

Long abstract – Monographic section

YOUNG PEOPLE BEYOND STEREOTYPES

Edited by Carlo Buzzi

Attempts at empowerment: between marginality and signs of change in Sinti youth

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Within the highly variable youth universe, young Sinti and Roma often remain among the most invisible, if not considered markedly different from their peers.

Conditions of marginality and segregation characterise the history of these linguistic-cultural minorities in Italy: it is as if the structural and social transformations that have taken place over decades had not brought about changes in their relations with the majority groups. Nevertheless, some authors highlight the importance of contextualising reflections on Gypsy groups and cultures in order to avoid irreversibility, fatalism and a sense of powerlessness, as well as to grasp the effects of certain policies.

One of the elements emerging from research on Sinti and Roma concerns the generational continuity of certain salient features of Gypsy cultures, which resist exchanges with other cultures and contribute to the identification of diversity within the majority of population.

This contribution analyses one of these elements, i.e. intra-group experiences and representations of the meanings of educational paths, in order to investigate intergenerational continuity and discontinuity. The starting hypothesis is that, although there are elements of continuity with previous generations, it is possible to detect a change underway, albeit a minority one, in which small attempts at empowerment are emerging, challenging the meanings attributed to education and transforming intra- and inter-generational relations.

The contribution fits into the frame of several international studies that have analysed the unexpected trajectories of Sinti and Roma youth, not seeing them as exceptional cases but as evidence of ongoing changes. The study presents qualitative research conducted with Italian Sinti youth in order to gain a better understanding of the internal variability of this youth universe.

Specifically, the empirical contribution delves into the school experiences of a group of 13 young Sinti from Reggio Emilia who continued their studies after secondary school, aged 15-21, and the point of view of 10 Sinti parents from Reggio Emilia. It is part of a long-term project, whose research design also included interviews with teachers and social workers.

The results of the research highlight how the educational advancement of young Italian Sinti is a process that takes place in stages and over several generations, in a slow process with stops and restarts, but which sees a section of young people, albeit a minority, engaged in processes of constructing new meanings of education.

The results confirm the persistence of common strategies at the intergenerational level, such as not revealing one's cultural affiliation within school in order not to be treated differently and have better results. But they also identify elements of discontinuity, such as parents' regret for not having completed their studies, which affects the rethinking of the meanings of education for their children, and the choices of young Sinti students to invest in education as a means of social mobility but not of denial of their cultural affiliation.

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The significance of these stories of young Italian Sinti lies in revealing dynamics that are different from those which are often predetermined or expected. For the young Sinti interviewed, going on to secondary school implies entering a new world, with many unknowns, many fears and without the example of people around them who, having lived the school and work experience positively, can encourage and stimulate them. By not experiencing a normalisation of school continuity, these young people go beyond stereotypes and are the first members of the family unit to invest in education, in turn becoming role models for others to follow – an important development to recognise because it nurtures new relations between *Gage* and Sinti and within the group.

The analysis is triangulated with the point of view of teachers and social workers only a minority of whom grasp these changes taking place.

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