

## **Redefining Education for a Social Solidarity Urban Economy: Becoming Relational**

Across the globe, there is increasing evidence that cities are looking for new ways of addressing issues of inequality and urban poverty. An emergent area of interest is the growth in popularity of the social and solidarity urban economy (EESC, 2017; UNRISD, 2016; Vickers et al, 2017), which, rather than following individualistic, market driven approaches serving private concerns, represents the belief that a change in relationships based on solidarity and co-operation is a fundamental component in developing sustainable and inclusive economic activities and policies in our cities. So far, however, there has been little focus on how education interventions could build stronger relationships with urban communities and help to lay the foundations for more inclusive social solidarity economies. The aim of this proposed research is therefore to examine the comparative way in which education institutions in four different cities around the world engage with their locality through various relational mechanisms and infrastructures (such as governance, curriculum and pedagogy).

The proposal addresses gaps in the literatures of education and urban studies by illuminating the extent to which a place and its communities can become more relational through education policies and practices, making a significant contribution to theory and practice in a range of fields (education, urban spatial inequalities, governance). The research is timely, tying in with current calls for education “to focus on learning environments and on new approaches to learning for greater justice, social equity and global solidarity” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 3), so as to empower young people to help build flourishing, sustainable and inclusive communities that foster notions of social justice and solidarity (IEA, 2017; OECD, 2018). At the same time, the proposal builds on the findings of urban geography scholars (Massey, 2007; Robinson, 2005, 2016 and Ward, 2010), by addressing the need to gain an insight into the everyday social relations and activities that take place in our urban cities.

Engagement relationships between urban education institutions and the communities in which they are situated have long been held to offer the potential to have a positive effect on a wide range of socio economic indicators. There is a large body of research, informed by a social-justice agenda, which focuses on inter-agency interventions via area-based initiatives in areas of socio-economic disadvantage (Auerbach, 2009; Dryfoos, 2005; Dyson and Raffo, 2007; Kerr et al, 2014). However, although such research undoubtedly seeks to develop a collective response to inequality and urban poverty, the focus tends to be on the relationships between groups of professionals, who make collaborative decisions about what is best on behalf of the school and its community. In considering how approaches to education can help to build stronger relationships with urban communities, this proposal is focused less on inter-agency interventions but rather looks to broaden the education agenda by exploring more radical forms of engagement between institutions and communities that seek to enhance a whole range of indicators by responding to the lived realities of people in communities in which schools are located, explicitly setting out to build a sense of relatedness and human collectivity (Amin, 2006) through education policy and practices. These forms of engagement are broadly categorized here as those which aim to develop ‘relational citizens’ through a range of means such as governance, pedagogy and curriculum.

This research aims to surface approaches to education that are grounded in notions of social solidarity, of policy-school, interschool and school-stakeholder relationships that are based on doing with, not doing to; the fundamental ethos of a more relational city. The proposal sets out to explore the notion of education and relational engagement in urban contexts through the investigation of four key questions:

- What are the discourses of public services/policy/schooling that support a social-solidarity approach to education?
- What are the institutional foundations that support a social-solidarity approach to education?
- How do some education institutions develop social solidarity policies within challenging policy contexts?
- What are the links between education policy/practice that has an explicit social solidarity agenda and the development of relational citizenship in urban cities?

### **Research design**

Theoretically this project adopts a relational perspective. Evidence from my doctorate indicates that relational theory provides a helpful way of understanding the relational identities and associated notions of power and positionality that emerge in urban education contexts (Ralls, 2017). Research has found that theories of the relational are helpful in supporting the development of policies and institutional structures that promote social justice and solidarity (Burkitt, 2016; Cordelli, 2015; Donati and Archer, 2015). Relational theory focuses on how relationships can be constituted to generate the 'relational goods' (interpersonal trust, emotional support, care and social influence) (Cordelli, 2015) that are required if there is to be a fundamental shift to a more reciprocal relationship between the state, civil society and citizens (Mulgan, 2012).

In order to answer the research questions, the project will use a qualitative comparative case study approach. Research will examine the comparative way in which education institutions in up to four different cities around the world engage with their locality through various relational mechanisms and infrastructures (such as governance, curriculum and pedagogy). The cities (Barcelona, Berlin, New York and Rio de Janeiro) have been identified based on evidence of their attempts to develop, in different ways, an enabling and supportive urban context of cross-sector partnerships and collaboration that can help to build a successful social solidarity economy (Vickers et al, 2017; Solidarity NYC, 2013). Barcelona, for example, has developed a city 'impetus plan for a social solidarity economy' (SSE). At its heart is the recognition that our understanding of the socioeconomic functioning of society, and the active role that we can play in it, is shaped from childhood (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016). The plan thus supports a programme of continuing professional development for educators across the city and changes to the curriculum, from primary school through to universities, with the aim to embed SSE values and practices in education institutions and generate "critical and active citizens" (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2016, p.26).

During the initial stages of the project, documentary and policy analysis will be used to help identify appropriate urban case studies and to build professional relationships. Each city case study will focus on a different area of interest (governance, pedagogy, curriculum or policy). Individual interviews will be held each year with 2 key individuals responsible for developing and overseeing the education initiatives in each city (e.g. policy makers, local government officials, educationalists). Interviews will seek to explore the ways in which professionals are attempting to redefine education for a social solidarity economy. Fieldwork in each case will encompass participant (e.g. students, community members, parents, and teachers) focus groups of up to 12 participants and observations of the wider project in action. The focus group and observations will help gain an insight into diverse participant experiences so as to better understand the lived realities of those engaged in the project and the extent to which they feel that there has been an attempt to make their place more relational through education. The interviews, observations and focus groups will set out to explore how participants are conceptualising and/or operationalising the links between a social solidarity

urban economy and the development of education policy/ governance/curriculum or pedagogy. The data generated from the interviews and focus groups will be coded thematically as key themes emerge and triangulated with my observations of practice and existing sources of data, such as statistical data provided by the institution or city region and documentary evidence of institutional policies and practices. The focus groups will utilise visual and artistic methods and participatory mapping techniques to create participant artefacts. In the latter stages of the project, the focus group participants will be supported to invite policy makers, local government officials and educationalists to a small discussion event and exhibition of their artefacts. This will act as the final focus group in each city, bringing together the professionals responsible for developing and overseeing the education initiatives and those who have been engaged in these projects. These events will provide an opportunity to better understand how the education initiatives have impacted on the lived realities of local community members and the development of relational citizenship in urban cities. This research will thus provide a rich description of how participants are not only redefining, but exploring, elaborating and experiencing the theory in practice of education for a social solidarity urban economy, whilst identifying possible effects on participants' economic or citizenship behaviour in the urban city.

### **Year 1**

Data Collection: project set up, ethics, recruitment, consent, developing international networks, policy data. Projected Output: i) literature review ii) conference presentation – initial findings/literature review.

### **Year 2**

Data Collection: Fieldwork (governance/curriculum/pedagogy). Conduct interviews, focus groups, observations, data analysis. Projected Output: i) Conference presentation – interim findings. ii) Example papers: Discourses of Social Solidarity Education in the Urban City: Spaces of Possibility; Understanding institutional foundations for a social-solidarity approach to education: Relational Governance.

### **Year 3**

Data Collection: fieldwork (governance/curriculum/pedagogy). Conduct interviews, focus groups, observations, data analysis, writing up and feedback. Projected Output: i) Conference presentation – project findings. ii) Example papers: Redefining Pedagogy for a Social Solidarity Urban Economy: Becoming Relational Citizens of the City; Possibilities and Challenges for Social Solidarity Education in the UK Context. iii) discussion event/exhibition in each city Dissemination and output: At least 5 papers in academic journals and policy papers are anticipated by the conclusion of the fellowship. Media coverage of the project will be sought through the university press officer and papers will be presented at local, national and international conferences.

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