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Higher Education Taking Action towards the Sustainable Development Goals:
Perspectives from Asia and Europe

Opinion | Alberto Carmelo Mureddu

Higher Education Taking Action Towards the Sustainable Development Goals: View from Italy

The Italian university system has experienced a continuous cutting of funding for decades. Education in Italy has increasingly become a privilege, and the severe economic crisis of recent years has made the situation become more critical than ever. The gap between the richest regions in the north of the country compared to the poorer ones in central and southern Italy has increased considerably and with this the impossibility of many young people to attend University.

A category that exists only in Italy is the category of *Idonei non beneficiari* (entitled but not beneficiaries). In fact, even if they have the economic requisites to obtain a study grant from the region, which is indispensable for living and studying, especially if they live far from the university, this money is denied due to the lack of funds. This is something very common especially in southern Italy, where the economic crisis has hit harder than in the rest of the country. Government policies have tried in recent years to privilege the large and already rich universities, disadvantaging small universities. This wrong view has led to a crisis in the Italian university system and a depopulation of many cities and regions. According to the new national parameters, those universities spend more money receive more funding, and this has led the large universities in the north, where the economy is more stable, to have more and more funding than in the south where the economic situation is in constant crisis.

The lack of work, the difficult economic situation and the lack of confidence in government measures have forced many young people to leave Italy. Italian researchers are among the worst paid in Europe and often the structures and laboratories do not have the right machinery for scientific research. Despite this, there are some excellences in the field of research, but they are subsidized by private individuals, the academic institutions financed by the state are often in problematic conditions for the reasons already mentioned.

However, there have been associations that in these years have achieved important results through their union action. In fact, in Sardinia, my region and where I study, one of the poorest in Italy, thanks to the continuous efforts over these years, the total coverage of funds has been obtained for the students who cannot afford the studies, the free services of catering and public transport and an increase in the no tax area that allowed many young people to start their university career. But this is certainly not enough, the critical points remain and to obtain a university that is truly within everyone's reach it is necessary to make students participate as much as possible in the political life of the universities.

Furthermore, it is necessary for the government to take the problem of education seriously, according to the OECD we are in the last places in Europe for number of graduates. In an increasingly competitive labor market, a serious awareness of university issues is essential, in addition to taxation, it is important to review study programs to keep up with other countries outside and inside the EU. This will allow not only to provide a better quality of teaching but also to increase the number of graduates. Moreover, all this can only give excellent results also for the economy of the country.