

Resilience, Vulnerability And Inequality In Immigrant Children During The Covid 19 Pandemic

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Abstract.

During the global pandemic, the perception of vulnerability was experienced to some degree by everyone, although some narratives report some social groups being more affected than others. In this contribution, considering the concepts of “vulnerability” and “resilience”, we have tried to analyze the condition of migrant children at school. From the concepts highlighted, the scenario expands, investigating emotions, reactions, and social needs implied in the emergency dimension.

We wanted to explore the “school community” area, in which the subject inserts himself and acts in the emergency conditions, through some testimonies in the field.

We asked ourselves about the “pre” e “post” pandemic, identifying different phases of the social emergency. Then, we have tried to investigate distance learning between native and young immigrants, attempting to clarify the causes that have exacerbated the scholastic disadvantage. We questioned ourselves about the vulnerability and the role of the latter in relation to social change in the educational context.

In recent decades, migration policy has built a construct of vulnerability, which has also permeated the school context, defining different categories of immigrants, and producing a stratification for access to services (Campomori & Caponio, 2014).

The pandemic has exacerbated the processes of exclusion, crossing socioeconomic possibilities with different social actors (Stojkoski, et al., 2020); intersecting the institutional vacuum in education with crises management as a whole; while medical and legal assistance services for migrants were interrupted.

Therefore, this paper explores the inequality through the lens of the pandemic emergency and the pre-existing disadvantage of Covid-19.

Keywords: Downside; social exclusion; immigration; situation of risk

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10-12 December, 2021

Barcelona, Spain

1. Introduction

The article considers the increasingly central role in the social sciences of the “resilience” concept, with specific attention to post-emergency situations.

It is indeed more and more common a scientific approach that privileges the investigation inherent in the social reactivity in facing a disastrous event, rather than the analysis of pre-existing social vulnerability factors.

If up to the Eighties (Miozzo, 2002) the primary needs coincided with the need for food, shelter, and rescue since the Nineties the need for security and psycho-physical wellbeing began to play a more and more important role. We are witnessing the declination of new forms of thought about the concept of “security” until it is closely related to the idea that it is essential to the realization of the well-being of the individual. In a society as complex in its organization, globalized and fluid (Bauman, 2005) as ours, it is no longer sufficient to satisfy basic needs. Indeed, it is also necessary to satisfy a very high number of secondary and tertiary needs, among which we can include physical, psychic, family and social security in daily life, and even more so after a traumatic event.

However, in a society that is so fluid (*ibidem*) and variable in its social organizations and political changes; unequal in the expressive, economic, and social possibilities of individuals; still strongly characterized by disparities of gender, ethnicity, geographic origin, and social status; and shaped by the instability of global economic markets, it is increasingly complex to respond to the needs for security and identity expression of individuals.

It is in this scenario that a new language is emerging, articulated, and shared by the scientific literature in the field (Drabek & McEntire, 2003), which enriches the mechanics of disasters; gives a new interpretation to the organization of aid; to the emerging professional skills in the social field; and gives back space to reactions, investigating the social impact of the post-trauma emergency. The literature (Young, 2006; Newman, 2006), moreover, is influenced by the process of globalization, it gives prominence to the social community and to the resilience put in place by it in case of disaster.

The acceleration and uncertainty with which societies evolve, imposing emergency responses, partially motivate the fame and diffusion of this word. Suffice it to say that the NRRP (National Resistance and Resilience Plan), passed as law with the Conte government (June 22, 2021), is nothing more than an acronym referring precisely to this dimension, i.e. National Recovery and Resilience Plan. The choice of using the term “resilience” within a political-economic planning “in the Covid era” enriches the semantics of the term and offers spaces for further reflection.

The concept of resilience and the one of vulnerability begin, thus, to be correlated, and the former seems predominant in the narratives and attention that the sciences attribute to it over the latter (Bergstrand et al., 2015).

The general idea that justifies this approach, focused on resilience, gives greater importance to the endogenous resources of a local community, as well as to its capacity to self-transform in response to a negative event (Auriemma & Iannaccone, 2020).

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The widespread adoption of this approach by many disciplines (sociology, emergency psychology, geography, and territorial sciences) and its consequent success, risk, however, today, to make the notion of “resilience” too vague and to transform it into an “umbrella term”.

The present article intends to offer a contribution of clarification, examining some aspects of the concept of resilience, arriving at proposing some distinctions between the meaning that it can assume in the different phases of the risk cycle: from that which precedes the event; to that of the post-event emergency; up to the reconstruction, anchoring to some extent the question of resilience to qualitative research; as well as contributing to the ongoing scientific debate.

Specifically, our interest is limited to the exploration of the resilient dimension related to the migrant condition: there are few investigations in this field of research, although it shows relevance for migration studies. We know, indeed, how important it is for a migrant to possess the ability to cope with difficult periods, to face social reorganization; expressing a certain ability to project oneself into the future dimension, according to an idea of “solidarity-based welfare” (Latouche, 2016).

Resilience is also related to a community dimension: as the community supports the individual in coping with stressful conditions. Those who are better included are better able to overcome difficulties (Youngmann & Kushnirovich, 2020). In our view, then, the inclusive condition is also denotative of the quality of social relationships: this quality impacts the ability to cope with traumatic conditions.

Another factor, of no small importance in putting resilient behaviors into practice, is the ability that individuals possess to adapt to change.

2. Resilience: an issue to be defined

The most recent literature refers to resilience by correlating it with disastrous situations (Tierney, 2012; Bruneau et al., 2003; Dynes et al., 1987).

The success met by the concept of “resilience” in a variety of disciplinary contexts has been matched by a growing polysemy of the term. It is due not only to the differences between the fields of application, but also - within the same field - to the varied interpretations, as well as to the heterogeneous uses that can be made of this concept: for example descriptive or normative (Domingue, 2020; Castrignanò & Landi, 2014; Hempel & Lorenz, 2014).

The concept of resilience was first introduced by Holling (1973) in reference to some ecological systems, and defined as the measure of the system's ability to absorb changes and resist stress events. Later, Hashimoto (et al., 1982) related the idea of resilience to water production systems, and explored the issues of resilience, reliability, and vulnerability. Reliability, resilience, and vulnerability are accepted in the scientific literature, as determinants of resilient systems, and indicative in assessing social conduct (Fordham, 1999). Much more recently, the UK's Department for International Development (2011) offered a definition regarding resilience.

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«It is the ability of countries, communities, and households to manage change, by maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of shocks or stresses – such as earthquakes, drought or violent conflict – without compromising their long-term prospects».

This definition has the merit of presenting resilience as an “ability” and, therefore, of considering it as a capacity for self-transformation of a dynamic nature, which manifests itself in a process, after a negative event. It is not a simple “property” of a system, as sometimes suggested by those who insist on the intrinsic characteristics of the system itself, but a dynamic predisposition to cope with risk and its dramatic components.

In defining resilience, it is possible to distinguish two issues: the question inherent in the social structural dimension through which it takes shape and emerges either as an action of the individual or as a community action; and the spatio-temporal question that pertains to the expressive context in its temporal declination.

According to our investigations regarding the social structural dimension, it is crucial to distinguish an intrinsic-structural dimension, and an extrinsic-dynamic dimension (Luthar, et al., 2000).

While regarding the space-time axis, we can understand space as a “variable”; indeed, we could hypothesize that the ways in which resilience is produced are very different, depending on whether we are dealing with a family unit, a local society, or a large system; and they vary as the spatial dimension of the social component varies. Below we will refer substantially to an intermediate dimensional level, that of a community, that is, the school community with a specific interest in the migrant community.

As far as the time scale is concerned, the definition itself suggests relating the ability of a system to self-transform in the face of a disastrous event, while maintaining a long-term perspective.

This process that we define as “active adaptation”, however, takes place over long periods of time, which are marked by at least four distinct phases:

I. the **pre-emergency phase**;

II. the **first emergency phase** (Lockdown phase: March 9-May 3, 2020): part or all of the population is confined to their homes for health security in order to analyze the ongoing pandemic situation, events, and existential risk indices);

III. the phase of the **temporary resumption** (easing of containment measures: May 18-June 14, 2020) of the system's fundamental activities, in the context of a "temporary territory" (allows the primary and productive functions, basic of a State, to produce goods and services. It is sought to ensure, thus, the minimum services to the population for its security and wellbeing);

IV. Phase of **progressive reconstruction or resumption** (coexistence with Covid-19 and its variants: June 15, 2020 - today) of all productive activities of goods and services (see who distinguished the phases).

The ways in which a resilient attitude manifests itself vary in each stage, although some aspects are common to all: for example, resilience always involves a rejection of passive dependence on external resources, as well as the ability to negotiate forms of intervention with higher-level institutions and social agencies.

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3. In search of a conceptual model of resilience as a tool for social science

The conceptual model of resilience, to which we would like to focus our attention, focuses on the temporality of the critical event to define disaster. If we assume that the event affects a community, which possesses characters through history (such as a school community), we must assume that these characters depend on a co-evolutionary process that correlates to some extent the social system and the biophysical environment with which it interacts (Davico, et al., 2009).

Adger (2000) defines “social resilience as the ability of individuals, organizations and communities to adapt, tolerate, absorb, cope and adjust to change and threats of various kinds, highlighting how there is a relationship between social resilience and ecological resilience” (Adger, 2000, pp.347 ff.).

We can trace Adger's definition within the scientific literature, which deals with the topic of dynamics of complex, adaptive, social-ecological systems (SES) (e.g. Holling 1973; Adger et al., 2005). Adger (ibidem) emphasizes the dynamic characteristics of resilience, which can be represented as a process (Pendall, et al., 2010) capable of activating resilience, response, recovery, and the creation of new options following a shock (Cutter et al., 2008); and whose defining characteristics are those of adaptability and transformability.

The concept of resilience focuses attention precisely on the impact of the shock and the effects it may have on the territory (Gardiner, et al., 2013): it allows to build a conceptual framework through which to represent territories and with them communities in a dynamic and systemic way, in which the different components, economic, social, and institutional are connected to each other (Swanstrom, 2008).

This definition of resilience can be ascribed to the “adaptive” literature, and finds its origins in the theory of complex and adaptive systems within evolutionary theory. This approach argues that the system contains within itself adaptive capacities, which allow it to reorganize naturally, after a dramatic event, its structure (Caniglia et al., 2017; Vale, 2005), both economically, institutionally, and socially, to find new evolutionary expressions.

Adaptive resilience could be a dynamic type of process that never folds back on itself, returning to the previous situation (Tierney, 2020).

Logically following this approach, we deduce that the resilience of a territory or a community does not depend only on the prior economic dimension, but also on the responsiveness of individuals, as well as of the community as a whole.

Indeed, there is a clear relationship between social resilience and economic resilience (Hallegatte, 2014; Rose, 2007) but at present it is not yet clear whether it is the former that influences the latter or vice versa. Economic resilience today is measured by GDP; according to Hill (et al., 2008), resilient regions are those in which, after a critical event, the growth rate returns to a higher level.

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We clarify here that the community dimension is not the result of an individuals' set, according to an additional process, in which the sum of the parts constitutes the whole. In our scientific exploration, we will be oriented following Norris' approach (et al., 2008, pp.135 ff.), who defines a resilient community as a "community capable of activating a network of adaptive capacities, which lead it to adapt following a disruptive collective event". According to this approach, social resilience could be defined as a multidimensional phenomenon decomposable into at least three dimensions:

1. the ability to respond to the shock event;
2. the capacity for adaptation;
3. the capacity for individual, community, and territorial transformation.

We interpret the "capacity to react" to the shock as the individual or community reactive measure to the dramatic event. It is mostly about social behavior dictated by survival instinct, innate reactions, followed by mental confusion and a wide range of emotions from fear to disbelief.

"Adaptive capacity" refers to the readiness of individuals to adapt to new measures or rules, whether they are restrictive in behavior or limiting in space. At this stage, the community calculates future risks and benefits in adapting behaviors. One is more aware of what has happened and tries to model one's own actions and behaviors, following conducts that have been suggested by Public Institutions.

Inspired by the recent evolutionary-environmental approach (Simonovic & Arunkumar, 2016), we distinguish in the "adaptive capacity" some functional elements for our investigation:

- 1. robustness**, which represents the ability of the system to withstand external stresses;
- 2. redundancy**, i.e., the ability to implement services in an uninterrupted manner (health service; distribution of goods and basic necessities...)
- 3. resourcefulness**, i.e., the ability to use tools (economic, communicative, social, technological) to achieve operational objectives (e.g., spurring the community to vaccinate in order to cope with a pandemic);
- 4. rapidity**, an essential element in countering the devastating effects of any traumatic event, and establishing a new system, transformed by events.

"Transformational capacity" on the other hand, emphasizes decision-making and the ability to live with and accept the drama and its components, and one begins to deploy new economic and social resources to transform the event and reinvigorate existence. Individual resilience, in essence, could be defined as "the ability of an individual to respond in adverse situations and circumstances" (Valero, et al., 2015).

Resilience is a "property" that connects individuals or communities to how they respond to certain events.

Considering the dynamic, multidimensional and complex nature of resilience (i.e. an open system, endowed with balances, multiple circuits, feedbacks and self-organizing capacities), social science today considers it appropriate to apply research and survey methods inspired by systemic approaches, which assess the qualitative dimension of the phenomenon, taking into account that the quantitative dimension does not yet have its own defined unit of measurement (Folke, et al., 2010).

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Already from these brief premises, we can guess how social resilience is not a visible element, directly observable and measurable (Folke, et al., 2021). We believe, therefore, that qualitative research, at the current state of the art, can best respond to the instances regarding emotions, feelings, fears, and conflicts fielded by those, who survived the pandemic drama. Although, as far as possible we will also draw on the numbers declared by Italian and foreign institutions to describe the phenomenon at a macro level. We find more pertinent the adoption of a qualitative approach, in coherence with the social sciences that have so far dealt with this magnitude, to highlight all the dimensions of the social system; the adaptation pathways; the relationships within the system and its components (Martin & Sunley, 2013; Graziano 2013; Walker, et al., 2006).

The investigation proposed here required careful consideration regarding possible descriptors of social resilience, as the literature has mostly focused on environmental shocks so far (Aldrich, 2012; Folke, 2006).

We know that the co-evolution of a social system produces an anthropization of the environment (Climent-Gil, et al., 2018) and, in particular, the formation of a built environment can be considered as a kind of interface between the two systems mentioned above, namely the social system and the biophysical environment. The school is a highly anthropized environment where emotions, individual and group growth, relationships between individuals, expectations, and fragility coexist, shaping the classroom context, hence the biophysical environment.

In our opinion, the factors that can be considered influential on the probability of an effective response to a negative event constitute what could be called the structural resilience of the community. They concern not only the characteristics of the social system, but also those of the environment (natural and built), as well as the relationships that have been formed between the two systems.

It must be said, moreover, that each of them is endowed with characters referable to specific sub-systems, which may constitute additional resources for resilience. Norris (et al. 2008) about the community, identifies four main sets of resources, partially overlapping with each other, which form a network of factors: **economic development; social capital; information; communication; and community competence.**

To these could be added others, including those of a socio-political nature (e.g., the quality of governance and community leadership); the cultural sub-set (Ungar, 2011); and the psycho-social sub-set (Giddens, 1990).

The characters highlighted so far, in addition to being potential resources for resilience, help to define the degree of vulnerability of a community. Regarding vulnerability and resilience, following Cutter's (et al., 2008) suggestions, we assume here that the two concepts must be kept distinct. Another element that we found as "essential" in emergency is that it arises from the unplanned interaction of different agents. Disasters, which affect a community, seriously threaten the structure and glue of the community. These approaches, aimed at pointing out the internal dynamics of communities affected by disasters, are of great importance (Lauer, 1982). As a matter of fact, they highlight elements of rupture and elements of continuity, points of crisis, and resources, drawing a scenario of massive mobilization of energy. New and intense forms of post-trauma

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social ties would come to life, while other, more peripheral relationships would be loosened or abandoned. Under the action of these aggregative forces of mutual aid, new narratives, symbols, and common memories would be elaborated.

We emphasize, here, the need to maintain a perspective and global vision of the way the community reacts to the emergency, investigating, beyond the standardized criteria, environmental contexts that are little known and little explored especially with regard to some determinants, such as the school community, represented by the children of immigrants in relation to the dimension of resilience.

Simplifying, we could argue that disasters reshape life stories, social values, and ways of interpreting the past, present, and future.

4. The pandemic effect on immigrants

If one listens to individuals who have survived dramatic events, one realizes that their narratives speak not only of individual pain, but of an entirely changed world; of a time that is marked by a “before” and an “after”, of presences, real or internalized, that continue to move within a collective scenario (Thoits, 1982; Kreps, 1984). Communities, like people, never return “as before” after shock events. What has happened remains embedded in the life of the community and a new reality comes into being (Van de Eynde & Veno, 1999). We are witnessing a “cultural mourning” (Beneduce, 2004), a kind of loss that includes the entire known social world: significant buildings and spaces (the square, the church, the school, the cafe, etc. ...) that constituted the ordinary geography of social relations, customs, and rituals, marked by known languages, are reshaped by the drama (Kaniasty & Norris, 1999).

Before exploring the relationship between immigrants and resilience in depth, we intend here to reflect briefly on the migrant condition, mentioning quantitative data, so that we can identify trajectories and lines of thought, useful for the definition of the condition of resilience at a macro level.

Istat data (2020) give us back a social context in which the increase in poverty is a constant in recent years in our country. If in 2019 there were 4.6 million poor, today there are 5.6 million, 1.4 of whom are foreigners (26.9% foreigners in absolute poverty vs. 5.9% natives). Among the poorest are foreigners looking for work with dependent minors, mostly residing in the South.

Among the most exposed, the most vulnerable, are immigrants (Cutter, et al., 2003). The Covid-19 pandemic has amplified conditions of vulnerability and exacerbated structural inequalities (OECD, 2020a; 2020b) unequally affecting social groups and communities: some of whom were already strained by the economic crisis, following the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy (2007-2013); and by the social exclusion, as well as the cultural and economic divide to which they were already exposed before the pandemic.

The “housing issue” is very implicit: indeed, foreigners, due to a lower income capacity and less opportunity to accumulate savings, almost always live in rent.

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Many domestic workers without a regular contract and a residence permit, and without the possibility to move within the territory, have lost their jobs (Hu, 2020). In fact, during the lockdown, mobility restriction measures prevented many migrant workers from moving and seeking employment opportunities.

The employment condition also highlights that foreign workers are often subordinated to precarious contract types. The pandemic has also led to the closure of many productive activities in which foreigners were employed, such as hotels, bars, and restaurants; while in other sectors, such as personal and household care, it has emphasized social distancing, making it effectively impossible to carry out all jobs in which physical presence is necessary. Immigrant women, for example, have suffered the crisis much more than men, since they are employed as domestic helpers and caregivers, with a reduction in the employment rate twice as great (Perocco, 2021).

Even the health issue shows a condition of extreme vulnerability, as a matter of fact, the lack of possession of the health card has excluded entire shares of the foreign population from the possibility of booking the vaccine on the portal in charge. Exploring the data of the National Vaccine Registry (updated June 27, 2021), indeed, it is noted a lower vaccination coverage among people born abroad than those born in Italy (50% versus 60%). This inequality increases as age decreases: among adolescents and young adults (12-29 years of age) coverage is 15% for those born abroad and 28% for those born in Italy.

Among foreigners, factors related to the migrant condition are also important: fragility linked to administrative or bureaucratic aspects (32.3%); legal irregularity (22%); asylum seeker status (15%) and refugee status (10%). Also not irrelevant is the percentage of those who have problems connected to education, therefore mostly language problems (80%) and illiteracy (9%) (Istat, 2021 b).

Synthesizing Istat data, foreigners also express a lower ability to participate in cultural and recreational-social activities: they often limit, indeed, the sphere of their sociality, directing it more to the community of origin; they express frequently precarious work situations; they have difficulty in accessing the welfare and care systems of the individual, and in some cases give up care altogether because of the original scarcity of income (Istat, 2020; 2021 a). In this scenario, learning, the right to study, and measures to combat school dropout also falter.

Foreign minors (876.801 in 2019/2020 with Italian citizenship) are among the most vulnerable categories, affected by multiple disadvantages linked to the material absence of supports, spaces, and skills, not only digital but also linguistic (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003).

Moreover, immigrants show a certain difficulty in focusing on the present and leaving behind the drama of the events caused by the pandemic: we are witnessing phenomena of social immobility, which we could define as "social fixity". In this "opaque" social area, individuals would attempt to maintain pre-existing social relations, without, however, having the ability to project them into the future. There would be no lack of impulses for the renewal of social relations, but these would be more characterized by requests for help, focused on primary and secondary needs. Indeed, looking at Caritas data, it emerges that foreign families (60.7%) have asked for greater economic support

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and basic necessities than Italian families; among the former, families with dependent children stand out (74.1%).

Despite the numerous bonuses put in place by the Conte government and the Draghi government, "Italy Care Decree; Relaunch Decree; August Decree, and Refreshments decree"¹; the measures appear to have had minimal impact on foreigners present in Italy. The *XXX Rapporto Immigrazione Caritas-Migrantes* (2021) shows that foreign families are in a position of extreme vulnerability, exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic.

In general, there is an increase in economic and material needs: being able to buy food, pay rent and pay for basic necessities.

Therefore, we are beginning to observe, through demographic indicators, the "pandemic effect" that has occurred in many different social contexts and has been produced by a combination of many factors.

An initial exploration of the migrant condition in a pandemic context highlights the need for an analysis of community relations and the emotional dimension, precisely to understand the resilience that runs through them.

At a macro level, some difficulties emerge, which can be therefore traced back to the sphere of housing, relationships, and access to social rights, on which weigh phenomena that can be addressed to the reduction of income and the contracted territorial mobility during the lockdown; the lack of enforceability of social and welfare rights; educational and cultural poverty that in some cases make orientation within the Italian welfare system difficult if not impossible. In this complex social context have emerged behaviors, dimensions of action, agents, and determinants that have reshaped the social system and the biophysical environment: it is crucial for us to investigate more closely trajectories and dimensions to understand how the pandemic has impacted on resilience and in what way; what emotions, what conditions and conflicts have emerged in the early stages of the pandemic Covid-19.

Analysis of the data shows that the measures so far taken, for pandemic containment and economic recovery, have reached, to a minimal degree, foreigners. The solutions adopted, therefore, have not been entirely effective in counteracting the already present gaps between natives and migrants (Guzi, et al., 2015)

5. Field Research

5.1 Resilience and school community: secondary school teachers

In our field research, we attempted to consider school communities and families, distributed across the Lombardy area, correlating them with resilience.

¹ Other measures include: bonus for car purchase; "catering bonus" to help small restaurateurs; "bonus TV and decoder"; bonus "digitization kit" (85 million euros); bonus "rents"; birth allowances to support families with newborns; bonus "kindergartens"; bonus "caregiver"; emergency income; purchase of platforms and tools divide (10 million euros) and many others, which we do not include here

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We distributed 150 questionnaires to teachers of secondary schools of first and second degree; and interviewed a small sample of 15 teachers (through Meet) to investigate more deeply some aspects of resilience in the school context. We then interviewed (again through Meet) 30 immigrants with dependent underage children attending primary and secondary schools in Lombardy on the issue of resilience. The distribution of the questionnaires and the conduct of the interviews took place in the period between May and October.

Fig.1. Questionnaires: 150 secondary school teachers of 1st and 2nd grade, Lombardy area, on DAD and resilience (data expressed in %); year 2021.

SAMPLE	
Average age of the sample (years)	50
Target	%
Male	38%
Female	61%
Not answered	1%
Teaches in a Secondary Institution (I grade)	57%
Teaches in a Secondary Institution (II grade)	43%
What do you think about DAD?	
I have not received adequate training to teach in DAD	51%
We are not ready to use technology in the classroom	49%
Before the pandemic, what was your relationship with technologies?	
I had never used digital technologies before the pandemic in the classroom	69%
I had sporadically used technologies in classroom teaching	18%
I had only used them once before the pandemic	13%
What platforms did you use most during the lock-down (in DAD)?	
Google Classroom, Teams, Edmodo	42%
Meet e Zoom	28%
other tools (e-mail, whatsapp...)	30%
How much did your students, in your opinion, participate in educational programs in DAD during the pandemic?	
At least 25% of the students did not participate in the educational programs with assiduity	70%
At least 50% of the students did not participate in the educational programs with assiduity	22%
All students have participated in the educational programs assiduously	8%
How much time does it take to prepare for classes in DAD?	
More time is needed to prepare the lesson	28%
A lot of time is needed to learn how to use the new teaching methods	68%
More time is needed in general because the technological tool is very complex	4%
Did you ask your students if they owned a notebook?	
I did not ask my students if they had a PC dedicated to study.	29%
I asked my students if they had a PC dedicated to study.	68%
Not answered	3%
Did you ask your students if they had access to the Internet and its infrastructure?	
I asked my students if they were having trouble with the network (to connect)	14%
I did not ask my students if they were having trouble with the network (connecting).	80%
Not answered	6%
Prior to Covid, were any of your students in a "vulnerable" condition. If so, did you ask if they had a Pc and access to the network?	

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<i>I was aware of the "vulnerable" conditions of some students but had never had a chance to figure out who owned a PC, or if they had the network before Covid</i>	89%
<i>Not answered</i>	11%

The categorical structure of the survey was constructed at the same time as the identification of the documentary material, according to an inductive logic (Fielding & Schreier, 2001). The method followed was that of the quantitative survey for the macro dimension (SPSS); and qualitative for aspects related to resilience (NVivo).

In the data reported, due consideration must be given to possible indices of error caused by social desirability; by problems of disorientation and memory, due to the pandemic condition; sampling errors, correlated to the collection of data, which took place at a distance due to social distancing. The results of the research should be interpreted taking into account these limitations.

From the data in our possession (see fig.1) we are unable to investigate the quantitative level of the pre-emergency phase in order to “measure” the condition of resilience.

What emerges, however, is a certain lack of technological competence on the part of the teaching staff, and there is, consequently, a low level of participation by foreign students in lessons: it would be necessary to investigate these two areas more closely to verify any correlations. Here, we limit ourselves to noting a greater social and economic vulnerability that affects the learning outcome and, with it, the manifestation of resilience.

The “structural-intrinsic” dimension of the school community (Luthar, et al., 2000) shows some weaknesses: the lower income possibility, expressed especially by immigrants (*XXX Rapporto Immigrazione Caritas-Migrantes*, 2021), aimed at the purchase of the digital tool, would make the resilience response to the ongoing pandemic fragile, as it would affect school and learning continuity.

The low level of digital competence, declared by teachers, would also express a structural-intrinsic resilience to the school system of modest proportions, which is unable to cope with the renewed modes of teaching imposed by social distancing.

The temporal dimension highlights, then, a capacity for transformation and adaptation to the pandemic emergency, which covers a rather long period of time, that is, from February to May, substantially revealing an inability of the school system to respond to the various emergency phases and, therefore, an inadequacy in actively expressing significant levels of resilience in situations of risk.

With qualitative exploration, through interviews with teachers, we are better able to delineate the scenario within which resilience manifests itself. Therefore, we report here some responses offered by the interviewed sample, which better than others reconstruct the picture of the emergency in relation to resilience.

Phase 1 (pre-emergency). We asked teachers if the school was ready for the emergency; if an economic and educational investment had been made, to deal with **social emergency** situations, to stimulate learning and socialization before the pandemic.

"We weren't ready at all! It's something that took us completely by surprise. And we struggled to get our bearings on what to do" (teacher, woman, 52, secondary I).

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Phase 2 (emergency-lockdown). We asked the sample about behaviors; social distancing; and possible measures put in place by the school community. In this phase, social distancing seems to have been a very difficult component to overcome, especially for those teachers who were used to the frontal lesson. The **linguistic issue** had an impact on the quality of learning of children of foreign origin.

"The biggest challenge I have encountered in distance learning is, unfortunately, not being able to reach all the kids in my class: I had a lot of problems with foreign kids starting secondary school, because they had not yet fully settled in, they did not know their new classmates well, and the language diversity created problems both in assigning homework and understanding online lessons" (teacher, man, 38 years old, secondary I).

The **digital divide** resurfaces overwhelmingly during the lockdown, and it impacts foreign children in particular.

"Most of the foreign students didn't have connections or devices available, and I didn't know how to reach them. Distance learning is undemocratic: those who have the options get ahead; those who have less or none at all fall behind. And I feel like I can't do anything." (teacher, man, 45 years old, secondary II).

Another emerging issue is related to the question of **study support**, which was better expressed by those parents who could boast a greater availability of time and higher schooling. Immigrants, for both linguistic and occupational reasons, mostly working in jobs where a physical presence is required, could not express assiduity and control over their children's learning.

"It was necessary to intervene many times, out of the prearranged appointments with the class, in order to assist the immigrant parents in supporting the children in their studies. It was very difficult to check homework: often they didn't have it. The distance made relationships complicated and parents, unfortunately, could not follow their children, because they work" (teacher, woman, 35 years old, secondary I grade).

During the lockdown, the importance of the **socializing role of the school** emerged: we know that the school institution performs a complex task in this area that is not without conflict (Lacey, 2012; Bosisio, 2005).

"School cannot be a place to learn skills and knowledge, and that is it. School is also important for experiential learning. In my experience, I have noticed that this is more true for younger students[...]at a time in their growth when they are developing their social and emotional skills. In a remote setting, though, it is complicated. I found it very difficult to think of activities and lessons that had socialization as their goal, and I don't think I succeeded." (teacher, man, 47, secondary II grade).

Differences in socioeconomic status also weighed on learning in DAD.

"Economic inequality weighed more on the most vulnerable: foreign children, who were already in a disadvantaged condition, connected little[...] or did not have good signal coverage or did not have an internet subscription, so they missed part of the lessons" (teacher, man, 54 years old, secondary II grade).

Phase 3: Temporary recovery (May and June)

We explored the dimension of **safety**. We then asked the sample whether as a school community they felt safe within the school, again in attendance in May; and whether they felt the school had been able to model itself according to new social demands.

"The school adhered to all the protocols. Inside I felt safe, but the problem arose outside. I wondered what my students were doing and where they were going, knowing that the virus was still going around. Truth be told, I was terrified. I am not ashamed to say that in those months I wore a double mask[...]I remember, however, that the boys were very happy to meet, laugh and joke in the classroom

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again[...]with the boys it was not always easy: we filmed them often so that they could observe the distances (teacher, woman, 33, years old, secondary I grade).

Phase 4: Resumption of all economic-productive and social activities (June - October 2021)

In this last phase, related to resilience, we asked if they **felt different and transformed** as individuals and in the role of teachers; and if in their opinion, the school community had been shaped by the new social instances, and if this implied some radical changes within the school. The totality of teachers surveyed agreed that they felt “changed”.

"Come Summer, we were beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel[...]everyone, I think, felt profoundly changed by the epidemic and the scenes of war, which were witnessed. I have lost friends and family, and I estimate it will take time to get over what happened. I do not know if we are out of it. I do not think in all honesty, but we will see[...] the kids seem tired and a bit apathetic sometimes, but I do not know if that has to do with Covid. The school, for its part, has tried to withstand the impact: we have tried everything! What is certain is that a good part of the students did not reach the level of learning that they could have achieved with face-to-face lessons. Then, for the foreign students, things were more complex. We managed to reach a few of them" (teacher, man, 49 years old, secondary school, II grade).

Explored the 4 phases of resilience, without being able to measure it quantitatively, but tracing it in the testimonies of individuals, emerges an extrinsic-dynamic dimension (Martin & Sunley, 2013) not able to adapt in time to the demands of the renewed social school system. Highlighted are: "vulnerabilities", mainly due to the foreign condition; a partial adaptation to the shock; and a slow pace of change are evident. The economic and social structure of the school community is particularly compromised by the pandemic event, as evident from the numerous testimonies summarized here. The school community reveals a capacity for shaping and adaptation, which we might call “embryonic”, but which is unable to assist the social system in its sudden changes.

5.2 Resilience and Foreign Families

We have, in a second phase, attempted to define the determinants of resilience through the considerations, made by the sample of foreigners with specific reference to school. 60% of the sample interviewed is male, 40% female. The average age is 39 for men; and 36 for women. 100% of the sample resides in Lombardy. 30% live in the province of Brescia, 22% in that of Lodi, and the remaining 48% in the other provinces of Lombardy.

The families interviewed are composed of 2 parents, both foreigners. 60 % come from Romania, 28% from Morocco, and 12% from Albania.

87% of the sample has compulsory schooling; 9% have a diploma and 4% prefer not to answer.

46% of respondents work in services; 8% in commerce and 14% in domestic work; 32% in construction. All households surveyed have at least 2 dependent children attending secondary school. 47% attend junior high school; and 53% attend senior high school, of which 100% are enrolled in technical or vocational schools.

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In this second phase, the survey was directed toward exploring the determinants of "**robustness, redundancy, resourcefulness, and speed**" (Simonovic & Arunkumar, 2016). In the interviews conducted, we favored the qualitative methodology, as it better returned the context, within which the determinants emerged; and because to date, the very recent research in the sociological field has not yet identified a unit of measurement, which can accurately consider and measure the levels of resilience. We used a Likert scale (from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree).

74% of the sample reported a moderate degree (SL=3) of "*pandemic resilience*"; 26% felt they "*were unable to cope effectively with the distress brought by the pandemic*" (SL=1).

One respondent regarding the domain of "**robustness**" states:

"We weren't ready. We did not have any money. My wife lost her job, she was a domestic helper. We had so many economic difficulties, and we could not follow our children in school. [...] Here, there is no space: it is not easy to study here. [...] Some of our friends caught Covid. We got really scared."

92% of the sample felt they were "very dissatisfied" (SL=1) about the school's "ability to withstand the pandemic"; while 15% were "fairly dissatisfied" (SL=2); 7% could not make a judgment. Regarding the "robustness" expressed by the school one foreign woman asserts:

"The school did not help me and my children because we did not have computers at the beginning. My children could not follow the lessons[...] they followed them a little bit on the phone. Then my children did not understand the homework very well[...] Unfortunately, the help that the school usually gave us in the afternoon for studying was missing. And I could not help them[...] I had to work, and then they are difficult things for me".

94% of the sample regarding "**redundancy**", "very much appreciated" (SL=5) the ability of the "*Italian State to ensure the continuity of services in general and the availability of basic goods and products, especially in the lockdown phase*"; 4% were "*quite satisfied*" (SL=4); 2% did not respond.

"We always had the ability to buy food, and when we could not anymore we would go to Caritas, so we got through the hardest time."

Regarding the ability of the "*school to ensure continuity of educational service*", 93% are "*very dissatisfied*" (SL=1); while 7% are "*fairly dissatisfied*" (SL=2).

One of the foreigners interviewed further states:

"School was a disaster: classes were there and they were not there. When there were, there was not always a signal[...] my children had few lessons: there was not a fixed time, like at school[...] Then sometimes the homework with the e-mail."

More than half of the sample thinks that the school has not been particularly **enterprising**: indeed, 64% declares itself "*very dissatisfied*" (SL=1) about the school's ability to "*communicate the emergency, the change of teaching method, the change of timetable and of study to the families*"; 29% "*quite dissatisfied*" (SL=2); while 7% is at an average level (SL=3). The sample, moreover, states that many teachers did not "*know how to use the platforms*": respectively 91% think they are "*very dissatisfied with the ability expressed by the teachers in using platforms and online teaching tools*" (SL=1); 9% state "moderate dissatisfaction" (SL=2).

Regarding the dimension of **rapidity**: 91% of the sample surveyed do not believe that "*the school has organized quickly for DAD*" (SL=1); 7% that it "*organized fairly quickly*" (SL=2); while 2% preferred not to answer.

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One of the moms offers testimony that encapsulates a sentiment common to many families in the sample.

"The school has struggled to get organized. I remember at the end of April, not all teachers were able to upload lessons to the platform. Many could not upload anything at all[...]our children missed months of school."

Fig.2 Illustrates the feelings felt by foreigners in STEP 1 and STEP 4



We then investigated the **emotional dimension**: we asked foreigners to identify at least 3 emotions they felt during the lockdown, and then during the ongoing phase. Several feelings and emotions emerged:

-in phase 2 (the lockdown), the following stand out: fear (17%); anger (11%); anxiety (8%); depression (8%); distress (9%); sadness (6%); resistance (13%); gratitude towards doctors and nurses (17%); solidarity (11%).

-in phase 4, which is the current phase, in which one lives with the virus, the following emerge: anger at the constraints imposed by the green pass (15%); fear of possible variants of the virus (26%); depression due to economic issues (24%); hope of a return to "normality" in a short time (13%); impatience with the limits and social distancing imposed by the virus (8%); disorientation with regard to the future (14%).

5.3 Discussion

From the data in our possession, we cannot investigate the pre-emergency phase in the field at a quantitative level in order to "measure" the condition of resilience.

Although at a macro level the survey gives us a complex picture where: there is an absence of technological competence expressed by the teaching staff; there is also a lack of exclusive possession of the digital tool "dedicated to learning", for reasons hypothetically linked to its cost. Consequently, there is a scarcity of participation by students in online lessons. Moreover, the temporal dimension emerges as crucial, which invalidates the learning result: since teachers need a lot of time in order to acquire skills

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useful both for the creation and the organization of learning contents (Ferrari, et al., 2018). These variables, related to the school community and to foreigners specifically, highlight a dimension of resilience that is not particularly significant in a state of emergency.

The “structural-intrinsic” dimension of the school community (Luthar, et al., 2000) shows, indeed, some weaknesses: the lower income possibility, expressed especially by immigrants (*XXX Rapporto Immigrazione Caritas-Migrantes*, 2021), aimed at the purchase of digital tools, would make the resilience response to the ongoing pandemic fragile, as it would affect school and learning continuity.

The low level of digital competence, declared by teachers, would express an intrinsic-structural resilience to the school system of modest proportions, which is unable to cope with the renewed teaching methods imposed by social distancing.

The temporal dimension shows, then, a capacity for transformation and adaptation to the pandemic emergency, which covers a rather long period of time, i.e. from February to May, substantially revealing an inability of the school system to respond to the different emergency phases and, therefore, an inadequacy in actively expressing levels of resilience, necessary in situations of risk.

In the qualitative survey emerges a low or moderate satisfaction about the determinant of the “robustness” expressed by the school system: indeed, almost all of the sample interviewed is not satisfied with the strategies put in place by the school to ensure educational continuity and an adequate level of learning. The sample also declares itself not very adherent to the robustness variable, since the economic factor affects a social vulnerability that pre-exists the pandemic.

In the same way, “initiative” is also lacking: in fact, more than half of the sample declares dissatisfaction regarding the school's ability to offer lessons through new teaching methodologies (DAD). Similarly, the resourcefulness of individual teachers does not seem to emerge significantly in the individual actions of distance learning.

The “rapidity” expressed by the school system in modeling itself on the new learning needs in the pandemic phase does not seem to rise to a level that ensures an indicative school resilience.

While, with regard to the determinant of “redundancy”, the sample interviewed declared themselves to be very or fairly satisfied with both the availability of basic necessities and access to primary services, even in an emergency phase, and the rapidity of response of the central government to the Covid-19 emergency.

With regard to feelings, there are mixed emotions. In the first phase, we witnessed a transversal solidarity, which mobilized individuals, associations, the third sector, and obviously state and parastatal bodies, creating bonds and feelings of closeness among people, even of very different origins. Different biographical perspectives, shared vulnerability, and uncertainty of the future seem to have, in a first phase, minimized some forms of social exclusion (Schwartz & Schwenken, 2020).

In the current phase, feelings such as anger, fatigue, impatience, fear, and worry about the future economic situation prevail; although a small proportion of the sample states that they have hope that the emergency will be overcome and that they will return to “ordinariness”.

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On the whole, the interviewees feel disoriented and unable to build and plan for the future, either because of the limitations imposed by the green pass, or because of the economic problems with which foreigners have to deal: hope and positive attitudes towards the future seem to struggle to emerge.

6. Conclusion

During the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic, we all experienced some degree of vulnerability. Although many media narratives have told us of the extraordinary role of doctors and nurses in the face of a pandemic that seemed to "democratically" strike the globe at all latitudes, the survey conducted here and the data in our possession show that the pandemic crisis hit marginal groups of society the hardest, including foreigners, and prevented them from activating articulated processes of resilience.

We note that in journalistic narratives the immigrant usually generates interest if traced back to specific social fields mostly pertaining to the field of rescue or delinquency. The limits of this narrative approach have been repeatedly highlighted by the scientific literature (Schewel, 2020), which has highlighted the condition of presence-absence in television schedules and information precisely according to the processes of social perception. Generalist information has given very little attention to immigrants in relation to the pandemic and the possible processes of resilience: the only cases in which migrants were mentioned were those in which the category of riders and farm laborers was reported.

We know that in a state of emergency the level of vulnerability depends on previous economic conditions; our physical condition; collective behavior; the effectiveness of measures to prevent risk; the possibility of accessing resources for social assistance and forms of welfare; and the level of social integration (Campomori & Caponio, 2016): precariousness is, therefore, all the more profound if pre-emergency conditions are already compromised by fragile socio-economic assumptions. The activation of social actions of support and recovery is, then, fundamental to respond quickly in the first phase of the emergency to the primary and secondary needs of feeding, sheltering, safety and clothing. The risk and emergency literature (Dynes & Quarantelli, 1980) has emphasized how the concept of resilience must be related to structural and dynamic variables, as well as determinants, that affect levels of resilience; and how crises exacerbate discrimination and emphasize inequality and competition among social groups.

We know, moreover, that socialization plays a crucial role in the integration processes of foreigners, and that measures of social distancing, on the other hand, are harmful on a psychological level, because they outline processes of deterioration of social well-being and, consequently, invalidate possible processes of resilience. In immigrants, the consequences of isolation have been particularly dramatic (Kuhn, et al., 2021; Borkowska & Laurence, 2020) showed us that declines in cohesion and socialization were strongest in the most disadvantaged communities, particularly among some ethnic minorities and among the least skilled people: pointing to educational attainment as one of the causes of lower resilience.

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Nevertheless, in some cases we have also witnessed phenomena of solidarity and mutual support (Grasso & Giugni, 2019; Koos, 2019) just like in the first pandemic phase in Italy.

It is, therefore, crucial to analyze socio-economic and political systems, which can create social inequalities and determine unequal access to resources and welfare, exposing the most vulnerable to greater risk.

A picture emerges from our survey that suggests an increase in discrimination and disadvantage, not only at the social level but also at the school level; this does not directly imply a pessimistic view of the integration processes that are taking place in our society, although school closures and DAD have highlighted some unresolved issues in the world of education.

It is in our view important at this historical stage to initiate the reconnaissance and exploration of more comparative studies on the differential effect of school closures and lockdowns, and their long-term consequences on levels of integration, learning (Grasso, et al., 2021), and resilience.

We should not forget that if the pandemic has sharpened socio-economic differences between social groups on the one hand; it has also, on the other hand, detected fragilities and weaknesses in the processes of inclusion of foreigners; and has made visible, as well, structural problems, which had been limiting the contexts of school learning for years.

If in the pre-vaccination world it was very challenging to harmonize the will of individuals and cultures; to find a compromise between economic interests and health needs; to develop a strategic and balanced long-term economic planning; and to model processes of foreign integration; today, in the midst of a health crisis and in an increasingly unpredictable world, it is even more complex to look to the future and reduce vulnerabilities.

Now, perhaps, more than a year after the proclaimed state of pandemic emergency, we should ask ourselves whether we have learned to trace and show states of resilience; whether our lifestyles, our culture, our habits have changed and been shaped by a renewed present.

As a scholar of sociology, I believe that the pandemic offers an extraordinary terrain for exploration and research in the social field, as well as that Europe presents itself as a privileged context to study and understand the diversity of integration models, and resilience processes, expressed by the different states of the Union.

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