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Proceedings of the 1st International Conference of the Journal Scuola Democratica

EDUCATION AND POST-DEMOCRACY

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VOLUME II

Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Technology

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VOLUME II
**Teaching, Learning,
Evaluation and Technology**

Scuola First
democratica international
Conference

**ASSOCIAZIONE "PER SCUOLA
DEMOCRATICA"**

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***Title* Proceedings of the First International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" - Education and Post-Democracy VOLUME II Teaching, Learning, Evaluation and Technology**

This volume contains papers presented in the First International Conference of the Journal "Scuola Democratica" which took place at the University of Cagliari on 5-8 June 2019. The aim of the Conference was to bring together researchers, decision makers and educators from all around the world to investigate the concepts of "education" in a "post-democracy" era, the latter being a set of conditions under which scholars are called to face and counteract new forms of authoritarian democracy.

Populisms, racisms, discriminations and nationalisms have burst and spread on the international scene, translated and mobilized by sovereigntist political movements. Nourished by neo-liberalism and inflated by technocratic systems of governance these regressive forms of post-democracy are shaping historical challenges to the realms of education and culture: it is on this ground, and not only on the political and economic spheres, that decisive issues are at stake. These challenges are both tangible and intangible, and call into question the modern ideas of justice, equality and democracy, throughout four key dimensions of the educational function, all of which intersected by antinomies and uncertainties: ethical-political socialization, differences, inclusion, innovation.

The Conference has been an opportunity to present and discuss empirical and theoretical works from a variety of disciplines and fields covering education and thus promoting a trans- and inter-disciplinary discussion on urgent topics; to foster debates among experts and professionals; to diffuse research findings all over international scientific networks and practitioners' mainstreams; to launch further strategies and networking alliances on local, national and international scale; to provide a new space for debate and evidences to educational policies. In this framework, more than 600 participants, including academics, educators, university students, had the opportunity to engage in a productive and fruitful dialogue based on researches, analyses and critics, most of which have been published in this volume in their full version.

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Premise

Since 1973, with Chile's Dictatorship as a neoliberal 'laboratory', it's more than 45 years that the Global Education Reform Movement has transformed educational systems all around the world through a discourse rooted on epistemic and ideological hegemonies. A new 'truth' of the homo economicus as able to rationally and freely pursue its interest as self-entrepreneur is relentlessly spreading: the Human Capital paradigm then connects individualistic choices and personal skills to impose diverse educational tracks through a Life-Long-Learning investment. Thus, the restructuring of the Education State, thanks to policies of privatization, competition and high stakes accountability, has implied a new ethics challenging social justice ideals.

The massification of educational systems in Europe and worldwide, together with the increasing demand for their democratization, have profoundly challenged traditional teaching models: the lecture, the magister teacher and the specific spatial-temporal devices aimed at disciplining students according to the needs of a Fordist capitalist society and to the reproduction of class inequalities. Starting particularly from the Fifties in schools, and more recently in higher education, new teaching-learning configurations have been explored and developed: situated and participatory didactics aimed at involving students in a reflexive relationship with knowledge and social reality; new ways of hybridizing formal and informal learning; new pedagogies exploiting the possibilities inscribed in new medias and digital technologies. These practices, sometimes radically, reverse theory and practices in order to develop student-centred learning processes. The thematic sessions within this stream explore the challenges, tensions, ambivalences and potentialities of pedagogies and didactics innovations involving school and university teachers, students, as well as their surrounding environments: the physical, architectural, material and technological spaces that constitute a crucial component of situated learning processes.

The relation between education systems and policy making changed in the last decades, consequently to three innovations sharing the common paradigm of evaluation, namely: the establishment of national/international large-scale testing, the diffusion of systems assessing schools' and the raising interest for efficacy and cost-effectiveness of education interventions. These innovations have been highly debated from different and controversial perspectives. The aim of the conference stream is to collect papers focused on actual uses of different forms evaluation, in order to overcome previous ideological oppositions, contributing to move the debate into a more pragmatic and fruitful phase.

Further issue: How is digital technology changing education? Online schools and classes are becoming widely available; backpack of many

high school and college students, instead of physical textbooks, are now carrying iPads and various forms of devices connected to online; teachers now have more ability to personalize lessons, instructions, and projects for each group or student; by using devices and programs to distribute classwork and assignments, they can even personalize lessons and focus on the work of each student; increased opportunities and constraints for students to collaborate together from a variety of places becomes possible; free online classes called "MOOC's" otherwise known as Massive Open Online Courses are becoming widely popular. Finally, a mounting set of variegated pressures to produce pedagogical innovation in teaching and learning is being addressed to teacher and school staffs. Even the governance of school system and school-daily life as a whole is undergoing a wide process of digitalization. But what does the increase in digital technology and approach mean for the current times? Although many advantages come with digitalized learning, there are also disadvantages that researchers, educators, academics and professionals are aware of, including and not limited to minimal to zero face-to-face interaction in the classroom and the lack of ability to work in person with study partners and teachers. Any conversation that does not include the potential dangers of the widespread use of technology would not be complete. Therefore, the stream focuses also on the interplay between learning theories and technologies. Both learning theories and tools are composed of multiple attributes, and they refer to many aspects and facets which render educational technology highly complex. Evolution in both theory and technology reflects no clear successive breaks or discrete developments, rather, waves of growth and accumulation. Evolutions in society and education have influenced the selection and use of learning theories and technologies; learning theories and technologies are situated in a somewhat vague conceptual field; learning theories and technologies are connected and intertwined by information processing and knowledge acquisition; educational technologies shifted learner support from program or instructor control toward more shared and learner control; and learning theories and findings represent a fuzzy mixture of principles and applications.

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The platformisation of higher education in Italy: Three case studies and a research agenda

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Keywords: *Digital platforms; Platformisation; Higher education; Virtual universities; MOOCs*

Introduction

Digital technologies are nowadays interwoven in the very fabric of our everyday lives: from health to the environment, from research to clinic, from media to politics, from economy to gender, from spiritual life to gym activities. Our personal and professional worlds are entangled in increasingly complex knots of digital technoscientific knowledges. Space and time are all but unaffected by these changes, as miniaturised mobilities (Elliott, Urry, 2010) enact new arrangements in which spatialities and temporalities shrink, stretch and overlap.

The phenomenon of digitalisation is emerging in education too. Its growing importance has been discussed in terms of a digital governance of education (Landri, 2018) that is being fabricated and enacted across Europe and beyond. Digital technologies are also relevant to the fields of school (Selwyn et al., 2016) and lifelong learning (Romito et al., 2019). Higher Education (HE) too is becoming increasingly digital: now, twenty years after the Sorbonne Declaration, within the European space of education (Lawn, Grek, 2012) a new policy agenda is emerging which calls for greater recognition of these issues into HE. Digital-based teaching and learning practices are also increasingly performed, and digital infrastructures are now crucial for governing HE on various scalar levels (Williamson, 2018).

Digitalisation processes are ever more frequently mediated by and made operational through digital platforms accessible via electronic devices. The concept of «platform society» has thus emerged to stress the inextricable relationship between online platforms and social processes (van Dijck et al., 2018). Platforms are programmable digital architectures designed to order interaction among users and aimed at the systematic collection, algorithmic processing, circulation, and monetisation of user data. They are to be intended as both technical infrastructures, political stages, and array of relationship that constantly need to be performed (van Dijck, 2013). Hence, platforms cannot be considered as mere technical or economic phenomena, but rather as socio-technical devices possessing agency and shaping everyday life (Kitchin, Dodge, 2014).

Platforms operate in disparate fields, such as tourism, news, health, mobility, governance. A 'platform education' is arguably emerging too, as learning, teaching and governance of education are increasingly mediated by and enacted through digital platforms. Education is thus undergoing a 'platformisation', to be intended as a process of continuous change in which «platform operators and their underpinning logic intervene in societal arrangements» (van Dijck et al., 2018: 198).

1. Aims and methods

Despite its growing importance, 'platform education' has scarcely been focused as a «matter of concern» (Latour, 2004). In this exploratory contribute, the platformisation of Italian HE will thus be addressed. In particular, we will attempt to trace some effects of platformisation processes on Italian higher education. Some wider remarks about platformisation will be also drawn and open questions will be put forward.

Three case studies have been followed which are situated in three different fields: the CINECA consortium, knot and weaver of managerial processes and practices in the organisational texture of the Italian HE; EduOpen, the main Italian inter-university MOOC providing open higher education; and the Italian Virtual Universities (IVUs), relevant private actors in digital higher/lifelong teaching and learning. A non-representational methodological sensitivity has been adopted (Law, 2004; Thrift, 2007). Different techniques have been used, such as historical reconstruction of policies (Landri, 2018), content analysis on website and platforms, digital ethnography (Pink et al. 2015), autoethnography.

2. Following the platformisation of higher education in Italy

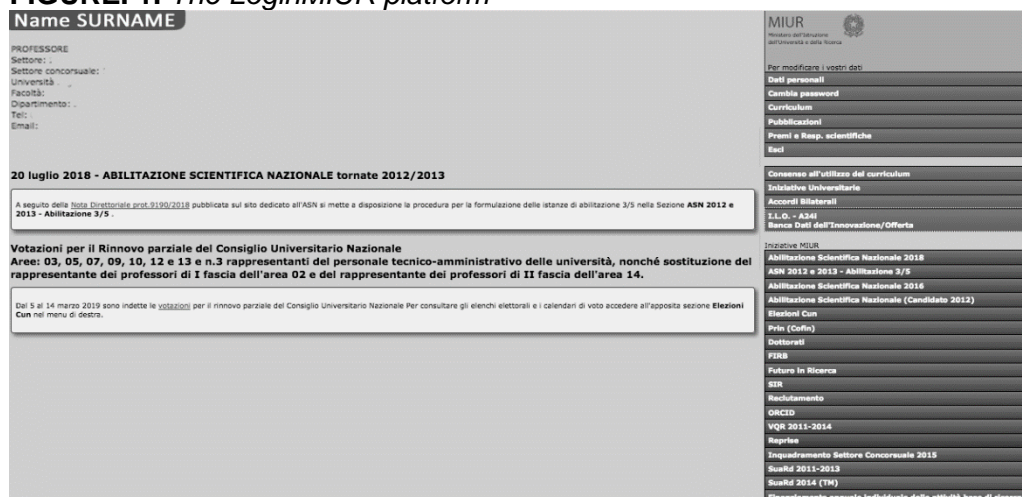
A multisite exploration of the platformisation of Italian HE has been undertaken. In order to do so, actors were followed in three fields: managerial processes, open education, virtual teaching and learning.

2.1. CINECA: Managerial processes and infrastructures

To a certain extent, the history of the private non-profit consortium CINECA converges with that of the informatisation of the Italian academic arena. CINECA was founded in 1967 by the Rectors of the Universities of Bologna, Padua, Florence and Venice. It hosted the first supercomputer available in Italy in 1969, and in the 1980s emerged as an important hub for national (e.g., GARR) and international (e.g., EARN-BITNET) academic networks. From the early years of the new millennium, CINECA started developing software for the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR), which became part of the CINECA consortium in 2007. In 2013, CINECA could count on 72 members.

Two CINECA management platforms can be compared which have penetrated the everyday life of Italian HE professionals: LoginMIUR and IRIS.

FIGURE 1. The LoginMIUR platform

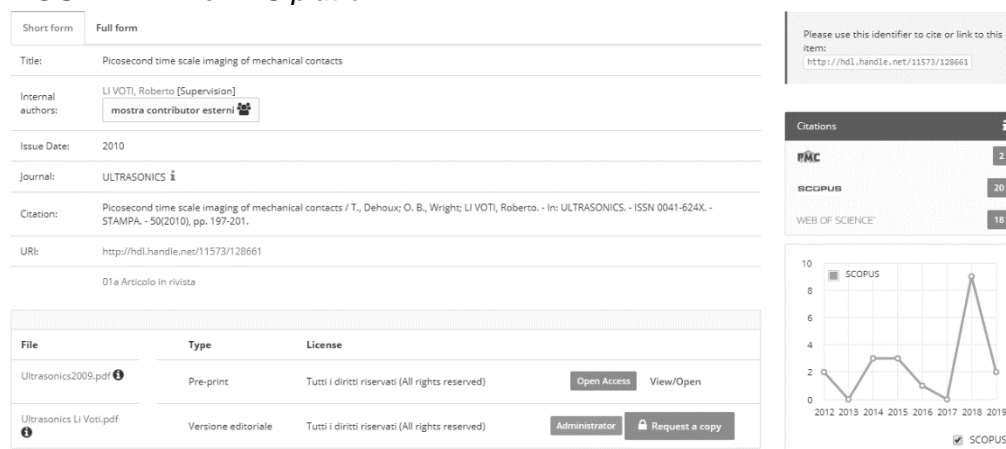


source: Screenshot of <http://loginmiur.cineca.it> (access: June 2019)

LoginMIUR (developed in 2007) is a personal platform from which teachers and researchers working for MIUR can manage their careers. It suggests three main affordances (Figure 1): *i*) it is an electronic archive of information collected by the MIUR; *ii*) it is a repository of initiatives from university and MIUR (scientific qualification, etc.); *iii*) it works as an electronic agenda reminding deadlines.

IRIS (developed in 2013) may be considered as the platform for evaluation of research and accreditation in Italy. It is a Current Research Information System (CRIS), i.e. a database for storing, managing and disseminating data about research conducted at an institution. It is compatible with the international CRIS standard CERIF, which was developed after EU Recommendation 91/337/CEE. IRIS is anchored to global bibliometric databases that allow to visualize the performance of research products and researchers (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. *The IRIS platform*



source: screenshot of an IRIS page (access: June 2019)

LoginMIUR and IRIS are very different platforms. First, they differ in the scalar level they move on. LoginMIUR is rooted on local standards and spaces, while IRIS travels on global standards and transnational networks. Also, they embed different mode of governing organisational processes: a bureaucratic government of public administration (Delvaux, Mangez, 2008), in LoginMIUR, and an evidence-based governing work through the performance and reputation of human resources, in IRIS (Ozga, 2014; Normand, 2016). They may be also compared with respect to the *affordances* they offer to researchers: LoginMIUR invites to a usage as private tool for managing one's career, whereas IRIS bears inscribed a usage as a public tool for researching, exhibiting the results of one's research and comparing them with those of others.

The platformisation of Italian HE translated by CINECA/IRIS with respect to managerial processes thus seems to have occurred as convergence to global trends in HE based on the New Public Management discourse (Ball, Youdell, 2007; Gunter et al., 2016) which is thereby made operational as a mode of governing in the Italian academic field.

2.2. EduOpen: The Italian way to open education

EduOpen is an Italian MOOC platform founded in 2014. Its peculiarity is to be an «academic» portal (Limone, 2016) providing open HE that was set up by public universities and funded by the MIUR. It is a network of public (e.g., MIUR; GARR) and private actors (e.g., CINECA, which offers the technological infrastructure; Blackboard; Paperlit). It nowadays hosts 247 courses, 55054 students, 19 institutions, 259 teachers and tutors. It offers different affordances:

orientation for high school students, teacher training, masters, business training, lifelong learning for every type of learner (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. *The EduOpen MOOC platform*



Source: screenshot of <https://learn.eduopen.org> (access: July 2019)

In 2015, MIUR approved the financing of the EduOpen MOOC project that was submitted the year before by 14 Italian universities. The same year, the Italian Rectors Conference (CRUI) published *MOOCs: Perspectives and Opportunities for the Italian University* (2015) and constituted an Observatory for Italian MOOCs. EduOpen was officially launched in 2016 and became partner of European Association for Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU). In 2017, EduOpen was accredited for teacher training and co-founded the European MOOC Consortium (EMC); the same year, the CRUI published the *Guidelines for setting up quality MOOCs in Italian universities* (2017). At EHEA Conference 2018, the EMC submitted a position paper about «the integration of MOOCs in the Bologna Process» (2018).

Until recent times, the platformisation of Italian HE through MOOCs took place mainly via bottom-up initiatives by individual universities (CRUI, 2015). In the last years, however, something began to change. As shown, CRUI engaged MOOCs as a policy issue: an observatory was set up, descriptive and prescriptive reports were published, and standards for the future were codified. On the other hand, the EduOpen network successfully enrolled the public power of MIUR in its project and connected to various European networks working on open education.

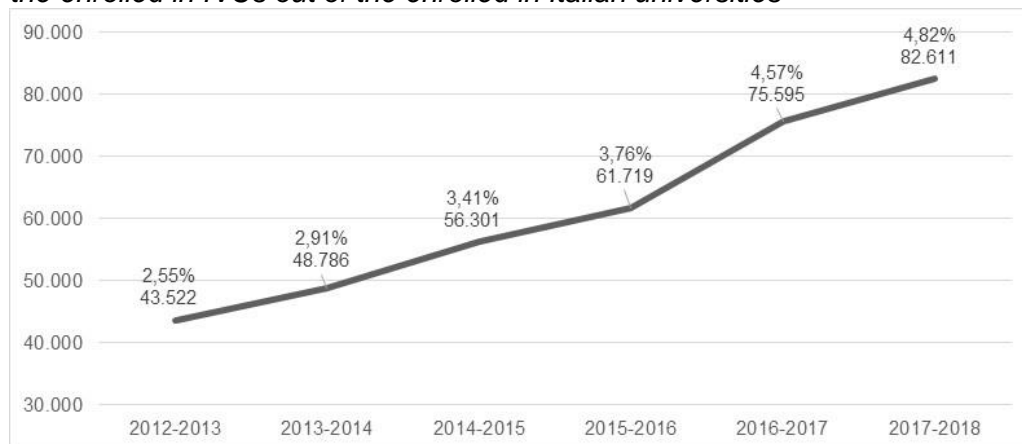
Hence, the platformisation of Italian HE with regard to open HE can be described as a process of *making associations* among heterogeneous actors and practices, or as the knotting of an action net (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2011) driven by EduOpen – a process in which connections are woven and kept in place through the work of heterogeneous actors and mediators.

2.3. *Virtual Universities: digital teaching and learning*

Italian *Università Telematiche* (IVUs) are non-state universities providing formal HE. They thus have to comply with the legal regulations imposed by the public sector and the criteria and procedures imposed by ANVUR, the Italian agency for evaluation.

In the 2017-2018 academic year (AA), the 11 IVUs gathered 4.82% of the 1,713,129 students enrolled in Italian universities (Figure 4). While enrolments in offline universities dropped from 1,665,511 in AA 2012-2013 to 1,630,518 in 2017-2018, enrolments in IVUs almost doubled in the same period (MIUR, 2019).

FIGURE 4. Time series of students enrolled in IVUs. The percentages indicate the enrolled in IVUs out of the enrolled in Italian universities



source: Elaboration on MIUR (2019)

The frantic normative production on VUs, as well as the overlapping of normative sources, led to an ambiguous and intricate jurisprudence (MIUR, 2013). Virtual HE entered the Italian policy agenda with Law 341/90, which allowed universities to set up «distance HE initiatives». At the beginning of the new millennium, the EU was simultaneously working on eLearning and Lifelong Learning, along the lines of the Lisbon Strategy. The MIUR converged with these trends with Decree 17/04/2003, which introduced criteria and procedures for VUs accreditation. IVUs thereby emerged as a policy issue, a nexus of educational and organisational practices as well as a formal education/lifelong learning option. All current IVUs sprung from the private HE market between 2004 and 2006 (Table 1). Gradually more specific criteria and procedures for VUs were introduced with Decrees 987/16 and 06/19.

TABLE 1. IVUs and number of enrolled students (AA 2017-2018)

Virtual universities	Students enrolled (2017-2018)
UniPegaso	25.212
UniCusano	16.624
UniNettuno	11.877
e-Campus	11.437
UniMarconi	9.474
San Raffaele	4.313
UniTelma	2.475
UniFortunato	841
Italian University Line	248
UniDav	110
Uni Mercatorum	(missing)
TOTAL	82.611

source: Elaboration on MIUR (2019)

These platformisation processes of HE could thus be further explored as a *marketisation* of formal education/lifelong learning carried out by private actors standing alongside the public power as providers of instruction. Moreover, such platformisation is also leading to *change* in learning practices. Due to their online mode of existence, IVUs suggest new affordances for learners who are thus enabled to tinker with the learning arrangements with which they are entangled through sociomaterial, sociospatial and sociotemporal practices (Fenwick, Edwards, 2012) – beyond the «forme scolaire» (Vincent et al., 1994).

3. Final remarks

In this preliminary research an attempt was made to explore the processes of platformisation of Italian HE. Such processes were analysed focusing on three relevant fields for Italian HE: managerial processes, open education, digital teaching and learning.

These platformisation processes fields intercepted processes of change occurring in the Italian HE arena. With respect to the field of managerial processes, the platformisation of HE through CINECA/IRIS was analysed as *convergence* to transnational isomorphic dynamics based on NPM strategies. In the case of open education, we examined the case of EduOpen and described platformisation as *making associations*: previously dispersed actors allied in a complex network which stabilised around a common issue. As to digital teaching and learning, IVUs allowed us to explore platformisation as *marketisation* of formal HE and *innovation* in learning practices.

The platformisation processes vividly show the symbolic and material strength of platforms. Such processes are enacted by unstable assemblages of heterogenous entities: political actors, economic stakeholders, members of epistemic communities, and obviously the platforms, with their software and their agency. These processes are not neutral, as they are inscribed with values and endowed with a normative power: as shown with respect to Italian HE, they orient practices and shape social arrangements in diverse fields.

Hence, a research agenda may be traced to further develop the theme of platformisation in HE and critically investigate its implications. A relevant issue concerns democracy. In 'platform education' an ambivalence can be observed among education and learnification (Biesta, 2005), HE as a common good (Marginson, 2016) and as private property. Do platforms foster reflexivity and co-participation, or do they rather contribute to marketisation and standardisation? Also, research could focus on whether and how the platformisation of HE might translate over time into the mobilisation and (social) construction of knowledges and competencies which may affect curricula and educational policy and practice overall. Finally, reflections could be set on how the European space of (higher) education will look like after this 'platform deluge'. How will teaching, learning, governing of education be performed? For whom? At what price?

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