

Mapping Alternative Education in Italy: The Case of Popular and Second-Chance Schools and Interventions in Lombardy

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Abstract : School drop-out is a multifactorial phenomenon that in Italy concerns all those underage students who, at different school stages (up to 16 years old) or training (up to 18 years old), manifest educational difficulties from dropping out of compulsory education without obtaining a qualification to repetition rates and absenteeism. From the 1980s to the 2000s, there was a progressive attenuation of the economic and social model towards a multifactorial reading of the phenomenon, and the European Commission noted the importance of learning about the phenomenon through approaches able to integrate large-scale quantitative surveys with qualitative analyses. It is not a matter of identifying the contextual factors affecting the phenomenon but problematising them by means of systemic and comprehensive in-depth analysis. So, a privileged point of observation and field of intervention are those schools that propose alternative models of teaching and learning to the traditional ones, such as popular and second-chance schools. Alternative schools and interventions grew in these years in Europe as well as in the US and Latin America, working in the direction of greater equity to create the conditions (often absent in conventional schools) for everyone to achieve educational goals. Against extensive Anglo-Saxon and US literature on this topic, there is yet no unambiguous definition of alternative education, especially in Europe, where second-chance education has been most studied. There is little literature on a second chance in Italy and almost none on alternative education (with the exception of method schools, to which in Italy the concept of "alternative" is linked). This research aims to fill the gap by systematically surveying the alternative interventions in the area and beginning to explore some models of popular and second-chance schools and experiences through a mixed methods approach. So, the main research objectives concern the spread of alternative education in the Lombardy region, the main characteristics of these schools and interventions, and their effectiveness in terms of students' well-being and school results. This paper seeks to answer the first point by presenting the preliminary results of the first phase of the project dedicated to mapping. Through the Google Forms platform, a questionnaire is being distributed to all schools in Lombardy and some schools in the rest of Italy to map the presence of alternative schools and interventions and their main characteristics. The distribution is also taking place thanks to the support of the Milan Territorial and Lombardy Regional School Offices. Moreover, other social realities outside the school system (such as cooperatives and cultural associations) can be questioned. The schools and other realities to be questioned outside Lombardy will also be identified with the support of INDIRE (Istituto Nazionale per Documentazione, Innovazione e Ricerca Educativa, "National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research") and based on existing literature and the indicators of "Futura" Plan of the PNRR (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza, "National Recovery and Resilience Plan"). Mapping will be crucial and functional for the subsequent qualitative and quantitative phase, which will make use of statistical analysis and constructivist grounded theory.

Keywords : school drop-out, alternative education, popular and second-chance schools, map

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