

EDITORIAL

Investing in Education Is the Best Alternative for All Crises

Education has never been built in a historical vacuum. Its development has always been intertwined with the political, economic, cultural and territorial transformations of societies. In moments of stability, schools broaden horizons, strengthen networks and drive innovation; in times of crisis, they come to occupy an even more strategic position, becoming simultaneously an instrument of reconstruction, an object of dispute and a field of resistance. Over the centuries, every shift in the material structures of collective life has demanded profound institutional responses from educational institutions, capable of reorganizing priorities and preserving the cognitive heritage accumulated by preceding generations in the face of unforeseen ruptures.

Few convictions withstand the turbulence of the present time as well as the belief that education constitutes the most solid response a society can offer to its own crises. It is on this foundation that the present issue of *Diversitas Journal* is organized, dedicated to the theme “Investing in Education Is the Best Alternative for All Crises”. This choice continues the path begun in the previous issue, which addressed the dynamics of science in the face of global geopolitical conflicts: if there knowledge was examined amid conflict, here we investigate the ground that makes it possible. Indeed, the crises of the current moment rarely present themselves in isolation; they overlap and reinforce one another — pandemics that interrupt school trajectories, recessions that compress public budgets, the climate emergency that displaces populations, disinformation that corrodes public debate, instability that wears down institutions— and, as they accumulate, they expose fragilities built up over decades. Deciphering how access to cultural and scientific goods remains conditioned by social and spatial determinants is, therefore, the starting point that guides the studies gathered in this issue.

Every crisis is, in essence, a moment of rupture that exposes fragilities previously concealed by everyday routine. Emergency responses, however necessary, are by nature provisional: income transfers, financial relief, spending cuts. What distinguishes societies that overcome crises from those that succumb to them is the stock of accumulated capacities: knowledge, skills, health, solid institutions. Education is the systematic means by which a society builds this stock. Without a consistent formative base, immediate containment efforts exhaust their effectiveness at the first signs of recession, leaving the community vulnerable to new structural shocks.

The economic theory of human capital offers the first argument, the most direct one. Educating people costs resources, but it makes them more productive, raises their earnings and sustains growth. Spending on education is consumption in the short term and investment in the long term: it expands the capacity to absorb new technologies, to innovate and to manage development itself. Technical progress, by itself, yields nothing if the human capacity to use it has not been formed. By refining individuals’ intellectual and operational faculties, formal instruction

converts latent potential into dynamic vectors for overcoming the material constraints that limit social expansion.

The Brazilian experience confirms this argument with data. Empirical research based on household surveys shows that returns to schooling become increasing from approximately five years of study, that the very first year of schooling, literacy, already yields a high return, and that gains rise again near the completion of secondary education. Wage premiums are concentrated in complete cycles of study, not in isolated years: completing a stage is worth more than accumulating fragments of schooling. This finding reinforces the need to ensure continuous learning pathways that shield students from dropout and from the precariousness of unfinished knowledge.

In times of fiscal tightening, education is usually among the first areas to suffer cuts, which is precisely the opposite of what the evidence recommends. The international financial crisis at the end of the first decade of this century illustrated the opposite path: the resumption of the State's role was accompanied by legislation, funds for the maintenance of education and the expansion of compulsory schooling. Education was treated as a social right that cannot be left to the mercy of the market, nor read as a commodity. Withholding funding during recessions irreversibly compromises the future of new generations, deepening the chasm of poverty and restricting the room for maneuver of socioeconomic development itself.

Investing, however, does not merely mean spending more. Quantity without quality does not generate development: more years of school may not translate into productivity if learning does not take place. For this reason, precise investment involves teacher training, permanent evaluation and funding oriented toward the cost per student of quality. Quality is the condition for expenditure to become return. This requires adequate pedagogical infrastructure, valuing the teaching career and curricular practices articulated to the demands of the contemporary world, overcoming the mere quantitative expansion of enrollment devoid of formative effectiveness.

The returns to education are also not distributed uniformly across the territory. States and regions display distinct patterns of schooling and earnings, and areas with a weaker educational base tend toward relative stagnation. Balancing human capital across regions is thus a strategy for reducing disparities, and bringing educational institutions to the interior is part of that strategy. The decentralization of universities, technical institutes and training hubs acts as an inducer of local productive arrangements, anchoring skills in peripheral regions and deconcentrating opportunities for material and cultural advancement across the national space.

The benefits of education overflow the individual who is educated. More schooled people adopt health prevention practices, participate more in democratic life, tend to have fewer children and to invest more in them. Education raises life expectancy, reduces future poverty and produces direct externalities, in earnings, and indirect ones, in equity and social justice. The community environment gains in cohesion and social capital, forming a web of solidarity and civic awareness that lowers vulnerability indexes and makes urban and rural networks more resilient to external shocks of any kind.

It is in the face of concrete crises that the argument becomes evident. Pandemics demand

science, qualified professionals and a population capable of understanding health recommendations. Climate crises demand environmental awareness formed over generations. Disinformation, perhaps the most silent crisis of the present time, finds its antidote only in the critical thinking that schools cultivate. An educated society adapts, innovates and reorganizes more quickly in the face of the unforeseen. In such circumstances, analytical discernment and formal knowledge become the main line of defense against the collapse of public systems and the fragmentation of the social fabric.

Recognizing education as the best alternative for all crises does not, however, authorize reducing it to an economic instrument. People are the ultimate ends of development, not mere means of production. Education is a social right and a public good, and its value is not exhausted in wage returns: it emancipates, forms for citizenship and dignifies. It is precisely this intrinsic character that makes it a response equal to any crisis, including those that are not measured in percentage points. By cultivating the sense of justice, artistic sensibility and reflective autonomy, integral formation enables the individual to question the course of civilization itself and to propose more equitable institutional arrangements.

The articles gathered in this volume reflect this diversity of perspectives. The contributions engage in dialogue with different fields of knowledge and, more than offering definitive answers, invite critical reflection on the role of education in the face of present uncertainties. The epistemological diversity of this issue reaffirms a fundamental principle of Diversitas Journal: understanding contemporary phenomena requires permanent dialogue among different disciplinary fields, valuing plural, intercultural and socially committed approaches. The debate established in the following pages offers theoretical and applied insights that cross the traditional boundaries of knowledge to envision viable collective solutions.

This issue of Diversitas Journal therefore reaffirms the journal's commitment to a public, quality, democratic and socially engaged education. An education committed to human dignity, the defense of life, environmental sustainability, the promotion of social justice and the construction of a future guided by dialogue, cooperation and the strengthening of educational institutions.

We hope that the studies gathered here contribute to broadening the academic debate on the complex relations among education, crises and development, stimulating new research, interinstitutional partnerships and reflections capable of supporting responses to the great challenges of our time.

We invite our readers to go through the pages of this issue with a critical spirit, openness to dialogue and a willingness to reflect on the role of education in a society marked by profound transformations. May each article represent not only an opportunity to access knowledge produced by researchers from different fields, but also an invitation to the collective construction of more sustainable, democratic paths committed to justice and human development.

We wish everyone an excellent reading and fruitful reflections.