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Dissemination of “Educating Communities” to Reduce Youth’s Social Exclusion

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to analyse the role of “educating communities” in reducing social exclusion for young people. The paper is divided into three parts. In the first part we give some definition of educating communities, as a network between schools and communities, involving social workers, parents and institutions that are focused on the behaviour of young generations. The second part is dedicated to an overview of the best practices present in the US (the Greenbrook Elementary School in New Jersey), where the model of educating communities exists since more than 10 years, so that we can observe the evolution and the results too. After this analysis we will investigate an embryonal experiment of educating communities in Calabria. Particularly, we will investigate the experimental program in Calabria, because Calabria is one of the poorest regions in Europe, with very high level of educational poverty, very high risk of social exclusion and very strong presence of criminality. The program about educating communities in Calabria involves Region, local institutions, third sector (social firm, NGO), youth workers and schools. Its aim is to build a different future for young people, ameliorate the social mobility and the intergenerational transmission of poverty (material and immaterial). Finally, in the third part we will conclude showing the policy implication of the investments in educating community (social cost, time of network creation and moral hazard) and the focusing on the challenges of the dissemination of educating communities in reducing social exclusion.

Keywords: Education, Education and Inequality, Education Quality, Equality of Opportunity, Social Exclusion, Intergenerational Mobility

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to give a contribution about public politics against young's social exclusion. For this research, we have considered, first of all, the literature review about relations between social and educational context and the life cycle of young. The needs of students from disadvantaged communities have been recently highlighted in several studies from the United States to Europe. Studies conducted by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD), as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), show each year the competences' trend in the areas of Mathematics, Reading and Science, underlined growing differences between students in developing regions and students in developed regions. We believe that the geographic residence is not the only factor that can influence PISA results and that building an "educating community" may generate positive effects in formal and informal competences.

Particularly, this paper deepens youth condition in Calabria Region, one of the poorest regions in Europe, in which a union of Primary and Secondary School with several social associations and young workers has created a movement called "educating community", as a "place" of discussion and sharing experiences with a common aim: include young in local communities. We've decided to study the condition of Calabria for many reasons. Calabria is not only the poorest region of Europe, but is also the region with the highest level of youth unemployment and one of the Region with a troubling level of scholastic dispersion. The international organization Save the Children in his last two annual reports (2015 and 2016) has evidenced about the relevant incidence in poverty and risk of social exclusion for young and minor and many young that leave school very early.

Youth and poverty

For the writer, it's very important in this historical phase to study social and economic condition of young people because of the concentration of poverty for "Millennials" as people born around and after 1980. We will analyse particularly the condition of youth living in the marginalized area or in peripheries of big cities. The urban area affects and is in turn influenced by social change: it is the place where the society can weaken or strengthen depending on the interaction, and it can be a source of opportunities and restrictions for people living there. Hence the idea that urban space can affect a young person today to the kind of adult who will be tomorrow. The presence or absence of functional structures such as schools, youth centers, libraries, sports facilities and even medical facilities, can affect the growth of young and turn him or not, into a successful adult, responsible and involved in the development of its urban context.

Within the city itself, there are completely different ways of life: life in the suburbs is almost always stigmatizing and tends to reproduce the status of young people in poverty and exclusion typical of the area, while those who were lucky enough to be born and live in central areas has a better chance to access and benefit from social and

economic opportunities. Those who come from wealthy families to experience the city can participate in educational activities or just leisure without foreclosure, favoring private spaces. The most vulnerable are forced instead to settle for what the city offers them for free. If the services were poor, both in terms of quantity and especially from the qualitative point of view the effects on young people may be different: a lack of integration of young, poor or deprived, often pushing them towards negative behaviors (crime, school dropout).

The city, therefore, does not produce for youth living standards and equal opportunity, but rather it is the place where in recent years' social mobility has reached very low levels. The starting point, therefore, play an essential role since they determine not only the opportunities, but also the individual's level of relationship that can establish with the inhabitants of other areas. Who's from a deprived neighborhood can become an outcast from opportunity and positive relationships only because they live in that particular neighborhood.

From the sociological point of view, this kind of analysis refers to the methodology of the Chicago School of the early 900 that is based on the existence of so-called "natural areas" or habitats of different types of people in the city. Emblematic in this regard is the classic example of Shaw (1930) on the possibilities and perceptions of young people in urban slums who observe the different opportunities of the most affluent, including their lack of access to the same opportunities and feel compelled to commit to these negative actions sometimes delinquent in order to improve their social position.

Years later, Wilson (1987) introduces the term "neighborhood effects" to highlight how living in a disadvantaged background can certainly increase the risk of poverty of the individual: social norms, family environment and the quality of the neighborhood where you live can affect negatively the standard of living of the people living there.

The idea that the district of residence has an effect on the growth of young people over the years is supported by numerous studies that analyze the effects of institutions in the neighborhood and interacting with young: the presence or absence of adequate schools, parks, libraries, places socialization, etc. But if this sort of studies is well-established in the United States, in Europe, we can say that this is an area of research still very young and that has affected mainly the Northern countries. Garner and Raudenbush (1991) analyzed the neighborhood effect considering the level of social deprivation in educational institutions and education of 2,500 young people in Scotland: also in familiar contexts, not particularly disadvantaged situations of spatial deprivation in education/school negatively affect learning and then employment opportunities in the future. Similarly, Andersson (2004) studying the condition of adolescents in Sweden showed the presence of different types of neighborhood effects associated with the educational environment and intended to be reflected in future in professional contexts. Kaupinenn (2008) regarding the case of Helsinki is a

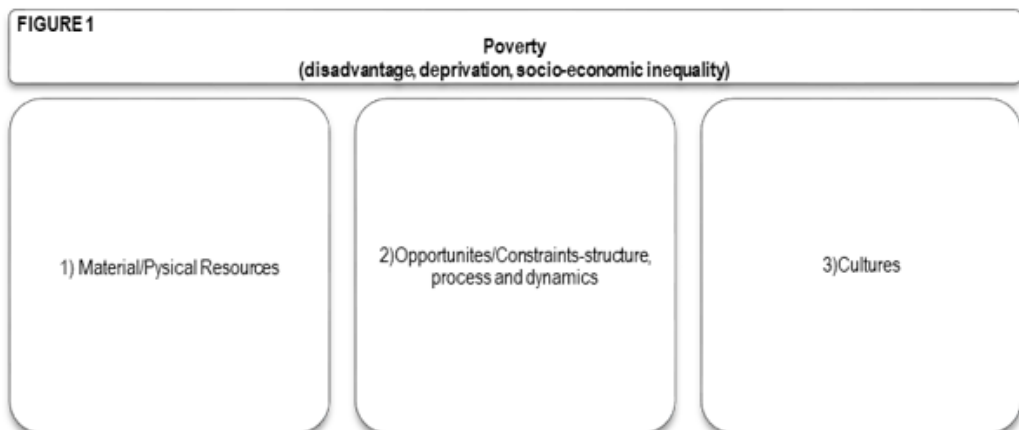
step further and concludes that the educational environment is certainly one of the means by which the effect occurs to influence the young in the completion or abandonment of the secondary school.

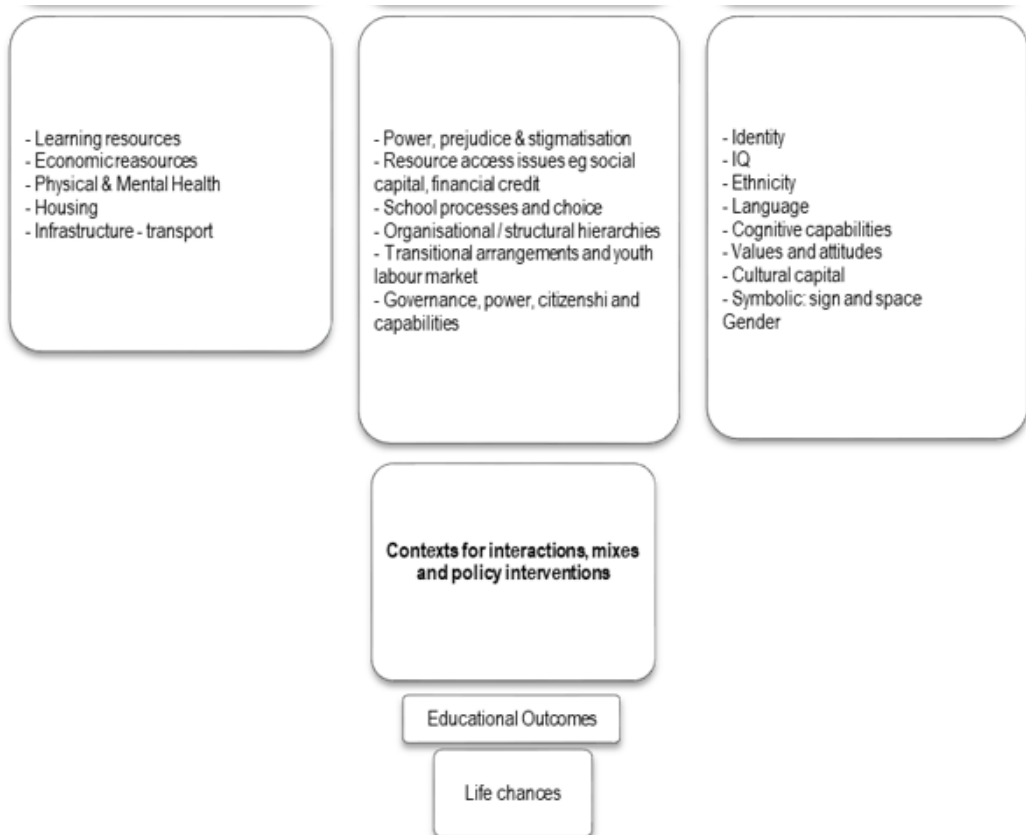
Studies by Sibley (1995) show that even in English city poverty and social exclusion of young people is determined not only by the place where you live but also to the neighborhood where they're attending the school. Even Bauder (2002) described similar phenomena with the term "cultural exception" to demonstrate how the weight of the reputation of a particular school can affect the life of a young reducing their future life chances.

Considering the risk of social exclusion for adolescents growing up in poverty, Cauce (2008) has put in evidence how students from poor family living in disadvantaged area, are much more exposed to violence, and how this attitude affects their functioning, to have lower academic achievement and school attendance, and to have higher rates of school dropout.

About the connection between education and social exclusion, in the following pages, we will use a model related to recent studies conducted by Raffo (2009) at the University of Manchester. He has created a diagram (Figure 1) representative of how poverty can affect the education of a young and as a special education system combined with social relations are able, in turn, to have an impact on poverty of the individual. Following the diagram, in fact, we can comprehend how a lack of material resources, caused by an economic deprivation, can affect the scholars' result of young. But Raffo explains another two aspects: the first one is about opportunities related to familiar condition or to any particular prejudice (i.g. if the student lives in a periphery), the second one is about the cultural aspect (gender attitudes). A good mix of social interaction and policy interventions could reduce material deprivation, stigma and prejudice and increase the opportunities for students.

Figure 1





We will use this graphic in our simulation of educating community in Calabria to understand how the participation of the community could positively influence the educational outcomes of students involved in the Community and their aspiration too.

Can school prevent social exclusion?

During the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education, UNESCO recommended the spreading of inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994), underlining how an inclusive orientation are ‘the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all’. By this way, inclusive education could be a very good tool against social exclusion, because of the cultural overcoming of differences like gender, races, social status.

In 1996 Jacques Delors has written one of the most important document about education: “Learning: The Treasure Within”. In this paper emerges a central role of education in life of the population, particularly for young population because of the aim of education as a universal permission to everyone to become a member of society without diversity without barriers to participate in the society. But education

is not a “miracle cure or a magic formula” that open the door to a world in which all principles will be attained, but as one of the principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war. In this sense two factors became fundamental: strategy and network. Primary, strategy is important because the policy-makers have to plan the intervention as well as the economic resources that the community education needs. Secondly, it’s necessary to create a solid network between schools, local institution, third sectors, civil society; this network will cooperate to every step of the community as the society in which students will be included.

Some years later than J. Delors, after the event of September 11, 2001 in New York, A. Dodd and J. Konzal (2002) have deepened the role of education and school in the creation of a safer world, particularly in public school where children have the opportunity to learn with and from children whose back-grounds are very different from their own. Also, from their point of view, a strong network between school and parents is one of the principal steps to have an educational system able to contrast social exclusion: studies of individual families show that what the family does is more important to student success than family income of education. Jean Konzal has the opportunity to improve his model in Greenbrook Elementary School (New Jersey – USA): for five years, she has involved parents, teachers and students in a particular project called “Kindergarten Parent Journal Writing”. During this project she has created a work group called PTO (Parent-Teacher Organization) with the aim to produce a bimonthly newsletter for the whole community, to raise money for events for family and student. The integration of teachers and parents has been positive and this case was studied by many researchers an innovative experiment of cooperation.

Where many actors of educational system stay together and work together for the community, they will produce real benefit for children’s success in school and life: if a teacher and parent know, trust, and respect one another, there is a greater likelihood that one will initiate contact with the other when needed to help the child.

Recently, Epstein (2011) has made a theory about the importance of a partnership between schools, family and communities. In his theory, there are six different categories of participation: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. As Dodd and Konzal, Epstein considers relevant the participation of parents, but in this case he looks with a big interest with the involvement of community partners from *civil society* (volunteer organizations, senior citizen organizations, libraries, museums, zoos, faith-based organizations, or individuals living within the community). When this partnership works cooperatively with a shared responsibility, the effects on students’ well-being are extremely positive: “school–community partnerships can impact student success and post-school outcomes as well as positively influence and benefit the community in return” (Willems and Gonzalez-DeHass, 2012).

It's important to underline how parental role is very important not only during "present life" of a student/child, but also for the adult of the future. The transmission of education from parents to children is an important tool to assess the extent of intergenerational mobility in a society: intergenerational transmission of education and of economic status is really persistent in emerging economies or in less developed areas of developed countries (Pastore F., Roccisano F., 2015). In some case, researchers talk about under education traps: where certain families (because of the neighborhood effects, the fixed costs of education or a problem in the educational system) remain uneducated from one generation to the next.

Finally, a good network needs the involvement of social agents, local authorities and youth workers. In this network teachers, parents and the other actors have to work together: that's why researchers called them "peers". From these collaborative learning students have lots of added value: new ability in argumentation, structured controversy, reciprocal teaching and will be much more able in problem solving and to achieve goals.

Social Exclusion, education and facilities: the educating community is a possible policy for Calabria?

Poverty has multidimensional aspect: there is an economic poverty, but there is also poverty in terms of poor living. Amartya Sen (2000) talked about "Aristotelian perspective" to describe the origin of a dimension of poverty based on the impossibilities to be part of important activities. Being unable to participate in social life can impoverish a person: relational deprivation impoverishes a family's life, influencing and reducing economic opportunities for parents today and for children in the future.

Following this approach, we have analyzed the inclusion in Calabria, sited in the South of Italy, of the poorest Region in Europe (Eurostat 2017), particularly we have studied the relationship between facilities and social exclusion of young people leaving. In the Appendix 1 the reader could see the result of our studies: the distribution of schools, cultural activities (public and private library), social center (daily and residential) and sports facilities by the five provinces.

For the purpose of this paper, is important to underline how if distribution of schools reflects the distribution of population in the five provinces of Calabria, the distribution of equipment for young, from several surveys collected by us, marks a huge disparity between the five provinces of Calabria. The level of disparity most substantial is that relating to social activities, considering daily and residential center for minors. Among the 162 social centers dedicated to young people, 94 are located in the much more opulent province. By contrast, in the poorest areas, which the risk of social exclusion is higher, there is a very little number of facilities: young people living in the peripheral areas of the poorest provinces should need of important services against deprivation.

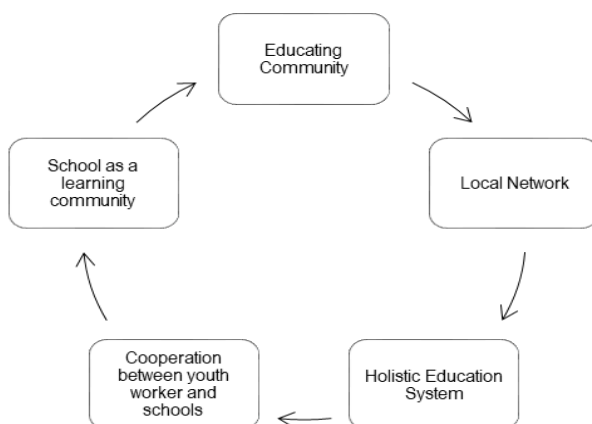
In this condition the birth of a partnership between school, community and parents, could be an important challenge for every student living in a periphery or in a poor area.

During last year, we have analyzed the development of “educating community” in Calabria, and look at some interesting finding. The composition of the Community presents all the Epsteins’s categories: voluntary from each province of Calabria, schools, local and regional authorities, youth worker, social workers and parents. The aim of the coordination was to design a common platform of action that defines the principles useful for the promotion of thematic experimentation that comprehends the social formation system of Calabria as a system of human energies, and reflects on what amount of energy (skills) is available in the system today, how much energy is used and what is not used. It would be an experiment that analyses the causes of the unblocked potential energy blocking factors (e.g. Bureaucracy, know-how and school organization, territorial education, training centers, workplace alternation) work with network methodologies and pathways innovation to foster the release and expression of these energies.

Between the stages of the route, a program's manifesto for a regional pact for innovation in educational processes was envisaged. A pact that puts together the various stakeholders involved in the various training issues and is able to initiate a first definition of an organizational structure that allows shared construction, indispensable in instructing structural policies directed at different regional territories, a capability strategy on:

- Helping disseminations of positive structural practices
- To promote effective networks between schools and other educational agencies on the basis of organizational-operational-psycho-pedagogical-social pluralism, design
- Take good care of good practices,
- Devote real measures to children and teenagers and to those who follow them every day,
- Support joint participation and reflection of organizations, institutions and people who are learning

Figure 2: The Educating Community in Calabria



The students involved in a first experiment of the Community were living in a deprived place, an area of Calabria called *Locride* in which the risk of social exclusion is straightly correlated to criminality: young people abandons school and get easy money from criminal group affiliates to *ndrangheta*.

The target has included 100 students from high schools with special educational needs: foreigners (young refugee or migrants' sons), repeating students, students living in poor families, students at risk of dropping out. In primary schools, the community has worked to involve 230 vulnerable students with an inclusive approach. The overall group included problematic and risky scholars, both because the indicators of absences and votes clarify their deficiencies, and because they come from families at high risk of social exclusion and crime.

The first result of this partnership is published in a Report led by INDIRE the Research Center of the Italian Ministry of Education (INDIRE, 2016) on the project called "Educating Community for the rebirth of Locride". In this publication we can read how the strong role assigned to the partnership between school and the social organizations involved was one of the main features of the project, as is also summarized in the title that has been attributed. The operation of the network was set up with a non-bureaucratic approach to decision-making, on an effective participatory way, often characterized by the informality of the sessions organized and marked by numerous extended meetings. The choices were taken exclusively in the Group of management and coordination following the peer approach.

The relationship between the members of the Educating Community (tutors, experts, local authority) allowed to oversee the relationship with the class teachers and to consolidate the contributions of skills, motivation and behavior acquired in the courses. Also, it is interesting the attention to the growth of the Educating Community (of the school and the other members of the partnership) looking at the common replication: the same partnership could be replicated everywhere, and this disseminating dynamic could develop the experience involving every piece of society and therefore not just students.

Students and the partnership of the Community have worked together on several courses:

Individualized mentoring	Experts met students with lack of aspirations to increase their self-confidence
The leader in me	A motivational course with the aim to enforce personal life skill
My school blog	Students have to gain informatics abilities to create a school blog as a network between school and community. In the blog students have published event organized by local authorities and social organization involved in the project.
School to work transition	In this path students and experts have deepened the evolution of the job and the method to understand how knowing personal capabilities and working on their enforcement could be an easy way to find a job linked to personal attitudes

Finally, our findings about this first experimentation show us how an “educating community” could affect the dynamics evidenced by Raffo in his diagram on poverty and education outcomes: working in groups during class course overcomes the lack of material resources, by sharing what students need to follow the course; playing moments, with ice breaker games, struggles prejudices and contribute to create a spiritual group in the class and in the school. About opportunities and cultural activities, working on aspirations and on personal attitudes, could influence in an encouraging system the future and job opportunities of students.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study and the effect of “educating Community” in a disadvantaged area like *Locride* could be more depth in future research when we have a complete information on scholar’s performance during a school program and when the scholar has to find a job or a university course.

Future research should examine how educating community influences local authorities and citizens: does a partnership school/community can promote civil participation?

Conclusions

This paper shows how a partnership between schools, parents and social organization could have a positive impact on young people, increasing their opportunities and contrasting social exclusion. The experiment of “Educating Community” has produced many positive effects in scholar’s life and for the community. That’s why we think that “educating community” could be a good practice and a good policy to combat young poverty and social exclusion.

Policy makers have to look at this kind of partnership and facilitate the participation of schools in public activities as well as the participation of local authorities and social organization in the school’s activities, following the inclusive approach and according to the principle that no one stays behind.

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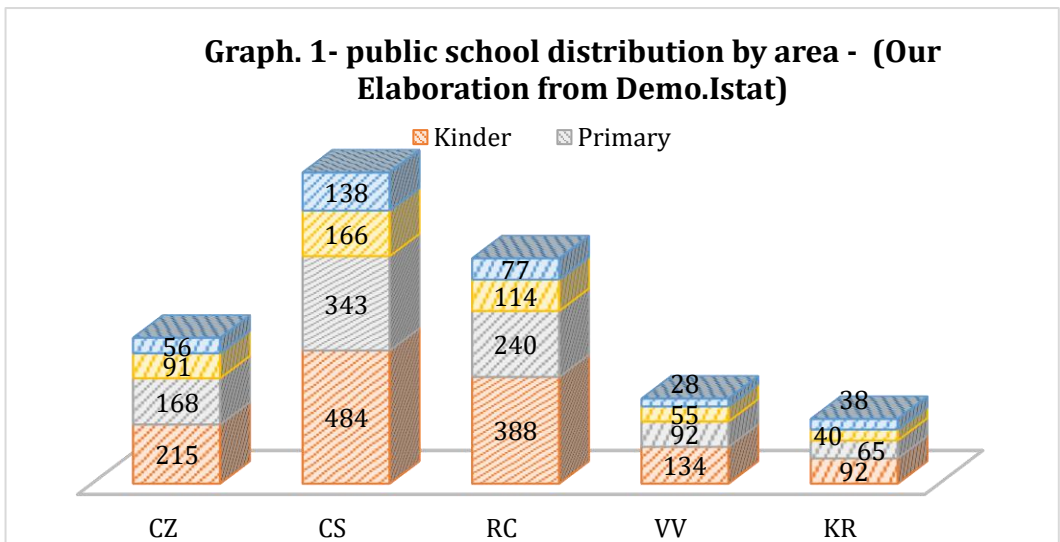
APPENDIX 1: The distribution of schools and facilities in Calabria

In this appendix, we describe our analysis between facilities and social exclusion of young people in Calabria.

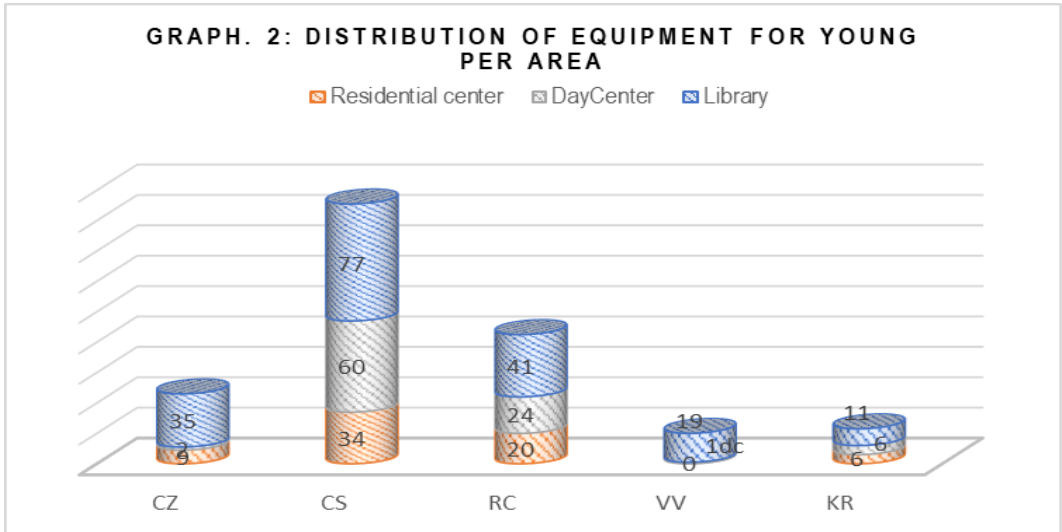
To do this, we have considered the distribution by the five provinces of schools, cultural activities (public and private library), social center (daily and residential) and sports facilities.

	Total	Age (3-18)	Average Income (2015)
Catanzaro (CZ)	362.343	53.201	€ 9.259,00
Cosenza (CS)	711.739	101.263	€ 8.655,00
Reggio Calabria (RC)	553.861	87.108	€ 8.954,00
Vibo Valentia (VV)	161.619	25.120	€ 8.400,00
Crotone (KR)	175.566	29.506	€ 7.313,00

Considering that Cosenza’s province is the most populous province, we can observe how the distribution of schools reflects the distribution of population. It’s important to put in evidence how Calabria Region in 2016 has promoted and voted in the legislative assembly a particular norm to preserve linguistic minorities and students living in internal areas.



If distribution of schools reflects population, it will be much more interesting the analysis of the distribution of equipment for young, from several surveys collected by us, that evidences a massive disparity between the five provinces of Calabria. The level of disparity most substantial is that relating to social activities, considering daily and residential center for minors. Among the 162 social centers dedicated to young people, 94 are located in a province. By contrast, the poorest areas shall need a much more numerous allocation in the social sector.



To be able to analyze the structural equipment in the five provinces of Calabria Region we will create a dedicated index of structural equipment for young people.

We surveyed the number of public school compulsory in all areas. We select a unique cohort of the population between 3 and 18 years and consider nursery schools, primary schools, secondary schools, and high school.

Consider:

- The density of the cohort (the ratio between the populations of the cohort 3-18) and the surface area in km²
- The number of endowment related to the cohort

To build our index says:

1. S_k = groups of individuals per area (area $S_1 = 1$, $S_2 =$ zone 2, etc.)
2. $m_k = \text{Max}K$ = maximum value of the relationship. This value will serve as reference data in order to proceed with normalization.
3. $\psi (S_k) = m_k / m$ = ratio of the density of the population of the cohort and number of schools normalized to the maximum value

Since we do not have values at the individual level, we consider the relationship created according to the density of the population cohort and the number of schools in the various provinces. We construct an index improved based on the maximum value of the distribution: we impose normalization to the maximum value of 1.

S_k	Density of population (d)	c School (kindergarten, primary, secondary)	d/c	$\psi(S_k) = mk/m$
CZ	22,03	530	24,06	0,32
CS	15,09	1131	74,94	1,00
RC	27,13	819	30,18	0,40
VV	21,83	309	14,15	0,19
KR	17,00	235	13,82	0,18

If in the first case, the maximum index was in Cosenza Province. The lowest endowment of schools is always represented by the poorest provinces of Vibo Valentia and Crotona.

After this, to a better idea of large-scale equipment for young we construct a table in which we give a comparison of indexes created in the same way as was done for the school area for all of the areas considered: social, cultural and sporting.

Compared to what was said earlier on perceptions of quality of life in the various areas of Calabria, we can observe that the province of Cosenza, which is the most populous, is the best equipped in every field.

Groups S_k	School Index	Social Index	Cultural Index	Sport Index
S₁ = CZ	0,32	0,08	0,31	0,44
S₂ = CS	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
S₃ = RC	0,40	0,26	0,30	0,39
S₄ = VV	0,19	0,01	0,17	0,23
S₅ = KR	0,18	0,11	0,13	0,24

It's easy to see how the distance between Cosenza and the other provinces, is very far: young people living in the peripheral areas of the poorest provinces should need of important services against deprivation.