



Common ground: Mobilities and educational resources for inclusion of people with foreign background. Introduction

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Last year our Journal reported (Morri, 2022) the launch of a scientific agreement between AIIG-*Associazione Italiana Insegnanti di Geografia* (Italian Association of Geography Teachers) and INAPP-*Istituto Nazionale per l'Analisi delle Politiche Pubbliche* (National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies), which during the summer of 2022 made a 9-month deal to develop regional laboratories, training activities and dissemination products aimed at preventing and combating the risk of the educational dispersion of young people with migratory background¹ (this agreement was based on a wider institutional agreement signed

by INAPP and the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies).

Within this context of common interest, the two institutions involved in the scientific cooperation chose to select and collect in this thematic issue of J-READING some essays focused on the performance disadvantage of students of foreign origin and the search for mitigating solutions in an educational context. Both themes have in recent years been a relevant subject of research worldwide through cross-cultural approaches (Volante et al., 2018); in international literature there is a growing number of studies concerning insights into the correlation between levels of inclusion and training success in different countries (Güngör and Perdu, 2017), surveys and comparative analyses of initiatives implemented to contain the risk of dropout of immigrant young people (Colombo, 2018), identification of tools and experiences for promoting school inclusion and support for educational success (Schachner et al., 2018) through the enhancement of citizenship education and intercultural

¹ The cooperation that started in 2022 was not the first between the Editors of this issue, because prior to this an opportunity for collaboration had been represented by a session (Young People of Foreign Origin and Educational Failures) which Morri and Scialdone promoted and co-chaired within the International Conference “Reinventing Education”, that took place online in June 2021 (a selection of proceedings in *Scuola Democratica* 2021).

mediation. The challenge at stake is the one that imagines a sort of diasporic education (Gholami, 2023), as requested by increasing flows of youth mobility. Thus, the general objective of this thematic issue of J-READING is to increase the availability of international data relating to students from migrant background, broaden the knowledge framework on integration effectively achieved in school/higher education systems and also take into account inclusion problems.

As shown by the Eurydice reports, education systems all over Europe face the challenge of weak performance linked to students with immigrant background (see the last data in the European Commission et al., 2019). Italy ranks among the EU's top places for what concerns the number of early school leavers and the relevance of this phenomenon has grown during the last decade. Even more alarming are educational failure data referred to second generations (mostly born in our country), which went from 32.8% to 37.6% in two years according to ISTAT. For these children and young people – who represent approximately 10% of the school population – the school system is the first context for the challenge of integration. Analysis of these phenomena, also comparing results from different countries, must consider the incidence of subjective variables and factors related to contextual systems and local situations (inclusive capacity of educational agencies and local resources, targeted policies).

For what concerns unaccompanied foreign minors, there is a lack of data on the effective exercise of the right to education recognised by international conventions². Scholars should concentrate greater efforts on determining factors of dropout and analysing the paths taken by those who dropped out of the training circuits, together with the identification of practices and policies to tackle early school-leaving and support care-leavers' transition to adulthood. It would be appropriate in this perspective to experiment with accompanying actions aimed at autonomy and detect major problems in different territorial areas. Moreover,

² While it would be useful to monitor school/training courses actually followed.

in this case it is necessary to emphasise that the concrete enforceability of access to learning and qualification opportunities is for these subjects the first guarantee of protection from the risk of falling into circuits of illegality and exploitation.

The authors herein present a range of different approaches to investigate various aspects of problems linked to international mobility and the multicultural transformation of schooling and educational systems. Readers will find both methodological studies and in-field data with a quantitative or qualitative approach. The main territorial reference concerns Italy, including localisation in concentration areas of arrival and foreign presence (from South to North: Sicily, Naples, Turin), and not avoiding exercises in comparison with other national contexts (Spain and Brazil). The overview offered in the following pages is multidisciplinary, as requested by migration studies and mobility issues: scholars do not only come from geographic domains, but also from other fields of social sciences like demography, statistics, institutional economics, ethics, educational research and experimental pedagogy.

The two texts that open and close this special focus are co-authored by INAPP researchers. Let us start from the end: demographic projections given by Polli, Rosano and Casacchia imply that the foreign component is going to be a structural part of the Italian population until 2050, while in the first article Ferri, Di Castro and Marsiglia show a lot of empirical evidence based on OECD PISA data, suggesting that immigrant student gaps (especially due to language and socioeconomic factors) can even be amplified if school contexts avoid finding ways to mitigate disadvantages. Thus, the integration of minors with migrant background is certainly a crucial challenge for our school system. This is confirmed in two other essays that deal with case-studies localised in different areas of our country, which have in common a high concentration of non-Italian young people on an urban scale. The Turin experimentation described by Batini, Barbisoni and Marchetta shows educational activities which are able to improve linguistic skills and classroom climate; on another side, Amato and Matarazzo report sundry aspects of inclusive didactics experienced

in Naples, also analysing perceptions of urban spaces and the use of mental maps.

Educational research on geographic analysis has been linked to migration issues by various scholars, with special regard to citizenship education (Sarno, 2011; Esteves, 2015): relevance of geographic reasoning is widely illustrated in Botelho, Valadão and Rocca's comparison of school curricula set in Brazil and Italy. A different kind of collation deals with policies affecting the chances of inclusion of unaccompanied young migrants in Spain and Italy: Rinaldi's article enlightens the protection measures offered after the arrivals in Andalusia and Sicily, remembering that this group must not be considered a homogeneous one but one of the most exposed to exploitation risk. A matter of human rights and empowerment emerge also in Granata and Monti's article, focused on refugees' needs. According to their study (which includes the situation of asylum seekers from Ukraine), both institutional and civic practices of hospitality have necessarily to enable spaces of agency to increase mutual learning.

Lastly, the relation between mobility and educational settings needs to be analysed, also in the case of international students in academic contexts, that can reveal peculiar sides of exclusion phenomena (O'Connor, 2016) and even suggest unusual forms of transnationalism (Hou et al., 2021). This theme seems to be "an understudied subject, that has not been researched as much as it should be by geographers" according to Ferrario, whose paper contains a lot of original data on international students at the University of Piemonte Orientale.

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