



## Research Article

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# Putting Education Back at the Center: Some Reflections and Proposals on the Italian Situation

Emanuela Susca

Researcher in General Sociology,  
University of Urbino Carlo Bo,  
Urbino (PU), Italy

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## Abstract

*In this article, I address issues of inequality in Italy and, in particular, the role that education can play in fighting inequality. Moving beyond the nevertheless real problem of the scarcity of funds allocated by the Italian governments to education, I focus on the objectives that should inform spending criteria, thus emphasizing the importance of truly inclusive education, achievable through an ambitious path of comprehensive and incisive reforms. A country that does not excel in the civic sense and that for some scholars is even becoming less civilized, Italy should put education back at the center not only as a matter of social justice, but also to avert decline and improve the quality of its democratic coexistence.*

**Keywords:** Italian Society, Empowerment, Education, Inequalities, Equality

## 1. Introduction

Focusing on the current situation in Italy, in this article I address events and processes related to that inescapable theme of the social sciences, inequality. The starting point of my remarks is that one can legitimately delve into how the social sciences, and sociology in particular, have put equality on the agenda over time (Flew, 1976; Campbell, 2021), but the realistic and all too modest goal of reducing inequality continues to have scientific and ethical value.

Driven first by the Covid-19 pandemic and then by widespread inflation linked to the ongoing war in Ukraine, inequality in its various forms does not seem likely to diminish. Nor does it seem acceptable in this regard to ignore the critical importance of education, which bears an inherently political character in the highest sense of the term for anyone who cares about the goal of justice and the survival of democracy itself. And this is not only because schools and universities can promote critical thinking among young people and, in doing so, contribute decisively to forming knowledgeable citizens who are willing to care for the common good rather than follow the law of the strongest (Chomsky, 2019). More fundamentally, and this almost goes without saying, inequalities in societies also increase or decrease according to the amount of resources allocated to education and how these resources are delivered. States and governments may present their choices as merely technical or – according to the well-known TINA (“There is no alternative”) logic (Borriello, 2017) – as dictated by inescapable requirements of economic rationalization and waste elimination. However,

whether they are aware of it or not, their decisions contribute greatly to perpetuating hierarchies and stratifications, and maintaining the economic rents of already advantaged individuals and groups.

What I have said does not imply, of course, that to pursue equality it is sufficient to merely spend more on the education of children and young people or people in general. As I shall have occasion to say with specific reference to the Italian situation, the overall and prolonged underfunding is a fact that should undoubtedly be emphasized, but the manner in which the available funds are spent and the purposes pursued matter just as much and probably even more. Moreover, it seems essential to pay attention to the fact that education, by its very nature a promoter of equality and multiplier of opportunities, can become and in not a few cases has become a factor that produces and exacerbates inequality. There has been and still is a focus on the extent to which laws or the tax system can or should promote redistribution or counteract economic rents to enable more individuals to compete in the professions and in society in general. However, almost ironically, it seems to be primarily education, as it is articulated and managed, that most enables and reinforces inequality both within countries and internationally (Piketty, 2020).

## 2. Economic Crisis and Education Crisis in Italy

Turning now to the Italian situation, similar observations can be made to those, by no means reassuring, that apply to the rest of Europe and perhaps to the entire Western world. The current phase seems unfavorable both to the revival of education that encourages critical thinking and to the implementation of measures that strengthen the link between education itself and equality. The budgetary difficulties, far from having been alleviated or even less resolved, have been exacerbated by the demands imposed by the recent health emergency, which moreover has itself increased inequality, especially to the detriment of the younger generation and women (Saraceno, 2021).

Moreover, even before the pandemic, Italy seemed to be moving toward a postdemocratic scenario (Crouch, 2000, 2005). The country's liberal-democratic system was already under attack both from the most socially irresponsible neoliberalism and from movements and trends that could broadly be labeled populist (Benadusi, 2019). Alongside the privileges of the establishment and the domestic political class, a growing popular discontent was also growing with regard to the European institutions, an object of attachment for many Italians in the past that has more recently come to be viewed instead with ill-concealed resentment. Despite being among the founding states of the European Union, Italy was, in short, no exception to the growing trend toward Euroskepticism that was similarly manifested in all southern European countries (Quaglia, 2011; Verney, 2017).

One can easily understand how in such a context education would also appear to be suffering; the understanding is clearly supported by a reality of years of underfunding, particularly evident in comparison with other European countries. According to Eurostat data, in 2019, Italy spent less than 8.8 billion euros of public resources on the education system, or 4.1 percent of GDP, a lower percentage than Bulgaria (4.2 percent) and the EU average of 4.7 percent. It is true that Spain, for example, spent even less; however, Sweden spent 7.6 percent, France 5.35 percent and Germany 4.7 percent (Chiellino, 2023).

Even beyond the raw data, the malaise of Italian education has been effectively remarked upon by one of Italy's leading pedagogues, Massimo Baldacci, who has spoken lucidly of investments and reforms that were designed to make Italian schools economically efficient but have left them at a crossroads today. On the one hand, there is final submission to the logic of the market and acceptance of the idea that education should simply prepare children and young people to be future docile workers; on the other, there is the arduous but not entirely impossible task of a true championing of education within an authentic and broad democratic project aimed at emancipation (Baldacci, 2019). But how to effectively pursue the second path? With what to effectively engage teachers and students, who experience the challenges and difficulties of education daily, and the public? These questions are even more urgent in the current phase, which sees the Italian government engaged in the implementation of the *Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza* (PNRR,

National Recovery and Resilience Plan).

The PNRR is the next-generation European fund management program. Conceived primarily to help restore the losses caused by the pandemic and approved by the European Commission in June 2021, it has an articulated structure involving a series of reforms and a substantial number of investments in crucial issues, including ecological and digital transition, health, justice, transport and schools. For schools, in particular, the so-called School 4.0 plan has been formulated, which insists on the digitization of school environments and processes by allocating, at least on paper, quite substantial resources (2.1 billion euros) to the transformation of traditional classrooms into innovative learning environments and the creation of laboratories for the digital professions of the future, both accompanied by an extensive training program for the digital transition of all school personnel (Ferri, 2021; Balzano, 2022).

However, since the transition from the previous Draghi government to the current Meloni government, reservations and perplexities about the PNRR as a whole have grown. Prominent voices in the government and majority forces have complained and continue to complain about the alleged abstractness and dubious usefulness of the PNRR as it has been formulated, often raising the idea that an overall rethink is needed, with a downsizing of the amounts to be invested and a slowdown in the previously planned tight reform agenda.

### 3. Returning to a Path of Fundamental Reforms

In the now distant past, Italian education went through an important series of reforms (Besozzi, 1998, pp. 107–112). Two in particular are worth mentioning: the establishment of the single middle school in 1962, which overcame the previous divergence between a pathway that allowed for the continuation of studies and a professionalizing pathway that launched youth early into the world of work; and the liberalization of access to university courses in 1969, under which any diploma obtained after a five-year course allowed for enrollment in essentially any university faculty. However, many years have passed, and the objective democratizing thrust produced by those regulations seems to have faded if not been extinguished altogether. The reforms that have since been aimed at education, besides giving the general impression that they have been dropped from above and explained too little to teachers and citizens, seem to have been inspired more by the state's desire to curb spending or simply to make schools and universities more responsive to the needs of the business sector.

An eloquent example of what has just been stated is the compulsory school-to-work alternation introduced in Italy in 2015 with Law no. 107, often and from many directions criticized for further opening the doors of education to economist logics and commodification of knowledge. In this regard, it must be acknowledged that in Italy the problem of the relationship between school and work was and is real, and that, as a result, school itself cannot remain deaf and entrenched in itself. Moreover, the omnilaterality of education is a profoundly democratic principle, and the skills that are essential for young individuals to become protagonists in society and work cannot all be encapsulated in a school context (Baldacci, 2019, pp. 188–198). However, the aforementioned law has addressed this issue in a way that is probably superficial and certainly not attentive to the real meaning of the word “work.” There is no such thing as work endowed in the abstract with inherently formative power; instead, there are jobs and professions that stand on hierarchical orders and are performed by women and men in diverse and particular contexts.

To put it briefly, and recalling observations of researchers in the field (Pinna & Pitzalis, 2020), the goal of promoting the socialization of young people to work should be pursued only with the understanding that the same policy can take on different or even opposite forms and meanings depending on the different segments into which a school order that is hierarchical and hierarchizing can be broken down. In other words, it is necessary to consider both the social background of the students involved in internship experiences and their relative educational paths. From this point of view, we can clearly see that the majority of young middle-class people fulfill their school-to-work alternation obligations in public institutions or in cultural and nonprofit organizations – that is, in

contexts sheltered from the laws of profit that dominate in the private sector. Young working-class people, on the other hand, are placed without screening and often without even adequate precautions for their safety in the world of real wage labor and, what is more, in unskilled jobs.

Instead of tightening the relationship between education and work, that contested law widened the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged even more. And this even though, almost ironically, those protesting against that law in Italy were not those enrolled in vocational institutions who were objectively penalized but mainly high school students of higher social status (Pinna & Pitzalis, 2020, p. 32). While it is true that by mobilizing and sometimes going so far as to occupy their own schools, those high school students had some success in obtaining a recalibration of the system through the *Percorsi per le Competenze Trasversali e l'Orientamento* (Pathways for Transversal Competencies and Orientation), it is equally true that those battles did not mark any form of empowerment for the youth of the working class nor all in all a step in the direction of less inherently classist educational institutions.

Getting to the heart of the matter, therefore, it can be argued that it would be more appropriate than ever to seriously discuss and accept the proposals also recently formulated by experts and scholars and concerning a real fundamental reform of Italian schools (Oliva & Petrolino, 2019; Benadusi & Campione, 2020). Through these proposed changes, the start of compulsory schooling would be brought forward to around the age of three, allowing all children to attend preschool and thus achieving at least two benefits. First, everyone would be able to start learning earlier and would have more opportunities to learn more and better and achieve a higher level of education. Second, it would be possible to offer all children the opportunity to socialize with their peers in a stable way, a possibility that is even more important in an age such as ours in which adults seem to have less and less time for their children and the peer group is an even more valuable resource for the interpretive reproduction accomplished by the new generations, even to the benefit of society as a whole (Corsaro, 1992). Moreover, looking specifically at the Italian case, bringing forward compulsory schooling would be perfectly in line with the goals set in the aforementioned PNRR, which in addition to digitization envisage a strengthening of the supply aimed at children up to six years of age and an action to combat the territorial inequalities that in Italy penalize the southern regions. Since the latter are also poorer from the point of view of services aimed at early childhood, making preschool part of the actual school would mean extending educational interventions that are valuable for future personal and professional development to the part of the population most at risk of exclusion.

There is another aspect to consider, however, with potentially even greater repercussions. The reform proposals that have been put forward also envision a lengthening of the current compulsory schooling up to the age of majority (which in Italy is currently set at 18). By this route, it would be possible to accompany the cultural and human growth of young people longer and in a better way, which would benefit especially those who, due to their families' low social and economic backgrounds, are currently destined to enter the world of work very early and in usually low-skilled positions. These young people too often remain excluded from high-level education and are usually the predestined victims of an early differentiation of educational paths that almost always channel students to different schools predominantly on the basis of their social origin, reproducing already existing social inequalities (Gremigni, 2020, p. 131).

For disadvantaged students, extending the period when school must necessarily be attended would mean postponing the time when it is inevitable to make choices that will weigh for a lifetime. To be more explicit, a longer period of compulsory education could facilitate the creation of more gradual and flexible pathways, in which young people and their families would not be completely left to their own devices and it would be within a certain limit possible for each to rethink and course-correct from the choices already made (Luzzatto, 2020). More narrowly and looking to the nearer future, it would also be possible to shift the choice of directions two years further and, consequently, make the first two years of high school the terminal phase of compulsory education. In this way, a phase of education aimed at the elevation of skills and the generalized attainment of a minimum

threshold could be created in a short time, what is more, by flanking a core curriculum with a series of personalized and flexible optional pathways in view of subsequent choices. Nor would such an option be a mere second best. Rather, it would be an incisive and in some ways ambitious reform, which would also imply a redesign of the concluding state exam, that is, the test that allows for the attainment of the middle school diploma and which is currently taken at the end of a period of only three years (Benadusi & Campione, 2022, p. 554).

#### 4. The Objective Difficulties Associated with Lifelong Learning

Bringing the focus back to actual schooling and compulsory education obviously does not mean underestimating the importance of lifelong learning and the possible benefits that individuals can derive from it. In times such as the ones we are living through, it would be completely unrealistic to expect to restore an educational system totally centered on traditionally conceived schooling or an education seen as a store of knowledge and experience all concentrated in the first phase of people's lives. On the contrary, the goal or horizon of smartness – that is, the integration of people, environment and technologies (Iannone, 2020) – imposes more than ever a vision of education that is authentically inclusive and aimed at overcoming various old and new inequalities. Furthermore, precisely by reasoning about the empowerment of the most disadvantaged and especially about a possible rebalancing in education spending to the benefit of the social classes that today in fact receive the least, even Piketty (2020, pp. 1011–1012) proposes creating in the various countries of Europe and the world a widespread lifelong learning, strong and financed in each country by aligning upward – that is, towards what the various states already spend on those who attain the highest qualifications – the resources available to each. In particular, Piketty would set aside the amount ideally unspent and saved in state coffers by each of those who drop out of school immediately after fulfilling their compulsory education, so that anyone who so desires can draw on that treasury and resume their studies later in life.

However, even leaving aside the costs or the willingness of the political class to do so, both Piketty's idea and lifelong learning itself as a generalized opportunity raise some doubts and perplexities, at least when transposed to the Italian context. Even if one wants to disregard the issue of the public debt that grips Italy, pushing rather in the direction of periodic cuts or at any rate lasting underfunding, it does indeed seem difficult to identify agencies and contexts that are actually capable of guaranteeing quality lifelong learning on a large scale and according to universalistic criteria.

Ultimately, it does not seem realistic to think of placing such a burden on the *Centri di Formazione Professionale* (CFPs, Vocational Training Centers), among which, however, there is no shortage of virtuous experiences and good practices to be strengthened or taken as models. Partly because of scarce or inconsistent public investment and delegated competencies at the regional and local levels, Italian CFPs can represent an opportunity for growth, including human growth, for families and individuals living in the central-northern areas and especially in large cities, although the situation is currently very different in the rest of the country (Besozzi & Colombo, 2014, pp. 267, 272). It is at the very least doubtful that CFPs can take on in the medium term a task truly aimed at everyone and each person. Similar, in some ways, is the reasoning on professionalizing tertiary education, which certainly has strengths (Aiello *et al.*, 2020) and reasons to claim more attention and resources. The fact that there are calls from several sectors to save professionalized tertiary education from the fate of second choice compared to the university, perhaps denouncing an alleged all-Italian lack of technical work culture, cannot exempt us from recognizing that not all Italian areas are equal and equally developed from an industrial and technical point of view. After all, as I have already had occasion to mention, in Italy territorial inequalities are undoubtedly one of the dimensions of inequality itself. It would already be quite a lot to be able to overcome at least in part these territorial gaps, strengthening and making more attractive than it already is an educational offer that can be valuable for the prevention of school dropouts precisely in those parts of the country where the problem of school dropouts is more serious and early dropouts are more numerous (Farinelli, 2022).

It would really be too much to expect that channel to contribute decisively to meeting the needs related to lifelong learning.

Furthermore, skepticism is also more than justified regarding the possible role of universities. In truth, it is by no means easy to imagine that they will take on widespread advocacy of the cultural growth of people now adults and already out of formal education in the near future. Often hindered rather than directed by reforms that in words would like to modernize it and that occasionally come down from above (Viesti, 2018), the Italian university world is in a state of distress and probably not very ready to offer in a generalized way a second chance to those who, for personal reasons or to retrain professionally, ask for a part of academic knowledge for themselves (that is, for a part of an asset that, at least in the Italian context, is conceived in theory as an asset of all). Then consider the fact that university teachers themselves are by no means alien to the maximizing and entrepreneurial logics touted and often imposed on the rest of the working world (Colarusso & Giancola, 2020). If it happens that those who teach at the university are inclined to devote more effort to publication – especially if remunerative at the level of recognition and rankings – than to ordinary teaching endeavors, it is at least difficult to think that the aspirations of different users, and those less disciplined to the times and modes of schoolwork, can be accommodated or valued by universities. Moreover, Bourdieu's (2000) remarks about the construction and transmission of specific culture in schools are valid in this regard. The learning that takes place in schools and is perfected in universities is not so much or only an acquisition of content that can be postponed. It is a long immersion in a structured and organized environment so that people acquire the cognitive structures and behavior patterns that apply almost exclusively in the schools and universities themselves. Poorly or discontinuously and non-canonically educated individuals, returning as students to the places of education, end up lacking the ability to express themselves and to pose their own questions, to the point that education itself can be said to be responsible for turning social discrimination of the disadvantaged into cultural discrimination as well (Bonichi, 2010).

Putting education back at the center by looking especially at strengthening initial learning, therefore, does not mean denying the value of lifelong learning. Rather, it means trying to put the link between education and the fight against inequality in realistic terms. After all, unless one is, so to speak, compelled by unemployment, it is very difficult for a person from the most disadvantaged social classes to resume education and training. If the goal is to provide as many people as possible with opportunities for empowerment, the most effective and direct way seems to be to enhance and improve elementary and secondary education.

## 5. The Interconnected Issues of Inequality and Demotivation

One can frame the underlying difficulty related to lifelong learning that I have just mentioned within a more general tendency toward resignation that is certainly not unique to Italy or only to recent times. Advanced modernity and late capitalism tend to leave individuals alone in the face of risk, making autonomy and self-actualization inescapable imperatives (Beck, 1986/1992; Bauman, 2001). All those who fail or even succumb end up simply becoming losers who have no one to blame outside themselves and, therefore, almost predestined victims of a state of powerlessness and self-guilt.

With his studies on the many faces of domination and the world of education, Bourdieu can be helpful in better understanding how this state of affairs translates into an *amor fati* – that is, a state of mind of resignation. In his seminal studies with Passeron (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964/1979, 1970/1990), Bourdieu showed clearly how, in the absence of appropriate and even robust correctives from above, school selection and pedagogical action itself tend to act as mechanisms for guaranteeing and reproducing the social order. Moreover, Bourdieu explained how domination, even before economic, is also cultural, social and political (Bourdieu, 1997/2000, 1998/2001). In fact, in Bourdieu's perspective, subjugation is exercised and must be explained also and first of all on the cognitive level, and results not in some form of passivity or in a sleep of reason from which subjects spring, but in strategies that appear only formally the result of free choices, because in reality they remain heavily

conditioned by structural limitations and at the same time are deeply introjected. The result is an extremely realistic portrait of those who are disadvantaged in various ways, who experience exclusion not only in education, of course, but also in employment and professional biography and even in the full enjoyment of citizenship. However, this exclusion often or almost always tends to take on the guise of self-exclusion that causes them to miss out on even the few opportunities offered, moreover drastically limiting the possible margins of intervention even in the event that political power sees fit to implement enlightened and well-meaning policies.

Thus, the Bourdieusian idea of a strong link between objectification and subjectification in the construction of inequalities in and through education allows us to not lose sight of the logics expressed in the microcosms of individual choices/non-choices and, in parallel, to affirm or remind us that education itself can only become a promoter of emancipation on the condition of as complete a break as possible with the reasonable and resigned acceptance of social asymmetries. Moreover, Bourdieu's perspective can help explain why the most objectively disadvantaged people and groups also tend, as a rule, to be the least likely to explicitly question schools for their role in preserving social hierarchies or, at the very least, for their lack of commitment to countering inequalities. Indeed, it is not enough to point to the reason for this in the fact that states generally offer accounts of education spending from which it is mostly difficult to infer which social classes and territories receive more or less, so that the substantive reality of investments that tend to privilege those who are already privileged tends to remain hidden in budgets (Piketty, 2020, pp. 1012–1013). Nor is it enough to keep in mind that the less well-off and educated are even less able than others to evaluate such budgets thoroughly. A role must also be acknowledged for resignation, which, on the one hand, produces a low propensity of the most disadvantaged to mobilize to pressure parties and governments and demand quality education for themselves and their children and, on the other hand, leads to underutilization of the available opportunities as well.

Returning to the current Italian context, the theme of resignation as an agent of reproduction seems particularly relevant and even inescapable for anyone who cares about democracy itself, as demonstrated by the reality of young people neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs). According to data made available by Eurostat, Italy's overall situation is worse or far worse than that of other EU-27 countries, regardless of whether one considers the young people in question: in the 15–24 age group, in the 15–29 age group, and in the 15–34 age group. The territorial inequalities I have already mentioned certainly play a role. With regard specifically to NEETs aged 15–24, the European regions where the situation is worst are mostly Italian, particularly in the south. In 2021, Sicily was in last place with 30.2 percent of these young people, a deterioration of almost one percentage point from the previous year. In the lowest positions were also Campania, with 27.7 percent compared to 28 percent in 2020, and Calabria (27.2 percent). However, considering that the European average was 10.8 percent, it can be seen that the problem exists not only in southern Italy. Only the Autonomous Province of Bolzano slightly exceeded that average (10.5 percent), while other northern or central regions are still far below: Piedmont and Lazio (17.7 percent), Lombardy (17.3 percent) and Emilia-Romagna (13.5 percent). In summary, comparing 2021 data with 2020 data, only in the regions of Marche, Molise, Campania and Sardinia has there been a decline in NEETs. In all other regions of Italy, the situation has worsened significantly, with particularly alarming data for Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the Province of Trento, Liguria, Umbria and Lombardy (Chiellino, 2023).

In any case, gender also plays a role in this aspect of the Italian context, as the incidence of NEETs is higher among women, even more so when considering the older age groups, namely 25–29 and 30–34 (Esposito, 2022), which brings us back to the issue of the impossibility of fully understanding inequality by considering only absolute or relative poverty in terms of economic and cultural resources. As and more than in other countries, in Italy, the gender factor continues to play a far from minor role in individual trajectories from early age and throughout life. Inequality in education and society also passes through an asymmetrical socialization between genders that is already clearly visible in girls' educational choices (Biemmi & Leonelli, 2016) and that is then to be linked to two phenomena deep-seated in the Italian context, and moreover recently aggravated by

the pandemic: low female labor market participation and the gender pay gap.

Investing more and better and immediately in the younger generation would solve or at least alleviate the social problem posed by NEETs, while also increasing the number of highly educated young people capable of contributing to the vitality of the economy and society itself. Indeed, the interconnected issues of inequality and demotivation inevitably have important economic and social repercussions, and clearly, the goal of inclusion of the disadvantaged has to do not only with social justice but also with the well-being and prosperity of a society.

## 6. Conclusions

The fact that the exclusion of the disadvantaged is also self-exclusion should certainly not lead to blaming the victims of inequality, whether social inequality, gender inequality or, especially, education inequality. Rather, as is almost self-evident, there is a need for states and governments to address such inequalities even irrespective of the distress expressed or not expressed by those who are most underprivileged.

The Italian case stands to show how punctual interventions aimed at bringing schools closer to the world of work tend ultimately to be of little use in combating inequalities or even overcoming existing ones, and how instead we need to act more broadly and more ambitiously. Targeted investments and affirmative action that provide opportunities for those who would be excluded to pursue the best educational pathways, perhaps even introducing forms of rebalancing between branches and territories and mitigating segregation on a local or gender basis, are far from negligible aspects. Similarly, it would be more than appreciable for investment in education in Italy to become more conspicuous by aligning with virtuous examples from other parts of Europe. Even more important, however, appears to be the pursuit of a genuinely universalist perspective focused on raising the quality of compulsory education, which, as I have said, in Italy could or probably should be combined with a lengthening of compulsory schooling itself.

Such a goal, however, would seem to require a greater focus on education than at present and one that, going beyond specialists, involves the broadest possible sectors of the public and intellectual community. It is obvious that pedagogy and sociology of education are concerned with schools, investigating the role they can play in welfare, social justice and democracy. The turning point, however, which has probably not yet occurred, concerns sociology and the social sciences all, which are now being called upon to abandon a view of education that is still too functionalist, focusing almost exclusively on the tasks of selection and preparation for the labor market. There is no doubt that schools must pursue these goals as well, all the more so in a present age in which knowledge is essential for the production of value and the most disadvantaged live the nightmare of precariousness or even of becoming superfluous and being cast aside. However, in addition to arguably being the main tool that societies have at their disposal to combat inequality, education is still essential for real pluralism and for democratic coexistence itself. It is not simply a vehicle to reach one's future job or profession.

While Italian public opinion itself has long deplored the weakness of Italians' civic sense, there are even scholars who have recently described Italy as a country that in various aspects and ways is going backwards in comparison with the civilization process outlined in his time by Norbert Elias (1939/2000), receiving affirmation of this depiction when they look at widespread illegality, corruption, mismanagement of the environment, violence against women, the elderly and minors, and online hatred (Baldissera *et al.*, 2022). In the face of all this, it really seems time to try to change course by putting education back at the center in a non-functionalist perspective – that is, by spending more resources not only economically and, perhaps most importantly, by countering fatalism. If one really wants to conceive of education as being a kind of vehicle that enables each person to reach a destination, driving or even thinking about such a vehicle means neither necessarily pandering to the inclinations of the passengers nor getting each person off at the place for which he or she seems destined.



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