

Long abstract – Monographic section

YOUNG PEOPLE BEYOND STEREOTYPES

Edited by Carlo Buzzi

Youths on the margin. Expectations of the future, ties with places and participation in public life in the inner areas of Calabria

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Different, ignored and unfulfilled. This is how young people living on the margins, that is, far from the urban and metropolitan contexts offering most social inclusion opportunities, are commonly described. People living in the inner areas experience many difficulties that prompt them to leave. At the same time, in recent years in Italy, several studies have produced a new overall narrative of the inner areas, clarifying the link between territorial fragilities and political decisions, and above all, turning attention to young people who remain or return to live in small, depopulating towns. The article presents some results of a broader research that investigated living conditions, values and ideas that guide the choices and actions of youths in the inner areas of Calabria. It offers an in-depth analysis of their orientation to stay/leave, their attachment to places and their engagement in public life. It also contains a comparison with adults' positions on the same issues. The research is part of the stream of studies promoted by the “Riabitare l'Italia Association” and used the data collected through a thousand telephone interviews with residents of the inner areas of Calabria (572 with young people aged 18-39 and 428 with parents with minor children) and a focus group with university students originating from the same municipalities.

The results show that the majority of young people are interested in living in small or very small towns, with different routines and ways of life and expectations of the future that favour conscious embeddedness in the local context. The widespread orientation to remain and live in the towns of origin has probably been strengthened by the valorisation of the importance of emotional and family ties following the post-pandemic period. Yet, this represents a result that overturns common sense. In fact, the research outlines the profile of citizens interested and willing to stay in the inner towns of a region considered as the most extreme of Italy, either by those who look at it from outside and often also by those who live there. A notable historical heritage, a vast natural habitat, gastronomy, less frenetic rhythms, the warmth of relationships, are traits of the local cultures in which young people identify themselves and which bring them closer to the adults who live in the same places. At the same time, uncertainty about the future has a greater impact on their orientation to stay or to leave, determined above all by the weakness of citizenship rights and of opportunities for independent living and working.

The young people interviewed are aware of the value of their territory as a resource for the economy and a potential lever for local development. They also consider the protection and safeguarding - of local culture, of the environment, of those living in need - reasons for collective engagement. There are quite a few who participate in the activities of groups and associations, especially in the artistic-cultural field, where the strongest call is to local identities and to the rediscovery and valorisation of traditions, and in the humanitarian or social field, aimed at

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solidarity and care of vulnerable people and groups. Moreover, compared to parents, young people are more sensitive to environmental issues.

Finally, the research reveals a positive link between the desire to stay and the participation in public life: the more motivated the presence of young people is, the more active they are, although threatened by the risk of no longer being able to remain. Feeling part of the community encourages them to take part, and as long as they stay, young people do participate.

How much attachment to places and local traditions, adherence to sustainable values and lifestyles, and the desire to stay will be able to retain youths in the inner areas will also depend on the ability of policies to fill the civil gap and promote conditions that allow new generations to express their voice and play an active role in the development of their community.

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