

What Right to Study? A Set of Integrated and Inclusive Policies between the University and the City

CHAIR SESSION 4

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The right to education has been recognized as a human right in a number of international conventions, among which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, crucial to ensure the dignity of all individuals. It encompasses the obligation to eliminate discrimination at all levels of the educational system, including the university system. The right to study is also provided by Article 34 of the Italian Constitution, in the framework of the fundamental constitutional principles, constitutional judgments and State and Regional legislation.

Among the extensions of the right to education, Appadurai reflected on the “right to research”¹, as the right to access tools to increase the knowledge capital essential to foster an active role in policy arenas and access to the city’s opportunities. In this regard, Appadurai highlights the need to look at rights not only as a formal status but by measuring the ability of different subjectivities to put them into practice effectively.

If we look at the right to study as both a status and a sense of belonging and enhancing subjectivities, the role of the university fits into a whole system of accessibility of opportunities, in which the city plays a key role. This perspective opens a vision where the right to study can’t be considered only as a standard—for example, about “square meters or number of services per student”—, but a complex set of integrated policies to enhance and include young people.

A set that is referenced to four main fields.

The first is the right to individual and social well-being, including psychological and group balance. Many signs reveal the precarious stability of the young generation, linked to an uncertain future not even guaranteed by the University. The Covid era has increased anxieties, loneliness, and inadequacy.

The second is the specific right to well-founded knowledge, which concerns the possibility for young people to access data in a well-versed way within a broader “right of scientific citizenship”². Scientific

¹ Arjun Appadurai, “The Right to Research,” *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 4, no. 2 (2006): 167- 177.

² Pietro Greco, “La cittadinanza scientifica,” *Micron*, 9 (2008): 6-7.

citizenship is about an idea of rights declined in its cultural dimension, in the fairness of information, access to information and knowledge, and the quality of knowledge. This awareness is more challenging to mature in the age of social networks and globalized information systems.

In addition to well-being related to the individual and his or her access to an articulated idea of culture and knowledge, I highlight a broader right to protagonism. This third field concerns the possibility of practicing full citizenship, which means the possibility of having an active role in society, including the opportunity of independently initiating enterprise and social innovation projects.

Finally, in the background, we can consider the complex right to quality of life, which relates to many aspects of young people's everyday life, outside and inside the university. It includes decent and affordable housing and the ability to easily attend places for sports, study, recreation, and leisure.

This perspective is complex and multilevel; the role of the city—public administration, but also third sector and private actors—is as crucial as that of the university. Therefore, it can only be fostered by an ecosystem of subjectivities, in which the university dialogues and collaborates with others. That is also demonstrated by the behaviours of students who move to study. Their choice is based not only on the quality of educational offers but also on evaluating the city in which it is located. Students and their families thus consider a system of urban limits and opportunities (e.g. the role of the housing market, educational and labour offerings, and openness to international contexts and networks).

Thus, right-to-study policies should be implemented as multi-level integrated policies, analyzing and programming together urban and university systems.

That is fueled by articulated and complex student needs (not just consumers and workforce), including how student rights meet other fragile rights (with a risk of competition on issues such as housing, mobility and transportation, public spaces and services) and how they can play an active role in-for the city.

It is also about building a political vision at different scales that can be declined into an operational dimension that can test this renewed idea of the right to study.

The challenge for universities today is where this vision is generated, through which coalitions, and with which policy tools.

References

Appadurai, Arjun. "The Right to Research." *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 4, no. 2 (2006): 167- 177.

Greco, Piero. "La cittadinanza scientifica." *Micron*, 9 (2008): 6-7.