

Measuring and representing educational poverty. An empirical application of recent indicators

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The concept of educational poverty (EP) has appeared in academic literature since the Nineties of the 20th century but, despite the passage of several decades, there is still no full consensus on its definition and operationalization. Initially the concept of EP was developed in the context of research on poverty. Then scholars sustaining approaches such as that of capabilities, of human development and of living condition contributed to a better definition of EP concept, stressing the idea that also non-material aspects of deprivation should be considered in order to describe well-being and quality of life. According to this perspective, education and capabilities flourishment are essential to define the living conditions, support personal fulfilment and a full citizenship. Other scholars have then explored the issue of the multidimensional measurement of poverty to analyze the EP.

In recent years, in Italy, the effort of the NGO Save the Children Italia to stimulate the debate on the definition of EP, and the role of Impresa Sociale Con I Bambini in the allocation of significant financial resources to support interventions to tackle this multidimensional phenomenon, contributed to raise the attention on the critical issues connected to the definition and the measurement of EP.

The measurement of EP is not a trivial operation, since it is a multidimensional phenomenon that requires to consider several intervening variables. The number and type of dimensions to be considered for measuring EP is the subject of heated debate, highlighting how the phenomenon is complex and composed of different dimensions interacting in its definition.

Save the Children Italia and ISTAT have played an important role in the debate by implementing some EP indices, based on different indicators, considering both contextual and individual determinants. However, the process of defining the most effective measure of EP is still on the way. The debate put the accent on some issues related to the lack of data on specific dimensions, the need to detect more effectively the non-cognitive skills, to define the targets to be included in the minor's population addressed in EP research, to investigate the role of personal resources, of parenting, of educational community and of the quality of children's relations in compensating the initial material disadvantages.

The quantification of a phenomenon depends indeed on its definition. So different definitions of EP lead to different measurements, and different measurements lead to different representation of the phenomenon itself. The purpose of the paper is to provide an empirical example of how differently the EP scenario in a certain territory

can be described, according to the use of an index rather than another. This work will be supported by the analysis of data collected in a local project aimed at reducing EP, among a population of students of the province of Brescia, using different indicators, such as those of the Save the Children and of ISTAT.

The empirical analysis proposed will consider both contextual and individual aspects recognized in the recent indices as potential determinants of educational poverty, so the nature of the data used to picture the entity of the phenomenon at a territorial level are both secondary and primary. Around 1000 questionnaires have been collected through an online survey submitted between 2020 and 2021 to the students of 23 lower secondary schools and 5 upper secondary schools located in three district areas (4-Val Trompia, 9-Bassa Bresciana Centrale and 12-Val Sabbia). Some secondary data will be collected among those available at local level. Some original indicators will also be used to investigate specific dimensions.

Being aware of the experimental nature of the proposal, the paper purpose is to provide an empirical example of different possible representation of EP using different parameters, in order to stimulate the debate on which indicators can be more effective, according to different contexts, which are the most difficult to collect, and which are still missing.,