

Foreign Minors and Young Adults in Detention Facilities in Italy: Successful Pathways and Critical Factors in the Education Process

Adriana Valente, Silvia Caravita

Abstract: This study analyses success and failure of educational process for immigrant minors and young adults in detention facilities in Italy. The analysis includes unaccompanied foreign minors (UAMs) and the young Roma, foreigners that are “dissimilar to the dominant group” (Schwartz & Petrova, 2020). The two-level study, a survey to Juvenile Detention Centres in Italy and deep interviews with teachers, educators and heads educators of the local juvenile justice center of Rome, is focused on the educational processes in prison, moving from general data to specific life stories, raising questions on if and how the educational process within the prison environment can positively impact the personal development of young detainees. The study inquires: what can be considered educational success in prison and its relationship with identity development for young foreigners; which factors are weighing on minors and young foreigners; possible ethnic or gender discrimination. Despite the challenging context and the limits of education in prison, the study provides evidence of successful achievements and of positive impact that education can have on the difficult process of identity development of foreign minors through an interplay among pupil-related factors, school-and prison-related and macro-system factors.

Keywords: foreign minors and young ROMA, educational process, Juvenile Detention Centres, Identity development

Introduction

All adolescents need to understand who they are, what they want and who they may become, “what makes them to be distinct from others, and what gives a sense of continuity despite the ongoing changes” (Kroger, 2007). These questions are pressing and sometimes traumatic for young migrants and refugees that are in detention facilities.

For them, “transitions that imply renegotiating their identity” (Crocetti & Salmela-Alo, 2018) are manifold, given their situation of at least double marginalisation: they belong to a minority and are under the stigma of prison. For them, the identity processes, the “organization of self-understandings that define one’s place in the world” (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006, p. 5) is continuously challenged and often it is hard to reframe adverse events into growth opportunities and to develop well-being associated to identity commitments. As stressed by Caramiello, also with reference to audience characterized by marginality, the “search for an *identity*” is one of the most problematic issues (Caramiello, 2021, p.17).

Previous studies analysed the psychological well-being and life satisfaction among immigrant populations, showing the impact of acculturation on well-being (Schwartz et al., 2013). Well-being refers to a number of dimensions of positive psychological functioning, including self-esteem, life satisfaction, competence and mastery, and a sense of meaning or purpose (Waterman, 2008). A variety of categories of well-being have been distinguished (Linley et al, 2009; Waterman, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2013). In this paper, we mostly refer to psychological well-being, more inclusive than the eudaimonic one (Schwartz et al., 2013). Psychological well-being is defined as a positive construct that includes feeling competent, “self-acceptance, ability to meet the demands of one’s social environment” (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

In this study, we investigate development and well-being opportunities for foreign minors and young adults in the marginal context of juvenile detention centres (JDCs), through the prism of educational pathways.

We wonder how far the educational setting of the juvenile justice system may constitute an environment capable of positively influencing the process of identity development of foreign minors and young adults in prison, or at least may envisage studying as a practice of resistance (Pastore, Videma & Rojas, 2020), and which factors interact in this process. We also aim at detecting what can be considered educational success in prison and its relationship with identity development for young foreigners.

The concept of reeducation and rehabilitation in prison may conflict with being prison a total institution, with an enclosing power on individuals (Goffman, 1961). Reeducation, according to Faugeron, may turn out to be not so much an acceptable objective, but a pure legitimization of the maintenance

of the institution and of the deprivation of liberty on which it is based. If legitimation is based on symbolic dimension (Berger & Luckman, 1966), it has also been noticed that each symbol is not legitimating per sé, it must follow a process of legitimation in order to enhance own legitimating effects (Cipriani, 1986). Reeducation could also be an issue of the process of legitimation: the myth “de la «bonne peine» permettant l’amendement du condamné... autorise un processus de légitimation producteur de discours réformateur” (Faugeron & Le Boulaire, 1992, p.3).

The sociological analyses raise many questions on functions and meanings of penalty and detention in the cultural and social systems of any country. The deep ambivalence of the double institutional mandate: to punish and to regenerate is discussed as one of the critical nodes for a change of policies (Calaprice, 2010; Pellegrino & Inglese, 2016; Oggioni, 2019a).

Among the interpretations of punishment developed by social historians as described by Vianello (2019; 2020), claiming a beneficial potential seems to be the closest to the role of education in the prison institution.

Dealing with children and youth living in a context of adversity, specific cultural values and socialization practices embedded in educational interventions have shown to promote positive outcomes (Dimitrova, 2014; Dimitrova & Ferrer-Wreder, 2017).

Nevertheless, as has been stressed by “States General on the Enforcement of Criminal Penalties”, educational interventions need to be redesigned particularly for foreigner detainees, in order to promote the growth of the person and especially to support his/her psycho-physical well-being (Migliori, 2020).

In this paper, we refer to ‘young adults’, and not only to ‘minors’ because young people up to 25 years of age who commit a crime when they are under-age are detained in JDCs alongside minors of 14 to 18, often in separate buildings. We are aware that the term “foreign” may suggest a distance between cultural systems; nevertheless, in this paper, we use the term ‘foreign’ as we are dealing not only with migrants but also with youth born in Italy who do not have Italian citizenship, as is the case for some under-age migrants and some people of Roma origin; Many of the latter were born in Italy but cannot prove the continuity of their stay in Italy or may be paperless; they are often in a status of de facto statelessness.

Two distinctive elements characterise the subjective situation of youth in JDCs. They are detained as they have been charged with breaking the social contract, but they also suffer a situation of exclusion and marginalisation due to their being foreigners, often phenotypically and culturally dissimilar to the dominant group. These two elements can strongly affect educational pathways and contribute to the risk of failure. In fact, an educational process always takes place within an epistemological paradigm that does not divide

the person from the environment and looks at the complexity of both according to a systemic logic, as Bateson and Longo (1993) would put it.

The study mainly focuses on two groups that are usually considered culturally far apart in many ways: young Roma and unaccompanied foreign minors (UAMs), which account for the majority of females and males respectively in the juvenile detention facility of Rome “Casal del Marmo”.

For both groups, it is active in the public space the metaphor of the “invasion”. Actually, they are part of less-favored groups of migrants, those sharing some common characteristic that are “viewed as a threat to the majority ethnic or cultural group in the destination society” (Schwartz & Petrova, 2020). Dehumanization is an indicator of prejudice for both groups, as noted for Roma (Kteily et al., 2015), for which a widespread prejudice reflects “socially approved dominant societal norms”, also in institutional practices (Kende, 2017).

For UAMs, it has been stressed that the strategy of dehumanizing representation, also in the perspective of moral acceptance in a victimhood, can be extremely functional to justify the condition of refugees (Louis et al., 2007), to keep firm boundaries between groups belonging to (in-group) and not (out-group) (Esses et al., 2013; Haslam, 2006; Leyens et al., 2000; Tudisca et al., 2019).

Moreover, previous studies showed the importance of ethnic, family, and religious identities for young Roma (Dimitrova et al., 2013), and similar findings emerged in surveys of UAMs (Clayton & Gupta, 2019; Oppedal et al., 2020; Fang, 2020).

Approaching educational success in prison

In a prison setting, one should reflect on and review the concept of school success. Ravecca (2009) defines it as “active attendance at a course of study deliberately chosen, leading to obtaining a formal qualification with a mark corresponding to (...) cognitive potential”. In fact, sociological literature often refers to *achievements* or *attainments*, meaning results or participation in formal education. However, Cole (1990) noted that conceptions of achievement “change with the times, are influenced by many factors, and take different forms for different people”. Considering the growing differentiation between students and educational pathways, and the expansion of key competences for lifelong learning to include, besides skills and knowledge, also attitudes and behaviours, the concept of school success may be more appropriately replaced by that of educational success. Educational success is less immediate, and it is sustainable throughout one’s life.

This is closer to the concept of educational success in pedagogy, intended as “approaching the full development of the human person, (...) which is

good and is a goal for society as a whole” (Montalbetti & Lisimberti, 2015, p. 79). Albeit close to the complex concept of educational success, this approach does not conceal nor does it critically tackle the idea highlighted since Durkheim of education as a social fact and as a dependent variable of society.

Quoting Memoli & Sannella (2017) “Responsibility and reciprocity are understood as compulsory epistemological categories for the design of policies aimed at overcoming conflicts, the promotion of social cohesion and the creation of social inclusion”.

In brief, those results can only be attained that are allowed by the environment, on the one hand, and by subjectivity, on the other hand, in a continual interaction. In our case, what can we reasonably mean by educational success for young foreigners in a juvenile detention centre?

Not only does the educational process occur *in* prison, but it *encompasses* the prison, getting imbued with spiritual and material factors that are part of the prison environment. Moreover, the educational process is affected by the difficulty of setting a long-term goal for the future of the detained youth, more than is the case outside prisons.

As regards learning for foreign minors, it was noted that the “negotiation between a pre/past (the experience of migration, family background, personal experience) and a post/future (socio-professional integration, the individual and familial project of inclusion)” is a fundamental part of their development experience (Colombo & Santagati, 2010). Moreover, in prison they have to come to terms with the concept of re-education, established by modern legal systems and in Italy by Article 27 of the Constitution, mainly interpreted in terms of rehabilitation. Regulatory documents and case-law consistently reaffirm the essential aim of “recovering the deviant minor through his or her re-education and social rehabilitation” (Constitutional Court, 1992) and “the design and setting up of individualised projects aimed at the re-education, social rehabilitation and work reintegration of the minors who have entered the criminal justice system, promoting the values of civil coexistence” (DGMC, 2013).

These texts suggest a call to strengthen the link between the education of individuals and social demand, reminding us how power relations are perpetuated through cultural practices (Foucault, 1980). The objection was made (Ciappi & Coluccia, 1997) that society should be changed before re-socialising those who break the law if crime is the result of a criminogenic society. “The rehabilitation process thus risks being undermined by a mechanism that seeks to elicit socially acceptable responses...whether or not authentic growth has been experienced” and the risk is to implement a “first deconstruct, then reconstruct” rehabilitation process, which - recalling the Gofmanian concept of spoliation - tends to dismantle the elements that make up

the subjective story of the minor (Barone, 2018, pp. 76) as an obligatory step for a reconstruction process, leaving the question open of how the person's identity may be recomposed.

As the tip of an iceberg, education in marginal contexts raises questions that are common to "standard" school environments, criticized for being structured in ways that "subtract resources from youth, divesting them of their cultures, languages, and community-based identities" (Valenzuela & Rubio, 2018).

The embracing concept of educational success includes the issue of the transition process of young people from disadvantaged tracks. Walther (2015) points out the two approaches of *cooling out* and *recognition* introduced by Goffmann (1952) to explain how societies based on capitalism and democracy construct social reproduction. Educational systems always operate a mediation between the two approaches, allowing young people only "to receive esteem – in the sense of confidence in their trainability and employability – after accepting disrespect of their subjective aspirations". Identity work is central in the concept of educational success, as identity is a core dimension of *recognition*.

In building the identity frame, starting from the emphasis on crisis (Erikson, 1968), a number of models have enhanced subjective aspects, regulatory aspects, and elements linked to the interaction with the setting. A variety of perspectives, domains and models of identity are debated in social psychology (Schwartz, Luyckx & Vignoles, 2011; McLean & Syed, 2015).

Different disciplines have highlighted aspects such as solidarity with the group individuals belong to (Sciolla, 1983, p. 110), the resulting constraints (Pizzorno, 1983), the communication and relational process "allowing individuals to perceive and understand themselves as autonomous subjects when they are so perceived and understood by others" (Colombo, 2007, p. 15). Calhoun (1994) had already stressed the dynamic character of self-knowledge, defining it as an ongoing progress. From a philosophical perspective, Braidotti (2002) highlights the relationship with the history, genealogy, and sets of relations inside and outside each person: "Identity is a game of multiple and fragmentary aspects of the self, a game of relationships as it needs a bond with others; it is retrospective as it is determined through memories and recollections ... it is made of successive identifications". Identity is highlighted as something complex and manifold, a trajectory designed by the relationships nourishing it.

In these studies, a synthesis is made between at least two tensions: a tension between different selves, dispersed in time, space, and one's unconscious, and a tension between the individual and the external sphere, having belonging, recognition, and relations as its essential traits. A close relation between these different spheres in identity development processes, and the

coincidence of essential relations between the individual, the environment, and relevant resources in the analysis of educational success, led us to classify the answers given by the respondents with LeCompte and Dworkin's categories. Thus, we used the four areas: *pupil-related factors*; *school-and-prison-related factors*; *interactions between the above-mentioned factors*; and *macrosystem factors*. LeCompte and Dworkin, in detecting risk factors for early school leaving, centered their analysis on education in troublesome contexts, but their insights have been milestones for the whole educational system.

Method

Foreign minors often end up in detention for committing petty crimes, and for this very reason, they are detained for short periods. Short periods of detention and a high turnover of foreign minors in JDCs are among the reasons why we identified teachers, educators and heads of education in detention facilities and social services, as the people to interview to perform our analysis. The considerations of educators and educational heads of JDCs about the factors influencing the educational success, played a main role in order to detect if and how the educational offer of the juvenile justice system may positively affect the process of identity development of foreign minors and young adults in prison and in understanding the dynamics of individual growth (Valente & Caravita, 2019).

Our study followed a mixed methodology. First, a survey was launched on the educational offering in the sixteen JDCs operating in Italy in 2016, based on semi-structured questionnaires addressed to all the educational heads of the sixteen JDCs. This first part of the study was aimed at collecting quantitative data about the presence of foreign minors and young adults, their attendance of school courses and the diplomas they achieved. Also qualitative data resulted from items that investigated about the other educational activities, the courses of apprenticeship and the socializing initiatives proposed by the institutions, including the observed outcomes that they had produced. Open questions inquired about the related factors having a negative or positive impact, the obstacles or facilitators of school class attendance, the role of the family on the overall educational path, the evidence of positive feedback on the living conditions of the young detainees that their participation in the educational and cultural activities might have produced. The constraints met by the institutions were also inquired.

The findings produced by the analysis of the questionnaires provided the ground for a second, qualitative study, consisting of eleven in-depth interviews with teachers, educators and heads educators of the local juvenile jus-

tice offices of Rome's Casal del Marmo JDC, one of the two Italian facilities holding both males and females.

The additional information gathered with interviews allowed a deeper understanding of the processes that involve UAMs and young Roma in the educational contexts created by the institutions, with their specific constraints and human relationships.

The two parts of the study enabled us to get a picture of the educational processes in prison, moving from general data to specific life stories, raising questions on if and how the educational process within the prison environment can positively impact the personal development of young detainees and what factors are weighing on minors and young foreigners.

Results

Young foreigners in JDCs and educational qualifications obtained

There are 159 foreign minors and young adults, boys and girls, in JDCs on 31 January 2019, and 196 on 31 January 2017 (Table 1). In 2019, they account for almost half of detained youth (43%), two percentage points less than in 2017. The presence of minors in prison is in slight but constant decrease, both for Italians and for foreigners.

Table 1. Minors and young adults in JDCs (31.1.2017 – 31.1.2019) by gender. Absolute values

| | 2017 | | | 2019 | | |
|------------|------|--------|-------|------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| Italians | 249 | 7 | 256 | 198 | 12 | 210 |
| Foreigners | 169 | 27 | 196 | 144 | 15 | 159 |
| Total | 418 | 34 | 452 | 342 | 27 | 369 |

Source: CNR-IRPPS charts based on Ministry of Justice data.

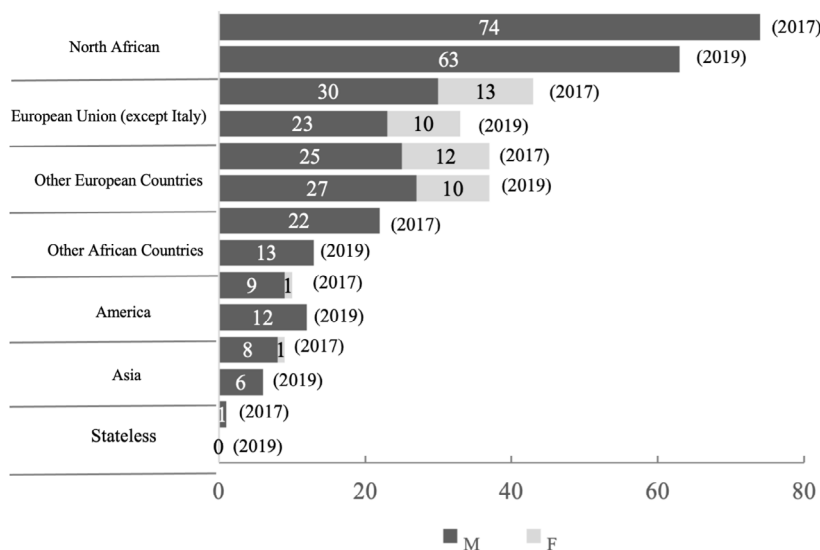
If the number of young foreigners in JDCs is high compared to the marginal number of young foreigners on Italian soil, the average length of their stay in JDCs is shorter than that of Italians. The over-representation of young foreigners in Italian prisons compared with their presence in Italy is to be related to the difficulties encountered in fully implementing towards them the principle of “residual nature of detention” – one of the cornerstones of the system of juvenile criminal procedure, codified by the Decree of the President of Republic 448/88. The average length of their stay in JDCs for foreign minors and young adults is 117 days vs.138 for Italians (2016). The difference is even stronger for females: 93 days vs.130 for Italians (2016). Foreign

minors and young adults, in fact, are more frequently subject to detention measures (transfer to prison) following minor offences or on precautionary grounds.

This is due to the fact that young foreigners may not have any family or dependable adults in Italy who may allow for the application of non-detention measures. In January 2017, less than 16% of all foreign boys and girls in JDCs were 'second generation' and had, therefore, a family with them. The rules governing juvenile criminal proceeding are considered the result of excellent legal work, as proved by the overall low number of minors in Italian JDCs. However, these rules produce a different effect on those who may lack a reliable family structure to count on to avoid detention in the case of minor crimes, or to support them in a recovery programme, producing an indirect discrimination against them. This is often the case for UAMs and Roma minors.

As regards the origin of young foreigners in JDCs, the picture at 31 January 2019 (Figure 1) is not very different from that at 31 January 2017. However, a reduction was recorded in the number of prison admissions from the main area of origin, North Africa – mainly Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia – and the absence of females from African countries. A slight decrease concerns the minors and young adults coming from other countries of European Union – mainly Romania and Croatia – and from other European countries – among these, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia.

Figure 1. Foreigners in Juvenile Detention Centres at 31 January 2017 and 31 January 2019 by gender and by country of origin. Absolute values

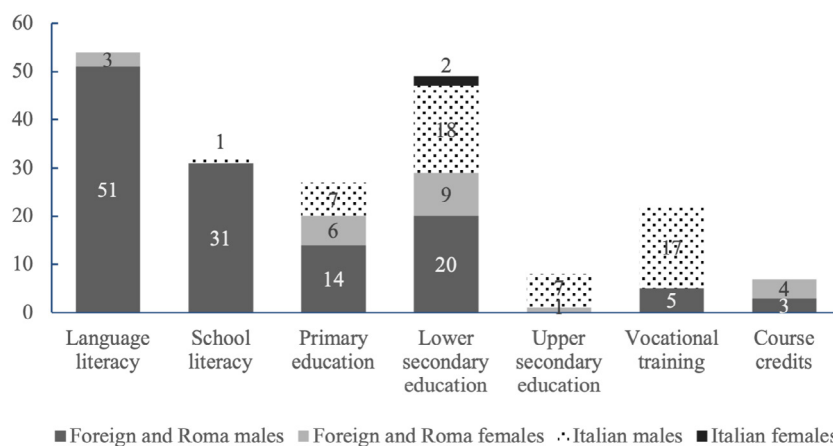


Source: CNR-IRPPS charts based on Ministry of Justice data.

The presence of male detainees from Africa in JDCs goes hand in hand with the presence of UAMs on Italian soil in a situation of great vulnerability, with a high percentage of them not to be found and easy prey to criminal organisations. As regards young Roma, it is not possible to detect how many of them are in JDCs, as records are kept by nationality and not by ethnic group. Therefore, the Roma can have Italian nationality, as well as of countries of the European Union (Romania, Croatia), or of other Eastern European countries. A significant presence of female Roma is reported in the Casal del Marmo JDC.

This vulnerability has a negative impact on the likelihood they have to obtain certificates of study. The family expectations of these early-adultized youth may sometimes be a direct or indirect cause of their deviance, or of their difficulty in even considering, let alone pursuing, their educational pathway. Moreover, short stays in JDCs limit the number of diplomas obtained, compared to the number of courses attended. In the school year 2015–16, a diploma was obtained by 209 young adults who spent time in 14 of the 16 JDCs. If we include the certificates obtained on completion of tailoring, carpentry, and pizza-making courses, the total number of diplomas obtained by young foreigners exceeds 300 in 2016. Data cannot deal with the turnover in JDCs.

Figure 2. Minors and young adults, Italians and foreigners, who obtained a certificate or a diploma in the school year 2015–16 by gender. Absolute values.



Source: CNR-IRPPS Survey.

The number of diplomas obtained show a commitment of both minors and young adults and the structure; paradoxically, the prison can be, for disadvantaged minors and young adults, the first place of care, also as regards education (Rossolini, 2002; Savoia, 2018; Kallman, 2019).

The possibility of completing a course of study depends on individual motivation as well as on whether a JDC can set up the requested course of study, especially for upper secondary education, and on the student's length of stay in the facility. Young women often have children staying with them, which is one of the grounds for course exemption; this perpetuates another indirect discrimination. The rule implies a priority between childcare and education, without helping young mothers to think to own possible future in terms of personal growth and building opportunities.

A rule intended to protect maternity and children turns out to be a disincentive especially for foreign young women with children, Roma in particular, so feeling demotivated to seek education as nourishment in their identity construction process.

Similarly, the shortening of stays for young ladies with children, while meeting a role of protection for both maternity and childcare, deprives these young ladies of the to some extent unique prospects offered by prison, as a time to stop an adverse path and be able to enjoy a personal care space, central to the growth process.

There are more language and school literacy diplomas among foreign young men. Female detainees mainly obtain lower secondary and primary education diplomas, followed by language literacy and upper secondary diplomas. Upper secondary education diplomas are mainly obtained by Italians. Besides school and language diplomas, 55 tailoring certificates were obtained, mostly by foreign young women, as well as a number of certificates in carpentry (by Italian and foreign young men) and cooking and pizza-making (by foreign and Italian young women).

All JDCs set up workshops in multiple areas: handicraft, cooking, graphics, information technology, writing, drama, film clubs, music, and painting.

The answers given by the JDCs highlight the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of these activities and their positive impacts on the following: skill development, aptitude discovery, self-esteem development, adaptation to rules, reduction of stereotypes, orientation in the hosting culture, and group dynamics.

Other initiatives aim at establishing an interaction with 'the world outside' and relations of mutual knowledge between these youth and local communities. Detention facilities involve public institutions and bodies as well as private and voluntary organisations. These are sports and recreational events, convivial situations, and meeting with cultural figures. Moreover, on these occasions, the young foreigners have the opportunity to exhibit their own culture, by sharing music, typical dishes, and rites with others.

These social situations take place in a more informal environment and need considerable organisational efforts, which is not always easy due to limited resources, both material and human (cultural mediators). Detained

foreign minors and young adults have to overcome problems of discrimination and stereotypes (Schwartz et al., 2012), as well as problems linked to their low self-esteem, which limits socialisation opportunities, as noted with reference to a 'simple' situation of students in a new international setting (Quinton, 2020). These are, however, valuable moments, all the more so that they enhance an exchange between youth having cultural variety in prison and outside. These initiatives put the "emphasis on intergroup communalities", inside the prison and between the prison and the external world, also giving relevance to "autonomous choice", in favour of a multiculturalism without the side effects of mutual distrust between ingroups and outgroups, of intergroups competition (Hogg et al., 2017) and of weakening social cohesion (Cobb, 2020).

Moreover, 12 JDCs out of 16 set up work, apprenticeship, and traineeship pathways. For everyone, Italian and foreigners, men and women, most work programmes were set up within JDCs (220 of 262 in total). As regards the possibility of doing some activity outside, data suggests different opportunities considering gender and nationality of the detainees. The percentage of working activity carried out outside JDCs varies: it is around 20% for Italian males, 18% for Italian females, 14% for foreign males, and only 6% for foreign females. The lower percentage of work opportunities outside the prison for migrants, women and especially migrant women, testifies to a reality that is still reluctant to free itself from prejudices, combining ethnic and gender discrimination.

Once the detention period is over, JDCs are not normally notified whether a course or work programme started inside the facility is then continued outside. Nor JDCs can verify whether the minors and young adults use the qualifications obtained, or to what extent the credits acquired are taken into consideration.

Factors of educational success and failure in prison

There are different ways to interpret educational success (Erickson, 1968), just as there are in the literature dealing with measurements of success (Alivernini, Manganelli & Lucidi, 2017). LeCompte and Dworkin (1991)'s categories may help us understand key success factors, based on the answers given by respondents. These authors analysed the risk factors for dropping-out and worked out four categories. They shifted the focus from the centre – an educational pathway in situations of excellence or normalcy – to the margins, i.e. an educational pathway in situations of disadvantage.

Pupil-related factors.

These have to do with past experience, familial and socio-economic factors, and other traits of the pupils' cultural context, including peer pressure (which may push them out of school as other activities are seen as more

appealing). These are factors over which school has little control (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991, p. 56), and are the very factors that were commented on the most by educators in our study.

Factors related to specific migration backgrounds fall within this category. For instance, the mandate UAMs receive from their families may negatively affect their motivation to pursue their own personal plans: *“In order to give economic support to their families, they try and pile up money in a short time”*, and this is incompatible with educational offerings in JDCs. The tie with their families and the culture of their groups are determinant factors, even at a distance. For many Roma girls, it is almost impossible to escape from the requests of the patriarchal culture in their families. *“It is a huge effort to cope with the pressure of mates in the camp (...); they are led to believe that there is ‘only one identity possible’*. Therefore, it seems that these youth find it hard to experience bi-culturalism positively. However, *“girls sometimes keep in touch (with the juvenile justice offices)... it was the first time they heard about rights”*; the possibility of continuing their identity-building process on the basis of belonging to two cultures in some cases appears possible.

Moreover, the circumstances concerning ongoing criminal proceedings or being without identity papers add to emotional instability and do not favour active and regular participation in school activities. Those who have family and friends far away find it difficult to contact them. Among other issues, Internet connections are rarely authorised in JDCs, and telephone lines can only be used under supervision. This weighs heavily on young detainees, who feel very sad about it. These factors, together with a perception of *“the blatant failure of the tests they have undergone to define their own identity”*, give rise to feelings of shame and lack of self-esteem, and inhibit them from contacting their families. This also generates depressive phenomena, facilitating deviant and self-destructive behaviour, including psychotropic substance use, which is increasing in new entries in JDCs.

Even though the family can be an integral part of a young person’s delinquent pathway, all interviewees agree that emotional support plays a key role in starting and successfully completing any educational programme. The family can provide a *“stable reference point”*, psychological and material support, and can help make *“plans outside the prison”*. Above all, the family is a key factor for the implementation of alternatives to detention.

A positive factor is the high level of agency that often UAMs and young ROMA have in common; for them, the condition of adolescent is often denied by events or by family choices. Nevertheless, JDCs tell about strength factors in the attitudes of these detainees: *“awareness of the reality”*, *“strong motivation to learn the Italian language and culture”*, *“determination to attempt a different way of life”*. In these cases, success consists mainly in discovering own potential, self-esteem, willing to get knowledge and skills that

can be immediately spent in the labour, a better approach with the dominant culture. Besides this, particularly for ROMA girls, success may also consist in acquiring gender awareness and competences, as well as knowledge related to rights, on personal and childcare, in gaining the pleasure of reading short stories, also “*to be able to write to own lover*”.

School-and-prison-related factor.

It is not always possible to set up the required school pathways in a timely fashion in a JDC. Despite the efforts of educators, for young foreigners it is all the more difficult to receive personalised teaching, catering for their individual cultural and school specificities. A number of respondents have explained that short stays in a detention centre contributes to making their educational pathway fragmentary and not very effective. The intention is to pursue module-based education, preferably with individual care, but this is difficult to implement, considering the imbalance between needs and available resources.

The respondents provided suggestions concerning both educational elements and cultural and multicultural aspects aimed at stimulating the motivation of the young detainees. On the one hand, suggestions were made to “*involve teachers in any transfer from one detention centre to another*”, “*hire special needs teachers for learning disorders*”, and provide ad hoc training for teachers.

A relevant structural problem for female detainees is the limitation of just three JDCs in the whole country. This geographical marginality, together with public transport issues, discriminate female detainees, preventing or severely limiting visits from friends and family, increasing a sense of isolation and disconnection from the outside world.

Interactions between the factors listed above.

The relationship between educators and students and between students is a central issue. Deprivation of emotional ties and a difficult relationship with a family that is absent or abroad generate a sense of loneliness that is difficult to deal with by educators, as “*the guys do not like to talk about their stories*”. In particular, UAMs do not talk about their journey, and if they do, it is in an offhand manner: the length of their journey, the deaths, the cost of the journey, and what they expected but did not find. Only if a context of communication is created is it possible to listen to what they want to say. Positive facts that emerge in educational pathways may be put in relation with inner changes in the youth and with changes in the systems around them. What makes the difference is probably an interaction between a number of elements. The creation of a positive climate is briefly mentioned, suggesting the creation of “*a serene atmosphere, to make them feel at ease*”; and “*a context that is perceived as favourable to the world of youth, their expectations*”.

In the responses of JDC operators, interpersonal factors are referred to repeatedly, such as letting go of distrust, recovering self-esteem, and making plans for the future, all what in literature has been connected to - particularly psychological - well-being: *“A relationship of trust is important; establishing a relationship is the first step”; “Everything rests on the relationship that is established, mainly on the trust you gain. At the beginning, the guys put you to the test; they challenge you”; “young girls detainees, if they feel to be observed as ‘rare animals’, they become openly opposed to the teachers. Some teachers have left right after a first experience”.*

The request to young detainees to participate in an educational pact may be received as a signal that they are worthy of trust; *“Roma girls are more motivated than boys, as they see it (the educational pact) as personal redemption”.*

As regards the relationship between teachers and students, a greater presence of cultural mediators would be needed, as reported, to tackle cultural issues. Conflicts in the intercultural dialogue are often not easily solved, with reference, for example, to gender: *“North African boys from different countries are generally very much in agreement on the conception of women”*, and this sometimes poses problems of poor recognition of female teacher’s authority by some students: *“Once I scolded a boy and then he told me: ‘don’t you dare talk me like that in front of the others”*. Other barriers arise in the classroom when culturally sensitive topics are dealt with, such as homosexuality.

On the other hand, it was reaffirmed that sometimes *“conflicting relations between young people from different cultures may lead to a difficult environment in the classroom”*. The conflicts between guys that feel they are carriers of different cultures are frequently mentioned in the interviews, transversally regarding various ethnic and cultural groups. In the prison context, the elements of identification with one’s own group, tend to create walls towards others, rather than enhancing forms of multiculturalism. Young Roma, for example, *“they feel they belong to the Roma people ... their identity is based on family, tradition, ... that way of life, historical mythology”*, however, even *“Muslim Roma and Christian Roma ... feel different”*. Some Roma girls *“believe that their only possible identity is not to enter the school contest that assimilates and pushes them away (from the group)”*. Precepted cultural distance leads to condition of reciprocal social exclusion.

It seems that inside the prison, the sense of isolation and marginalization leads to increasing identification with ingroups. The ethnic group cohesion seems, along with belonging, to provide life with meaning and find interior strength.

It has been observed that *“more time and space should be found to enhance different cultures”* and that *“we still do not do enough from the points of view of the culture of origin and of interculturality”*.

By a somehow different perspective, someone observed that sometimes “*interculturality takes place through crimes*”, “*guys from different nationalities met in rehabilitation community or in the neighbourhood*”, giving rise to a multiculturalism heralding new belongings.

Macrosystem factors.

These have to do with the characteristics of the current social, political and economic context, affecting the lives of detained youth, despite their condition of being confined. The labour market is of particular importance, next to a set of rules and regulations, such as minimum working age. UAMs expressly coming to Europe to seek work often do not understand the legal minimum working age. The economic environment should also include working opportunities outside prison, training courses with internship and traineeship, work bursaries, which might be lacking; this deficiency is felt especially for foreigners and foreign women, highlighting discrimination that results in a lack of opportunity. Constraints also arise from the young detainees’ legal position, as these measures are intended only for those who received a final conviction. Finally, a negative impact results from local communities being reluctant to accept criminal offenders. The opportunities to use educational qualifications to earn income are not so many for immigrants. Furthermore, once out of prison these youth have to put up with precarious conditions, not only economic, which the policies implemented by social services can affect very little.

The Roma girls, despite not lacking in motivation and aspirations, are hardly interested in possible training offers “*because they do not think that they will continue outside the prison a path that leads them to practice a profession*”. In fact, the discriminatory process that restricts integration into the labour arena is actualized by both the external environment and the family itself.

Discussion

JDC environment represents a situation of extreme margin that continually confronts minors and young people, in particular foreigners, with its constraints and limits.

First of all, we found that foreign minors and young adults are overrepresented compared with autochthons, considering their numerical presence in Italy. The principle of “residual nature of detention” – a cornerstone of the system of juvenile criminal procedure since 1988 - is not properly implemented for foreign minors, due to the fact that young foreigners may not have any family or dependable adults in Italy who may allow for the application of non-detention measures. Following to the law Zampa (47/2017), protection

measures have been defined for UAMs, and the new role of “voluntary tutor” has been introduced, involving citizens, after adequate training, in being a guide for UAMs. Nevertheless, still lot needs to be done to avoid that those ones belonging to most fragile or adverse contexts, enter JDCs.

The prison environment, with temporal and spatial limits, challenges the definitions of psychological well-being: it is not easy to talk about a possible increase in well-being when we usually can envisage just short periods of stay and few events suitable for the youngsters to experience psychological well-being: feeling competent, gaining self-acceptance and feeling able to meet the demands of the social environment.

Even the multicultural context finds possible expression only in limited and rigidly defined spaces. It seems that inside the prison, the sense of isolation and marginalization leads to increasingly identify oneself with the peers of the same ethnic group. The positive identification with the ingroups, conceptualized moving from the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), helps to understand the phenomenon.

It was observed that individuals, from migrants to ethnic minorities, tend to incorporate two or more cultures into their identity (Arnett, 2002; Kim, 2015). In prison this process, due to the demanding task of developing own identity, has proved to be challenging, and education system finds it hard to facilitate it. We have seen how sometimes “interculturality takes place through crimes”.

The survey and the in-depth interviews anyway show some positive results, ascribable to a successful trajectory, within a variable range of potential ones. In addition to obtaining course credits, or a diploma, being able to attend a school course and participate in an educational pathway is already an achievement. This implies overcoming the *sadness*, *anguish*, sense of *isolation* and *failure* that entry into prison brings with it or tends to make worse.

Interviews frequently highlighted that even finding some peace of mind and experiencing interesting situations may both be considered success factors. The same was said for having “*the perception of being good at something*”, “*experiencing oneself as skilled in a training environment*”, being able to make something for oneself or for others, and amazing a family member or educators by making a product, or giving a performance: all factors confirming a positive trajectory in the identity construction process.

Successful achievements by detainees have been documented by the relevant number of diplomas, mainly linguistic, but also relative to school degrees and to certifications of accomplished handcraft and artisanal activities, showing that, in spite of short periods of detention and of the obstacles of environmental context, prison can also represent, for some disadvantaged minors and young adults, the first place of care.

Therefore, the mentioned results include all the factors that sanction important moments in the development of one's identity. We found similarities to what was shown with reference to school experience of refugee children and unaccompanied minors who live in residential care facilities and attend provincial centres for adult education (Augelli et al., 2018), as "students confidence grew with activities and projects they participated in and could be proud of" (Bartlett et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, less migrants than autochthons perform internship outside prison - relevant for imagining a future work situation - and the number is much lower for women migrants. The discrimination connected to the stigma of prison becomes higher for ROMA girls, who are faced with constraints both from the dominant culture and from familiar/group culture.

Ethnic/cultural discrimination joins gender discrimination. Even the right of attending classes is not properly taken into account for young mothers with children: instead of adequate learning environment, they receive grounds for course exemption.

A reflection on education inside detention centres helps us to detect aspects in common with education outside prison. The educational targets identified by the Circular letter of the Department of Juvenile Justice (DGMC, 2013) are in line with the "key competences" promoted by European Union, OECD and UNESCO, in particular, "developing self-esteem", "seeing one's personal dimension accepted, expressing interests and experiences", "acquiring the ability to be cooperative in a social dimension" (Council of Europe, 2018), as well as students' learning experiences "having intrinsic value" (OECD, 2019), and developing "self-esteem and personal attachment in a trusted setting" (Claeys-Bouuaert, 2014). However, if these skills are difficult to acquire and assess in many educational settings 'outside' prison, they are daunting 'inside' prison, due to difficulties in the identity construction process, loss of self-esteem, surrender of individual responsibility and emotional isolation. These skills are hardly recognizable in an "infantilizing" detention model (Piré, 2014; Sbraccia e Vianello, 2016; Oggioni, 2019b; Migliori, 2020) opposed to a responsabilising one (Bertolini, 2015; Allred et al, 2013; Brancucci, M, 2016). Education cannot disregard the efforts that each one, and particularly foreigner young people in detention condition, undertake in the difficult process of identity development. What Walther (2015) recalls in terms of "struggle for recognition" (Honneth, 1996) is the dialectic relationship of socialisation, identity and inequality. "Love", "respect" and "esteem" are the three dimensions of recognition identified by Honneth, contributing respectively to self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. The educational setting of the juvenile justice system, side by side with the whole prison institution and the social environment should move in the direction to embed these principles in order to positively influence the

process of identity development.

Our analysis of factors conditioning educational success according to LeCompte & Dworkin's approach, showed specific elements that may positively act on the educational setting in the prison.

A wide range of elements are among the key factors affecting the processes of identity development, the commitment in and accomplishment of any educational programme, the planning of alternatives to a prison-bound life. They include the positive influence of emotional support, the high level of agency of many young detainees, the beneficial consequences of an effective context of communication, of a constructive climate among detainees, of good relationships between teachers and students, of the opportunities to make use of educational qualifications.

In particular, establishing a relationship of trust with adults who take care of detainees and a feeling of being accepted seem to be an undeniable premise for embracing the contribution that other people can provide to the construction of life projects. "Responsibility and reciprocity" (Memoli & Sannella, 2017) still seem to be key issues in education for promoting social inclusion.

In addition, studies concerning UAM minors in residential care facilities, noted that the possibility of building a relationship of trust is a prerequisite for understanding "how to read the future through the present and to take steps toward an unclear and unstructured horizon" (Augelli et al., 2018).

Sometimes, the educational proposal is only the set in motion of a slow process that will mature in even long times. For instance, we have been reported that some young mothers acquired a stronger awareness and later on they passed on to their children the idea they could change their lives. In these cases, a generational leap was observed.

To conclude based on Frederick Erickson's statements (1987) for whom school success is also used reflectively to highlight what all actors, persons, and institutions can do, the innovation in educational practices cannot progress separately from a pursuit of change in society and from a renewed awareness of the link between personal development and the requests of the social system. "Responsibility and reciprocity are understood as compulsory epistemological categories for the design of policies aimed at overcoming conflicts, the promotion of social cohesion and the creation of social inclusion".

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