

Long abstract – Monographic section

YOUNG PEOPLE BEYOND STEREOTYPES

Edited by Carlo Buzzi

Redefining youth: conflicts, connections and solidarity

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For decades young people have been portrayed as politically apathetic, narcissistically withdrawn into the private sphere, uninterested and fundamentally incapable of assuming public leadership. Various analyses have returned to an image of a generation of disinterested young people on the edge of political engagement.

In the context of the debate on the decline of traditional forms of political participation (such as voting and party membership), this article analyses the different forms of political activation that characterise the experience of new generations in Italy.

Although most Western societies face complex processes of transition to adulthood, Italy faces a particular pathology. The reasons for this specificity lie in four key elements: the persistent ties of young people to their family of origin, the economic dependence of young people living away from home, the lower participation in the labour market and the lower income of young workers compared to adults.

In this context, despite the challenges of growing social inequalities and the need to construct their own biographies autonomously, without the support of institutions capable of proposing real models of action, young people know how to express a repertoire of creative capacities, of forms of active negotiation with social, political and economic dynamics. They develop strategies to keep the main coordinates of their lives under control, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the context, partly adapting to it and partly shaping it through their own creativity.

To understand these strategies, we use the narratives collected in a nationally significant research project (PRIN) 'Mapping youth Futures: Forms of Anticipation and Youth Agency', which focuses on unconventional political participation within associations, solidarity purchasing groups, informal groups, social centres, young men's and young women's movements. Forty-two narrative interviews were conducted with young adults between the ages of 25 and 34, involved in various forms of association and politics.

Through the lens of Martuccelli's existential sociology, the paper highlights the importance of a renewed focus on young people's values, emotions and aspirations, integrating the analysis of youth biographies with structural and political dimensions. It focuses on political practices, examining how young people make use of social, cultural and political resources available to them.

The focus of the analysis is the relationship between unconventional politics and institutions, exploring the different forms of political activation among the generations involved. Through the interpretation of the interviews, a picture emerges where the concept of participation is articulated between a strong and a weak dimension, with a fundamental emotional element linking doing politics to a sense of belonging to community. This argument leads us to depart from the representation of young people as a politically apathetic category, narcissistically withdrawn into

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their private dimension, uninterested and essentially incapable of assuming the public protagonism, which has been in place for decades. The article concludes by pointing out that, far from showing a lack of interest in community life, the young men and women who took part in our project found specific ways of being active and engaged in a wide range of participatory activities going beyond the boundaries of traditional politics and including institutional, cultural and individual elements. The young people we met are addressing major epochal issues, from fighting against inequalities to acting in support of human dignity, from issues of climate justice to fighting against precariousness, making themselves the bearers of a broader and more innovative conception of politics going beyond the dynamics of traditional political systems and institutional spaces to reconstruct itself in a plurality of social spheres.

This redefinition calls for a new vision in the analysis of youth experiences, opening up spaces for broader and more innovative politics going beyond the traditional institutional venues.

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