

## Long abstract – Monographic section

YOUNG PEOPLE BEYOND STEREOTYPES

*Edited by Carlo Buzzi*

### *Emerging Adults: Navigating Uncertainty, Local Engagement, and Future Construction*

Simona Guglielmi, Arianna Piacentini, Giuliana Parente and Maria Tullia Galanti

Studies on the transition to adult roles have increasingly highlighted a shift in the subjectivity of young Italians compared to previous generations. Not only do the timing and pathways of transition change, but also the value system and priorities guiding life choices. New conceptions of the social boundaries of the "youth" category intertwine with persistent mechanisms of inequality influencing the modes and timing of transitioning from dependence on the family to autonomy. Within this framework, the article focuses on the segment of the youth population effectively termed "emerging adults". According to this approach, young people between the ages of 18 and 25 in contemporary societies are neither adolescents nor adults. They go through a period of exploration in which, through various experiences, they experiment, gain clarity about who they are, and who they want to be.

The overarching thesis of this article is that the meanings attributed to this phase and the opportunities to experience it may be influenced not only by class, social status and cultural capital inequalities, but also by living in territories more or less "welcoming" to the needs of the younger population. The geographic variability of transitions to adulthood in Italy is well-documented in the literature, often explained by the North-South divide in economic opportunities and different family relationship models. However, the role played by local youth services and projects remains largely unexplored.

Methodologically, the article applies the IDEA battery - Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood developed by Reifman, Arnett and Colwell (2007), within a mixed-method research design combining discursive interviews and survey data. Data were collected as part of the MAYBE: "Moving into Adulthood in uncertain times: Youth Beliefs, future Expectations, and life choices between changing social values and local policy initiatives" coordinated by Simona Guglielmi (University of Milan) and funded by Fondazione Cariplo.

For the qualitative research, a total of 18 discursive interviews were conducted with young people aged 15 to 27 participating in youth initiatives promoted by five municipalities in Lombardy between September 2022 and February 2023. Additionally, a survey was conducted in high schools between February and May 2023, involving 1227 students enrolled in the last school year.

Both the structured questionnaire and interview guide were designed with reference to the five dimensions of the IDEA battery:

1. Identity Exploration: exploring one's sense of self, including questions about values and life goals;

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2. Instability: referring to the frequent changes characterizing this phase of life;
3. Self-focused: highlighting the emphasis on oneself and personal growth;
4. Feeling "in between": emerging adults often feel trapped between adolescence and full adulthood, experiencing a sense of "incompleteness";
5. Possibilities: this dimension emphasizes optimism and the wish to explore different options and take risks.

Analysis of the MAYBE survey data revealed how living in a territory perceived as "youth-friendly" can particularly impact three specific dimensions of "emerging adulthood" defined by the IDEA battery: Identity Exploration, Possibilities, Self-Focused. Qualitative interviews shed light on underlying processes in this relationship, thus understanding how youth policies can represent an opportunity for growth or stimulus in the process of constructing one's future. This theme is particularly relevant in Italy, where local youth policies constitute a mosaic of heterogeneous interventions united by the mark of "fragmentation". However, they appear potentially capable of activating empowerment mechanisms that can influence early preferences for life choices.

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