

Contents

Corrado Polli, Aldo Rosano, Oliviero Casacchia

Forecast of the foreign component in the Italian population to 2050

Valentina Ferri, Giovanna Di Castro, Salvatore Marsiglia

Exploring immigrant gaps in education: empirical evidence

Federico Batini, Giulia Barbisoni, Giusi Marchetta

Shared reading aloud as a tool to improve integration: an experiment in Porta Palazzo (Turin, Italy)

Fabio Amato, Nadia Matarazzo

Spaces and practices of inclusive didactics: a territorial laboratory in Naples

Lúcio Antônio Leite Alvarenga Botelho, Roberto Célio Valadão, Lorena Rocca

The linchpins of geographic reasoning for a successful teaching/learning: Comparison between school curricula in Italy and Brazil

Patrizia Rinaldi

Variable impacts on young migrants and related measures in Spain and Italy. Andalusia and Sicily: a comparative analysis

Anna Granata, Paolo Monti

Past and present experiences of “natality” in border crossing. An Arendtian reading of the agency and rights of refugees

Carla Ferrario

Finding Common Ground: International Students in UPO and their Academic Experiences



Forecast of the foreign component in the Italian population to 2050

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Received: January 2023 – Accepted: March 2023

Abstract

Although migrants are young when they arrive, they will age if they are allowed to stay in the destination country. Available data show that the foreign component of the European population is experiencing an aging process even in countries where net migratory gains are substantial. In Italy in the period from 2002 to 2021 the number of migrants aged 65 and over increased from 41 thousand to 274 thousand, the share of over 65s was 3.0% in 2002 and almost doubled in 2021, reaching 5.5%. Studies specifically concerning the demographic forecasts of the foreign population are scarce and can be of great interest as these processes have direct repercussions on the composition of the job offer and inevitable and economic repercussions regarding health and pension spending. For this purpose, the study adopts a stochastic approach based on the properties of the event-point processes which allowed to make forecasts on the overall population residing in Italy by 2050, highlighting the foreign component.

Keywords: Forecast, Model, Migration, Italy

1. Introduction

The process of population ageing that has been underway for several decades, favored by the general increase in life expectancy and the gradual decline of births, is causing imbalances in the population structure with a relentless increase in older cohorts. This dynamic, which is taking place in all European populations, also affects the migratory component of these populations. Although migrants are young when they arrive, they will age if they are allowed to

remain in the country of destination. Ageing of these groups is expected to increase across Europe, with few evidence of re-immigration. Available data on the age distribution of the migrant population show an increasing process of ageing even in countries where net migration gains are substantial. In southern European countries, such as Italy, Spain and Greece, substantial migration flows are a relatively recent phenomenon. In Italy, the migration balance has been steadily positive since the early 1990s (Istat, 2022). However, the foreign

population in Italy is also experiencing an ageing process: in the period from 2002 to 2021, the number of migrants aged 65 and over increased from 41,000 to 274,000, the share of those aged 65 and over was 3.0% in 2002 and will almost double in 2021, reaching 5.5%. Studies dealing specifically with demographic forecasts of the foreign population are scarce and may be of great interest since these processes have direct effects on the composition of the labour supply and inevitable and economic repercussions regarding healthcare and pension expenditure. To this end, the proposed study adopts a stochastic approach that will make it possible to make forecasts on the total population resident in Italy by 2050, including the foreign component, focusing on migratory background rather than the citizenship that is an administrative issue.

2. Methods

First of all, it is necessary to premise that making a future projection of the foreign resident population is not conceptually simple since neither the criterion of citizenship nor that of country of birth allows to identify it exactly. In fact, foreign immigrants at the beginning of the migration process constitute the entire target population, but as time goes by, naturalized immigrants and second-generation immigrants must be subtracted from them, as they become more and more relevant and important contingents as the time of stay in the destination country passes (Strozza et al., 2002). To overcome these drawbacks, in our model we will assume that acquisitions of citizenship do not take place during the period considered and, therefore, a foreign citizen remains as such for the entire duration of stay in Italy.

The methodology used follows a stochastic approach and is based on the properties of point-event processes (Bertino and Sonnino, 2007). The model adopted to simulate the single events with demographic implications (birth, death, emigration, and immigration) is one that refers to the composition of multiple Poisson processes. Through this method it is possible to simulate the evolution of a population, the composition of which is known at a certain instant, by randomly generating the succession

of individual events that will occur in each year of the forecast. The entire procedure is repeated for a fixed number of times, generating, for each year of the study, several forecasts of the population structure. In this way, for each year under study and for each population characteristic, the respective mean values and mean square deviations can be calculated, providing an indication of the variability of the demographic measures. The time interval considered here is from the year 2020 to the year 2050, that is a time span to obtain a reasonable prevision also comparable with other available forecast projections.

The procedure requires certain information that is necessary for the calculation of the rate of realization of the events; this includes the structure of the population at the initial forecast instant broken down by gender.

The starting parameters used for the estimates refer to the year 2019 and the source is the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat). The choice fell on 2019 in order to avoid the problems associated with the pandemic period, especially when estimating the demographic and probabilistic functions, which will be described below. To forecast future population trends, the procedure requires a forecast scenario for the main demographic aggregates (births, deaths, emigrations and immigrations).

With regard to mortality, gender-specific mortality rates observed from 1960 to 2019 were considered. Then, through the Lee-Carter methodology (1992), a theoretical mortality function was estimated for individual ages and sexes. Through this function, the probabilities of death up to 2050 were estimated. As regards fertility, the structure of future rates has been considered constant, while the number of average children per woman is expected to rise from 1.24 to 1.50, in line with Istat forecast. The estimation of immigration and emigration rates has been made based on Eurostat data on foreign inflows and outflows. From the rates calculated by age and sex, using the Roger-Castro methodology (1981), theoretical which approximate the trend of the observed rates functions have been estimated. Regarding the choice of future flows of immigrants and emigration rates, it was decided to adopt the

same forecasts provided by Istat (2022) through the forecast indicators (median scenario) that is the more likely scenario.

3. Results

3.1 Forecast of the entire population

The results of the forecast of the entire resident population are presented below. Figure 1 shows Italy's resident population in 2019 (colored bars) compared with the forecast to 2050 (transparent bars). The figure shows the evolution of the relentless ageing process of the Italian population with the progressive increase of the older generations. At the same time, the reduction of the population in the younger age groups can be observed. This is caused by two concomitant phenomena: on the one hand the reduced number of average children per woman assumed in the model and on the other hand the progressive reduction in the number of women of childbearing age.

The age pyramid makes it possible to evaluate, in an intuitive and immediate way, the processes taking place. Table 1 includes indicators calculated on the forecasted population that are useful for outlining the dynamics of the processes. The adopted technique allows the possibility of repeating the simulation several times, so that the average value of the indicators and their standard error are calculated. For the sake of simplicity, only the value of the indicators for the starting year 2019, the intermediate year 2035 and the final year 2050 are presented in Table 1. The average age of the population will increase from 45.5 years in 2019 to 49.3 years in 2035. A further increase to 51.5 years in 2050 is expected, that is an increase of 6 years compared to the base year value. The average age at death will also increase by almost 6 years from the current 80.7 years to 86.8 years in 2050. In the projected scenario, it is expected that the current trend of increasing survival caused by technological progress in the field of medical sciences, as well as the overall improvement in living conditions, will continue.

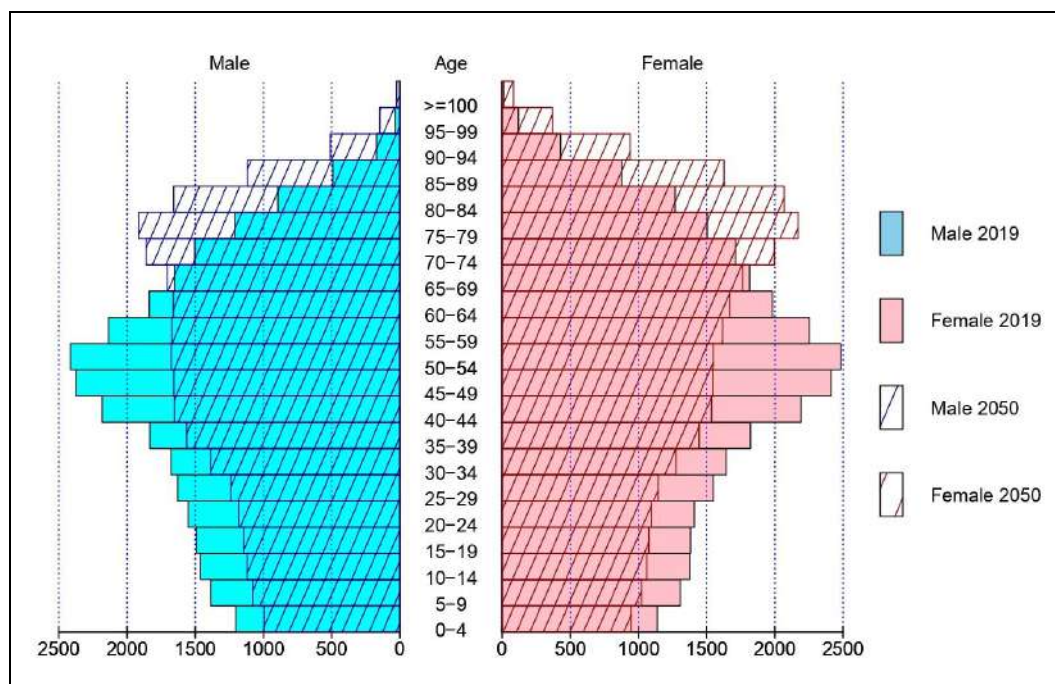


Figure 1. Resident population forecast. Comparison of the years 2019 vs 2050. Authors' elaboration.

Looking at the indicators that are most relevant for the economy, it is interesting to note that the trend in the structural dependency ratio of young people will tend to decrease from 20.6 to 18.9 in 2035. The value of the indicator in 2050 (21.6) suggests that this trend will reverse. In fact, although the generations between 0 and 14 years will decrease overall, from a certain point onwards, there will be a very sustained reduction in the working age population in favour of the older cohorts. This trend will cause a reverse of the indicator with a rising trend. Over the time period considered the index of structural dependency of the elderly will double from the current 35.8 to 69.3, showing that for every three persons of working age there will be two persons aged 65 and over. The structural dependency ratio of the population is also reported. Lastly, the structural dependency ratio of the population is presented: as one might expect, it will increase from the current 56.4 to 90.2, suggesting that in 2050 for every person of working age there will be another person of non-working age.

	2019	2035		2050	
	Indicator	Mean value	Standard error	Mean value	Standard error
Population mean age	45.5	49.3	0.2	51.5	0.7
Dependency ratio - young age	20.6	18.9	0.3	21.6	0.8
Dependency ratio - old age	35.8	53.8	0.2	69.3	1.1
Economic dependency index of the population	56.4	72.7	0.3	90.2	1
Mean age at death	80.7	84.2	0.1	86.8	0.1
N.of newborns	401444	408637	16600	377074	22738

Table 1. Main demographic indicators to 2050 (average values and mean square deviations). Authors' elaboration.

The estimated number of births is also presented; our assumptions, in accordance with Istat's (2022) forecasts, predict an increase in the average number of children per woman from 1.21 to 1.50. The consequence would be an

initial gradual increase in births (from 401,444 in 2019 to 408,637 in 2035). Subsequently, due to the reduction of female cohorts at younger ages, the number of births will decrease to 377,074 in 2050.

The trend in the total population is expected to decrease from about 59 million in 2019 to an estimated 55 million in 2050. The gradual reduction of the population combined with progressive ageing adds a further demographic problem. Migration flows, from the analysis of the estimates made, play an important role, although not enough to compensate for the existing imbalances.

3.2 Forecasts of foreign population

Through demographic projections it is possible to outline the possible future development of the foreign immigrant population. This is the result of particular scenarios established a priori. Through this projection it is possible to make some considerations on the amount and age composition of the foreign population resident in Italy in 2050. Once the foreign population resident in Italy in 2019 has been selected, the assumptions underlying the proposed model provide for the adoption of the same mortality, fertility and migration parameters previously used, in accordance with the Italian population forecasting model. In particular, the same inflows of immigrants will be assumed. Ultimately, we will assume the demographic characteristics of foreign immigrants and natives to be very similar, which is likely as time goes by, conforming and integrating with the socio-cultural patterns of the hosting country. These choices represent a good approximation of reality, although some important clarifications must be made. Considering the fertility, the literature shows as the reproductive behavior of immigrant women and their migration history are strongly connected and the years spent in the host country should be taken into account. For example, international studies highlight how fertility tends to decrease immediately after the arrival in the host country (Alders, 2000). Moreover, specific surveys on Italy showed that the reproductive behavior of immigrant women changes strongly depending on the country of

origin and the reasons for migration (Mussino and Strozza, 2012). With regard to mortality, depending on the geographical area of origin, both the causes of death and the level of total mortality may vary greatly (Fedeli et al., 2015; Pacelli et al., 2016). It should also be mentioned that, generally, migrants have a greater propensity to emigrate again and to move than natives; this tendency is greater among migrants coming from more remote countries. The approach proposed here is meant to be an experiment compared to the more tested studies already carried out to assess the 'rejuvenation' effect of the migration component on the demographic ageing of a population. In fact, 'what-if' models are generally used that compare a projection model that incorporates migration with another excluding it (Le Bras, 1991; Golini, 1998). Graph 2 compares the two age pyramids of the foreign immigrant population in the year 2019 and its projection to 2050. Based on the described assumptions, the immigrant population grows more than twice as fast overall

(from about 5 million to 12.8 million). In addition, the age structure and relations between generations will change. In fact, while in 2019 the foreign population is mainly composed of individuals of working age and children of pre-school and school age, in the near future it will lose this peculiarity and begin to align with the native population. According to estimates, the average age of the foreign population will rise from 34.8 years to 43.6. The dependency ratio of the population will increase from the current 28.4 to 57.0. In addition, there will be a large increase in the cohorts over 65 years of age, which will cause the old-age index to rise considerably (from 25.5 to 145.5). We can therefore conclude by saying that if the assumptions underlying our model are confirmed, the population of foreigners will also be affected by a progressive ageing process.

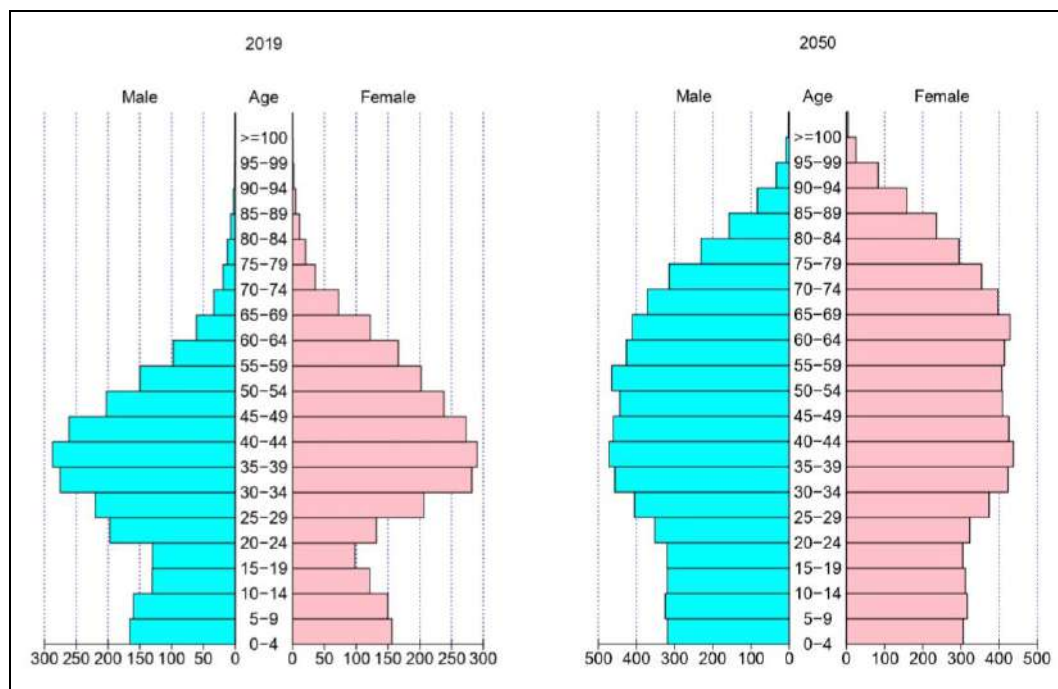


Figure 2. Foreign population in 2019 and its projection to 2050. Authors' elaboration.

4. Conclusions

Forecasting demographic scenarios is of fundamental importance for undertaking policies that safeguard the country's productive and social structure. The Istat produces demographic forecasts for the Italian population with a 50-year horizon and predicts an acceleration in the ageing of the population, which can only be partially offset by an increase in fertility (which is difficult to predict at present) and by new entries of people from abroad. It is more difficult to make forecasts on the migration component. Once the pandemic shock has been overcome, it is assumed that immigration will get the average levels registered in the five-year period 2015-2019 starting from the year 2023. The foreign component has contributed to reducing the decline of the Italian population and particularly the working-age population. By 2036, Italy will lose 3.5 million individuals of working age with -24.7 percent in the 35-54 age group, -7.4 percent in the 15-34 age group, and +17.6 percent of workers in the 55-69 age group (Istat, 2019). In the next years, the migratory balance will be always positive and growing, but not sufficient to compensate for the decrease in population resulting from progressive ageing and the reduction in births.

The forecasts to 2050 produced in this study show a decrease in the resident population with significant ageing, which also concerns the foreign component of the resident population: the dependency ratio among foreigner's resident in Italy would rise from 28.4 to 57.0, values like those of the Italian population observed today.

Among the limitations of the study it is worthwhile to mention the estimated variability of the predicted demographic indicators, that is unexpectedly low, due to the intrinsic hypotheses of the adopted methods. By using different approaches this aspect can be improved. The forecast of the foreign population is affected by the assumptions adopted on the forecast of demographic parameters, which are assumed to be similar to those of the resident population. This trend has been observed in the long run in many countries (Murphy, 2016), and inevitably results in the age structures of the foreign and native population tending to resemble each other.

The results of the prevision can be used to develop knowledge related to population growth in a geographical perspective and interpreted through arguments and assumptions of dominant theories of population change in time and space for didactic purposes.

Acknowledgements

We are thankful of Prof. Salvatore Bertino for his advice in methodological issues.

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Exploring immigrant gaps in education: empirical evidence

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Received: January 2023 – Accepted: March 2023

Abstract

Migratory background is known to influence students' school performance, both in reading and mathematics and science literacy. Using data from the OECD PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2018, we analyze the differences in scores between immigrant and native-born students in Italy, considering the variables that most influence the existing gaps. To better understand this achievement gap through econometric analyses as the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition (Oaxaca, 1973; Blinder, 1973), our study analyzes the role played from other variables (i.e. gender, social and economic background, motivational variables, school context, school address) and how these differently influence the education gap of students with a migrant background, in the different subjects. The decomposition results suggest that the differences on PISA assessment from immigrant and non-immigrant student are all significant but larger in reading and science than in mathematics. On these matters, the study confirms the relevant weight of the language spoken at home by the student.

Keywords: Migratory Background, School Performance, Reading Literacy, Mathematics Literacy, Science Literacy, PISA Test

1. Introduction

Geography and classroom management with high shares of migrants are highly correlated. The subject is indeed very useful in the promotion and dissemination of values linked to active citizenship, as many studies claim. Indeed, it would not only help to describe the earth, but also to discover new worlds (Alaimo et al., 2015).

Specifically, by studying this subject, anthropological aspects relating to world populations are also known, and clearly, this type of teaching becomes very useful in classes that experience the proximity of peers from other geographical areas.

Many studies currently indicate that foreign families and young people choose education and training as their goal. This choice is motivated both to possess active citizenship tools and to

compensate through study for the formal social rights they are denied. Moreover, a strong motivation lies in the increased job opportunities that could overcome the immigrant status to which they would eventually be condemned. To sum up, gaining recognition in the social sphere also concerns the possibility of greater approval from others (Colombo, 2014).

Although foreign families are motivated, the drop-out rate in 2020 was three times higher than that of the native population. Moreover, it would appear that it is the 17-18 year olds who drop out of education and training systems prematurely (Ministry of Education, 2021). School participation is thus part of a set of indicators useful to measure the level of integration and is considered as an element of stability and improvement of the migrants' situation (Cesareo and Blangiardo, 2009).

It seems important to invest in reception, inclusion and integration processes. Firstly, because in numerical terms migrants can integrate and increase pupils per class. Secondly, it is important to remember that migrants can significantly enrich an "internationalised mindset". Many researches highlight this strong relevance of immigrants in terms of new ideas and perspectives arising from the "suspended" adolescents' condition of immigrant origin (Besozzi et al., 2009; Colombo, 2010).

Apparently, students involved in "mixité scolaire" demonstrate greater adaptability in terms of inequality of entry, which can be overcome without further specific action. Of course, remain several factors that exacerbate or mitigate the problems associated with school migration. First, there are the socio-demographic aspects relating to the ratio of foreigners to total Italians. Then there are the cultural factors in terms of adequate preparation for reception by school facilities, teachers and families. Moreover, among the most important factors, there is that relating to the duration of immigrants' school insertion, where time stands out as a stabilising and channelling factor (Colombo, 2014).

The teaching of geography would indeed promote opportunities for inclusion in schools through the enhancement of differences. Working and living with children often means coming into contact with different types of

differences: gender, physical ability, cultural heritage, family background, or economic availability (Gallinelli and Malatesta, 2018).

Geography becomes fundamental in this historical moment in which the processes of cultural globalization are creating a complex socio-territorial context which is increasingly difficult to interpret and teach (Giorda and Zanolin, 2020).

Despite the great efforts that are made in terms of education to be able to transmit the values of active citizenship, the condition of "pupils of foreign origin" if accompanied by long periods of school failure could lead to serious damage to the life of the individual from an economic and social point of view, as well as affecting society as a whole for the same reason.

According to the sociological approach, education (understood as participation in education) and educational success would be essential for the redistribution of social resources.

Furthermore, according to the same approach, the presence of foreigners in the classroom and the formation of classes made up of different ethnic groups would be seen as a penalization because they encourage the growth of further inequalities such as the cultural belonging, the differences in terms of citizenship status and socio-economic differences.

In this sense, many studies aim to investigate further which variables most influence inequality in learning and final results and try to propose policy making solutions (Colombo, 2014).

Immigrant and non-immigrant students gap in academic performance is widely studied in literature (Marks, 2005; Mostafa, 2010) but understanding the factors that most affect this gap is a debated topic on which there is not clear interpretative agreement.

Our paper is aimed to estimate the differential between immigrant and non-immigrants students' scores in the fields of science, mathematics and reading. A high level of reading performance is important for all disciplines for which reading is required. Reading can therefore influence academic achievement in all subjects such as science, history, geography etc. For these reasons, we think it is important to verify which variables most influence the difference between natives and foreigners, thus contributing to school failure and integration difficulties.

2. The educational disadvantages of young migrants

Many studies tend to compare school systems by referring to macro-indicators, comparing educational models and political systems at an international level (Entorf and Minoiu, 2005; Micklewright and Schnepf, 2006). Other studies focus their theses on the unequal availability of human capital and of resources for foreign students, arguing that in many countries the parents of immigrant students tend to be less educated, work in lower-level jobs, earn lower incomes, hold generally less wealth (Ammermueller, 2007; Archambault et al., 2017; Murat and Frederic, 2015; Teltemann et al., 2022).

The line of research focusing mainly on background highlights how socio-economic disadvantages are sometimes compounded by other factors, such as parental attitudes towards schoolwork or the educational aspirations of parents and immigrant students themselves. In these cases, the greater propensity to attend vocational schools has been highlighted by many studies (Barban and White, 2011; Kao and Thompson, 2003).

The preference for vocational schools seems to be associated with the measure of family income and generates a self-selection in which brighter students are more likely to choose “better” school paths (Bratti et al., 2007). This is also the case in Italy, where in particular, the risk of school delay or dropping out for foreign students is significantly higher, even net of social origins (Azzolini and Barone, 2013).

However, educational choices seem to be mediated accurately by educational attainment and, therefore, mainly by academic difficulties rather than a preference for non-academic paths (Cebolla-Boado and Garrido Medina, 2011). Deepening the link between these elements seems undoubtedly relevant. Human capital disadvantage added to educational disadvantage is also reflected in access to the labour market and with inevitable implications for wages (Heckman and Mosso, 2014).

The disadvantage in terms of human capital added to the educational disadvantage is also reflected in access to the labor market (Heckman and Mosso, 2014) with inevitable implications

on wages (Machin and Puhani, 2003).

Furthermore, less wealth and human capital in many cases also means a gap in the possession of digital devices, or internet connections (Ragnedda, 2018), and there is a growing number of studies that focus on the role of technology also about access to information, all learning, to socialization, which seems to be positively associated with the acquisition of skills, even if only in part (Hu and Yu, 2021).

Finally, language is undoubtedly one of the main mechanisms behind the educational disadvantage of students with a migrant background, and among those most studied. It is well established that migrant students’ level of knowledge of the host country’s language influences their academic success, but it is important to understand to what extent, and the possible role in different school subjects. Limited language proficiency may lead to differences in academic performance, not only in literacy but also in other areas, such as mathematics, in which progress may be impeded by limited literacy skills (Gandara et al., 2003).

Research that focusses on the role of language distinguish between the students’ familiar language used at home and the language used at school (generally referred to as L1 and L2, respectively). In fact, the language spoken at home could reflect not only a greater or lesser competence in linguistic disciplines, but also a greater or lesser degree of integration of the student’s family. The relationship between language use and academic performance is very complex and cannot be resolved with a dichotomous approach, as it seems that linguistic diversity sometimes acts as a resource for academic performance, if on the other hand in the school environment if used with sufficient balance in the language of the host country (Agirdag and Vanlaar, 2018).

Evidence from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures 15-year-old students’ ability to use their reading, math and science knowledge and skills, provides with a scenario of persistent immigration gaps in schooling between different countries. Investigating the performance of students, it would appear that in most countries the scores of immigrant students tend to be lower than those of native-born areas.

However, the gap was not observed in all OECD countries, or has different magnitudes. The different disparities observed in countries are the subject of possible reflection on the mechanisms and channels through which disparities are most amplified.

In 2018, across OECD countries, 48% of 15-year-old immigrant students (first and second generation) cannot speak the language of the PISA assessment received at home (OECD, 2018).

In Italy, the family environment, the high degree of regional heterogeneity and the consequent disparity in terms of the quality of the school system play an important role and influence students' educational outcomes (Agasisti and Vittadini, 2012; Quintano et al., 2012; INVALSI, 2017).

Understanding the factors that increase the gaps between immigrant and non-immigrant students appears very useful for the construction of educational models in the way of facilitating social inclusion and promoting equality in educational and career opportunities for all students. Reflection on these factors appears even more urgent because of the growth of migratory flows appears constant.

The research aims to analyze the academic performance of foreign students in Italy and the relationship with some individual, educational, or socioeconomic variables previously discussed such as background, home language, school climate, digital resources, the class or school they attend. Moreover, we analyze the differentials in distribution of academic performance.

3. Data and Methods

The PISA Survey (Programme for International Student Assessment) is carried out by the OECD every three years. The central aim of this survey is to investigate about the skills in reading, mathematics and science of 15 years old students, and what they can do with what they know.

This paper analyses the survey of 2018. The main dependent variables are alternatively the mathematic, reading and science scores.

Based on the availability of PISA data, the covariates included in the equation of academic scores were the characteristics of the individual, family, academic background (Table 1).

We consider “Students with an immigrant background”, those students whose mother and father were both born in a country other than that where the student sat the PISA test. “Non-immigrant students” are students whose mother or father (or both) was/were born in a country other than that where the student sat the PISA test, regardless of whether the student him/herself was born in Italy.

Female	The variable takes value 1 if student is female, 0 for the male.
Escs	PISA index of economic, social and cultural status.
mean_escs	Pisa index of economic, social and cultural school status (ESCS).
Gfofail	Fear of failure. Positive values in this index mean that the student expressed a greater fear of failure than the average student across OECD countries.
Age	Age of students
Belong	Positive values on this scale mean that students reported a greater sense of belonging at school than the average student across OECD countries.
Mastgoal	Learning goals (MASTGOAL). Positive values in the index indicate more ambitious learning goals than the average student across OECD countries.
Disclima	Disciplinary climate. Positive values on this scale mean that the student enjoyed a better disciplinary climate in language-of-instruction lessons than the average student across OECD countries.
cell3p	Variable indicating the possession of 3 or more mobile phones with internet access at home
vocat_school	Variable indicating the vocational school path
lang_at_home	The variable takes value 1 if the language of origin country is spoken at home, 0 otherwise

Table 1. Variables included in the estimates.

In order to estimate the amount of the differential between immigrant and non-immigrants students scores, we applied the OB decomposition (Blinder, 1973; Oaxaca, 1973; Jann, 2008). This method allow us to distinguish which part is due to the differences in characteristics included in model estimations and which part remains unexplained. We estimated the threefold decomposition, dividing math, science and reading scores differences into endowments (E, due to differences in the predictors), coefficient (C, the contribution of the unexplained component) and interaction effects (I, indicating simultaneous differences) between the two groups:

$$E = \{E(X_{NI}) - E(X_I)\} \beta_M \quad (1)$$

$$C = E(X_{NI})(\beta_{NI} - \beta_I) \quad (2)$$

$$I = \{E(X_{NI}) - E(X_I)\}(\beta_{NI} - \beta_I) \quad (3)$$

Our reference group are immigrants. The endowments component designates the expected change in the scores of the immigrant group if the group is characterized by the predictor levels of the non immigrant group. The coefficient effect indicates the expected change in mean scores of the immigrant group if the immigrant group had the non immigrant group's coefficients.

$$R = \{E(X_{NI}) - E(X_I)\} \beta_{NI} + E(X_{NI}) (\beta_{NI} - \beta_I) - \{E(X_{NI}) - E(X_I)\} (\beta_{NI} - \beta_I) \quad (4)$$

To observe the decomposition of the immigrant/non-immigrant students-gap along the distribution we apply the OB decomposition by computing RIF regressions proposed by Fortin et al. (2011). We performed an OB decomposition for 10th, 50th and 90th percentile based on estimates previously obtained (Firpo et al., 2018).

4. Results

We use the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition (Oaxaca, 1973; Blinder, 1973), originally used in labor economics to decompose earnings gaps, to discriminate the part of the gap that can be explained by differences in observed variables from the part that remains unexplained.

The Oaxaca results (Table 2) show that the differential between non immigrants and immigrants is slightly smaller for mathematics (33 points), and higher for science (39 points) and reading (40 points). Most part of this differential seems to be explained by the variables we considered in the model. In particular for mathematics, the differential connected to the discrimination effect is lower (5 points). While it is higher for the sciences (14 points).

The variables which explain better the differential are the school socio-economic index and the language spoken at home. At school level, as the socio-economic level of the school increases, the difference between non-immigrants and immigrants increases (14 points).

It is interesting to note that if the socio-economic index increases the differential for all three subjects (from 15 to 16 points), the language spoken at home affects only the differential in reading (13 points) and science (15 points).

The classroom disciplinary climate perceived by the students seems to influence the differential by around 3 points for all the subjects considered in the study.

The vocational path increases the differential only in reading.

In the unexplained part, the most significant variable are the language spoken at home which is significant for reading and for science (not for mathematics) and owning three or more cell phones connected to the internet, which we hypothesize create not only a proxy of a higher socio-economic background, but also of greater social and cultural capital.

	OB_pv5math y	OB_pv5rea d	OB_pv5scien ce
	b/se	b/se	b/se
overall			
group_1	495.7816*** [0.9433]	487.9717** [0.9632]	477.8865*** [0.9006]
group_2	462.5460*** [2.9495]	446.9883** [3.0629]	438.5354*** [2.9545]
difference	33.2356*** [3.0967]	40.9834*** [3.2108]	39.3511*** [3.0887]
endowments	24.8104*** [3.4292]	34.3996*** [3.5521]	30.1307*** [3.4268]
coefficients	5.2580* [2.8871]	11.2623*** [2.9755]	14.4993*** [2.9009]
interaction	31.672 [3.2425]	-46.785 [3.3372]	-5.279 [3.2582]
endowments			
female	0.5524 [0.4202]	-0.2917 [0.2469]	0.3803 [0.3026]
escs	-0.1815 [2.0602]	-21.946 [2.1088]	-5.4435*** [2.0694]
mean_escs	16.5015*** [1.8545]	14.0033*** [1.7256]	15.8229*** [1.8099]
gfofail	-0.1285 [0.1525]	-0.1709 [0.1762]	-0.1494 [0.1626]
age	0.1308 [0.1506]	0.0267 [0.1074]	0.0761 [0.1208]
belong	11.866 [0.8067]	2.6355*** [0.8675]	0.4704 [0.7942]
mastgoal	-0.7088* [0.3757]	-0.2778 [0.3321]	-0.1804 [0.3185]
disclima	2.7721*** [0.7204]	2.6919*** [0.7204]	3.0996*** [0.7580]
cell3p	0.3613 [0.2522]	0.4954 [0.3117]	0.54 [0.3298]
vocat_school	0.7443 [1.0436]	4.7124*** [1.1520]	0.6452 [1.0396]
lang_at_home	35.803 [2.5290]	12.7694*** [2.6198]	14.8696*** [2.5692]
coefficients			
female	-16.171 [2.7934]	-17.691 [2.8570]	0.8935 [2.7788]
escs	-40.017 [2.6442]	-43.578 [2.7048]	-9.3026*** [2.6490]
mean_escs	15.427 [2.5962]	-1.12 [2.6552]	30.974 [2.5840]
gfofail	0.0042 [0.0776]	0.0103 [0.1913]	0.0099 [0.1831]
age	298.512 [142.5360]	1.794.539 [145.7777]	1.030.495 [141.8121]
belong	0.9329 [0.5868]	1.6218** [0.6349]	0.5757 [0.5726]
mastgoal	-1.8706** [0.8385]	-13.348 [0.8439]	-0.3742 [0.8093]
disclima	0.8099 [0.5511]	0.5817 [0.5543]	0.9380* [0.5546]
cell3p	-78.355 [8.5145]	-15.0981* [8.7097]	-20.6758** [8.4714]

vocat_school	-24.186 [3.9952]	6.677 [4.0895]	-21.008 [3.9724]
lang_at_home	-18.131 [3.5296]	5.9501* [3.6141]	12.7778*** [3.5227]
_cons	-83.263 [143.1313]	-1.593.528 [146.3865]	-74.389 [142.4048]
interaction			
female	0.0752 [0.1409]	0.0823 [0.1457]	-0.0416 [0.1327]
escs	3.258 [2.1551]	35.479 [2.2047]	7.5737*** [2.1690]
mean_escs	-0.7879 [1.3272]	0.572 [1.3567]	-15.819 [1.3248]
gfofail	0.1086 [0.1481]	0.2681 [0.2377]	0.2566 [0.2286]
age	0.0226 [0.1096]	0.1359 [0.1590]	0.078 [0.1259]
belong	-13.573 [0.8410]	-2.3597*** [0.8876]	-0.8376 [0.8281]
mastgoal	0.7587* [0.3955]	0.5414 [0.3714]	0.1518 [0.3307]
disclima	-0.8528 [0.5802]	-0.6125 [0.5836]	-0.9876* [0.5840]
cell3p	-0.1598 [0.1932]	-0.3079 [0.2413]	-0.4217 [0.2826]
vocat_school	0.6751 [1.1168]	-18.637 [1.1537]	0.5864 [1.1100]
lang_at_home	14.267 [2.7777]	-4.6822* [2.8459]	-10.0551*** [2.7809]
N	10146	10146	10146

Table 2. Oaxaca decomposition math, reading and science gap. Elaborations of the authors on PISA data.

The Oaxaca Rif results related to math show that there are from 32 to 36 points of difference between immigrant and non-immigrant students depending on the percentile of the considered score (Table 3). It is important to note that the differential is almost entirely explained by the variables that we have taken into consideration in our study because of the significance of explained part.

The discriminatory effect in mathematics would seem to emerge among those who have the best results, however it is not very significant the unexplained part. The variables that best explain the difference are related to the average of the school socio-economic index, in particular the highest coefficient is up to the median.

Still in the differential of mathematics, the climate classroom it seems to be significant in terms of differential. In particular, it is about 2 or 3 points. For those who have the highest yields, the difference can be made by having a

high number of technological devices in the house. In this case, we have used the presence of several mobile phones as a proxy for a quite high level of Internet-enabled technology devices in the house. In the last part of the distribution, it is also very important the school type.

We will comment on the unexplained part only for the 90th percentile as it is the significant one. In this part, we see weighing more the tenacity and individual characteristics; while the fear of failure, in the unexplained part, would seem to bring closer the two groups.

In the unexplained part, the presence of a large number of smartphone in the family, over three, seems to decrease the differential between immigrant and non-immigrant students in mathematics and reduce the discriminatory effect. As already noted, the presence of digital devices probably flattens the differential because it could be the result of a greater wealth of the family (which could also mean a higher cultural and integration index) and because “internet-connected” devices, such as smartphones, offer information resources and study support. These findings also appear to be supported by those studies which have indicated that moderate, rather than high or no use of ICT, may positively predict academic achievement or scores on computer-based cognition on OECD PISA tests (Odell, 2020).

Reading performance is obviously the most problematic in terms of the difference between immigrant and non-immigrant students (Table 4). The differential decreases as test outcomes increase. The immigrant boys who achieve the lowest results are those who suffer from the greatest differences compared to their native peers. However, the explained part increases in the same way the discriminatory effect concerns only and exclusively the less well-prepared children.

	Math rif_m10	Math rif_m50	Math rif_m90
Overall	b/se	b/se	b/se
group_1	377.1056***	499.5578***	610.6440***
	[2.6671]	[1.6404]	[1.9705]
group_2	341.0488***	466.6339***	575.4964***
	[9.7367]	[6.2761]	[5.9473]
Difference	36.0567***	32.9238***	35.1476***
	[10.0954]	[6.4870]	[6.2653]
Explained	19.6943**	44.9691***	16.8598**
	[9.0100]	[7.0808]	[7.0247]
Unexplained	163.624	-120.452	18.2878*
	[10.7916]	[8.4054]	[10.1221]
Explained			
Female	0.7333	0.737	0.6676
	[0.7067]	[0.6110]	[0.5666]
Escs	-9.523	44.881	10.183
	[6.7977]	[4.5886]	[4.6914]
mean_escs	26.0874***	21.8448***	11.1962***
	[6.9732]	[4.4371]	[2.6771]
Gfofail	-0.0908	-0.2994	0.3694
	[0.4195]	[0.3622]	[0.3803]
Age	0.3468	0.1675	0.049
	[0.5026]	[0.2929]	[0.2458]
Belong	2.879	20.947	-0.0615
	[2.7971]	[2.0222]	[1.6005]
Mastgoal	-12.709	-0.826	-0.8703
	[1.5267]	[0.7870]	[0.6988]
Disclima	3.7920*	3.0392**	2.6424*
	[1.9713]	[1.3462]	[1.4671]
cell3p	10.496	0.2388	0.6294*
	[1.1507]	[0.4857]	[0.3778]
vocat_school	-64.428	25.102	4.8420**
	[5.0054]	[3.0801]	[2.2194]
lang_at_home	21.337	10.9741*	-36.227
	[9.4343]	[5.6340]	[6.0888]
Unexplained			
Female	58.278	11.038	-19.355
	[9.9065]	[6.2249]	[6.3268]
Escs	-2.7319*	0.805	-0.9748

	[1.6254]	[1.0838]	[1.1238]
mean_escs	70.977	45.039	17.795
	[6.5831]	[3.9684]	[2.6012]
Gfofail	0.3228	0.2314	-0.5875*
	[0.4551]	[0.3085]	[0.3128]
Age	-225.05	24.362	947.895
	[558.9440]	[350.1076]	[337.9553]
Belong	-0.3288	-0.8656	-0.1757
	[0.9024]	[0.6513]	[0.5256]
Mastgoal	-10.638	-13.735	-1.6655*
	[2.2307]	[1.1359]	[1.0081]
Disclima	-0.0665	-0.0469	-0.0721
	[0.1208]	[0.0817]	[0.1063]
cell3p	-9.442	-48.873	-33.7442***
	[51.7570]	[24.0494]	[10.8768]
vocat_school	-186.285	29.522	54.806
	[13.3338]	[8.2013]	[6.0411]
lang_at_home	-0.7121	14.817	-15.093
	[2.8262]	[1.6335]	[1.7545]
_cons	2.611.376	-183.863	-430.973
	[571.8139]	[348.7159]	[336.1017]

Table 3. Oaxaca RIF decomposition math gap. Elaborations of the authors on PISA data.

As far as the comment of the explained part concerns: the differential is mainly due to the school socio-economic index, in particular this variable weigh for those who are in the lowest part of the distribution. The sense of belonging to the class also increases the differential in the first part of the distribution.

Even the climate classroom would seem to be an element that increases the differential. Language spoken at home also appears to increase the differential in the 50th and 90th percentiles. On the other hand, observing the unexplained part, the language spoken at home would seem to decrease the discriminatory effect in the first part of the distribution. At the 90th percentile, on the other hand, it is noted that the discriminatory effect increases

	Reading rif_m10	Reading rif_m50	Reading rif_m90
Overall	b/se	b/se	b/se
group_1	363.1784***	492.1031***	604.5344***
	[2.8701]	[1.6845]	[1.9452]
group_2	321.2888***	451.6212***	567.2862***
	[10.2849]	[5.0479]	[7.0938]
Difference	41.8896***	40.4819***	37.2482***
	[10.6779]	[5.3215]	[7.3557]
Explained	172.171	34.5175***	43.2685***
	[11.6699]	[5.8235]	[9.3929]
Unexplained	24.6726*	59.644	-60.203
	[14.4056]	[6.6486]	[14.6767]
Explained			
Female	-1.273	-0.0261	0.0098
	[1.0452]	[0.2419]	[0.3692]
Escs	-124.354	-16.824	79.941
	[9.0809]	[3.4780]	[6.0031]
mean_escs	15.6372**	14.8470***	10.9067***
	[6.5519]	[3.2947]	[3.0610]
Gfofail	0.0244	-0.3095	-0.3265
	[0.4191]	[0.3372]	[0.5142]
Age	0.7586	-0.2851	0.2554
	[0.7764]	[0.3095]	[0.4100]
Belong	7.1834**	18.603	16.504
	[3.2358]	[1.5021]	[2.1460]
Mastgoal	0.4369	-0.7184	-0.2272
	[1.3211]	[0.6725]	[0.6661]
Disclima	3.8798**	2.1247*	18.574
	[1.9456]	[1.0946]	[1.4475]
cell3p	18.991	0.1995	-0.2065
	[1.4686]	[0.3322]	[0.3828]
vocat_school	32.811	37.579	6.0054**
	[4.6089]	[2.4578]	[2.5642]
lang_at_home	-21.751	14.7496***	15.3495**
	[9.4182]	[4.6624]	[7.2646]
Female	-136.311	26.791	0.3769
	[10.3852]	[5.2167]	[7.8309]
Escs	-25.375	-0.4018	0.7441

	[2.1339]	[0.8426]	[1.4076]
mean_escs	-54.332	0.3736	11.491
	[6.4528]	[3.0510]	[2.9830]
Gfofail	0.2944	0.332	0.4021
	[0.4637]	[0.2756]	[0.4853]
Age	-660.107	552.9237**	-312.138
	[605.2173]	[272.8401]	[473.9109]
Belong	-13.844	-0.7526	-0.5225
	[1.0275]	[0.4942]	[0.6933]
Mastgoal	11.955	-14.865	-11.837
	[2.0076]	[0.9852]	[1.0227]
Disclima	-0.0482	0.0186	-0.0236
	[0.1095]	[0.0578]	[0.0776]
cell3p	-753.652	-31.404	96.593
	[54.6865]	[16.7774]	[19.3843]
vocat_school	10.521	0.3102	92.943
	[12.5251]	[6.6438]	[6.8112]
lang_at_home	-5.2757*	21.325	3.5160*
	[2.8983]	[1.3941]	[2.0391]
_cons	7.764.439	-547.0239**	2.827.054
	[624.3254]	[274.5976]	[473.1642]

Table 4. Oaxaca RIF decomposition reading gap. Elaborations of the authors on PISA data.

As far as the sciences are concerned, we again observe that the unexplained part of the distribution is significant in the lowest part (Table 5). The unexplained portion represent for more than 60%. In the remaining percentiles, it does not observe any significant coefficient effect on the differential.

Once again the variable that has the greatest impact is the socio-economic index of the school. The foreign language spoken at home increases the differential from the median upwards. In the unexplained part of the 10th percentile, no variable seems to be significant, evidently there are some aspects that have not been considered in our dimensions, which implement the coefficient effect.

	Science rif_m10	Science rif_m50	Science rif_m90
Overall	b/se	b/se	b/se
group_1	360.7385***	480.5886***	586.6152***
	[2.5496]	[1.6698]	[1.8916]
group_2	322.9535***	444.8824***	555.4217***
	[5.9081]	[5.5503]	[6.3523]
Difference	37.7850***	35.7063***	31.1935***
	[6.4348]	[5.7961]	[6.6280]
Explained	15.7903**	37.5894***	26.3598***
	[7.2037]	[6.4565]	[8.9282]
Unexplained	21.9947***	-18.832	48.337
	[8.2468]	[7.3053]	[12.4833]
Explained			
Female	0.4084	0.346	0.7801
	[0.4221]	[0.3603]	[0.6440]
Escs	-80.059	-61.629	-3.052
	[5.5070]	[3.9032]	[5.1377]
mean_escs	13.9792***	16.2839***	13.6757***
	[3.9112]	[3.5809]	[3.0570]
Gfofail	0.1609	-0.4365	-0.0809
	[0.2738]	[0.4217]	[0.2768]
Age	0.116	-0.02	-0.1777
	[0.2664]	[0.2132]	[0.2919]
Belong	17.682	0.2887	-1.92
	[1.8369]	[1.5711]	[1.7035]
Mastgoal	0.3142	0.2526	-0.0636
	[0.7073]	[0.6886]	[0.6460]
Disclima	18.831	5.0059***	14.676
	[1.2503]	[1.3995]	[1.5199]
cell3p	0.6985	0.1787	0.099
	[0.6487]	[0.3967]	[0.3532]
vocat_school	-24.508	13.538	4.6308**
	[2.9734]	[2.5046]	[2.3368]
lang_at_home	69.186	20.4992***	11.0008*
	[5.1464]	[5.0883]	[6.2913]
Female	49.107	0.4876	62.868
	[6.6751]	[5.5377]	[6.5460]
Escs	-19.009	-1.8757**	-17.048

	[1.3328]	[0.9419]	[1.2230]
mean_escs	-42.265	18.801	43.472
	[3.9428]	[3.3006]	[2.8964]
Gfofail	0.1062	0.5920*	0.0029
	[0.2853]	[0.3159]	[0.2930]
Age	1.326.457	286.823	4.767.023
	[357.9257]	[294.3908]	[347.7988]
Belong	-0.4166	-0.3389	0.4199
	[0.6206]	[0.5132]	[0.5513]
Mastgoal	10.029	0.2634	-0.0104
	[1.1416]	[1.0440]	[0.9942]
Disclima	0.039	-0.1345	0.0034
	[0.0782]	[0.1560]	[0.0775]
cell3p	-0.4591	-84.065	-170.738
	[28.8924]	[20.0899]	[18.7524]
vocat_school	-72.171	-2.171	60.261
	[8.3723]	[6.8067]	[6.2997]
lang_at_home	-0.2998	4.6918***	24.444
	[1.8303]	[1.5012]	[1.7939]
_cons	-102.19	-283.695	-472.61
	[357.8577]	[296.9187]	[350.4309]

Table 5. Oaxaca RIF decomposition science gap. Elaborations of the authors on PISA data.

5. Conclusions

The differences on PISA assessment in reading, mathematics and science are larger in reading and science than in mathematics where are slightly smaller (but still significant).

If in mathematics most part of the variables considered in the study seem to be responsible for the gap between immigrant and non-immigrant students, for reading and science seems also to have a relevant weight the unexplained features.

In any case, in line with the literature, the socio-economic variables and the language spoken at home are those that most affect the genesis of the gap between immigrant and non-immigrant students. In the study, however, the school socioeconomic level rather than the family level, plays a significant role and influences academic achievement in all three

domains analysed.

According to the literature, at the origin of the school failure could also be the schools' unpreparedness to deal with teaching more attentively to foreign pupils, furthermore, excessive mobility of these students in the territory, and socio-economic and cultural deprivation could further contribute to this dynamic. The nationalities of origin that show difficulties particularly in the first generation improve in the second generation in terms of school performance (Colombo, 2014).

In fact, it seems that in school contexts with a high socio-economic level the gap between immigrant and non-immigrant students is emphasized, while students' scores probably tend to get closer in the most disadvantaged contexts. This occurs more strongly for immigrant students with lower scores, for whom the disadvantage of the immigrant condition probably adds up to that of his individual characteristics.

Therefore, the role of the socio-economic variables regarding to the family does not seem relevant, at an individual level, but rather the school socio-economic context, in which for immigrant students with lower performance, in the lower part of the proficiency distribution, the disadvantage is significantly amplified, and more significantly for mathematics.

Good scholastic performance generally concerns children from the Eastern European area. Conversely, young students of the Latin American area are more at risk of school failure due to material poverty and the low social and cultural capital of families (Colombo, 2014).

On the other hand, the role of socio-economic variables on mathematics learning outcomes, and the possible role of these characteristics through background, is an area of study widely explored by scholars (Karakolidis et al., 2016; Bodovsk et al., 2020). Although, these studies tend to focus mainly on the gender perspective, as we know that the female students have lower scores on average (Zhu, 2018).

We have also seen that the increased availability of technological resources at the household level (such as the possession of more than three Internet-connected smartphones) flattens the differential between immigrant and native students, especially with regard to

achievement in mathematical skills. Given the increasing role of digital technology also in relation to learning, this finding will require future investigation. It may be important to understand the extent to which digital technology is closely linked to greater family wealth, or is a sign of a higher cultural and integration index, as well as a tool in the service of studying, learning and socialising.

In the end, analyzing the role of language, our results confirm the relevant weight of the language spoken at home on reading and science.

Although we do not have empirical evidence, we can deduce that all the subjects in which the students understand, elaborate, and explain themselves in Italian can be strongly influenced by reading results.

The language used at home by the student with his family members therefore constitutes a crucial variable not only in the transmission of knowledge, and in strengthening linguistic mastery, in reading and science, but probably constitutes a proxy for the level of integration and general inclusion of the family in the country of destination (Isphording and Otten, 2014).

To sum up, we also underline how the language spoken at home has no effect on performance in mathematics, where the socio-economic context of learning seems to affect almost exclusively.

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Shared reading aloud as a tool to improve integration: an experiment in Porta Palazzo (Turin, Italy)

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Received: December 2022 – Accepted: March 2023

Abstract

The integration of minors with a migrant background is certainly a crucial challenge for our school system. In relation to the linguistic difficulties detected by international student assessment programme results, it is necessary to plan educational activities and policies aimed at strengthening students' ability to understand texts and socialise them in order to promote academic success and the inclusion of first- and second-generation children and their families. This article presents the exploration of a case study in a context with a high rate of migration, namely the Porta Palazzo district in Turin in the northwest of Italy, where the project “Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo” verified the effects of shared reading aloud on a sample of classes from kindergarten to primary and secondary school. The results demonstrate a statistically significant increase in text comprehension and linguistic skills but also a beneficial impact on the well-being of the students by improving the classroom climate while turning the school environment into a more welcoming space. Hence, the linguistic benefits obtained by shared reading aloud, according to the method presented, not only contribute to the educational success of students and to effectively counter early school leaving, but they also provide students and their families with the tools to orient themselves in the country of arrival.

Keywords: Shared Reading Aloud, Linguistic Benefits, Text Comprehension, Cross-Cultural Integration

1. Introduction

Over the past twenty years, the importance of identifying educational policies that promote the inclusion of children and young people from migrant backgrounds in European schools and facilitate their integration into society through education has become particularly evident. Despite the various policy initiatives developed by the European Union in this regard, the results

of surveys reveal that student support in most countries tends to focus more on the educational than on the social and emotional needs of the students. Thus, the research identifies several difficulties that can negatively affect learning and development and that are linked to the experience of people with a migrant background, including the process of migration (leaving the country of origin, learning a new language and new rules at school), the socio-economic and

political context (e.g. policies on the availability of resources for schools aimed at inclusion) and secondary aspects, such as inclusion in the right school year, the different language of instruction and, finally, the lack of adequate teacher training to help deal with diversity and the difficult engagement of families (Eurydice, 2019). These difficulties make it more challenging to achieve positive results as learning problems are accompanied by strong demotivation and a sense of unhappiness (Wang, 2021). Since language barriers are also a major obstacle to the expression of these students' discomfort, it would be important to promote practices which are aimed not only at overcoming language difficulties but which are also attentive to the socio-emotional development and diversity of students in a way that is helpful to all students, including those with a migrant background.

2. Linguistic disadvantages of students with a migrant background in Italy

The increase in the number of immigrant children in the Italian school system has been accompanied by a growth in scholarly interest in analysing their actual chances of learning skills and making school choices on a par with native peers. While school undoubtedly represents an arena of primary importance in the process of minority integration (Colombo and Santagati, 2010, 2014), studies and statistics show that the linguistic disadvantages of the children of immigrants continue to be significant and make this segment of the school population particularly susceptible to early school leaving.

PISA 2018 results show that regarding the perception of reading skills, immigrant students in 21 countries, including Italy, were more likely than non-immigrant students to report reading difficulties. Family background represents a decisive factor in this: on average across OECD countries, immigrant students who speak the language of instruction at home reported that they both felt competent and had little difficulty in reading, compared with immigrant students who mainly spoke another language at home (OECD, 2019). A greater perceived sense of efficacy is associated with a greater share of responsibility assumed and a greater level of commitment to future gratification: while this

consideration particularly concerns adolescents (Bandura, 1993, 1995), it is equally important to take into account the factor of motivation in the lower grades of education as well. Moreover, this perception of experiencing difficulty is confirmed by OECD data on reading skills, which shows that the scores obtained by Italian pupils with a migrant background are significantly lower when compared with non-immigrant pupils (OECD, 2022).

According to the INVALSI 2022 data report, first-generation foreign students attending primary school realise on average a lower achievement than the typical student, showing that the gap in text comprehension is greater than “what is learned on average in half a school year”. Second-generation foreign students also achieve on average a lower outcome than the typical student but with a smaller gap in text comprehension than is observed for first-generation foreigners. Furthermore, the gap between students with an immigrant background and natives increases from sixth to eighth grade, whereas for second-generation students the aforementioned distance is smaller. “This narrowing of the gap leads to support and confirm the hypothesis of the compensatory effect of school on language disadvantage” (INVALSI, 2022).

As far as decoding the text is concerned, the difficulties encountered by foreign students may be the result of socio-cultural disadvantage and reduced knowledge of the language and vocabulary. Other problems may be related to the difference between the Italian writing system and the system of origin.

One of the difficulties most encountered by foreign students is precisely that in understanding and studying the text: this may result from said difficulty decoding the text. Furthermore, they may have problems in understanding the specific lexicon, the microlanguages belonging to each specific subject and the syntactic organisation of the text. Moreover, factors such as demotivation, low self-esteem, inadequate approaches to reading activity and unsuitable strategies implemented by teachers contribute to poor performance both in understanding and studying. Hence, it is common for immigrant boys to have negative feelings towards school and to lack motivation and interest in school, which contribute to

exacerbating difficulties such as those described above (Murineddu et al., 2006).

The learning difficulties observed represent a major obstacle to the integration of these students. In particular, primary school students who do not speak the language of instruction at home report “a lower sense of belonging” and are more exposed to peer bullying (Eurydice, 2019). Also among the other indicators, children of immigrants in this country have one of the highest percentages of early leaving from education and training (Gabrielli and Impacciatore, 2021): the dropout rate reaches 36.5% (Openpolis, 2020), a significant percentage within an already discouraging picture. In fact, despite the progress made, the incidence of early school leavers even among natives in Italy stands at 12.7%, one of the highest ever after Romania (15.3%) and Spain (13.3 %), which is far from the target of 9% by 2030 set by the EU (Openpolis 2022).

3. Shared reading aloud in school: practice to ensure equity

As previously described, in text comprehension first- and second-generation foreign students obtain significantly lower scores than natives (INVALSI, 2022), and low levels of text comprehension translate into difficulties in accessing information, understanding instructions and reading more complex written texts. Considering these aspects, daily shared reading aloud in class represents a strategic and decisive practice to ensure equity in school and promote the educational success of all students (Batini, 2021), allowing to combat disparities and sociocultural disadvantage (Batini, 2022; Brokamp et al., 2019; Scierra et al., 2018; Balfanz et al., 2010; Duncan et al., 2007).

In fact, shared reading aloud is a practice capable of acting on the initial socio-cultural differences in an equitable way, increasing the chances of academic success with long-term effects (Batini and Giusti, 2022). The effects of shared reading aloud on linguistic dimensions and literacy skills make intensive interventions necessary not only in the 3–6 age group but also in primary and secondary schools (Batini, 2021; Batini et al., 2018). Daily practice of reading

aloud in the school timetable represents an action of “cognitive democracy” capable of responding to the social differences that some children carry on their shoulders. The introduction of shared reading aloud is a real action in the direction of a learning democracy capable of supporting and legitimising the achievement and strengthening of fundamental skills for life and school success (Scierra et al., 2018).

4. Linguistic and comprehension benefits of shared reading aloud

The benefits of shared reading aloud are numerous and concern the most varied and vast domains: cognitive, attentive, mnemonic, emotional-relational, interpersonal skills, etc. In this study, the focus is placed on language and comprehension skills.

The results of various studies show that it's possible to obtain benefits in the whole linguistic area with the practice of shared book reading mediated by an adult. The skills that benefit more from reading aloud are receptive vocabulary (Kotaman, 2020; Chao et al., 2015) expressive vocabulary (Zhang et al., 2018; Gonzalez et al., 2010), lexical skills (Wright and Dunsmuir, 2019; Ionescu and Ilie, 2018), narrative production (Baker et al., 2013; Nielsen et al., 2012), vocabulary depth (Van Druten-Frietman et al., 2016; Damhuis et al., 2015), mathematical and scientific language (Nevo and Vaknin Nusbaum, 2018; Hojnoski et al., 2014), and adult–child verbal and communicative interactions (Kozminsky and Asher-Sadon, 2013; Brannon and Dauksas, 2012).

Among the linguistic benefits of reading aloud, there is the improvement of the vocabulary relating to the words, the concepts expressed, the knowledge of the contents and the genre of the informative text (Neuman et al., 2016) as well as greater linguistic skills (Liu, 2014). The effects on vocabulary development are evident already in the earliest years of life (Marjanovič-Umek et al., 2017; Blamey et al., 2012) and continue throughout the school age (Makumbila and Rowland, 2016; Baker et al., 2013). Joint attention and shared book reading are important facilitators of children's early vocabulary development (Farrant and Zubrick,

2012). Through reading aloud, children are able to learn new words with extraordinary speed, inserting up to 3,000 terms a year into their vocabulary (Nagy and Anderson, 1984). Basically, reading aloud exposes children to a richer vocabulary, linguistic forms and varieties that are not part of everyday speech.

Further benefits of reading aloud that have been demonstrated concern the expansion of newborns' receptive vocabulary (Richman and Colombo, 2007) and the improvement of literal and inferential comprehension skills (Çetinkaya et al., 2019). Shared reading aloud appears to have a particular impact on text comprehension from an early age and children's exposure to books plays an important indirect role in the development of future reading skills. Shared book reading supports receptive language development, and receptive language development shows a strong link with reading performance once reading becomes autonomous (Sénéchal and LeFevre, 2002). In this sense, exposure to reading is crucial for lexical expansion; in turn, vocabulary expansion is a fundamental condition for developing autonomous reading skills and reading comprehension.

Again, shared reading-aloud intervention can improve a large number of linguistic skills (Batini et al., 2020) in addition to those just described, such as word decoding, reading speed and accuracy (Hemphill et al., 2015). The evidence underlines how the school, through the use of this practice, can play a decisive role in avoiding the crystallisation of disadvantaged conditions.

5. Method and fundamental principles of shared reading aloud

Shared reading aloud is an innovative teaching practice, which if introduced into the educational and school system, facilitates the development of different types of skills. In order for the didactic action to be effective, it is necessary to follow the correct protocol. The method of reading aloud here proposed was developed by Prof. Federico Batini and his working group (University of Perugia – Department of Experimental Pedagogy) through field research and experiences of local, regional

and national projects for the inclusion of reading aloud as a daily practice in every school order and level (Batini, 2021).

Several fundamental principles of the method must be taken into consideration to ensure the success of the practice. The method requires that reading aloud is carried out by the teachers every day (quotidianity). Reading sessions must become part of the school setting: reading must therefore take place in an organised framework (systematicity). The duration of individual reading sessions must be gradually increased, starting from the attention level of students up to an hour of daily reading in order to lengthen attention spans (intensity). Reading aloud starts with illustrated, short, simple stories with accessible language and content close to the experiences of children and then continues with longer, more complex stories with fewer images, more articulated language and content. Not necessarily linked to the immediate experience of the students (progressiveness). Especially in this context, which is characterised by high levels of multiculturalism, it is necessary to start with the very frequent use of picture books, which act as linguistic mediators. Exposure to images and the progressive connection between words and pictures is a very powerful support to comprehension. The illustrated books have an inclusive nature, as they facilitate access to the words: through the use of images, they play a linguistic support function. Furthermore, the choice of books must offer a plurality of points of view, of languages, of publishing houses and of geographies, related to the targeted classes with which one works (bibliovariety). The variety of reading choices, which should include a large number of genres, themes, cultures, types of characters and narrated events (Batini and Giusti, 2021, 2022), is essential to ensure the inclusion of each participant. In choosing the books, it is necessary to think specifically about the groups in which the project is implemented to make sure that everyone feels in some way represented by the stories, but it is also necessary to go further. Therefore, attention must be paid to differences in appearance, personal characteristics, skills and abilities, culture and geographical origin and the temperament and values of the characters of the stories that are proposed.

The practice of reading aloud involves

moments of discussion during or at the end of the reading session. Initially, open stimulus questions are proposed that are able to act on imaginative and metacognitive skills, which over time will favour autonomous and spontaneous interactions and reflections (socialisation). It is necessary to always take into account the students' point of view: they have the right to choose, to ask not to complete a reading, to express themselves freely and to provide an interpretation (focusing on children and students). Furthermore, this practice is considered an autonomous didactic: the pleasure of reading must not be understood as a moment linked to school evaluation but in its own right and independent. It also requires the participation of all teachers: precisely because reading should not be superimposed on literature and is not the responsibility of a specific teacher, the practice of reading aloud involves the entire class staff.

With this method, experimented in several contexts and with important results concerning natives, we have decided to intervene in the peculiar context of Porta Palazzo. The aim was to introduce the practice of reading aloud in a systematic, intensive, progressive and bibliodiversity-oriented way in school and to motivate and train teachers of all disciplines and levels to integrate reading aloud into their own curricular teaching for preventive, indicative, inclusive and democratic purposes.

6. The experiment of Porta Palazzo: the area and the school

Porta Palazzo is one of the most vital central districts of Turin, historically characterised by the presence of one of the largest open-air markets in Europe and by a rate of immigrant presence historically among the highest in the city. Located between the cathedral and the archaeological area dating back to the Roman period of the Porta Palatina, Porta Palazzo is an urban area in which integration and complex urban coexistence mix.

The project takes place at the Istituto Comprensivo 2 of Turin, which includes 4 complexes intended for classes for the 3–6 age group and for primary and secondary school.

The institute is attended by 1,033 pupils of 35 nationalities, of which 71.6% are of other nationalities. Of these, 56% were born in Italy.

The decision to participate in the activation of a shared reading-aloud project at Porta Palazzo was taken by the school management with the aim of training new citizens to ensure the educational success of students and to help students discover their inclinations and talents. At the same time, the intention was to preside over the territory, a particularly complex area due to the socio-economic difficulties of the families who live there, the linguistic and cultural barriers they experience and the high territorial mobility. In the years in which the project has been active, the institute has demonstrated some important requisites that have contributed to its realisation: human resources made up of motivated teachers, an economic investment in the renewal of the institute libraries, the verticality useful for carrying out scientific surveys and timely external and internal monitoring of activities and results.

The hypothesis that supported our intervention in such a specific context is related to the benefits that shared reading aloud could bring regarding the lexical heritage and understanding that constituted the main areas of difficulty regarding normal communicative interaction in the learning context.

7. “Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo” project: aims and phases

Fondazione per la Scuola is an institution of the Compagnia di San Paolo which aims to contribute, also through the development and promotion of research activities, to raising the quality and effectiveness of the educational system, drawing on the best experiences in terms of innovation of learning processes, facilitating their transfer and assisting schools to acquire, adapt and use them. “Riconessioni – Educazione al futuro” is a Compagnia di San Paolo's programme created by the Fondazione per la Scuola, which experiments with primary and secondary schools of first grade using an innovative educational system model and accompanies them in the process of

technological, organisational and didactic innovation. The goal is to make the school the central hub of social transformation by building a solid community with all the subjects involved.

The project “Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo” was carried out thanks to Compagnia di San Paolo’s “Riconessioni – Educazione al futuro”, Fondazione per la scuola and FISSUF Department (Philosophy, Social, Human and Educational Sciences – Department of Experimental Pedagogy) of the University of Perugia with the scientific coordination of Professor Federico Batini. The “Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo” project has been taking place since 2020 and is currently underway at the Istituto Comprensivo 2 in Turin.

The project aims to include daily and intensive shared reading-aloud activities practised by teachers of children and teenagers with the following objectives: to promote inclusion and integration in the school and social environment; to promote the learning of the Italian language through exposure to stories; to facilitate cognitive, emotional, psychological and identity development processes; and to improve relational skills and the overall well-being of children.

The project has seen different phases and actions. The design phase of “Ad Alta Voce Porta Palazzo” began in 2020. In a first phase, between June and July 2021, the staff involved in the project (educators, teachers, school referents) were trained. Specific training has been provided for each school level (classes for the 3–6 age group, primary and secondary schools) relating to the following: the motivations and effects of reading aloud; practices, techniques and operational strategies for reading aloud; evidence of connection with the ministerial objectives; evidence of connection with autonomous reading attitude; and age-specific bibliographies. The tool of teacher training has had a dual function of motivation and empowerment. The involvement did not concern only teachers of literature or of languages but the greatest number of teachers possible because the reading practices concern the entire teaching staff. As a support tool, between July 2021 and June 2022, bibliographies dedicated to the project were drawn up, updated continually and given to the

teaching staff. Online monthly monitoring meetings have been scheduled since November 2021, in which the research group supported the project actors by responding to any difficulties encountered and providing practical tools on reading aloud. Since November 2021, LaAV (Lecture ad Alta Voce) has been involved, a voluntary movement that supported the project with online and face-to-face meetings on reading aloud.

The phase of measuring reading-aloud effects involved two different moments. Between 11 and 15 October 2021, before introducing the narrative training activity into the classes, the students involved in the project participated in ex ante measurements carried out by the research group in schools. Some abilities (cognitive, attentive, linguistic, emotional, etc.) were investigated through the use of standardised tools specific to the reference age in each school grade. The aim in this first phase was to investigate the average starting level of the classes that joined the project. Since the beginning of the reading activity, educators and teachers have sent the diaries (weekly semi-structured ongoing tools) to the research group, with the aim of reflecting on the activities carried out, on the progress of the practice of reading aloud and keeping track of the development path of children and adolescents. The ex post measurements were carried out between 28 and 31 March 2022, when the classes were again subjected to the skills assessment using the same standardised tools to verify any improvements after 5 months of daily reading aloud.

8. Linguistic and comprehension tests

The main standardised tools used to investigate the linguistic and comprehension effects of shared reading-aloud training are the following. For the 3–6 age group, the Oral Text Comprehension Test – TOR (Levorato et al., 2007) was used. It is a standardised tool that evaluates the ability to understand narrative texts in children aged between 3 and 8 and allows to identify the presence of possible difficulties in the cognitive-linguistic area. The assessment of oral text comprehension is not influenced by expressive skills, and therefore the test can also

be used with children who have difficulties in language production and an atypical linguistic and/or cognitive development. Structurally, this tool consists of 3 forms (A,B,C), each appropriate, in terms of length and difficulty, for a specific age range. Each form includes 2 stories, for each of which 10 comprehension questions are asked.

For the primary school students, an individually administered intelligence test was used: WISC-IV, Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Fourth Edition (Orsini et al., 2012; Wechsler, 2003). It is an instrument used to assess the cognitive abilities of children aged between 6 years and 0 months and 16 years and 11 months. With this tool, it is possible to calculate 5 composite scores useful for describing children's behaviour in distinct cognitive areas. For the present study, the Verbal Comprehension Index (VCI), a measurement of verbal concept formation, was used to investigate the effectiveness of narrative reading-aloud training. This index evaluates the ability of children to listen to a question or request, retrieve information previously learned from both formal and informal education, reflect and reason, give an answer and express thoughts verbally. It is a good predictor of academic readiness and achievement orientation but can be influenced by background, education and cultural conditions.

9. Data analysis

The data collected within the classes involved in the project were analysed by comparing the trend of the sample responses with the available data of Italian standardised normative samples relating to the single tests used. The aim was to verify if there were any variations over time in the positioning of the group exposed to reading-aloud training with respect to the average scores expected by age and to the performance ranges provided by the qualitative descriptive classifications of the single test.

Furthermore, the effect of narrative training was calculated by comparing the average variation over time of the results obtained in the individual tests for the group subjected to reading aloud with the average variation over

time for selected control groups (classes not subjected to any intervention reading who continued with their normal educational-didactic activities). A mixed model with a 2x2 design was used to verify the effect of the narrative training, where the variable "time" (with two levels: time 0 and time 1) constitutes the within-subjects factor, while the variable "group" (with two levels: control and experimental) represents the between-subjects factor. The group-time interaction provided the measure of the significance of the intervention's impact in the experimental classes compared to the control. The results shown below highlight the increases (and possible decreases) of the two groups, experimental and control, between the first and second test administration.

10. Results for the 3–6 age group

The results obtained for the 3–6 age group on narrative text comprehension skills using the TOR are presented below. On a sample of 60 children aged between 3 and 6, an analysis was carried out to compare the trend in the answers obtained with the data available from the Italian standardised normative sample (composed of 967 children). The aim was to verify if there were variations over time in the positioning of the reading-aloud group with respect to the average scores expected by reference age. We previously knew that the sample would be below the expected average for the corresponding age; however, the purpose was to verify how much it was possible to reduce the gap between scores after shared reading-aloud training.

Figure 1 shows the increase over time of the positioning of the sample exposed to the reading-aloud training compared to the expected average score for the reference age according to the test norms. Before the narrative training intervention, the sample was on average 2.4 points below the expected performance for the age; at the end of the daily reading-aloud activity, the average result of the sample classes is close to the normative average, positioning itself only 0.4 points below it. The average increase in the classes is therefore 2 points on a total scale of 10 (Table 1). It can be easily hypothesised that if 2 points were earned in 5 months of training (using the normative

averages aligned to the different pre- and post-training ages), continuation of this activity would be able to completely eliminate the gap.

were not subjected to any reading-aloud training and continued with the normal educational-didactic activities.

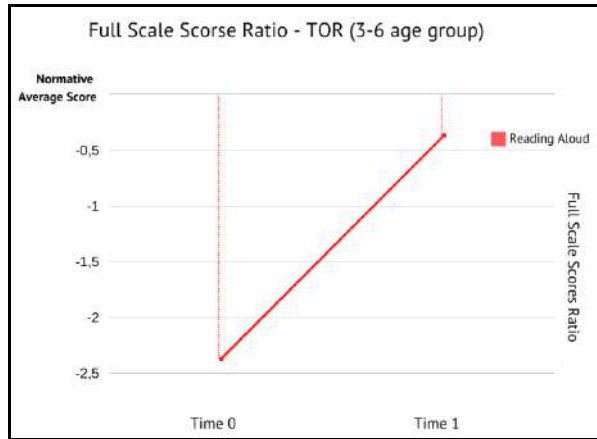


Figure 1. Increase in the positioning of the reading-aloud sample compared to the expected average score for the corresponding age.

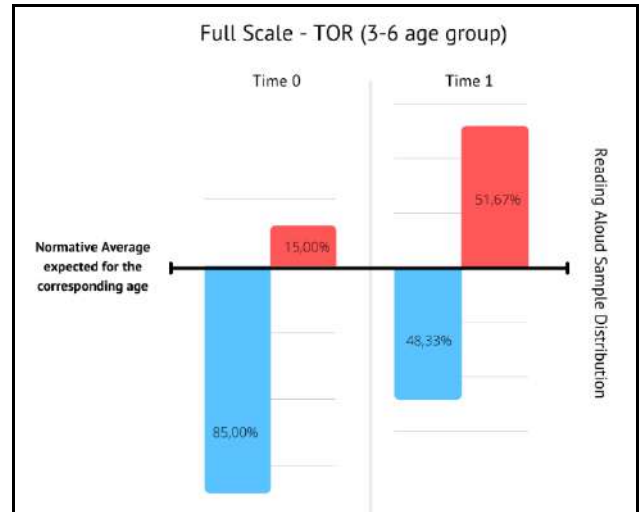


Figure 2. Different distribution of reading-aloud sample with respect to the normative average before and after narrative training.

Ratio between sample average and normative average – Full Scale TOR (3–6 Age Group)	
Time 0 Score	2.4-
Time 1 Score	0.4-
Increase Score	2.0

Table 1. Ratio between reading-aloud sample average and normative average before and after narrative training, and related increase score.

Full Scale – TOR	Time 0	Time 1
< Normative Average	85.00%	48.33%
> Normative Average	15.00%	51.67%

Table 2. Distribution of reading-aloud sample with respect to the normative average at time 0 and at time 1.

Figure 2 instead shows the different distribution of the sample before and after the narrative training. At time 0 (pre-training), 85% of the sample has a performance on oral text comprehension that is below the normative average expected for the corresponding age, at time 1 (post-training); 51.67% of the sample is above it (Table 2).

Further investigation was conducted calculating the effect of narrative training by comparing the average variation over time of the results obtained for the reading-aloud (experimental) group with the average variation over time for a control group (consisting of 60 children aged between 3 and 6). As a control group, classes from different Italian territories and from different socio-cultural contexts were selected (group randomly selected from a large sample of the Tuscany region). These classes

From the baselines analysis, it is possible to observe a significant difference in the average starting scores of the two groups considered. The reading-aloud group shows a much lower performance than the control group at time 0 (before narrative training). The experimental group obtains an average starting score of 2.55 against a score of 5.23 for the control sample (on a total scale of 10 points). This result can be read considering the type of test used, developed in Italy and with a standardised normative sample made up of subjects of Italian nationality. It is not difficult to understand the positioning of the experimental sample if one takes into consideration the socio-cultural context described above and the plurality of nationalities of origin of the subjects making up the experimental group. On the other hand, as already mentioned above, the selected control group is made up of children aged 3 to 6 with an

almost clear majority being of Italian nationality and coming from different Italian territories. Despite this, the meaning of this measurement, albeit carried out with culturally calibrated tools that don't take into account the different nationalities of origin, lies in the schooling processes that see the children of the project attend the educational school system in Italy, with Italian as their language of learning.

Despite this, what emerges from the analyses conducted using a 2x2 mixed model is a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$; observed power = 0.982) in the increase of oral comprehension skills between the two groups. The experimental group, despite starting from an initial score of 2.55, reaches a final mean score of 4.68, showing an increase of more than 2 points after narrative training. Instead, the final mean score of the control group is 5.70, with an increase of 0.47 (Table 3). Figure 3a shows how the reading-aloud group, although starting from an average score lower than the control group, at time 1 positions itself close to the performance of the control group. Figure 3b instead shows the significant difference between the increment levels of the experimental group (increment = 2.13) and the control group (increment = 0.47).

Full Scale – TOR	Time 0	Time 1	Increase
Control	5.23	5.70	0.47
Reading Aloud	2.55	4.68	2.13

Table 3. TOR average and increase scores of the control group and the experimental (reading-aloud) group.

11. Results for primary school

The results obtained for the primary school on verbal concept formation using the Verbal Comprehension Index (VCI) of WISC-IV battery are presented below. On a sample of 31 children in primary school, an analysis was carried out to compare the trend in the verbal comprehension average scores obtained with the data available from the standardised normative sample. The aim was to verify if there were changes over time in the positioning of the group exposed to reading-aloud training with respect to the performance ranges provided by the qualitative descriptive classifications of the

test. A score of 70 was used as the normative cut-off value, which, according to the alternative classification of indices/IQ by Flanagan and Kaufman (2004), represents the score at the lower limit of the normative average.

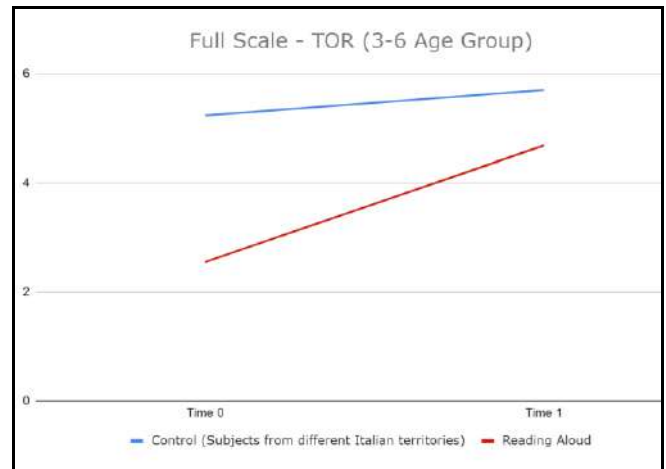


Figure 3a. Differences in TOR average scores at time 0 and time 1 for the experimental group and the control group.

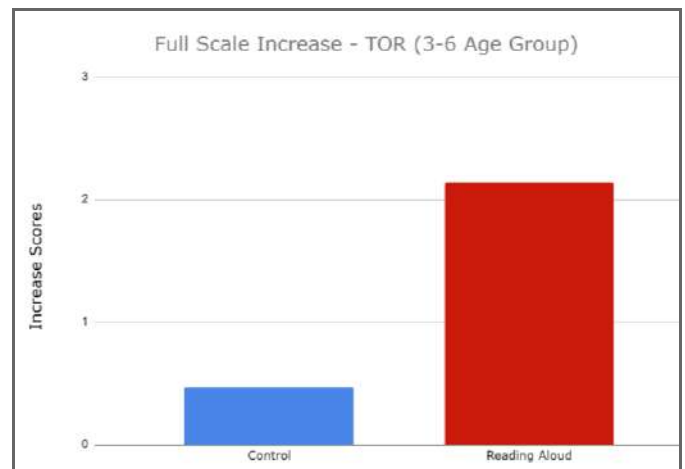


Figure 3b. Difference between the increment levels of the experimental group and the control group.

Figure 4 shows the increase over time of the positioning of the sample exposed to the reading-aloud training compared to the cut-off value corresponding to the lower limit of the normative average. At time 0 (before narrative training), the sample was on average 4.77 points below the normative cut-off value; at the end of the daily reading-aloud activity, the average

result of the sample classes was 15.94 points above it, with an increase of 20.71 points (Table 4).

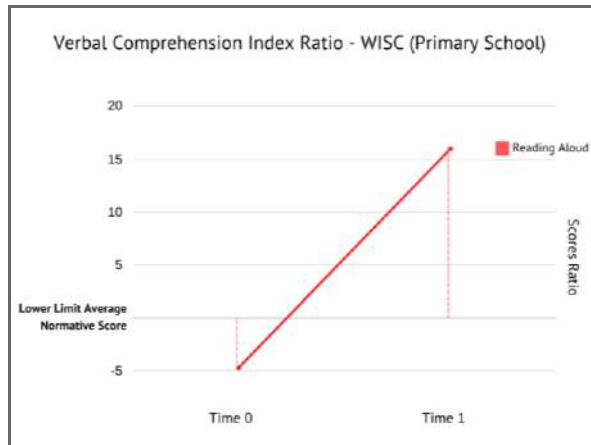


Figure 4. Increase in the positioning of the reading-aloud sample compared to the lower limit of the average normative score.

Ratio between sample average score and lower-limit average normative score – VCI)	
Time 0 Score	4.77-
Time 1 Score	15.94
Increase Score	20.71

Table 4. Ratio between reading-aloud sample average and lower limit of average normative score before and after narrative training, and related increase score.

In Figure 5, it is possible to observe the different distribution of the sample before and after the narrative training. Before reading-aloud training, 62.50% of the sample has a performance on verbal comprehension index that is below the cut-off value corresponding to the lower limit of the normative average; after narrative training only 25% of the sample is below it, while 75% is above it (Table 5).

Also, for this age group, further investigation was conducted to verify the effect of reading-aloud training by comparing the average variation over time of the scores obtained for the experimental group with the average variation over time for a selected control group (consisting of 26 children at primary school). As a control group, classes from different Italian territories and from different socio-cultural

contexts were chosen (group randomly selected from a large sample of the Tuscany region). These classes continued with the normal educational-didactic activities in school, and children were not subjected to any reading-aloud training.

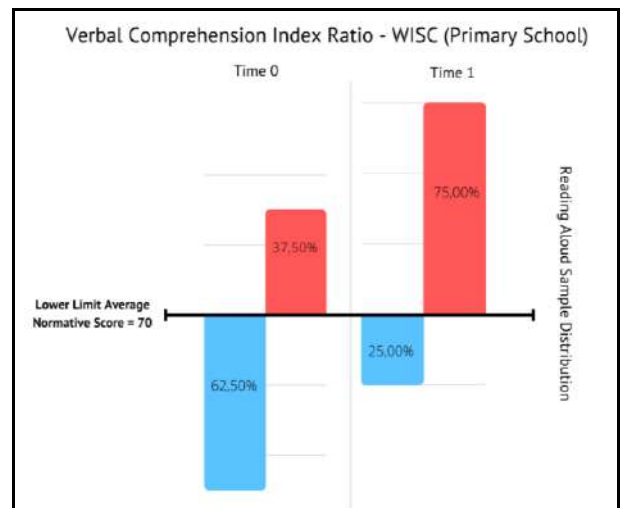


Figure 5. Different distribution of reading-aloud sample with respect to the lower limit of normative average score before and after narrative training.

VCI (Primary School)	Time 0	Time 1
< Lower-Limit Average Normative Score	62.50%	25.00%
> Lower-Limit Average Normative Score	37.50%	75.00%

Table 5. Distribution of reading-aloud sample with respect to the lower limit of average normative score at time 0 and at time 1.

From the analysis of the baselines, a significant difference emerges in the average starting scores of the two samples. At time 0, the reading aloud group shows a much lower average verbal comprehension score than the control group. The experimental group obtains an initial average score of 65.23 against an average score of 100.54 for the control sample.

This result can be read in light of the method of investigation of the construct under examination, i.e. through the use of a battery with a standardised normative sample made up of subjects of Italian nationality. Also, as

mentioned above, the VCI can be influenced by background, education and cultural conditions. The starting condition of the experimental sample is easily understandable if one considers the socio-cultural context described above and the plurality of nationalities of origin of the subjects making up the experimental group. Furthermore, the selected control group is made up of primary school children with an almost clear majority being of Italian nationality from different Italian territories. Also, for this age group, the meaning of this measurement, although conducted with culturally calibrated tools that do not take into account the different nationalities of origin, lies in the schooling processes that see the children of the project attend the educational school system in Italy, with Italian as their language of learning.

However, from the analyses conducted using a 2x2 mixed model, there is a statistically significant difference ($p < .001$; observed power = 0.999) in the increase of verbal concept formation skills between the two groups. The experimental group, although starting from an initial score of 65.23, reaches an average final score of 85.94, with an increase of about 20 points after the narrative training. The final mean score of the control group is 97.77, with a slight decrease in the mean score of 2.77 (Table 6). Figure 6a illustrates how the reading-aloud group, although starting from an average score lower than the control group, at the end of the daily reading-aloud activity positions itself close to the performance of the control group. Figure 6b instead shows the significant difference between the increment levels of the experimental group (increment = 20.71) and the control group (increment = -2.77).

VCI	Time 0	Time 1	Increase
Control	100.54	97.77	-2.77
Reading Aloud	65.23	85.94	20.71

Table 6. Verbal Comprehension Index average and increase scores of the control group and the experimental (reading-aloud) group.

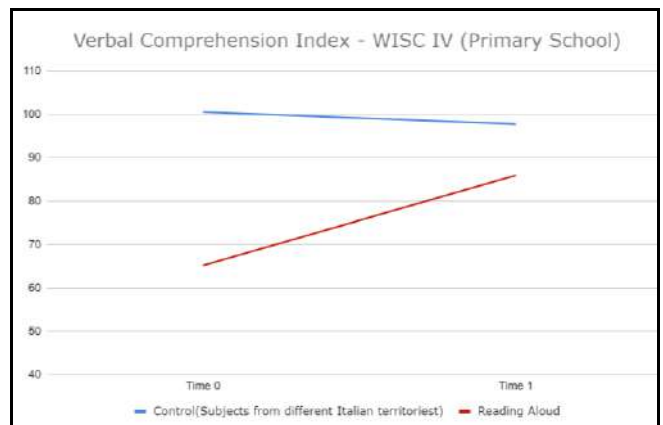


Figure 6a. Differences in Verbal Comprehension Index average scores at time 0 and time 1 for the experimental group and the control group.

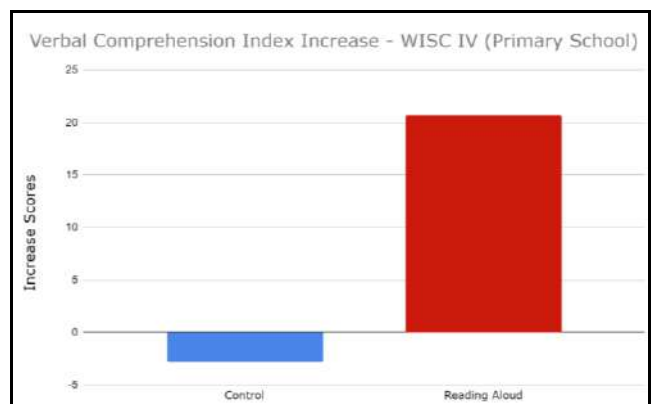


Figure 6b. Difference between the increment levels of the experimental group and the control group.

12. Conclusions

As per the literature, shared reading aloud acted on the dimensions of vocabulary and comprehension and confirmed the hypothesis. The peculiarity of these results lies in the fact that it is usually assumed that reading cannot be used with groups of such diverse backgrounds because they are deemed unable to comprehend the texts due to the language difficulties they display in traditional teaching practice. On the contrary, it has been shown that shared reading aloud has a much faster effect than didactic instructional activities. Indeed, there is an increase in text comprehension skills and even the development, in some cases, of autonomous reading practice.

The effects of this shared reading-aloud method are in fact multiplied by the involvement of the students and the creation of a welcoming and sharing climate created by the stories and the work of the teachers who engage in an activity at the service of all students (Surian et al., 2022). Several researches claim teacher support is an important factor affecting students' achievement at school: students need to feel that their teachers are involved in their education and that they care about their students' well-being (Klem and Connell, 2004). This ensures a feeling of well-being even for those who usually experience a difficult relationship with school, and it contributes to developing greater motivation with respect to school and studying: the qualitative data both collected from the students (who also talk about the class climate) and the teachers confirm what was collected through the standardised instruments.

Finally, the practice of the shared reading-aloud method contributes significantly to the inclusion of students with a migrant background and also their families. The bibliovariety and socialisation components, in fact, constitute a space for mutual understanding based on dialogue and comparison of different experiences, giving importance to an intercultural education activity that in most European countries is considered an autonomous discipline (Eurydice, 2019).

In the meetings with the families of the Porta Palazzo students, it was discovered that the children had gotten into the habit of reading stories in Italian to their parents, causing a retroactive effect on the adults, which contributes to increasing their understanding of Italian, enhancing their involvement in school life as well as their ability to make effective use of information about the functioning of the school system in order to be an active part of their children's education.

As far as the limitations of the research are concerned, it must be pointed out that there is a limited sample of subjects involved in the surveys: it is necessary to extend the field of research to other schools in order to verify the persistence of the effects of the method and its benefits. Since the project was first activated, teacher training has covered not only the Istituto Comprensivo 2 Torino school staff but also teachers, educators and principals from schools

in Turin with a social background similar to the one in Porta Palazzo and with a multicultural student population. This has offered the opportunity to detect the needs of the different language groups present in the district's schools and to implement the dissemination of educational resources in the area (intercultural centres, multilingual bibliographies prepared by experts and linked to individual cultures, etc.).

The continuation of the project will in any case provide an opportunity to observe the longitudinal effects of the method, and the analysis of the results could further confirm the effectiveness of shared reading aloud as a useful tool to counter school dropout.

Reflecting on the critical issues highlighted by the research could also contribute to a much-needed reflection on the actual opportunities that the education system in Italy offers to the new generations of students to ensure their educational success and to transmit, in particular to pupils with a migrant background, a greater sense of belonging to a community in which they can grow, flourish and to which they can make a personal and significant contribution to their own well-being and to that of society as a whole.

Acknowledgements

- Federico Batini wrote paragraphs 3, 4, 5, 6, 11 and 12; Giulia Barbisoni wrote paragraphs 8, 9, 10, 11; and Giusi Marchetta wrote paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 7.
- The authors thank all participating teachers and students for their trust and daily work. The authors also thank the school IC Comprensivo 2 of Turin (IT), the headmaster (Prof. Massimo Cellerino) and the research team of the FISSUF Department of the University of Perugia.
- The authors thank Alessio Surian, University of Padova, for revisions and suggestions, and the Fondazione per la Scuola for supporting this research.

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Spaces and practices of inclusive didactics: a territorial laboratory in Naples

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Received: February 2023 – Accepted: March 2023

Abstract

The paper proposes an analysis of the school experience and urban perception of students with migratory background, in a neighborhood of Naples with a high concentration of foreign nationals. It will collect the first results of the field work realized with the cooperation of the teachers involved as coordinators of education and inclusion activities for students with migratory background, enrolled in the three gymnasiums of the III-IV Municipalities – which include the railway station neighborhoods – where the percentage of non-Italian students reaches the highest level on the urban scale, in view of possible strategies for inclusion. The methodology is mainly qualitative and uses focus groups and in-depth interviews both with teachers and students. The field work, although in progress, points out that the critical issues faced by non-national students affect both the learning and the social process; furthermore, these extend into perceptions of the urban space.

Keywords: Inclusive Didactics, Urban Perception, Students with Migratory Background, Naples

1. Introduction

This contribution aims to present the first contents of a research that was born thanks to the activity carried out by the authors for the project commissioned to AIIG by INAPP on the educational dropout of students with a migrant background (Amato and Matarazzo, in press). Through some focus groups, the critical issues of the school inclusion process and the actions implemented in the city of Naples

between scholastic institutions and non-profit associations were collected to share interventions and good practices to contain the risk of dropping out of school. In that circumstance the purpose of going analytically deep into the topic took shape, starting from the experiences of three high schools in Naples, located in the neighborhoods with a high density of non-Italian students. These meetings also performed a function of connection and exchange of practices between the teachers involved.

The lack of updated data prompted us to proceed with meetings and interviews not only with teachers but also with CNI (Non Italian Citizens) students, in order to provide the research an initial framework in which to continue the study in the following months.

The immigrants' children have a fundamental and strategic role in the host countries because they represent the stakeholders of a social and cultural change. To intercept and deeply examine these processes, the study of school integration is a priority.

The comparative studies promoted periodically by the OECD show that the income differential of the children of immigrants is quite widespread. In Italy there is an extensive literature on this topic based mainly on periodic monitoring: among the many, we consider the production of the Ismu Foundation, focused not only on the Lombardy region (Santagati and Colussi, 2020) and the annual reports on immigration in Italy by Idos (Idos, 2022).

This paper moves from the idea that school as the main environment where to observe the migrant's perception of urban space is strategic. It locates it within the framework of international studies that combine the three focuses of this research itself: city, foreign children and school (Ismail, 2018; Banks, 2007; den Besten, 2010; Demintseva, 2020; Gül, 2020).

This contribution represents only the first step of an ongoing research. As we will demonstrate, the available data on non-Italian students in the Neapolitan schools is not updated, so a purely qualitative approach was the only path to be followed.

In particular, the contacts acquired during the previous focus groups were useful in order to enter the three schools, thanks to the collaboration of the teachers involved. They made it possible to carry out simple observations of school spaces in order to understand the dynamics of interaction even outside the classroom. Furthermore, several meetings and open interviews with teachers allowed us to go back to the history of the policies implemented by every school to support non-Italian students.

If teachers didn't require any selection, because everyone involved in inclusive paths

was interviewed, students were selected according to nationality, gender, age and time of arrival, in order to match different experiences, perspectives and perceptions on school, everyday life and urban space.

The students interviews were realized individually in some school place (auditorium, classrooms, labs) almost always without teachers. At the end of the interview, we asked the interviewed to draw a mental map representing their everyday pathways and their reference points in the neighborhood they live in.

Mental maps are a typical tool of perception geography, although born in others fields of the social sciences (Lynch, 1969). This geographical approach also spread rapidly in Italian urban studies from the second half of the 1970s (Bianchi and Perussia, 1978), to then become rarer from the end of the 1980s until it almost disappeared in the mid-1990s. It has known a renewed interest thanks to the spatial turn in the last decades (Pezzoni, 2020).

These maps combine objective knowledge with subjective perceptions: in our case we used them to catch positive and negative impressions on places more than precise knowledge about the location of geographic features.

2.The city of Naples and its migrations

The city of Naples is an inexhaustible field of research that too often emphasizes a sort of exceptionality or anomaly if compared to the rest of Italy, an exceptional city that would have ordinary characteristics (Amato, 2020). Through the prism of international migration, it is possible not only to read the peculiarities of this city as well as the more "normal" aspects shared with other Mediterranean metropolises, but above all this interpretation allows us to intercept the transformations occurring in different places of the city. The relationship of the Naples with "the other" in recent decades is nothing new but has crossed the history a city which has periodically confronted foreigners, often conquerors and invaders. In the age of the great migration at the turn of the 1900s, the port

of the city assumed the role of hub for transoceanic emigration. Starting from the 1970s it was then affected by immigration, first punctually and then more widely. In an initial step, Naples was interpreted as an intermediate stage of international migration for those who made settlement choices in the central-northern Italian regions. The first entries into the city were linked to Italian colonial legacy: after the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia (1962), some families from the Horn of Africa arrived in Naples. Since the 1970s, Moroccans set up more stable migratory projects that combined itinerant trade with unskilled jobs. Starting in the 1980s, the immigration process took on a more defined form: the presence of Filipinos, Cape Verdeans and later Sri Lankans, Peruvians and Dominicans became more significant, occupying above all domestic assistance activities, a niche in the labour market which it will then be taken by Ukrainians, Romanians and Poles. Also, in the Eighties we witness the arrival of communities from Sub-Saharan Africa (especially Senegalese, but also Ghanaians, Nigerians and Burkinabe). Since the 1990s, it has become clear that the city is no longer a place of transit but rather a place of sedentariness which generates processes of change in the urban landscape. In the last fifteen years there has been a progressive intensification of the foreign presence with a great momentum of the communities coming from the Indian subcontinent: the migratory pressure (foreigners on the total population) went from 3.2% in 2011 to 6.2% in 2020 and then decreased to 5.8% in 2022. In an increasingly complex general context (Arab Spring, economic crisis, refugee crisis, effects of the Coronavirus pandemic, war in Ukraine...) the migrant presence changed and Naples changed with it. In 2022, 53,440 foreigners are officially registered (Table 1). The Sri Lankans are confirmed as the first nationality (14,291 presences) followed by the Ukraine (7,053, first nationality in Campania) and, at a distance, by the Chinese (4,412) and the Romanians (2,261).

Country	Male	Female	Total	% of non-Italians
Ukraine	5,437	16,627	22,064	17,18
Sri Lanka	8,659	7,986	16,645	12,96
Bangladesh	9,411	1,954	11,365	8,85
China	5,100	4,538	9,638	7,51
Romania	3,824	5,102	8,926	6,95
Morocco	4,324	2,191	6,515	5,07
Pakistan	4,739	817	5,556	4,33
Poland	646	2,662	3,308	2,58
Nigeria	1,931	1,283	3,214	2,50
Bulgaria	694	1,933	2,627	2,05
India	1,661	759	2,420	1,88
Philippines	887	1,457	2,344	1,83
Ghana	1,912	410	2,322	1,81
Algeria	1,614	379	1,993	1,55
Albania	1,031	903	1,934	1,51
Russia	206	1,546	1,752	1,36
Senegal	1,506	266	1,722	1,38
Burkina Faso	1,290	256	1,546	1,20
Dominican Republic	764	1,181	1,945	1,51
Brazil	214	988	1,202	0,94

Table 1. Nationality over 1,000 presences in Naples. Source: www.demo.istat.it.

The novelties of recent transformations can be seen in the growing weight of the Pakistani (3,098), Bangladeshi (1,960) and Indian (908) communities, preceded only by the historical presence of the Filipinos (1,708), Nigerians (1,465) and Senegalese (1,174). Eastern Europe also expresses the presence of Poland (937), Russia (803) and Bulgaria (658). The historical presences of the Dominicans (1,000), Algerians (783), Cape Verdeans (708), Peruvians (652) and Moroccans (556) is now stable. The total of foreigners under 19 are 8,853 that is 16.5% of the total present.

From this data we can stress the sedentariness of the pre-existing communities. Now they demand services and citizenship, and the growth of the second generation is associated with the increase in arrivals, whose composition presents increasingly heterogeneous actors, with the increase in unaccompanied minors (de Filippo, Strozza, 2015). Most of the asylum seekers have been placed in temporary reception centers. A solution that appears ineffective due to the extension of residence times and because, at the end of the reception process, these people find themselves joining the ranks of absolute marginality traced on the streets of the city.

There is no updated data on a neighborhood scale (the latest available ones go back to 2016, Amato, 2021), but by now all the neighborhoods are affected by the migratory process. Nonetheless, the districts of the historic center are those most involved. In these spaces of Naples there has been a growing presence in the marginal segments of the housing market and an increase in the entrepreneurial dimension with the management of small shops and itinerant trade (Laino, 2022).

In general, the IV Municipality records the highest percentage of third-country nationals: in 2016, out of 99,321 inhabitants, there were 15,571 foreigners with an incidence of 15.7%. In particular, the districts of St. Lorenzo and Vicaria (which together with Poggioreale and the Industrial Zone make up the IV municipality) are districts with the greatest concentration. The most numerous national group is the Chinese one which absorbed 24% of foreign residents in the entire Municipality in 2016: 56% are males and 44% are females, a relative gender balance which is a sign of a solid

migration project. In second place we find the Pakistanis (11% of the total of foreigners) with a clear male prevalence (91%), followed by the Ukrainians (9% of the total) who, instead, have a clear female majority (77%).

Important evidence of the change in the city is linked to the issues of living, jobs and training as reported in the first survey by Laino (2015). According to this research, the fourth Municipality of Naples confirmed its primacy especially in relation to the presence of non-national students in the schools. The non-profit sector and the associations promoted by migrants are a further element that makes up the multicultural transformation of the city. The significant presence of NGOs with a supply of "low-threshold" social, educational and health services confirms this transformation. If a part of the associative sector has been following the migratory process since the 1990s, an explosion of these stakeholders has been recorded since the 2000s. The fourth Municipality, and partly also the third one, registered the concentration of non-profit organizations, migrants, confessional and non-confessional voluntary associations, trade union structures and tax aid centers (CAF) (Figure 1). Some of these structures have become important reference points for the local schools, ensuring activities, training support and partnerships for projects.

Although the presence of immigrants' children in Naples has been limited up until now (de Filippo, 2011) - if compared to other cities, especially in the Center and the North of Italy - there is no doubt that it is increasing rapidly and is characterized by a wide variety of origins, migratory projects and settlement models, as well as significant heterogeneity in the composition by gender, age, marital status.

In the main groups living in Naples, the prevalence of second-generation minors is now dominant. According to the research the demographer Strozza carried out a few years ago, 95% of Nigerian minors and 87% of Chinese minors were born in Italy. Among the nationalities with a low proportion of minors but almost all born in Italy are the Algerians and the Senegalese. On the contrary, among the citizens of Eastern Europe and the Indian sub-continent, the proportion of minors born in Italy is almost always lower (Strozza, 2016).

3. Old data for a fast process

The hypothesized research suffers from a heavy deficit due to the unavailability of updated data from the Ministry of Education on the presence of CNI in the city of Naples. The most thorough research, promoted by Salvatore Strozza (2016), is based on data from the school year 2012-13. This the same data base is associated with the publication of the urban planner Giovanni Laino (2015) which considers the presence in schools of minors with a migratory background: one of the three elements that together with job and housing make up the interpretative matrix of changes in the city. These two surveys interpret the change taking place on the urban scale and highlight the role played by the central districts of the city in the absorption of CNI students (Figure 2).

The most recent data, unfortunately, is available only on a regional scale: it shows that the Campania region occupies a secondary role compared to other contexts (MIUR, 2022a, 2022b). On a regional level, in the 2020/21 school year, against the absorption of 12% of the total number of Italian students (with Lombardy hosting 15%), the region ranks seventh, registering 3.2% of the total of non-Italian students. And again, combined with the total number of students, the impact of students with Italian citizenship is only 3% compared to the national average of 10.2%. This places Campania in the second-last place, ahead only of Sardinia. Still on a regional scale, using the only parameters available, the generalized decline of Italian pupils in recent years has also affected Campania, historically a region where this rate was increasing: from 928,856 students in the school year 2018/19 to 900,704 in the 2020/21 one.

In the same period, however, CNI students have grown: 27,883 (+606 compared to 2018/19). The constant growth of second generations characterizes the evolution of the presence of students with a migration background also in Campania. This follows a consolidated national trend: in the s.y. 2020/21 there are 12,847 CNI students born in Italy, equal to 46% of the total pupils with a migratory background, compared to a national average of 66.7%.

However, the component relating to the students not born in Italy remains important: of the 27,883 CNI pupils, 8,288 are in secondary schools, that is 29.7% of the total, a higher percentage than the national one, with a presence of students born in Italy of 2,078, that is 25.1% of the total, compared to a national average of 45.6%. These data place Campania fifth from last position on a national scale. Of the 4,313 CNI kindergarten students (15.5% of the total, lower than the national average), 3,034 were born in Italy, that is 70.3% of the total, a percentage impact that is far from the 82.7 in Italy. In the primary school there were 9,690 pupils, accounting for 30.9% of the total compared to a national impact of 35.8%. Also in this case the rate of those born in Italy is growing (5,288, over half of the group) but with values far from the national ones (74.5%). Finally, like the national trends, the presence in lower secondary schools was: 5,592 students equal to 20.1% (in Italy 21.3%), 2,447 students were born in Italy (48.8% compared to 65% on the national scale).

The only change of scale allowed by the available data is the condition of the province of Naples which absorbs 46% of the regional total, with 12,976 CNI students, which corresponds to 2.5% of students enrolled. In kindergartens we have 1,870 pupils equal to 2.3% of students enrolled; in the primaries 4,672 (2.8%); in lower secondary schools 2,678 (3%); in secondary schools 3,666 (2%). These percentages are lower than the regional average due to the high population density of this province compared to the other four of the region. In secondary schools, on which the current research focuses, there is a slight prevalence of high schools (1,399) over technical institutes (1,217) and professional institutes (1,059), a different distribution than the national one of the southern macro-area, where the technical institutes dominate. Out of all pupils, 2.5% of CNI, just under half were born in Italy (6,004). In kindergartens, an impact of 2.3% was recorded, 1.8% (1,267) were born in Italy, while 0.7% were born abroad.

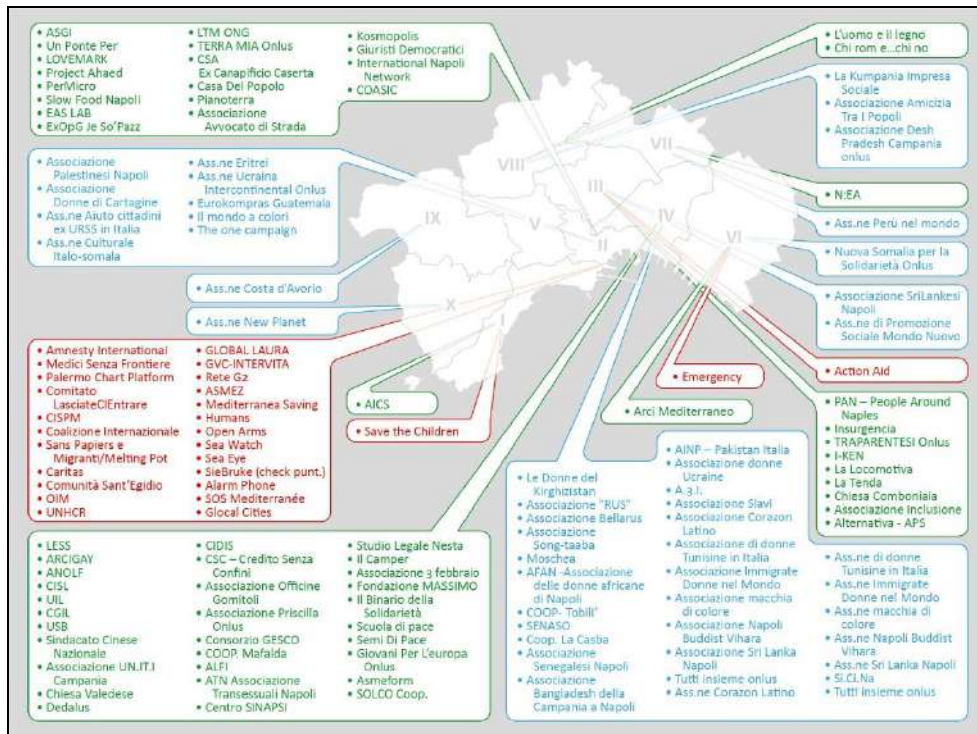


Figure 1. The NGOs for migrants in Naples. Source: Rignoli, 2020.

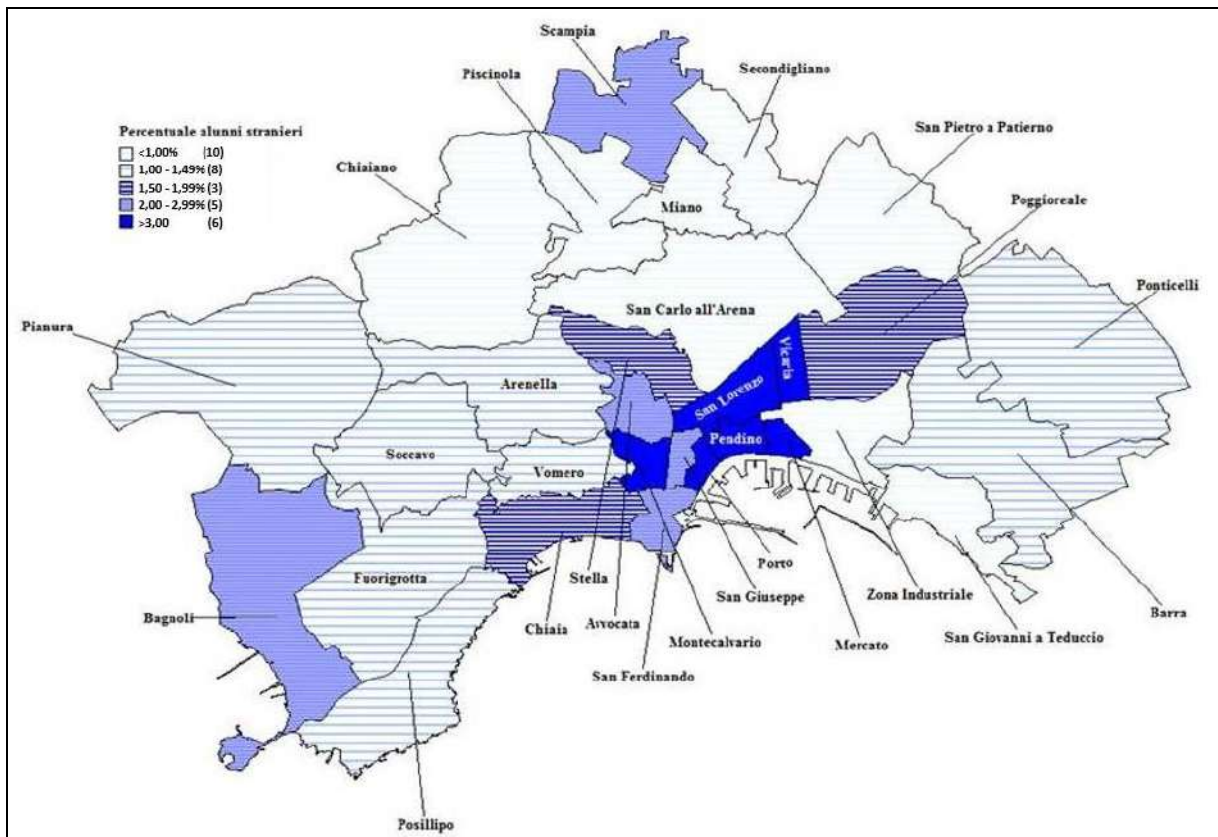


Figure 2. The percentage of non-Italian students (*percentuale alunni stranieri*) out of the total number of students in Naples on a municipal scale. Elaboration on Strozza, 2016.

Moreover, in the primary schools (3% CNI on the total number of pupils) the share of the students born in Italy prevails (2,527 equal to 1.8%). In the secondary schools, however, the total of 2.7% of those enrolled sees the prevalence from abroad which absorbs 1.5%. Lastly, 2% of those enrolled in upper secondary schools record the lowest impact of those born in Italy with 0.5% (988 students). Europe and Asia are the continents most represented among the students of the Province of Naples.

With secondary schools, in the Province of Naples there are 517 institutes of which 90 do not have any CNI pupils, while the vast majority of schools (414) register up to 15%, beyond this threshold there are only 13 schools, including one that exceeds 40%. This is a macro redistribution that follows national trends, according to the schools with a presence of up to 15% of CNI prevail, nevertheless in the central and northern regions the schools with a share between 15 and 30% have grown significantly. Even on a provincial scale, the prevailing nationality is Bangladesh which represents 4%, and therefore most of the regional presence.

4. The field work

The field study is organized in two parts: the first one, dedicated to collect the experiences of teachers involved in inclusive didactics, where we asked critical issues concerning actions for inclusive paths, the second one, dedicated to interviews with the students, in order to collect their perception not only about school and education issues, but also about their life in Naples and the neighborhood they live in.

The choice involved three high schools (Figure 1) located in the central railway station area, sharing a number of non-national students greater than fifty, the availability of human resources dedicated to projects for the inclusive didactics and the availability of specific procedures and activities for their education pathway.

The institutes with these requirements and which accepted participating in the research are: ITIS “Alessandro Volta”, Liceo Statale

“Pasquale Villari” and ITP “Alfonso Casanova”. They are distant no more than 2 km from each other, each located in the III or the IV Municipality. The first two schools are nearer the central station than the third one, that is closer to the historical city center, involving other little clusters of migrant presence in Naples (i.e. the Cavone and Sanità neighborhoods, in the III Municipality).

All three schools have a specific didactic protocol for non-Italian students and a consolidated activity for them so that they are identified in the surrounding neighborhoods as families with migratory backgrounds.

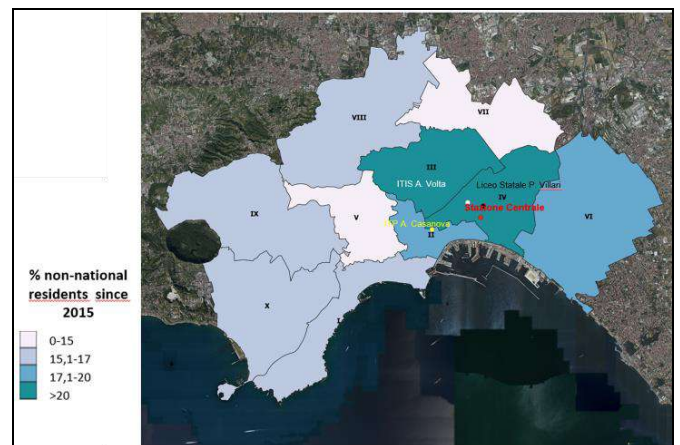


Figure 3. Percentage of non-national residents in the Municipalities of Naples (2015) and location of the schools selected. Elaboration on data of the Municipality of Naples.

Among them, Liceo Statale “Villari” is recognized by the other two institutes as the main pivot for the city of Naples with programs for inclusive didactics. Although the Villari school does not have the highest density of students with a migrant background, it is a particularly important school because it has anticipated the transformation processes involved. This school has focused since the early 2000s on intercultural exchanges with the French context to allow Italian students to experience a wider world. But if the presence of second-generation students was still sporadic, the growing arrival of new arrivals in Italy (NAI) forced teachers to question their practices as they were unaccustomed to confrontation

with new cultures. In this first decade, the few initiatives achieved, seemed in some way forms of folklore. In 2007, with the project “Migrant routes and plural cities: my story and your story” this school became the protagonist through a agreement of understanding with the Dedalus association for various projects to welcome unaccompanied foreign minors (MSNA), training courses in Italian as a second language and above all peer education experiments. The school “Villari” joined the project “October 3rd” for a network of Italian and European schools that deal with the issue of migration, allowing a teacher and two students to attend intercultural workshops in Lampedusa and exchanges with other European schools. In more recent years, in response to the highest dropout rates in the two-year period, an Intercultural commission was created. The main action of this commission is a permanent reception protocol (with exemption from disciplines with dispensatory and compensatory measures) that made this best practice a reference on an urban scale.

4.1 Critical issues and best practices for inclusive didactics of students with migratory background

The most critical issues perceived by teachers are largely linked to the lack of funding projects and to some organizational difficulties. In particular, the insufficiency of available resources weakens the continuity of personalized care and support pathways, that require the constant presence of support, such as teachers for foreigners, psychologists and cultural mediators. The scarcity of funding for projects of didactic inclusion for pupils with immigrant origin also affects the quality and effectiveness of teacher training. In fact, the didactic path is often entrusted to the availability and sensitivity of individual teachers with an increased risk of school failure, with the resulting consequences of disparities in opportunities and evaluation.

A further imbalance that an adequate availability of resources could help to correct is that linked to the tendency, recorded by the teachers involved, of the families of pupils with a migration background to choose to relate with

third sector operators rather than with school, teaching and non-teaching staff. This is presumably for reasons involving language or even the perception of socio-emotional comfort. Having more financial resources would make it possible to give continuity to some of the services supplied by the associations within the school and perceived as a useful support for the orientation and inclusion of both students and their families. This “wishful list” contains the permanent presence of an Italian language teacher as a second language and not tied to discontinuous projects; the creation of structured and mandatory training sessions for teachers; the recruitment of other personnel for the afternoon accompaniment also in the classrooms to support the study and above all the families.

As for the organizational difficulties, an initial bias was found dealing with the criterion adopted for the placement of students of non-Italian citizenship, which takes into consideration the level of education as a priority with respect to age and neglects the risk of penalizing the processes of socialization which also represent an indispensable component of learning.

Furthermore, the application of the ministerial guidelines for the inclusion of pupils with a migrant background (MIUR, 2014, 2022a, 2022b) is uneven. This raises questions of the right to equal opportunities of Italian and non-Italian students, whose protection isn’t guaranteed in an organic and systemic way among schools of the same municipality or, even worse, among class councils of the same institution. The bias due to inclusion based on educational level and not on the student’s age is one of the most critical aspects. A contributing cause of this situation is the role played by school managers, often perceived as weak or in any case not incisive enough for the purpose of adopting homogeneous working methods and criteria within the reference school context. In general, the unpreparedness of the teaching staff to face the change, which is left, as mentioned, to spontaneous actions linked to the goodwill of individuals, is underlined.

If the range of critical issues is vast, so is that of good practices for the care and inclusion of pupils from migrant backgrounds implemented

by school managers and teachers.

The testimonies collected, including those from students, confirm that the best results are those achieved thanks to peer education practices, i.e. the education of students who, on a rotational basis, are called to support their classmates with difficulties. The effectiveness of such a path seems to be farsighted when in a certain sense it prepares cultural mediation within the school itself, starting it from the bottom up as a structural component of the didactic experience. In doing so the foreign students who receive the education among peers prepare themselves in some way to actively replicate it in the future, also making the most of their dual linguistic knowledge. Teachers must also be trained to overturn the peer education mechanism in cases where excellence among foreign students occurs, as happens, moreover not infrequently, especially with technical disciplines.

The many initiatives aimed at improving the hospitality of school environments for non-Italian users are also recognized as valid, through the installation of multilingual posters, which favor the bilateralism of the integration process, i.e. aimed at both foreign and Italian students.

Finally, the interaction of the school community with the realities of the third sector in the districts of Naples affected by this survey appears useful, if not indispensable. In fact, it can be identified as a mechanism to some extent compensating for some structural deficiencies in the scholastic institution, although it is to be hoped that the budget available for this joint activity will be greater in the future.

4.2 The students' point of view: perception of school and urban space

In addition to the experience of the teachers experience responsible for the inclusive education paths for students with migratory background, the fieldwork also collects the experiences of students (26 at the moment of writing this paper). These interviews were realized with an unstructured questionnaire. The main nationalities are Ukrainian, Pakistani and Sri Lanka, but we also interviewed Latin

American students.

Most of them live in the same municipality of the school they attend, but in some cases their home is up to 10 km from it, usually because the family transferred to another neighborhood.

Most of the students interviewed arrived in Naples for family reunification between 2015 and 2022, now they are between 14 and 20 years old.

In their school experience, most of them are enrolled in a lower class with respect to their age because when they arrived in Italy the school system assigned them this way and some of the interviewed have a clear perception of this.

Nobody reports difficulties with teachers, as expected in three schools attentive to non-nationals, but some of them experienced discrimination and bullying. Only a few, in fact, have friends among the classmates; most spend the free time with family members or fellow country people. In moments and spaces for aggregation within the school, such as breaks or physical education lessons, both students and teachers detect a tendency to socialize that occurs mainly with other non-Italian students.

If the main learning difficulty is the rather common one with the humanities (above all the national language and history), as expected for non-national students, it is relevant to note that for all of them the path of inclusion began with the attendance of Italian taught by teachers within the school or NGOs.

A common feature of the migratory and school experience of the young people interviewed is that represented by the time most of them dedicate to some work activity, often in a family business (this is typically the case of Pakistanis and Sri Lankans). If many work a few hours on weekends, others are also busy every afternoon and sometimes at night as carers, with predictable effects on school performance. It is clear, in fact, that the fragmentation of commitment between school and work increase the risk of dropout, although in the Neapolitan neighborhoods covered by the present research, local students also often have similar experiences.

In terms of urban and life space, most of the

interviewed experienced the public space of the municipalities as being insecure because of the perceived danger of being robbed. They are afraid of walking in Piazza Cavour, very close to the central station, whose degraded urban landscape is often identified as a threat. Some of them think that the dangers in the neighborhoods around the railways station are harder for non-Italians.

More in general, the students' perception of life in Naples city center appears largely conditioned by family, usually when parents prohibit going somewhere because of some kind of risk, as in the case of some places in the III and IV municipalities.

The interviews with the students were completed with the request to draw a mental map of the city of Naples with the mandate to indicate their everyday path between home and school and/or home and the favorite place. We collected 26 mental maps to be processed with others we are going to collect. The map contained in figure 4 was selected because its author has been living in Naples for more time than the others. Nevertheless, the author lives in a peripheral suburb, he/her appears to be familiar with the most touristic places of the city, like the seafront.



Figure 4. Mental map of the way from home to school. Source: a student interviewed.

5. Conclusions

This study, as mentioned, is partial and in progress. It supports the interpretation of the

strategic role that school plays in processes of inclusion of non-Italian citizens not only within the school community but also, and above all, in the territorial community (Strozza et al., 2014). In fact, it is at school that young people with a migration background have their first contact with the host society and where they face the opportunity to experience socialization that is in some way free from family conditioning.

Inclusive education combines the idea that all students are able to affect their education and learning goals and to be active and equal partners in a shared learning environment. A culturally responsible pedagogy seeks to enhance students' previous experiences with cultural knowledge and different attitudes in the learning process. Multicultural education aims at a transforming process leading to the cultivation of active members of society who are able to think critically (Banks, 2007). The mitigation of prejudiced attitudes is a prime example of this where students have the opportunity to interact and produce their own cognitive schemas and knowledge through the maintenance of their own national cultural capital. Systemic efforts for inclusive paths are necessary both for the empowerment of students with migratory background and national ones in a Citizenship Education perspective.

However inclusive education related goals are often marginalized due to issues that are considered to be of "higher" political priority. The meaning and importance of inclusive education is inadequately understood and, consequently, teachers and school staff are in many cases insufficiently prepared.

Typical of this lack of knowledge is the primary approach with non-national students. Even in schools with consolidated programs for the inclusion of non-Italian pupils, such as those involved in this study, in fact, the needs of the latter are almost always immediately met Italian language course; these, although indispensable, risks blocking the perception of deeper questions and difficulties.

Initiatives aimed at inclusion that use alternative languages, such as music, generally record more immediate results confirming that linguistic barriers can initially be bypassed giving priority to a more rapid acceptance

among non-Italian students.

The school experience is itself an urban experience. In the case of this research, the school location in the city center and close to home give students the opportunity to walk in urban public spaces and develop an individual perception of places and community.

This study will continue to meet teachers and students and to extend the research to other school levels and also to the II municipality, in order to collect a more complete range of territorial experiences, useful to suggesting practices and policies for inclusion in the school and in the city.

Acknowledgements

The Authors wish to thank the schools Liceo Statale “P. Villari”, ITP “A. Casanova” and ITIS “A. Volta”, and especially Daniela Barretta, Annunziata Di Maria and Lidia Verde for joining the study and offering data and being available for interviews.

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The linchpins of geographic reasoning for a successful teaching/learning: Comparison between school curricula in Italy and Brazil

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Received: January 2023 – Accepted: March 2023

Abstract

A considerable portion of the most recent researcher in the field of geography learning has been dedicated to the investigation of the *modus operandi* employed in the interpretation of the spatiality of facts and phenomena. Therefore, mental operations essential to the exercise of an effective geographic reasoning are, nowadays, the object of systematic investigations. It is in response to this contemporary reality that it is registered in several countries that initiatives aimed to the recent reformulation of their curricular norms guiding the teaching of geography and, consequently, their educational systems. With the purpose of identify and understand the geography prescribed in the official documents that rule the education in Brazil and in Italy, this study shows the results of a comparative reading among these national documents. In our comparative analysis, to which we associated to the Grounded Theory, we took as reference and foundation the substantive concepts that we considered essential to the geographic analysis (space – scale – time) and to the development of an effective geographic reasoning. The results of this analysis reveal a set of significant and diversified conditions and, also, to a certain extent, divergent as the geography that is intended to be taught in both countries.

Keywords: National Curricula, Geography Learning, Geographical Reasoning

1. Introduction

It's not only today that the renovation sought in teaching geography aims a didactic-pedagogic action that overcomes the forms and methods of teaching-learning which to lead the students to a mere replication of contents, and, to the consequent lack of their interest in this subject.

Such fact leads us to ask: What happens in the process of teaching and learning geography at school? Does the old known didactic, which applies the traditional and related to memorization of facts and phenomenon methods, contributes to the young student's disinterest in this subject? On the other hand, we also debate: How much of motivation of young

students of geography is linked to the new possible and available technology and to the innovation of the lessons by the teachers? How to promote a geography teaching which stimulates the interest of the young students and connects him to the understanding of reality?

Certainly, all these questions lead us to think about the success or the failure of school geography among the students, meaning that searching for the answers for all the questions turns out to be of extreme importance. Answering all these questions is not, obviously, the purpose of this study, nevertheless, these questions were the reason that stimulated us to develop this research. Even before discussing about these already established questions, we thought it is essential underline what we expect or understand of geography.

Therefore, we believe it is significant to treat the linchpins that sustain the geography science, once we believe they are possible catalyzers of active and dynamic scholar geography. We start from the principle that, to take a step forward, that is, in order to answer the questions posed, it is relevant to review the meaning of the substantive concepts of this science – its pillars.

In this study, we presented part of the results of research carried out within the framework of geography involving an analytic-comparative lecture of curriculum norms that governs the stages of the *Ensino Fundamental* in Brazil, and of the *Primo Ciclo di Istruzione*, in Italy. By means of a theoretical discussion, interpretation, and comparative analysis presented, we seek to make associations and reflections concerning to the geography established on the Brazilian and Italian curricular orientations. The discussions elaborated in this study attempt to propose problems related to the importance of the scientific pillars of science geography for of the development of a scholar geography that reveals more significant to the teacher and, consequently, more interesting to the student. Such task also allowed us to comprehend, in a more systematic manner, the curricular norms instruments, in question, by comparison (Botelho, 2022).

We choose the comparative method of Weber, as suggested by Sartori (1990), Zotti (1996), Schneider and Schmitt (1998) and

Fachin (2006), to analyse the documents that has the same intention, are similar, but, distinct at the same time. The curricular norms analysed in this study are of the same nature and property, the object of orientation and education in their countries – Brazil and Italy – being effective, contemporary and current normative. These set of attributes make theses normative analogues and subject to investigation according to the analytic-comparative method (Ornaghi, 2014, p. 140).

The comparison of a national document with an equivalent international, has the aim to reveal another context and show us how the external context, with its peculiarities, similarities cultural differences organised itself face to the same aim, which is, in this case, the rules and indications for geography teaching. Generically, present, analyse and compare different educational normative contexts is still an attribution for us to understand tendencies in education. And, in the specific case of this study, comprehend what is expected of the geography teaching in a national scale with developments within international level. We are aware that when comparing similar documents in different cultural contexts, what we understand of geography and its substantive concepts can reveal discrepancies, at some point. However, the geographic science has been developed in academy in an environment that allows exchanges among peers related to its scope, methods, main concepts, and categories of analysis.

We reaffirm that we will use, as data base, official documents from Brazil – *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BNCC) – and from Italy – *Indicazioni Nazionali per la scuola dell'infanzia e de primo ciclo*. The former was ratified in 2017, while the latter, in 2012 and revised in 2018. The reading and analysis of these documents was done from section of the documents destined to the *Ensino Fundamental* in Brazil and to the *Primo Ciclo di Istruzione*, in Italy, both relatively correspondent. Such clipping was made according to the student's age (between 6-7 years and 14-15 years) and the presence of geography in all this respective scholar years, in both countries.

Between the end of 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century it began, in the field of geography teaching, a movement that involved – and still does – researchers concerned for innovations that reinforce the meaning and the importance of geography learning in school. This intellectual movement includes researchers worried about a certain *modus operandi* of geography, aiming the development and comprehension of cognitive processes linked to the spatial order of the things and phenomena and to the way of thinking problems under the geography vision. In this movement, there are tendencies and indications of which ways we can follow in order to overcome the cited problems and presentation of alternative proposes of didactic-pedagogical actions, with the aim of dynamize the geography teaching, such as the proposals for the development of geographical reasoning presented by Daudel (1979), Merenné-Schoumaker (1986, 2002, 2012), Castellar (2019), Castellar and Juliasz (2017), Castellar and De Paula (2020), Castellar, Pereira and Guimarães (2021), Roque Ascensão and Valadão (2017a, 2017b, 2016, 2014, 2011), Roque Ascensão, Valadão and Silva (2018) and Roque Ascensão et al. (2022). Likewise, we identified in the ideas of Cachinho and Reis (1991), Cachinho, (2000), Gomes (2009, 2016), Souza (2016), Santos (1979, 1988, 2004), that dialogue or even anchor, the most recent proposals on geographical reasoning.

It is worth mentioning that in the international literature, the number of publications dedicated, in a systematic way, to geographic reasoning is still small. This term has become important in the Brazilian school scenario, since it is prescribed as a goal in the curriculum of this country in 2017. For this reason, there is currently a considerable number of researchers and publications in Brazil that deal with this theme, while in the international literature they are publications aimed at understanding spatial thinking were more significant.

However, it is important to note that the term reasoning geographically and the way to do it is not new, and neither is geographical reasoning synonymous with spatial thinking. With regard to the latter, a report was published in 2006 by

the National Research Council of the United States of America, as well as in 2017 a book entitled “The Power of Geographical Thinking” (2017), to name a few examples. According to Castellar and De Paula (2020, p. 297), the notions of spatial thinking “are not theoretically and methodologically sufficient to support advances in Brazilian geographic education” (p.297). These authors argue that one of the issues is the fact that Brazilian geographic education differs “substantially from the Anglo-Saxon epistemic matrix, greatly influenced by Hartshorne (1939)” (p. 298). According to these researchers, the interpretations of space in Brazil are more focused on the perspective of production than the perspective of organization, and in the same way, space is interpreted more from a relational and relative point of view than merely absolute (Castellar and De Paula, 2020).

We believe that the development of Geographical Reasoning depends on the establishment of logical relationships on geographic issues in the understanding of geographic situations, and, moreover, for such reasoning to occur, a dialectic must be established between the nature of the phenomenon and space, and vice versa; and, in this sense, conceptually moving away from establishing the positioning of objects, calculating distances or perceiving volumes, among other issues that are important to the development of spatial thinking. The spatial thinking is then contained in geographical reasoning. In other words, in all geographic reasoning there is spatial thinking, but not in all spatial thinking there is geographic reasoning (Botelho, 2022).

We go back in time to quote Vidal de La Blache and Yves Lacoste on the use of the term geographic reasoning. La Blache, in a conference held at the University of Paris in 1914, made considerations about the most important methodological foundations for geography that would allow the development of complex reasoning, which would lead us to the understanding of locations, and named it geographic reasoning (Ribeiro, 2019). To some extent, the term geographic reasoning gained prominence in the field of geopolitics from publications that Yves Lacoste made about the

bombings that occurred in the Vietnam War. In these publications, the French geographer calls geographic reasoning a linked logic of articulated thoughts that allowed selecting the places to be bombed by American troops with the intention of flooding the Vietnamese plain and transforming the situation in which thousands of people lived, that is, a way to think strategically about locations (Lacoste, 2008; Verdi, 2017).

It seems that the results of these research, which began at the end of the 20th century, start to reverberate into the context of curricular norms in some countries indicating, to some extent, changes in teaching methodology of this subject. Contemporaneously, the concepts that valorize the capabilities of young students to spatially and geographically thought were incorporated to the norms that rule education and the scholar curriculum in some countries, such as, Brazil, Portugal, Chile, United Kingdom, Australia, United States of America (Ministério da Educação, 2018), Sweden (Örbring, 2017) and Finland (Tani et al., 2018). Despite the already achieved advances, within today, it is current in schools a limited, excessively communicative, informative and illustrative geography.

In this study we used, as reference, the conceptions which have been developed in Brazil by the Teaching and Research Group in Geography (GEPEGEO), nucleated in the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais – UFMG. Since 2010, Valéria de Oliveira Roque Ascensão and Roberto Célio Valadão, have aims to develop research related to the teacher's knowledge and the geographic interpretation of the spatial phenomena, notably, with geography teachers of basic level. These researchers have been demonstrating that “the geography teachers do not operate with the geographic knowledge, but act informing their students about spatial components – the climate, the relief, the urbanization, the economy” (Roque Ascensão et al., 2022). It is through the use of the theoretical conception of the Pedagogical Content of Knowledge – PCK, proposed by Shulman (1986), that these researchers believe the information is not the basic principle of teaching and “breaking with this idea of ‘teaching things

over the space’ is crucial to the PCK in Geography”, being them in discordance with the idea of teaching what is traditionally called geographic content (Roque Ascensão et al., 2022). For the researchers, the base of the teacher's knowledge is the interface between the knowledge of the content (syntactic and analytic) and the general pedagogical knowledge, with emphasis on the curriculum knowledge and on the teaching knowledge. The term substantive concept, as it was used by them, refers to a permanent conceptual net that aims to found and sustain the construction of a given scientific knowledge.

But what is effectively a geographic analysis? Searching for an answer for this question, the GEPEGEO researchers appealed to the classic authors¹ of geographic thought, seeking to identify the substantial knowledge of geographic science and their epidemiological elements. Hence, Roque Ascensão et al. (2018, p. 36) refer it as “the existence of a hard core of this science”, composed of substantive and syntactic concepts of the subject identifiable from classic to contemporary geographic analysis. They also assume that the lack and precariousness of knowledge of this content can affect teaching (Roque Ascensão et al., 2022).

According to these ideas, our readings highlight that most of the researchers consider that the scholar geography should focus on the geographic concepts, in order to guarantee learning founded on scientific bases and in the development of geographic reasoning. As stated by Cachinho (2000), it is when answering these questions concerning to geography, that it is necessary to use of a set of basic concepts that confer scientificity to the ongoing analysis. These concepts constitute the fundamental pillars of the interpretation of facts and spatial

¹ Alexander Von Humboldt (Humboldt, 1877), Friedrich Ratzel (Ratzel, 1983), Paul Vidal de La Blache (Vidal de La Blache, 1913), Elisée Reclus (Reclus, 1876), Halford John Mackinder (Mackinder, 1891), Jean Brunhes (Brunhes, 1897), Peter Kropotkin (Kropotkin, 2021), Maximilien Sorre (Sorre, 1948), Carl Ortwin Sauer (Sauer, 1966), Richard Hartshorne (Hartshorne, 1939), David Harvey (Harvey, 2012) and Milton Santos (Santos, 1986).

phenomena, but the relevance and meaning of each of these concepts are far from being consensual among researchers, considering their distinct epistemological affiliation (Cachinho, 2000).

From the view of classic authors of geography and under the perspective of the Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), Roque Ascensão and Valadão (2014, 2017b) identified as substantive knowledge the space, the time and the scale; and as the syntactic knowledge of the subject, the cognitive actions, such as, localize, describe, and analyse. These authors elucidate that, even if there are different variations on it comes to be space, time and schedule, these concepts are essential and reveal permanence in many already consecrated studies in geography science. It is also valid for the articulated and dialectic use of the cognitive actions already cited, always presented in the study and comprehension of the specialities (Roque Ascensão and Valadão, 2011).

Regarding to the inherent dynamism of the spatial phenomena, it is due to variable action and complex web of processes marked by changes, relations, and interrelations. The processes operate in all spatial components inherent to the geographic situation under investigation (Roque Ascensão, 2017b). We believe that the core of the geographic reasoning lies on a systematic argumentation in which elements decompose making understandable the relation between them and the space, seeking for logical connections with other elements that articulate with the reality in question.

From the point of view of Roque Ascensão and Valadão (2014, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, Roque Ascensão et al. (2022) and of the other authors cited in this study, we present below the considerations about the substantive concepts essential to geographic analysis: space, time and scale (Kedron and Holler, 2022).

2. Space, time and scale: the fundamental pillars of geographic science

2.1 The space

We start from the premise that geography studies geographic space, but which space are we referring to? In agreement with Harvey (1989), Lefebvre (1974) and Santos (1988), we understand that the space that interests us is the socially produced space. However, throughout its history, geography developed concepts of space according to its analysis needs that did not always correspond to the social space, to the point that Harvey (1989, p. 13-14) questioned: “how different human practices create and make use of distinct conceptualizations of space? Given this, we ask ourselves: what are the privileged conceptualizations of space in national curriculum regulations in Brazil and Italy? Are there, to some extent, references to the types of spaces in the texts of these documents? We argue here that it is important for the teacher to understand that space is simultaneously absolute, relative and relational. As Mitchell (2021) asserts, space is not absolute, relative or relational in itself, but can become one or all simultaneously, depending on the circumstances. We are not defending here the elision of absolute and relative space, but we are in agreement with Santos (1988) when he points out that the relational space is what comes closest to geography, in such a way that in our teaching practices we must aim at the geographical interpretation in a relational way.

It is precisely in this same sense that the concept of geographical space considered in Roque Ascensão and Valadão’s proposal is the relational, as it is this concept that approaches what the authors mean to be the objective of geographic investigations. Absolute and relative space have reduced importance. However, the absolute for establishing the mere location of geographic coordinates of an object on the earth’s surface, to conceive space in its concrete, exact and immobile dimension (Hartshorne, 1939). The relative space for considering space as an empty by plane highlighting the relationships between objects, their spatial distribution and quantification, to establish order and organization by means of the explanation of

systems. We reiterate that although the absolute and relative spaces suppress the subjects and their actions (Valenzuela and Pyszczk, 2012; Santos, 1988, 2004), they can be present in the geographic analysis, but it is essential that this analysis has the relational space as a fundamental pillar.

It is the relational space that incorporates the lived place (living space) and that contains the vision of the integrated whole always in transition, being considered a social product (Valenzuela and Pyszczk, 2012; Harvey, 2009; Lefebvre, 1974). For this reason, the relational space is “an inseparable set of systems of objects and systems of actions” (Santos, 2006, p. 44), socially (re)produced, dynamic and in constant transformation.

For Roque Ascenção and Valadão (2017b, p. 180) it is up to the teaching of Geography to understand the spatiality of phenomena in which “the relationship between space and phenomenon is considered, in the sense of understanding that a phenomenon affects the space where it occurs, just as it is affected by the characteristics of the place of its occurrence”. This understanding requires going beyond answering “where?”, “how?” and “why?”.

2.2 The Scale

The term scale, as polysemous, offers us an almost infinite number of possibilities. Considering the meaning of the measure of proportionality of the graphic representation of elements and objects in the territory, the cartographic scale is the mathematical result of the reducing of real world in graphic representation, which allows evaluate distances and obtain measurements from the use of maps. However, the complexity of geographic space and the multiple dimensions and magnitudes of socio-spatial phenomena require a higher level of abstraction (Castro, 2017; Delaney and Leitner, 1997). Furthermore, generalizations made on one scale may not be valid on another scale (Kedron and Holler, 2022). All these factors corroborate that the use of the cartographic scale is insufficient to solve the problems of geographic analysis beyond the purely mathematical perspective.

In according to Roque Ascenção and Valadão, we consider that the geographic scale is the revealing of the intensity and the scope of a phenomenon and its flowing relationships (Roque Ascenção et al, 2018). Souza (2016, p. 180) reinforces this idea: “[...] in social-spatial research, it is obvious that we need, at all times, to use the cartographic scale, which is one of the essential informative elements of any map (or letter, or plan)”. However, he asserts that we should not fail to differentiate cartographic scale and geographic scale, since the latter “has to do not with the fraction of the division of a surface represented in a cartographic document, but rather with the very extension or magnitude of the space that is being taken. into account” (Souza, 2016, p. 180-181). It then becomes fundamental, in geographic analyses, to emancipate the scalar reasoning beyond the narrow limits of cartography.

Reasoning geographically requires confronting different scalar levels of successive and classificatory totalities, as this reasoning is multiscalar par excellence. A multiscalar reasoning is based not only on the multiplicity of metric and real quantities, but also considers perception and conception (Castro, 2017), insomuch that a single scalar level is insufficient to explain the totality of the geographic phenomenon investigated (Mérenne-Schoumaker, 2012).

2.3 The Time

Time and space are central dimensions to geographic studies. In the same way, we ask: what should be the time of geography? In the Roque Ascenção and Valadão’s proposal, we understand that time, to which these authors refer, concerns a specific and circumscribed temporal dimension, not corresponding to geological time nor to the entire scope of human-historical time.

We believe that no event can be truly geographic if it is being considered on a temporal scale under the perspective of deep time (since it involves geological processes) or in the totality of human-historical time. Invariably, even if some consider this time as part of human-historical time, in our

understanding, the time cut of the spatiality of the phenomenon must have, as a principle, the duration of the event in a time of the present, of the now, of spatial practices (Botelho, 2022). We remember that every spatial practice is an action or a structured set of actions from the perspective of social relations (Souza, 2016).

We understand that time in geographic studies concerns the duration of phenomena that affect space and, in this case, has a direct relationship with the dynamics of processes of all orders that occur in geographic space. Such dynamics can be understood as multiple spatialities that combine themselves and, when combined, reveal the duration and continuity of the phenomenon. Complementing this conception, Souza (2016) reiterates these ideas when dealing with spatial practices, so that temporal analysis, seen from this perspective, can reveal different temporalities – more or less ephemeral and more or less permanent –, starting by considering the ephemerality of the event (like an earthquake), or just a few hours (like a hurricane), a few days (like the effects of an earthquake), a few weeks (like the harvest of agricultural products), or even consider the continuation of the phenomenon for a period of time. relatively long period of time (such as a war; such as a drought).

It is not therefore how long the air mass will reach a certain region that we have to worry about; this should concern to the climatology or meteorology. From the perspective we defend here, time is linked to the duration and consequences of atmospheric phenomena on man and society. It is time seen in the particularity of a temporal scale proper to the analysis of a geographic situation, in which one must consider the duration and consequences of phenomena on space in the present; that is, it is a time scale committed to the analysis of the spatiality of the phenomenon. Consequently, we can conclude that not all historical time is the time required in the analysis of spatiality.

We believe that human-historical time, or even geological time, can be accessed in geographic studies as an aid to understanding a given situation, however, according to the concept of geographic space adopted here, we must focus on the time of space production and

its dynamics. It is in this particular analytical cut of time that it becomes possible to recognize the simultaneities, ruptures, sequences and continuities of phenomena in favor of understanding a geographic situation (Santos, 1979, 2008, 2012).

3. The analysis of curriculum regulations

We believe that by understanding the perspective of the substantive concepts – space, time and scale – contained in the Brazilian and Italian curricular norms, it is possible to infer which is the geography prescribed in these documents. Thus, it is important to highlight that both curricular norms are not organized from the perspective of the concepts that we consider essential to geographic studies. Therefore, in view of the interpretation of these concepts in the normative texts in search of understanding which is the geography that is engendered in the curricular normatives, we associate the comparative methodology to the methodological procedures of the Grounded Theory, in order to allow a more detailed and flexible analysis of written, verbal and visual material (Fernandes and Maia, 2001; Rocca, 2010).

Grounded Theory aims to understand phenomena or describe them from the subject's point of view, in order to support theoretical sensitivity (sense and meaning to data). Therefore, the role of the researcher is to compare incident with incident, bringing out the data, establishing conceptual categories that are relevant to the observation of central issues of the object under study in the search for patterns, which, in the end, serve to explain the event and, in the case of this article, also to understand synthetically the researched in a whole (Fernandes and Maia, 2001; Nico et al., 2007; Rocca, 2010; Cepellos and Tonelli, 2020).

The procedures for analysing the curriculum documents included the selection, interpretation and categorization of textual information. In the case of the BNCC, the text referring to Geography starts on page 359 and ends on page 395. In the Italian curriculum norms, it starts on page 56 and extends to page 59. It should be highlighted that we analysed the entire text of the curriculum norms and the list of learning

objects. In the case of the BNCC, the learning objects are divided into 123 skills. We present, separately and proportionally, the results of the analysis of the texts and the results of the analysis of the 24 learning objects related to *Indicazioni Nazionali* and the 123 skills related to the BNCC.

When selecting the words and excerpts in the curriculum documents, the question that guided us in the first phase was: “What does this represent?”. Thereafter, while reading, besides taking into consideration the lexical link of the date, we also bore in mind terms, expressions, procedures and indications contained in regulations that, directly or indirectly, mention or refer us to categories of substantive concepts of geography.

Next, we grouped the selected material into categories of concepts, if the concept combines characteristics of unique objects. This is because we understand that in case a concept brings together a series of more specific concepts, they are called a category (Cornoldi et al., 2018). Therefore, categorization was the process used to classify information into meaningful categories. At this stage of our analysis, the guiding question was: which kind of category does such an expression belong to? Our objective in identifying the categories present in the regulations arises from the need to understand what kind of space, time and scale are privileged, proposed or favored in these documents.

3.1 The concept of space in curricula norms

In the analysis of the curricular norms, references to living space, absolute space, relative space and relational space were identified (Table 1). We understand that these categories of space are, to some extent, hierarchical, so that the relational space constitutes the main objective of geographic analyses and, in it, the other categories of space are contained (Mitchell, 2021).

As for selected excerpts from the BNCC text, none of them explicitly bring us the concept of space categories. However, the text as a whole contemplates, to some extent, the dialectical

relations and the integrated whole referred to the relational space:

Therefore, students need to broaden their knowledge about the use of space in different geographic situations ruled by historically established norms and laws, including the transformation of space into used territory - a space of concrete action and unequal power relations [...] (Ministério da Educação, 2018, p. 381).

Living space – L s
It refers to the space circumscribed to people's daily lives; where there is coexistence with other individuals in society, directly linked to the concept of place.
Absolute space – A s
It refers to the space of conventional Euclidean references and simple location; it is the Cartesian space, organized from a system of coordinates.
Relative space – RT s
It refers to the relationship between geographic objects in space, seeking to validate the explanation of a spatial organization that most of the time excludes social practices.
Relational space – RC s
It refers to the vision of space as an integrated whole, in constant transition, where the phenomenon affects the space and the space affects the phenomenon; “a truly and densely social space, and the dynamics to be highlighted are the dynamics of social relations (even without losing sight of natural dynamics and their relative conditioning)” (Souza, 2016, p.31).

Table 1. Space categories recognized in the BNCC/Geography (*Ensino Fundamental*) and in the *Indicazioni Nazionali/Geography (Primo e Secondo Ciclo)*. Authors' elaboration.

In the Italian regulations, as in the text of the BNCC, there is no explicit reference to the concepts of space. Although in Italian legislation the concept of space adopted is unclear, we categorized excerpts as relational space such as: “Geography studies the relationships of human societies with each other and with the planet that hosts them”; “Geographical knowledge also concerns the processes of progressive transformation of the environment by man or by natural causes of different types” (Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca, 2012, p. 56).

The excerpts selected as indicators of relative space are, in both regulations, excerpts that refer us to the idea of analysing a certain element

considering scalar levels or of an object in relation to the other, without considering interrelationships or spatial practices, such as example: “In this way, students must be guaranteed an understanding of the natural and cultural characteristics of the different societies and places around them [...]” (Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca, 2018, p. 368).

Regarding absolute space, we find the following examples: “By dealing with the concept of space, the development of topological, projective and Euclidean spatial relations is encouraged, in addition to geographical reasoning [...]” (Ministério da Educação, 2018, p. 362) or “Students must equip themselves with spatial coordinates to orient themselves in the territory [...]” (Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca, 2012, p. 56). At this point, we ask: To what extent is absolute space fundamental in Geography classes?

In both regulations, it is possible to perceive that the place of experience (living space) becomes reference for thinking about scalar levels that go from the local to the global.

When analysing the BNCC skills, we observed that the relational space, whose frequency (68.3%) is significantly higher than other identified categories, is strongly indicated in the document, even implicitly, because no mention in the document of the relational term.

In Italian regulations, all learning objectives fall into one of the analysed space categories. The learning objects register low frequency of occurrence of living space (8.3%). However, the lower frequency of the relational space (25%) in relation to the absolute (29.2%) and relative spaces (37.5%) calls our attention.

3.2 The concept of time in curricula norms

In the analysis of the concept of time, we took as reference terms that refer us to the sense of time in general, such as: “changes”, “period”, “transformation”, “processes”, “past”, “future”, “memory”, “cycle”, among other terms. Likewise, we consider expressions that refer us to the idea of temporality, such as: “the times of

nature”; “subjects’ memory” and “in a given time”. Therefore, throughout the categorization it was possible to infer the following senses of time: chronological, atmospheric and climate, historical, geological and time of the spatiality of the phenomenon (Table 2).

It should be noted that in relation to other times found in curricula norms, such as social time or nature times, we chose not to use these expressions, which does not mean that these times are not present in regulations; we preferred to use the categories presented because of the way in which the concept of time is dealt with in the classroom.

<p>Chronological time - C t</p> <p>It refers to the time in which every day human activities unfold in sequence; it is time measured by exact and constant fractions, it can be organized in order to consider the counting of hours, days, months, therefore, it is time that can be marked on clocks and registered on calendars.</p>
<p>Atmospheric and Climate weather – AC t</p> <p>It includes two distinct temporal dimensions: (i) the state of the atmosphere for relatively short periods of observation (hours, days or weeks at most), essential in weather forecasts; (ii) the regularity of successive weather conditions reproduced over years of systematic collection, essential in the recognition of climate types.</p>
<p>Geological time – G t</p> <p>Refers to the chronological scale composed of billions of years that fits the geohistory of planet Earth; consequently, an analysis of events that took place over deep time is not consistent with the production of geographic space, given how recent, from a geological point of view, the origin and action of society with nature is.</p>
<p>Historical time – H t</p> <p>It refers to the temporal dimension that begins with the emergence of humanity and continues until today; along it, a chain of transformations takes place, “their causes and consequences, the periods thus established and their duration, the places of their incidence” (Santos, 2006, p.88).</p>
<p>Time of spatiality of the phenomenon – SP t</p> <p>It is the time of the event commanded by society, as preconized by Santos (2006), of that event that is always current and, not, of the past or future event; it is the time of the present, but not necessarily the instantaneous, in which the spatiality of the phenomenon loaded with current elements is constructed.</p>

Table 2. Categories of the concept of time recognized in the BNCC/Geography (*Ensino Fundamental*) and in the *Indicazioni Nazionali/Geography (Primo e Secondo Ciclo)*. Authors’ elaboration.

When analysing the time categories in the documents, we realized that the frequency of chronological and atmospheric times and climate

is reduced. However, when the physical-natural processes are mentioned, it is oriented, to some extent, towards the resumption of deep time by proposing a relationship with geological, geomorphological processes or the evolution of life on Earth, as shown in the excerpt from follow from BNCC:

Likewise, the times of nature cannot be ignored, as they mark the memory of the Earth and the natural transformations that explain the current conditions of the natural physical environment (Ministério da Educação, 2018, p. 361).

The same concern applies to the following excerpt from the Italian norms:

The history of nature and that of man, however, unfold in different times: the long times of nature are intertwined, often in conflict, with those much shorter than man's [...] (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, 2012, p. 56).

In these examples, the demarcation of the deep time scale is clear in order to understand the current conditions of the physical environment, such as the relief, the climate and the arrangement of the continents, among other themes, from a perspective that is not of geographical order. But to what extent are the times of nature necessary and fundamental to explain the current conditions of the natural physical environment? To what extent are the times of nature linked with contemporary spatialities and practices? If these times are linked merely to physical processes, is this not engendered there and revealing itself to be part of the dichotomy between physical geography and human geography?

About the time of spatiality of the phenomenon, such an idea is not directly indicated in the texts. However, in the excerpts extracted from the regulations, it is possible to perceive geographical situations in which the use of time at the service of interpreting the spatiality of the phenomenon is favored. Despite this possibility of reading, in a generalized way, we perceive that the texts of both normatives guide in the sense of historical time.

Regarding the analysis of the BNCC skills, we recorded a low frequency of recurrence of chronological, geological and atmospheric times and climate, reaching a total of almost 10% of the skills together. Unlike the indications in the text of this regulation, historical time has a low frequency in skills (17.9%). While the spatiality of the phenomena has a higher frequency (64.2%). In 8.1% of the skills there is no applicability of the time concept.

In the BNCC skills, historical temporality is clearly marked with the use of terms such as historical transformations, different eras and the colonial system, just to name a few examples, as in the following skill:

“Describe the routes of dispersion of the human population across the planet and the main migratory flows in different periods of history, discussing the historical factors and physical-natural conditions associated with the distribution of the human population across continents” (Ministério da Educação, 2018, p. 389).

Although we interpret the vast majority of skills in the temporality of the spatiality of the phenomenon, the BNCC does not make this distinction nor it bring this discussion by privileging historical time in its text.

In the investigation of the concept of time in the learning objectives of the Italian regulations, we did not find applicability in 45,8% of the total objects. There is no record of chronological, atmospheric, climate and geological time. Historical time registered a frequency of 12,5%. The possibilities of interpreting the time of the spatiality of the phenomenon corresponds to 41,7% of the recurrences.

The significant absence of the temporal dimension in almost half of the learning objectives is strictly related to learning that requires knowledge such as: orientation, laterality, displacement in space, absolute location, the use of maps and cartographic scales, pure and simple. This result leads us to infer that the Italian regulation emphasizes cartographic knowledge. It is noteworthy that these specific objectives are distributed proportionally in all school stages.

With regard to the historical time in the Italian document, it is placed in the learning objectives that evoke the past, as in socio-historical frameworks of the past, evolution over time and historical, political and economic evolution, that is, a use of time merely history, divided into periods, in a succession of events.

We remember that the effective use of learning objects in the Italian regulations, according to the temporality of the spatiality of the phenomena, is dependent on their reading and treatment by the teacher. Like the BNCC, the Italian regulations do not bring any discussion and delimitation in this regard.

3.3 The scale concept in curricula norms

Like the concepts of space and time, the concept of scale is polysemic and serves many areas of knowledge. It is important point, we chose not to use other scalar categories or subdivisions of the geographic scale that may be present in the regulations, such as: the scale of the phenomenon, the scale of analysis and the scale of action; the relative scale and the relational scale; nor take into account the use of pre-established and fixed space-scalar terms (Souza, 2016; Castro, 2017).

We understand that these issues are complex and lead us to a series of other issues that are important to understanding the geographic scale, so we believe that future research is needed to address this issue.

Therefore, when analysing the regulations, we chose to categorize the scales into cartographic and geographic (Table 3).

In the analysis of both regulations, throughout the texts, there is no guideline that refers directly to the categorization of the scale. However, everything indicates that there is an orientation towards the geographical scale.

At the BNCC, it is possible to perceive such an indication in the following statement, which emphasizes the importance of transit between scales in the geographic sense: “[...] articulation of different spaces and scales of analysis, enabling students to understand the existing relationships between facts in the local and

global levels” (Ministério da Educação, 2018, p. 362).

Cartographic scale – C s

Refers to the mathematical result of reducing the real world to graphical representation, allowing to evaluate distances and obtain measurements from the use of maps; check the distance between objects on a map, or the dimensions and proportions of what is being cartographically represented.

Geographic scale – G s

It refers to the intensity and scope of a phenomenon and the flow relationship that constitutes it; being defined from the analysis of the phenomenon itself, which should “put in the foreground the nature of social relations, including spatial practices, whose perception may vary greatly” (Souza, 2016, p.198).

Table 3. Scale concept categories recognized in the BNCC/Geography (*Ensino Fundamental*) and in the *Indicazioni Nazionali/Geography (Primo e Secondo Ciclo)*. Authors’ elaboration.

The same concern for multiscale analysis appears in the Italian regulations, from the local to the world context, such as: “The comparison of reality itself (lived space) with the global one, and vice versa, is facilitated by the continuous comparison of spatial representations, read and interpreted in different scales [...]” (Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca, 2012, p. 56).

All excerpts dealing with the scale in the BNCC lead us to the geographic scale (whether relative or relational), as shown in the following excerpt:

In this regard, it starts from the understanding that, in the current reality, the international division of labor and the distribution of wealth have become much more fluid and complex from the point of view of spatial interactions and interdependence networks at different scales. (Ministério da Educação, 2018, p. 382)

In the case of the Italian regulations, 71.4% of the excerpts refer to the geographic scale, as in the following excerpt: “[...] getting used to analysing each element in its spatial context and in a multiscale way, from the place to the global context” (Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca, 2012, p. 56). For the cartographic scale, the frequency of recurrence is 28.6%. In any

case, guidance on scale is scarce in both documents.

When analysing the BNCC skills, we noticed the low frequency for the cartographic scale (9%). However, this frequency increases considerably in terms of geographic scale, making up 90.2% of skills. Only in 0.8% of the skills there is no applicability of the concept of scale.

The geographic scale in the BNCC consists of those skills that demand the idea of flow, scope, intensity, as well as the interrelationships between objects and phenomena, such as: “Recognize specificities and analyse the interdependence of the countryside and the city, considering economic flows, of information, ideas and people. In this and other examples, there is the possibility of developing a scalar reasoning between relationships and interrelationships.

As an example of a clear reference to the use of the cartographic scale in the BNCC, we took the following skill: “Measuring distances on the surface by the graphic and numerical scales of the maps”. In this case, what matters is the treatment of the scale from a purely metric and mathematical perspective.

In the case of the Italian regulations, the learning objectives record frequency of recurrence of the cartographic scale at 29.2%. However, this frequency increases considerably in terms of geographic scale, present in 66.6% of the objectives. In only 4.1% there is no applicability of the scale concept.

In this document, the references to the cartographic scale are enclosed in those learning objectives that approach absolute space and, consequently, demand location, position and measurements, which reduces possibilities for other relationships. It is mainly present in objects associated with orientation and cartography (*geo-graficità*).

Regarding to the geographic scale, this was considered when the learning objective allows conceiving situations that involve, to some extent, flow, intensity, scope and expansion of phenomena, as in the following objective: “Recognize, in your own life environment, the functions of the various spaces and their connections, the positive and negative

interventions of man and project solutions, exercising an active citizenship”.

3.4 The processes in the curricula norms

As stated by Roque Ascensão and Valadão (2017b), we consider that in the course of the analysis of a geographic situation it is essential to use the substantive concepts - space, scale and time - in mobilization with the cognitive processes to locate, describe and interpret, seeking to understand on the processes that manifest themselves in the production of space.

It is from this perspective that, in the analysis of Brazilian and Italian regulations, we seek to understand from which point of view the processes are placed, if they are seen as an inseparable set of processes that make a phenomenon act on a given space, in order to lead to study committed to the totality. We are aware that the study of a single concept or spatial component does not explain the geographic reality (Hugonié, 1989). This idea led us to explore the concept of process in the regulations under the logic of fragmentation and systematization (Table 4).

The analysis of the processes revealed a discrepancy between the data of the analysed norms. In the BNCC, there is no recurrence of processes in the text that are consistent with fragmentation, the proposition being clear through the systemic analysis. In the case of Indicazioni Nazionali, this is an unfavorable aspect, as systemic processes (45.5%) are less frequent compared to fragmented processes (54.5%).

In the analysis of the BNCC skills, there is no applicability in 9.8% of the skills, which we believe are closely linked to principles of the category of absolute space. Despite this, most skills (82.9%) are related to systemic processes. Only 7.3% of the skills were categorized as referring to fragmented processes.

<p>Fragmented Process – F p</p> <p>Reveals the approach of contents in a fragmented way, where there is no connection between the processes and phenomena of a geographic situation; it is the drawer plan, where you study process by process, concept by concept, component by component. It, therefore, does not explain reality.</p>
<p>Systemic Process – S p</p> <p>It refers to the integrated, problematized and dynamic approach, in which concepts, components, phenomena and processes are related and articulated, placing them in relation to others, allowing a systemic analysis of a given geographic situation. In this approach, what is taken into account are the interrelationships that the agents establish with each other and with the structures that, in fact, give meaning and life to a system. (Cachinho, 2000, p.177).</p>

Table 4. Categories designed to approach the processes in the BNCC/Geography (*Ensino Fundamental*) and in the *Indicazioni Nazionali/Geography (Primo e Secondo Ciclo)*. Authors' elaboration.

In the case of the analysis of the learning objectives of *Indicazioni Nazionali*, the lack of processes in 33.3% of the objects and, likewise, the frequency of 37.5% of fragmented processes calls our attention. Systemic processes were identified in 29.2% of the objects.

3.5 The frequency of substantive concepts

In the following figures, we selected the frequency of the substantive concepts that are closest to what is expected of them in the construction of a geographic analysis, contained in the selected excerpts (Figure 1), skills (BNCC) and learning objectives (*Indicazioni Nazionali*) (Figure 2). In this way, we selected the frequency of the relational space, the time of the spatialities of the phenomenon and the geographic scale, and we also included the systemic processes.

Based on this selection of data, it can be seen that there is a difference between the regulations in relation to the frequency of the relational space. This category of space is little considered in Italian norms. In Brazilian norms, a more effective clarification is needed in relation to this approach. Promoting the relational category of geographic space is essential to move towards geographic analysis.

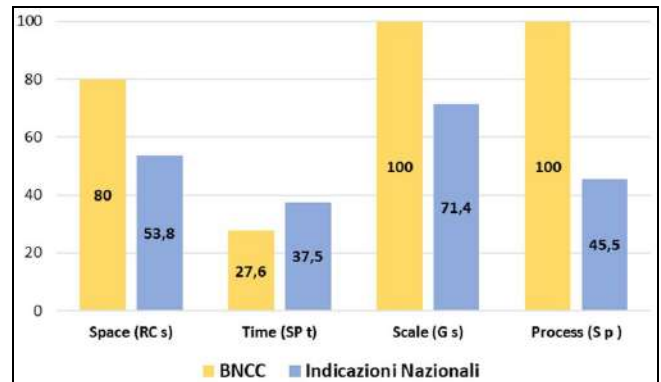


Figure 1. Frequency of structuring concepts that are closest to what is expected from their functionality in the construction of geographic reasoning based on the interpretation of the excerpts. Authors' elaboration.

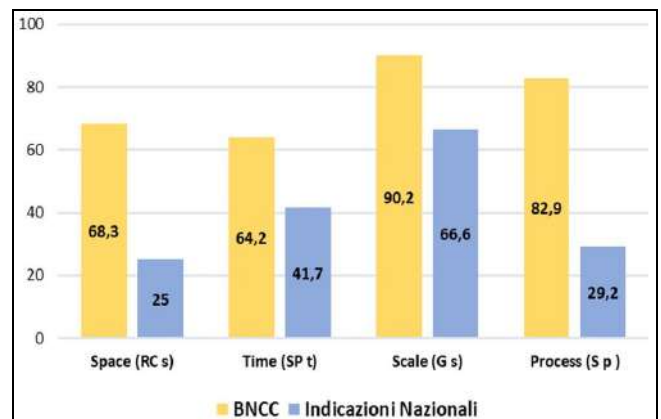


Figure 2. Frequency of structuring concepts that are closest to what is expected of their functionality in the construction of geographical reasoning based on the interpretation of skills and learning objectives. Authors' elaboration.

In the case of the concept of time, despite the spatiality category of phenomena being highlighted in our analysis, it is only a possibility of reading. What we perceive, in a generalized way, is that the documents favor historical time. However, in the case of *Indicazioni Nazionali*, it is noteworthy that none of the time categories are present in 45.8% of the learning objectives. This fact compromises, to a great extent, a geographic analysis.

We can consider that the scale has the best result among the substantive concepts, being privileged in the documents the category of the geographic scale. Even so, it deserves attention

in some aspects, especially in the Italian document, which, perhaps due to the strong cartographic orientation and absolute space, highlights the cartographic scale.

It is worth remembering that the frequency recorded in terms of substantive concepts, for the most part, concerns the possibilities that are presented, in such a way that all of this depends on the teacher's interpretation of what is contained in the text when considering the functionality of these concepts in the construction of a reasoning that is geographical.

4. Conclusions

The curricular norms that rule the education and the teaching of geography in Brazil and Italy, once investigated from the point of the basic pillars that we consider essential to the adjectival analysis of geography, reveal a set of aspects that characterize the teaching of geography prescribed in two socio-economical distinct realities, one Latin-American and, the other European.

With regard to the Brazilian normative, the document largely supports and contemplates the geographical interpretation. This suggests that there was, in Brazil, investment in construction of a normative that dialogue with contemporary questions in the field of geography teaching research concerning to the substantive concepts of this science. With respect to the Italian normative, it recommends a formulation aimed to a geography which is still revealed, in a certain way, traditional and discordant with what has been developed in recent years in the fields of geography teaching research. The investment of the Italian normative related to the prescriptions effectively directed to the interpretation of the spatiality of the investigated phenomena is fragile. Such fact puts away the curricular Italian document from an expected geographical analysis really systemic. It is important to note that, in March 2022, the Italian Ministry of Education established a commission to review the teaching of geography in Italy.

In the view of the above mentioned, we reaffirm the importance and the essentiality of the use of the substantive concepts in

geographical analysis dedicated to the development of the geographical reasoning, and consequently, to a well-succeeded teaching-learning. We believe that the core of pedagogical turning – of one turn – in geography lies on the understanding of the permanence of the conceptual net here mentioned and analysed, the understanding of their meanings and purposes in favour of the geographical and scientific literacy, so as to disapprove a mere descriptive and fragmented geography. The results achieved here reinforce the necessity of critically understand that the school geography holds, within today, a strong signature of questions that are not, necessarily, geographical, both epistemologically and methodologically. These questions can reveal itself firmly rooted in the national curricular normative, as it is demonstrated in this study, but also in school culture, in teacher practice, in didactic collections, in teacher training and mainly in the imaginary of society.

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Variable impacts on young migrants and related measures in Spain and Italy. Andalusia and Sicily: a comparative analysis

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Received: January 2023 – Accepted: March 2023

Abstract

Migration is based on mobility, on the crossing of space in a determined time; the inescapable “precariousness” of the foreigner’s relationship with the territory is manifested in all its evidence. This paper focuses on the Mare Nostrum and the migration of the vulnerable. The problems related to protecting unaccompanied foreign minors are linked to their condition, including their minor age, alien status, and the lack of parental figures. Both with the supranational legal space (international and European), recognising an element of alienation from the domestic system for managing such situations, and with issues related to migrant law contribute to protections, creating conflicts and overlaps. International law protects the child’s best interests; in contrast, domestic law aims to balance the rights of the foreigner and domestic interests of a collective nature (especially public order and internal security). The research aims to analyse the multiple impacts of protection systems in several areas of great interest to unaccompanied young migrants: 1) rights and protection, 2) employment and job readiness, and 3) Andalusia and Sicily policies and programmes. This article examines the legislative changes that have taken place over the last two years and how these have affected the condition of young migrants in two Mediterranean countries, Spain and Italy. More specifically, two regions are compared: Andalusia and Sicily. The methodology used is socio-legal analysis combined with empirical research.

Keywords: Migration, Unaccompanied Minors, Socio-Legal Theory, Italy, Spain

1. Introduction

Migration is based on mobility, on passing through space each time; the inescapable “precariousness” of the foreigner’s relationship

with the territory manifests itself, in fluid time, in all its evidence. Although migration is part of human history, the creation of nation-states, with the demarcation of borders, has presented this

phenomenon as a watershed between legality and illegality.

Despite this, migrants and asylum seekers use the Mediterranean routes to enter the EU irregularly. They embark on long, dangerous journeys from North Africa and Türkiye, crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Italy, Spain, Greece and, to a lesser extent, Malta. The large majority of the migrants transiting through Libya on their journey towards Europe. This has contributed to development of well-established and resilient smuggling and trafficking networks in Libya. Within these flows, there is a specific subgroup of our interest, namely minors without a parent or legal representative.

The particularly vulnerable situation of unaccompanied foreign minors is due to several known circumstances. It is not just a question of age. The lack of family references in the host territory and the insecurity generated at all levels by administrative irregularity in which they find themselves are also determining factors. If we also consider the difficulties of the migratory journey, which is usually chaotic and often traumatic, as it is marked by violence or despair, it is clear that we are dealing with a group that needs the transformative action of the state (Durán Ruiz, 2021; Save the Children, 2016). Moreover, many are victims of criminal networks involved in child trafficking for sexual exploitation and child labour, exacerbating their inherent vulnerability. With this in mind, reception and protection are crucial factors in their development and education. However, despite legislative efforts, their vulnerability worsens with the transition to adulthood, a weak point in the protection systems examined here.

Unaccompanied migrant minors are not a homogeneous group, which is the origin of their social and legal problems, reflecting the transition to adulthood. The transition stage to adulthood is complex, so the Committee of the Council of Europe suggests that States should provide additional support when minors under protection are 18. To enable their rights in the difficult situation of being migrant subjects and promote integration, the child's best interest is realised only with the social inclusion of unaccompanied migrant children so that they become active members of the host society.

The migration of children and young people is a particular segment of migration and child law. Migrant children's studies involve

migration studies, multilevel policy instruments and a critical aspect of contemporary migration.

The research question: Are current tools for transition to adulthood effective?

UMMs very often reach adulthood in an irregular situation (without a residence permit), leading to deficiencies in socio-occupational integration and exacerbating their vulnerability.

2. Methods

This article is based on a dynamic analysis of the situation of young migrants in Spain and Italy, the protection measures offered and the social and economic implications for this collective. It provides data and analyses policies on the transition to adulthood over the past three years. It aims to demonstrate how some procedures fail in their commitment to leaving no one behind. The research originates in the overall work of the doctoral thesis and the post-doctoral research project.

The methodology used is socio-legal analysis combined with empirical research. According to socio-legal theory (Schiff, 1976), the legal analysis is directly related to the social situation to which the law applies and is described by observing the implications of the law in changing or maintaining that situation.

Sixty-five documents were examined, including international and national guidelines, policy briefs, white papers, policy statements, reports based on quantitative and qualitative surveys, academic articles, blog posts, online databases, websites, and webinars. Interviews with long-standing experts in the field were combined with primary and secondary literature. In this way, we pursue an interactive approach that triangulates quantitative data, qualitative interviews and literature (Levy et al., 2020). The documents cover the period from March 2019 to May 2022. They were analysed using a grounded approach. This means those general ideas, recommendations, and explanations are based on or emerge from "systematically obtained data from social research" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The grounded theory has been applied to qualitative research to discover the meanings of people's actions, interactions and social experiences during interviews. These explanations have been defined as "founded"

because they are based on the explanations and interpretations of the participants. In addition, the grounded theory has been used as a research tool to conceptualize latent social patterns and structures in the research area of migrant child empowerment in the protection system through constant comparison.

The analysis of contemporary migration phenomena is closely linked to geographical areas, nation-states and borders. However, in a fluid world, these superstructures are only of relative value. The first and insurmountable difference concerns the form of the status of each. Spain is a federal state where the competencies of the Autonomous Communities are many and relevant in the field of migration. These have extensive competencies concerning protecting minors without family references, including those of non-Spanish nationality. At the same time, Italy is a centralised country where regional competencies could be improved, especially in migration. Comparing Italy and Spain can be a useless exercise in style, while reaching areas or regions is a valuable objective for decision-makers.

In the original research design, the comparison was between Campania and Andalusia. As we delved into the field research, we realised that they were “non-comparable magnitudes”, whereas, for geographical and historical reasons, Andalusia could be concretely compared to Sicily.

3. The legal status: Stepping out of the shadows

The priority objective of the protection systems under consideration is the integration of Unaccompanied Migrant Minors. It is a challenge and a success to bring active, trained and, above all, young people into society in countries of constant demographic decline, such as Spain and Italy.

The literature in the field of Migration Studies is crisscrossed with divergent currents of thought regarding integration, such as the assimilationist, functionalist, or multiculturalist. There are also those, such as Schinkel (Schinkel, 2018), who even reject integration as an expression of nationalism and neo-colonialism (Favell, 2019).

While human mobility is an intrinsic part of social change, to gain a more meaningful understanding of the “agency” and structure of migration processes, this article conceptualises migration as a function of aspirations and abilities for young people to migrate to geographical areas perceived as opportunities (de Haas, 2021).

Countries such as Spain, France, Italy, and Romania automatically grant residence permits to minors staying in their territory. In contrast, countries such as Hungary, Greece, Sweden, and the United Kingdom allow children to live irregularly in their territories. Therefore, minors must have a residence permit to regularly live in Spain and Italy in legal situations, whether in a reception centre or not. The processing of residence permits begins in the residential centres for minors; centres are responsible for obtaining the documentation of minors and for sending reports to the child protection entity to the legal guardian.

Although Spain and Italy have geographical and historical affinities, there are numerous differences regarding our subject matter.

3.1 Spain

The Spanish system guarantees protection to all minors under the jurisdiction of the state. Within the framework of this system, a fundamental task is to adopt all possible measures to ensure that minors reach adulthood with their rights protected and with sufficient opportunities for the development of their adult life in an autonomous, independent, and equal manner with nationals. The assumption of guardianship by the public entity¹ entails the possibility of obtaining the necessary documentation to legalise the stay in Spain. As soon as the abandonment procedure begins, getting a residence permit and, subsequently, a work permit is of fundamental importance for the future of the UMMs. Nevertheless, in practice, there are many strategies for the competent authorities not to declare the child “unprotected or unshielded”², not to assume guardianship and, therefore, not to grant a residence permit.

¹ Tutela administrativa.

² En desamparo.

To understand it well, the example is Instruction 3/2000 of the State Attorney General's Office on the procedure for returning foreign minors who enter Spain illegally and do not contribute to the situation of "desamparo". Instruction 3/2003, "on the return of foreign minors who intend to enter Spain illegally and who are not in a legal situation of abandonment"³, is based on the automatic application of the "Institution of emancipation by independent life" of Article 319 of the Civil Code⁴ to conclude that the foreign minor over 16 years of age, who enters Spanish territory, is emancipated.

The residence of all minors under the protection of the Child Protection Services is considered legal under Article 35.7 of the 2000 Law on Foreigners. Still, more is needed to leave the protection system regularly at 18. At 18, minors under guardianship must go with a residence permit; when they do not have one, the authorities have not transmitted the documentation of UMMs during their minority. The regions, for their part, apply to the Government Delegation, which must resolve the application, considering that the immigrant minors under guardianship are guaranteed their regular residence in the country by law.

Therefore, processing the residence permit has two prerequisites: the declaration of abandonment and the protection of the competent public body, analysed below.

3.2 Italy

Despite the similarity of European countries overlooking the Mediterranean, the regulatory differences prevent an exhaustive comparison between Italy and Spain. The contents of the third paragraph (using the guidelines and indications of the first paragraph) and then add the other paragraphs civil rights) deserves an ad hoc paper. Below is the section of the Italian case of possible comparison. The wave of migratory flows of unaccompanied minors to

³ Instrucción 3/2003, sobre la procedencia del retorno de extranjeros menores de edad que pretendan entrar ilegalmente en España y en quienes no concurra la situación jurídica de desamparo.

⁴ Institucion de emancipacion por vida independiente del art. 319 delCodigo Civil.

Italy has been constant in recent years, reaching 8,000 units of new entries registered annually (Platamone and Calderone, 2019; Accorinti, 2016). Like other legal practitioners and the entire social context, the Italian legislator found important critical issues in regulating, managing, and solving legal and social problems.

The problems relating to the protection of unaccompanied foreign minors are linked to their peculiar condition, including the minor age, the status of a foreigner, and the lack of parenting figures. Both with the supranational legal area (international and European), recognizing an element of extraneousness to the internal system for the management of such situations, and with issues related to the matter of migrant law, they contribute to protections, creating conflicts and overlaps⁵. International law protects the best interests of the child. In contrast, domestic law aims to balance the rights of the foreigner e internal interests of a collective nature (especially public order and internal security) (Valente, 2020).

The definition of Unaccompanied Migrant Minor (UMM) was mentioned for the first time in the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers of 9 December 1999, n.535⁶. However, it does not refer to UMM as a unitary discipline also, in the subsequent law, the so-called Bossi-Fini⁷, the reference is relegated to the operational aspect. We must wait for the "Legge Zampa"⁸ to find a univocal discipline dedicated to unaccompanied foreign minors. Recently the issue was also dealt with in the Security Decree. In Italy, by law, unaccompanied migrant minors must be equated to all effects with their Italian⁹ and European peers; they cannot be rejected at the border or,

⁵ Decreto-Legge 4 ottobre 2018, n. 113 (known as Decreto Sicurezza).

⁶ Decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri 9 dicembre 1999, n. 535.

⁷ Legge 30 luglio 2002, n. 189, *Modifica alla normativa in materia di immigrazione e di asilo* (non as Bossi-Fini).

⁸ Legge 7 aprile 2017, n.47. Disposizioni in materia di misure di protezione dei minori stranieri non accompagnati (known as Legge Zampa), GU n. 93, 21-4-2017.

⁹ Article 1, Legge Zampa.

except in exceptional cases, expelled¹⁰; the UMM, according to current legislation, must be placed in a safe place under Article 403 of the Italian Civil Code. Within the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, on 29 July 2014, the Mission Structure for the reception of Unaccompanied Migrant Minors¹¹ was established, with the task of creating a new reception system dedicated to UMMs. *Ad hoc* regulations have complied with the rights recognized by international conventions, the standard European asylum system, and domestic law, without prejudice to the competencies attributed to the regions and municipalities in this area. From the collaboration between the Mission Structure and the Central Service, with the support of EASO, the need was shared to study the development of a tool for SAI¹² project operators, a network destined to qualify as a privileged reception system for UMMs.

The new legislation harmonizes the relevant legislation at the national level, implementing all-around protection in favour of the minor and to the detriment of migration control. The first interview, for instance, is a fundamental tool to activate appropriate protection as soon as possible, especially for UMMs with vulnerability conditions. Under c. 1 of Article 19-bis of Legislative Decree 142/2015, the qualified staff of the reception facility and the cultural mediator, under the direction of the Social Services of the competent local body and with the help, where necessary, of non-governmental organisations (NGO) with proven experience in the protection of minors, collect the personal information of the child to bring out every valuable element for their protection. From a substantive point of view, the rights of minors have been consolidated with health protection, education, and all procedural guarantees, also through emotional and psychological assistance, the right to be informed and express one's opinion and legal aid. Previously, school enrolment and enrolment

in the health system were subject to a residence permit. This obstacle has been overcome by aligning with the right of international minors, which guarantee all minors the same rights.¹³ From a procedural point of view, the assignment of the guardian immediately after the identification of the minor and his / her entry into the first reception centres has optimized the bureaucratic times for the procedure relating to obtaining the residence permit¹⁴. Regarding reception, family custody is preferred, together with enhanced protection. Above all, the figure of the guardian goes from being the guarantor of the minor's assets (the UMMs arrive without investments) to the guarantor of personal rights, documentation, education, health protection, listening and family right. The guardianship task is also multifaceted because of the sharing of this care function with other subjects involved in managing the minor (any foster care, assistance bodies, etc.). The guardian remains, in any case, the coordinator of the child's rights with the institutions so that he/she may act as a spokesperson for their needs and promoter of the necessary solutions, being his/her legal representative. For example, the guardian may carry out the necessary acts to submit registrations and authorizations, propose sentences with the judge's authorization, initiate criminal proceedings to protect the child if he/she is the victim of a crime, appoint a defence counsel, etc.

Undoubtedly fundamental is the "primary" need: the request for a residence permit.

¹⁰ Articles 1 and 3 of *Legge n. 47/2017*. Disposizioni in materia di misure di protezione dei minori stranieri non accompagnati. G.U.

¹¹ MSNA (Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati).

¹² SAI (Servizio Centrale del Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione). Central Service of the Reception and Integration System.

¹³ Article 14 of *Legge Zampa*.

¹⁴ Centres activated by the Ministry of the Interior and financed by the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (FAMI).

Mode	Short description	Target person	Proponent	Responsible	Time of resolution	Where
1 Temporary Residence Permit	Residence permit last 1 year	UMM under custody	Guardian	Bodies exercising the guardianship	1 month – within 9 months	Reception centre for protected minors
1.1 Domicile	Where the address is, the Government Immigration Office will proceed ex officio with the procedure of the residence authorization	UMM, under the resolution of a Residence permit	Children’s Services of the Region (Comunidad Autónomas)	The Government Immigration Office also grants the registration card and the document accrediting legal guardianship.	Enter the Children’s Services	Reception centre for protected minors
1.2 Foreigner Identity Card	Both: a minor in possession of a passport and a minor without documents	UMM, under the resolution of Resident permit	Children’s Services of the Region (Comunidad Autónomas)	Guardian Legal representative	Enter the Children’s Services	Reception centre for protected minors
1.3 Residence permit renewal	Renewal for another year as long as the circumstances of its initial concession subsist	UMM, which has the permit in effect	Ex officio	The Government Immigration Office	During the sixty calendar days prior to the expiration date of the validity	
2 Temporary residence permit due to exceptional circumstances	Minors in the Protection Service who reach the age of majority without having obtained a residence permit	UMM without the residence permit	The interested party (ex UMM)	The Government Immigration Office	1 -6 months	
3 Work Permit	To obtain the residence and work authorization, the Immigration Regulations require the presentation of a one-year full-time employment contract	UMM holders of residence permits, who have turned sixteen	Guardian	The Government Immigration Office	1 – 9 months	
4 Refugee Status	Apply to apply for asylum	The minor follows the same rules and requirements as adult refugees	Guardian	Asylum and Refuge Office and Interministerial Commission for Asylum and Refuge of Ministry of Interior	3 -6 months	Authorized offices

5 Acquisition of Spanish nationality	Acquisition by “residence permit”	UMM who have been subject to protection for at least 2 years + 1 years of legal residence. In addition to good conduct and proven integration into Spanish society	Guardian	Ministry of Justice	2- 5 years	Ministry of Justice
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Table 1. Comparative typology of modes of regularization – Unaccompanied Migrant Minors – Spain. Own elaboration (Ministerio del Interior de Reino de España).

Mode	Short description	Target person	Proponent	Responsible	Time of resolution	Where
1 Residence Permit for Minors	It is valid until reaching the age of majority	The UMMs, for which refoulement or expulsion are prohibited	By the minor directly or by his/her guardian	Immigration Office of the Police Headquarters responsible for the Territory	1 month	Central Service of the Reception and Integration System (SAI)
1.1 Residence Permit for Minors renewal	Residence permit for study, work or awaiting work (1 or 2 years)	Training and conduct requirements	Guardian or Ex UMM	Questura (police headquarters) of residence or domicile	1 month	Residence or domicile
2 Residence permit for family reasons	UMM under fourteen entrusted to a family or distant relative. Valid until the age of majority	The UMMs, for which refoulement or expulsion are prohibited	The same minor with the lawyer or legal operator	Immigration Office of the Police Headquarters responsible for the Territory	1 month	Central Service of the Reception and Integration System (SAI)
2.1 Residence Permit for family reasons renewal	Residence permit for study, work or awaiting work (1 or 2 years)	Staying in Italy for three years and participating in an integration project for two years	Relative or Guardian	Questura (police headquarters) of residence or domicile	1 month	Residence
3 Residence Permit for social protection	Permit granted for 6 months, even in the absence of a passport	UMMs victims of situations of violence or severe exploitation and trafficking		Judicial Authority following a complaint		

3.1 Residence Permit for social protection	1 year renewal. At the age of majority it can be renewed for study or work	Psychosocial assistance programs	Guardian	Questura (police headquarters) of residence or domicile		
4 International protection	Residence permit for asylum request lasting 6 months	Well-founded fear of danger, death or torture in the country of origin	Guardian or Responsible for the reception structure	Territorial Commission for the Recognition of International Protection	Criterion of urgency	Questura (police headquarters) of residence or domicile
4.1 Refugee status	Refugee status	Well-founded reason + violation of children's rights		Territorial Commission for the Recognition of International Protection		
4.2 Subsidiary protection	Actual risk of return to the country of origin	Recognized "serious damage"		Territorial Commission for the Recognition of International Protection		
4.3 Special protection	The same subjects of protection for humanitarian reasons	Appropriate residence permit also protects the private and family life of the UMM		Territorial Commission for the Recognition of International Protection		

Table 2. Comparative typology of modes of regularization – Unaccompanied Migrant Minors – Italy. Own elaboration (Ministero dell'Interno Italiano).

4. Season of reforms and reflection

In 2019 (before the pandemic), only 395 applications were sent, according to the government's response to Senator EH-Bildu's parliamentary question¹⁵. The number is anecdotal when one considers that in 2019 all regions took in almost 5,000 minors¹⁶. Catalonia counted 176 authorisations, then Ceuta with 61, Andalusia with 60, the Basque Country with 17, Murcia and the Valencian Community with 14, Galicia with 11, the Community of Madrid with 10, Aragon and Castilla-La Mancha with 8, the Canary Islands with 6, the Balearic Islands with 4, Castilla y Leon with 3, up to Navarre with 2 and Cantabria with 1.

The small number of protected minors who reach the age of majority in a legal situation manifested the procedural problems in the protection system. The Ombudsman has pointed

out in his reports the urgency and drama of this situation, which is often the result of misinterpretations of existing legislation.

In the season of reforms in the field of immigration (extranjería), there are some significant regulations for the integration of unaccompanied migrant minors that will be mentioned below.

1. *Instrucción*¹⁷ 1/2020, of 6 March, of the "Secretaría de Estado de Migraciones". This norm allows migrant minors of working age from the age of 16 to work without further documentation. This is a clear break with the past, born of the express will of this collective, whose migration project is closely linked to work. It also extends the possibility of acquiring a residence and work permit for young migrants aged between 18 and 23 in the agricultural sector until 30 September 2020, including formerly protected persons.

¹⁵ Question 184/000077.

¹⁶ Secretaria de Estado de Relaciones con las Cortes, 2019.

¹⁷ Decree, here and onwards (author translation).

Many young migrants in an irregular situation had worked in the agricultural industry during the pandemic, the aforementioned Decree regularised their position with residence and work permits who have been employed continuously in this sector.

2. *Instrucción* 9/2020 of 29 September. This decree is significant because it entails granting a residence and work permit to young people between 18 and 21 in a legal situation, provided they have been employed in the agricultural sector.
3. Royal Decree 13/2020 (Agrarian Decree), of 7 April, adopted specific urgent measures on agricultural employment.
Royal Decree 903/2021:
 1. UMMs can enter the labour market from the age of 16 (and after 18)
 2. a separate regime for ex-protected young people
 3. extending the duration of residence permits and allowing young people aged between 18 and 23 who have been forced into irregularity to access a work permit.

In Italy, the Zampa Law of 2017 (Law No 47 of 7 April 2017. Provisions on protection measures for unaccompanied foreign minors) was at the forefront regarding training and protection, as highlighted above. However, in the last two years, due to the health emergency, transfers from the municipal UMMs centers (Centri MSNA) to the SIPOIMI centers have slowed down and, in some cases, been interrupted. This situation has created overcrowding and inconvenience. Training and work courses were also suspended, including those for teaching the Italian language. At the end of 2020, Italy enacted Law 173/2020 (which converted Law Decree 130/2020) and introduced amendments to the Security Decree n. 113 of 2018 and n. 53 of 2019 led to reforming the reception system with the transition from SIPROIMI to the Reception and Integration System (SAI). In fact, regarding reception, the new Reception and Integration System has been established, replacing SIPROIMI (Protection System for International Protection Holders and Unaccompanied Foreign Minors) and reverting to a similar system to the previous SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees).

5. Analysis: Andalusia and Sicily

This more specific research concerns the Mediterranean, which, thanks to its “intermediate” geographical position, represents the natural border between Asia, Africa and Europe (Ferrario et al., 2020). This peculiar position of the Mare Nostrum and some of its coastal states makes it possible to investigate how migration strategies undertaken by the youth population can be relevant tools to strengthen networks of relations and synergies with some European countries.

The research aims to reflect on the increased flexibility and complexity of current migration and the capacity for interaction between state and community in a dialectical relationship between the global and the local. Moreover, the unprecedented transformations in the demographic, social, economic and, ultimately, territorial spheres in an increasingly globalized and interdependent world require comparative investigation (Magistri, 2017).

In the broader post-doctoral project comparing Spain and Italy, the need was felt to confront regional areas to circumscribe the problems related to legal status, the first step towards integration. After outlining the issues related to the emergence of irregularity according to the rationalist (legal) approach, we turn to some reflections and research proposals suggested by the humanist (cultural) approach (Brusa, 2004, 2011).

In this section, we focus on the relationship between migration phenomena and geographical contexts, analyzing territorial social capital in the processes of settlement or transit of the young immigrant population (Lazzeroni and Meini, 2019). The comparison between Andalusia and Sicily lies in their comparable magnitude in geopolitical and demographic terms. Both are regions of landing, transit, and permanence of migratory flows from North Africa. Both have had the same historical evolution: from being lands of emigrants to receiving immigrants.

The Registry of Unaccompanied Migrant Minors records, as of December 31, 2021, a total of 9,294 minors under guardianship throughout Spain.

34.4% of the UMMs in Spain are in the protection system of Andalusia, 97% are male, and only 3% are female.

67% are minors from Morocco, 7.8% from Algeria, and 5.6% from Mali, following the other sub-Saharan nationalities. Arrivals by sea are 68.8% of the total, bearing in mind that the arrivals by land are registered in the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

On the educational and training front, during the pandemic, Andalusia experienced overcrowding in the reception centres for minors due to the exodus from the autonomous city of Ceuta to the peninsula. The lockdown also resulted in a drastic reduction of personnel, administrative and support staff. Consequently, there have been problems in teaching with the abandonment of intensive courses and language problems due to the need for more computer resources in the residential centres.

On the labour front, pre-employment contracts were interrupted, especially in the hotel and restaurant sector, in a region like Andalusia with a strong tourist vocation.

It should be emphasized that in Andalusia alone, the Agrarian Decree has provided an opportunity for these young people in times of pandemic; during 2021, more than 100 young migrants under the age of eighteen and the age of twenty-one had access to employment and regularization, removing them from the uncertainty of the transition to adulthood and the shadow of irregularity.

As of 31 December 2021, unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents increased by 73% compared to the same period in 2020. The unaccompanied foreign minors surveyed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies as of 31 December 2021 amounted to 12,284 (there were 7,080 in 2020): 9 out of 10 are males, primarily 17-year-olds (62.1%) and welcomed mostly in the South and the islands (55.48%). Sicily alone welcomes 28% (3,466), followed by Lombardy with 19%. In Sicily, minors under protection are 77.7% male and 22.3% female. Arrivals by sea are 74.7% of the national total, and the nationalities of origin are much more uneven than in Andalusia.

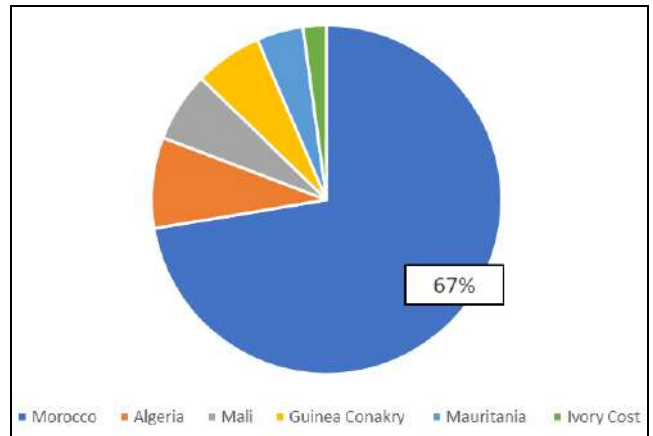


Figure 1. Country of origin (Spain). Own elaboration (INE, Ministerio Interior and Caritas).

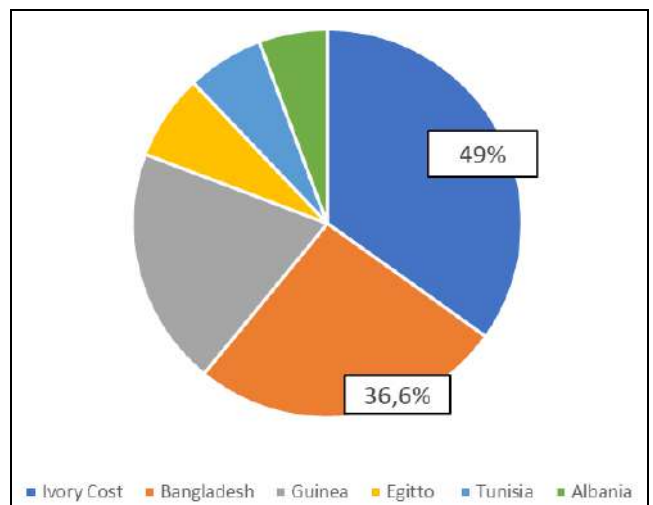


Figure 2. Country of origin (Italy). Own elaboration (Ministero del Lavoro e della Politiche Sociale and Caritas).

49% of the minors in the protection system are of Ivory Coast nationality, followed by 37% from Bangladesh and 28% from Guinea.

The last two years in Sicily were characterized by reduced places in the second reception centres, from 3,142 to 1,727. The pandemic short-circuited the reception system with the brutal quarantine on ships, where three minors died. The problematic quarantine in crowded hotspots, with the downward spiral of the failure to ascertain age.

The cornerstone of the Zampa Law is guardianship, but in the last two years, there has been a progressive reduction in the institution of the voluntary guardian.

On the educational front, the failure to

transfer to the second reception centres caused the interruption of the educational and training process, and remote teaching was also problematic in the dual reception centres, with interrupted the planned training courses for UMMs ex-protected up to twenty-three years old.

On the labour front, some virtuous initiatives should be underlined for the Sicilian region, such as the Empowerment Project that involved about 1,000 UMMs in 2020/21, mainly in the catering and tertiary sectors, and Regional Law No. 20/2021 “Regional Law for Reception and Inclusion”¹⁸ that favoured labour insertion in the agro-food sector.

Similarities were found between the two regions examined:

1. Vulnerability in the face of COVID (especially for irregular migrants who feared repatriation);
2. Increased psychological distress (e.g., escape from the centres);
3. Increased inequality (increased exploitation, especially in agriculture);
4. Stigmatization and increased racism and xenophobia towards the collective (“necessary enemy theory”).

6. Conclusions: from humanitarian migration to functional migration

This migration phenomenon does not follow the paradigm of “social capital” in the territory of immigration due to its “dynamic” nature. The network of norms bypasses the link with social networks at regional, national, European and international levels (Lazzeroni and Meini, 2019).

In fact, the concept of “childhood” prevails over the image of “migration”. The sacredness of childhood was defended and codified in the broader “season of rights”. Child protection becomes the cornerstone of the defence and protection of the vulnerable collective par excellence. This paradigm is extended to migrant minors, and unaccompanied minors are most exposed to exploitation, illegal trafficking networks, forced marriages and unskilled labour

of criminal groups. Migrant minors without a family reference are children and young people who, due to their situation, are exposed to social exclusion and educational, employment and social difficulties, and social exclusion and educational employment and social challenges. The hopes that accompanied them when they left their country for a better life are dashed, which can also affect them psychologically. The covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing crisis have exacerbated the above. It is, therefore, essential to find out what difficulties this unexpected situation has caused for children and young people on the move and the on children and young people on the move, and consequences it may have on their personal, social and personal, social and professional development.

In Spain, the pandemic has ushered in a season of reforms. Spanish legislation is compensating for the shortcomings of regularization. Until a few months ago, when they turned 18, former UMMs used to leave the protection systems without the residence permits processed. The work permit was directly a chimera.

During the pandemic in 2020, there were 400 young ex-protected between the ages of 18 and 21 who worked in the fields. More than 100 UMMs and former UMMs regularized in agriculture, only in Andalusia in 2021. At the end of June 2022, 9,300 (UMMs and former UMMs) have benefited from reforming the new Immigration regulations. A further 1,200 applications are in progress, and 77% of applications are successful. This means access to legal status and entry into the legal labour market. More than 3,300 young migrants have renewed their residence permits and have become the workforce and active taxpayers.

And what about the sacred minor? The migration project has become a priority compared to the fundamentals of humanitarian reasons. The homogeneity of this collective, composed mainly of Moroccan adolescents, draws the profile of economic migration and keeping them “prisoners” in the protection system exacerbates their vulnerability.

And in Italy? The Zampa Law was pioneering and partly a model for other national laws. The Zampa Law allows easier regularization and access to the labour market in Italy. However, the training courses are long and

¹⁸ Legge Regionale n. 20/2021 “Legge regionale per l'accoglienza e l'inclusione”.

often need a real employment outlet. According to the experts interviewed, the sectors in which young ex-protected migrants are employed are personal services (especially for non-self-sufficient persons, Alzheimer's patients, and severely handicapped persons), the social-health sector, the tourism/hotel/restaurant sector (cook's assistant, dishwasher), the fruit and vegetable sector, and commercial and/or warehouse workers.

In comparison, in Spain, the change has been in favour of employment integration. In Italy, there have been mainly income and inequality support measures. With experience gained through field research, the Author suggests listening to unaccompanied migrant minors and understanding their motivations and goals without caging them in an inadequate protection system, made more to confirm our philosophy than to help their integration.

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Past and present experiences of “natality” in border crossing. An Arendtian reading of the agency and rights of refugees

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Received: January 2023 – Accepted: March 2023

Abstract

Recent crises in Europe and beyond have renewed a longstanding debate on the status and treatment of refugees. Hannah Arendt famously questioned the limits of universalistic human rights discourse based on the widespread phenomena of statelessness and displacement that emerged during and after World War II. In this paper, we analyze recent patterns of inclusion and exclusion of refugees in Italy through the lens of Arendtian narrative and theorizing. We consider three cases of interaction between families, schools, and other public institutions in light of the shifting normative framework before and during the war in Ukraine. Two major insights emerge from this analysis. From a pedagogical point of view, the most promising educational practices with refugees are those centered on enabling their agency and corresponding experiences of “natality”. From an ethical-political perspective, these practices highlight a latent tension between the universalistic scope of human rights enshrined in the human rights declarations and their structural dependence on the particular norms and procedures enacted by nation states. The understanding and teaching of human rights within our political communities is inseparable from the practices that engage with refugees. In this sense, our practices of inclusion and exclusion affect the understanding of national borders as a barrier or threshold with other political communities, but also the interpretation of our own ethical-political principles.

Keywords: Refugees, Human Rights, Hannah Arendt, Agency, Inclusion, Exclusion, Ukraine, Minors

1. Introduction

Recent crises in Europe and beyond have renewed a longstanding debate on the status and treatment of refugees. The current understanding of these crises is, indeed, significantly indebted to the conceptual and legal heritage of the XX

century, and especially to the experiences of mass statelessness and dislocation that emerged in Europe in the wake of World War I and later exploded in the tragic persecution against ethnic and religious groups that marked World War II. The time of re-interpretation of human rights and re-organization of political boundaries that

immediately followed these experiences is still a focal point to understand the contemporary language of rights, asylum, migration, and humanitarian help. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol of the United Nations are, to this day, the main point of reference in international law when it comes to the treatment of refugees and the protection of asylum seekers. There is, however, increasing concern about the application of the treaties, especially in a time of massive migratory phenomena originated by old and new kinds of crisis: economic, political, military, and environmental (Benhabib, 2020, pp. 79-82). In this shifting scenario, it is useful to reconsider how the status of refugees was intellectually framed in the years following War World II, to then assess its evolution as it emerges from recent experiences of border crossing, rejection, and inclusion.

The account presented here is meant as an interdisciplinary contribution to this inquiry through philosophical and pedagogical lenses; in the following paragraphs, we will also explore some interactions between this philosophical-pedagogical reading and some emerging insights on the concepts of border, border-crossing, and boundary in recent geographical scholarship. The aim of this interdisciplinary inquiry is to open up new questions and avenues for joint research and Citizenship education spin-offs.

2. Refugees crises from the XX to the XXI century: an Arendtian reading

In 1951, the same year when the UN Refugee convention was signed in Geneva, Hannah Arendt published *The origins of totalitarianism*, a landmark book in which she questioned the limits of universalistic human rights discourse based on her analysis of the condition of stateless and persecuted people before and during World War II (Arendt, 1958). Her intellectual account was inspired by her own experience as a war refugee, which she recounted for the first time in the essay *We refugees*, published in 1943 (Arendt, 2007). Her personal path through antisemitic persecution entailed crossing border after border to save her life, and ultimately to heavily rely on the help of

other refugees as she arrived in the United States in 1941. She remained a stateless person up until 1951 when she finally got access to US citizenship.

Arendt observed that when the condition of being stateless and a refugee became a mass experience, the existing moral discourse on the universality and inalienability of human rights dramatically showed its ineffectiveness: people deprived of their social connections and political status were exactly in the position to enjoy rights based solely on their being human, and instead they found out that those rights would be enforced only if some political community accepted them as citizens and took responsibility for their protection. In this sense, Arendt claims, “we became aware of the existence of a right to have rights (and that means to live in a framework where one is judged by one's actions and opinions) and a right to belong to some kind of organized community, only when millions of people emerged who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global political situation” (Arendt, 1958, pp. 296-297). The emergence of these masses, not only deprived of a home but also of the possibility of finding a new one, lead to a detrimental transformation of the societies where these were temporarily displaced, as highlighted by all those democratic countries that ended up abandoning these crowds to “a form of lawlessness, organized by the police” and a regime of “unrestricted and arbitrary domination” that was not dissimilar to the treatment offered by the totalitarian countries (Arendt, 1958, pp. 288-289).

Based on this analysis, Arendt was skeptical of the renewed confidence in human rights discourse that followed the 1948 Declaration, and she insightfully noted that post-War solutions to the problem of persecuted peoples still based on the nation-state model, like the establishment of a sovereign Israel in Palestine, would only end up generating new masses of displaced and refugees, in this case Arabs pushed out of their homeland (Arendt, 1958, p. 290; Paz and Kook, 2021). The insistence on this logic of identity and exclusion in “a global, universally interrelated civilization”, she cautioned, may ultimately “produce barbarians from its own midst by forcing millions of people

into conditions which, despite all appearances, are the conditions of savages” (Arendt, 1958, p. 302).

Arendt was more hopeful in view of the concrete actions of solidarity, activism, and reinterpretation of their condition displayed by the refugees themselves, something she experienced during her own years as a refugee (Arendt, 2007, p. 273). She pointed out that, when faced with the devastating consequences of being deprived of our community and left to our bare existence “mysteriously given us by birth”, humans are still capable to be saved “by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or by the great and incalculable grace of love, which says with Augustine, ‘*Volo ut sis* (I want you to be),’ without being able to give any particular reason for such supreme and unsurpassable affirmation”. (Arendt, 1958, p. 301). This unique potential that human agency has of inaugurating something genuinely new and discontinuous from the mechanisms that determined the boundaries of the present is derived, she argues, from our “natality”: the fact that each new person brings into the world a “new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born” (Arendt, 1998, p. 247), and with it a capacity to “forgive” and overcome the past to reconfigure our social relationships.

In the last couple of decades, migration and human rights scholars have applied these Arendtian concepts to the current debate on refugees and their rights, especially by highlighting the parallels between the unprecedented masses of displaced and stateless individuals of the 1940s with the crowds of undocumented migrants of the 2000s and 2010s (Rancière, 2004; Hayden, 2008; Krause, 2011; Gündoğdu, 2015; Owen, 2018; Stonebridge, 2018; Holohan, 2019; Schinagl, 2019; Fiske, 2020). Recent scholarship in border studies is clearly aware that, within that timeframe, the global scenario has significantly changed: the clearly defined national borders whose crossing determined the fate of many XX-century refugees have been now largely replaced by ubiquitous “border spaces” of control and exclusion, dis-located borders that extend their influence inside and outside traditional geographical and political frontiers (Brambilla, 2010, pp. 74-76), such as in the case of the

buffer zones that the EU has established in Turkey and North Africa or the “offshore processing centers” that Australia opened in the Pacific countries of Nauru and Papua New Guinea (Essex, 2019). Moreover, the borders are becoming increasingly personal: for some, they disappear, such as in the case of EU citizens, while for others, whose legal ways to move towards the EU or the USA are effectively non-existent, they evolve into barriers rather than thresholds (Schulze Wessel 2016; Schulze Wessel and Razum, 2022). Yet, the idea of a “right to have rights” still proves especially apt to evaluate the moral and legal problems that arise in those liminal spaces created outside or inside national boundaries (ships, camps, shelters, prisons), where refugees are confined in a deeply uncertain status when it comes to their effective ability to claim the rights they are formally entitled to by international law (Kesby, 2012; Hirsch and Bell, 2017; Kmak, 2020; Riva and Hoffstaedter, 2021). This condition is especially morally problematic in the case of minors that find themselves captive in this kind of contexts, and that have been consequently designated as “Arendt’s children” (Bhabha, 2009). A large share of these child migrants are in fact in a position of functional statelessness, with their fundamental rights being formally recognized by international law, but practically unenforceable because of the absence of political institutions willing to take responsibility for them (Belton, 2010; Barbulescu and Grugel, 2016).

3. Recent patterns of inclusion and exclusion in Italy: three cases

Based on this recent revival of interest in the application of Arendtian narratives and theorizing to current refugee crises around the world, we adopted a similar framework to look into recent patterns of inclusion and exclusion of refugees in Italy. We considered, in particular, three cases of interaction between families, schools, and other public institutions in light of the shifting normative framework before and during the war in Ukraine.

Inclusion policies developed from the 1970s when, after the arrival of large numbers of immigrants, Italy turned from a country of

emigration into one of immigration. Today around five million immigrants are present in Italy, eight percent of the overall population. The foreign population in Italy is highly diverse in terms of country of origin, age, gender, and legal status¹.

In the mid-2000s, large numbers of refugees fled from African countries and the Middle East to escape persecution, war, and famine, and in 2015 this phenomenon culminated in the worst migration crisis in Europe since World War II. In that period, the Italian public debate focused on the distinction between “economic migrants” and “refugees” or “asylum seekers” (UNHCR, 2019), with reference to the 1951 Geneva Convention. In contrast to economic migrants who choose to move in order to improve their lives, refugees have been forced to leave their country without a real choice to save their lives from humanitarian crises, armed conflicts, persecution, or violations of human rights.

The Constitution of the Italian Republic ensured the rights of those in need of asylum in Italy as early as 1947. However, the gap between that statement and its enforcement is evident. Even though the right to asylum is enshrined in the Italian Constitution, the complexity and slowness of the recognition process inhibits the participation of many international protection applicants (Fontana, 2019).

Beyond that, it is also clear how inclusion and exclusion practices vary depending on the different categories of migrants seeking asylum.

¹ As of first January 2022, there were 5,193,669 foreign residents in Italy. In 2021, the majority of asylum and protection permits were granted to citizens of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nigeria. According to Ministry of Interior data updated on 11 June 2022, 132,129 people fleeing the conflict in Ukraine arrived in Italy since February: 69,493 women, 20,181 men, and 42,455 minors. As of 31 August 2022, according to the latest Report published by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, there were 17,668 unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy. Currently, the largest country of origin is Ukraine (5420, 30.7%), followed by Egypt (3389, 19.2%) and Tunisia (1654, 9.4) (Istat, annual report 2022).

We analyzed from a comparative perspective three different cases of asylum application management, taking the current period as a reference, from the outbreak of war in Ukraine in February 2022. The interest in these three cases is linked firstly to the statistical significance of the three groups, and secondly to the different reception strategies activated for each of them by our country.

The *first case* concerns adult asylum seekers, present in our country since the late 1940s. Italy has not created clear instructions on the areas of reception of asylum seekers and refugees, despite a significant, although variable, yearly number of permits for international protection released each year (Table 1). Moreover, the system of reception for asylum seekers and refugees is guided by an emergency approach. The refugee’s reception should be carried out in three steps: a) rescue and first aid, to be realized in government structures; b) initial reception, which should take place at regional or interregional level centers called hubs; c) a second reception and integration, to be implemented in the National Protection System for asylum seekers and refugees, spread throughout the national territory (Catarci, 2016).

The most problematic aspect of the “classic” reception of refugees is the absence of a future life project that would allow for autonomy in employment and housing, as well as the possibility of moving to other European countries based on their life plans (Fontanari, 2018). Inclusion policies should thus entail not only basic assistance but also all those needs related to information and guidance regarding access to the local network of social, work, and health services, on top of employment support to facilitate social inclusion. For those who have abandoned the people, places, and social roles of their previous life, being provided with proper time and space is vital to cope with these losses and to compose and come to terms with their own stories.

Year	Number of permits
2018	51,500
2019	27,029
2020	13,467
2021	31,000

Table 1. Yearly international protection permits in Italy 2018-2021.

Source: Istat, 2020; 2021; 2022.

The *second case* concerns unaccompanied foreign minors, who are assimilated in terms of age and vulnerability to the condition of asylum seekers, at least until the age of majority, through the recognition of a residence permit for humanitarian reasons (Traverso, 2020). Their total number registered in Italy has been highly variable over the years (Table 2). The legal definition of ‘unaccompanied foreign minors’, proposed by the European Community in 1997, has certainly helped define this particular form of migration but it risks inhibiting an evolutionary vision of the growth paths of these young people: they are, in fact, minors, but they also quickly become legal adults, since they are predominantly between 16 and 17 years old at the time of their arrival in Italy. They are also foreigners by citizenship, but they become students of our schools, thus participating in Italian culture; they are formally not accompanied by an adult figure, but they often make the migration on a family mandate and with frequent exchanges at a distance with their family of origin (Granata and Granata, 2019).

Compared to other European countries, Italian services are broader and more diversified. Beyond food and accommodation, they also take into consideration learning the Italian language, receiving legal protection and health care, and in particular access to school, which is not provided in any other European legislation. However, the Italian system has been defined as an unfinished reception, particularly when it comes to the transition to majority and autonomy (Giovannetti, 2008). Young refugees have little interaction with the social and cultural environment since most communities for minors are peripherally located, at the margins of cities or in small isolated municipalities, with few possibilities of communication with the outside world and society.

Year	Unaccompanied foreign minors
2018	10,787
2019	6,054
2020	7,080
2021	12,284

Table 2. Unaccompanied foreign minors present and registered in Italy at December 21st, 2018-2021.

Source: Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2018; 2019; 2020, 2021.

The *third case* we wish to discuss concerns asylum seekers from Ukraine following the conflict that began in late February 2022. For them, with an unprecedented decision, on 4 March 2022 the European Union formally acknowledged the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons deserving special temporary protection, thus activating its Directive 2001/55/EC and initiating a special reception plan, distinct from the general provisions for the inclusion of asylum seekers (Ambrosini, 2022). The influx of Ukrainian citizens who sought international protection in Italy was unprecedented and vastly outnumbered the general figures of the previous years (Table 3).

Specifically, the Italian legislation on the reception of Ukrainian refugees (DPCM 28 March 2022), which was drafted based on the European Union directive, provides for: one-year renewable international protection, immediate access to health care and the education system, and the possibility of seeking regular employment in each territory. The great novelty of this approach is the possibility of recognizing the autonomy and responsibility of refugees, and guaranteeing the possibility of seeking autonomous housing solutions, with a contribution of 300 euros per person and 150 euros for minors (thus expressing trust in the refugees and in the housing market, which is usually disinclined to open its doors to foreign tenants). Excluded from this program are the foreign people who were living in Ukraine and left the country with the rest of the population (students, foreign workers on temporary contracts, and asylum seekers).

2022 Ukrainian refugees in Italy	
Women	113,692
Minors	62,575
Unaccompanied minors	5,042

Table 3. Ukrainian citizens seeking international protection in Italy in 2022.

Source: Istat, 2022; Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2022.

4. Promising practices: from agency to “natality”

Representations of the refugee figure respond to a complex and ambivalent view, based on the regulatory framework, the central and municipal resources available for its applicability, and the socio-cultural and media climate. As Didier Fassin (2011) explains, between the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, two approaches took shape in this process: the humanitarian approach (particularly at the end of the 20th century) and the securitarian approach (starting with the 21st century). Whereas in the early 1990s, the collective narrative about refugees is heavily focused on the dynamics of suffering and trauma, thus prompting compassion and assistance devices, in the early 2000s, a narrative centered on insecurity, crime, and terrorism prevails, thus inspiring the rise of anxiety, fear, and security devices (Khosravi, 2007). Although in times of economic crisis the latter tends to prevail, to the point of criminalizing the former, both approaches coexist in our reception system: the refugee is at one time a subject to be protected (vulnerable, suffering, and needy) and at another time a subject to be protected from (threatening and dangerous for others, the natives in particular). In both approaches, although profoundly different, there is a lack of attention to the uniqueness of the actions and efforts displayed by the refugees in building a new life for themselves (D’Agnese, 2020).

The Arendtian perspective stands out as particularly illuminating for overcoming these passivizing and dehumanizing approaches to refugees and for bringing to the light those practices that, instead, enhance the agency of these people within the new community. According to her, refugees, as humans, should

be given the chance to express their agency, to introduce a “novum” into history, to begin something that was not there before, thus refuting any mechanistic reading of socio-historical processes (Arendt, 1958). The fact that a person is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, “that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world” (Arendt, 1958, p. 47). By their natality, humans realize themselves and the plurality takes place in a community.

From a pedagogical point of view, the most promising educational practices with refugees are, indeed, those centered on enabling their agency and corresponding experiences. Human rights are fully embodied in contexts that do not “manage” refugees as passive subjects, but rather aim at developing their capabilities and supporting mutual learning processes that redesign the boundaries of the learning community. In other words, refugees had to be able to express their capacity to actualize natality and take the initiative to build their new lives. Refugees dwell concretely in loss and death, their past, their house, and daily life has been stolen and the present is a constant threat. Because of this dramatic situation, they act to save their life but also to enact their projects and their humanity, attempting to give a new meaning to their lives. In this way, they would be – if placed in the conditions to be able to do so – in the condition to “take initiative” and actualize “natality” in the new society (D’Agnese, 2020).

In Hannah Arendt’s thinking, the construct of natality is articulated in relation to what she identifies as the three fundamental forms of human activity: labour, work, and action, which have the task of preserving the world. Of the three, the most closely related to the human condition of natality is action: “the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting: an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities” (Arendt, 1958, p. 9). In this sense, action and natality are the central categories of political thought.

The transmissive nature of education is challenged by the construct of natality. But, if one aim of education is to teach people to enact their humanity and search for new meanings of their life, even in unfavorable conditions, refugees embody education at its best (Levinson, 2001). The educational bearings of a political application of Arendt's thought could be crucial for the whole community. However, the currently prevailing forms of refugee reception do not align with her perspective (Catarci, 2016).

If we look at the three cases of application of the U.N. Refugee Convention that we have considered (classical refugees, unaccompanied minors, and "special" refugees from Ukraine), it appears that the passivity/action dichotomy is indeed the crucial node in the reception system of the three categories of refugees, as it happens to be applied in very different ways. The reception model for classic minors and refugees, while virtuous and generous in intentions, is in need of major changes. In particular, the separation of people from the ordinary life of society makes their subsequent integration and action in the community difficult, if not impossible.

In the context of their life as refugees, there are three main areas where they have a chance to express their agency and autonomy: *housing*, *employment*, and *skills*. These three assets represent the major challenges, from a social and educational perspective, for the inclusion of all refugees.

When dealing with these dimensions, the logic behind the reception of unaccompanied minors and classic refugees is similar.

As far as *housing* is concerned, prolonged stay in host communities – for minors and adults – inhibits the possibility of developing autonomy in the choice of a living place. In the case of minors, paradoxically, the longer the length of stay in the community, the less the children develop autonomy skills, according to the process of "regressive infantilization" (Sbraccia, 2011). In the case of adults, the inability to choose how to live and with whom, hinders the possibility of developing agency and autonomy skills for their lives.

Regarding the *employment*, the issue is even more delicate. If for minors there are few opportunities for knowledge and training in the field of work while in their host community, for adults the long wait for the attribution of the refugee status and the lack of recognition of their educational qualifications makes it difficult to enter the world of work quickly. Assisted and protected the former, precarious and unrecognized the latter, minors and adult refugees live in a suspended situation that effectively excludes them from the community.

Finally, regarding the *skills*, if in the case of unaccompanied minors the school experience guarantees a broader education and the acquisition, in many cases, of a qualification, for adult refugees there is only basic literacy. In both cases, there is a lack of opportunities to develop specific skills for autonomy, such as financial skills that allow one to assess the cost of a rent or the adequacy of a salary, closely linked to the two previous dimensions (housing and employment).

Different, at least in the regulatory premises and invested resources, appears to be the reception of Ukrainian refugees. With regard to *housing*, according to European regulations, they can choose whether to be placed in facilities, spend a budget on renting a house, or be taken in temporarily by a family.

In addition, when it comes to *skills* and *employment* opportunities, educational qualifications can be recognized and, in theory, people can carry out their own profession in the country of asylum. In practice, in Italy, the procedure for recognition of qualification is so slow and complex that it discourages most professionals and brings them to look for other countries to realize this aim. Minors, who have arrived mainly in the wake of their mothers, are entitled to immediate inclusion in school settings, although within a system that does not always adequately recognize their prior skills.

Some authors have questioned whether it is legitimate to differentiate how refugees are received and included in this way (Ambrosini, 2022; Costello and Foster, 2022). Undoubtedly, the different treatment of people fleeing war and persecution appears problematic and discriminatory (i.e. migrant people in Ukraine,

mainly from African countries, are not recognized in Italy as Ukrainian citizens, even though they are both fleeing the same war). But it can also be seen as an opportunity to rethink the boundaries and modalities of the new practices of reception and inclusion that emerged after the war in Ukraine, to then extend such promising practices to all refugees in the future according to a logic that recognizes the refugees' capacities and agency.

5. A reconsideration of boundaries: from “natality” to embodied rights

From an ethical-political perspective, the practices of inclusion and exclusion that we have explored highlight the latent tension between the universalistic idea of human rights enshrined in the international declarations and its problematic incarnation within the particular norms and procedures enacted by nation-states increasingly concerned with the control of their legal boundaries and geographical borders.

In this problematic context, the agency of refugees and stateless persons, whenever it finds proper conditions to be expressed and recognized, acquires a transformative aspect, as it highlights the tension between formal citizenship as a legal status and substantive citizenship as the activity of finding a place in the cultural and social fabric of a political community, contributing through study and work to its development and, finally, coming to publicly raise claims and affirm rights as active players of that society. Even outside of the boundaries of citizenship as a given status, all those practices that enable the refugees' agency also lead them to express “acts of citizenship” (Isin, 2008) that do now flow from the legal boundaries of citizenship, but rather display the non-identity between those boundaries and the universalistic moral principles that are supposed to be the sources of justification of any democratic and egalitarian polity. In this way, “paradoxically, the rights-claiming migrant, who transgresses the borders of political communities, comes to represent the citizen *par excellence*, calling on the state to do justice to its universal foundations” (Rees, 2017, p. 6). These forms of civic agency suggest the possibility of

reframing our understanding of the normative meaning of the borders of democratic communities through the lens of the Arendtian category of natality, which, as we have previously suggested, appears particularly apt to frame the condition of the refugee.

In *The human condition*, Arendt draws from Greek and Latin sources to point out two inseparable aspects of human agency: one that is related to the ability to initiate (*archein, agere*), the other related to the task of achieving and bringing to a conclusion (*prattein, gerere*). The first aspect is the one rooted in the human condition of natality and signals the irreducible contribution that comes from the individual, but it is the second that later prevailed, especially in the impersonal political language of norms and institutions. This is a great loss that needs to be remedied, since, she argues, the political space, marked by the human condition of plurality, thrives only when the novelty of individual action can intertwine with the actions of others to jointly define a shared world, a space where political power is always shared, a form of acting together with others (Arendt, 1998, pp. 189; Musso, 2014, pp. 55-60; Vergani, 2020, pp. 119-123). In this perspective, action “always establishes relationships and therefore has an inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries”; limitations and boundaries, human institutions and laws are structurally vulnerable to the impetus of change transformation that “arises from the human condition of natality”. This is especially true in the case of territorial perimeters, both “the fences inclosing private property” and “the territorial boundaries which protect and make possible the physical identity of a people”. As each generation participates through their actions in the task of building the world they will inhabit with others, it becomes increasingly clear that “the boundlessness of action is only the other side of its tremendous capacity for establishing relationships, that is, its specific productivity” (Arendt, 1998, pp. 190-191). This spontaneously disruptive tendency of action rooted in natality is complemented by the human attitude towards speech, which is in turn rooted in the condition of plurality, “of living as a distinct and unique being among equals”. The composition of action and speech that originates

among different humans sharing the same world is dynamic, it constantly redefines agreements and arrangements, so that each generation and each new encounter can express its “answer to the question asked of every newcomer: ‘Who are you?’” (Arendt, 1998, p. 178).

Thorough her entire intellectual journey, Arendt has been deeply committed to the possibility that these pre-political spaces of action and conversation can decisively renew the realm of political relationships and constantly regenerate a plural community of different yet interdependent subjects. In her reading of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (Arendt, 2005, pp. 5-39), she points out that a prominent aspect of Socratic agency was the inquiry for relationships beyond the walls of the polis, a trait direly needed by a civilization whose most fundamental weakness was the constant agonism among city-states enclosed behind their narrow borders. Friendship, in this sense, is for Aristotle prior to justice, and when the order of legal justice crumbles, it is up to the human ability to establish friendly relations through interpersonal agency so that the world can be rebuilt anew.

The immediate expression of this kind of agency is, Arendt argues, a fundamental freedom of movement that can be construed as “the freedom to depart and begin something new and unheard-of or as the freedom to interact in speech with many others and experience the diversity that the world always is in its totality”; this freedom constitutes “the substance and meaning of all things political” and without it “there is no political space in the true sense”. For this very reason, however, “the means by which one can establish a political space and defend its existence are neither always nor necessarily political means” (Arendt, 2005, 129), but they rather need to be found in the ethically inspired actions of those that, outside pre-established boundaries, creatively open new shared perimeters of encounter and interaction (Hayden and Saunders, 2019).

This Arendtian reading of the tense relationship between agency and borders is significantly in tune with the recent evolution of border studies. The increasing amount of border-crossing phenomena born of globalization has loosened the connection between territorial

borders as institutionalized perimeters of political sovereignty and national boundaries as homogenous and stable forms of cultural identification (Paasi, 2013, pp. 478-483). As a consequence, in recent decades, border studies have moved from a focus on territoriality and sovereignty to a more processual, practice-based understanding of borders (Paasi, 2007). Arendt’s analysis of the condition of refugees signals a farsighted awareness of this contemporary development, both normatively and methodologically.

From a normative point of view, it is important to note that the Arendtian perspective shares some relevant sensibilities with XXI-century border studies, but it should not be seen as an anticipation of the borderless globalization narratives that marked the end of the XX-century. Arendt recognizes that all human experiences of communal life develop within significant normative boundaries and that systematic neglect and violation of legal and geographical borders is actually a frequent feature of totalitarian movements (Arendt, 1958, pp. 389-398). In *The human condition*, she writes that “before men began to act, a definite space had to be secured and a structure built where all subsequent actions could take place, the space being the public realm of the polis and its structure the law” (Arendt, 1998, p. 194). In this sense, for her, the existence of a bounded legal space is constitutive of a community within which people can move in freedom (Lindahl, 2006, pp. 881-883). The concept of a “right to have rights” is, after all, not the offspring of a universalistic Kantian cosmopolitanism, but rather a critique of the problematic status of people who, even after getting into national borders that should protect their freedom, remain suspended within immaterial boundaries of exclusion. This concern is consistent with much recent geographical literature devoted to the problematic proliferation of border zones and borderlands (Newman, 2017) that, well beyond national frontiers, put border-crossers within normative bubbles that separate them from the entertainment of their rights. The right to have rights is, in this sense, an early inquiry into the “law of the land” that should govern old and new borderlands created by the tension between Modern imaginaries of territorial sovereignty

and unprecedented phenomena of human displacement.

Arendt's aim, then, is not to contest the role of boundaries in general, or even specifically of national borders, but rather to highlight that their ethical and political value depends on how in practice they enable or suppress the expression of the human conditions of plurality and natality. What she contests is not the territorial dimension of the *nomos* that regulates our coexistence, but its Schmittian understanding as a boundary that springs from a primordial relationship of the people to soil (Jurkevics, 2017, pp. 347-349) to preserve the separation of the own and the strange (Lindahl, 2006, p. 895). For Arendt, instead, boundaries constantly emerge from intersubjective agency and their normative goal should be that of enduring freedom and plurality. This stance is inspired by her methodological focus on the experience and agency of refugees; a focus that is, again, consistent with recent research trends in border studies. Borders are in fact increasingly characterized based on the kind of agency that surrounds them and that determines their impact on the lives of those that cross them. This methodological sensitivity for agency at the borders emerges in several contemporary lines of inquiry: on the bordering practices that sovereign states and private actors enact outside of traditional frontiers (Johnson et al., 2011, pp. 61-63), on national boundaries construed "as processes that exist in socio-cultural action and discourses" (Paasi, 2007, p. 72) rather than as territorial heritages of Modern politics, on the performativity of borders, with the application of Judith Butler's understanding of gender boundaries as repetitions of stylized repertoires of agency to the continuous reproduction of geopolitical boundaries through collective actions (Butler, 1988; Johnson et al., 2011, pp. 66-67).

It is with the same methodological focus on agency, confident in individual initiative and interested in experiences of border-crossing, that we look at the most promising practices we explored. Unfortunately, in many ways, these practices constitute an exception rather than the norm: surely the securitarian logic of border surveillance inspires a widespread suppression of the individual agency of refugees, but the

language of humanitarian protection also reflects a questionable understanding of asylum that admits only those who are ascribed a moral status of innocence and victimhood, and consequently frames hospitality as an act of care towards passive subjects in need (Ticktin, 2016, pp. 257-262). As Arendt noted, asylum was never conceived as a measure for the masses, but only for the few exceptional cases of those who were persecuted for specific actions, leaving all the rest, including her, in the cold (Arendt 1958, 280-194; 2007, 264-265). The practices of hospitality and empowerment of refugees that we have endorsed, instead, embody assumptions about the moral status of all those who are involved that do not align with the structural disparity of the relationship between those who manage and those who are managed, the political community that grants certain rights and those who temporarily and conditionally entertain them.

In these promising contexts of practice, human rights are first and foremost embodied rights, the outcome of agency originated from within the refugee groups and empowered from without, by the community of those willing to enable and correspond to their initiative. These kinds of practice become especially crucial when the legal framework that should protect those rights is constantly eluded and bypassed by the institutions that are supposed to enforce it in the first place. So where institutions show their deficiencies, often with the support of citizens that identify with the boundaries of a closed community, it is up to concrete gestures of empowerment and solidarity to create spaces of enabled agency and authorized voice. In this sense, speaking of embodied human rights serves to point out how, from an Arendtian perspective, those rights are "created through human decision and determination" and "instantiated through our action" (Parekh, 2007, 759). Going beyond Arendt's pessimism on human rights discourse, local experiences of self-organization, mutual solidarity, and critical deliberation among refugees in many places around the world serve to unsettle "the logic that expulsion from citizenship as conferred by states and at the heart of the Westphalian world order is a catastrophe, necessarily stripping people of agency (action), opinion and the ability to

participate” (Fiske, 2020, pp. 563-564).

These promising practices are, in a sense, practices of moral resistance and contestation of a narrow understanding of citizenship as a privilege of belonging. In the moral perspective they open, the border crossing of refugees can be reframed from being the violation of a norm, with the consequent burden of a liminal condition of suspicion and suspension within the community, into a risky but potentially transformative new beginning, an experience of natality that initiates relations with other human beings on different terms. The outcome is an acknowledgement of mutual responsibility and an invite to consider that the boundaries of citizenship are boundaries of active recognition and cooperation rather than the perimeter of a legal status that is granted based on traits that are fundamentally independent of a person’s agency, such as their factual circumstances of birth or their ancestors’ lineage.

6. Conclusions

The problem of borders, and their crossing, is essential to the understanding and teaching of citizenship and human rights in democratic societies. Our practices of inclusion and rejection express our understanding of national borders as a barrier or threshold with other communities, but also more generally our interpretation of the ethical-political principles that preside over democratic life. By looking at the experiences of refugees and their forms of agency as they attempt to cross borders, overcome exclusions, and initiate new lives, we learn more about the dynamic nature of belonging and participating in the political community, and about the questionable nature of the ideal and material boundaries that allow or deny human cooperation and development. The aim of this learning process is not to romanticize mobility and border-crossing, but rather to keep our practices of boundary construction in sight and open to scrutiny and contestation (Pratt, 1999, p. 156).

These issues cannot be resolved exclusively from the point of view of political theory or constitutional law, since the justification of the boundaries of the demos, including questions

regarding who should be a member and who should not, what voices count and which claims should remain unheard, can only be answered through practices that open up a space of hospitality consistent with the principles of liberal democracy (Benhabib, 2020, pp. 91-92). This “boundary problem”, following its formulation by Frederick Whelan, “is one matter of collective decision that cannot be decided democratically [...] We would need to make a prior decision regarding who are entitled to participate in arriving at a solution [...] [Democracy] cannot be brought to bear on the logically prior matter of the constitution of the group itself, the existence of which it presupposes” (Whelan, 1983, p. 22).

Arendt’s awareness of the importance of pre-political forms of moral agency and her understanding of the irreducible plurality of the public sphere, where human agency constantly questions and pushes preset normative limits, offer a more dynamic and inclusive picture of the borders of the political community, where the refugee and the citizen are both essential to define the boundaries of the polis (Makris, 2019, pp. 77-81). As Arendt noted, the possibility of civic friendship among citizens and refugees, their ability to share the same world in action and discourse, is the only proper ground where to host the diversity that inevitably populates the political community and constantly questions the significance of its borders. This awareness has profound implications for civic education and refugee hospitality practices.

In the field of Citizenship education, we suggest, then, that an interdisciplinary approach that jointly encompasses the philosophical, historical, and geographical understanding of the refugee crises between the XX and XXI centuries is essential to properly introduce the students to the structural tension between the historical specifications of citizenship, with their corresponding legal incarnations, and the ideal profile of citizenship in democratic theory. The study of geographical and political borders should be paired with the abundant history of refugees’ and migrants’ border-crossing that accompany them and the corresponding evolution of the interpretive and normative concepts used to take stock of it. This should also offer important occasions of recognition

and mutual learning in all those educational settings inhabited by refugee minors and second- or third-generation migrants, whose personal stories are intertwined with that history.

In the field of hospitality practices, the lesson we draw from the cases we examined, together with the Arendtian lesson we articulated, is that the recent legal and political framework articulated in Italy and the EU to prepare the reception of refugees from the war in Ukraine should not be construed as the idiosyncratic product of a state of exception, but rather as the promising early draft of a new normal. The massive amount of Ukrainian citizens successfully accepted and supported in the EU since the start of the conflict shows that a more

empowering and open-ended approach to refugee reception appears to be, *prima facie*, applicable to similar influxes of asylum seekers from other crises. Although specific cultural and contextual aspects of each refugee crisis are relevant to the historical trajectory of their reception, the Arendtian lesson suggests that only practices that enable the generative natality of the refugees' agency are consistent with the traits of our human condition and, ultimately, with the principled assumptions we rely on to justify the normative boundaries of our democratic communities as communal experiences of cooperation and deliberation among free and equals.

Acknowledgements

Even if the paper was devised together by the authors, P. Monti wrote paragraphs 2 and 5, A. Granata wrote paragraphs 3 and 4, both authors equally concurred to writing paragraphs 1 and 6.

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Finding Common Ground: International Students in UPO and their Academic Experiences

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Received: January 2023 – Accepted: March 2023

Abstract

The article aims to reflect on the international migratory movements in Italian Universities. This important phenomenon resulting from globalisation has increased the number of interchanges of foreign students in our educational system. The study explores university perspectives from the point of view of the strengths and challenges of international activities in Italy, as well as the immigrant students' role in social and human capital of a foreign society.

This paper calls for a rethinking of education across borders by examining the University of Piemonte Orientale's (UPO) student academic experiences, with particular focus on achieving internationalisation, within an increasingly challenging political and socio-economic context.

Within this framework and thanks to the collection, storage and processing of data, the article offers an overview of the relationships between UPO and foreign students. In particular, the methodological approach sets out to link the quantitative data, analyse the student migration dynamics and pay attention to the territorial approach in order to understand both the social inclusion and migrant identity dimensions.

Keywords: International Students, Migrant Inclusion, University of Piemonte Orientale

1. Introduction

Trends in international student mobility suggest an increase in the number of students studying in different countries all over the world. In the OECD countries the number of international students enrolled has reached 4.4 million, accounting for 7% of all tertiary students. The share of international students is higher in advanced levels of education, in fact they make up 5% of the students enrolled in

bachelor's, 14% in master's, and 24% in the PhD courses for foreign students in the 2020 academic year (OECD, 2022).

The number of international students being educated in Italian universities is increasing every year. With the growing number of such students, the issue of their inclusion becomes relevant. Their adaptation not only determines the success of their education, but also measures the relevant role of universities in the global

educational system, which in the initial stages should be aimed at accelerating the adaptation of international students to everyday life. However, while increased student enrolment has several benefits for university education, the non-Italian students could be subject to a series of social and mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety and other. These problems are due to different factors such as language barriers, being in a new environment, different socio-cultural norms, difficulties in making local friends, work restrictions, cultural knowledge and low social support.

During the Coronavirus Pandemic/Covid-19, many studies have shown that the epidemic led to major traumas in people's lives (Badar et al., 2023; Chirikov et al., 2020; Mellillo, 2021; Wang et al., 2020) and especially some groups such as the elderly, disabled, homeless and young people. This is not the first pandemic, but it is the first in times of globalisation, in which the world network of spatial connection is linked to a rapid circulation of information, goods and persons, greater by far than in the past (De Vecchis, 2021, p. 47).

Foreign students are an often ignored cluster however, and were socially and economically affected by the pandemic because of their immigrant status (Angeloni et al., 2020; Firang, 2020; Guadagni, 2021). In fact, many international students experienced a number of problems related to the administrative procedures required to leave the country in order to take up studies (Erasmus students) or to go back to their family. In 2020 most EU and OECD countries closed their national borders in an effort to limit the coronavirus epidemic, and many universities temporarily stopped their activities. While the majority of the students returned to their hometowns or found safe accommodation with close friends or extended families, the international students remained in campus residence because of travel restrictions and limited financial resources. Students had to use online learning and to adapt to the limited social support caused by the isolation. While these students faced difficult personal and educational conditions, they nevertheless also demonstrated resilience.

This work analyses the mobility of foreign

students and aims to provide information on the student data at enrolment, in terms of the student flows enrolled at universities, according to some socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, citizenship and type of course attended.

The work is divided into different parts. The first section is dedicated to presenting the national data, the second examines the student academic experience of the University del Piemonte Orientale (UPO), with particular focus on the data (such as the number of student enrolment, their academic career, the number of students receiving a scholarship). The final part is dedicated to the relationships between UPO and foreign students.

2. Methodology

This study uses a mixed-method approach and is based on the analysis of official statistical data. The first part is dedicated to the theoretical framework, in particular a geographical literature review of human capital and student mobility.

The second part is divided into two steps of analysis. In the first step the work examines the data of the Statistical Bureau of the Italian Ministry of University and the EDISU Piemonte that show the present situation in Italy and at UPO. The second is dedicated to the analysis of specific data by UPO of the enrolments divided into type of courses, citizenship and gender.

The qualitative study concerns the students who do not have Italian citizenship and who have decided to study at UPO without Erasmus agreements.

The data involve many factors such as the number of international students (total number, female and male), the origin of the students by citizenship, the type of master's or bachelor's degree chosen and the overview of scholarships.

The conclusions are reviewed in the light of the theoretical approach of the link between international students and human capital. The article concludes with a proposal for future research to study the experiences of international students in Italian universities.

3. Theoretical framework and development of hypotheses

Migration studies have received great attention and been investigated through theoretical and empirical analysis (Brusa, 1999, 2004, 2006, 2012; Cristaldi and Morri, 2014; Cristaldi, 2020, 2021; De Vecchis, 2014; Meini, 2008, 2012), while the other forms of mobility, such as student flows, have received much less attention. International student mobility is a peculiar form of temporary movement (Staniscia, 2012) with important effects for the original and host countries.

The university student's mobility is now a relevant phenomenon in many countries. Migration flows towards foreign universities have increased considerably and this has affected Italy too.

The international students' movements have been dominated by flows from Asia, North Africa and the Middle East to the USA, Australia, United Kingdom and the European Union and reflect the uneven development of the global education and economic system (Holloway et al., 2012).

The link between the role of migrants and the increase of human capital regards their innovative contribution to the dynamism of the host economies. In many countries, the admission of foreign students to some university courses requires the passing of national entrance exams. The exams aim to verify that these students are well prepared to successfully pursue university education in the host country (Arenas, 2021).

Current migrations are characterised by relational, territorial and cultural components and are conditioned by the new means of communication (Magistri, 2017). In order to understand student mobility, it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach (Turco, 2018). This tool allows an integrated analysis of the different spaces: the departure areas where the decision to study abroad matures, and the arrival ones where new forms of interaction take place between the cultural models of family of origin and the values and languages of the host community (Lazzeroni and Meini, 2021, p. 66).

Students are encouraged to attend their studies abroad by push and pull factors. The first operate within the country of origin and initiate

the students' decision to go abroad. The push factors are driven by the limited study possibilities in the home country, leading to the desire to live in a different place, to acquire the knowledge of a different culture and the possible future opportunities to study or work in a developed region. For example, by studying in the European Union countries, it is possible to get a diploma which might offer more opportunities to work in other European countries like Germany or France.

The mobility of international students is strictly linked to the concepts of human and social capital (Trigilia, 1999). The availability of qualified human capital allows the communities to produce innovation processes and manage activities with a higher scientific and technological topic. The quality of human capital depends on many factors, such as a higher education system and a good level of research.

Social capital is the tool whereby to facilitate cooperation within a group and brings great benefits (Ostrom, 2009, p. 17) for the people involved. It always includes human capital and it's possible to have more types of social capital related to the different human capital (Ostrom and Ahn, 2007, p. 4).

In particular, being linked to foreign mobility it has the important role of creating familiar social networks, forming formal and informal relationships, promoting inclusion and building identity in a multicultural society.

International student mobility is an opportunity to increase the quality of human capital, as "high profile" immigration could develop an innovative environment within the universities and help to increase the competitiveness of the country's system. According to Lachmann (1978), capital in its most basic sense is a set of assets capable of generating common benefits. To link migratory phenomena, these resources are represented by territorial factors, and in particular the relationship between migration dynamics and the existing physical and social capital in a specific space.

From a geographical point of view, it is important to highlight how the actions of international students and their connection to colleagues and the institutions take place in a

specific territorial context. Their actions thus influence the development models and local processes. However, they are greatly conditioned by the characteristics of the place. This is the general concept of territorial capital (Dematteis and Governa, 2005), in which the social and human capital represents parts of the context, together with material goods.

In the light of these considerations, when the international students enter the local educational system, they create a conceptual and empirical link with the space and they become one of the resources of the territorial capital. They could be the key drivers in upgrading the quality of local economies and political systems, to create knowledge and to improve current human capital. Universities must foster the processes of social and cultural integration, in order to capitalise on the advantages deriving from cultural diversity (Amin, 2012).

4. Overview of foreign students in Italian universities

The data used in this paragraph come from the MIUR database (<http://ustat.miur.it/dati/didattica/italia/atenei>) and contain the careers of all the students enrolled in Italy from the academic year 2010/2011 to date.

The historical series 2010/2011-2020/2021 of foreign students enrolled in Italian universities increased by 62%. In the reference period, the female gender registers a minor growth trend, but the total number of first enrolled students between 2011/2012 and 2015/2016 decreased (Caritas and Migrantes, 2022). According to Cimea, the COVID 19 pandemic led to a 9% reduction in international student flows (enrolled in bachelor’s and master’s degree courses, and post-graduate degrees). From the data on courses of study, it is interesting to note that despite the downward trend, 47% of Italian universities recorded an increase in the number of pre-registration applications (on the University web site). In the case of master’s degrees, 63% of institutions received a higher number of applications, while 37% registered a slight decrease (Lantero et al., 2002, pp. 5-6).

The first step of the analysis is to explain the difference between “real” foreigners, i.e.

those who have attended high school abroad (the International Students “IS”), and “Italian foreigners”, i.e. those who have attended high school in Italy but do not possess Italian citizenship (second-generation youth, “SG”).

Table 1 shows the distribution of students by origin in the last academic year.

Academic Year	Students	Total	SG	IS	% of SG	% of IS
2021/2022	First enrollment	323,852	18,798	21,348	5.8	6.6
2021/2022	Enrollment	1,822,141	109,681	62,841	6.0	4.3
2021	Graduates	370,758	17,224	10,383	4.6	2.8

Table 1. Number of students¹ and graduates by country of origin in Italy, academic years 2021/2022. Elaboration on data MIUR (2022).

Figure 1 confirms that the number of foreign students enrolled in Italy has grown in the last years. In fact, the average share in a tertiary qualification has increased from 72% in ten years (from 2010/2011 to 2021/2022). On average, tertiary education is high among women. Female students now make up a clear majority of young adults with a bachelor’s or master’s degree. The female rate increased during the period considered. The representation of women in tertiary education grew between 2010 and 2021, the average share is higher by 4 percentage points (from 3% to 7%).

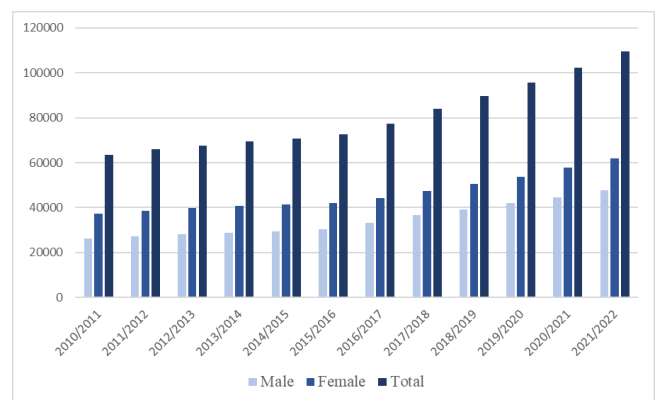


Figure 1. Number of foreign students (on the vertical axis) in Italy from 2010/2011 to 2021/2022 academic years (on the horizontal axis). Elaboration on MIUR data (2022).

¹ Total enrolments include first-time enrolled students. Total enrolments are shown of students of three-year and single-cycle degree courses.

Figure 2 shows the two groups of foreign students enrolled at an Italian university. The first group should include students who have grown up and studied in Italy and who decided to continue their tertiary education in the same country: these could be immigrants in Italy with their families or second generation migrants, still awaiting citizenship. The second group represents students who come to Italy to enrol at a university and this group (International Students) has grown in number along with the SG group. This fact indicates that the children of immigrants and second generations have more access to university than in the past. This means that a greater number of students attend secondary school and that their families invest in education in order to assure high-quality and well-paying jobs in the future. This is an important factor to help the original communities to integrate into the host country.

Therefore, the number of foreign students has grown in the last ten years and this is due more to the growth of SG students than to IS. In fact, the first group grew by 81% from the academic year 2010/2011 to 2021/2022, while instead the international students increased by 68%.

The distribution of International Students, by the first 10 citizenships for the academic year 2021/2022, are shown in Figure 3.

On average about 50% of the total international students come from these ten countries, the most representative being Iran, China, India, and Turkey. As some OECD countries, Asia is the most represented continent in Italy, thanks to the weight of Iran, China and India. Almost half of foreign students come from Asia. The monitoring of international students by country of origin seems crucial in order to develop targeted services of guidance and to evaluate the effectiveness of current cooperation policies (OECD, 2022).

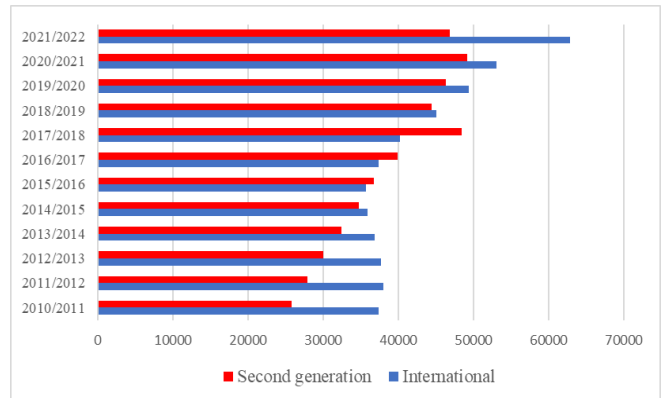


Figure 2. Number of second-generation students and international students (x-axis) in Italy for the academic years 2010/2011 to 2021/2022 (y-axis). Elaboration on MIUR data (2022).

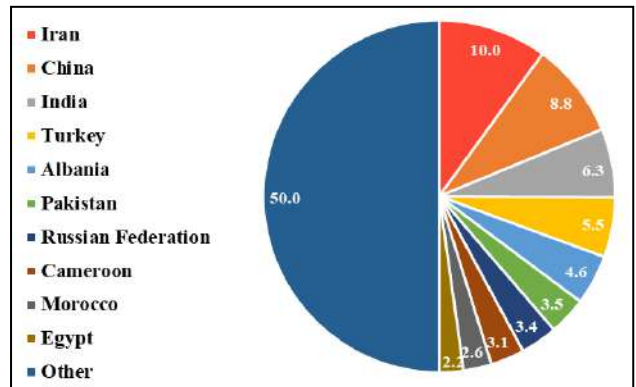


Figure 3. Percentage of international students enrolled by country of origin, academic year 2020/2021. Elaboration on MIUR data (2022).

For example, the number of Chinese students enrolled in Italian universities has increased in the last few years thanks to the “Marco Polo” programme, passing from over 50 in the past century to over 5,000 in the 2011/2012 academic year. This programme aims to attract Chinese students by giving them a number of facilitations such as reserved places and various measures to help with the issue of visas. The considerable presence of Chinese students in Italy is the demonstration of the success of international cooperation in the education sector, despite the obvious linguistic difficulties. Since 2009 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) has offered scholarships to foreign citizens and Italian citizens living abroad, in order to promote international

cooperation in cultural, scientific and technological fields and to spread the Italian language and culture in the world (According to Law 288/55 and its subsequent changes and additions) (MAECI, 2022).

Male foreign students in the STEM² field represent 21.3%, a considerably higher percentage than women, who represent only 12.3%. Female international students have a low share of STEM degrees. There are many possible factors contributing to the discrepancy between women and men including: a lack of female role models, gender stereotyping and less family-friendly flexibility in the STEM fields. However, the number of foreign female students in STEM fields compared to 10 years ago has increased (from 9% to 12.6%) (MIUR, 2022). To encourage and support women in this field many countries have increased opportunities, through benefits and scholarships

The number of graduates i.e., the number of students who completed the programme within the reporting calendar year, has improved over time (Figure 4), and the increase is in line with the number of enrolled students and the rate reaches 16% in the current years.

At present, few Italian universities offer English courses, especially bachelor's degrees. This would represent a fundamental first step to attract foreign students, who rarely decide to add the learning of a new language like Italian, only spoken by a limited number of people in the world. The internationalization rate of Italian universities is an important condition to evaluate the quality of the national educational system. In this regard, in contrast with the OECD average, Italy shows negative numbers and a considerable "brain drain" abroad, which is not balanced by the arrivals of foreign students in our country.

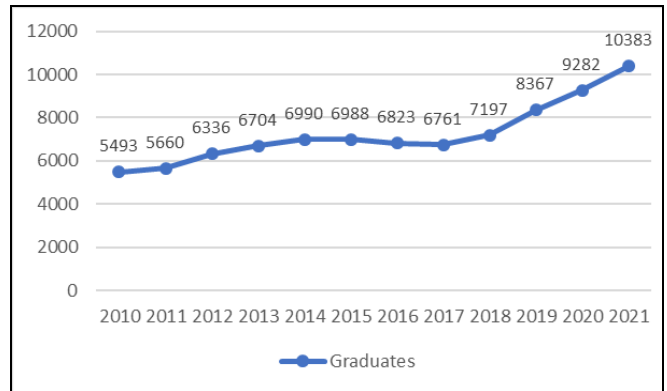


Figure 4. Number of international students (y-axis) graduated from years 2011 to 2021 (x-axis). Elaboration on MIUR data (2022).

5. International Students at UPO and their Academic Experiences

According to data provided by the Italian Ministry of University (MIUR, 2021) 1,226 foreign students were attending university courses in UPO in the 2021/2022 academic year. In other large and important Italian universities, in the same year the numbers of non-Italian citizen students were higher than in UPO: 9,165 at La Sapienza Rome, 7,477 at the University of Bologna and 8,371 at the Politecnico of Milan, but among the medium-sized universities UPO is second only after the University of Siena³ (1,517 students).

These data confirm the importance of analysing the presence of international students in a medium size university like UPO.

In the year 2021, there were 349 tertiary education international students and 877 second-generation students at the University of Piemonte Orientale (UPO, 2022).

In the 2021/2022 academic year there are 346 IS, and in 2011/2012 there were 76, with a 357% increase over a ten years period. According to data provided by UPO (2011), today students attending bachelor's and master's degree courses come from more seventy different countries, compared with 46 nationalities in 2011.

² STEM are Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

³ Both provinces have a similar number of immigrants as a percentage of population in 2021: 10.27% Novara and 10.8% Siena (ISTAT, 2022)

Most of the international students in UPO originated from Africa (30.9% of the total) and Asia (34%), and these rates are aligned to the national trends (section 4). When moving to an analysis by country, Tunisia, India and Iran, (respectively 11.7%, 6.6% and 6.3%) were the most represented ones; Cameroon, Morocco, and Syria followed (Figure 5).

At the University of Piemonte Orientale, international students are particularly numerous in the School of Medicine (150), with values recorded in the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences (63), the Department of Humanities (39), the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (40) and the Department of Economics (29). Not all fields of study are equally popular among international students and during the a. y. 2021/2022 the three most common fields of study were: the master's degree in Medical Biotechnology (66 enrolled), followed by Modern Foreign Languages (27) and Medicine and Surgery (24). The number of foreigners doing a PhD programme and post-graduate degree courses has increased over time, so the international students have the opportunity to complete their higher education in UPO. Graduate students, whose bachelor's degree had already been earned in their own country of origin, contributed to the growth of the international students' group. Now they are enrolled in a master's, postgraduate or PhD programme (Table 2).

The most represented nationalities in the School of Medicine are from South Asia (India, Pakistan and Iran) and West Asia (Syria and Israel). In particular, the first Syrian students arrived through a cooperative project. In 2015, the European Parliament called on the Commission and member states to establish educational corridors to receive students from Syria, Iraq, and Eritrea (UPO, 2022). Educational corridors for Syrian students aim to help young Syrians pursue their studies in a country not at war. The representation of Syrian students in the UPO has grown over time, from 1 to 27 between 2018 and 2021, thanks to the project and the now primarily transnational ties. In fact, now most of Syrian students arrive through the creation of ad hoc social networks.

UPO is also a partner in University Corridors

for Refugees⁴ (UNICORE 4.0), coordinated by the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). The project aims to promote refugee access to tertiary education (in the a. y. 2022/2023 the application was reserved to Niger, Nigeria and Cameroon students). The winners enrolled in the Master's Degree in Medical Biotechnologies and received grants and other benefits (UPO, 2022).

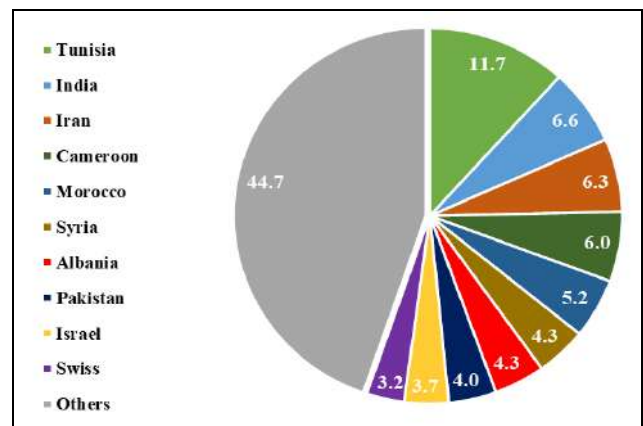


Figure 5. Percentage of international students enrolled by country of origin, academic years 2021/2022. Elaboration on UPO data (2023).

Types	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
PhD	6	8	5	17	17
Master's degree	37	45	91	110	142
Bachelor's degree	10	20	68	86	169
Single-cycle master's degree*	22	21	30	44	47
Post-graduate degree	55	64	34	64	72
Total	130	158	228	321	447

Table 2. Distribution of enrolled students by type of degree or master from academic years 2018 to 2022 (temporary data). Elaboration on UPO data (2023).

Table 3 shows the distribution of the first year students by citizenship from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023 (temporary data). In the academic year 2022/2023, the number of students from Iran has increased. At present, 41 Iranian students are attending their courses in UPO and in particular in the Department of Health Sciences (36 of them are enrolled in the

⁴ Caritas and Migrantes, 2022, pp. 94-98.

Master’s Degree in Medical Biotechnologies). The table should be interpreted not only considering the growth trend but also according to the presence of bureaucratic obstacles, such as the modalities of issuing visas by the embassies that may change every year.

The case of Iran is representative because it highlights the role and importance of social ties and networks. Undoubtedly, the country’s current political situation is a push factor to go abroad, but the networks of friends and relatives play an important role as drivers of attraction. Table 3 shows the top ten nationalities represented in the academic year 2022/2023 and, even though the values fluctuate over time (due to many factors such as national migration policies, the economic dynamics of international cooperation between countries, or the global health situation), the presences of some nationalities such as Iran, Tunisia, Morocco, Cameroon, and India are a constant. The existence of an established national community in the host country helps newcomers secure preferential access and maintain relations with the mother country. In 2022, Indian students had some problems with visa restrictions, thus the number did not increase. On the University website, the number of their applications for UPO courses was higher than the actual enrollments.

The remarkable link between university and cooperation projects and the existence of a national community represents the important factors to provide a significant support for good academic experience to international students. Other factors are the possibility of getting a scholarship and the low tuition fees. In general, many of the international students in UPO come from developing countries and a family that could not have afforded to fully pay for an overseas education. They come from families who approve of sending them to more developed countries to improve their future. International students in UPO may have to address many financial difficulties. Student visas have work restrictions, so they cannot work or can only do so for a limited number of hours. For this reason, many international students try to get a scholarship. Figure 6 compares the number of IS and the number of scholarships won during the period from 2013/2014 to 2022/2023. Both lines

increase over time, but after the 2019/2020 academic year there is a clear gap and the possibility to get an economic and housing benefit has decreased due to increasing competition.

Citizenship	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023*
Iran	4	0	2	20	41
Tunisia	2	6	18	31	40
Cameroon	9	4	16	11	27
India	3	8	26	10	19
Syria	1	1	6	9	17
Morocco	18	24	7	10	9
Ethiopia	0	0	3	5	7
Albania	1	5	3	10	5
Bangladesh	0	2	0	4	5
Istrael	3	2	4	4	5

Table 3. Distribution of students first enrolled by citizenship from academic year 2018/2019 to 2022/2023. *Temporary data. Elaboration on UPO data (2023).



Figure 6. Number of scholarships (on the vertical axis) by academic year from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023 (on the horizontal axis). Elaboration on EDISU Piemonte data (2023).

With regard to the “success” of their academic career, the number of international students at UPO who completed their degree in time is quite positive. In 2021 just under 50% of them graduated in two, three, five or six years from the first enrollment (according to the degree programme); in 2020, this rate was 54%.

International students at UPO often come across difficulties in getting familiar with the new social environment and thus they seek to establish relationships with other people with a similar cultural background. Their study and life

paths have some important effects on the construction of identity triggered by the host context. This aspect also emerged from a discursive analysis undertaken on (16) in-depth interviews (period November-December 2022⁵) among male and female students (aged 19-32) and from an ethnographic observation on the field. Foreign students are all non-EU citizens. Seven of them are enrolled in a master's degree course (four of whom in a course delivered in English), while nine are enrolled in a bachelor's degree course (three of them are enrolled). Coming from different backgrounds and enrolled in various study courses, the students interviewed were recruited through the *snowball* method, according to criteria of exemplarity and specificity (Norton and Fatigante, 2018, p. 34).

The qualitative analysis of the international mobility of students and their choice of the UPO suggested the following conclusions.

Firstly, most students expressed their difficulty in studying in a different country with a different language. The great majority of international students left their home country less than 48 months before the interview and moved directly to Italy and to Novara, without stopping in other countries and cities. They left their own country with the purpose of attending a university course and many of them do not have a family network but only compatriots that attend a UPO course. They stated that the Italian national migratory policy is not crucial in their decision to study in Italy. They actually chose Novara and UPO thanks to word-of-mouth.

Secondly, the language is perceived as an important barrier, as they are not fluent in Italian and this limits their possibility to establish a relationship with Italian colleagues and to get acquainted with the host culture. Their poor knowledge and understanding of the language negatively affect their approach to the academic and administrative staff. Some international students have trouble understanding the lecture and reading materials. People speak quickly and they cannot ask or feel embarrassed to ask them to repeat again.

Furthermore, during the SARS-Covid-19 pandemic isolation the students who remained

on campus suffered from emotional stress due to limited social relationships. Most of the students interviewed reported that the city of Novara offers few possibilities to meet fellows and to have cultural experiences.

On the other hand, the existence of a community and the presence of a network of friends and relatives are important driving factors. They are aware of the cultural differences of the new environment (such as food, clothing, behaviour) and find some aspects they like and others they do not. They generally express positive feedback about the host culture, campus life, and UPO courses and academic staff. Finally, they appreciate the relatively low university fees and the possibility of getting a scholarship.

In the end, for international students the experience in UPO represents an opportunity to promote their social mobility and to improve their skills in a multicultural environment. In particular, their experience is based on medical and biotechnology careers, since these are the most popular and attractive subjects with the many opportunities offered in terms of collaborations, networks and future work.

UPO offers the possibility of attending three master's degrees taught in English and to access the three-year degree it is necessary to have the Italian B2 certification, required by law. These aspects do not contribute to increasing the international enrolments.

The international students remaining abroad try to contribute with their remittances to support their own family and pay for their education on their own. Their academic university career also becomes a way to help their parents in their country of origin.

6. Conclusions

Nowadays, globalization encourages the international mobility of students and they move not only to obtain a qualification, but also to develop their cultural, linguistic and social skills. International students could bring positive contributions to host countries because they can be an important factor of human and social capital resources and the economic development countries overall may take this opportunity. According to Findlay (2010), the international

⁵ The qualitative research is ongoing and the publication sets forth the data of the preliminary results.

students could be a resource for the host communities rather than for their societies of origin. In particular, analysing the flows of international students to the UK from the host country perspective, the author stresses that the students' international mobility is composed of highly skilled individuals and the host countries have to understand in what way to attract the most talented and brightest minds to develop their knowledge-based national economies. Universities could play a direct and important role in attracting and training quality human capital but it is necessary to create a "good ground". The education system has made huge progress in seeking to attract international students to sustain (Findlay, 2010; Madge et al., 2009) and develop their academic career. The attractiveness of a university is due to some important elements such as the language (according to OCSE the English-speaking countries dominate in the destination of choice of foreign students); accessible tuition fees, friendly environment, low cost of living (Staniscia, 2012, p. 251). In addition, international students who are more immersed in the campus culture and share their experiences with peer groups have more opportunities to integrate with the new society. Just as some researchers have argued, integrating international students into university campus environments is essential (Aggarwal and Çiftçi, 2021, pp. 2264-2265), as they must go through a number of transitions and experience challenges such as new lifestyle, cultural and language issues.

For host countries the negative impact could be represented by the unreturned expenditure in terms of human and social capital increase, but the empirical evidence shows that it is more appropriate to consider a "brain circulation" and "not brain loss" (Staniscia, 2012, p. 250).

The International students' experience in UPO could be considered quite positive, demonstrated by the increasing number, the scholarships and international grants won, the quality of the research and the positive impact of the UPO international cooperation. They attend master's degrees in English and in particular STEM subjects where there are more English-speaking courses and more opportunities in terms of future work and academic careers.

This article is a first step in studying international student mobility, an understudied subject that has not been researched as much as it should be by geographers. Future research will carry on with qualitative studies, through other field surveys and a quantitative analysis, with a benchmark among Italian universities.

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