only by the different effects that the use of the same methods can naturally have on pupils from different socio-economic positions, but also by the fact that «each social stratum has its own type of school» (Gramsci, 1977, Vol. I, 501).

Specifically, the multiplication of professional schools in which study assumes an immediately practical-instrumental function as well as taking away space for disinterested training produces numerous internal stratifications, assuming the appearance of a democratic school even where it tends to eternalise traditional differences by increasingly narrowing the base of the technically prepared governing class and favouring an ever clearer polarisation between the top and the bottom. The role of the teacher then becomes essential to raise the cultural level of the disadvantaged and create a conjunction between the top and the bottom (Gramsci, 1977, Vol. I, 500-501).

Like 'organic intellectuals' who, differently from traditional ones, set themselves the goal of culturally raising the popular masses and loosening the distance between intellectuals and the masses, the

teacher must be able to keep the instruction-education connection alive. For Gramsci, in fact, the grave error of idealistic pedagogy consists in having insisted too much on the distinction between instruction and education. In order for instruction not to be also education, the learner would need to be a mere passivity, a 'mechanical container' of abstract notions, which is absurd and, moreover, is 'abstractly' denied by the supporters of pure education precisely against mere mechanistic education (Gramsci, 1977, Vol. III, 1541).

In the same way, if education is exalted at the expense of instruction, there will be a school of rhetoric, without seriousness, because the material substance of the certain will be lacking, and the truth will be true of words, precisely rhetoric (ivi, 1542). Being the only one aware of the contrasts between the type of society and culture that he represents and the type of society and culture represented by the students, the teacher must act as a guide, removing those crystallised forms of folklore sedimented in the mind of the pupil and using a 'hegemonic' approach, the only one that allows him to avoid forms of domination and indoctrination and guarantees the creation of those 'positive' ideologies mentioned above. But what kind of knowledge should the teacher promote?

As we have seen, Gramsci reads ideology as a positive factor in the constitution of historical action only when it is conceived as a partial vision of reality, which therefore requires continuous questioning before becoming common sense. The acquisition of critical awareness thus becomes essential not only to recognise the ideological patina in which the popular masses are entangled, but also to avoid falling into the error of building and spreading ideologies that simply replace the dominant ones in content, but which retain the detestable characteristic of statically imposing themselves on the subordinate class.

Critical awareness is therefore configured as the acquisition of knowledge aimed not at mere cultural elevation, but at becoming aware of one's place within the corporate organisation. It is not by chance that Gramsci divides culture into two types. The first form of culture refers to an encyclopedic knowledge and is considered by Gramsci «really harmful especially for the proletariat», so much so that, in one of his articles for *Il Grido del Popolo*, he dedicates harsh words to it: «this is not culture, it is pedantry, it is not intelligence, but intellect, and against it we react with good reason» (Gramsci, 1973, 15, my translation). Being aimed at the acquisition of specific knowledge to be used concretely in the world of work, this form of culture can be considered 'instrumental'. Conversely, the type of culture that Gramsci promotes is «organisation, discipline of one's inner self, taking possession of one's personality, conquering a higher conscience, for which one is able to understand one's historical value, one's function in life, one's rights and duties' (ibid., my translation).

For Gramsci, the end of culture is, therefore, the acquisition of a critical spirit and of that 'self-consciousness' which allows one «to be

masters of oneself, stand out, get out of chaos, be an element of order» (ibid., my translation). Hence, Gramsci proposes the idea of devising a new educational action, the unitary school, aimed not simply at making the unskilled worker a skilled worker but at allowing every citizen to become a ruler or, at least, be placed in the conditions of being able to become one (Gramsci, 1977, Vol. I, 501). According to the Gramscian project, the first grade of the 'unitary school', the elementary one, in addition to the teaching of the first instrumental notions (learning to read, write and count), should include the part that Gramsci considers 'neglected' of rights and duties; that is, the first notions of the State and of society, as primordial elements of a new conception of the world that enters into a struggle against the conceptions given by the different traditional social environments, that is, the conceptions that can be called 'folkloric' (ivi, 485).

As for the higher school grades, according to Gramsci one of the greatest problems would lie in the inability to lead children to a level of intellectual autonomy sufficient to make them ready for the intellectual 'leap' that the passage from high school to university implies. For this reason, Gramsci thinks it is necessary to conceive the last phase of the unitary school as the decisive phase, in which «there is a tendency to create the fundamental values of 'humanism', intellectual self-discipline and moral autonomy [...and to] develop the element of autonomous responsibility in individuals [...to the point of making it] a creative school» (ivi, 486).

When Gramsci speaks of a 'creative school', he is not referring to a school of 'inventors', but rather to one in which learning takes place through a spontaneous and autonomous effort of the student, in which the teacher exercises only a guiding function. Gramsci is in fact convinced that discovering a truth without suggestions and external help is always creation, even if it is an old truth and represents the only way to try to discover new truths.

## **Conclusion**

There are two main reasons why we believe it is essential to recover the Gramscian reflection on education. If, on the one hand, Gramscian analysis of society and politics allows us to understand the ideological patina within which we are entangled, on the other hand it helps us to reflect on the possibility of recognising it and, therefore, of going beyond it. Education, and that of adults in particular, represents in Gramscian thought the keystone through which to build new subjectivities and, therefore, new social imaginaries. In this context, the function of critical thinking, in great crisis in contemporary society, acquires particular importance. For Gramsci, the construction of new conceptions of the world must necessarily pass through a 'philosophical' phase that helps us to question them and, in this way, to

elevate them. Only this *modus operandi* allows us to construct imaginaries that do not merely replace the dominant ones while retaining the characteristic of imposing themselves from above as absolute truths. On the contrary, it is precisely the constant questioning of one's own ideology that makes it superior. In this context, it is therefore necessary to train people capable of grasping the complexity of their surroundings up to themselves becoming the source of that desired change. This leads to the idea first of the Factory Councils, then of the organic intellectuals and, finally, of the master in the unitary school all aimed at acting as a bridge between the wise and the ignorant, the elite and the mass, the learned and the workers without ever – and in this lies the great merit of Gramsci – to have the claim to incorporate the culture of the latter into that of the former, but to defend it by giving them for the first time the tools to truly express themselves.

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## The Territorial Networks for Lifelong Learning Between Strategy and Operation

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**ABSTRACT:** *The work illustrates how the construct of lifelong learning has conceptually and widely exceeded the limit of being considered a 'service' and has come to be recognized as a subjective right. It is therefore intended to highlight how the purpose of ensuring the person is actually trained requires a relatively 'new' type of organization that involves subjects with different qualifications who offer services in the field of training and work. In our country, the task of carrying out synergistic operations, in order to provide each person with a training offer that meets their needs, the assessment of specific needs, guidance services and credit recognition is entrusted to the territorial lifelong learning networks, in which the CPIAs (Provincial Centers for Adult Education) play a leading role. The attempt to ensure the citizen has access to lifelong learning in a continuous and stable way, not only revolutionizes the cultural aspects related to the concept of education and its implications but means rethinking and redesigning the role of actors and activities according to the supply of integrated services which must be directly matched by the offer of an equally integrated, non-hierarchical, open and flexible organizational system, strongly oriented towards collaboration in order to achieve common and shared purposes. The results of a desk analysis will be shown; according to it the organizational models of the current territorial networks, although provided for by European and national regulatory provisions, leave the possibility of guaranteeing everyone the opportunity to always learn almost unachievable. It will be highlighted that there is still a lot to do, especially in terms of network design, strengthening multilevel, national, regional and local governance and how it is necessary to commit to improving institutional relations between systems for the provision of education services, training and work. The difficulty encountered in what we interpret as a process of social change, if on the one hand brings with it the awareness of the complexity of reality, on the other hand it cannot make us retreat from the objective, mainly of the public administration, of guaranteeing fundamental rights of the person.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Lifelong Learning, Territorial Networks For Lifelong Learning, Right To Study, Multilevel Governance, Social Change*

## Introduction

In Italy, with article 4 (co. 51-68) of Law 92 of 2012, the Agreement in CU of 20 December 2012, and the Agreement in CU of 10 July 2014, lifelong learning was established and regulated, as «any activity undertaken by people in a formal, non-formal, informal way, in the various stages of life, in order to improve knowledge, skills and competences, from a personal, civic, social and occupational perspective» (Law 92 of 28.06.2012, article 4, paragraph 51). By means of these provisions, each person is recognized a subjective right to lifelong learning for the whole course of life and the supporting structures of the lifelong learning system are identified *in the territorial networks for lifelong learning*.

The change in the way of conceiving training, not limited to adolescence or post-adolescence, has several determinant, among these, some sociological and psychological ones. For the former, we can identify the independent variables of this change (Smelser, 2007, 355-356) in the lengthening of the life span and an improvement of its general conditions, in globalization (Bauman, 2001; Gallino, 2000), and in the more recent technological revolution, therefore, in the society of knowledge (Alberici, 2002). These conditions have placed the life of modern adults facing continuous development tasks (Giddens, 1994): it is necessary, in fact, that they always strive to maintain an active life from both a social and working point of view, and that they know how to face risks related to potential changes. With respect to psychological determinants, in the second half of the last century psychological models of development emerged including *the life cycle* (Erikson, 2018) as well as *the life span or life-span psychology* (Baltes and Reese 1984; Baltes 1987) which, notwithstanding of their diversity, have dedicated more space and attention to adulthood compared to what had happened in the past, capturing its specificities. Both approaches have highlighted how the individual is an evolving subject even in mature age, thus providing a new breeding ground for pedagogical research. It should be noted that if on the one hand the possibility of lifelong learning during the lifetime has been scientifically recognized, on the other, in the current and future historical social context, this opportunity is and will be an essential necessity.

The national legislation requires that the policies in the field are carried out primarily through the provision of integrated services of education, training and work through the creation of territorial networks for lifelong learning or multi-actors who would primarily provide guidance, help the individual to define their training needs, and allow the recognition of skills acquired in any learning context, whether formal, non-formal and informal, thus making individual acquisitions practical in the social/working environment.

The formation of these structures is linked to strategies for economic growth, young people access to work, welfare reforms, active aging, the exercise of active citizenship, including by immigrants.

### 1. Education Policy Adult learning and European benchmarks

Since 2009 Italy has made significant progress in improving the level of participation of adults in education (25-64 years) and learning (8.1% in 2019), despite the small negative decline in 2020 (7.2%) clearly attributable to the COVID-19 health care crisis. Despite the launch of a series of reforms and various initiatives in our country, the percentage of adults who attend courses to improve their skills is growing very slowly; specifically, it is still below the average of other European Union countries (9.2% in 2020 compared to the target of 15%). As an example, consider the 'best performer' Sweden that reached 34.3% in 2019 (dropping to 28.6% in 2020) of adult participation in lifelong learning. In Italy, there remains a high level of young people especially in the foreign population, between the age of 18 to 24 who drop off, and people obtaining a tertiary education qualification within 34 years are far from the European average percentage. This negative trend goes hand in hand with the employment rate of recent high-school graduates between the ages of 20 and 34 who finished their studies within one to three years before taking the survey (Table 1).

**TAB. 1. Education and training benchmarks (2009-2020)**

		Italy			EU-27		
		2009	2019		2009	2019	
		%	%		%	%	
Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP		4,5	3,9		5,1	4,7	
Adult participation in learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	6,0	8,1		7,9	10,8 <sup>b</sup>	
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Native-born	16,6	11,3		12,6	8,9	
	Foreign-born	42,1	32,3		29,3	22,2	
Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)		19,0	27,6		31,1	40,3	
Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment	ISCED 3-8 (total)	60,6	58,7		78,0	80,9	

Notes: d = definition differs, 18=2018

Source: Our elaboration from Eurostat data.

Evidently, at the national level there are still initiatives and important steps to be taken to improve the lifelong learning system. Between these, as also highlighted by the Adult Learning Agenda 2020-2021 published by INAPP, there is a need to strengthen the governance mainly in terms of the quality of relations between the parties involved

(education, training and work), and to increase their direct involvement in practical support for upskilling and retraining of adults.

## **2. The exercise of multilevel governance in Europe**

In Italy, the legislation establishes and designs a multilevel governance model for the organization of a lifelong learning system that responds to the need for greater efficiency with respect to the complexity of the objectives to be achieved.

In particular, in the Agreement in CU of 10 July 2014 between the Government, Regions and local administrations on the document containing *Strategic lines of intervention in relation to services for lifelong learning and the organization of territorial networks* it is stated that the territorial networks they form is the backbone of the lifelong learning system. The components of the planned territorial networks include entities that provide public and private education, training and work services present in the territories, such as the territorial service networks of the Provincial Centers for Adult Education (CPIA), training agencies and businesses, trade union and employer representatives, the national observatory on migration, the structures of public research bodies, universities and chambers of commerce.

The national agreement outlines the multilevel organizational dynamics at the national level, as well as those of the regions and of the autonomous and local provinces. The first is assigned the functions of monitoring, evaluation and guidance, with the task of identifying specific policies and strategic priorities; the second is responsible for the planning by the regions and the development of the networks together with the definition of territorial development, innovation and competitiveness programs, the identification of training and professional needs and the integrated use of available resources; third, the actors ensure citizens have direct access to the network of services to support learning paths. At the Regions is certainly attributed a crucial and strategic role in the constitution and development of the networks of each territory in order to respond adequately to the production peculiarities, to the different vocations at which correspond multi-year development plans.

With the goal of defining a theoretical framework where to place and interpret the initiatives undertaken by the European Union in terms of governance, we highlight that the term governance is used in different fields of study, the political, economic, administrative, etc. and in various sectors, public policy, corporate governance, new public management, etc. and can be exercised on different geographic assets: local, national, European, regional, etc.

The concept of governance was used for the first time in official EU documents by the European Commission in 2001 in the *White Paper on European governance* that addressed the ways the Union exercises its

powers. The text highlights the need to bring citizens closer to the European institutions through a regional and local democracy to achieve greater partnership between levels, each of which contributes to the achievement of shared objectives. One of the proposed changes is creating links through networks, since they bring together businesses, communities, research centers and regional and local authorities both on a European and a global level, promoting the success of Community policies. Therefore, in the exercise of governance, the network organization is presented as a resource.

Subsequently in 2009, the *White Paper on multilevel governance of the Committee of the Regions*, the consultative body takes the initiative to present its conception of a governance system that involves regional and local authorities in the definition and implementation of policies of the Community and defines multilevel governance as «coordinated action by the Union, Member States and regional and local authorities based on partnership and aimed at defining and implementing EU policies and recommends strengthening the practice of partnership both vertically (regional and local authorities such as national government and the European Union) and horizontally (regional and local authorities such as civil society), in particular, in the context of social dialogue. The proposal to develop a European culture of multilevel governance is launched and represents a permanent challenge.

The subsequent *Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on 'Building a European culture of multilevel governance: initiatives to follow up on the White Paper of the Committee of the Regions'* sets out the general principles of multilevel governance that it integrates into the strategies and policies of the European Union and establishes the new objectives including the ambitious project of drawing up a European Union Charter of multilevel governance.

In 2014 this objective was achieved with the adoption of the *Resolution of the Committee of the Regions on the Charter for Multilevel Governance in Europe*, open to the adhesion of local, regional, state and international institutions and that is defined as «consisting in the coordinated action of European Union, the Member States and regional and local authorities, founded on the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality and partnership, which is realized through operational and institutionalized cooperation aimed at elaborating and implementing Union policies». In this context, it is specified full respect for the equal legitimacy and responsibility of each level and the principle of loyal cooperation.

In addition to the preamble, the fundamental and implementing principles are described. The latter are interesting and undertake to:

1. promote citizen participation in the policy cycle;
2. cooperate closely with other public authorities by thinking beyond traditional administrative borders, procedures and hurdles;
3. foster a European mind-set within our political bodies and administrations;

4. strengthen institutional capacity building and invest in policy learning amongst all levels of governance;
5. create networks between our political bodies and administrations from the local to the European levels and vice-versa, whilst strengthening transnational cooperation.

Therefore, we can read the multilevel governance conceived in the Agreement in CU of 2014, as a strategy aimed at implementing in a participatory manner primarily European policies and objectives, using organizational methods, networks, considered as development factors.

### **3. Regional governance in Europe and the lifelong learning system**

From the analysis of the results contained in the National Report on the implementation in Italy of the Council Recommendation *Pathways to improve the level of skills: new opportunities for adults* of 2019, prepared pursuant to point 16 of the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on regional initiatives, it is highlighted that the national and regional level of governance relating to the creation of a system for lifelong learning is severely lacking and disjointed.

From the desk analysis of the regional legislation on the creation of territorial networks, in many only the intention to create them is expressed and in general the diversity of the regulatory systems and of the methods of conceiving the structure of the networks themselves is evident. While this can be understandable on the one hand, as each territory has its own characteristics in the relationships with the various stakeholders of the current and potential networks, on the other hand, there is lack of strategic framework, of a vision, of a clear mission upstream, which end up benefiting inadequate initiatives without wide-ranging and limited in time, contrary to what would be needed for a network to be structured permanently, such as the right it should guarantee. In fact, there are several Agreements in which public utility services are formalized between different social and institutional actors, mostly good and valuable practices (Wenger, 1998) have been produced resulting from sporadic initiatives of various actors involved in education and training processes. In reality, there is still much to be done especially in the area of institutional relations in order to be able to establish networks with state, regional, local governance, which confer systematicity and stability to interventions that aim to take charge of the adult, to read professional and educational needs and to guarantee the individuals the opportunity to learn throughout their life, to have the previously acquired skills in any context, even non-formal and informal, recognized, to allow and to provide them with more personal, social and civic resources to be able to benefit from better employment, social and professional opportunities.

Naturally, the importance of a *National Skills Plan*, the investments used to achieve the set objectives, the control and monitoring actions,



the in-depth study and study of the aspects connected to it, should be emphasized.

The statements are confirmed in an informal document, although no less significant, published at the beginning of 2020 by the National Group for Lifelong Learning to the Government Bodies in which it is presented a *National Skills Guarantee Plan* that has as salient objectives: the identification, evaluation, certification of skills; a tailor-made training offer; the recognition of skills acquired anywhere (Porcaro *et al.*, 2020).

Among the measures designed to adopt all, the implementation of a system governance entrusted to a national control room is invoked.

The difficulties of governance and coordination of the various initiatives, among others, are due to the fact that the integrated services to be made available to each person are the responsibility of various institutional actors: the ministries of education and labor, the regions and other stakeholders such as social partners, employers and inter-professional funds, associations from the third sector, local administrations and other central authorities (for example the ministries of health and justice) each with their own organizations, rules and internal structures. An attempt has been made to find a solution to this central problem recently, through a document entitled *Implementation of the EU Agenda for adult learning 2020-2021*, in which the managers are among the only two target groups of the intervention. politicians (central/regional/local level) who are entrusted with the objective of strengthening governance.

#### **4. Territorial networks and integrated education, training and work services**

To analyse the characteristics of these structures it is possible to refer to the network systems model which is configured as a generalized interpretative paradigm of the dominant functions, processes and structures of modern societies (Castells, 2000; Barabási, 2002; Musso, 2007). A plurality of accredited studies use this paradigm to explain social, economic and political phenomena including the web and social networks; relationships and social capital; social movements and networks; primary social networks (parents, friends, neighborhood); business networks, the network among businesses, the network economy; infrastructure networks; criminal networks, local development partnerships and welfare networks (e.g.: social, health, work, etc.). It is in the latter area that the study of the governance of public interest networks (Longo, 2005), such as lifelong learning, can be placed.

The *public interest* can be connected to the policy network or to the analysis of the relationships between actors who are interdependent because they cannot pursue their objectives alone but need the resources of other actors to succeed and are involved in the process of

formulating public policies; therefore, they create a reticular organizational structure where the nodes, interconnected with each other, represent the actors who become part of it. They are generally conceived as horizontal, flexible, dynamic and strongly connected structures from the point of view of information exchange, as opposed to hierarchical (Weber, 1995) models characterized by vertical, top down power relations. In the public sector, making even small changes in some of its parts requires an operational, effective change of course, which leads to the management of several organizations with a shared purpose, from a 'government' perspective (traditional/bureaucratic hierarchical structure) to that of 'governance' (network structure) or to «a new style of governance distinct from the model of hierarchical control and characterized by a greater degree of cooperation and interaction between the State and non-state actors within mixed public decision-making networks/private» (Mayntz, 1999, 3).

Reflection on the institutional characteristics of stakeholders to identify government needs and analyse the organizational and operational tools that public (and non-public) bodies can activate in practice, together with attention to the possibility of offering services by relying on a team of public and private operators and non-profit, the reason why this model should be preferred to the traditional one is largely attributable to the studies of S. Goldsmith and W.D. Eggers (2010). From these studies we draw indications to understand some of the salient features underlying the networks that could support the lifelong learning system.

The authors, wisely, argue that a network is not improvised but, in order to provide public services efficiently, it must be appropriately designed.

First of all, those who design the network must have the skills to do so, thus if the networks for lifelong learning are designed with regional traction, it is in the public sector that adequate professional skills should be sought. Among the initial problems to be faced are the definition of the mission, the objectives to be achieved interpreted as problems to be solved, the real 'public value' that is to be created or supported, and to define the role of the public administration. It is necessary to calibrate the constitutive project of the network on the purposes to be pursued in terms of processes and not of roles, and that is independent of already defined 'historically' mechanisms, to use tools and languages common to the partners and to appropriately find economic resources.

The choice of the right partners, of the nodes, is fundamental and must be selected on the basis of the objectives to be achieved or rather their proven ability to pursue the objectives set by possessing distinctive skills. Cultural compatibility plays an important role, for example, in the case of the territorial network for lifelong learning, it could be sought in the value and weight attributed by all stakeholders to its diffusion, the shared meaning attributed to its outcome. Likewise, the

system of good practices and the enhancement of existing ones should not be overlooked.

It will be necessary to consider the operational capacity that is the possession of technologies, experiences, skills of potential nodes in relation to the objectives to be pursued, its 'proximity' to the recipient of the service. The ways in which to build networks can be through Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding, etc. which, although flexible in the determination of the actions, must guarantee a certain stability over time and permanence to the system, going beyond the turnover of professionals. Therefore, the public sector would become a connector that should exhibit an adequate set of resources for 'network management', putting in place actions to exercise control and monitor the provision of services, ensuring their continuity so that each node can respond to the own operated.

Communication becomes an essential element, both internally between the components of the network, as a tool for exchange and coordination, using, for example, unique information templates, and towards the outside as a means of reaching users and the territory, using portals of the network.

## **Conclusion**

In the wake of the studies by Hjern and Porter (1988) it is noted that, with regard to the implementation processes of the networks in the P.A. which necessarily involve the joint and interactive functions of several organizations, a design can be configured that is put in place by a structure made up of different 'fractions' of the original ones. Since the territorial network for lifelong learning is a structure that provides a multiplicity of services, it requires the involvement of different systems, which themselves have equally diversified organizations. Starting from this knowledge, a strategic action could be the identification of 'fractions', sections, offices of each organization specifically dedicated to carrying out the tasks of the network and its activities signed in Agreements.

Guaranteeing the right to lifelong learning means promoting both individual and collective cultural, economic and social advancement; it means not only ensuring the right to study in its maximum extent and in a new configuration but also underlies the intent to fulfil an institutional task with co-responsibility between systems, and a constitutionally guaranteed right as in art. 3: «All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions. It is the duty of the Republic to remove the obstacles of an economic and social nature which, by limiting the freedom and equality of citizens, prevent the full development of the human person and the

effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and of the country».

Observing the dynamics of the phenomenon under study as it evolves, we cannot help but see the extremes of forms of social change understood as the transformation of models of social organization (Smelser, 2007, 355). In this capacity, the process does not present the characteristics of linearity and coherence but returns the *complexus*, that is, the weft of complexity, the «fabric» that «derives from different threads and becomes one. All the various complexities intertwine, therefore, and weave together to form the unity of complexity; but the unity of the *complexus* is not thereby eliminated by the variety and diversity of the complexities that have woven it» (Morin, 1995, 56).

From this perspective, then, we will have to be able «to think without ever locking concepts, to break closed spheres, to re-establish the articulations between what is disjoint, to strive to understand multi-dimensionality, to think with singularity, with the locality, the temporality, never to forget the integrating totalities» (Morin, 1995, 35).

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## **School Work Alternance: What Challenges for National Educational Systems?**

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## The Articulation of SWA in Italy: Context, Processes and Outcomes of Scholastic Innovation

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper aims to analyse the articulation of School-Work Alternance (SWA, thereafter) through the identification of organisational models based on the grade of scholastic innovation, the type of adopted curriculum, and the attributed goals to this measure. These cognitive objectives were reached through the elaboration of data collected by a survey carried on SWA coordinating tutors in 432 upper secondary schools in Italy: first, we built an index of innovation and other indices regarding the organisational processes activated by schools; and we classify the different organizational models of SWA. Our theoretical frame conceives the SWA as a tool of neoliberal reform in education and at the same time as an outcome of reorganisation of scholastic knowledge produced by the social change and connected to the economic tertiarization (Bernstein, 1973, 2000). In this view, the analysis started with the hypothesis that SWA may be implemented through different organisational models according to the manner through which schools (and the scholastic actors) relate with involved partners and depending also on restraints and resources of the local socio-economic context. Our findings show not only the divisions within the scholastic field but also as this measure may lead schools in peripheric contexts to reinvent themselves, going beside the dichotomy between bureaucratic compliance and the enhancing of neoliberal regulation (Bengtsson, 2011). Rather, the combination of some innovative practices and resources seem to return a new centrality to the educational system with regarding its capability to convert the attack to its autonomy in a mean to influence on production world, without giving away the typical values of public education (Apple, 2012; van Dijck et al. 2019), at least according to the vision of European and Italian social model.*

**KEYWORDS:** *SWA Models, Scholastic Innovation, Bureaucratic Compliance, Pedagogical Practices, Scholastic Knowledge*

### Introduction

The School-Work Alternation (SWA) represents one of the attempts to undermine the traditional sequential system – which prefers a generalist and not very pragmatic education, postponing the application of ‘theoretical’ skills to the labour market – in favour of a dual school

system, oriented towards integration between theory and practice. Following the reform of the 'Buona Scuola', the SWA becomes a universalistic educational model, although it is interpreted differently depending on the type of school: in technical and professional institutes it is configured as a true dual educational model; while in other more generalist types of schools, such as high schools, the SWA model is understood as an opportunity for orientation to work.

According to the recent sociological reflections, the European objective of creating a knowledge society seems to present contradictory connotations: education is considered a necessary resource for the economic and social model of the EU, mostly in an entrepreneurial mindset. It is clear the anchoring to the neoliberal paradigm of the social system, which also affects the processes of education reform, at the international level, in the characters of decentralization and privatization (Cobalti, 2006; Serpieri 2009, 2012; Parziale 2012, 2016). A reduced inclusive capacity of schools and universities derives, firstly, precisely from the privatization process inherent in the 'continuous' global reform of the educational system (Ball, 2012; Serpieri, Grimaldi, 2013), damaged over time also by linear cuts in public spending (Ascoli, Pavolini, 2012); and, secondly, from the continued prevalence of technical knowledge over critical knowledge, reserving the latter to increasingly narrow and limited circles. The topics of today's public debate, focused only on the lack of connection between school and the labour market, leave out, in fact, the now permanent issue of educational inequalities due to the social origin, even though it concerns all the most industrialized countries without distinction. On the other hand, the modern school still represents the only universalist pillar of our welfare system: although in a contradictory way, the school acts as a socialization agency and, at the same time, adopts instruments of social selection. It is precisely on these latter aspects that it becomes interesting to thematize the question of the compulsory introduction of SWA. If up until the reform of the *Buona Scuola*, the SWA appeared to be a clear instrument for the reiteration of neo-liberal processes, the passage to the renewed measure of Pathways for Transversal Skills and Orientation (PTSO), through Law 145 2018, seems, instead, to be an attempt to move away from this logic, even if it is not sufficient on effective change of the policy approach. The most important idea of SWA keeps being central, namely that learning by doing is relevant and should at least partly replace vertical teaching based on teaching theoretical knowledge.

In a general framework, therefore, the SWA has a challenge before it, followed by interpretation questions. Does SWA respond to selective logics of reproduction of social inequalities? Or can it be transformed into a social tool to help the school, proposing itself as an opportunity for the student to become a person ready to read the world critically?

The wide margins of interpretation of the device, left by the legislator, leading to the hypothesis that there is a variety of possible declinations



of the SWA along the two possible interpretation paths in Italian schools.

In order to respond to these questions, it is presented below the theoretical framework that oriented our empirical research on the implementation of SWA in Italy.

## 1. Theoretical framework

Several sociologists assume a critical point of view regarding the lifelong learning paradigm, seeing it as an ideological tool for reforming European educational policies along with a neo-liberal regulation profile (Ball, 2012; Biesta, 2013).

In the reflection about global reform of education, these authors underline how neoliberalism pursues a privatisation end of the modern education system also indirectly, for example through the adoption of a managerial organisation by schools and universities (Gunter *et al.*, 2016).

This conflict also concerns the implementation of the European lifelong learning paradigm and especially policies as SWA (or PTSO).

If the SWA is considered as one of the main training activities of lifelong learning, then it is reasonably thought that the desire for an integration between the education and the labour market (Pinna, Pitzalis, 2020) is associated with a more general vision that aims to train workers dedicated to organizational objectives (Olssen, Peters, 2005) and adaptable to a labour market marked by high precariousness (Gallino, 2011; Pitzalis, 2016). This aspect is central because it affects the education purpose: from the critical formation of the person (*Bildung*) to technical training in a neoliberal vision (van Dick *et al.*, 2019).

The theoretical framework adopted here examines these reflections, although reconsiders them in view of the social conflict, which has historically characterised the formation of the modern educational system (Mannheim, 1929; Brint, 1998). These questions may be better clarified if we take account into the main conceptual categories of the sociological perspective proposed by Bernstein, who conceives the unequal distribution of knowledge in society as the source of the unequal distribution of power. According to Basil Bernstein, inequalities between social classes depend on the use of two different linguistic codes that affect the way knowledge is organized and the way schools are attended.

The possibility that SWA may take on different configurations from the neo-liberal one, even divergent ones, could be better understood, if the theoretical framework of reference is enriched by Bernstein's reflections on the contradictions inherent in the transformations of the scholastic organization following the economic tertiarization that has crossed Europe since the 1970s.

According to Bernstein (1973, 1977), the transition to a tertiarised society led to a profound redefinition of cultural and organisational models in the family, at work, and at school. Regarding the change in schools, the British sociologist noted the progressive affirmation of the 'integrated' curriculum to the detriment of the 'collection' curriculum. The latter presupposes a hierarchical organization of knowledge, based on clear disciplinary boundaries and conveyed by teachers who, with a good deal of teaching autonomy, transmit mainly theoretical knowledge; the integrated curriculum, on the other hand, is based on interdisciplinarity and the hybridization of theoretical and practical knowledge, with the interests of the students at its heart. From Bernstein' perspective (2000) and its developments (Fitzpatrick *et al.* 2018; Kneen *et al.*, 2020), therefore, we can consider the spread of SWA as one of the possible ways in which the transformation of the school curriculum is taking place in the current scenario, paving the way for different outcomes.

Considering these reflections, we hypothesize the existence of different organizational models of SWA, which depend on the way in which individual school organisations relate to the socio-economic environment and based not only on the mere contrast between acceptance of the neoliberal regulation and its rejection.

We assumed that: 1) there are different ways in which schools relate to the socio-economic environment of reference (Scott, 1995), which cannot be traced back to the mere opposition between an attitude to reject this policy and the acceptance of the neoliberal education; 2) it is possible to identify an organizational model of SWA based alternative, innovative models (these ones may be originated by different attitudes, like resistance, resilience, negotiation).

## 2. Methods and Data

The paper wonders about this peculiar question, focusing on the realization of the SWA in Italian upper-secondary schools in the school year 2018 – 2019 when the measure was redefined as Paths for Soft Skills and Orientation.

The discussed data were collected by a sample survey conducted through an interview with a questionnaire (CAWI), addressed to SWA coordinator teachers in schools with a single educational path, distinguishing high schools from technical and vocational institutes. Out of a population of 1,233 institutions, we constructed a random sample of 433 schools (35% of the total).

The analysis takes into account not only the policy framework (see par. 1 in the other our contribution in this collection of essays, Fasanella *et al.*, 2021), but also the interpretative paradigm proposed by Bernstein, regarding the difference between educational systems oriented towards

the integration of the student's curriculum and educational systems oriented towards collection-based curricula.

It is useful for the presentation of the research to present below the factors considered for the construction of the SWA models.

As far as the contextual dimension is concerned, the type of school education (high school vs. technical and vocational) and the three geographical macro-areas (North, Centre, South) have been taken into consideration, which combined together give six territorial-scholastic contexts.

In the context of the data analysis, we proceeded to the reduction of the space of the contributions of the dimensions (identified in the theoretical framework) through the construction of typological and synthetic indexes through the Principal Component Analysis (PCA: Di Franco, Marradi 2003), useful to start the analyses to identify the implementation of the SWA was concerned.

Our attention focused on a set of indexes obtained through the synthesis of variables carried out subsequently converted into new categorical variables in order to detect the degree of scholastic innovation according to the guidelines of the reference legislation. We report the indexes below (and also in Table 1 in Fasanella *et al.*, e 2021).

On the Bernsteinian perspective, we consider, first of all, the distinction between a collection and an integrated curriculum, also identifying a hybrid type, summarizing the variables related to the SWA integration in the didactic routine (such as the tendency to reorganize lesson times according to the SWA activities). Furthermore, other indexes have been built in this perspective: the teaching innovation, independently of SWA, namely to adopt cooperative learning models; the distribution of work about SWA between school and extra-curricular organisations (e.g., in terms of monitoring of student in SWA); the degree of cooperation between schools and extra-curricular organisations, in terms of regulation of the relationship (strong agreement or weak agreement); type of learning in the SWA experience, in terms of activities carried out in the workplace or at school (respectively the student may be involved in an applied task or in seminar); policy sharing at school that is referred to the degree of teaching board engagement in the implementation of SWA.

Other indexes are used to investigate the organizational SWA models, regarding the scholastic context: school heads and individual teachers support their SWA coordinator, envisioning three different modalities (High, Medium, Low or Absent) also for these two typological indexes.

Finally, we considered also the economic sector in which the involved partners operate. About the economic sector, we detected how many projects regarded the tertiary sector and how many the other ones (primary and secondary sectors): we started by estimating the number of projects for each economic sector and then we build two specific indexes, one addressed to analyze the involvement of the tertiary

sector, another one useful to consider the involvement of the other two sectors in this policy.

In order to identify the organizational models with regards to the implementation of this policy, we consider also the orientation of projects to vocational ends, to the transmission of transversal competencies, or to the development of the student's guidance skills.

The relationships, even non-linear, between the indexes are analyzed multiple correspondence analysis (MCA: Benzécri 1973) in conjunction with cluster analysis (Di Franco, 2006), reconstructing thus the organizational models adopted by the schools in implementing the SWA along two dimensions: one concerns the opposition between innovation and resistance to the change; the other one represents a specification of the first dimension as it investigates the direction assumed by innovation considering also the possibility that traditional scholastic organization persists.

### **3. Findings**

The classification of schools through cluster analysis made our two hypotheses were corroborated. Indeed, in addition to a group of schools that implemented the policy in line with the neoliberal interpretation suggested by the reference legislation, and to the presence of schools that did not fully adopt this policy, two other organizational models can be identified. On the one hand there is a model that radicalizes the neoliberal vision of SWA and on the other hand there is a model in which schools take the policy on themselves, reinventing it in such a way as not to delegate projects to extra-curricular organisations nor give up the full implementation of the policy.

Going in order, we can first identify a 'traditional neoliberal model' that comprises 19% of the schools in our sample. This model is typical of those schools that have seen SWA as a means of introducing learning by doing within them or reinforcing pedagogical practices of this kind through the work experience presupposed by alternance projects.

This organizational model reflects the traditional coordinates of neoliberal regulation, in favor of greater prominence for extra-curricular organisations, starting with companies. It is no coincidence that this model prevails in the technical and vocational schools located mainly in the most industrialized areas of the country (19% are in the Centre and as many as 40% in the North) and therefore characterized by a more solid educational supply than that one generally found in the southern vocational schools. Almost 50% of the schools in this group tend to make their students develop vocational skills in primary and (especially) secondary sector workplaces. Consistently, in more than 85% of cases, situated learning is proposed. In summary, the policy is implemented through an integrated curriculum that promotes learning by doing and

vocational purposes; however, this SWA approach is linked to a strict division of labour between schools and extra-curricular organisations (mostly companies): the former are in charge of monitoring, while the latter design and implement the interventions. The low contribution to the policy by the school head as well as by individual teachers confirms this division of labour. Therefore, the SWA class tutor cooperates with the teacher managing the policy in the school and even more with the extracurricular organisations tutors, which deal with the specific activities students have to carry out.

It is interesting to note that 20% of the schools show an innovative organization compared to the group just described. In fact, in this case we can speak of an 'innovative neoliberal SWA'. In fact, as many as 64% of the schools in this second group are characterized by organizational and didactic innovation (a phenomenon present in only 32% of the sample overall), without however moving away from the neoliberal vision of the policy. In fact, these schools tend to build networks with extra-curricular organisations, mostly engaged in the primary and secondary sector (therefore, they are market-oriented companies), in order to implement projects aimed at transferring professional skills to students. In addition, the learning is situated in the companies: the projects are designed and managed directly by these last ones.

The main difference with the previous model is the active cooperation of schools with extra-curricular organisations, revealing as a quite good engagement in the policy by school head, teaching board and individual teachers: this cooperation produced a good teaching innovation, an aspect in contrast to the previous model.

A third group is made up by schools adopting a 'traditional-bureaucratic SWA'. This group includes 29% of the schools' sample: in particular, 50% of the high schools in the North and 27% of those located in Central Italy follow this organizational model.

The schools in this group show a reluctant attitude towards the adoption of SWA. In fact, they are little inclined to build networks with extra-curricular organisations and they are not oriented towards school innovation: compared to the overall sample in this group we are twice as likely to find schools with a low level of innovation (59% vs. 29% of the sample). Therefore, these schools adopt collection curricula, even if the purpose attributed to SWA interventions is the development of guidance skills. However, this policy vision seems to reflect a low investment in opening the school to the outside world rather than a willingness to innovate pedagogical practices and exploit the emancipatory potential of SWA through its creative reworking.

In short, the schools following this organizational model judge SWA as a bureaucratic task, for which it is not worthwhile to reorganize resources and internal practices: teaching board, individual teachers and school heads do not really show interest in the implementation of SWA.

In the tables below we summarize the main findings obtained through cluster analysis (Tabb. 1-4).

**TAB. 1. Traditional-Neoliberal SWA (19% of schools)**

V.Test	cla/mod	mod/cla	global	Modalities	Indexes or Variables
7,61	33,80	85,71	49,31	Situated Learning	Type of Learning
7,23	45,71	57,14	24,31	Vocational	Ends attributed to SWA
5,32	43,04	40,48	18,29	North Technical-Vocational Schools	Type of School
4,65	35,40	47,62	26,16	Medium-High	Primary or Secondary Sector Involvement
4,65	34,13	51,19	29,17	Low or Absent	Tertiary Sector Involvement
4,26	37,80	36,90	18,98	Low or Absent	School Head Engagement
3,91	26,52	72,62	53,24	Low or Absent	Policy Sharing at School
3,66	28,57	57,14	38,89	Low or Absent	Individual Teacher Engagement
3,12	41,03	19,05	9,03	Centre Technical-Vocational Schools	Type of School
3,07	24,89	70,24	54,86	Low or Absent	Teaching Innovation
2,82	24,89	65,48	51,16	Separated	Distribution of work between schools and extra-curricular organisations
2,52	28,07	38,10	26,39	Collection	Type of Curriculum

**TAB. 2. Innovative-Neoliberal SWA (20% of schools)**

V.Test	cla/mod	mod/cla	global	Modalities	Indexes or Variables
8,09	55,70	52,38	18,29	North Technical-Vocational Schools	Type of School
6,24	36,73	64,29	34,03	Integrated	Type of Curriculum
5,68	38,94	52,38	26,16	Medium-High	Primary or Secondary Sector Involvement
5,67	40,00	50,00	24,31	Vocational	Ends attributed to SWA
5,36	41,86	42,86	19,91	Medium-High	Policy Sharing at School
5,16	35,71	53,57	29,17	Low or Absent	Tertiary Sector Involvement
3,82	27,32	66,67	47,45	Strong	Cooperation between schools and extra-curricular organisations
3,70	28,49	58,33	39,81	Medium-High	Teaching Innovation
3,33	31,19	40,48	25,23	Medium	Individual Teacher Engagement
3,12	41,03	19,05	9,03	Centre Technical-Vocational Schools	Type of School
3,11	27,01	55,95	40,28	Medium	School Head Engagement
3,06	38,30	21,43	10,88	South Technical-Vocational Schools	Type of School
2,70	24,88	63,10	49,31	Situated Learning	Type of Learning
2,40	27,59	38,10	26,85	Medium	Teaching Board Engagement

As we can see from the last table, we identified a fourth group made up of 32% of all schools. Well, this group is characterized by an organizational model that supports our second hypothesis. In fact, the schools in this group adopt SWA in a creative way, exploiting the

emancipatory potential of the shift from the collection curriculum to the integrated curriculum, that the adoption of this policy presupposes.

**TAB. 3. Traditional-Bureaucratic SWA (29% of schools)**

V.Test	cla/mod	mod/cla	global	Modalities	Indexes or Variables
8,77	46,09	85,48	53,24	Low or Absent	Policy Sharing at School
7,67	57,89	53,23	26,39	Collection	Type of Curriculum
7,67	50	67,74	38,89	Low or Absent	Individual Teacher Engagement
6,99	55,86	50	25,69	North High Schools	Type of School
6,01	40,51	77,42	54,86	Low or Absent	Teaching Innovation
5,36	35,95	88,71	70,83	Medium-High	Tertiary Sector Involvement
4,91	34,91	89,52	73,61	Low or Absent	Primary or Secondary Sector Involvement
4,66	38,5	70,16	52,31	Weak	Cooperation between schools and extra-curricular organisations
4,19	48,78	32,26	18,98	Low or Absent	School Head Engagement
3,56	40,74	44,35	31,25	Guidance competencies	Ends attributed to SWA
3,28	45,83	26,61	16,67	Centre High Schools	Type of School

**TAB. 4. Innovative-Scholastic SWA (32% of schools)**

V.Test	cla/mod	mod/cla	global	Modalities	Indexes or Variables
8,40	72,62	43,57	19,44	South High Schools	Type of School
8,32	50,68	79,29	50,69	Centred	Type of Learning
6,29	51,95	57,14	35,65	High	Individual Teacher Engagement
5,45	47,70	59,29	40,28	High	School Head Engagement
5,39	47,67	58,57	39,81	High	Teaching Innovation
4,77	43,90	64,29	47,45	Strong	Cooperation between schools and extra-curricular organisations
4,74	38,68	87,86	73,61	Low or Absent	Primary or Secondary Sector Involvement
4,48	46,94	49,29	34,03	Integrated	Type of Curriculum
3,80	37,91	82,86	70,83	Medium-High	Tertiary Sector Involvement
3,41	45,69	37,86	26,85	Medium	Policy Sharing at School
2,94	46,51	28,57	19,91	High	Policy Sharing at School
2,88	40,22	52,86	42,59	Transversal competencies	Ends attributed to SWA
2,80	42,22	40,71	31,25	Guidance competencies	Ends attributed to SWA
2,62	38,92	56,43	46,99	Integrated	Distribution of work between schools and extra-curricular organisations
2,49	45,83	23,57	16,67	Centre High Schools	Type of School

In fact, 64% of schools are characterized by strong cooperation with extra-curricular organisations and – more importantly – slightly fewer (56%) work in an integrated way with them. In a nutshell, the monitoring, design and implementation of alternance projects are shared in the school, which thus integrates SWA into its teaching offer.

This aspect is evidenced by the fact that not only the school head and the teaching board, but also individual teachers show a high engagement in the consolidation of the SWA. The prevalence of Southern (44%) or Central (24%) high schools could partly explain the

predilection for transversal and/or guidance skills, as well as the involvement of the tertiary sector more than the secondary one. In fact, the latter is decidedly less developed than in the North of the country and at the same time it is generally not linked to the educational offer of high schools.

However, the orientation to transversal competencies and guidance seems to be the direct consequence of an organizational model in which the school challenges its practices, but without delegating SWA projects to companies or other extra-curricular organisations. This attitude seems to signal a distancing from the neoliberal model of lifelong learning: it is worth to reflect on this aspect, which leads us to speak of 'innovative-scholastic SWA'.

#### **4. Discussion**

While adopting a critical perspective, the research presented in this article is based on the hypothesis that schools may adopt SWA according to organizational models different from the one suggested by the neo-liberal regulation, which nevertheless exerts a relevant influence on the reform of the education system (Apple, 2012; Ball, 2012).

This hypothesis, which arose from the study of the recent SWA regulation and the idea that it is linked to the internal conflict dynamics of the education system, was confirmed by the survey illustrated here.

Our findings show not only the divisions within the scholastic field but also as this measure may lead schools in peripheric contexts to reinvent themselves, going beside the dichotomy between bureaucratic compliance – revealing cultural resistances – and the enhancing of neoliberal regulation – devaluing the theoretical knowledge and subordinating the educational system to the immediate needs of companies (Bengtsson, 2011). Rather, the combination of some innovative practices and resources seem to re-turn a new centrality to the educational system with regarding its capability to convert the attack to its autonomy in a mean to influence on production world, without giving away the typical values of public education (Apple, 2012; van Dijck *et al.* 2019), at least according the vision of European and Italian social model.

This latter aspect emerges clearly from the analysis conducted with the support of the MCA combined with cluster analysis. In fact, the identification of four organisational models of SWA leads to the exclusion of the idea that in Italy there exists a net bipartition between schools strongly oriented towards SWA and schools resistant to change (Scott, 1995), perhaps situated in the more economically marginal areas of the country.



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## SWA/PTSO Projects: Career Trajectories and Student Educational Pathways. Building of a Typology

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**ABSTRACT:** *The recent law\* (l. 145/2018) on Pathways for Transversal Competences and Orientation (PTSOs), which replaced the School-Work Alternance (SWA), confers to the Italian upper secondary schools a central role in promoting educational paths oriented to the development of both professional and soft skills. The paper aims to discuss the characteristics of SWA/PTSO projects that involve upper secondary school students in cultural or work training activities. Project corpora were analysed using the 'content analysis as survey'. It allowed to identify the most significant associations between the constitutive elements of the projects developed by the schools. In the typology of projects are differently combined: i. soft skills to be developed by the students (e.g., citizenship, vocational and managerial skills); ii. educational methods used to implement the activities (differentiated into learning by doing or learning by thinking).*

**KEYWORDS:** *Student Career Trajectories, Soft Skills, Local Community, Typology Of SWA/PTSO Projects, Content Analysis 'As Survey'*

### Introduction

In Italy, the School Work Alternance (SWA) has evolved significantly from its origins in 2004, through Law 107/2015 and the deregulation of 2017, to the recent Guidelines of the MIUR (Law 30 December 2018, no. 145) in which the Pathways for Transversal Skills and Orientation (PTSO) are outlined. Compared to the SWA, the major innovation of the PTSOs can be identified in the orientation purpose of the learning pathways, aimed at enabling students to develop both entrepreneurial competences (related to learning by doing) and transversal competences (related to strategic thinking and problem solving) useful for their future employability, in any field of job placement, and in the

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\* In Italian law, the original wording of SWA corresponds to the acronym ASL and PTSO corresponds to the acronym PCTO.

perspective of lifelong learning (Knapper, Cropley, 2000). In context of these innovative elements, the PCTOs' request that the school should continue to enhance its relationship with the world of employment and external organisations in order to create synergies with the local community and ensure the future employability of students (Ecorys *et al.*, 2013; European Commission, 2013).

This paper argues the results of the *content analysis as a survey* (Losito, 1996; Faggiano, 2016) carried out, in part, on a sample of SWA/PTSO projects promoted by 22 national schools in Italy, and in part on the virtuous projects – the *Alternance Stories* – published by the schools on the MIUR Platform of Alternance Stories. Specifically, the 22 schools were selected from the sample of 100 schools identified by INVALSI, which is the principal investigator of the PRNI. As for the projects downloaded from the MIUR platform, 223 schools promoted the most virtuous projects. The analysis of content as a survey is the first step of a more extensive and complex research design, which is part of the Project of Relevant National Interest (PRNI) called *Evaluating the School Work-Alternance*, coordinated by four research units<sup>†</sup>. In general, the purpose of the evaluation is to assess whether and to what extent SWA/PTSO projects represent an educational methodology that is integrated into the school curriculum and that succeeds in enhancing students' job opportunities and tertiary education orientation skills (Defelix *et al.*, 2006; European Commission, 2010). The results of the analysis of the content as a survey enables a description of a typology of projects that summarises, in three different paths, the importance conferred on the development of: entrepreneurial (VTP), managerial (MTP) and expressive-communicative (CTP) competences

## 1. Research steps: content analysis as a survey of SWA/PTSO projects

The procedure for selecting the schools to be involved in the exploratory study took into consideration two variables: *i)* the territorial repartition of the 100 schools sampled by INVALSI (North-East; North-West; Centre; South; South and Islands); *ii)* Type of school: (High School, Technical School, Vocational School).

The first step of the selection procedure is the exploration of the project material on the websites of the 100 sampled schools. Specifically, were selected and collected:

- the SWA projects promoted in the school years 2016/2017 - 2017/2018;
- PTSOs implemented: *i)* in the years 2017/2018, during the SWA-PTSO transition period; *ii)* in the years 2019/2020 and *iii)* in planning for the three-year period 2019/2022. In this case, the

<sup>†</sup> The research units involved in the PRNI are: INVALSI; University of Rome Sapienza; University of Genoa and University of Milan Bicocca.

PTSOs were selected from the section 'educational offer' of the *Three-Year Plan of the Educational Offer* (TPEO) published on the schools' websites.

The projects were downloaded from the websites of the 22 schools and from the *MIUR Platform of Alternance Stories*. A total of 198 projects were selected. Specifically, 109 projects were downloaded from the websites of the 22 schools involved in the exploratory study. The structure of these projects is very heterogeneous: *i*) some projects are articulated in objectives, outcomes, didactic methodologies; *ii*) other projects are presented as discursive productions of the schools, i.e., as narratives of experiences; *iii*) finally, there are projects included as attachments of the TPEO. On a technical-operational level, the corpora analysis was carried out by applying the Content Analysis as a survey form. The textual corpora were reported in a cases for variables data-matrix which, as we will see in the next paragraphs, made it possible to analyse the most significant associations between the components of the projects. The content analysis as a survey form is structured in two sections. The first section is a list of variables contained in the official (ministerial) documents which accompany the policies (pre-code classification); the second section is a list of variables – classified according to thematic field, learning objectives, activities, expected competences and teaching methodologies – which represent the result of the interpretation work on the textual corpora (ex novo classification, Table 1).

**TAB. 1.** *List of dimensions: format of content analysis as a survey*

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<b>Pre coded classifications</b>
- Institute name
- Type of school (High School, Technical School, Vocational School)
- Territorial Repartition (North – East and West – Centre, South and Islands)
- Background
- Project title
- Type of project (enterprise in action, simulated training enterprise, service learning, transnational project)
- Law (SWA/PTSO)
- Integration in the TPEO
- Registration on the MIUR Platform of the Alternance Stories
- Duration
- Type and number of classes involved
- Partnership
- Name of partner
- Place of the activities implementation (school or hosting organizations)
- Type of hosting organizations (Research Institutions; University; Other Public Institutions; Private Enterprises; Third Sector)
- Location of project activity
<hr/>
<b>Ex novo classifications</b>
- Thematic area of project
- Project learning objectives
- Project activities
- Expected competences
- Didactic methods/techniques
- Certification of competencies (assessment criteria – blank cells)

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## 2. Descriptive-explorative analysis

### 2.1. Pre-coded classifications

When considering the integration of SWA/PCTO projects within the school curriculum, we can see that the 33,3% of the project documents analyzed are included in the *Three-Year Plan of the Educational Offer* (TPEO). The other part of the projects (66,7%), instead, was published on the school websites, in the thematic sections dedicated to the description of the project activities (traineeships, workshops, training periods carried out in enterprises, etc.) involving students of the last three years (III-IV-V). Half (55,1%) of the learning projects analyzed are included in the SWA framework that provides for their implementation under Law 107 2015 of the Good School. Another part is represented by PTSO (Law 145 2018) and projects implemented in the SWA-PTSO transition period.

The project material is composed of: *1)* 109 projects, selected from the website of the 22 sampled schools, and *ii)* 89 projects uploaded on the MIUR web platform. Most of the SWA projects were carried out in the 2014-2017 period (55,3%); this is followed by the PTSO projects carried out in the 2018-2019 period (22,8%) and those (21,9%) that were also included in the *Three-Year Plan of the Educational Offer* (TPEO). The projects examined are divided into 51 in absolute value (a.v.) (25,9%) with a duration of one year and 43 in a.v. (21,7%) extending over a longer period of three years, while only 25 in a.v. (12,6%) involve a commitment of one or a few weeks without ever reaching two months of activity. In addition, they generally provide for the involvement of all classes relevant to the SWA/PTSO measures (III-IV and V).

Most of the projects analyzed provided for the realization of activities carried out in synergy with the hosting organizations, according to the educational methodology of the enterprise in action (59,9%), which provided for the promotion of educational learning paths carried out through project initiatives in which the students had the opportunity to manage real enterprises, with the realization of a product or a service. Following the projects involving the simulation of these activities in the laboratory (simulated training enterprise - 24,9%) and projects promoting activities with a relevant socio-cultural impact (service learning - 12,2%). On the other hand, there was a very small number of projects that required students to spend a short period of time training in a foreign country (transnational mode - 3%).

Project activities are mainly carried out at school (67,2%), followed by projects carried out in cooperation between schools and hosting organisations. The planning of SWA/PTSO projects can involve various partners, both public and private. Particularly involved are private enterprises (13,3%), public institutions (excluding universities and research institutes, 10,1%) and Third Sector organisations (9,6%).

## 2.2. Ex novo classifications

The project material selected is extremely heterogeneous. In particular, the project outlines can assume: *i)* a structured format, articulated in objectives, outcomes, educational methodologies; *ii)* an unstructured format, i.e. as discursive narratives of experiences. Other projects are presented as attachments integrated into the TPEO. To reconstruct the content of the project sheets, an operational definition was adopted which made it possible to identify if a description was present in the project: (a) the thematic area; (b) the learning objectives; (c) the activities carried out; (d) the expected competences and (e) the methods and techniques employed.

Most projects are within the thematic area of *i)* 'Prototyping, information and communication technologies' (27,3%). Following are the projects referring to the area of: *ii)* 'Support of social inclusion and dissemination of civic Ness values' (23,2%); *iii)* 'Sustainable development and critical consumption of territorial landscape structures' (16,7%); *iv)* 'Simulation and study of strategic marketing and of the economic-financial balance of enterprises and business organizations' (6,6%) - (Table 2).

**TAB. 2.** *Classification of thematic area of the project (Distribution of frequency).*

<b>Classification of thematic area of the project</b>	<b>a.v.</b>	<b>%</b>
Economic and business organisation	27	13,6
Commercialisation, marketing and internationalisation	13	6,6
Staff selection and human resources management	6	3,0
Taxation and financial resource management	3	1,5
Sustainable development and critical consumption	33	16,7
Social inclusion and civiness	46	23,2
Prototyping, information and communication technologies	54	27,3
Scientific research	11	5,6
Not specified	5	2,5
Tot.	198	100

The educational objectives of the projects can be summarized in the following classification (Tab. 3). Most of the objectives concern the involvement of students in vocational courses related to the learning of technical knowledge and the design and production of prototypes (62,2%).

Most of the project activities involved students in creative and scenic writing laboratories (23,2%) or in enterprise visits and enterprise training (21,7%). Regarding the work orientation function of SWA and PTSO projects, it results that a not negligible part of the projects (20,2%) analyzed involved students in simple theoretical courses on work safety issues (Table 4).

**TAB. 3.** *Classification of project learning objectives (Distribution of frequency).*

<b>Classification of project learning objectives</b>	<b>a.v.</b>	<b>%</b>
Learning technical knowledge related to the design and production of prototypes (prosthetic products, clothing, digital apps, etc.).	122	62,2
Promoting traditional craft industries (agri-foodstuffs, textiles, etc.).	15	7,7
Acquisition of management and information technologies competences (hardware design software, business management techniques, etc.).	16	8,2
Development of the environmental and landscape heritage (events inspired by ecology, respect for the environment, etc.).	7	3,6
Promotion of the legal-administrative culture and inter-institutional dialogue (meetings with public administrations, local authorities, etc.).	5	2,6
Promotion of cultural activities of artistic and social interest (museum visits, creation of murals, etc.).	13	6,6
Not specified	20	9,1
Tot.	198	100

**TAB. 4.** *Classification of project activities (Distribution of frequency).*

<b>Classification of project activities</b>	<b>a.v.</b>	<b>%</b>
Writing and multimedia laboratories (creative writing, theatre, digital, music...)	46	23,2
Design and creation of prototypes (prosthetic artefacts, electronic mini-implants, etc.)	16	8,1
Enterprise visits, training, job shadowing and vocational courses for job placement (on-the-job training; electronic plant management, food processing and conservation)	43	21,7
Guided tours of a cultural nature (archaeological digs, museum visits, voluntary work, etc.)	19	9,6
Theoretical courses and lectures (safety, sustainability, etc.)	40	20,2
Not specified	34	17,2
Tot.	198	100

Almost a third of the project activities (28,3%) involved developing transversal competences related to strategic thinking, such as problem solving or project management, while a sixth of these (15,2%) concerned activities of a socio-cultural nature and another similar quota (14,1%) referred to activities aimed at improving students' socio-emotional competences (Tab. 5).

**TAB. 5.** *Classification of expected competences (Distribution of frequency).*

<b>Classification of project activities</b>	<b>a.v.</b>	<b>%</b>
Capability to engage with others in activities with a significant socio-cultural impact	30	15,2
Strategic thinking capabilities (problem solving, project management)	56	28,3
Capability to improve one's social-emotional and group interaction competences	17	8,6
Capability to negotiate and communicate constructively in both school and professional environments	28	14,1
Not specified	75	33,8
Tot.	198	100



Among the most commonly applied methods is the use of simulation (problem solving and case studies - 17,7%); followed by business life cycle analysis (which generally precedes an internship in a enterprise – 15,1%) and planning digital activities (such as website building or starting social awareness campaigns – 12,4%) (Tab. 6).

**TAB. 6.** *Teaching methods/techniques (Distribution of frequency/multiple choice questions)*

<i>Teaching methods/techniques</i>	<i>v.a.</i>	<i>%</i>
Personal model canvas; Brainstorming; Coaching e Silent-Coaching	60	10,8
Problem solving and Case studies	<b>99</b>	<b>17,7</b>
Role play and staff selection simulation	63	11,3
Life cycle data analysis	<b>84</b>	<b>15,1</b>
Prototype construction (robotics, etc.)	54	9,7
Communication planning and other digital activities	<b>69</b>	<b>12,4</b>
Crowdfunding activities	3	0,7
Tot.	432	100

### 3. Multiple Correspondences Analysis: the *cultural project of alternance*

In the aim of identifying the main directions of the cultural orientation that distinguished the schools promoting the SWA/PTSO projects, we decided to proceed with a multivariate analysis technique – the *Multiple Correspondences Analysis* (MCA) – focusing the attention on the first two factors extracted<sup>‡</sup>.

The table below represents a synoptic scheme of active and illustrative variables (active and illustrative) included in the MCA model (Tab. 7).

**TAB. 7.** *Set of variables included in the model*

<b>Set of active variables</b>
- Thematic area
- Learning objectives
- Expected competences
- Didactic methods/techniques
- Description of activities
<b>Set of illustrative variables</b>
- Type of project
- Law (SWA/PTSO)
- Integration in the TPEO
- Registration on the MIUR Platform of Alternance Stories
- Duration of project
- Type and number of classes involved

<sup>‡</sup> The two extracted factors produce a total of 18.8% common inertia. The weight of the two factors is distributed as follows: 11,9%; 6,21%.

### 3.1. First factor: transversal competences of citizenship VS vocational competences

The first factor is characterized by the opposition between projects oriented to transferring transversal competences on citizenship and civicism (negative semi-axis) and projects oriented to transferring *vocational skills and job placement* (positive semi-axis). In detail, the first semi-axis factor includes all those projects aimed at:

- enhancing and promoting knowledge of the area's artistic and craft traditions, in order to encourage students to work in teams and work with others to realize activities with a significant socio-cultural impact;
- promoting civic and legality culture by organizing theory courses in cooperation with public institutions and local administrations.

The project activities are oriented towards the development of transversal competences on citizenship and cultural expressions (MIUR Guidelines), which require students to show the competences of committing to others and feeling empathy in group interaction. The activities in which students are generally involved are of a strong social and cultural impact: these are itinerant tours of the territory, structured in cycles of guided visits, during which they are often offered the opportunity to interact with Third Sector Organizations or the public sector, which animate local communities and contribute to the revitalization of the territory's craft, landscape, artistic and cultural heritage. The other semi-axis of the factor, on the other hand, refers to one of the typical aims of technical and vocational schools (of all geographical repartitions), which consists in the transfer of: *i.* techniques competences for the production of prototypes, made in the laboratory or during work experience in enterprises according to the *enterprise in action method*; *ii.* management and managerial competences related to problem solving, project management, to which the *simulated training enterprise method* is generally connected (tabb. 8-9).

**TAB. 8.** Active variables-modalities significantly related to 1° Factor

Variable label	Modality label	T-Value
Life cycle data analysis [YES/NO]	No	-10.61
Entrepreneurship competences [YES/NO]	No	-9.93
Communication planning and other digital activities [YES/NO]	No	-8.28
Problem solving and Case studies [SI/NO]	No	-7.89
Prototype production [YES/NO]	No	-7.47
Thematic area of the project	Social inclusion and civicism	-7.12
Role-playing and staff selection simulation [YES/NO]	Yes	-6.64
Expected competences	Capability to engage with others in activities with a significant socio-cultural impact	-4.92
Expected competences	Capability to create trust, to feel empathy	-4.25

Competences in cultural awareness and expression [YES/NO]	Yes	-3.63
Description of activity	Cultural guided tours	-3.58
Learning objectives of the project	Promoting traditional craft activities	-3.21
Learning objectives of the project	Promotion of cultural, artistic and recreational-social activities	-3.15
Learning objectives of the project	Enhancing the area's artistic and craft traditions in order to promote the integration of knowledge with work experience	-3.11
Thematic area of the project	Sustainable development and critical consumption	-2.18
Training objectives of the project	Promotion of legal-administrative culture and inter-institutional dialogue	-2.12
Description of activity	Cultural guided visits	-2.07
<b>Origin of axes</b>		
Learning objectives of the project	Management and computer programming	2.15
Learning objectives of the project	Learning technical knowledge related to the design and production of prototypes	3.18
Description of activity	Design and creation of prototypes	3.26
Competences in cultural awareness and expression	No	3.63
Expected competences	Capability to negotiate and communicate constructively in both school and professional environments	3.91
Thematic area of the project	Economic and business organizations	4.10
Description of activity	Enterprise visits, training, job shadowing and job placement courses	5.13
Thematic area of the project	Multimedia technologies, information technology and communication	5.32
Expected competences	Strategic thinking capabilities in problem solving and managing ambiguities	5.72
Role-playing and staff selection simulation [YES/NO]	Yes	6.64
Prototype construction (robotics, etc.) [YES/NO].	Yes	7.47
Problem solving and Case studies [SI/NO]	Yes	7.89
Communication planning and other digital activities [SI/NO]	Yes	8.28
Entrepreneurial competences [YES/NO]	Yes	9.93
Life cycle data analysis [YES/NO]	Yes	10.61

**TAB. 9.** *Illustrative variables-modalities significantly related to 1° Factor*

Variable label	Modality label	T-Value
File uploaded in the MIUR platform of SWA projects? [YES/NO]	No	-6.67
Does the Project fall under SWA or PTSO law?	PTSO	-4.91
Is the project included in the TPEO? [YES/NO]	Yes	-4.43
Number of students involved	Up to 20	-4.10
Type of project	Service Learning	-4.09
Type of host structure	Third Sector	-3.78
Site where the project activities are carried out	School and Hosting Organization	-3.48
Project target classes	III-IV-V	-3.12
Type of hosting organization	Public institutions	-2.64
Geographical distribution	North-West	-2.33
Project year recoded	2019 to 2022	-2.22
Site where the project activities are carried out	School and Hosting Organization	-2.14
Type of hosting organization	Training organisations and universities	-2.04
<b>Origin of axes</b>		
Number of students involved	Up to thirty students	2.21
Geographical repartition	All geographical repartition	2.34
Project duration	Biennial	2.46
Number of students involved	up to twenty students	3.27
Does the Project fall under SWA or PTSO law?	SWA	4.27
Site where the project activities are carried out	School	4.32
Is the project included in the TPEO? [YES/NO]	Yes	4.43
Type of project	Enterprise in action	4.75
Type of hosting organization	Private enterprise	5.56
Sheet uploaded in the MIUR platform of SWA projects?	Yes	6.67

### *3.2. Second factor: Learning by doing VS learning by thinking*

The second factor identifies the learning context and methodology of projects aimed at transferring transversal or vocational competences. Regarding educational methodologies, SWA/PTSO projects may provide practical training based on doing – learning by doing – or training based on learning by thinking.

As can be seen from the following tables (Tables 10-11), the first semi-axis of the factor is characterized by a set of significant dimensions of projects aimed at promoting the entrepreneurial culture of learning by doing, through involvement in enterprise visits, training, job shadowing and professional job placement courses. In order to guide students in reflecting on the job expectations to be undertaken in the future, it is useful to organize periods of learning by doing to encourage observation of organizational dynamics and relations with private enterprise.

On the other semi-axis of the factor, however, are projects oriented towards the dissemination of the culture of learning by thinking, which use methods such as cooperative learning, role playing and simulation. To encourage learning of management competences in students – in communications, web marketing and managerial planning – it is important to provide moments of interactive dialogue in the class, also involving enterprise experts.

**TAB. 10.** *Active variables - modalities significantly associated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> factor*

Variable label	Modality label	T-Value
Competences in cultural awareness and expression [Yes/No]	No	-6.03
Activity description	Enterprise visits, training, job shadowing and job placement courses	-5.81
Problem solving and Case studies [Yes/No]	No	-5.08
Thematic area of the project	Economic and business organization	-5.01
Prototype construction [Yes/No]	No	-4.81
Learning objectives of the project	Learning technical knowledge related to the design and production of prototypes	-4.29
Thematic area of the project	Commercialization, marketing and internationalization	-3.61
Expected competences	Capability to engage with others in activities with a significant socio-cultural impact	-3.43
Activity description	theory courses and lectures (safety, sustainability, etc.)	-3.42
Role-playing and staff selection simulation [Yes/No]	No	-3.24
Expected competences	Strategic thinking capabilities in solving problems and managing ambiguities	-2.93
Communication planning and other digital activities [Yes/No]	No	-2.87
Personal model canvas; Brainstorming [Yes/No]	No	-2.84
Labour market study; Business life cycle analysis [Yes/No]	No	-2.69
Thematic area of the project	Staff selection and human resources management	-2.59
Entrepreneurial competences [YES/NO]	Yes	-2.48
<b>Origin of axes</b>		
Expected competences	Capability to create trust, to feel empathy (social-emotional skills)	2.10
Thematic area of the project	Multimedia technologies, information technology and communication	2.21
Learning objectives of the project	Enhancement of the environmental and landscape heritage	2.22
Entrepreneurial competences [Yes/No]	No	2.48
Thematic area of the project	Social inclusion and civicness	2.50
Learning objectives of the project	Promoting tradition artisanal	2.61
Analysis of business life cycle data [Yes/No]	Yes	2.69
Personal model canvas; Brainstorming [Yes/No]	Yes	2.84
Communication planning and other digital activities [Yes/No]	Yes	2.87
Role-playing and staff selection simulation [Yes/No]	Yes	3.24
Thematic area of the project	Sustainable development and critical consumption	3.26
Activity description	Writing and multi-media laboratories (creative writing, theatre, digital, music...)	3.53
Expected competences	Capability to negotiate and communicate constructively in both school and professional environments	4.18
Activity description	Design and creation of prototypes	4.34
Prototype construction [Yes/No]	Yes	4.81

Learning objectives of the project	Management and computer programming	4.95
Problem solving and Case studies [Yes/No]	Yes	5.08
Competences in cultural awareness and expression [Yes/No]	Yes	6.03
Activity description	Cultural guided tours	7.11

**TAB. 11.** *Illustrative variables-modalities significantly associated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Factor*

Variable label	Modality label	T-Value
Type of school	Technical school	-4.52
Type of hosting organization [specify]	Private enterprise	-2.76
Project duration	Annual	-2.37
<b>Origin of axes</b>		
Type of hosting organization	No partnership	2.26
Project duration	Annual	2.64
Project classes	III	2.74
Type of hosting organization	Public Institution	2.80
Type of school	High school	4.46

#### 4. SWA/PTSO projects: proposal for a typology

The MCA, combined to bivariate and trivariate analysis, has made it possible to identify distinct types of training pathways on the basis of:

- a different articulation of the subjects, objectives and competences required of the students. Specifically, we move from vocational competences (vocational training project, VTP), to managerial competences (managerial training project, MTP) up to expressive and communicative competences (cultural training project, CTP);
- a variety of educational methods and types of integration between school and hosting organisations (meetings with experts, visits to the enterprise, business simulation, project work in and with the enterprise, internships, entrepreneurship projects, etc.).

##### 4.1. Vocational training paths based on a learning oriented action (VTP)

These are technical-laboratory pathways aimed at training highly professional profiles; they involve complementary learning contexts (school and hosting organisations); they are based on modules and study-work initiatives (training periods). The school and the enterprise/hosting organisations are no longer considered as separate contexts, but as integrated in a coherent pathway for develop the competences required by the educational profile typical of technical and vocational schools located in Central and Northern Italy. However, in context of enterprise, students may develop transversal, expressive and communicative competences (*i.* capability to improve their socio-emotional and group interaction competences; *ii.* strategic thinking skills, problem solving, project management). This first type of project reproduces in a more unified and complete way the objectives of job

orientation and professionalization of knowledge (Costa, 2012; Morel *et al.*, 2009) typical of the SWA cultural project.

**TAB. 12.** *Constitutive dimensions of VTP*

<b>Context of implementation</b>	Technical and Vocational schools (Central and Northern Italy)
<b>Law</b>	SWA
<b>Type of project</b>	Enterprise in Action
<b>Co-design and engagement of other partners</b>	Private enterprises and public institutions
<b>Main area of project focus</b>	Economic and business organisation; sustainable development and critical consumption
<b>Learning objectives</b>	Learning technical knowledge related to the design and production of prototypes
<b>Project activities</b>	Design and realisation of prototypes
<b>Skills</b>	i. Capacity to improve one's social-emotional and group interaction skills; ii. Strategic thinking skills (problem solving, project management).

#### *4.2. Management training paths based on simulated action learning (MTP)*

This type includes PTSOs that involve the realisation of a simulated setting for the development of managerial competences. The *simulated training enterprise* is widely used in vocational schools (in the centre and south) in the economic sector, oriented to the dissemination of administrative culture and management control in modern enterprises.

**TAB. 13.** *Constitutive dimensions of MTP*

<b>Context of implementation</b>	Vocational and High Schools (Central and South)
<b>Law</b>	SWA and PCTO
<b>Type of project</b>	Simulated training enterprise
<b>Co-design and engagement of other partners</b>	Private enterprises
<b>Main area of project focus</b>	Computer prototyping and communication technologies; personnel selection and human resources management; commercialization, marketing and internationalization;
<b>Learning objectives</b>	Management and computer programming
<b>Didactic methods/techniques</b>	Problem solving and case studies; role playing and personnel selection and simulation
<b>Skills</b>	Strategic thinking skills (problem solving, project management).

#### *4.3. Cultural training paths based on an action of dissemination of a civic culture (CTP)*

These projects are aimed at enhancing the artistic and craft traditions of the community, encouraging students' ability to engage in activities with a relevant socio-cultural impact (Sen, 2000). With these pathways the alternance aimed at development in students the acquisition of critical awareness of material and immaterial heritage (High School of North-East).

**TAB. 14.** *Constitutive dimensions of CTP*

<b>Context of implementation</b>	High schools (North-East)
<b>Law</b>	PCTO
<b>Type of project</b>	Services Learning
<b>Co-design and engagement of other partners</b>	Social Private and Third Sector
<b>Main area of project focus</b>	Sustainable development and critical consumption; Social inclusion and civiness
<b>Learning objectives</b>	Enhancement of the environmental and landscape patrimony
<b>Project activities</b>	Guided tours of a cultural nature (archaeological digs, museum visits, voluntary work...); Theoretical courses and lectures (safety, sustainability...)
<b>Skills</b>	Capacity to engage with others in activities with a significant socio-cultural impact

## Conclusion

To summarize, three different types of *alternance* pathways have been distinguished according to:

- the competences required from the students involved in the project actions. Specifically, these vary from entrepreneurial competences (VTP) to managerial competences (MTP) to expressive and communicative competences (CTP);
- the multiplicity of educational methods used to enhance the co-planning of alternance actions between schools and hosting organizations. In particular, in the VTP the integration between school and the business world is more evident and is articulated in the classic solutions of work experience (traineeships, etc.). In PTMs, work experience activities are replaced by business simulation activities (human resources management, working methods within an organization). CTPs include all those projects of civic education, cultural promotion and artistic training, aimed at enhancing the non-material heritage of the territory.

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## The Host Organisations' Point of View on Italian School-Work Alternance Programs

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**ABSTRACT:** *This contribution presents some first results from the research by the Milan-Bicocca unit, within the Project of Relevant National Interest (PRIN)-2017 Evaluating the School-Work Alternance: a longitudinal study in Italian upper secondary schools. In-depth interviews to privileged witnesses in host organisations as well as to institutional representatives were conducted to investigate their point of view on school-work alternance and paths for transversal skills and orientation programs. Through the support of interview excerpts, a reflection upon relevant themes regarding on-the-job experiences will be presented. The analysis was carried out with a predominantly exploratory intent, focusing on the role that host organisations might have on preparing students to labour market demands for soft skills as well as on sustaining their self-orientation competence. All interviewees agree on the relevance of a training experience design that would give space to transversal skills, facilitating students' self-consciousness, as well as awareness on their interests, their aspirations, and, consequently, promoting an attentive entrance into the labour market. The interviews highlight some practical experiences (e.g., time management, teamwork, different styles in relating to colleagues) that represent examples of transversal skills, possibly useful in the school to work transition. Furthermore, a work environment emerges as a fundamental training place for enhancing these skills, in the perspective of learning-by-doing and situated learning. Finally, characteristics of the various productive contexts emerged as crucial in shaping the features of proposals for SWA or PTSO programs available to students.*

**KEYWORDS:** *High School, School-Work Alternance, Transversal Skills, Career Orientation, Host Organisations.*

### Introduction

To effectively address young adults' difficulties in the transition from secondary school to either tertiary education or the labour market and to improve their career orientation, since 2005 Italy adopted School-Work Alternance (SWA) programs as a part of their scholastic curriculum. SWA is a pedagogical approach that aims to improve on-

the-job experience, which is useful for promoting young adults' employability and strengthening the connection between learning content and the demands of the labour market. Host organizations are central players in the training process, since they endure the significant task of providing, through learning-by-doing and situated learning, a context and active approaches to enhance students' soft skills and their self-orientation capacity towards the labour market, either directly or passing by tertiary training relevant for the desired position.

In order for SWA to be functional, actions of coordination and connection between schools and host organizations are necessary. Nevertheless, the literature shows that the adaptation to organizational and political aims is greater for schools than for host organizations (Camera di Commercio Lombarda, 2015; Assolombarda, 2016; Pinna, Pitzalis, 2020).

This contribution presents some first results from the research by the Milan-Bicocca unit, within the Project of Relevant National Interest (PRIN)-2017 *Evaluating the School-Work Alternance: a longitudinal study in Italian upper secondary schools*. In-depth interviews to privileged witnesses in host organisations as well as to institutional representatives were conducted to investigate their point of view on SWA and Paths for Transversal Skills and Orientation (PTSO) programs. Through the support of interview excerpts, a reflection upon relevant themes regarding on-the-job experiences will be presented. The analysis was carried out with a predominantly exploratory intent, focusing mainly on the role that host organisations might have on preparing students to labour market demands for soft skills as well as on sustaining their self-orientation competence.

## **1. From School-Work Alternance to Paths for Transversal Skills and Orientation**

The provisions included in the President of the Council of Ministers Decree of November 3, 2020, recalled by the Ministry of Education with the note 1990 of November 5, 2020, adds, among the many prohibitions resulting from the COVID-19 health emergency, educational trips and outings planned by the educational institutions, with a single exception that is activities related to the PTSO. In a historical moment in which the uncertainty for the school activities has been and still is maximum, it has been considered important to continue to plan and realise this type of formative activities. The Guidelines for PTSO were published by the Ministry of Education on October 8, 2019. However, they originated from the provisions of Law no. 145 of December 30, 2018 (Budget Law 2019) which, in art. 1, paragraph 785, provides for their adoption by decree of the Minister of Education. This Decree (no. 776) was issued, with a considerable delay with respect to the Budget Law, on September 4, 2019, the last day of life of the first Conte Government.

It is precisely the Budget Law 2019 that disposes the first important change, decreeing the renaming of the activity from SWA to PTSO. SWA had been introduced by the Legislative Decree No. 77 of April 15, 2005, pursuant to Article 4 of Law No. 53 of March 28, 2003 (the so-called Moratti's Reform). Nonetheless, it was made compulsory for students in the last three years of upper secondary schools by the Law 107 of 2015 (the so-called Good School Law). The latter envisioned SWA as an innovative teaching modality allowing, through practical experience, to help students consolidate the knowledge acquired at school, to field-test their aptitudes and to enrich their training. The name change can be read as an attempt by the Conte I government to detach itself from its predecessors, namely the Gentiloni government and before that the Renzi government, signatory of the Law 107/2015.

Yet, which are the main differences between SWA and PSTO? Firstly, the number of hours that students must complete for this training activity in the last three years of their course of study has been more than halved:

- 210 hours for Professional Institutes instead of the previous 400;
- 150 hours for Technical Institutes instead of 400;
- 90 hours for Lyceums instead of the previous 200.

Schools that wish to have their students engaged for more hours have full freedom to do so. However, the resources available to the program have been cut. It has gone from the 100 million euros of state contributions provided by the Good School Act to 42.5 million. Schools can try to take advantage of regional calls or other types of funding to make up for the missing resources, just as host companies can obtain funds to support company tutoring through calls issued by the Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Crafts and Agriculture or other funding bodies. However, the most competitive schools and those located in economically richer areas have an advantage over the others, which see greatly reduced the possibility of bridging the gap through activities carried out with state funding. In fact, PTSO programs, in order to be effective, require careful planning, management and evaluation to be set up in a flexible manner and made functional to the territorial context in which the school is located. Moreover, general choices of the school with regard to transversal skills need to be in continuous connection with the Three-Year Plan of the Educational Offer (PTOF) of the school, according also to the different nature and type of study courses (lyceums, technical institutes and professional institutes).

Although the planning of PTSOs must balance the curricular, experiential and orientational dimensions, the most important change is connected with the shift of focus on the orientational purposes of PTSOs. If the purpose of SWA was to integrate technical and disciplinary skills with practical work experience, bringing the school closer to the labour market and holding students responsible for their work obligations, the purpose of the PTSO is rather to develop transversal and interdisciplinary skills, so that students can understand

what is the branch of work best suited to their aptitudes and thus engaging in more informed choices when it comes to start a career or to select the university educational path. Indeed, through the 2016 New Skills Agenda for Europe, the Commission and the Council of Europe have focused attention on the centrality of quality competency-based education. The Council Recommendation of May 22, 2018 updates the 2006 version on *Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning* and frames key competence as a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ajello, Sannino, 2013; Decataldo, Fiore, 2018).

The eight competences for lifelong learning are interdependent and equally important: 1) functional literacy; 2) multi-lingual competence; 3) mathematical competence and basic competence in science and technology; 4) digital competence; 5) personal, social and learning-to-learn competence; 6) social and civic competence in citizenship; 7) entrepreneurial competence; 8) competence in cultural awareness and expression. Personal and social competencies deserve a closer examination, i.e. transversal and transferable skills through the operational dimension of doing: the ability to interact and work with others, problem-solving skills, creativity, critical thinking, awareness, resilience and the ability to identify the forms of guidance and support available to deal with the complexity and uncertainty of change, preparing for the changing nature of modern economies and complex societies.

The PTSO would aim precisely at improving the learner's basic skills while simultaneously investing in more complex skills to ensure resilience and adaptability. Doing-oriented projects and reality tasks allow the development of learning outcomes connected to the real world.

## **2. The Preliminary Research: Interviews to Privileged Witnesses**

This contribution presents some first results from the preliminary exploratory phase of a research by the Milan-Bicocca unit, within the PRIN Project *Evaluating the School-Work Alternance: a longitudinal study in Italian upper secondary schools*.

In-depth interviews to privileged witnesses in host organisations as well as to institutional representatives were collected to investigate their point of view on SWA and PTSO programs. Interviews were conducted in Italian and the extracts presented here in English are an accurate translation made by one of the authors of this paper.

Table 1 presents the main features of the twelve interviews conducted, dividing interviewees between institutional representatives and referents in host organisations. For each interviewee the role in their organization, the way the interview was conducted, and the code given to the interview text are reported.

**TAB. 1.** *List of interviewees, by institution and host organisations*

	<b>Role of the interviewee</b>	<b>Interview Conduction</b>	<b>Code</b>
<i>Institutional representatives</i>	Assolombarda - Chair of the Training Department	Face-to-face	ist1
	Chamber of Commerce of Genova - Chair Department of Orientation to Work and Chair of Liguria Centre for productivity	Online – double interview	ist2 (ist2.a, ist2.b)
	Confartigianato Lombardia – Vice President	Online	ist3
	CNA Piemonte - President	Online	ist4
	University 'La Sapienza' - Vice Dean for Rights to Study and Teaching Quality	Online	ist5
	University of Genova – Vice Dean for Training	Online	ist6
<i>Referents in host organisations</i>	University of Milan-Bicocca - Ex SWA Representative	Online	org1
	University of Genova - Ex Orientation Representative	Online	org2
	University of Genova - Representative for the Orientation to university studies Area	Online	org3
	University 'La Sapienza' – Representative for the project 'Lab2GO'	Online	org4
	Large company based in Bologna - Human Resources	Online	org5
	Small company based in Manerbio (BS) - Owner	Face-to-face	org6

The analysis was carried out with a predominantly exploratory intent, focusing mainly on the role that host organisations might have on preparing students to labour market demands for soft skills as well as on sustaining their self-orientation competence. We looked primarily at the characteristics delineating the condition of PCTOs in host organizations<sup>1</sup>. It was decided to proceed with a thematic analysis of the interviews (Boyatzis, 1998), which involves the emergence of themes<sup>2</sup> from the interview texts, while maintaining the basic structure defined by the interview outline. Coding of texts portions, based on thematic elements, was facilitated by the CAQDAS (Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) Software Nvivo. The various codes connected with themes emerging from the interviews were, in many cases, grouped into thematic categories with a larger semantic meaning. In Figure 1 codes assigned to themes (either thematic categories or themes that were not grouped into categories) are shown. Figure 2 focuses on the 'actors' category, with related codes assigned to the category. This category was considered as a 'meta-category' composed by 'meta-codes' that were useful for the analysis process – allowing to understand who the portion of text was referring to – even though they do not refer to any substantial theme. Finally, Figure 3 shows the remaining categories with their thematic codes.

<sup>1</sup> The first interviews were conducted in February 2020, even though we completed them in June 2020, due to the COVID-19 lockdown. Nevertheless, interviewees were asked to focus on the pre-pandemic period.

<sup>2</sup> Themes are either explicit or implicit ideas emerging from the empirical material.

**FIG. 1.** Codes used for themes during the analysis with Nvivo (categories and themes not included in any categories). We report the number of documents – 'files' – and text portions – 'references' – wherein the code is used.

Name	Files	References
actors	12	330
bureaucracy	5	6
companies propensity	6	20
competences	12	67
compulsoriness	6	7
cooperation among actors	12	43
employability	5	16
evaluation	7	18
gap between the school and the labour market	8	34
initiative actions	6	15
organisational aspects	10	38
orientation	10	36
out of the classroom	6	13
projection toward the labour market or the universit	4	7
relationship with the territory	9	22
resistance	5	15
risks and issues	11	62
simulated enterprise	3	7
time evolution	6	20

**FIG. 2.** Focus on the 'actors' category, with a look at all codes which are part of the category

Name	Files	References
actors	12	330
companies	11	84
institutions and associations	12	61
other_families	2	2
other_general public	1	1
other_university teachers	2	4
schools	12	75
students	12	76
teachers	9	27

Moreover, the element of intersubjectivity was also taken into account (Finlay, 2003), through control activities in the internal research group of the Milan-Bicocca unit.



**FIG. 3.** Focus on the various categories, with a look all codes grouped into each category

Name	Files	References
bureaucracy	5	6
companies propensity	6	20
scouting - recruiting	4	11
competences	12	67
competences_technical professional	7	14
competences_transversal	11	32
competences_digital	5	7
competences_entrepreneurship	5	7
competences_certification	2	2
compulsoriness	6	7
cooperation among actors	12	43
employability	5	16
employability_hiring	4	8
employability_individual	3	5
evaluation	7	18
gap between the school and the labour market	8	34
initiative actions	6	15
Name	Files	References
organisational aspects	10	38
proposals	3	3
orientation	10	36
out of the classroom	6	13
projection toward the labour market or the univers	4	7
relationship with the territory	9	22
resistance	5	15
risks and issues	11	62
available time_not enough	5	17
issues_costs for companies	8	22
issues_minors	3	3
issues_mobility	1	1
issues_no educational outcome	7	17
issues_no incentives	1	1
Name	Files	References
simulated enterprise	3	7
time evolution	6	20
improvements in time	4	5
legal evolution	9	15
worsening in time	2	8

### 3. Preliminary Results

In the following paragraphs, we will enter more thoroughly into the themes that emerged from the interview texts in the thematic analysis phase with reference to the functions of the PCTOs, highlighting the aspects of importance to the privileged witnesses interviewed.

#### *3.1. Transversal skills*

Within all of the interviews, there is agreement on the importance of including in training a range of soft skills that can facilitate entry into the labour market. The interview passages reported below, moreover, all highlight practical examples of the acquisition of transversal skills (from time management and teamwork to knowing how to relate to colleagues). In addition, a work environment emerges as fundamental as a formative place for learning these skills, in the perspective of learning-by-doing and situated learning.

This is the chance students have to relate to a context that is different from their current one. So this can surely strengthen some skills, even other aspects of their personality. You realise how important it is to move in a work environment. So, beside skills, theoretical concepts, either theoretical or practical...like the ability to be punctual, to be respectful, to be attentive, to listen... and all these things that must be part of a work context that maybe they see for the very first time (ist2.b).

For the students it is certainly an educational opportunity [...] you use a printer, you use procedures, respect for time.... In other words, they are all things that actually help to build up a perception, to understand, for example, who can be called 'you' and who can't, to avoid getting into uncomfortable situations (ist1).

Students who experience this type of projects, envisioning training in a work context, might be considered at an 'early' age, if we think that they will not necessarily enter the labour market in the immediate future. However, they are still offered useful opportunities to acquire skills that they can certainly spend later in their professional life. From this point of view, transversal skills also facilitate the capacity for self-orientation.

#### *3.2. Digital competences*

Although the interview grid did not encompass a specific attention to the digital competences – considered, for example, by Unioncamere (2019) as part of transversal competences – within interviews this aspect was often reported by privileged witnesses as relevant within the issue of training in a work context.

So, here it says 'for example technological and digital skills', but [...] digital skills, in 2020, are transversal skills. [...] The school should pay

more attention to this. Because, for example, within the project I manage [...] students make an unconscious use of the internet, especially of social media, unconscious of potential risks they might be exposed to, physically and personally. [...] There is no awareness towards this topic. [...] They don't see the internet as a work tool [...] And this is the first among digital skills: to be aware about the internet as a tool to give solutions (ist1).

### *3.3. The orientation dimension of the projects*

The interviewees report that within the orientation process being able to see a job role up close in the working environment takes on a particular value, allowing students to acquire a specific idea of the various roles, in relation to their own abilities, aspirations, and work-related values, with a view to increasing their capacity for self-orientation. The following interview excerpt emphasizes how the paths taken at a given organization – a large company – show possibilities in the world of work that students do not always imagine for themselves.

Also understanding what the job fields are. Many young people [...] have [...] only a part of what their schooling could give them as a job opportunity. In our specific case [...] we do a fairly niche job and many of them don't even know it exists. So, I think it can give them [...] the opportunity to know other job opportunities that they had not considered. [...] The effect it should have is that of helping these young people to understand, [...] of helping them to orient themselves and understand what paths there are in the company in addition to those they already imagine. Or even to understand if the ones they have imagined are the ones they like (org5).

Moreover, the self-orientation objective is associated with the possibility to gain a perspective that is external from the school, as shows the following passage.

The PTSOs precisely for me serve to give [...] a new perspective to the student who finally finds themselves interfacing with a world outside the school, so being able to give a perspective of what happens outside and what are therefore the situations in which they can come to find themselves, or the contexts with which they can come to interface in the future (org4).

The following description looks at the orientation objective in terms of orienting students to make conscious choices about their formative paths.

The main purpose of these projects is to orientate students to a conscious choice of the training path, that is also a life path. So basically to approach them giving some tools to make thoughtful choices and also giving them tools to build a path beyond training,

considering also the following years, independently from the education path in university, so as a life perspective (ist6).

The person here interviewed is part of the university reality: for this reason, she emphasizes the formative path. Nevertheless, the concept can be transposed to the work path as well, as the interviewee adds that it is a 'life path' too.

### *3.4. The gap between the school and the labour market*

There are many voices among those interviewed that refer the existence of a gap between the education provided within the school environment and the actual necessities emerging on the labour market.

The school interest comes from the idea the schools realised that what they were teaching, even in technical institute, wasn't replying to the organisation's needs, so while entering the job market there was a large gap. Organisations are not satisfied, because they know that if they introduce a person they have to invest in training for two or three years, because skills are not overlapping (ist4).

Often PTSOs allow students to understand that school curricula and workshops, especially for technical institutes, are not updated with the effective needs of the jobs market. So, from a point of view of technical competencies, the outcome is not always positive (ist2.a)

These excerpts from interviews to members of category associations look at the issue of the gap between what students learn in a traditional education environment and what are the needs of a work environment, especially focusing on technical institutes.

### *3.5. Organisations propensity*

From the interviews with the privileged witnesses, several aspects emerged that are linked to the motivations of businesses to activate training paths with schools and to welcome students into their organizations through the PTSO modality. The excerpt from the interview that follows is a clear example of how the needs of a specific company can be reconciled with the type of project implemented with PTSOs.

The world is changing quickly, especially in the last year, and not having a product by myself, I need to change my company and my production as a chameleon. How can I do that? With skills I create during the development phases of my order. I mean, I arrive at my client, I take a production order to build these machines. It is sized in the company, it is developed, it is made possible to build and I need young people that have the intuition to be quick and dynamic for production. How to do this? Thanks to training within the company, so I try to shape workers that my company need. How to do this? With young fresh workers who want to learn with the basis from the school.

This is what I found from SWA. I preferred to invest this time I have together with the school, to teach, train, also for my needs (org6).

Therefore, this example shows, on the one hand, the need for organizations to recruit a young workforce that is still in training, and on the other hand, the desire to train students themselves, as businesses, in order to have workers with skills that are as appropriate as possible to the needs of the business itself. Moreover, the same function of PTSOs (or a very similar recruiting function) can also be carried out for universities or, in general, tertiary training organizations.

### *3.6. The geographical area*

A specific element asked in the interview dialogues through the stimulus of the track concerned the role of the relationship with the territory within the design of the PTSOs. According to what was reported in the interviews by several privileged witnesses, this aspect is linked to the theme of collaboration among actors. The following passage highlights this aspect, noting how, through collaborative work with schools in the area, we can also strengthen what is called the 'school-territory-enterprise relationship'.

The SWA paths, PTSOs, as they are now defined, are absolutely important and interesting paths for young students. We have been able to verify this as Bicocca, we have been able to verify it concretely, making available to high schools in the area, and then in this sense strengthening the relationship between school-territory-enterprise, considering the University of Milan-Bicocca as an enterprise that at that time gives the availability to welcome, we wanted to offer opportunities to experiment with practical activity, concrete action, the action of doing, for the students of high schools in the area, including high schools, classical, scientific and so on.... rather than technical institutes, within the structures of Milan-Bicocca, choosing as hosting structures all those colleagues who, within their offices, laboratories, departments, more service structures such as libraries, were able to offer positions for high school students (org1).

The following interview excerpt, on the other hand, shows how the specific characteristics of the territory influence the availability and types of projects for hosting students. In addition, the role of the territory is underlined in the relationship between the needs of businesses, in terms of types of professions, and the world of training, which can respond to these needs by looking at which businesses require personnel in the territory.

There are different approaches for example among Milan, Monza-Brianza and Lodi [...] The difference is related to the geographical context vocation. The vocation of the Brianza context, for example, is surely a context with a main manufactory vocation, so that there are

many opportunities to send students for a practical activity there. [...] Even more troublesome is the Lodi area, with a mismatch between orientation in general and with high rates of school dropout, while the context vocation, with some factories, but mostly agricultural. Professional education works very well there, and in relation to company's needs (ist1).

#### **4. A General Reflection to Conclude**

A relevant element emerged from all the interviews conducted is the importance of the collaborative dimension during the process of project design and implementation, showing the centrality of a cooperative approach. This means making an effort to actively involve within the planning activities and in the whole PTSO experience organisations, schools, students, their families, but also all the institutions possibly related to PTSO programs. Also within the Guidelines for PTSO published by the Ministry of Education the principle of co-design is defined as central in collaborations with host organizations and tertiary institutions in the area. In the following interview excerpt, the collaboration between school and company is mentioned as a specific factor for the success of PTSOs, with particular attention to the fundamental role played by school teachers.

The success factors are always related, in my opinion, to the ability and skill, the commitment of the teachers in contacting, choosing, the companies to send the teens to. When the teachers are active and the coordinators of these activities are active and are participating, even participating precisely with the company, the internship, in short, the alternation, this period becomes really interesting for the boy. The collaboration between school and company, I would say (org5).

The next passage, extracted from the interview texts, goes more into organizational details related to the collaboration between the tutor within the host organization and the school tutor.

Normally, when you prepare the training project, and here I am going on my personal experience, you discuss with the school what are the goals of the students at that moment and what can be in some way the inputs that come from our experience. So you really drop the project on the goals that the teens have. And this is done together, this is a collaborative work that actually takes some time, perhaps in the private sector it is seen as extremely time consuming, [...] and we try to adapt the path to the objectives, not necessarily selecting schools on the basis of the supply chain. I'll give you an example, I'm a language teacher, I don't only take students from linguistic schools when I do these experiences, I also take students from technical and nautical schools... however, together with the teacher, I find a training project that is coherent with what they are doing and that, at the same

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time, presents them with possibilities that maybe they haven't thought about or are thinking about (ist6).

We opened this paper with an outline on the time evolution that allowed to shift from SWA to PSTOs, considering in particular developments in the law and a transit of focus from an approach based on incrementing employability to a perspective driven by self-orientation and awareness of students' skills and possibilities. Then, we presented the preliminary research conducted by the Milan-Bicocca unit, with the use of in-depth interviews to privileged witnesses in host organisations as well as to institutional representatives. While going through results, we particularly focus on relevant themes emerged from the interviews, such as transversal skills, digital competences, orientation, the gap between schools and the labour market and, finally, organisations propensity to participate in the programs.

Our results show that the host organisations and institutional representatives interviewed have mainly a clear understanding of how, in what ways and what skills are necessary to guide students in their respective orientation path. With respect to specific competences required, some of the host organisations emphasize how certain acquired competences can be implemented or are more easily implemented only within the labour market (Jackson *et al.*, 2005) because these are not passed down in the education system. Often the host institutions have clear perspectives about those shortcomings that schools have in the implementation of some skills, especially digital skills.

The underlying paradigm in the words of representatives from host organisations is that of the search for a match between the needs of the production world and theoretical knowledge. The host organisations and institutional representatives seem to understand that the main objective of PCTO is implementing competences, not the simple provision of jobs (Giergji, Cillo, 2021), but the interviews let emerge that host organisations point out often also the secondary purpose of employability. By law, the mission of the PTSOs has become increasingly focused on orientation: the host organisations do not seem to evade this objective but, rather, they make it their own and integrate it within broader purposes that also reflect different possibilities of connection between the labour market and schools (Capecchi, Caputo, 2016). Good collaboration with schools, according to what we have defined as a cooperative approach, the chances –sometimes – of employment for students in the future and those of testing the flexibility of the organisations are all possibilities that could be implemented by PTSOs. Beside this, the problems that emerges in the realization of PTSTO in their full potentiality cannot be ignored: we are aware that this configuration of PTSOs model is only one within many possible models (Giovannella, 2016), but the cut of resources available, and the difficulties in the COVID-19 emergency made the path of

implementation of PTSOs even more problematic and uncertain in terms of development possibilities.

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## Civil Economy and Social Agriculture: Regenerative Factors in Marginalized Young People

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**ABSTRACT:** *Social agriculture is one of the areas of intervention of the civil economy, in which the dynamics of the market, gift, reciprocity and sharing, carry out in a close form the regulation of exchanges between members of the community, in order to realize virtuous and innovative generative processes also in training and formal learning (schools, universities and other training agencies) and non-formal learning (volunteering and active citizenship) of the school as an active community, open to the territory and able to develop and increase interaction with families and the local community. To realize and implement all this it is necessary: to support motivation for studying or reinforce it and the orientation of students characterized by particular marginalities, fragilities and disabilities; reinforce and guarantee the permanence in the training system or promote access to conscious work, or with regard to the theme of reducing and preventing early school leaving by promoting the reduction of territorial gaps and strengthening those educational institutions with greater delays, also through the promotion of innovative experiences, such as the districts of civil economy (Campi di Bisenzio, Empoli, Grottammare, etc.), in which civil and social agriculture play an important role in the development of the territories and its inhabitants. School, as an open and active community, is also fundamental in the involvement of students in social agriculture projects in the field of school-work alternance, with the aim of: implementing flexible learning methods from a cultural and educational point of view, which link classroom training with practical experience in the social field; enrich education and training paths with the acquisition of useful skills in the labor market; to establish an organic link between educational and training institutions with the world of work and civil society, which allows the active participation of third sector actors in the training processes; relate the educational offer to the cultural, social, economic and sustainable development of the territory.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Social inclusion, communities/territories, good practices, young people, reciprocity*

### Introduction: context and hypothesis

In a fast-changing society, in which: a) in 2030 every 20-year-old will probably dedicate 58,000 hours to work, 200,000 hours to body care

(sleep, care, etc.), 120,000 hours to lifelong learning; 200,000 hours on anything other than work, care and training; b) digital culture will supplant the analogue one, but the invasion of technologies will save the human need for creativity, aesthetics, ethics, collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving; c) a caregiver or a priest are more irreplaceable than an industrial expert or an accountant; d) all tasks that cannot be delegated to machines will end up being more paid and therefore we will be able to produce more and more goods and services with less and less human labor; e) the hours of free time will increase, already today much greater than those usable a hundred years ago. How to occupy them? How to avoid boredom and depression? How to grow intellectually? Will violence or social peace increase? (De Masi, 2017, 2019).

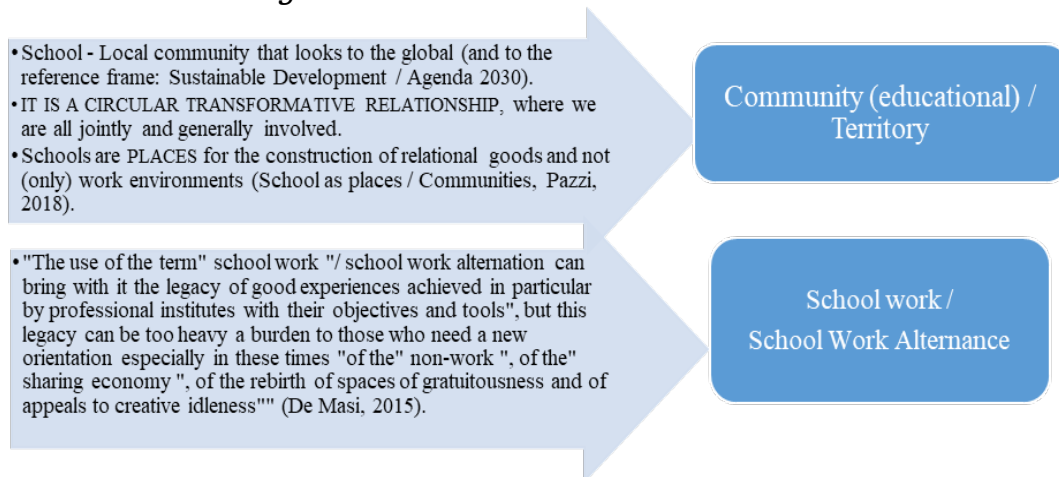
From the aforementioned considerations, the following questions arise (hypotheses): what role and function do the internship, school-work alternation, apprenticeship or other similar experiences in a business/company have if they do not help the student decide whether to continue do you study or quit? And in case of interruption of studies, which job to look for and how? On the other hand, in case of continuation of studies, which faculty to choose? (De Masi, 2019).

From the above considerations arise the following questions (hypotheses): what role and function do the internship, the school-work alternation, the apprenticeship or other similar experiences in a company/company have if they do not help the student to decide whether to continue his studies or stop?

Answering these questions is not easy, because the rapid changes in our society don't indicate the work of the future and therefore young people cannot be taught how to do it. What the school/the educating community can do is transfer to the young the scientific parameters, the values, the aesthetics, the needs that will guide the action of man, whatever the work they will be called to do. carry out (De Masi, 2019).

All this requires: 1) a new vision/paradigm and mission of the school/educating community, which will have to provide young people with a multifaceted toolbox made up of 'multidisciplinary' reading tools and at the same time develop a culture of 'multidisciplinarity' learning; 2) a renewed way of understanding skills «which must be recognized and made to evolve into ever richer skills [...] and referring to all the constitutive dimensions of the Person (Report 1). Functional knowledge is important, but «knowledge relating to the body dimension, the aesthetic, the social and the ethical ones are also important. And they are for all students, no one excluded» (Fiorini, 2008).

**FIG. 1. Vision/Paradigm**



Source: Elaboration of the authors ap Pazzi, 2018 and De Masi 2015

To achieve all this means acting – through co-programming and co-planning processes – on social, relational, cultural dynamics and therefore also on linguistic and symbolization dimensions, through «a school that trains people-citizens who are capable of expressing their transformative force in society. No young people ready for the market, but young people ready to radically change the market itself. [...] a school that becomes one of the preferred places of daily experience [...]» (Mancini, 2018) community-relational, aimed at the common good.

This is what we have tried to do in the elaboration of this article: focusing on the transformative theme of the school within a new paradigm of the civil economy in the field of civil agriculture, aimed at the theme of social agriculture and school-work alternance, which see the involvement young people who live (also) in conditions of marginality and social exclusion (examples in the field) and on the experiences of the civil economy sectors which are regenerative models of community.

## **1. Civil Economy/Civil Agriculture «towards/verso» social agriculture**

The paradigm/vision of the 'school-community' develops within the paradigm of the civil economy (Fig. 1, 2). This is not a new economic theory, but a vision that concerns an inclusive, participatory and sustainable development model, which has its origins in Humanism (Zamagni, 2019).

FIG. 2 *Paradigm and keywords*

Source: Elaboration of the authors

The paradigm of the 'community school' in its mission – training and multidisciplinary learning – is also realized in civil/civic agriculture (Lyson, 1999) and in social agriculture which is an 'experience of civil economy' (Pinzone, 2015) and civil/civic agriculture, which takes the form of a regenerative community welfare policy.

**Box 1** - Civil/civic agriculture, based on the involvement of local communities and citizens in processes related to agriculture, embraces highly innovative production and marketing systems in which agricultural practices do not end in a mercantile exchange, but maintain their inter -no lasting and continuous values of relationship, it is an agriculture based on sustainable practices and is deeply socially responsible. In Italy, social agriculture (AS), is regulated by law no. 141 of 2015 which aims to develop interventions and social, socio-health, educational and socio-work insertion services, in order to facilitate adequate and uniform access to essential services to be guaranteed to people and families and to local communities throughout the national territory and in particular in rural or disadvantaged areas. The same law identifies social cooperatives, social enterprises and farms as operators of the AS.

## 2 Experiences of civil economy: community and process policy for schools and territories

The first experience of civil economy in the context of the school-community vision concerns the project 'civil hub community schools, promoted by two third sector organizations Legambiente Campania and Libera Campania, in collaboration with Liceo Colombo di Marigliano,

the higher Instruction Institute Marone of Mercato S. Severino, the Comprehensive Institute of Santa Marina di Policastro, the Comprehensive Institute Pirandello-Svevo of Pianura in Naples.

This is a training course, which includes educational support actions through the activation of four workshops, animated by operators from Legambiente and Libera, of non-formal education. The topics covered concern: the fight against eco-mafias, the green community/green society, the gates of the Civil hub (community welfare, community economy, urban regeneration), civil memory.

The project is carried out with the involvement of the entire community in order to set in motion processes of social and economic development, aimed at creating mechanisms of environmental sustainability and fighting organized crime. It is a real path of individual, group and community empowerment that focuses on the territories, including the agricultural sector.

The second policy experience are the civil economy districts, which by addressing the *civitas*, intend to include – in addition to businesses – institutions (including schools and universities), the organized civil community/third sector and citizenship in its various forms associative. This is because the civil economy is a biodiversified and circular inclusive process, which expresses its vision/paradigm in the districts of the civil economy. Districts that are created through four dimensions of community improvement (Fig. 3), whose perimeter of reference is the improvement of people's lives and the social inclusion of marginalized/excluded subjects.

**FIG. 3.** *Four dimensions of community improvement*

1. <b>QUALITY OF LIFE</b> through ecosystem formats
2. <b>WORK</b> through the development of participatory, collaborative, shared, cooperative, horizontal, cohesive systems
3. <b>CIVISM</b> through new forms of voluntary work and active citizenship of everyday life and community-based re-generative welfare
4. <b>TERRITORY</b> through community actions of social and socio-urban re-generation, centered on reciprocity

Source: Elaboration of the authors

In Italy there are some civil economy districts (Fig. 4). Campi Bisenzio is the first district of civil economy. The activities of the district par-tone in 2014 up to the experimentation – with the Legambiente social promotion association – of the First Festival on the civil economy (october 2017).

#### FIG. 4 *Territorial development of the civil economy districts*

They have established civil economy districts: the Common of Campi Bisenzio (Florence), Naples, Pontecagnano (Salerno), Marcianise (Caserta), Lecco, Grottammare and the Mountain Community of the Castelli romani e prenestini (Rome).

There are also many construction sites already open, where constitutive processes are being deepened: Empoli, Putignano (Bari), Grosseto, Valtiberina (territories located between the regions of Tuscany and Lazio).

The experience of the Districts are added the various territories and contexts where the project "Here - circular community economies", of the third sector association "Legambiente national", is underway. Project that develops preparatory actions for the actual birth of the civilly economy districts.

Caritas joins the experience promoted by "Legambiente Nazionale", in particular through the European professional community, a place for reflection, research and networking at a national level of local experiences of social innovation and possible development centered on human promotion and environmental sustainability, also through circuits of social enterprises.

Source: Elaboration of the authors

In the first year of life, the district of Campi Bisenzio has put into practice the commitments arising from the results of the aforementioned Festival, establishing four working tables (Fig. 5), composed of local authorities, schools, universities, third sector and companies.

#### FIG. 5. *Working tables*

*1. Welfare Community; 2. Regeneration of places and community spaces; 3. New energy models and circular economy; 4. Work, young people and training processes*

*The construction of the district of civil economy It is a process cultural; operating: permanent job and experimental*

Source: Elaboration of the authors

The four working groups in their activities (co-designed and co-programmed) have started and developed a social, economic and environmental ecosystem aimed at the possibility of triggering and developing virtuous processes of citizen participation, collaboration between different subjects of the territory and development of a community increasingly capable of being resilient and proactive.

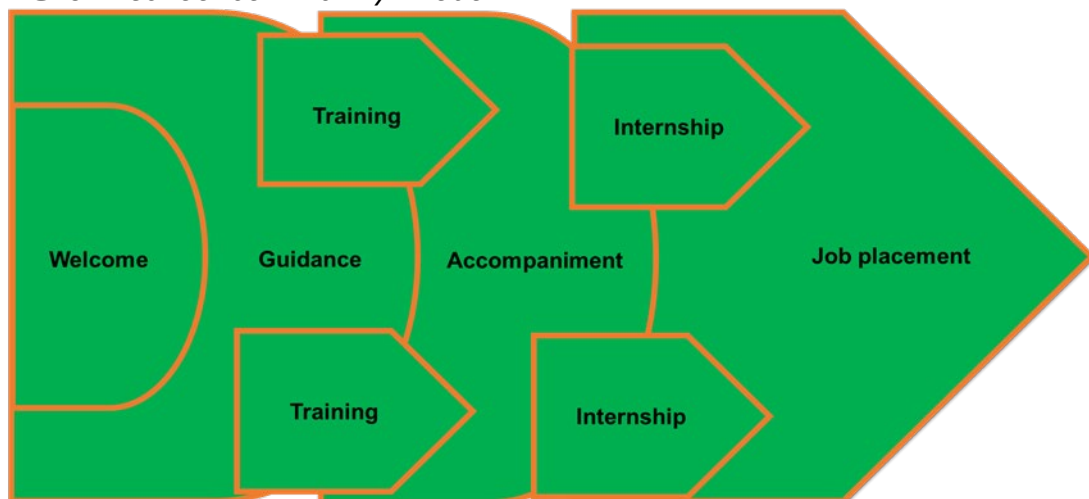
From these examples and from what has been expressed, it is necessary to move towards a 'school-community' model that must develop within the paradigm of the civil economy, where the actors of the social economy, local authorities, businesses they plan and co-plan interventions, activities, projects with the communities, as all the actors listed above are jointly responsible for the common good.

### 3. Social agriculture: school-work alternance and marginalized young people

The model includes (Figure 6) a path of social inclusion through the construction of a professional project focused on the subjective needs of each student and aimed at socialization at work, job insertion. It is a matter of articulating in a methodologically coherent way, a series of services and activities to support job placement based on the specific and complex needs of these students, to understand the subjective needs and change the conditions that hinder a positive entry into work contexts.

With the most widespread models within the services for guidance and job placement (Ghergo, Pavoncello, 2004), macro-types of action have been identified: reception, guidance, training, internship, accompaniment, job placement, evaluation. These are, of course, broad categories with open and flexible boundaries to detect innovative and improving elements, but certainly useful to facilitate comparison, evaluation and replicability of the project. The experiences described and the proposed model respond to the need of reflecting on concrete actions that the education system can provide in order to facilitate the school-work alternance for marginalized young people.

**FIG. 6** A 'school-community' model



Source: Elaboration of the authors

The opportunity to alternate various moments of learning (at school and in a working context) aims to promote processes of social and work integration in line with the development of the student's autonomy in an individualized and flexible design perspective. The purpose is to complete the educational-training course implemented at school with the concreteness of the operational situation in other life contexts. The results of this experience will allow the family and the various professionals involved to learn more about the real potential of the

marginalized young people. Through school-work alternance, the student and his family are offered the opportunity to:

- consolidate and implement school learning in a different context by experimenting with different non-school environments and enriching social experiences;
- develop personal and work skills and autonomy;
- acquire greater awareness of the skills and autonomy achieved;
- encourage career guidance to plan and undertake 'after school' Paths;
- build relationships and alliance with the resources of the territory.

### *3.1 Examples of school-work alternance for disabled people– Institute Emilio Sereni – Rome*

The school and the context The Agricultural Technical Institute is structured with a headquarters located in the 6th Town Hall which has an area of 11,300 ha. Emilio Sereni Institute is a consolidated reality in the context of higher technical education and consists of three offices distributed over the territory of Rome Capital, where two complexes are located: the main one in the 6th Town Hall and the branch in via della Colonia Agricola, in the THIRD Town Hall. The socio-environmental context of the territory of reference for the headquarters and the branch office does not offer adequate cultural stimuli and is characterized by medium-low economic conditions and a low presence of associations and social organizations. The territory of the branch preserves the characteristics of the Roman agro, with medium-large farms with a cereal and livestock production address. The student population comes mainly from middle-class families. Garibaldi Institute in Rome has promoted the school and work integration of students with mental disabilities, creating for each student an individualized work plan that includes both the activities carried out in the school environment, and promoting moments of independent life in the family context and in the work context, thanks also to the possibility of inclusion in the context of Guidance. The project has provided the activation of internship experiences in companies in the field of agriculture, environment, territory, sales and participation in events. During these experiences, tutoring activities were guaranteed through visits by the tutor to the company and group meetings with other trainees. Students with mental disabilities were accompanied to work through tutoring actions carried out by the companions designated as 'tutors'. In addition, interviews with parents and moments of comparison with the company realities of the territory were guaranteed. Job placement The project provided the establishment of a Social Farm, managed through an Onlus, with production and sales activities of products and services. Support to families.



### *3.2 Examples of school-work alternance for disabled people - Giuseppe Garibaldi Institute – Rome*

I.T.A. «Giuseppe Garibaldi» - Via Ardeatina 524 – Roma. The school is located in the territorial area of the Municipality of Rome VIII characterized by a population of about 135,000 inhabitants with a conformation of the mainly urban territory, with rural areas located on the borders of the City Hall. High levels of unemployment and school drop-out are the main problems that are recorded at local level. I.T.A. «Giuseppe Garibaldi» - Via Ardeatina 524 – Roma. The school is located in the territorial area of the Municipality of Rome VIII characterized by a population of about 135,000 inhabitants with a conformation of the mainly urban territory, with rural areas located on the borders of the City Hall. High levels of unemployment and school drop-out are the main problems that are recorded at local level.

### *3.3 Jobs4NEET «We sooth trust and cultivate hope to collect opportunities' - Maso Pez, Ravina (TN)*

It is a Project 92 youth social and work inclusion initiative. This project aims to offer girls and boys, in a vulnerable situation, opportunities for social and work inclusion, for satisfactory access to the world of work and a contribution to working life

Target groups: young people with social vulnerabilities, school and family, with a new attention to the phenomenon of young NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training), young people between the ages of 15 and 29, no longer included in a school /training path or even employed in a work activity.

The planned activities concern social agriculture in particular biological transplant seedlings, certified by I.C.E.A. on a production nursery area that currently exceeds 5,000 square meters. Quality products, strictly certified.

### *3.4 GLEAN - Growing Levels of Employability/Entrepreneurship in Agriculture for NEETs, CSAPSA - Center for Studies and Analysis of Applied Psychology and Sociology – Bologna*

Based on the construction of intervention models established for disadvantaged young people (paid traineeships, training courses, community projects, etc.), GLEAN proposes an innovative and engaging approach to learning. The project is based on the design, development and implementation of the NEET Entrepreneurship/Employability Program (NEEP), in the form of a mixed course, including classroom and online/self-learning sessions, with emphasis on practical experience, to learn how to work in agriculture. The program involves teachers and trainers in the agricultural sector, guidance professionals and employment agencies, social services, including social farms, vocational training schools, policy makers and the labour market as a whole.

Individualized tutoring and mentoring were provided during the course.

**Box 2 - Why Social Agriculture is important for marginalized young people?**

- Develop professional and soft skills;
- Promotes self-determination through the observation of the results produced by its agricultural work (from cultivation to harvesting, animal care, product processing);
- Involves young people in planning their sustainable and community-useful future;
- Spread optimism, resilience in the lives of young people in a teamwork and above all promotes... a new sense of life!

## Conclusion and future research developments

On the basis of what has been outlined in the paragraphs, it is observed that new ideas are not needed, but it is necessary - within the paradigm of the civil economy - to systematize (theories and experiences of civil/civic and social agriculture) at a transdisciplinary level education and training in the territories/communities and therefore also the experiences of school-work alternance,

Therefore, a civil rethinking of the traditional methods of teaching is necessary to enhance the culture of re-generative reciprocity and, therefore, the attitude to the 'school-work-community', focusing attention on knowledge, respect for differences and the promotion of inclusion, respecting the rights and dignity of adults and young people in conditions living in marginal conditions.

With the paradigm of the civil economy, 'starting' from the knowledge of the experiences of the Territories/Schools/Places/Communities (schools, civil economy districts, etc.), it is essential to proceed with the recognition/systematization of the existing in order to build a true community territorial that is also educating; in which all citizens are jointly involved.

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VOLUME I

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