

Long abstract – Monographic section

YOUNG PEOPLE BEYOND STEREOTYPES

Edited by Carlo Buzzi

Lifestyle choices and environmental cultures. Young neo-rurals who remain in inner areas

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Italian inner areas, characterized by demographic problems and exposed to risks of marginalization due to the distance from centers offering essential services, can be studied considering the possibility of enhancing the natural heritage and resources available in the territories in order to improve the conditions of the local population, especially the younger ones. When young people come from remote places that are far from urban centers, they are exposed to the “mobility imperative” for the realization of their life paths, often pursuing educational or professional opportunities that are not available in their places of origin.

However, the desire has emerged for many young people residing in Italian inner areas to remain in their municipalities and plan their future there. This tendency shifts the emphasis to youth settlement processes in inner areas in contrast with major demographic trends, such as the return to inner areas following experiences of residential mobility outside or the transfer to inner areas as an alternative to urban centers. The choice to settle down in these territories has been influenced by youth experiences of reconversion to agriculture through neo-rural and sustainable practices, based on a transformation of the rural world moving towards "re-peasantisation" and marked by a discontinuity from previous generations in working methods and values associated with land.

These are experiences which, on the one hand, reflect the requirements of the “restanza” in inner areas as an active and transformative form of living in the villages and, on the other hand, allow to analyze from a generational perspective the ecological awareness of some of the young people manifested in values, lifestyles and behaviors which can have an impact on their transition paths towards adulthood.

This paper explores the life choices made by young individuals who decide to settle down in inner areas of Italy with projects related to neo-rural practices and contexts. The objectives are to identify common and distinctive features among young people with different mobility experiences, explore the relationship of youth with environmental values and lifestyles, and understand how these components influence biographical paths and life projects.

The research design is based on a snowball sampling of young adults aged between 25 and 39, residing in municipalities in the inner areas of southern Italy and engaged in projects associated with the neo-rural sphere, such as associations, informal groups or agricultural enterprises. A total of 26 semi-structured interviews were conducted, initially focusing on the participants' projects and then on aspirations, meanings, and life choices related to staying in inner areas.

The analysis reveals ideas and values of the participants that reflect a strong environmentalism, highlighted in the perception of nature as a set of vital resources, criticism of traditional agriculture in favor of sustainable models, and the enhancement of neo-rural projects for social

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inclusion and territory regeneration. The participants also show adherence to lifestyles based on simplicity and psychophysical well-being, giving priority to the search for a balance between life and work opposed to career and profit-at-all-cost models. The appreciation of time and the search for alternatives to typically urban rhythms emerge as key reasons for voluntary permanence in inner areas, along with dimensions reflecting place attachment both those who have always remained and those who have returned.

In conclusion, the participants are distant from profiles of marginalized youth and possess an environmentalist culture that guides their life choices towards unconventional solutions and resistance to urban models, whose full adoption requires improvements in citizenship conditions in the inner areas.

Cite me: Stefania Leone, Andrea Orio, Scelte di vita e culture ambientali. Giovani neorurali che restano nelle aree interne in "WELFARE E ERGONOMIA" 2/2023, pp 59-73, DOI: 10.3280/WE2023-002005