



Participatory methods for citizenship education: interdisciplinary perspectives. Introduction

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Educational processes are complex pathways through which individuals build knowledge, skills, values and behaviour. These processes do not take place only in the moments dedicated to formal education in schools. They also include informal and non-formal learning occurring in different life situations, which take place in the territories where each individual's life unfolds. Territory plays a decisive role in educational processes as it provides a real and concrete context for learning, useful for reducing educational poverty and promoting the rights of the child and youth. Thus conceived, territory offers different opportunities for meaningful and contextualised learning, playing a strategic role in shaping educating communities, characterised by the action of different territorial actors (students, school, local authorities, stakeholders, etc.). These territorial actors interact in order to develop a collaborative, participative and educational process. For this reason, "territorial Education sets out to unite the objectives of the various forms of education (citizenship, intercultural, sustainable development...) in a territorial dimension, rethinking and redefining them on the basis of the diversities of the places and the complexity of the geographical spaces" (Dematteis

and Giorda, 2013, p. 18).

Communities developed on sharing and mutuality strengthen local knowledge and competence, which are essential preconditions for the valorisation of territorial capital. The educational processes can be understood by the educating communities as useful tools to foster the strengthening of students' self-awareness of their role as inhabitants of a territory. Indeed, they interact with the territory in a constructive way since they recognise its value, not only as a property but also as a lived space (Frémont 2007). All this becomes particularly important in the framework of Place-Based Education (Sobel, 2004), designed to bridge the gap between what happens inside and outside school in order to encourage students to adopt models of responsible behaviour towards the territory. This tends to strengthen a community's feeling of belonging to the territory itself, while working on the social, cultural, relational and affective spheres.

The first step to foster a feeling of belonging is, therefore, the knowledge of the space one inhabits, recognising the traces of the territorialisation process that generated it. This

also strengthens the population's sense of citizenship, which is more inclined to take action for the common good. Territorial education therefore also means educating to active participation, stimulating the feeling of citizenship of the people involved in the process (Giorda, 2011). In order to make territorial education a concrete process, it is necessary that theoretical learning can be accompanied by specific experiences and pathways through the use of appropriate strategies and techniques, so that girls and boys can directly identify with the role of active citizens, since “sustainable development, education, and global citizenship require, as an intrinsic need, the right, for children and teenagers, to participate in local communities for an education for the future” (Milani, 2020, p. 454).

The papers which are presented in this (concise) thematic issue highlight the need to activate and promote a high-quality education, which must be able to involve multiple territorial actors, favouring the active involvement of girls and boys in participation processes. The contributions are articulated around the use of different and complementary methodological tools that can favour the activation of participation processes that are fruitful for communities and, thus, for the development of the territory.

Mazza and Zanolin highlight the use of Community Maps and Storytelling as tools for territorial education, which are used in the realisation of the Nativi project, first tested in two Lombard high schools in the 2022/2023 school year. The aim of Nativi project is to experiment active citizenship paths with students, in order to encourage new forms of territorial awareness in them. The core of the project led to the creation of community maps, comprising the places identified by the participants, each with a specific symbolic value. The creation of the map represents a key element of the project, but what makes it relevant is, above all, the educational value that the territory is able to play for the communities living there, as it is able to strengthen the sense of belonging to the local community.

Rania and Coppola's paper focuses on the use of a methodological tool built in the field of social psychology, but still little known in the

geographical domain: i.e. Photovoice. This is a valuable participatory method that is useful for encouraging active citizenship in the decision-making processes adopted in the field of urban planning. The study involved 21 Italian university students (predominantly women) residing in north-western Italy, with the aim of surveying the symbolic value of places for the community, proposing new solutions to enhance urban spaces and make them more liveable.

The paper proposed by Manganello and Rampulla collects the results of a study conducted in a fourth-grade class of a primary school in Genoa and focuses on the ability of Digital Storytelling to develop specific competences in learning digital skills. Highlighting the way in which Digital Storytelling contributed to the development of geographic skills, the study revealed how the use of technology enabled acquiring multiple skills, allowing the 20 students involved in the project to become aware of their role in the territories where they live.

The papers presented in this (concise) thematic issue offer three examples of innovative projects and experiences in education developed with the intention of fostering participatory processes in schools. This assumption is fundamental for the creation of an educational context that goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge, encouraging the development of social skills, autonomy, responsibility and self-confidence, ensuring that students are not just passive recipients of knowledge, but get actively involved in the learning process through collaboration between peers, the sharing of ideas and engagement in problem-solving activities. The interdisciplinary perspective opened up by the dialogue between the three papers provides an opportunity for a stimulating reflection on the potential of territorial education, showing possible ways in which, through dialogue with other disciplines, “Geography teaching can help to prepare youngsters for the world of today and tomorrow” (van der Schee, 2012, p. 15).

References

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