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**Citizenship, Work and The Global Age**

**ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA DEMOCRATICA"**

**Proceedings of the 2<sup>nd</sup>  
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REINVENTING EDUCATION**

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**VOLUME I**

**Citizenship, Work and The  
Global Age**

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## **Building Intercultural Citizenship: Participatory Pathways Among Educators of Unaccompanied Minors, School and Territory**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Starting from the idea that nowadays the city is a significant place where citizenship takes shape, and along with the willingness to respond to Sustainable Development Goals, this paper debates active citizenship education with a renewed perspective, by focusing on the collaboration among all the actors (educators, teachers, local community) that face the challenge of the reception and integration for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). Adopting an emancipatory pedagogical perspective, it discusses citizenship education as «right to the city», referring to both UASC, who may overcome a number of cultural and social obstacles to full participation in schools and society, and to educators and teachers, who are required to implement common planning to ensure minors' inclusion and development. In order to investigate what kind of active citizenship education should be promoted to build a more inclusive and intercultural city, this paper presents the «social and integrated mapping» as a resource for creating pathways of participation among all the actors and discusses some findings from a participatory research, which has been developing in the City of Turin, on the pedagogical reception for UASC.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Intercultural city, Educators of unaccompanied minors, Participatory Research, Active citizenship, Partnership network.*

### **Introduction**

City, Living Together and Education are issues at the core of promoting active citizenship in today's multicultural societies. The interrelation of these themes highlights the active role that cities can play from an educational perspective, fostering a better living together and social cohesion: cities may place education as a vector of social transformation and improvement of community life, by constructing pathways where everyone feels represented, respected and heard and where everyone has a space for «living together as equal in dignity» (Council of Europe, 2008).

This article discusses how to build intercultural citizenship, by taking on a renewed perspective that recognizes the actors that are usually on the margin of the school process, such as educators and unaccompanied minors (UASC), and emphasizes the collaboration among educators, teachers, local community, institutions, and minors themselves. It addresses this issue by discussing three main questions: how to rethink active citizenship education in our multicultural cities? How to create shared pathways of participation within one's own territory? How can a research-training project become a space of promotion of intercultural citizenship for all the actors involved? Following these steps, a new paradigm of citizenship education grounded in daily practice in a network within the territory will be argued.

### **1. Citizenship Education as the «Right to the City»**

One of the key strategies for ensuring an equitable, inclusive and sustainable future is to promote the role cities can play as vectors of cultural, social and environmental development. The Agenda 2030 (ONU, 2015) highlights the needs to «enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries» (Goal 11). Cities should guarantee all inhabitants equal access to resources and opportunities for active participation in their living contexts, by promoting the conditions for the development of their full potential and empowering them to contribute to an inclusive and peaceful community without discrimination (Goal 4).

Today the challenge of active citizenship takes place at the local level: it is within local contexts that processes of inclusion and/or exclusion take place and complex social and intercultural dynamics develop. But it is also there that experimenting with creative educational pathways is possible. In fact, it is within local contexts that the game is played out between opportunities for reception, school and family support, socialization and cultural exchange: according to the possibilities to participate in social practices and to the limits or resources available in their own territory, people can construct their representation of reality and shape their personal and professional life projects. For any educational and social design to get success it should take into account that individuals' identity is situated and interdependent with that of the territory and of the other people who inhabit it (see also Pescarmona, 2008). This requires responding to the need to provide with multiple opportunities to meet and build spaces for positive interaction.

The proposal of a «Urban Model of Intercultural Inclusion» (Council of Europe, 2020) addresses this issue, by approaching active citizenship from the perspective of social justice. This model is not so much based on an idea of security or on an action to be carried out only 'on others',

but on these demands: what can the city do to promote equal participation for all? What kind of institutions, networks and competences are needed to generate inclusive dynamics?

In this way, citizenship education can be seen as the «Right to the City». This expression, which was proposed by Henri Lefebvre in the Seventies (Lefebvre, 1978), nowadays finds its meaning in the possibility of citizens *appropriating* of urban space, in its material and immaterial, relational and symbolic dimensions. As he said, this right «manifests itself as a superior form of rights: the right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit» (Lefebvre, 1978, 153). It is conceptualized as a collective rather than an individual right to change the city and shape the process of urbanization, by starting from a critical awareness of urban inequalities, and involving social struggles for appropriating urban spaces and claiming the rights to participation, to urban design, to education, to leisure and so on. This idea of active citizenship is configured not as the acquisition of a formal legal status, but as the practice of belonging to one's own context of life, the exercise of care and responsibility that is expressed in the speech-making processes and the commitment to action for the betterment of the own community (Lazzarini, 2016; Council of Europe, 2020).

This concept directly calls into question the principle of «urban justice» (International Association of Educating cities, 2017), as it focuses on the process of defining the ways to equal access to rights within the city as well as on the construction of *praxis* capable of activating synergies and co-responsibility with different institutions, local administrations, schools, practitioners and all the inhabitants, in order to interpret the needs of the territory and take action for its development. For this reason, building an intercultural city is not just an urban project, but it is properly a *pedagogical project* (Pescarmona, Matera, *in press*), which requires to rethink what methods, approaches and experiences can support this model of citizenship.

## **2. Social and Integrated Mapping of Territory for the Partnership Network**

In order to promote the Educational City, a good methodology is necessary to explore the opportunities of territory. In this perspective, the principal questions are: how to promote Educational City? What does it mean to build partnership? and, why build partnership? A good methodology is also a good answer to these questions.

The principal methodology is Social and Integrated Mapping of Territory (Milani, *in press*) in order to collect data of anthropological, educational, geographical and institutional characteristics of territory. What mean social and integrated? This methodology is social because surveys the social bodies (or communities), educational, cultural and

sports associations, schools, social cooperatives, informal groups or non-profit organizations with which it's possible to collaborate and to build participatory pathways. In this case, mapping will need to be very precise and thorough (Croce, 1995), so that there is a wide range of choice and good networking. No information should be left out, because it could compromise social work on the territory. Thus, an *integrated* reading of the territory is indispensable, with social data and other useful data: geographical, anthropological, anthropic, demographic data and data related to productive settlements. This integration is not trivial because all these data provide insight into the social, educational, and leisure needs of citizens and highlights the risks and criticalities of urban and extra-urban areas. In addition, the mapping is integrated because it collects the 'voices' of privileged witnesses of possible partners and social bodies engaged in path of citizenship and development of community. Mapping work itself promotes empowerment processes for free expression through the meeting with the possible partners for the construction of the partnership. The Social and Integrated Mapping of Territory is not only a mere recording and collection of elements that characterize the territory itself. It is the result of a reading of meaning and a reconstruction of the territory in its specific social scope, innovative, but also discordant, dissident and provocative. Forgetting these 'dissonant voices' or 'rougher words' in the mapping is already depowering the partnership building.

If the Social and Integrated Mapping of the territory has been well conducted, we will have all the elements to identify partners to activate intercultural and citizenship processes in urban or extra-urban contexts for a territory development. In fact, the Educational City is a weave to be built by many 'hands'.

These 'hands' are partners with whom a relationship of co-construction and co-design based on reciprocity must be developed. Partnership, in fact, is based on respect and recognition of the equal dignity of each partner. Promoting partnerships requires mutual appreciation in diversity, competence, and vision towards a common goal. It is necessary to build convergent perspectives without prevarication or forcing. Building partnerships, therefore, certainly has an ethical, responsible and political value (Floris, 1999; Milani, 2021) oriented towards the Common Good and the enhancement of social presences capable of taking care of citizenship and urban spaces. The social partnership is also aimed at building and generating social ties for community empowerment.

### **3. Partnership, Meta-Competencies and Collective Mind for building citizenship in Educational City**

Through partnership, it is possible to generate collective competencies (Milani, 2013) of citizenship also in the perspective of Global Education

(Council of Europe, 2019), in a vision of promotion and development of the local community. In addition, partnership work requires these meta-competencies, such as: «knowing how to cooperate», «wanting to cooperate», «having the power to cooperate» (Le Boterf, 2006) and «having the duty to cooperate» (Milani, 2013), in a dimension of synergistic and synchronous complementarity. A meta-competency constitutes a critical look at the ability to manage, generate, and master skills (Wittorski, 1997). In partnership work, «knowing how to cooperate» means, above all, knowing how to move away from one's own culture of service, without betraying it, in order to meet that of the other, generating complementary views and shared operational scenarios. «Wanting to cooperate», on the other hand, indicates the intention and sustains the ethical commitment to building partnership processes and to be provoked by the meanings imparted by the partners. «Having a duty to cooperate» indicates a willingness to take full responsibility for networking processes and paths and a commitment to fostering equal relationships between partners.

These meta-competencies can sustain the generation of a Collective Mind, which Weick and Roberts define as follows: «Collective mind is conceptualized as a pattern of heedful interrelations of actions in a social system. Actors in the system construct their actions (contributions), understanding that the system consists of connected actions by themselves and others (representation), and interrelate their actions within the system (subordination)» (1993, 357). The form that this Collective Mind takes will determine the contextual and synergic action of the partners and the value of their complementarity (Milani, 2013; 2014; in press) in thinking and feeling synchronic and syntonic, oriented to the ethical dimension, to the Common Good for the construction of the Educational City and full citizenship. In this perspective, spaces and practices generate experiences of community, citizenship and proximity.

#### **4. Rethinking the City from an Intercultural Perspective: Educational Challenges and Pedagogical Responsibilities**

Today, an educational and social challenge for operators, institutions and citizens is the reception of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). In fact, between 2014 and 2020, more than 76,000 unaccompanied minors arrived in Italy by sea, straining the country's legal and educational protection system.

In addition to the large presence of the phenomenon, several factors make the challenge of mutual integration critical (Matera, 2021), including: the prevailing age of arrival of these minors, which for 66.9% is 17 years old (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2020), the proximity to the coming of age of majority and the consequent loss of rights and guarantees of protection provided for minors, the limited

time for the planning of a sustainable integration pathway, the gap between different cultural and symbolic systems and the often compromised ability of self-determination of these minors, who are frequently «agents of family development» (Sbraccia, 2011). Added to these are the continuous changes in the legislative framework<sup>1</sup> and the migration phenomenon<sup>2</sup> and the lack of procedural clarity in the management of reception (Giovannetti, Accorinti, 2018). This last aspect is associated with the high territorial fragmentation of the services and pathways offered to migrant minors among the different regional realities, even among neighboring municipalities. In addition, these projects are often the result of the discretion of individual operators, reception facilities or associations/organizations and are often not sufficiently valued or shared.

For the management of this complexity, educators are asked to see and build, in the city, *spaces of possible training* (Pescarmona and Matera, *in press*) within which the full exercise of democratic citizenship (Dewey, 1916; Milani, 2014; Ulivieri, 2018) is made possible. Therefore, they are required:

- to develop *intercultural competence* – between citizenship challenges and citizenship responsibilities – in order to be open to constructive dialogues both with minors and with other operators of the reception system on possible perspectives, educational cultures and planning for inclusion and development, personal and territorial;
- to assume the *logic of co-responsibility* – which necessarily implies recognition of oneself as a citizen and related feeling of belonging to the community – and a *sense of civic duty* (Council of Europe, 2016), as foundational attitudes of intercultural competence.

The role of the educator, therefore, opens to the city, to find spaces and possibilities for «transformative learning» (Mezirow, 2016), in intercultural dialogue with other professionals and civil society. In this way, he promotes a *project of intercultural citizenship* within which citizens can learn about migration as a complex human, social and educational phenomenon and take responsibility for the development of the community and the territory.

Working in culturally heterogeneous contexts means confronting multiple life and professional histories, opening up to dialogue with

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<sup>1</sup> In recent years, important changes have been introduced to the body of existing legislation on unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy. The latest legislative provision on the subject is Law No. 173, December 18, 2020, which represents the fourth regulatory intervention dedicated to unaccompanied foreign minors since 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Migration is an impossible phenomenon to photograph, as it is subject to constant changes in terms of actors of migration and vulnerability profiles, routes, chains and migration flows, means of control and dynamics of recruitment in trafficking and exploitation, geopolitical conditions of countries of origin and arrival.

different 'experts' of the phenomenon and educational practice, such as the child and other professionals.

In the daily management of educational issues, educators activate networks, elaborate strategies, reconstruct interventions, modify and enrich anthropological and pedagogical visions, and develop contextualized competencies (Milani, 2013). In a word, they train themselves.

## **5. A Research-Training Project as a Space for Education to Intercultural and Democratic Citizenship**

How can research-training project become a space for participation and promotion of intercultural citizenship for all those involved?

Activating the theory-praxis circularity, involving educators in a research-training project, can open up spaces for co-construction of a more complex knowledge about the unaccompanied minors phenomenon and pathways in synergy with the territory. Some reflections from a wider research project (2018-present) are here discussed, in order to analyse the practice of educators working with unaccompanied minors in the City of Turin and their ability to promote virtuous partnerships by outlining shared projects on the territory.

After numerous open interviews with several key informants (educators of different types of structures, cultural mediators, heads of institutions, services and associations of the reception system and school teachers), a participatory research methodology was adopted (Griffiths, 1998; Mortari, Ghirrotto, 2019). The aim was «to empower disempowered groups» (Kara, 2015, 45), specifically educators, which are usually not considered in educational welfare policies, even though crucial to the design of sustainable school integration pathways. In particular, several focus groups were held, in which the analysis of the interviews conducted and, therefore, the researcher's interpretation were discussed with the educators.

Focus groups provided a space for educators to narrate their daily actions, to share their «epistemology of professional practice» (Wenger, 1998) and the implicit knowledge inherent in practice, to give visibility to their work, but also an important opportunity for learning. In fact, the focus group is understood as a *cultural environment* from which new and renewed knowledge emerges, which is fundamental to sustaining and renewing existing projects and developing new ones.

Here, the researcher is part of the process of constructing knowledge and revising the underlying assumptions of educational practice with unaccompanied minors. The focus group is a context of professional growth and training (learning environment) for the researcher: through it, he validates his previous interpretation, triangulates information and makes up for the problem of 'translation', resulting from the dialogue between the linguistic registers of different worlds.



The focus group, in this case, is the concrete expression of training in the field of operators, who constantly activate multidisciplinary networks and synergies with the community, to deal with complex and uncertain situations.

## Conclusion

To conclude, it is possible to state that:

- the promotion of participatory spaces aimed to strengthen educators' sense of belonging to the city, recognizing the social and media 'margin' of educational work as a «place of radical possibility, a space of resistance» (Hooks, 1998, 68) within which 'central' radical perspectives take shape;
- the methodology of participatory research has promoted an inter-cultural dialogue between educators working in different services, enhancing existing synergies and activating new alliances between various educational services and territory. This methodology has also allowed for a constructive dialogue between different cultural and linguistic registers – those of field workers and those of the academy – in a circular process of revision and mutual enrichment. The underlying perspective is that of *social justice* as a privileged condition for the equal expression of one's views, rights and responsibilities, both ethical and civil;
- the sharing and co-explicitation of interpretative models, in a process supported by critical reflection (Schön, 1983), has allowed for the development of new knowledge, skills and resources to improve educational practice with minors, but has also opened up new spaces for training where one's own identity (personal, professional, social, cultural) can be redefined. In fact, participating in this research allows one to create a network in the territory to implement the dissemination of knowledge, educational philosophies, practices and procedures to create a coherent and shared system of praxis, in order to influence the elaboration of practices, regulations and interventions that are more oriented and de-construct the social imaginary around the unaccompanied minors;
- the project has supported the formation of a Collective Mind (Milani, 2013) within which different intentionalities, experiences and perspectives intersect to form a common educational and planning culture.

The concept of citizenship is thus redefined and transformed in daily practice in a network with the territory, building new multi-cultural identities and a new idea of city and intercultural citizenship for the Common Good.

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