

EDUCATION IN A CRISIS. ITALY WITHIN SOUTHERN EUROPE: TRENDS AND THE WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

THE ESSAY DRAWS ON THIS CRISIS-FRAME AND AIMS AT SHOWING AS THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ITALY, COMPARED WITH GREECE, PORTUGAL, AND SPAIN THAT CONVERGE FOR THE SIMILAR MEDITERRANEAN WELFARE REGIME, REACTED TO CRISIS IN A PECULIAR WAY. BY COMPARING STATISTICAL INDICATORS OF NATIONAL PERFORMANCES (ABOUT: EDUCATIONAL ACCESS, SCHOOL SUCCESS, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH ETHNIC BACKGROUND) DURING THE CRISIS TIME (2000-2014), WE WANT TO FOCUS ON THE SUFFERANCE BUT ALSO ON THE RESILIENCE OF THE ITALIAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION. FOUR PRIORITIES RISE IN THE DIRECTION OF ITS REFORMABILITY: COMPLETION OF SCHOOL AUTONOMY, COMPLETION OF THE DIGITALIZATION PLAN PROVIDING ALL SCHOOLS WITH UPDATED ICTs, CHANGES IN TIME SCHEDULING OF THE SCHOOL OFFER, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEM. THE ESSAY REPORTS FINDINGS FROM A CROSS-NATIONAL RESEARCH PROJECT, CARRIED OUT BY ISCTE-IUL OF LISBON WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE FOUNDATION OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (PORTUGAL GOVERNMENT).

KEYWORDS

EDUCATION; CRISIS; SOUTHERN EUROPE; ITALY; STUDENTS WITH AN IMMIGRANT BACKGROUND.

EDUCACIÓN EN CRISIS. ITALIA EN EL MARCO DE LA EUROPA DEL SUR: TENDENCIAS Y VÍAS DE SALIDA

RESUMEN

EL ARTÍCULO ANALIZA LA REACCIÓN PECULIAR DEL SISTEMA EDUCATIVO ITALIANO A LA RECIENTE CRISIS, EN COMPARACIÓN CON PAÍSES DOTADOS DE UN «MODELO DE BIENESTAR

MEDITERRÁNEO», COMO GRECIA, PORTUGAL Y ESPAÑA. ANALIZANDO LOS PRINCIPALES INDICADORES ESTADÍSTICOS NACIONALES DE LOS SISTEMAS EDUCATIVOS —ACCESO A LA EDUCACIÓN, ÉXITO ESCOLAR, EQUIDAD E INCLUSIÓN DE ALUMNOS INMIGRANTES— SE HA PROFUNDIZADO EN LAS DIFICULTADES, PERO TAMBIÉN EN LA RESILIENCIA DEL SISTEMA ITALIANO DE EDUCACIÓN. EL ANÁLISIS PERMITE CONCLUIR QUE LAS PRIORIDADES EN TÉRMINOS DE REFORMA SON: COMPLETAR EL PROCESO DE AUTONOMÍA ESCOLAR, COMPLETAR EL PLAN DE DIGITALIZACIÓN, DOTANDO TODAS LAS ESCUELAS DE TICs ACTUALIZADAS, CAMBIAR LA JORNADA ESCOLAR E IMPLEMENTAR UN SISTEMA DE EVALUACIÓN NACIONAL. EL ARTICULO PRESENTA LOS RESULTADOS DE UN PROYECTO DE INVESTIGACIÓN TRASNACIONAL LLEVADO A CABO POR ISCTE-IUL DE LISBOA CON EL APOYO DE LA FUNDACIÓN DE CIENCIAS Y TECNOLOGÍA (GOBIERNO DE PORTUGAL).

PALABRAS CLAVE

EDUCACIÓN, CRISIS, EUROPA DEL SUR, ITALIA, ALUMNOS INMIGRANTES.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, the European Union has addressed huge attention to education considering the rise of qualifications a strategic lever to enhance both economic development and social cohesion, as well as to consolidate the cultural basis of Europe. As a matter of fact, since 1990 each state member has improved its performance in different areas of education policy. Pre-schooling rates have increased everywhere, early school leavers rates have decreased, higher education participation has improved along with the lifelong learning for adults (OECD 2016a).

The economic recession in 2007/08 put an end to the convergence process among countries and highlighted structural weaknesses, with a worsening of life conditions especially in Southern countries, due to the cuts of social expenditure and to the increasing exposition of the most vulnerable population to unemployment and poverty (Landri 2008).

Moreover, this financial crisis grafted on a previous past-rooted crisis within educational systems and its roles, which emerged from the trouble that affects the identity of the «European system» (Besozzi 2009). Austerity has been the main response to the financial slowdown, followed by the privatization of educational services and supply (Grimaldi 2013); however, it is not the only responsible about the reduction of public investment on education, but also it affected the families' and students' trust in education and their school choices (Damme, Karkkainen 2011).

This essay aims at analyzing statistical indicators of Mediterranean countries' performances both general (educational access, school success, expenditure on education), and specific (i.e. inclusion of students with ethnic background) during the crisis time. We want to focus on Italy by reporting the main findings of a transnational research project¹, in which we were involved as national experts. Current trends and the response to crisis

¹ ECSE project: *Educational Challenges in Southern Europe. Equity and efficiency in a time of crisis* (coord. João Sebastião, CIES-IUL, Lisboa), financed by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT) from June 2013 to November 2015. The research design aimed at developing a systematic survey of the impacts of crisis (2000-2014) on the performance of educational systems in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece. It drew on the main indicators of access, success and quality in education provided by OECD, Eurostat, Eurydice, Cedefop, and other

can be understood by describing the Italian education system with all its structural characteristics that affected the performances. During the crisis, some changes in policy making occurred, because of financial cuts, but education system showed a surprising resilience, enduring in offering equal access and opportunity as it did before the crisis.

Italy represents one of the most suffering countries within the Eurozone for the impacts of the crisis. As the crisis became longer than expected, public resources became insufficient to support investments for new drivers of growth and for education. However, the analysis highlights the double-face character of the Italian school system: inclusiveness coexists with significant «fault lines», such as class effect and scarce effectiveness in terms of educational outcomes. In this framework, we want to give evidence to structural weakness and educational inequalities, but also we want to recognize the role of social capital in the educational system and the persistent inclusiveness that school staff has pursued over the crisis.

1. MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES: WHAT IS CRISIS IN EDUCATION

The essay aims at showing as Italy reacts to crisis in a distinctive way, if compared to other Southern countries belonging to the Mediterranean welfare regimes (Spain, Portugal and Greece): this model is featured by a high degree of fragmentation of social security and high reliance on family (Ferrera 1996), outlining a form of capitalism based on insecurity without competitiveness (Burrioni 2016). A deeper analysis, however, underlines the lack of correspondence between welfare policies and educational strategies: according to Beblavý et al. (2011), Italy belongs to the cluster of «conservative countries»,

in which the state plays an important role in education, and stratification is reproduced both in education and in pensions/incomes; compared to the other Southern countries, Italy seems to be less egalitarian in the stratification process of education.

Starting from these similarities and differences, the transnational ECSE project contributes to the comprehension of the crisis impacts in Southern European countries in the educational field, developing a diachronic analysis in order to identify the major changes that these countries faced during the overall period (2000-2014). The comparative analysis confirms a framework of injustice and inequality that marks out Southern countries. As a crisis result, low economic growth and increase of unemployment, inequality and poverty levels characterize the area elsewhere: the most vulnerable are the youngsters, especially those with lower educational levels.

Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain show similar and persistent traces of social inequality and scarce quality in education, facing the challenge promoted by the European Union to improve their educational performances (Mari-Klose, Moreno-Fuentes 2013). ECSE project compared data on participation and access to the educational systems, educational attainment and public expenditure on education.

PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The increase of participation in all educational levels is common to all four countries that have gone through several reforms, in order to widen access to education. The evolution of compulsory education enrolment underlines the universal access to schooling (100%) in all Southern European countries. Whereas, the participation rate in upper secondary education is lower than 100%, despite

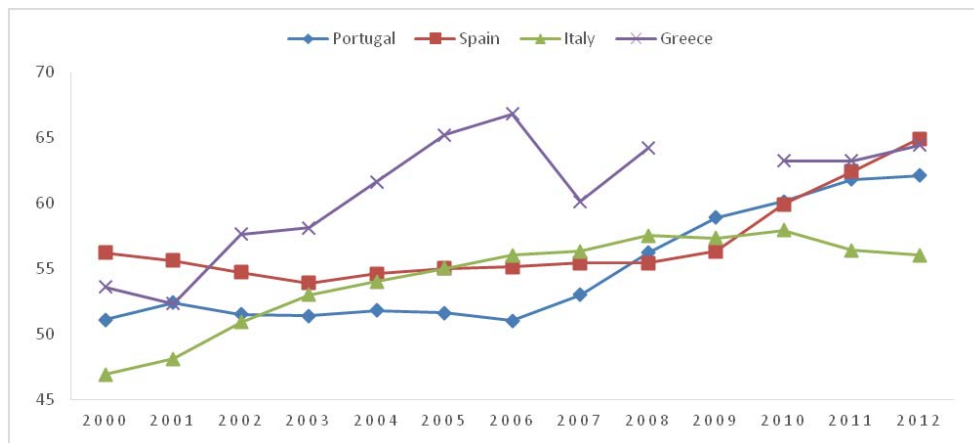
national sources. Beside the analysis of data, a second purpose of the project was to compare changes and innovation in policy making (2000-2013) in all nations, taken as responses to crisis. Each national report included data collection and analysis (by using the same analytical grid and template) and an in-depth interview with an expert in public education and training policies. This essay refers largely but not totally to the findings reported by ECSE project (see paragraphs 1-3-4), integrated with a significant updating. The expert's interview referred in par. 4 has taken place in Rome at the ASTRID research center in November 2014.

of the principle of «right and duty of education or training for at least 12 years» introduced in 2003 in Italy (the same regulation has been introduced in Portugal since 2009). Both Greece and Spain maintain a compulsory school of 10 years (lower secondary complete).

Considering students' enrolment between 2000 and 2012 from primary (ISCED 1) to tertiary education (ISCED 6) (Fig. 1), Portugal presents the highest rise in this indicator, however after a period of a significant rise, since 2007 this growth begins

to slow down. Greece is the second country with the highest improvement in students' enrolment. At the beginning of the decade, although Spain had the largest percentage of students enrolled (51.1%), between 2000 and 2003 the indicator reduced 2.3 percentage points. Since then, Spain has been recuperating and in 2012 reached 64.9% of participation, surpassing Greek's value. In the Italian case, although the country showed signs of improvement in this indicator, since 2010 the percentage of enrolment have started to decrease.

Fig. 1. Pupils students enrolled from primary to tertiary education, as % of corresponding age population



Source: Eurostat.

From the one hand, in Italy, Portugal, and Greece, vocational paths are alternative to general/academic courses and they address to weak population (ethnic groups or students with special needs); thus, in VET courses there occurs strong differences in educational performance considering social background, type of school or type of course. This «hidden selection» can also explain the reduced access to tertiary education. In all the four countries, the phenomenon looks similar: only a part of the secondary student population reaches the tertiary system, preferably those who come from regular academic pathways. From 2000 to 2011, Southern European countries presented a considerable increase of students enrolled in vocational paths, apart from Greece: this trend shows the progressive

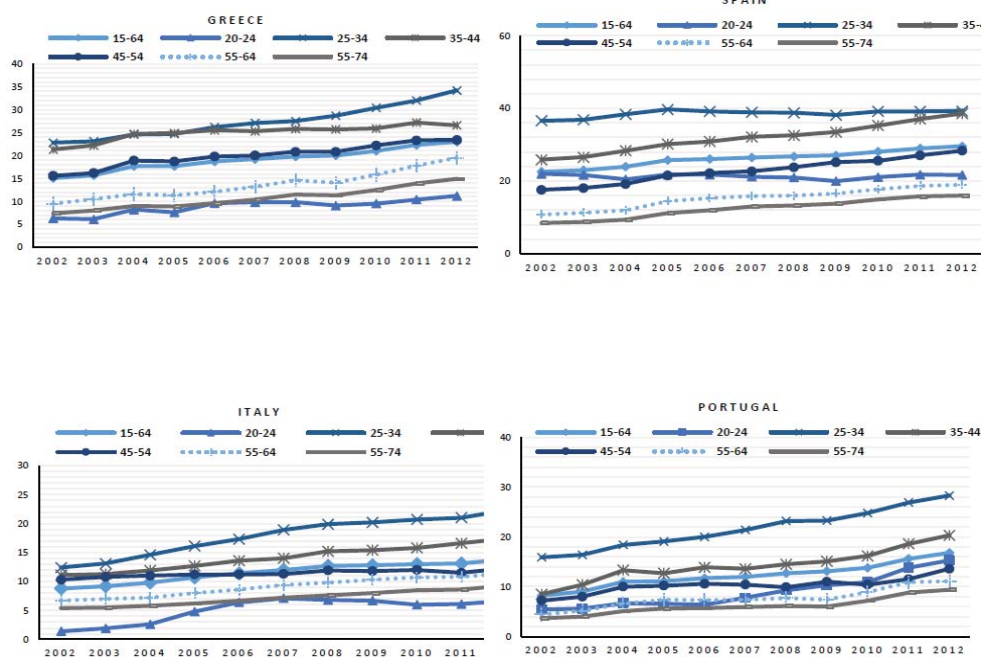
weight of VET in these countries, which has received attention in the European policy making. Since 2004 Portugal invested significantly in policies for enlarging VET courses supply, seen as a measure to decrease early school leaving, to ensure compulsory education attainment, and to give response to students at-a-risk of social exclusion. In Greece, vocational and technical courses represent the scholar pathways with «lower grades», for «lower status students». Italy is featured by a different population composition, revealing inequality among schools (type of school, localization), within classrooms in the same schools, among curriculum options.

From the other hand, from 2000 to 2012 tertiary education enrolment has grown in Southern Europe. In 2012 considering the age group 15-64,

we notice that: 29.6% of the population has a tertiary education degree (+7 percentage points since 2002), as well as 23% (+8 since 2012) of the Greek population; Italy and Portugal show the lowest proportions of population having tertiary education completed in 2012 (13.8% and 16.8%

respectively). In each country (see Figure 2), the largest age group with tertiary education is 25-34 year old (35.5% EU 27): Spain with 39.3%; Greece with 34.2% (+11 p.p. since 2002); Italy with 22.5% (+10 p.p.) and Portugal with 28.3% (a growth of 12.4 p.p. since 2002).

Fig. 2. Tertiary education attainment level (%) in Southern countries (2002-2012)



Source: Eurostat.

In Italy, the progressive decreasing in attendance to tertiary education and the increase of VET enrolment may explain the lowest levels in tertiary attainment, even if vocational options have permission of access to higher education; as for Portugal, the structural problem of qualification for such a long time and the evident early school leaving affecting the secondary level are determinant to explain the lowest attendance to tertiary and subsequent attainment.

To sum up, these are the main tendencies of Southern Europe in educational outcomes that the four countries have in common: enlargement of general attainment at the last cycles (ISCED

3-6) and a decrease at the basic ones (ISCED 0-2). There is also a gap concerning the «older» and «younger generation» of students, whereas the first ones are mainly concentrated on the lower levels of attainment, and the second ones hold higher certificates. Furthermore, the qualification structure of the active population in Southern Europe shows persistently lower educational levels when compared with the other European countries. In 2013 the share of population aged 25-64 years who hold only ISCED 0-2 are the following: 45% in Spain; 41.9% in Italy; 33.1% in Greece, and 60.8% in Portugal, being the European average 24.9% for the same year.

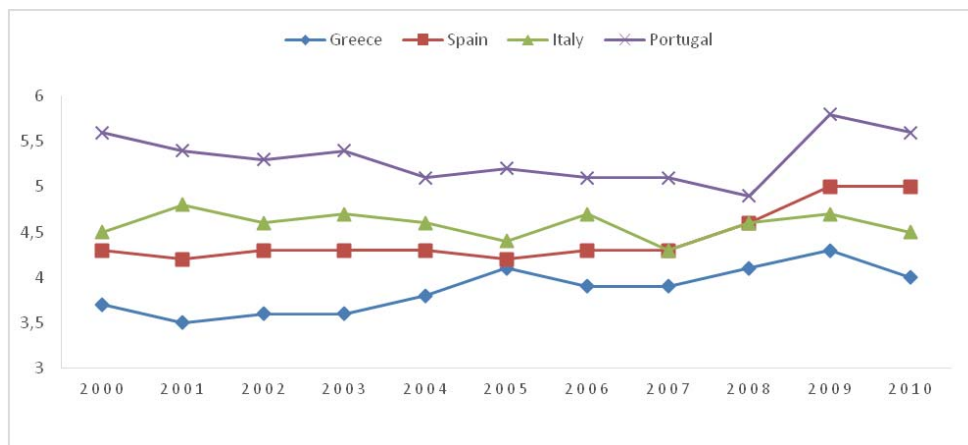
PUBLIC EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION

With no doubt, the trend of public investment in education had been positive over the last 20 years; however, with the advent of economic crisis in 2007/08 occurred the reversal of this trend, with a reduction in spending either in the European average or in Southern Europe. Even OECD last report (OECD 2016a) confirms that Italy, Portugal and Spain decreased their public expenditure on educational institutions (as a percentage of GDP).

In fact, between 2010 and 2012 all Southern countries have such great losses on their GDP that public expenditure on education collapsed more than 5% in Italy, Portugal and Spain.

We can observe this trend in all countries especially after 2009 (Fig. 3): Greece drops 0.3 percentage points, Italy and Portugal drop 0.2 p.p., Spain maintains the same value in 2009/10. Public expenditure as percentage of GDP was always higher in Portugal and it had a significant increase from 2008 to 2009 (+0.9 p.p.: from 4.9 to 5.8%).

Fig. 3. Public Expenditure on Education in Southern countries, as % GDP



Source: Eurostat.

It's worth noticing that the Southern European educational systems are mainly funded by public sector, considering especially compulsory education. Then the economic crisis directly affected the funding systems of education in these countries. Among other cuts, ECSE study reports a massive dismissal of teachers and high numbers of teachers with no place in schools in each of the four countries, as well as the interruption of some educational programs or other severe restructurings within the educational system (i.e. increasing students/teacher ratio, reducing school time).

In Spain, the loss of a high percentage of staff meant that school practically has ceased all extra-curricular activities and compensatory classes and meant more additional students per class. With

the same trend, Italy also reported that average class size increased as well the student/teacher ratio.

In regards to Greece, the recent lack of data does not allow to fully describe and understand the extension of the budgetary cuts (2012-14), but several factors reported a strong reduction of standards in education: students transport stopped in some areas because of funding; schools in poor areas without heating in the winter; foreign language text books are not available for free, and compensatory education has also stopped. Cuts on education personnel were also a reality and teachers experienced severe salary cuts. The administrative personnel have been also affected and being limited in education as well as in other institutions in the public sector (Kantzara 2014).

Despite the global expenditure decreased in last years, in Portugal this occurred mainly by restructuring human resources and salaries cuts, and by establishing priorities in education in terms of efficiency, meaning here that specific educational programs were more significantly penalized.

The governance of education and of schools funding can be determinant for the expenditure dynamics: in Portugal, Italy and Greece, with a more centralized framework, public funds are controlled by central government, while in Spain they are controlled and implemented autonomously in each region, being the shares of public funding even managed at a centralized level as it occurs with all educational subjects. In general terms, some new trends are detected along with the present recession: the ECSE study reports the increase of private funding share in some areas, particularly on tertiary education.

2. ITALY AND ITS PECULIARITY: A FRAGMENTED AND «HARD» EDUCATION SYSTEM

Italy is recognised as one of the eight most industrialized countries in the world but its recent trends are strongly declining as a consequence of the economic stagnation. This contributed to worsen the existing social inequalities that affect the occupational and educational system in Italy: gender differences; territorial divide between the Central-Northern regions and the Southern regions with islands included; age inequity.

An impressive progress has been made by the Italian education system along the last 5-6 decades: participation in secondary and tertiary education increased consistently with a huge involvement of girls at all levels. If in 1951 the secondary attainment rate among people 15-19 year olds was 10.5%, in 2015 it raised to 80.1%; similarly, in 1951 the share of tertiary education attainment among 20-34 year olds was 2.9% while in 2015 it raised up to 25.3% (European Commission 2016). Women have made faster progress in higher education than men: currently 30.8% is the young females' rate of tertiary attainment *versus* 20.0% of young males.

Despite the higher qualification, Italian women are less employed not only than males but also than their European counterparts.

Besides the gender divide in the labour market, the difficult transition from school to work and the youth unemployment are the hardest plagues for Italy now: only 30% out of the 20-34 year old people are employed having completed a general track in secondary education of 1 to 3 years (42% if the youngster hold a VET certificate) versus the Eu average of 60% (73% of the youngsters hold a VET certificate) (Ibidem). The whole unemployment rate for young people in 2015 was 39.9%; unfortunately, a university degree does not reduce the risk of unemployment to the same extent as in other European countries (ISFOL 2012). The poor profitability of the higher education is due to two reasons: 1) small size of Italian manufacturing units and their lacking resources, inconsistent with the levels of investment required for innovation activities; and 2) poor quality and credibility of the school system, with weak connections with the job opportunities' system.

Two are the reasons explaining this lack of confidence towards formal education in Italy: the low effectiveness of schooling showed by the high rate of early school leavers and of low performing students, and the class effect, which affects the students' choices and performances still consistently. Both factors rise serious issues of inequity and educational poverty.

In numbers, the rates of early school leavers in Italy are over the European average: the education cycle terminates after the lower secondary school for 14.7% of Italian people vs. 11% of Europeans (2015). As the dropout rate, the gender divide looks relevant: 17.5 out of 100 boys abandon the high school vs. 11.8% of girls. Moreover, school dropout shows a clear territorial divide: 11.6% is the ESL rate in Central and Northern areas, whereas it rises to 19.2 in Southern Italy (ISTAT 2016: 48).

Underachieving is also a consolidate issue in Italy due to the long-term stratification between high status population (living more in the North and in big cities) and the poor and illiterate population, generally located in Southern and rural areas.

Despite of evident progresses, the rate of Italian low performers (fourth percentile in PISA scores) is still higher than the Eu mean: Italy scores 19.5% in reading (vs. 18.7% Eu mean), 24.7% in maths (vs. 22.1% Eu mean), and 19.7% in science (vs. 16.5% Eu mean) (European Commission 2016).

Besides several factors affecting underachieving (such as: ethnicity, gender, and territory), there is the scarce participation to early child education. As many studies confirm (OECD-PISA 2015) even in Italy pre-primary education has great impact on further education and school performance of the child, even greater for students with immigrant background. Children with no pre-primary education have more than double (48%) probability of low performance in maths by the age of 15 (vs. 22% among students with more than one year of pre-primary education) (European Commission 2016: 44). Participation in pre-primary education (3-6 years) in Italy has increased consistently since 1997 now standing over the Eu mean: 96.8% Italy vs. 95% Europe, with a smooth decline between 2001 and 2011 (Ibidem: 64). However children of 0-3 years participate very little in childcare (17%) and services are not equally distributed along the national territory.

As for the class effect, in Italy parents' education levels seriously affect the choice of educational tracks and the chance of success of their children. Members of lower social classes are systematically under-represented in the academic-oriented school tracks (Mocetti 2012). Students having parents with only the compulsory education report a dropout rate of 27.7%, while it decreases up to 7.8% among those parents who achieved the upper secondary education and up to 2.9% among those families in which at least one parent has obtained an academic degree (ISTAT 2016: 48). PISA 2015 results mirror a similar situation, but not drastic if compared with the OECD countries mean (OECD 2016b: 209). In Italy the rate of students with low performance in science is 23 (vs. OECD mean 21) with 10% of variation explained by the student's ESCS (OECD mean: 13%); each one-unit increase in ESCS 30 and more points in the science score (OECD mean: 38).

To tackle inequity and inefficacy, over the last twenty years the Italian education system has undergone a series of transformations or attempts of transformations, at times announced and then abandoned, all in a background of political instability and fragmented policies. Furthermore, ministry office and educational establishments demonstrate a resistance to changes. Since the '90s, reforms targeted in the Italian education system aimed to leading it to processes of: devolution, autonomy of schools, «smooth» privatization, changes in the relationship between education and labour market (emphasizing digitalization, internships, and placement services. . .) and alignment to international standards, (Grimaldi, Serpieri 2012). One critical issue at stake in these years has been the lack of correspondence (and dialogue) between vocational training and education system. The reformist trend has been inspired of course also by the European guidelines on education and, financially speaking, draws on resources from the European Social Fund.

Between 1997 and 2015 at least six educational reforms have been carried out by both right and left governments with a neo-liberalist approach. School autonomy and de-centralization (1997 and 2001); elevation of the threshold for compulsory education from 16 to 18 year olds (2007); regulation within the public system for state and non-state schools (2000); simplification of curricula in the upper secondary (2008); changes in the teacher-institute job contract with more power of decision given to principals in order to match the school's need with the teacher's skills (2015).

As for the efficiency of the system, compared to other OECD countries Italy is characterized by underdevelopment in terms of monitoring and evaluation practices. The external approaches of evaluation are only recently introduced with the constitution of the National Institute of Education Evaluation INVALSI (2005). The implementation of randomized tests of performances is still coping with a set of obstacles, i.e. the opposition by teachers. This resistance mainly depends on the absence of a culture of evaluation in the public sector: teachers, as public employees, are not trained for it. In addi-

tion, teachers suspect these practices would lead to personal penalties and resources reduction.

While the teachers' external evaluation is almost absent, self-evaluation is constantly encouraged, i.e. the implementation of the compulsory Institute Evaluation Report (RAV). In spite of all these reforms, and the strong territorialisation and regionalization of policy system, the Italian education system still features local authorities with limited power. The central level reveals a loss of deliberative power and responsibility, so risking to leave local actors without relevant guidelines useful in defining priorities. Yet the system remains centralist over two issues of fundamental importance: personnel management totally financed by the State (it covers 80% of the total spending on the education system) and the allocation and management of other financial resources. As a matter of fact, the process of modernization lies substantially incomplete, without a clear design. The result is a fragmented policy landscape and ever-increasing inequalities in the welfare system

3. A NEW EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE: RECEIVING IMMIGRANT STUDENTS DESPITE THE CRISIS

Italy can also be compared to other countries in Southern Europe, through statistical indicators of Mediterranean countries' performances during the crisis, focusing on access to education and educational outcomes of a specific vulnerable group: pupils with an immigrant background. As a matter of fact, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece belong to the group of «new immigration countries», which are generally characterized by recent immigration flows, low-productivity economies, significant underground sectors, and a demand for labour that is primarily oriented towards unskilled workers (Reyneri, Fullin 2011).

In these national contexts young people with an immigrant origin suffer from a well-known and specific vulnerability in the education field; they have worse performances in comparison with native students, higher probability of dropout, higher risks of becoming NEET (not in education, employment,

or training) and suffer from material poverty and social exclusion (Santagati 2015). Along with the long-lasting crisis, undoubtedly, their condition risks to worsen more and more. The focusing on this group can be useful, so as to use the «mirror function» of migration (Sayad 2002) to explicit what is latent and problematic in the functioning of the democratic (educational) institutions. The idea underpinned to this approach is that the problems raised by the arrival of immigrants correspond to structural weaknesses of the receiving institutions. Similarly, the resolution of critical issues and the resilience to turbulence mirror the potential of the educational system in integrating migrant pupils (Colombo, Santagati 2017). Data about educational attainment and achievement of immigrants in every country can be read with the purpose of understanding the larger transformations of the education system and the challenges posed by the crisis impact to education policies in terms of inequality, old/new poverty, and injustice. Data about educational attainment and achievement of immigrants in every country can be read with the purpose of understanding the larger transformations of the education system and the challenges posed by the crisis impact to education policies in terms of inequality, old/new poverty, and injustice.

Like mentioned above, Italy, as well as other Mediterranean countries, shows a great influence of social origin, that is, there is a high likelihood of stopping basic education among poor children (Barone, Ruggera, 2015). Moreover, the gap between native and immigrant students is very relevant, and it is likely to enlarge along with the decline of public expenditure in education: this looks exactly what is occurring in Southern countries. Many characteristics are in common among Southern European countries; they have a similar migratory system, originated according to Ribas-Mateos (2004) by the impact of global economic process, a weak and familistic welfare state and a dynamic informal economy. Recently Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, have become new destinations of large international migration flows. In these four countries, immigration started to rise in the late 1980s, but the most significant

inflows occurred during the first decade of the XXI century, following a combination of increased global migration trends and strong labour force demands in South European economies. In 2014 immigrant residents in the UE28 are nearly 34 million corresponding to 6.7% of the total European population, in the Southern countries they reach 11 million corresponding to ¼ of UE28 immigrant residents (source: Eurostat). Immigrants are more numerous in Italy (nearly 5 millions, 8.1% of the total population) and Spain (4.6 millions, 10.1%), countries which rank respectively third and fourth among European countries for absolute values of immigrant residents, after Germany and the United Kingdom. Moreover, nearly 800,000 immigrants live in Greece (7.7% of residents) and 400,000 in Portugal (corresponding to 3.8% of the population). Southern countries are also featured by a high rate of low-skilled immigrant population and a low rate of qualified immigrants with tertiary education.

Approximately 18.5% of the immigrant population of the Southern countries are represented by children in the age of compulsory education, a sub-population in rapid evolution. A recent

comparative study underlines that the share of young immigrants in the population of compulsory school age is almost nine per cent in Greece and around seven per cent in Italy, Spain and Portugal (Schnell, Azzolini 2015). As a result of how recent the immigration is, the majority of immigrant children is made up of first-generation youths, with the second generation until now is marginal and mainly concentrated in younger age groups.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Contrasting the endemic demographic decline, in Italy from 2000 to 2010 the main impulse to growth has been the arrival of foreign minors, mainly thanks to immigrants' family reunifications. More recently, a relevant change is a rapid increase of foreign pupils born in Italy from immigrant parents. From 2008/09 to now the growth has slowed down (Table 1) and Italy shifts to a stage of more stabilization and normalization of migratory flows (Santagati 2014). This trend might be regarded as an effect of the economic crisis, which has led foreign families to return to their homeland.

Table 1. Non-Italian students enrolled in education system in Italy. 2000/01-2014/15

School year	Total	Per 100 pupils
2000/01	147,406	1.8
2001/02	196,414	2.2
2002/03	239,808	2.7
2003/04	307,141	3.5
2004/05	370,803	4.2
2005/06	431,211	4.8
2006/07	501,420	5.6
2007/08	574,133	6.4
2008/09	629,360	7.0
2009/10	673,592	7.5
2010/11	711,046	7.9
2011/12	755,939	8.4
2012/13	786,630	8.8
2013/14	802,844	9.0
2014/15	814,187	9.2

Source: ISMU elaboration on MIUR data.

Anyway, facing the arrival of immigrant pupils the Italian educational system has revealed its capacity to give access to education to all and its widely inclusive nature, as it emerges from the choice to avoid «special» or «receiving» classrooms as separate measures for newly arrived or non-native students, and this approach did not change during the crisis time. Since the first inflow of migrants, Italian schools have ensured open access to all immigrant minors to the ordinary classes, regardless of their legal status or their previous language skills, respecting the universal children's right to complete compulsory education.

In terms of access, education (together with health) has emerged to be more inclusive than other social institutions, which were more discriminating for culturally different minorities. For example, citizenship status is in Italy slightly restrictive, as it is based on the *jus sanguinis* and not on the *ius solis* (although currently subjected to be under reform). Students with non-Italian citizenship –as they are defined by the Ministry of Education– include the large group of young immigrants, no matter if they have born in Italy or abroad (Santagati 2016b). However, if the access to education seems to be guaranteed, foreign students are experiencing a lower success than the natives in the various educational levels. This achievement gap tends to grow during the high school and beyond (Colombo 2015b). Then it can be stated that equity in educational access is only formal and «apparent» because it does not coincide with an equity in terms of educational outcomes. This is mainly due to the effect of the crisis, but is also rooted in previous dysfunctions. In the following sections, we ought to show as inclusiveness of the Italian system can coexist with the weaknesses we pointed out above: class effect and low effectiveness.

CLASS EFFECT

It is likely pupils with an immigrant background –once entered into the school public system– fall into the same class effect, which gives disadvantages to pupils with a poor socioeconomic

background. In fact, if compared with others OECD countries, Italy reveals to have more differences between schools than differences within schools. Students' achievement rates vary more in relation to the school attended, than to individual features of the single student. In this way, there is a strong effect of «school segregation» that concentrates students with the same economic, cultural and social background in the same establishments producing «horizontal homogeneity» (i.e. students with high status are overrepresented in lyceums and underrepresented in vocational institutes). Early tracking at the end of lower secondary education can also explain inequality and r-selection because it links the school choice to family resources and status (Colombo, Santagati 2010). The same occurs for the likelihood to obtain the final diploma, which is higher in lyceums and lower in technical and vocational institutes: this makes realistic for low-background students to reproduce their social disadvantage. The issue, therefore, is dual: there is not just a need to develop a better orientation for weak students, in order to reduce any obstacles that can prevent disparity in the access to high school, but it is also at stake how to increase the quality of learning in technical and vocational schools in order to assign equal dignity to non-general tracks in comparison with other educational channels, both for native and foreign students (Santagati 2016a).

Data elaborated by Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) clearly show how large the educational gap is between immigrant and native students in all Southern Europe. Elsewhere the performance gap between natives and non-natives tends to decrease if immigrants were born in the receiving country: second generation immigrants partially perform like the natives. This trends do not vary significantly in Europe, according to the single model of reception because are justified by two permanent factors: lower socioeconomic background and little language skills (Azzolini et al. 2012).

As Schnell and Azzolini point out (2015), in each of the four «new immigration» countries the achievement gaps shrink substantially after accounting for differences in family backgrounds. The drawbacks faced by immigrant children are due to

fewer economic resources and material conditions being available to them. The parents' educational background does not account for immigrant-native differences in academic performance. The findings provide empirical evidence for the very precarious socio-economic integration of adult immigrants in new destination countries who, despite their relatively strong educational credentials, are placed into the lowest occupational positions.

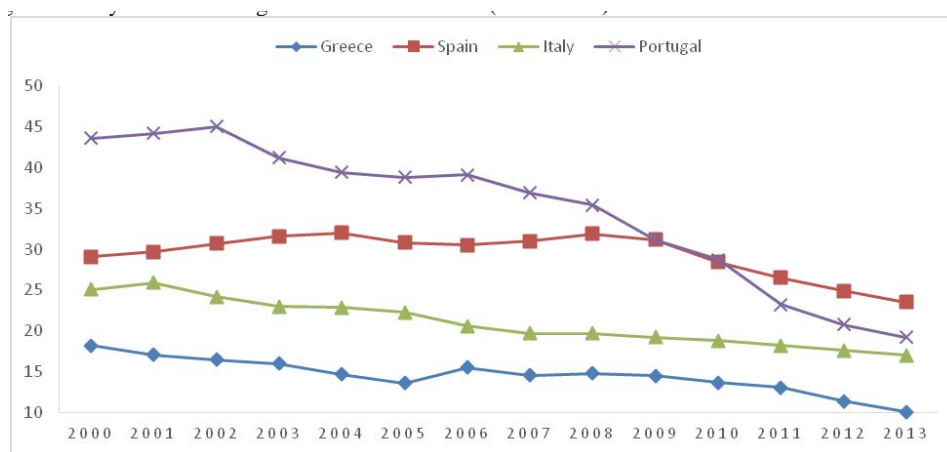
INEFFECTIVENESS OF THE SYSTEM

The second factor impacting with the inclusiveness of foreign pupils in Italy is the endemic early school leaving, which is to be considered the main indicator of ineffectiveness (Colombo 2013). Data on Early Leavers (ESLs)² among both native and immigrants allow us to compare Italy to other Southern countries. A (positive) downward trend of ESL rates in compulsory education has characterized Southern Europe from 2000 to today. In Italy (the worst performing country over the last two decades), ESL percentage had a great reduction from 25.1 in 2000 to 17.1 in 2013, achieving now

14.7 (Eurostat 2016). The decrease is partially due to positive effects of the European investments on permanent education, which all EU states have been entitled to; therefore, this does not appear to be a peculiarity of the Italian case.

The position of Italy within the European ranking remains almost unaltered: Italy is now ranking 4th from the last in the EU 27 (being 5th in 2013 after Spain, Portugal, Malta, and Macedonia). In this period, Italy introduced general measures, such as the enlargement of compulsory education (from 14 to 16 year old pupils) prescribed by law in 2007, and specific measures to combat early school leaving at school level with targeted projects and personalized curriculum. Many prevention programs have been developed in the Southern regions with the EU PON support, but the gap among strong/weak regions remains significant as far as the upper secondary participation rates are concerned. As Colombo points out (2015a), early school leaving still represents in Italy a neglected problem in its quantitative dimension, due to its endemic nature and to the scarce pressure by the public opinion and the media.

Fig. 4. Early school leaving in Southern countries (2000-2013)



Source: Eurostat.

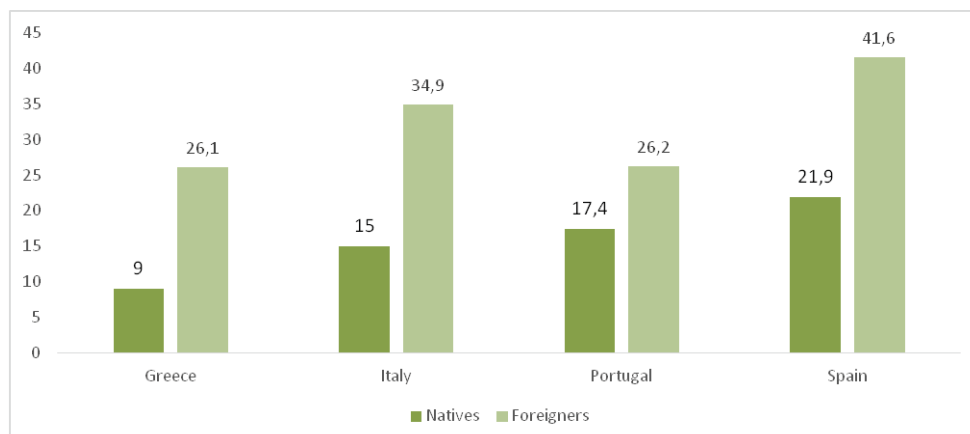
² ESLs correspond to the subset of 18 to 24-year olds who do not have a secondary education degree or a professional qualification and that do not attend school or VET courses.

Evolution of ESL's rate (Fig. 4) highlights the positive convergence in educational development in Southern Europe. In recent decades, these countries have had a net improvement in reducing ESL rates (OECD 2016a): Greece and Italy are characterized by a linear trend, while Spain and Portugal have registered more oscillating trends with an overall reduction of ESL as a result of national policies implemented. The different situations among the countries suggest that the decline of ESLs depends also by the impact of the crisis, the nature of the educational system and welfare, as well as by the implementation of measures of prevention/contrast, promoted by the possibilities of European cooperation (Colombo et al. 2015).

Comparing natives and immigrant pupils (2000-2013), Eurostat show a reduction of ESL

more among the natives, than among foreigners, the latter reporting an ESL rate double than that of natives. Foreign-born students face multiple risk factors that lead them to leave school early (i.e. economic deprivation, low educational expectations, scarce support from their families, conflictual relationships with peers, misunderstandings with teachers, etc.; cf. Nouwen et al. 2015) and these risks are harder to be overtaken. In 2014 in Europe the ESL rate is 11.2% among natives, while among non-natives the percentage rises to 23.4%. The gap between native and non-native students is higher in Italy, Spain and Greece, lower in Portugal; indeed, the gap between natives and foreigners explains a great part of the percentage of ESLs in every country (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Early school leavers in Southern Europe by citizenship, %, 2014



Source: ISMU elaboration on Eurostat data.

Despite improvements over the last years, in 2014 early school leavers still represent a large portion among foreign students in Southern Europe. It seems the national education policy are unaware about this point. Maybe they neglect the possible relapse, which can make the whole education system collapse and a large immigrant population is excluded from education. It is therefore necessary to intervene with specific measures in favor of a population that is likely to become absent not only from education, training and, maybe, from work,

but also from any public and institutional spaces of participation (Lodigiani, Santagati 2016).

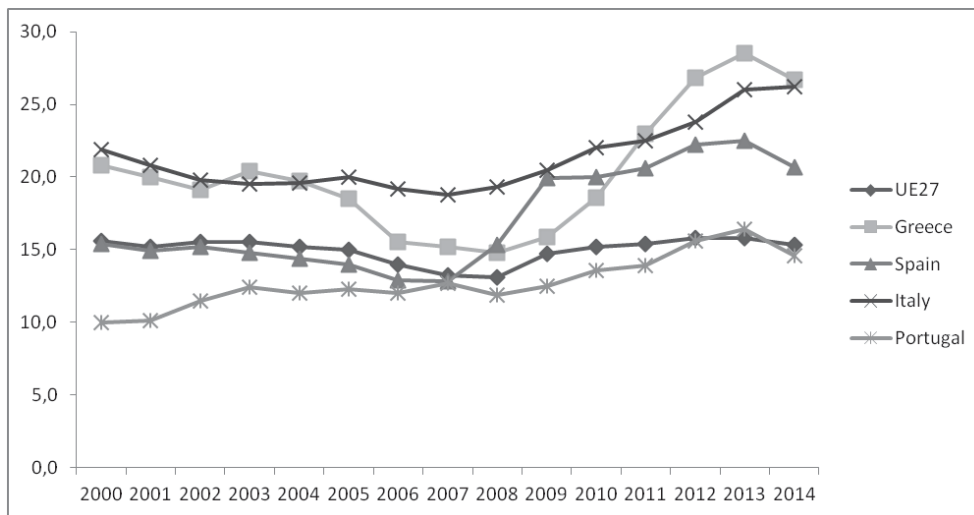
In this perspective, it is worthy to mention the strong presence of young immigrants among NEETs (people aged 15-29, neither in employment or in education or training): a group particularly vulnerable and over-represented in Southern Europe and among young people with an immigrant background. Since 2000 the four countries considered in this analysis show an increase in the percentage of NEETs, interpreted as a proxy of the condition of Southern

youngsters during the economic crisis (Eurofound 2012), particularly those with low qualifications and without motivation for education/training or unskilled for certain types of job. The percentage of NEETs is positively correlated with the income inequality of the European countries: in 2012, four years after the crisis, Italy had the highest level of NEETs (21%), followed by Greece (20.2%), Spain (18.6%) and Portugal (13.9%) (cf. Sebastião 2015).

During the evolution of crisis, the NEETs phenomenon has remained stable with respect to the

EU average (Fig. 6). Even when European countries reached a post-crisis stability (2012-14), the Southern area registered an exponential increase in the percentage of NEETs: see the stagnation of rather high levels of NEETs in Greece and in Italy (nearly 26%), and a relevant growth in Spain in correspondence to the beginning of the economic crisis (20.7% of NEETs in 2014). Portugal instead is characterized by more oscillating trends and by a significant decrease in this group in recent years (14.6%, 2014).

Fig. 6. NEET rates in Southern European countries (% of people aged between 15-29). 2010-2014



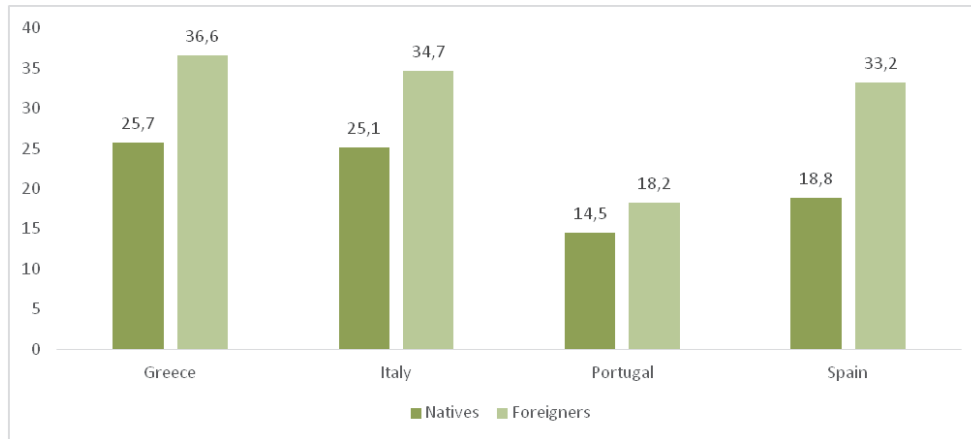
Source: elaboration on Eurostat data.

In 2014 (Fig. 7) the highest rate of NEETs with an immigrant background is registered in Greece, followed by Italy and Spain. However, Greece and Italy are characterized for the highest proportion of native NEETs (about ¼) in Europe. The ethnic gap is particularly high in Spain (+14.4 p.p. for foreigners) and in Greece (+10.9 p.p.), lower in Italy (+9.6 p.p.) and even more lower in Portugal (+3.7 p.p.). Therefore, data confirm the non-inclusion of this large group of young foreigners and, therefore, the ineffectiveness of educational and integration policies, not able of fostering the human capital of the younger generation.

The NEETs with an immigrant background have specific problems related to the lack of integration,

in terms of educational, social and professional inclusion. With no doubt, the situation is more serious in Italy (the worst performer also among the OECD countries, OECD 2016a) and it has to be explained with reference to the nature of the internal labor market. As Ingellis and Calvo affirm (2015), the Italian labor market is characterized by high inactivity, high rate of long-term unemployed (with a significant territorial gap between North and South), high unemployment of young people and women, a high percentage of people looking for their first job, lack of social protection for the unemployed and atypical workers.

Fig. 7. Immigrant NEETs in Southern European countries by citizenship, %, 2014



Source: ISMU elaboration on Eurostat data.

The previous analysis indicates a sort of Southern European convergence on the educational reception of young people with an immigrant background. The considered countries show persistent and structural weaknesses in respect to the inclusion of foreigners in the educational system: the high rate of ESLs and NEETs among young people with an immigrant background reveals that a significant part of the force work is characterized by low educational levels and difficulties in the first entrance in the job market. Nevertheless, the improvement promoted by the Europeanization that favors the convergence towards the same objectives, the scenario is quite different in the four countries considered: Spain holds the record of youth unemployment and early school leaving, Greece and Italy show high inactivity rates, Portugal appears to face a less problematic situation, but also it is characterized by a reduced share of the immigrant population and students. Evidence shows that despite official discourse, promoting investment in human capital and improvement in the educational system, ethnic inequalities persist.

To remark how Italy has coped with the challenge of including immigrant students in education during the crisis, data confirmed the initial hypothesis. On the one hand, despite financial cuts, the education system has shown its resilience to crisis by welcoming and embedding newly-arrived

and second generation immigrants in its ordinary functioning by applying to this student population the same principles and rules (inclusiveness, universalism, equity of treatment, attention to special needs) already applied for other disadvantaged pupils in the past. On the other hand, as a result of this embeddedness, even the immigrant student population suffered for the endemic and structural weaknesses of the system: influence of the class effect on educational outcomes and risk of dropping out as ineffectiveness of the educational supply. The negative effects of these weaknesses on the immigrant population are rather stronger because they are more tempted than natives to abandon the system before giving back the social investment the receiving society has made for them. And this brings evidence of the fragile resilience of national system facing the crisis.

4. THE WAY FORWARD: REFORMABILITY AND PRESERVATION OF THE SOCIAL CAPITAL

Without any doubt, Italy is one of the most suffering countries within the Eurozone for the impacts of the crisis. Not only for the great reduction of productivity, and the loss of many work placements in traditional economic sectors (manufacturing,

building and public employment) but also for the length of the austerity time.

Italian politics against the crisis have been oriented initially to support banks and large firms, and cutting public spending. Regions, schools and universities (mainly funded by the State), and public employees were the main victims of the cuts, followed by sanitary services and the big infrastructural projects. As the crisis became longer than expected, many public resources have been devoted to cover the increasing cost of unemployment. As a result, resources became insufficient to support investments for new drivers of growth. In this frame the crisis affected the national education system and made the ties looser between education and labour market. Moreover the multiple educational reforms had weak impacts on both quality and equity of the system.

A certain modernization of schooling has been carried out by the central government, stressing those priorities that each part mainly agreed to:

1. teacher employment³ and conservation of the same National Contract defined before the downturn;
2. digital gap reduction (cf. Colombo, Pitzalis 2016);
3. enlargement of the compulsory education and development of VET system at a regional basis;
4. curriculum reform: Ministry of Education issued national guidelines for the 1st cycle of education (document written in 2011 on the basis of former President of Republic Decree, n. 89/2009, which became mandatory only in 2011/12).

As a matter of fact, the education system in Italy cannot be defined as «motionless» during the crisis because a number of little changes have occurred at various levels; but as they were pushed by alternative forces (innovation, competition, prevention of

exclusion and recovery, etc.); the result is nothing but an organic reform.

Above we mentioned the double-face character of the Italian school system: resilience and inclusiveness coexist with significant «fault lines», such as class effect and scarce effectiveness in terms of educational outcomes. Despite the crisis, the general orientation towards equity, that is, universal access and participation, did not regress. All statistical indicators show stability of the social demand of education and progression in inclusiveness of the most vulnerable groups (see the regression of ESL rates). But, due to existing territorial divides and high risk of «school segregation» across early tracking, the system stays as an unequal agency that spreads non-unlimited resources in a segmented way. If the economic stagnation will endure, all social divides will probably become stronger and the weak impact of recent reforms will be neutralized.

Through the interview with a national expert⁴, the ECSE project has led to formulate some general orientations about the «reformability» of the Italian education system along three drivers of change:

1. *completion of schools' autonomy*, not in the sense of privatization of schools, but in the direction to reinforce local networks (schools-municipalities, schools-social services, schools-enterprises and schools-non-profit organizations). For this purpose, it can be useful to enlarge the effective power of management of institutes, both by using the law on measures for «simplification of public administrations and development» (n. 35/2012) (Campione, Fiorentino 2013) and by assigning an autonomous budget.
2. *Completion of the digitalization plan*, not only making each school connected with the high speed band, but also making better use of the existing technologies. This leads

³ By the Law n. 107, in 2015 65.000 new teachers were employed on a full-time contract basis; many of them were previously in-service teachers but with temporary contract. This measure seems to have ended the precariousness in teachers' recruitment, one of the greatest plagues of the public school system in Italy.

⁴ Vittorio Campione, consultant of the Ministry of Education in 2014.

to reconfigure spaces and organizations. A wider use of ITC is required also to personalize school choice better and to engage the student in his/her own path.

3. *Changes in the educational inputs.* To afford the reduction of inequalities, education (mainly in secondary pathways) should become more customized so as to meet the social demands. One of the easier points to change might be the time school schedule. As reported: «In our country the timing structure of schooling is the same since decades, in which youth stays at school for a given number of hours (usually very few, 5 or less per day) to receive a high number of subjects taught (more than in other OECD countries). It's time to put this structure under discussion, in order to understand why Italians are "framed" this way, what hinders that in future it would transform in a more flexible timing structure: it can be offered standard and basic subjects (such as language, math, science) and an open list of activities and disciplines to be selected by each student» (Colombo, Santagati, Cordini 2015: 47). It is not clear whether the curriculum's customization will make education more sustainable or more expensive; for sure it might be a solution to prevent early school leaving and, by consequence, reducing the costs of ignorance and dropout (Brunello, De Paola 2013). A legal framework for these changes is already existing (Law 275/1999) but so far no Ministry has solicited schools to adjust their time schedule, mainly because a re-modulation of school activities would require different engagement of teachers and school personnel.

Because they are low cost, we think that all these changes may be pushed on. The main obstacle to this seems to be the scarce consensus accorded until now to the idea to measure impacts and results of each reform: this is why we speak about «un-reformability» (Argentin et al. 2016). As already mentioned, the national evaluation system stands still in progress, because of the resistance of

a part of teachers and principals; they did not fully understand how (and how much) to benefit from outcomes assessments. Over times they had not been used to know in advance «what works» in school, therefore they cannot choose what is «working better» in their specific schools.

We ought policy makers would take over the idea of bring all reforms to their completion, capturing the convincement and engagement of teachers and principals not only by decree (top-down), but also with new forms of concertation and incentives (bottom-up). It is time to recognize both formally and substantially the huge spirit of inclusiveness the school personnel have demonstrated over the crisis. We can interpret this effort as *social capital of the Italian schooling system*: once the crisis will end it would deserve the right acknowledgment because it has to be preserved for future challenges

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