

education
and/for
social justice

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«Adult training to support youth empowerment:
evidence from European case studies»

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EMPOWERMENT, A THEORETICAL INSIGHT

Empowerment refers to a transformative process, linked to the change of people, groups and communities, deriving from a more or less negotiated interaction with the environmental and socio-cultural context in which they operate (Barnes, 1998)

It is in fact a **democratic process** of distribution and **sharing of power** that can be supported and priority should be given to groups that have less capacity to act for self-determination (Maso et al., 2017).

In the field of educational and pedagogical studies it is mostly applied to the topic of **disadvantage**, in its **intersectional dimensions** of ethnicity-education and gender-education (Biasin & Evans, 2019).

but the literature also gives relevant weight to the **role of the skills** that facilitate this transformative process (Loots & Walker, 2015; Monkman, 2011).

EMPOWERMENT AND SOFT SKILLS

According to (Xavier Ucar *et al.*, 2017) we intend to analyze the concept of **empowerment** of young people **in formal and non-formal education** paths, with reference to the relational and emancipatory dimensions of growth and well-being of **fragile young people**

The study of the empowerment of disadvantaged young people must be read in the broader context of **realigning the youth-adult relationship** and **questioning traditional roles of power** to acquire knowledge and skills for the personal development and well-being of young people.

Training programs for educational figures can indirectly influence the trajectories of young people: supporting their aspirations

Adults in educational paths have the key role of **supporting and facilitating the development** and strengthening of young people's **soft skills** (Rey, 2003).

In this sense, the **educational context** is to be perceived as an **activator of skills**,
from a socio-constructivist perspective

Supporting **soft skills**: critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration,
communication, creativity, flexibility/adaptability, leadership, social skills (21^o Cent.
Skills paradigm; Aslamiah *et al.*, 2021)



Their development is strictly connected with **teachers and educators lifelong learning** → to adequately respond to young people's needs

The aim of our contribution is to discuss the results emerging from the analysis of three projects funded by:

- National funds: the (**AMIF**) Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and **Con I Bambini** (to tackle educational poverty)
- European funds: (**Erasmus+**)

We will focus on the **teachers and educators' training paths** who have experienced train-the-trainer programs

Goal: support the motivation and empowerment of young people and **improve the social inclusion** of the target population

PROJECT BACKGROUND



Target population: 2500 minors and 400 adults (parents, teachers, educators and professionals in edu paths)

Intervention: (among others) strengthening of professional skills to support young disadvantage people/ the edu. community,



Target population: 80 young people with migratory background, 50 educators, 15 families.

Intervention: aimed at social inclusion, peer to peer edu, school/VET alternation



Target population: young people with socio vulnerabilities

Interventions: implementation of train the trainers' paths aimed at detection and reinforcement of pupils' soft skills

IRCrES role was in between evaluation and research:

- We intend to study educators' **methodologies and approaches** to support the empowerment of vulnerable young people
- Evaluate the **effectiveness** of the actions implemented

How?

Collecting qualitative data:

Focus group, interviews, evaluative brainstorming

The results come from multilevel thematic analysis conducted through
MAXQDA software

- 1) **Open coding**, i.e., the first phase of free coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1999) which allows us to take a first dive into the data available to answer the research question. Already in this phase the first reference categories begin to emerge, which will be organized in the second phase.
- 2) The second phase involves the grouping of the labels from the first coding into multi-comprehensive and **data-driven categories**
- 3) Hierarchization and **merging of codes** and overlapping categories axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)
- 4) Post coding analysis with **visual tools and maps**

What educational strategies work for promoting the empowerment of young people?

CODE SUP	CODE	% SEGMENTS CODED IN THE DOCUMENT
● EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP	Permeability & beauty	9,43
● EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP	Communicate young people's tools	9,43
● SYNERGY WITH THE EDU COMMUNITY	Schools	8,49
● SOFT SKILLS	Communication	7,55
● EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP	overcome digital divide	7,55
● SOFT SKILLS	Creativity for problem solving	6,60
● SOFT SKILLS	Emphaty	5,66
● SOFT SKILLS	Tools	5,66
● EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP	Development authonomy	5,66
● EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP	Experience with target population	5,66
● SYNERGY WITH THE EDU COMMUNITY	Associations	5,66
● EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP	Individual plans	4,72
● SYNERGY WITH THE EDU COMMUNITY	Families	4,72
● EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP	Space value - experience value	4,72
● EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP	Vision	3,77
● EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP	Strengthening of the relationship	2,83
● EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP	Understand thebackground	1,89

- Need **new forms of communication** to reach young people and help them develop their autonomy projects
- Young people **digital tools and self-esteem** → the most fragile young people are often more capable of mastering these tools than their reference adults

Challenge: overcome digital divide

- A priority of the Edu relationship is also the creation of **individual plans**
- Bring young people closer to their reference adults, starting from non-verbal communication, to **realign emotions** through the expressive use of the body and voice

Vision → Imagining their future based on their aspirations is a lever for emancipation

- The interviewees belong to extremely varied realities: schools, third sector, public institutions → **cooperation** is the key
- Support through the **network**
- Especially in the most fragile contexts, it is essential **to take charge of the entire family unit**, to maintain the relationship of trust with young people
- **Co-planning** between the various actors → benefit of implementing joint actions, capable of having a greater impact on fragile youngest, who feel part of an integrated and solid educational project

The last strategic area for supporting the empowerment of young people concerns the development of **soft skills**

The train the trainers' activities led adults to reflect on the importance of:

- **Communication skills:** active listening and the ability to facilitate problem solving (same communicative level as young people)
- **Empathy:** identification with the target population is fundamental to find solutions and encourage learning
- **Use of creativity** to strengthen problem solving supporting creativity in a broad sense (acting in a creativity way) is a pillar of the educational plan emerging from the analyses

In the last analysis we **display similarities between codes** in a map

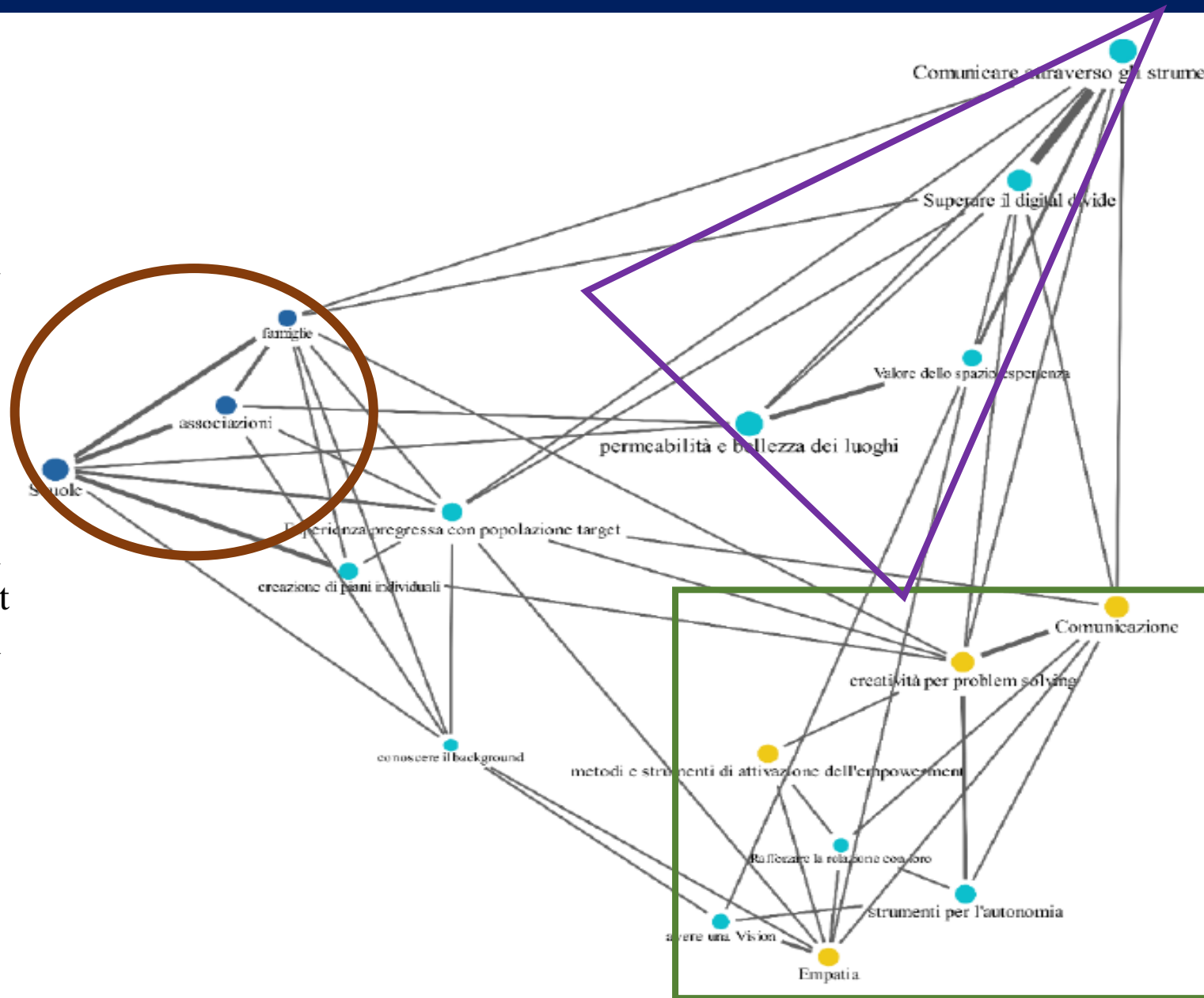
The more co-occurrences two codes have, that is, the more similarly they are used in the data, the closer they are placed together on the Code Map.

The positions on the map are calculated using the multidimensional scaling, a method of multivariate statistics (Ding, 2018).

The connecting lines are thicker the greater the number of coincidences between two codes.

If two codes are displayed closer in the code map it means that they are used in a similar way in the data (co-occurrences)

1° cluster: synergy with edu community references to schools, families and associations visibly co-occur in the same document (line thickness and proximity), which means that interviewees discussing these dimensions perceive them as closely connected



3° cluster: Edu relationship
it is larger and well connected with the other clusters, i.e. the space value (essential both in terms of development of soft skills and for the development of synergies within the ed. community)

2° cluster: soft skills
it is well connected with Vision, tools for autonomy and reinforcement of the relation: who talks about soft skills suggest an improvement of these areas

- Need to **realign** the young-adult **relationship** to support the strengthening of soft skills and for the personal development of young people with greater fragility
- The strengthening of the educational relationship therefore takes on a crucial value in defining young people life trajectories, but it must be supported by specific **life-long training programs** of educational figures
- need to **work on soft skills**, to increase the ability to support the most vulnerable young people and to promote their empowerment
- the train the trainers and the strengthening of relational and educational skills are not sufficient if there is a lack of **synergic work** between the actors of the edu. community, which from the analyzes conducted still appears to be poorly structured and organic

- Greater investments in training courses for trainers, in order to act on the empowerment of young people
- Promote actions aimed at strengthening the educational community
- We need to involve families in young people's educational paths

Our research persuaded us of the importance of carrying out more comparative studies, starting from the evaluation research conducted. The joint analysis of the data collected allows for policy reflections, which tend not to be sufficiently exploited in individual projects



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Thank you for your attention

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