Special Issue Distances

FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory, Tourism, Technology

Guest Editors

Anna Maria Zaccaria
Maria Camilla Fraudatario

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Summary

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Pietro Sabatino, Emanuele Madonia, Giancarlo Ragozini[1]

The Spatial Dimension of Early School Leaving in Campania Region: The Case of Scuola Viva Program[2]

1. Scuola Viva Programme and the different causes of early school leaving

Scuola Viva, a four-year program launched by Campania Region, over the course of its duration (2015/2019) has supported the implementation of learning, training and cultural experiences built thanks to the collaboration of schools, enterprises, citizens, and other local actors (i.e., non-governmental organisations) in order to strengthen local learning communities. Only during the first year of activities, the program made it possible the afternoon opening of 451 schools in Campania and the involvement of about 3,000 public-private actors, working together with schools in contrasting early school leaving and dropping out.[3] This led to the consolidation of practices (reflections, debates, and concrete actions) concerning the well-being of minors, young people and, more generally, the whole citizenry (Fortini, Madonia, Trezza, 2019).
Campania region represents one of the worst regions in the Italian context regarding performance indicators relating to early school leaving/drop out (MIUR, 2019; D'Arcangelo, Giuliani, 2022), although with significant internal heterogeneity. In such a context, interventions to contain the consequences of training failures and policies aimed at reversing a negative trend that has characterised this region for too long, are both necessary and crucial. "Scuola Viva" program moves in this direction. Regional data (ISTAT, 2017) show that the causes of early school leaving and dropouts cannot be limited to critical issues within the education system. There is also a multiplicity of factors, among which both the educational function of families and the lack of stable connections between all territorial structures involved in the education and training system are relevant and significant (Madonia, 2013).
Over the years, in fact, the debate in literature has expanded and enriched with new semantic components, passing from the simple idea of premature dropout – at first attributed to a process of occult selection by teachers (Besozzi, 1993) and then to socio-demographic features of the students (Gattullo, 1989) – to all those circumstances that limit, slow down or waste the possibilities of enriching one's knowledge and skills during formal education (Morgagni, 1998). Discontinuous school attendance and poor effectiveness of the educational/training action, therefore, are two other aspects to take into consideration, together with the more classic school dropout. With respect to identify the causes of such a complex phenomenon, therefore, literature provides us with the possibility of choosing between several alternatives: internal (causes concerning educational system and the characteristics of specific schools), external (concerning the general socio-economic context and the characteristic of students and their families) and causes concerning the interaction between the student's world (biographical path, strategies, norms and values) and the world of the scholastic institution (Moscati, Nigris, Tramma, 2008).
This varied set of possible causes makes the phase of defining policies to contrast early school leaving very complex, since identifying concrete actions becomes a choice that is anything but taken for granted, and this for a number of reasons. First, because it depends on the different value orientations of the political decision maker. Second, because it can refer to a very broad set of contributing causes: institutional, social, relational, purely individual (such as psychological) or

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3 Due to the difficulty of translating the Italian term of "dispersione scolastica" we are going to use "early school leaving" and "school dropout" as synonyms, referring, in both cases to "all those circumstances that limit, slow down or waste the possibilities of enriching one's knowledge and skills during formal education" (Morgagni, 1998).

strictly socio-demographic and economic factors. Third, because this universe of possible contributing causes analytically described in literature in an abstract and generalized way, assumes concrete configurations in the various local contexts. Values, norms, cultural orientations and material conditions of existence, in fact, are the broader context in which early school leaving occurs and, for the remedies to be effective, they must differ based on different territorial specificities, calibrated on the possible causes, but also, above all, on the actual resources present in the area (Madonia, 2013).

The policy-design of Scuola Viva seems to have taken this complexity into consideration, to the extent that its implementation, potentially, has represented a container of ideas, concrete interventions and relationships of local partnership configured according to the needs analysis of each territory. In line with the provisions of the 2014-2020 European Social Fund Operational Programme, Campania Region decided to promote, starting from the 2016/17 school year, a process of expansion of the educational offer of schools, in terms of both hours actually provided, and contents, intended as an instrument to support families against early school leaving and, in perspective, juvenile crime.[4]

The program, lasting three years, but then renewed for a fourth year, provided for an initial funding of 25 million euros to be distributed among the 451 schools,[5] carried out "interventions aimed at strengthening the local community through experiences and cultural paths of culture and learning based on the relationship between school, territory, businesses and citizens".[6] The formula is very simple as well as general: each school, placing itself at the head of a local partnership network,[7] had to guarantee a bare minimum of two weekly afternoon openings (at least, three hours each) during which carrying out planned activities. Each school could present only one project made up, however, of different thematic activities (modules) to be provided to a minimum of 10 participants: students enrolled in the 1st and 2nd grade state schools of Campania and/or young people up to 25 years of age.[8] The total duration of all planned modules had to be at least 240 hours.

This lack of more detailed rules has made it possible to articulate tailor-based interventions for each local context. Each school, by involving other competent actors working both on the territory or elsewhere, had the opportunity to build their own project on the basis of the knowledge accumulated, by the school staff and the whole local learning community, about the strengths to be exploited, the weaknesses to be compensated, the criticalities to be solved. Of course, it is not possible to say that all participating schools have been able to design and implement all this successfully. The available data, in fact, do not allow an assessment of what has actually been implemented. What we want to highlight, however, was the ability of the program to be able to adapt to the different needs perceived in the territories and to provide schools with the necessary autonomy to plan an intervention deemed effective. Furthermore, an aspect that should

4 The descriptive information about the experience of Scuola Viva shown in this work was the result of an analysis of the documents (decrees, notices and communications) published by the Campania Region, over the course of the various years, in the section dedicated to the program, at the following web address: http://www.fse.regione.campania.it/scuola-viva/

5 It should be noted that only the 451 institutes recruited in the first year were able to benefit, if they had requested it, from the financing of the subsequent years.

6 Public notice "Scuola Viva program", Regional Council Resolution n. 204 of 10/05/2016 (B.U.R.C. n.31 of 16 May 2016).

7 In particular, it was necessary to involve at least one local actor among institutional bodies, cultural promotion associations, social promotion associations, cooperatives, laic and religious volunteering, other non-governmental organizations, companies, oratories, etc. The participation of other schools or non-local associations was also possible.

8 Even with respect to possible participants, the public notice shows a considerable degree of inclusiveness: "the activities of the proposing educational institution must be aimed at enrolled students, students of other I and II grade schools in the area and young people up to 25 years of age of age, Italians and foreigners, providing for the widest involvement of the different population groups. The activities will have no restrictions, will be free of charge and open to the territory, so they must provide for, and guarantee, the participation of adults in general, both Italian and foreign. In relation to the size and intensity of the phenomenon of early school leaving in the region, students who have dropped out of school are considered to be the privileged recipients of the project".

not be underestimated, the three-year duration (subsequently extended to four years) immediately declared enabled the participating institutions to plan wide-ranging interventions and, if necessary, tackling complex problems whose solution is difficult, if not unlikely, in the short term. Finally, during the four years it is possible that the partnership network formed during the program was consolidated, increasing the social capital of the territory on which the intervention took place. This led to the much-desired creation and development of a permanent learning community capable of taking care of the formative path of its young members. Even in this case, however, it is not possible to say that all this really happened. However, it must be noted that the conditions for this to happen were all there. Furthermore, as regards the content of the modules, the call-for-projects provided for the full autonomy of the proposing institutes with regard to both the topics and the teaching methodologies, offering the widest possible choice between strengthening, counselling, school-work alternation, individual psychological support and parenting support.

With reference to the reflections on school dropout already carried out, it is clear that the general setting of the program represents a toolbox capable of being used in many different ways. Possible activities were very heterogeneous: from the simple afternoon opening that allows many young people to meet in an institutional place of culture, rather than in the street, passing through the didactic enhancements (in the sense of both an enhancement of the excellences and the recovery of under achievements), to extracurricular activities designed to bring young people closer to practices that they probably would never have had the opportunity to carry out (violin, riding, advanced programming courses), up to psychological support, individual guidance and parenting support. These are initiatives that respond to many of the possible causes of school dropout mentioned in literature. Moreover, attending school to carry out an activity that fascinates allows children to re-evaluate their relationship with the educational institution no longer influenced by the traditional point of view based on the two phases of teaching and evaluation.

This could help solving some individual/institution interaction problems and placing the idea of school, and its mandatory attendance, within the students' biography in a more meaningful and concrete way. Finally, even if we consider the "type" of early school leaving it addresses, it is clear that Scuola Viva program could be useful to intervene, at least in principle, on dropouts, on intermittent frequencies, and on the more general question of the waste of the formative action. It remains to be considered whether this lucky, at least on paper, phase of conception was followed by adequate implementation. The absence of data on what is actually achieved by the schools (the information available refers to what is foreseen by the projects), does not allow an assessment at the micro level, that is, of how effective the individual interventions of each school have been. Nonetheless, here we intend to deepen the macro level, that is linked to the ability of the program to operate in the most vulnerable contexts, especially those most exposed to the risk of early school leaving. Campania school audience, in fact, seems more involved with the risk of non-completion and non-continuation of secondary schools. In 2019, for example, the percentage[9] of early school leavers (ELET[10]) among young people between 18 and 24 in Campania (17.3%) is still higher than the national (13.5%), Central (10,9%) and Northern (10,5%) regions averages of the Country. A decrease of percentage of ELET over the last 15 years (2004-2019) has been recorded: the trend is very similar to what is happening in the rest of the country and in the South. This also means that there was not a reduction of the territorial gap, nor the beginning of new processes of divergence. Between 2004 (28.4%) and 2019, the ELET rate in Campania dropped by about 10 percentage points: the gap with the rest of the country remains

9 Data source for ELET at italian regional level is ISTAT.

10 The acronym stands for Early Leaving from School and Training. For the Eurostat refers to a person aged 18 to 24 who has completed at most lower secondary education and is not involved in further education or training. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Early_leaver_from_education_and_training

significant and tends to be unchanged. Competence levels of Campania students, as measured in Invalsi tests[11], is another critical sign, as it sees the region far behind both the national and the central-northern averages. It is interesting to note how the small gap in skills in Reading and Mathematics (but the same could be applied to all of the other indicators of the test) in the lower school grades starts to increase as grades go up. So, the gap among Campania and other regions of Central and Northern Italy is not very significant in primary school but then it grows in lower and upper secondary schools.
As we have already seen, in Campania this waste of resources happens on a daily basis, in a territory marked by profound internal differences: more than elsewhere, the territory presents a wide range of contexts in which unproblematic realities coexist with those affected by incredible conditions of social exclusion and risk of school dropout. The severity of the context variables in certain areas is so high that it is compatible with models of urban segregation typical of the "hyperghetto" (Wacquant, Wilson, 1993) in which the absence of productive activities produces a collapse of the social structure and the concentration of poor and marginal classes unable to access even unskilled jobs due to the narrowness of their informal social networks and the decline of institutions, starting with school.

2. Objectives and methodology

With respect to these premises, the objective of the contribution is to classify, on a very detailed geographic scale, the territory of Campania region on the basis of a synthetic index of "dropout risk". In this aspect the paper follows similar attempts in Italy of mapping dropout risk (Regione Puglia, 2019), as well as educational poverty (Pratesi, Quattrociocchi, Bertarelli, Gemignani, Caterina, 2021; Save The Children, 2018) and density of cultural and educational institutions (MIBACT, 2017). In all these cases, a detailed level of spatial analysis is essential to measure urban (and non-urban) segregation related to educational and cultural policies. Moreover, the choice of a synthetic index tries to be consistent with the multidimensional nature of school dropout causes.
Another objective of the paper is to verify how much Scuola Viva Program matched the young people most directly affected by early school leaving and educational poverty.
In other words, the study compares the territorial distribution of schools involved in the programme with a map of territorial disadvantage, as evidenced by the synthetic index of dropout risk. The lack of data available at school level (dropouts, absences, levels of learning) and the very nature of the indicators that are going to be used, shift the focus of the analysis to external causes of dropout, which refers to purely social, economic and demographic factors. Even if some internal causes can be, to a certain extent, connected to the external ones – the pedagogical action of the school is more difficult in problematic areas and with a high concentration of disadvantage (Madonia, 2013) – we are nonetheless aware of the strong weight attributed to exogenous variables. Furthermore, due to the nature of the study, nothing can be said with respect to the causes that refer to biographical or psychological factors of the young students. In any case, the tool proposed here will also try to identify the different connotations that this risk can assume in the various regional contexts, thus prefiguring itself as a real typological index.
In order to operate on a sufficiently detailed level of territorial aggregation, so as to safeguard the specificities of some territorial groups and reduce the distortion due to group heterogeneous areas in ecological analysis (Duncan, Cuzzort, Duncan, 1961), the data of the last population census (2011) relating to the census areas (*Aree di Censimento, from now on ACE*) were used. ACEs represent an intermediate aggregation (Bianchi et al., 2007; Crescenzi, Fortini, Gallo, Mancini, 2009) between the census sections (*Sezioni di Censimento*), often too small to calculate

11 "The INVALSI tests measure the quality of learning of skills – adapted of course to the age of the children examined [...] they measure some basics of critical thinking, which is inconceivable without the ability to understand texts, logical faculties, and the ability to solve new problems." (Invalsi, 2018, p.5).

some indicators, and those of the municipalities, in some cases too heterogeneous, especially when the number of residents and territorial dimension increase. It must also be noted that small municipalities correspond to a single ACE: In Campania region, this overlap between ACE and the municipal territory occurs in 483 cases out of 551. The unit of analysis selected is particularly useful in the city of Naples by operating an even more accurate disaggregation (73 ACE) compared to what would have been possible considering the neighbourhood (*Quartieri*) level (30) (De Falco, Sabatino, 2018). Although the use of data referring to 2011 may be anachronistic, it should be remembered that the policy design of Scuola Viva took place in 2015, a period of time not far from the last data available. Furthermore, the fact that only the schools involved in the first year of activities could participate in the following years, conferred a certain stability to schools' distribution. This means that there is no particular need to update the map of disadvantage as no really replanning of the program activities happened at macro level. The data were processed using SPSS, Excel and R software.

The entire set of indicators[12] initially taken into consideration, among the various options available for the construction of the typological index, refers to a series of phenomena that the literature often links to social exclusion or the risk of dropping out (Schizzerotto, Barone, 2006; Madonia, 2013; Moscati, Nigris, Tramma, 2008). In order to sinthesize the information of the collected indicators, though a few composite indicators, we decide to carry out a principal components analysis (PCA). PCA is a statistical method that looks for few latent unobserved and uncorrelated variables (usually called factors) that are linear combination of the observed indicators, maximing the explained variance. This method, followed by a Varimax rotation, is widely used to obtain data driven composite indicators (Saisana, Tarantola, 2002). In our case, looking at percentage of explained variance and following the Kaiser criterion, i.e. looking at the eigenvalues greater than one, we found two orthogonal factors (table 1), which explain approximately the 75,9% of the variance (39.7% for factor 1 and 36.1% for factor 2). The two factors refer respectively to purely socio-economic aspects, for which high scores indicate high levels of disadvantage (factor 1), and aspects concerning the human capital (factor 2), for which low scores indicate low levels of specialisation, education and skills. Table 1 reports the factor loadings, i.e. the correlation between the observed variables and the two latent factors.

Tab. 1 Factor loadings of the items on the first two factorial axis after a varimax rotation

	Factor 1	**Factor 2**
Incidence of families with potential economic hardship	,915	-,197
Incidence of large families	,822	-,162
Square meters per occupant	-,813	,176
Youth unemployment rate	,805	,227
Employment rate	-,674	,272
Incidence of high/medium specialization professions	-,015	,951
Incidence of adults with secondary or tertiary degrees	-,416	,866
Incidence of young people with tertiary education	-,347	,835
Incidence of low specialization professions	-,070	-,823

12 The initial set of indicators included: Resident population, Demographic density, Old age index, Incidence of foreign residents, Incidence of houses owned, Incidence of buildings in a poor state of conservation, Square meters per occupant, Incidence of adults with high school or university degrees, Incidence of young people with university education, Youth unemployment rate, Employment rate, Incidence of high/medium specialization professions, Incidence of low specialization professions, Incidence of large families, Incidence of families with potential economic hardship, Incidence of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). Data source of indicators is 2011 National Census data, available on ISTAT website.

The different combinations of the factor loadings associated with each factor made it possible to outline the type of risk reported in Tab. 2. "Wilson areas" represent the territories in which a strong socio-economic distress is accompanied by a very low level of human capital. The next two types ("socio-economic risk" and "human capital risk") are characterised by the strong disadvantage found on only one of the factors. "Dynamic areas with human capital risk" associate a very low human capital with a fairly favourable socio-economic situation, while "Core of local economy" refers to those areas where the most educated population of the region is concentrated (presence of management centres and specialised activities of the knowledge economy) but the socio-economic well-being levels are not particularly flourishing, neither particularly bad (high levels on the second factor, but intermediate on the first). All other ACEs showed intermediate scores on the two factors.

Tab. 2 Profile of dropout risk profile areas

Type label	**Factorial scores features**	**Label name**	**% on total regional population** (N=5.757.222)
High socio-eco risk / High human capital risk	Very high values on the first factor and very low on the second	**Wilson areas**	4,7
High socio-eco risk / Medium human capital risk	Very high values on the first factor but not particularly low on the second	**Socio-Economic Risk**	28,8
Medium socio-eco risk / High human capital risk	Values not particularly high on the first factor but very low on the second	**Human Capital Risk**	3,5
Low socio-eco risk / High human capital risk	Very low values on the first factor and very low on the second	**Dynamic with Human Capital Risk**	1,1
Intermediate ACEs[13]	Intermediate values on both factors	**Intermediate ACEs**	53,6
Very Low Human Capital Risk	Intermediate values on the first factor and very high on the second factor	**Core of local economy**	8,3

Once the possible types of disadvantages (or non-disadvantage) that characterise the various regional territories have been identified, it is necessary to understand which of these are associated with a greater or lesser risk of dropping out. In this regard, a comparison among each type was made on the basis of the averages of the indicator "Incidence of young people (15-29) who do not study and do not work" (Table 3). With respect to this latter indicator, it is important to specify two important issues. The first is that although this label is very close to the definition of NEET, this indicator is based on census classification criteria giving us significantly lower values than the NEET[14] data. The second question concerns the appropriateness of considering this indicator as indicative of the intensity of dropping out risk. In a recent document, the European Union highlighted how: «all countries (but Malta) where the proportion of early leavers is above 12% are characterised by high proportions of individuals who are simultaneously 'NEET' and 'ELET'. […] this result reflects the fact that people with low levels of education have weaker employment prospects and, there- fore, face a higher risk of being unemployed or becoming

13 Six ACEs with low level risk for the "human capital" factor and a high level of "socio-economic" factor were also included in this category. The choice to not constitute an additional category was due to the low number of territorial groups in question and by the total number of the population involved in it (83,435 units) which is of little significance.

14 In 2001, the incidence of NEETs (15-29 years) in Campania and in Italy was respectively 34.9% and 22.5%.

inactive while not in education or training. Secondly, poor labour market conditions for young people may make it hard to find a job even for people with an upper-secondary or a tertiary degree, thereby increasing their risk of becoming NEET» (European Commission, 2019, p. 54).
In other words, in countries with a share of early school leavers (ELET) above 12% and a weak productive system, the proportion of individuals who are both ELET and NEET at the same time is very high. As we have seen, due to its characteristics, Campania can legitimately be considered exemplary of this condition. Table 3, therefore, shows us the types identified, sorted by risk of dropout, in a ranking based on the incidence of young people (15-29 years old) who do not study and do not work, to which the average value for Campania and Italy have also been added. "Wilson areas" are those with the highest incidence of this category of young people (29.3%) and therefore at higher risk of early school leaving. These are followed by areas characterised by a "strong socio-economic risk" (24.7) and those with "low human capital" (22.0%), definitely above the regional average (18.4%). "Dynamic areas at risk of human capital" (18.0%) are in line with regional average, while it is interesting to note how the intermediate ACEs (16.7%), not particularly problematic compared to the regional average, are very disadvantaged if the data is compared to the national average (12.3). In all this, "Core of local economy" (11.0%) are an exception, characterised, as we have seen, by a strong presence of a population with a high level of education and highly specialised professional conditions.

Tab. 3 NEETs Index per dropout risk area

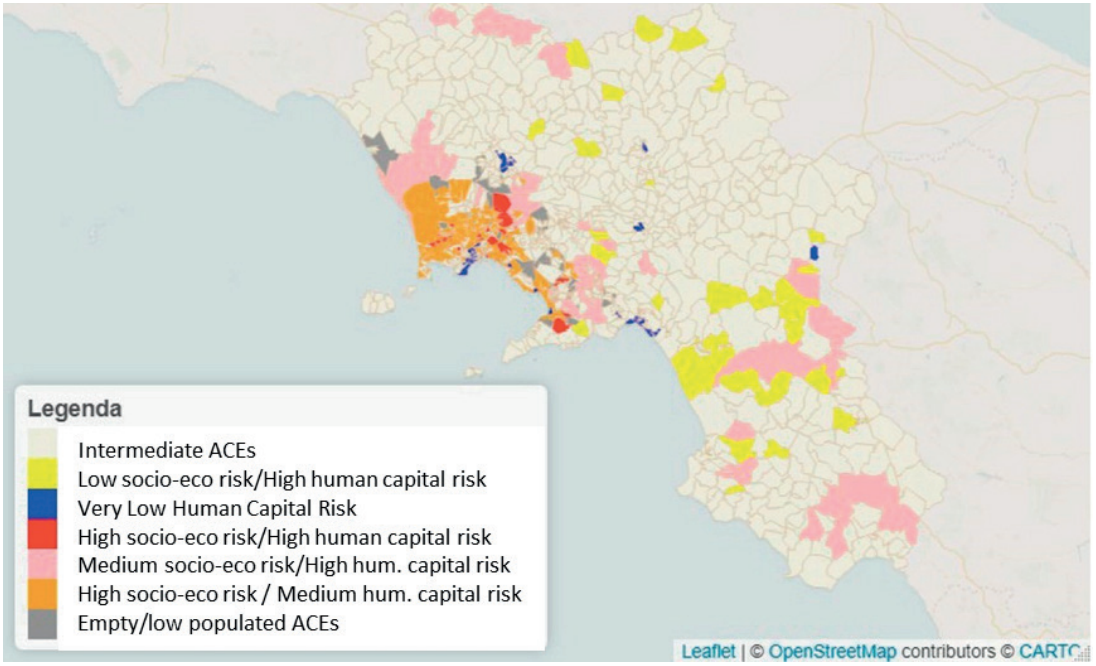
Tipo	Incidence of young people (15-29) who do not study and do not work
Wilson areas	29,3
Socio-economic risk	24,7
Human capital risk	22,0
Campania	**18,4**
Dynamic with human capital risk	18,0
Intermediate ACEs	16,7
Italy	**12,3**
Core of local economy	11,0

3. A geography of early school leaving risk in Campania

The types of areas identified have specific characteristics regarding both their size and their location within the region. Areas at risk in at least one of the two factors identified by the PCA include a population of over 2 million of inhabitants, representing the 38.0% of Campania residents in 2011[15], as shown in Tab. 2.
This classification of micro-territories within Campania Region, based on the combination of two different risk factors, allows us to outline a geography of the contexts potentially linked to early-school-leaving phenomena (Fig.1).

15 This value is the sum of the percentage of population living in Wilson (4,7%), Socio-Economic Risk (28,8%), Human Capital Risk (3,5%), Dynamic with Human Capital Risk (1,1%) areas.

Fig. 1: ACEs classified for dropout risk profile area



First of all, there are territories presenting a better situation than the regional average[16] in terms of the socio-economic risk but at the same time a higher socio-cultural risk. This is an original combination in which a small part of the regional population - about 60,000 inhabitants, just over 1% of the total - is included. This area is made up of 29 ACEs spatially well defined: none of these are located in the biggest metropolitan area and none of them are in the province of Naples.
In these territories a relative economic well-being is associated with a low level of education, and there is a very weak demand of high-skilled workforce in the labour market. These 29 municipalities/census areas are not much populated (in average less than 3,000 inhabitants), they are distant from the administrative and directional centres of the region, but relatively dynamic in terms of added value and occupation. The geography of these areas is well spread among the province, except Naples, and the most notably examples are in Piana del Sele (municipalities of Eboli and Battipaglia) and in the northern part of Benevento province (Baselice, Ginestra degli Schiavoni, Castelpagano).
The other areas with a "risk profile" show more predictable characteristics.
This is the case of Wilson areas: here there are extremely low values on both the socio-economic and the socio-cultural factors. In this class 23 ACEs are included, all located in the province of Naples, with about 250,000 inhabitants. These territories cover significant parts of the northern and eastern neighbourhoods inside the municipality of Naples and in its province (some ACEs in Pozzuoli, Quarto, Qualiano, Afragola, Caivano, Boscoreale). All these highly-risk areas register a massive concentration of residents in social housing complexes and the pervasive presence of crime organisations. A chaotic urban development, an unequal income distribution and the growth of criminal organisations determined the so-called "concentration effects" as described by Wilson (Wilson, 1993). The characteristics of these peculiar contexts have an impressive impact on the number of young people at risk of early school leaving, as seen in, which is disturbingly evident.

16 The regional average in this context is the average value in both factors, either the one representing socio-economic risk, either in socio-cultural risk one.

The group that presents exclusively a high socio-economic risk profile (but lower socio-cultural risk values) includes a much larger area, spatially placed close to the "Wilson area" above mentioned. The geography of this type (Fig. 1) is quite clear: 113 ACEs with a population of over 1.5 million inhabitants, all located in the provinces of Naples (101) and Caserta (12), following a North-East/South-West direction. It is interesting to underline that over 40% of the inhabitants in Naples province live in these areas with significant levels of unemployment and poverty.
The group presenting a high-risk level only on the socio-cultural factor (Human capital risk) has a more complex geography (Fig. 1) than the last two groups. First of all, this class is considerably smaller both in terms of number of units (49 ACEs) and population (just under 200,000 inhabitants). It is possible to identify two large territorial concentrations for this category: on the one hand the ACEs situated at the extreme edge of the Caserta-Napoli-Salerno metropolitan area, on the other, the ACEs of the extreme periphery of the region, in rural contexts with negative demographic dynamics.
Finally, to help the interpretation of risk factors' spatial dynamics, a group of ACEs without any particular risk profile was selected. These 35 ACEs have relatively average values on the socio-economic factor but are characterised by high levels on the human capital one. This territorial cluster is situated within the main towns of the region and, in the case of Naples, in its middle-upper class neighbourhoods (Vomero, Arenella, Chiaia, Posillipo, Fuorigrotta). An original geography that sees the places of residence of local elites just outside the historical centre of the city, but without settling in extra or peri-urban areas as in other western metropolises (Pfirsch, 2011). This cluster represents a social space attracting highly skilled and educated workers mostly thanks to its proximity to the most important public institutions (Universities, Research Centers, Healthcare Structures, Public bodies premises).
From the analysis some interesting points emerged. First of all, there is a crucial urban issue that involves the metropolitan area around the city of Naples where high levels of poverty and social segregation are concentrated. These are the areas where all the risk factors linked to school dropout unfold. Beyond this well-defined critical area, the geography of dropout risk involves a much wider territory where a relevant share of childhood and adolescence live.
Naples' metropolitan area at the same time includes the ACEs where the degree of exclusion of young people and adolescents from work and training is well below the national average. The urban context between Naples, Caserta and Salerno can be depicted as the most unbalanced and unequal. This is clearly the space where policies like Scuola Viva are more needed. Outside this conurbation, social exclusion/expulsion dynamics, as described by Sassen (2015) are less evident: a large part of the province of Benevento, Avellino and Salerno falls within an intermediate area without any particular alarm from the point of view of the risk factors associated to early-school-leaving. It is true that even in non-urban contexts there is a presence of risk areas, specifically linked to a low presence of a high-skilled population and to a local labour market scarcely demanding for graduate workers. All these territories can also be considered as a priority.

4. Matching policy and dropout risk geography: the spatial distribution of Scuola Viva

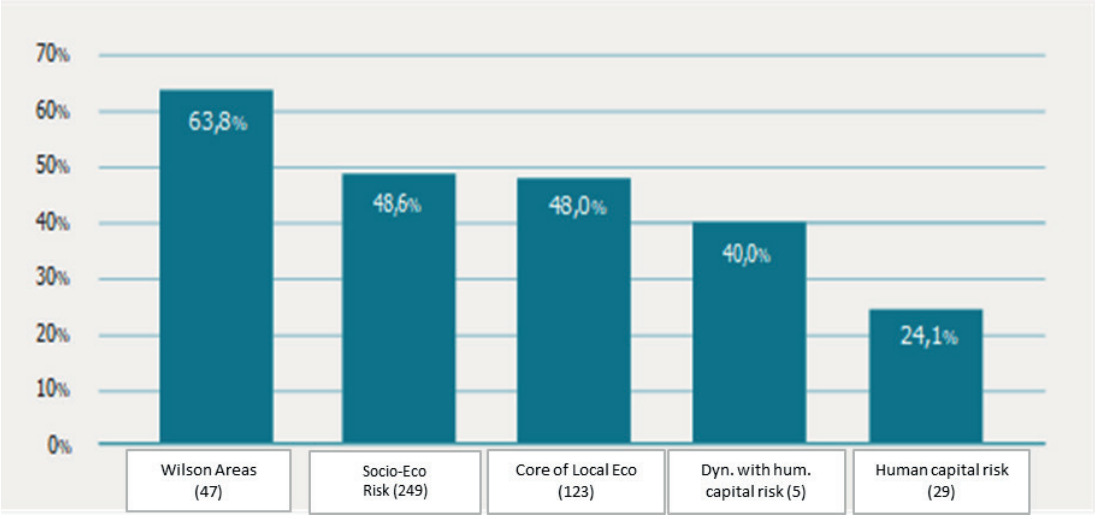
Regarding this risk map linked to school dropout, in which way the main regional education policy has been designed? A first answer, opening up further analysis can be given by studying the geographical distribution of schools funded by the "Scuola Viva" program. The percentage of school's beneficiaries of the program is by far higher in the Province of Naples: here 59% of the schools took part in the programme, compared to just over a third in the Province of Salerno (38%) and Caserta (35%). The percentages are even lower in the provinces of Avellino (24%) and Benevento (29%).

The map of the 451 schools participating in the first year of the Scuola Viva Program compared to the distribution of non-beneficiary ones (over 500) allows the match of each single institution in an ACE classified according to the typological risk index described above (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Localization of schools participating (yellow) and non-participating (blue) in "Scuola Viva" programme

Some critical issues relating to this matching method should be highlighted here. First of all, It should be noted the presence of Institutes with multiple locations, which in some contexts - notably in scarcely populated areas - can be geographically distant from each other. It is likely, in this case, that those school complexes are located in different ACEs than the main one. Moreover, since the location of a school does not necessarily correspond to the area where enrolled students live, it could not be fully representative of school dropout risk at local level.
These methodological issues are difficult to overcome considering data availability already mentioned before. However, Scuola Viva granted the access potentially to all young people up to 25 years old even if not enrolled in any of participating schools. This characteristic in some way justifies the choice of a place-based analysis rather than a school based one for evaluating the programme.
The matching between schools and areas classified by risk profile (Fig. 3) confirms what has already emerged in provincial distribution: the percentage of beneficiary institutions is much higher in areas of extreme disadvantage (Wilson areas). Here about two thirds (64%) of the schools had access to the program, against a regional average of 45%. The incidence of beneficiary institutions in the socio-economic risk areas (48.6%) is also slightly higher than the average, while a lower participation is recorded for the two "human capital risk" classes, both the dynamic ones (40%) and those not dynamic (24.1%).

Fig. 3: Percentage of schools participating in "Scuola Viva" programme per risk-profile cluster



5. Conclusions

As far as Scuola Viva Program is concerned, the analysis shows that, in some way, it has fairly intercepted the "demand" for intervention coming from urban-risk areas which, as seen, represent the vast majority of critical areas. In this sense, it is undoubted that Scuola Viva selection procedures took into account the difficulties of territorial contexts in which these schools operate. On the other hand, the distribution of the programme appears less effective in rural and peri-urban critical clusters where the risk factors are still present although to a more limited degree. In these contexts, an additional reflection on the policy design is needed in order to identify more accessible channels of participation.

More generally, the question of how to distribute public funds for combating early school leaving is as topical as ever. In 2022, the issue was the subject of controversy between the Italian Ministry of Education and an expert working group that assessed the system of indicators for selecting schools for funding as insufficient and unstructured (Gruppo di lavoro contro la dispersione scolastica, 2022). The critique moves precisely on two motivations that also underlie this contribution: first, the need to increase the number of indicators to understand the different dimensions related to school dropout; and second, to start from a "place-centered" approach in assessing the performance of each individual school, and then in determining funding criteria.

The goal here was to make a proposal for a method, potentially applicable to all educational policies, at least at the regional/local level. Future intentions therefore go in this direction: to apply the same mapping of "dropout risk areas" in other Italian (and European) regions; to update it with more recent data, such as those already released or about to be released from the 2021 Italian census; and to test other policies designed to combat early school leaving.

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