De Europa
Vol. 6, No. 2 (2023), 7-13
ISSN 2611-853X
www.deeuropa.unito.it

Surviving crises – through education?

Eduardo Barberis, Marcelo Parreira do Amaral

Introduction

Europe has faced several moments that have been labelled as crises in its recent past – to *name* but a few: the 2007/8 financial crisis, the so-called migration crisis after 2014, Brexit and its reverberations for political stability, the COVID-19 crisis. Some analysts may disagree, rightly noting that European societies constantly faced a number of challenges: just focussing on the post-War period, we may mention at least the Cold War, the 1968 students protests and following political turmoil, the democratization of Southern European countries. To the point that the concept of crisis, even if multifaceted and ambiguous, can be considered a key concept in Western though. Especially from late 18th century, when it started to be used as a metaphor of political, economic, and historical radical changes (Koselleck 2006).

Nevertheless, seen from a distance, and considering many economic and social indicators, after World War II the idea of an optimistic, never-ending progress was often there. Not by chance, welfare analysts talk about a Golden Age – the *Trente Glorieuses* – where growth and expansion of public provisions granted a safety net for many Europeans (Ferrera 2008). In the field of education, post-war decades saw the generalization of mass secondary education, with the growing participation of groups excluded before: women, working classes, minorities (Tomka 2013; Rogers *et al.* 2010).

The promise of progress within the frame of national industrial capitalism and welfare provisions was first challenged with the oil crisis in the 1970s. From then on, the mid-century social compromise (Crouch 1999) started to crumble: full employment, decreasing inequalities, management of social conflicts via democratic arenas, the Keynesian consensus based on the active role of the public actors in the economy more and more faded (Singer 1997; Jessop 2002).

In this respect, the crises from the 1970s onward were based on a systemic political and economic transformation that seem to speed up with limited chance to find a way out.

The experience of crisis is somehow becoming more common, part of a new normal – a systemic unsettling without a clear outcome (James and Steger 2022): the 2007/8 financial crisis; the so-called migration crisis after 2014; Brexit and its reverberations for political stability; the COVID-19 syndemic crisis; the new armed conflicts at the gates of Europe.

Eduardo Barberis, University of Urbino Carlo Bo, eduardo.barberis@uniurb.it
Marcelo Parreira do Amaral, University of Muenster, parreira@uni-muenster.de

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.13135/2611-853X/8483

Obviously enough, this condition has placed policymaking and governance under substantial distress. All these new and unexpected crises worked to exacerbate already long-lasting dilemmas in the multilevel relations between the European Commission, nation-states, regional and local authorities. Although experienced differently across the continent, with more or less "resilient" contexts (where Italy and Germany stand out for their respective ranking, being the first one of the least resilient and the latter one of the most resilient EU Member States – see Alessi *et al.*, 2020), these are major, across-the-board societal challenges as they become visible, for instance, in the difficult coordination of policy measures in many fields: education/training and youth policy are among the most relevant ones, given the evidence of both their centrality in European policy-making (*e.g.*, within the social investment state strategy), and the difficult social integration of younger generations (Morel *et al.* 2011; Irwin and Nilsen 2018; Parreira do Amaral *et al.* 2020).

Policymaking arenas are ridden with key challenges in their developments, in consideration of raising constraints in the performance of public actors, that concern foundational issues: what are the boundaries of the arenas of solidarity, both in geographical and social terms; which principles and limits are relevant in defining multilevel governance arrangements; how a balanced outcome between setting and reaching common goals, and taking into consideration spatial differences can be achieved. Ultimately, how spatial and social inequalities can be curbed in a diverse but united Europe (Kazepov 2010).

This themed issue calls attention to education and youth policies as key elements in finding a way out of crises for Europe, as arenas directly shaping the future of the Continent. European Union's crisis management through policymaking in education, training, and youth policies can be observed via different points of view, focussing on key present and future challenges – in particular in their intended as well as unintended relations with the creation of economic growth and social inclusion throughout the Continent (Cabane and Lodge 2019; see also Rambla 2022).

Amidst efforts made to create a European knowledge-based society/economy, global and continental thrusts towards adopting specific models and governance principles in the field of education/training (Ertl 2006) – such as 'governing by numbers' and comparative large-scale assessments such as PISA – created standardizing pressures that tend to disregard different regional/national realities. Similarly, in a field where national path-dependency is utmost such as in youth policy, recent European initiatives and actions tackling so-called vulnerable groups (*e.g.* policies targeting Early School Leavers, young people Not in Education, Employment or Training, as well as measures to improve school to work transitions and youth employment, among the others) started not only mainstreaming specific understandings of active inclusion, but also yielding highly uneven effect on European regions due to their varying contextual and institutional arrangements (Hvinden *et al.* 2019; Mertanen *et al.* 2020; Milana and Vatrella 2020).

The regulation of education is one of the building bricks of nation- and state-making in Europe, as much as the transition to labour markets calls into considera-

tion the huge varieties among national capitalisms and ways of regulating economies – still differentiated notwithstanding common (neoliberal) trends and EU coordination processes (Heidenreich 2022). Finally, in the last 20 years at least, we are seeing an increasing return of spatial cleavages and inequalities, along different directions (urban/rural; centre/periphery; dynamic vs. lagging-behind regions; large metropolitan hubs vs. small towns), that impact also on institutional capacity and check and balances (*e.g.* redistribution), on the priorities, social problems and governance structures involving our target policies (Iammarino *et al.* 2019; van Vulpen and Bock 2020).

All in all, the actual priorities, coordination mechanisms, and outcomes are subject to relevant variations that are worth to be taken into consideration both in policy and academic analyses.

1. Focus and orientation

In this respect, this special issue includes a set of six papers that deal with the above-mentioned challenges from a range of perspectives, mostly starting from an interdisciplinary academic and policy dialogue between Germany and Italy. We identified three key themes to be addressed, listed below.

1.1 Economic Crises, Inequalities and Youth in Education, Training, and the Labour Market

Europe has faced financial and economic crises of historic proportions. Since 2007/2008, the volatility in the world's financial markets caused major consequences for European member states and citizens, inducing vast public policy interventions in order to secure the stability of the financial system and support European economy. The European Union's has made considerable attempts at a coordinated framework included policy interventions to control and mitigate as well as resolve the economic and financial turmoil, though less has been achieved in terms of crisis resolution (Bieling 2012; Heins and de la Porte 2015). The latter is arguably related to a well noted nexus in the relationship between state and market, namely that while states are entrusted with regulating and setting limits to markets, they also are key to creating the conditions within which markets are to thrive – with very different perspectives on how this has to be done (Jessop 2002).

This issue is dealt transversally in at least two articles: Lello and Bazzoli discuss the consequences of socio-economic inequalities – also impacted by economic crises – on youth political participation, showing how class penalties are underdiscussed, but still relevant in Europe: the entanglement of educational, political and economic participation risk to reproduce such disadvantages intergenerationally. The argument is strongly consistent with Parreira do Amaral and colleagues, focussing on the crisis of citizenship and the citizenship in times of crises, where economic participation has an ambivalent inclusive and exclusionary effect. As a result, the amount, and the type of investment in education can be considered as one of the key factors impacting young people's life courses heavily.

1.2 Global Migration, Mobile Youth and European Integration

The so-called "migration crisis" has been framing European politics and policies on the incorporation of minorities from an immigrant background in recent years. Regional crises and the limitation of legal channel to enter the EU put European, national, and local institutions under severe stress, and under scrutiny of human rights observers: externalization of border controls and violence, the management of asylum seekers' application are issues at stake (Ambrosini *et al.* 2020). Also, the EU pact on migration and asylum, in an effort to couple border control, migration management and effective integration is unlikely to be effective given the premises of present and past problems (Thym and Odysseus Academic Network 2022).

The contributions in this issue focus on different dimensions of being young and migrant in Europe: the inclusion of minorities from immigrant background – old and new – in education and labour market remains an open question; and there is extensive evidence of intergenerational inequalities in access and success for generations of citizens with immigrant parents, as much as of marginalization and exclusion of new migrants, asylum seekers and refugees (Gabrielli and Impicciatore 2022).

Four contributions in this issue focus on related themes. The ethnographic account by Marconi on Ceuta and Melilla remarkably shows the encounters of different youth – those trying to cross the border and those volunteering to support them, both under the suspicious gaze of authorities controlling the borders. Her article raises much needed questions on the long-term scars of border management, which will affect the future of Europe, and of the global youth looking at Europe. The contributions by Morris-Lange and Rother on refugees' access to vocational education and training in four EU countries, and by Ince-Beqo and colleagues on minor refugees' access to education in Italy and Greece show that the border is not only external. Barriers to basic rights to education – and also to a functionalist approach to migration – penetrate educational and vocational institutions, producing and reproducing refugee disadvantage in the long run. Last but not least, Avolio and colleagues add an interesting focus on another type of relation between migration and education in Europe, *i.e.*, the vocational and professional qualifications of new professions working with migrants, as the intercultural mediators. They show that the EU-level debate is scantly turned into a solid national-level policy, limiting the potential effectiveness of bridging figures in the incorporation of minorities.

1.3 European Identity and Political Participation of Younger Generations

Finally, the political dimensions. As we have already mentioned above, the consequences of the economic crisis taking place since 2007/2008 throughout Europe have impacted youth opportunities – even though with national and local differences related to welfare and educational systems, and younger generations' structural position before the crises.

This can be translated also into specific consequences in the political arenas, *e.g.*, a certain distance between youth and mainstream party politics, as well as a wither-

ing of their feelings and enthusiasms towards the European construction. Scholarship has highlighted a general "greying" of Western European democracies (Goerres 2009), in that younger cohorts are nowadays less active than the adult and more mature ones, in the field of conventional participation but even in social movements and direct activism. "Apathy", however, is not an accurate diagnosis, as it can be questioned to what extent European and national politics actually address young people's interests, hardships, and demands. In this respect, the contribution by Lello and Bazzoli shows a number of influencing factors on participation – in which education seems more important than socio-economic conditions.

The picture emerging from the collection of articles shows several barriers different youth groups face to be active part of European societies. Notwithstanding a quite common formal engagement toward youth, politics and policies seem unable to grasp the complexity of becoming an adult in critical times – fragmenting opportunities, lacking a clear-cut vision for the future, and a shared understanding of how an inclusive, open society can work. In this respect, there is much space for an EU action to coordinate a renewed arena to debate the common future of its citizens.

2. Acknowledgments

The background idea and most of the contributions in this themed issue of *De Europa* were born in a dialogue between the two co-editors, taking the opportunity of the research programme *Hochschuldialog mit Südeuropa* (Higher Education Dialogue with Southern Europe) issued by the *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* (DAAD – German Academic Exchange Service). This led to the DAAD funding of a Summer School in 2021, organized in collaboration between the University of Münster (Germany) and the Ph.D. programme in Global Studies at the University of Urbino Carlo Bo (Italy), that had two key events: an online preliminary discussion in March 2021, and three days of on-site presentations at the University of Urbino Carlo Bo – notably enough one of the first in-person events after the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The different events involving established researchers and students at doctoral and M.A. levels from Germany and Italy offered both opportunity for an open dialogue about the social issues at stake and professional development training in the state-of-the-art in relevant academic debates.

The decision to translate this rich debate into a themed issue was shared with the late director of *De Europa*, Umberto Morelli, that warmly welcomed the idea. We thank him for his openness, and we would like to remember him with respect and gratitude.

Also, we would like to thank the managing editor Elisabetta Tarasco for her constant support.

References

Alessi Lucia, Benczur Peter, Campolongo Francesca *et al*. (2020). "The Resilience of EU Member States to the Financial and Economic Crisis". *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 148, 569-598.

Ambrosini Maurizio, Cinalli Manlio, Jacobson, David (eds) (2020). *Migrations, Borders, and Citizenship*. Cham: Springer.

Bieling Hans-Jürgen (2012). "EU facing the crisis: social and employment policies in times of tight budgets". *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, vol. 18, n. 3, 255-271.

Cabane Lydie, Lodge, Martin (2019). *Dealing with transboundary crises in the European Union: options for enhancing effective and legitimate transboundary crisis management capacities*. London: TransCrisis.

Crouch Colin (1999). *Social Change in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hvinden Bjørn, Hyggen Christer, Schoyen Mi Ah, Sirovátka Tomáš (eds) (2019). *Youth Unemployment and Job Insecurity in Europe*. Cheltenham: Elgar.

Ertl Hubert (2006). "European Union policies in education and training: the Lisbon agenda as a turning point?". *Comparative Education*, vol. 42, n. 1, 5-27.

Ferrera Maurizio (2008). "The European welfare state: Golden achievements, silver prospects". *West European Politics*, vol. 31, n. 1-2, 82-107.

Gabrielli Giuseppe, Impicciatore Roberto (2022). "Breaking down the barriers: educational paths, labour market outcomes and wellbeing of children of immigrants". *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 48, n. 10, 2305-2323.

Goerres Achim (2009). *The political participation of older people in Europe*. Cham: Springer.

Heidenreich, Martin (2022). *Territorial and Social Inequalities in Europe*. Cham: Springer.

Heins Elke, de la Porte Caroline (2015). "The sovereign debt crisis, the EU and welfare state reform". *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 13, 1–7.

Iammarino Simona, Rodriguez-Pose Andrés, Storper Michael (2019). "Regional inequality in Europe: evidence, theory and policy implications". *Journal of economic geography*, vol. 19, n. 2, 273-298.

Irwin Sarah, Nilsen Ann (eds) (2018). *Transitions to Adulthood through Recession*. New York: Routledge.

James Paul, Steger Manfred B. (2022). "On living in an already-unsettled world: COVID as an expression of larger transformations". *Globalizations*, vol. 19, n. 3, 426-438.

Jessop Bob (2002). *The Future of the Capitalist State*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Kazepov Yuri (ed) (2010). *Rescaling social policies: Towards multilevel governance in Europe*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Koselleck Reinhart (2006). "Crisis". *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 67, n. 2, 357-400.

Mertanen Katariina, Pashby Karen, Brunila Kristiina (2020). "Governing of young people 'at risk' with the alliance of employability and precariousness in the EU youth policy steering". *Policy Futures in Education*, vol. 18, n. 2, 240-260.

Milana Marcella, Vatrella Sandra (2020). "Youth Guarantee and Welfare State Regimes: Cross-Countries Considerations". In: Milana Marcella, Klatt Gosia, Vatrella Sandra (eds.). *Europe's Lifelong Learning Markets, Governance and Policy*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 419-429.

Morel Nathalie, Palier Bruno, Palme Joakim (eds.) (2011). *Towards a Social Investment Welfare State? Ideas, Policies and challenges*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Parreira do Amaral Marcelo, Kovacheva Siyka, Rambla Xavier (2020). *Lifelong Learning Policies for Young Adults in Europe: Navigating between Knowledge and Economy*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Rambla Xavier (2022). "Imaginaries of Education and Innovation in the European Union". In: Parreira do Amaral Marcelo, Thompson Christiane (eds.). *Geopolitical Transformations in Higher Education*. Cham: Springer, 163–178.

Rogers Rebecca, Albisetti James C., Goodman Joyce (eds) (2010). *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Singer Hans W. (1997). "The Golden Age of the Keynesian Consensus". *World Development*, vol. 25, n. 3, 293-295.

Thym Daniel, Odysseus Academic Network (eds) (2022). *Reforming the Common European Asylum System*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Tomka Béla (2013). *A Social History of Twentieth-Century Europe*. New York: Routledge.

van Vulpen Bram, Bock Bettina (2020). "Rethinking the Regional Bounds of Justice". *Romanian Journal of Regional Science*, vol. 14, n. 2, 5-24.