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# education and/or social justice

3-6 June 2024, Cagliari (Italy)

Education is a battleground of power, identity, and inequality. This volume unravels the tensions between exclusion and inclusion, privilege and marginalization, tracing how policies, epistemologies, and ideologies shape who belongs—and who is left behind.

## PROCEEDINGS

01

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# PROCEEDINGS

Vol. 1  
**Inequality,  
Inclusion,  
and Governance**

Organizers and partners

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Fondazione  
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# RETI PROJECT: INNOVATIVE PROCESSES TOWARD EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITIES

Irene Culcasi<sup>a</sup>

Maura Benedetti<sup>a</sup>

Marcella Tellini<sup>b</sup>

Italo Fiorin<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>LUMSA University of Rome; <sup>b</sup>Social Services Office, Porto Torres Municipality.

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the need for a new social contract for education, emphasizing collaboration among social actors to foster collective action for the common good. This evolving educational ecosystem promotes the active participation of diverse social actors and a shared methodology aimed at creatively re-imagining education. This paper presents the R.E.T.I. Project – Educational Research for an Inclusive Territory, coordinated by the EIS Postgraduate School at LUMSA University, with support from Eniscuola. The project integrates Service-Learning, Photovoice, and creative methodologies to address youth marginalization and strengthen partnerships between schools, families, and community actors. This paper outlines the stages involved in building a new Community Educational Pact, where all social actors are co-responsible and interdependent, offering a potential pilot model for inclusive educational governance.

Community educational pact; Community development; Service-Learning; psycho-pedagogical approach.

## INTRODUCTION: REBUILDING THE EDUCATIONAL VILLAGE

Educational poverty, as defined by Save the Children, refers to the deprivation of children and adolescents' opportunities to learn, grow, and develop their skills and aspirations (Morabito, 2022). Studies have shown a strong link between economic and educational poverty. In Italy, INVALSI (2021) reveals that students from low socio-economic backgrounds achieve significantly lower educational outcomes compared to their wealthier peers, which often leads to school failure and dropout. This highlights the need to tackle both types of poverty simultaneously. However, education remains an essential condition for

personal, social, and economic development.

Reflecting on the role of education raises questions about the school's mission. Schools must redefine their approach, moving beyond academic outcomes and disciplinary knowledge to focus on the holistic development of students, addressing cognitive, emotional, relational, social, ethical, and existential dimensions. As Delors (2021) suggests, schools should teach not only how to learn and act, but also how to live and live together with others.

Choosing to create an educational environment that fosters the holistic development of individuals has significant implications for its relationship with the wider social community. Education is a lifelong responsibility that cannot be shouldered by schools alone, but requires collaboration with multiple stakeholders. The African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child" highlights that schools are part of a broader community, and education is a shared duty. However, social fragmentation has weakened, and often created conflict, in the traditional unwritten educational pact that in the past ensured coherence of values among the various educational agents: family, schools, and social groups. The UNESCO Report *Reimagining Our Futures Together* (2021) calls for a renewed social contract based on care, reciprocity, and solidarity, emphasizing education as a public good. Rebuilding this educational pact requires transformation both within schools and within the wider community, adopting innovative approaches to create an intergenerational educational alliance that actively engages local social actors (Locatelli, 2023).

The R.E.T.I. Project (*Educational Research for an Inclusive Territory*) emerged from the desire to mend the social fabric of the local community in Porto Torres, weaving together the commitment and expertise of multiple stakeholders into a shared vision. Its aim is to rebuild the educational community or "village". This article outlines the developmental stages of the Project, which brought together the Postgraduate School EIS (Educating on Encounter and Solidarity) of the LUMSA University in Rome and the Municipality of Porto Torres. Through the direct involvement of schools and stakeholders, RETI initiated a model of intervention rooted in Community Educational Pacts, fostering a sense of shared educational responsibility to promote collective and locally anchored educational action.

## **1. PORTO TORRES CONTEXT**

Porto Torres is located in the northwest of Sardinia (Sassari) – with a population of 20.895 – serves as an example of the economic and social transformations

affecting former industrial areas. Once a significant hub of the chemical industry, the city experienced profound repercussions following the collapse of the industrial model developed in the 1960s. The resulting economic decline has left visible scars: high unemployment rates, significant emigration of the workforce, and progressive social fragmentation. These dynamics have had a particularly adverse impact on younger generations, who face an uncertain future characterized by diminishing educational and employment opportunities. At the regional level, Sardinia exhibits particularly concerning data regarding school dropout, with a rate of 18.8%. (Openpolis, 2019). Young people face a range of educational, economic, and social difficulties in a context where the lack of opportunities and support exacerbates their distress. The post-pandemic environment has further intensified the social and educational vulnerabilities in the region. Several studies, such as the VI HBSC Italy survey (Istituto Superiore di Sanità, 2022), highlight that 41% of Italian adolescents report a deterioration in their mental health and overall quality of life. This situation is also reflected in Porto Torres, where young people are confronted with increasing challenges that are reported to local social and healthcare services in the form of referrals. With the RETI project, the Municipality of Porto Torres has initiated a comprehensive revision of its educational and social policies. The project introduced a community-based approach to educational intervention, moving beyond the traditional individualistic paradigm. Through the Educational Pacts for Communities, tools promoted by the Ministry of Education in 2020, a collaborative network was established among local authorities, schools, associations, and third-sector organizations, aimed at fostering the existential and social well-being of the area. This new model, outlined below, is based on an approach of “proximity education”, where the local community plays an active role in educational governance.

## **2. R.E.T.I.: EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH FOR AN INCLUSIVE TERRITORY**

The RETI project in Porto Torres began in the 2020/2021 school year to address educational poverty and strengthen the alliance between schools and the community through Service-Learning (SL). This pedagogical approach combines experiential learning with community service, involving teachers, students, and the community in joint actions aimed at improving the local area. The decision to adopt SL stemmed from a process of listening and co-designing with local stakeholders, which led to the formulation of three key questions: how can we face educational poverty and promote youth participation in the community?; how can we enhance their well-being and empower them to

become transformative agents in school and life?; how can we build an educating community capable of sharing responsibility and expertise in the educational process?

## **2.1. RETI I**

In the first year of the project, 87 educators, including preschool and lower secondary school teachers, social workers, psychologists, and volunteers, participated in a training program on SL, which led to the launch of 8 local projects. Additionally, 50 middle school students took part in a three-day workshop on art, play, and critical thinking, facilitated by the Pontifical Foundation Scholas Occurrentes and specially trained volunteers. The students shared their visions, needs, and ideas for improving the community. The year concluded with a public event at the local theater, where students presented their proposals to local authorities and community members, alongside the projects already in progress, fostering collaboration and celebration.

The first year also helped reduce the gap between schools and institutions, initiating an empowerment process that transformed the local community into an educating community. This journey focused on recognizing the “educational competencies” of community members, positioning them as educators, and creating spaces for collaboration among schools, families, educational agencies, local authorities, and other stakeholders. Through SL, students, teachers, and the community worked together to impact key areas: 1) renewing teaching methods, 2) addressing needs within the school and community, 3) strengthening peer relationships and adult connections, and 4) expanding collaborations between schools and the local area (Culcasi et al., 2023).

## **2.2. RETI II**

In the second year of the project, the work of the steering committee was further strengthened. Since the early stages of RETI I, the committee has fostered dialogue among various community stakeholders, ensuring that educational and social challenges were addressed from multiple perspectives and areas of expertise. For the first time in the city’s history, the project brought together all local educational agencies on a shared platform, where they could exchange experiences and propose integrated solutions for the benefit of the community, particularly the youth. In RETI II, a workshop-based training on Photovoice was introduced. This participatory action-research methodology uses photography as a tool to capture and represent important social issues, sparking change and participation (Mastrilli & Santinello, 2016). The activity, combined with Service-

Learning, involved 20 teachers and culminated in a participatory exhibition. The exhibition focused on teachers' perspectives of school and aimed to open a dialogue with community actors in the post-pandemic era, emphasizing the importance of co-reflection, co-design, and active participation in shaping the educational experience (Russo et al., 2023).

### **2.3. RETI III**

The third year of the project highlighted a profound process of rethinking the role of the municipal social services, shifting from a model focused on individual case management to a shared and integrated vision of educational responsibilities, creating an intervention context where social services offices cooperate with community actors for youth “care and intervention” sharing educational responsibility. RETI III focused on the formal establishment of a group of local stakeholders – composed of sports, artistic and cultural associations, as well as individual citizens – whose goal was to operationalize the construction of a community educational pact. The EIS Postgraduate School supported the networking process by training and supervising the involved actors in co-design processes necessary for building the Community Educational Pact. The year concluded with a public event where the network, consisting of the Municipality, schools, and third-sector organizations, was presented to the community. This network, coordinated by the Municipality's social services, aimed to launch the Community Educational Pact.

### **2.4. RETI IV**

The fourth year of the RETI project, currently underway, began with the Municipality's publication of a Call for Interest to invite local entities to formally join the working group. The goal is to strengthen existing positive practices, processes, and individual, social, and territorial resources from a perspective of promotion and enhancement. Indeed, starting in 2020, and building on the work carried out within RETI I, II, and III, the Social Services of the Municipality of Porto Torres have adopted a new vision and mission through the SL approach and Community Psychology and action-research methods (Francescato & Tomai, 2023). This shift places a greater emphasis on fostering a sense of shared responsibility among community actors, aimed at initiating collaborative actions in both educational and social contexts. This new focus is opening up the opportunity to experiment with a community-based social intervention model, where welfare is community based, transforming it into a support system for inclusion. This community based intervention model has enabled



Social Services not only to respond to a broader demand for intervention in fragile conditions, but to promote personal resources and aspirations of young people, in a preventive perspective with the involvement of community network.

### **3. CONCLUSION: WITH THE EYES OF THE FUTURE**

An educational project is inherently concerned with the future and transformation. The beginning of every educational act is listening to the needs and expectations of individuals and communities. This listening process leads to a shared planning effort, where a community embarks on a journey of growth, navigating a path that is both defined and open, created through collective action.

The RETI project originated from a deep understanding of the needs of the Porto Torres community. This process of attentive listening guided all the key phases of the project's development. During a training session with middle school students (RETI I), they were asked about their vision for the city's future. Their responses revealed no hope for the future. Some even referred to Porto Torres as "Morto Torres", reflecting a sense of hopelessness. This disillusioned perspective was a key challenge for the project.

In his 2022 New Year's address, President Sergio Mattarella emphasized the importance of changing our perspective to "read the present with the eyes of tomorrow". He noted that young people are "the eyes of tomorrow" and raised questions about what they would ask of today and how they would envision their city, its spaces, and relationships. The challenge lies in measuring the gap between this imagined future and the current reality, and using this gap as an opportunity for human and urban regeneration. Listening to young people's perspectives must be followed by a responsible response.

The RETI project was developed as a responsible answer to a challenge posed by the future. It embraces the dream of transforming an initial situation that, like an alarm cry, mobilized a variety of stakeholders who gradually became part of the same collaborative network, sharing the responsibility of an educational pact, an alliance.

The project focuses on imagining the kind of future we want for the young people who will inhabit it, and taking action toward that vision. Key questions include: What should be different about Porto Torres? How should relationships between people evolve? How can the community become open and welcoming? What kind of spaces for learning, living, and leisure do we want?

Looking at the present from the perspective of the future, the RETI project aims

to transform the dystopian vision of “Morto Torres” into the utopian vision of the dreamed Porto Torres.

*Eutopie*, that is, places, historical experiences, and collective, associative endeavors, characterized by what is implied in the prefix *eu-*, meaning “good”. These are spaces of sharing and conviviality, participation and solidarity, where stories and narratives are exchanged, giving meaning to the present and opening up to the future. They not only enrich the present of individuals and their relationships with meaning, but also point to the direction of the journey, the goal toward which to orient oneself (Manicardi, 2024, p. 17).

This is the journey undertaken by the RETI project, moving toward an horizon driven by dreams and utopias.

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