DOCUMENTS

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6

Meanings and forms of political involvement of young people in Italy

The essay debates the conditions for change of political participation of young people in present Italy under the light of the research that has been made in the last years. In a context in which the political participation of the young people is characterized by meaningful levels, but at the same time by forms that do not have in its centre the policies of representative political institutions and traditional political actors, three seem to be the conditions that appear most significantly for the political participation of the young people. The first one is relative to the change of meanings of participation as a consequence to the cognitive mobilization. The second one is to the meanings of political categories and to their elaboration in a social context in which the centre is the relation of the private sphere (family members and peer group). The third is related to the form of participation that shows a permanent interest in politics, but at the same time the form and concept of politics does not correspondent fully with that of the older generations.

Introduction

The transition trajectory to adulthood, in relation of which youth has been defined in the sociological literature during the last decade, is today undergoing profound changes that affect, in a substantial way, the form, until now consolidated, of the relation between adults and the juvenile condition. From a structural point of view, what in the past was a transition to adult life is more and more a variety of different forms of possible transitions: more plural trajectoriesw that imply, from the individual's point of view, a individualization and privitation process of the juvenile condition.

In this context two fundamental presuppositions of the traditional concept of youth are in crisis: that it was defined as the pasing from the condition of dependency towards that of autonomy and from incompetence to competence. For both presuppositions the key element was the confrontation with the role of adults and as a consequence the definition of youth through the differences in relation to adults. In the last decade the changes of the youth condition have made this definition more and more inadequate, intensifying forms and trajectories in which different conditions cross and that were mutually incompatible in the past. In the present situation, «we can identify unceasing back and forth movements from one position to the other, and we are confronted by the proliferation of intermediate situations of semi-dependence ad semi-autonomy. The most immediate consequence of these phenomena is that the adult status is no longer useful for analysing the social incorporation of young people» (Benedicto – Morán, 2007: 604).

This change has important consequences for the sociology of the political culture of the young people. The area of politics expresses, sometimes without mediation, a logic of the intergenerational relations that maintains the asymmetry between the roles of adults and young people as one of the presuppositions of political action. The sociological analysis of the young people's political action therfore has to be rethink its conceptual categories through a change of focus from the roles and functions towards the meanings and forms of political action. The key issue is the study of the conditions of possibility from which the meanings and the forms of young people's political action can develop. Conditions that, according to an adequate constructivist perspective, can be analysed in the interrelations between the institutional processes, the construction of identities and social practices.

According to this perspective, recent research on young people's political participation make more and more evident the limits of traditional categories of analysis –as for example the distinction between conventional and non-conventional forms of political participation– and, at the same time, point at changes that can only be understood adequately if they are been looked at from a perspective that emphasises the analysis of the meanings and semantic presuppositions of juvenile political action.

The debate about these changes is open and is characterized by the different approaches. Some researchers have proposed an analysis of the political participation from the theory of social capital point of view. The interpretative possibilities of this approach are interesting even if they have significant theoretical limitations, as they exclude from the categorical fields the semantic study as well as relevant subjective dimensions, as is the case of the experience of political participation. A more systematic analysis, even respecting the limitations of space of a simple article, seems however necessary, given the relevance of the topic for the study of the forms of political participation of the young people.

Social capital, cognitive mobilization and political participation of young people

Social capital is an image with which sociological research makes references to dimensions of symbolic and value character, that are set in relation with the impulse towards behaviours considered as socially positive and desirable, where we can detect an efficient integration of the individual motivations and the collective ends, as for example in the forms of political participation. It is in this sense that some call the social capital also "social glue" (Van Deth, and others, 1999: XV), or as "lubricant of cooperation" (Putnam, 1993: 201), Coleman (1990) has define social capital as a set of qualitative characteristics of the social networks that become preconditions for individual action. According to this perspective social capital does not belong to the individual, but is available for the individual and to achieve his aims. According to the thesis of Bourdieu, Coleman underlines that the social capital has to do with the socio-structural resources that constitute the spectrum of possibilities of an individuals actions.

With a meaningful perspective change, Putnam (1993:196) has defined social capital as "the trust, the norms that regulate life, the networks of civic associations, elements that improve the efficiency of the social

organization promoting initiatives decided through common agreement". The definition by Putnam allows us to think of social capital either as a public good, in relation to the dimensions of obligation, trust and association level, or as a private good, because the benefits can also be enjoyed different subjects that those who invested in it. In particular, the structure of social relations is of especial importance for the configuration of the effects of the social capital. If Coleman explained the effects of social capital as positive when the social relations are multiple and generate the closing of the web of relations, Putnam (2000) has made evident that social capital may have positive effects or negative ones precisely depending on the structure of the social relations. The networks generate positive effects when they create a "bridging effect" (*bridging*) that establishes relations between individuals with different social and cultural characteristics, while the negative effects are greater in the case of networks that create links (*bonding*) between similar individuals; certainly we are not dealing with two opposing forms but more likely with different degrees of different intensities. For Putnam the relation between social capital and political participation is clearly defined as much as the first is a precondition of the second: the association practices are related with the trust among citizens and in institutions and with the levels of information and interest for politics. A problematic aspect of this relation is given by the conception of social capital as a property of the collective and as such capable of promoting attitudes and behaviours in individuals: we are dealing with a logical circle that does not allow to distinguish in an adequate way the collective level from the individual one. Thus, has correctly has been pointed out, "social capital is simultaneously cause and effect: if generates positive effects, such as economic development, the safety of the social environment and political participation, and is generated by the same effects that it produces" (Portes, 1988: 19).

But this causal logic is only on of the possible directions of the relation between social capital and participation. For example, Ronald Inglehart (1990) conjectured a different configuration. The social participation is not conceived as a pre-requisite for political participation, but as a parallel dimension to political participation conceived traditionally. The possibility to think political participation as not derived or caused by social participation is related to recognising the importance of knowledge mobilization, that is, the always greater expansion of education and information that during the last decades has taken place in western societies, and of which the young generations have benefited in first place. Among the most relevant consequences of knowledge mobilization we can point out an important change in the channels of `political socialization and in particular in the acquisition of political competence. The availability of cultural resources and of a wide range of information sources favours an individualized acquisition of the different qualifications needed to be able to orient oneself in the complexities of politics, makes the function of socialization or political "literacy" traditionally developed by political parties obsolete and at the same time creates the conditions for non-conventional forms of political mobilization, that is, in which the media and characteristic meanings of the politico-institutional system is not essential anymore.

From this perspective of recognising the relevance of cognitive mobilization for the political participation of the young, Jan van Deth

(2000) has offered an exciting contribution to the debate, that constitute also a revision of Inglehart's thesis. According to Van Deth, an increase in interest for politics does not necessarily mean an increase of the "relevance of politics" The concept of "relevance of politics pretends to close-up on to a dimension until today forgotten of the debate about the relation between social capital and political participation: we are referring to the subjective importance of politics, that is, of the social construction of the meanings that constitute it as are of political action and putting it in the horizon of values and meanings that the individual shares with the members of his own group. The variation of the relevance of politics is strongly linked to the intensity of cognitive mobilization: instead of a plurality of sources, channels and knowledge forms, information or social action, the area of politics is –above all for the young generations– in a minor position of relevance compared to the past, even when the individual shows a high level of political interest. This happens because the increase of resources heightens the level of individual autonomy as much as the probability to undertake alternative actions to politics.

In this context political action can be considered to be important, but at the same time it appears as subjectively uninteresting: for individual provided by high social and knowledge resources a low level of implication in political action is not necessarily accompanied by a low level of inter-subjective confidence, neither of a reduced association participation (Alteri – Raffini, 2007). In other words, the loss of political relevance can be an indicator not only of a crisis, but also the complete affirmation of democracy as institutional space of social action of the individual. In this sense some research (Bettin Lattes, 2001; Buzzi-Cavalli-de Lillo, 2002) have pointed out the tendency on behalf of the young in Italy to consider democracy as something "that is taken for granted". To take for granted democracy means that one does not consider it necessary to renounce to one's own positions and particular interests to procure to reconcile them with a collective value system colonized by the semantics and the actors of the traditional political system, but without meaning that the importance of the political order and its functioning is reduced. This type of change of the political culture manifests –in this specific sector of social life– the changes of roles, of meanings and of identities that go through all the social body. An important aspect of the logic of contemporary social change consists precisely in that: inside of every social system (economic, political, scientific and cultural) possibilities and developments are produced whose management cannot be controlled only by the system inside of which the innovation has been produced. For example, genetics is born as a development of the scientific and technological system, but is extended through the functions of the market (economic system), solicits moral positioning (cultural system) and requires forms of political and normative regulation (political system).

An important consequence of this logic of change is the crisis created in the function of the axis of it that the political system plays (representative institutions, parties, political class) throughout all of the 20th century. In these circumstances it is important to consider the loss of "relevance of politics" is not only consequence of frustration, but a deeper effect of change, in front of which the semantic horizon of politics does not find in traditional political institutions the centre of production of meanings for the social action and the lever for the transformation of society. That happens

because socio-political change can develop besides change processes activated in other areas of social life (Beck – Giddens – Lash, 1988) and only in a second moment affect the political-institutional system.

These changes accentuate the management dimension in the political work as a consequence of the greater complexity of society. Said in other words, the area of politics looses relevance in the horizon of meanings and as "lever of social change", but at the same time it manifests itself as an unavoidable element of social life. This is why the democratic political institutions are not being questioned and, above all among the young people, acquire the meaning of a reality whose existence is not seen as something to be defended o for which to fight, but that can be taken for granted, in the same way and institutional function present in society (Bontempi – Pocaterra, 2007).

The political participation of young Italians in some recent research

From the data of the survey *Euyoupart* (1) one sees an interest of the young Italians for politics that is higher than the one manifested by their contemporaries of other European countries: 43%, while the European average is around 37%. The same happens with the confidence in European institutions: 29% of young Italians trust the European Commission, compared to an average of 22,5%. However the interest in politics is not incompatible with a very critical judgment in relation to the practices often associated to behaviours of some members of the political elite: in effect, close to 49% of young Italians consider that politics means empty promises and 27% associate the meaning of corruption to political practice. Attitude towards politics is an interesting indicator of the redefining process of its meaning for young people. The data of the *VI Rapporto sulla condizione giovanile in Italia* (Buzzi – Cavalli – De Lillo 2007) show a fracture among the young Italians in their attitude towards politics.: 42% declares to be interested and involved, while 57% express their rejection to politics.

As can be seen in frame 1 –that compares the recent survey based on representative samples at national level– the group of involved young in an active way is very reduced and represents approximately the tenth of those that inform themselves about political issues but without participating actively. The other group (majority) is composed of those that keep their distance in relation to politics. In the internal articulation of this group exists a meaningful difference that is due to the inclusion, in one of the two surveys, of the *item* "politics does not interest me". The effects of this possibility to answer, deserves special attention. The judgement of rejection linked to discontent with politics is strongly re-dimmensioned, at the same time that the group of those not considered to be capacitated to follow politics is reduced significantly. It is known that in social research the way of formulating the items may influence even relevantly in the articulation of the data, however the comparison shows that the proposition of one's own disinterest in politics is not related with a feeling of lack of political competence, and even much less with net rejection forms, but it is due to the little importance that politics has for the horizon of meanings themselves; in other words, to its low relevance.

Frame 1. **Attitude towards politics (%)**

	2004*	2003**
I consider myself politically involved	3,8	3,5
I am up-to-date in politics, but I am not actively involved	38,3	35,9
I think politics is for those better qualified then me	34,5	16,1
I dislike politics	23,1	5,2
I am not interested in politics	-	39,3

Source: *De Luca (2007: 291); ** Loera – Ferrero Camoletto (2004: 46).

Regarding the critical attitude towards politicians, young Italians hold what could be considered a high conception of politics, i.e. made up of a field of meanings that, as can be observed in figure 1, condense importantly over the ideal dimensions that characterize political engagement. If we analyse the data, the highest-ranking responses show differing tendencies: in fact, if building a better world implies a strongly idealized conception of political engagement, precisely because the ideas themselves are identified with their supposed universal validity, the other two *items* refer to a different perception of the personal position with respect to the others whilst expressing the idea of a personal commitment as a qualifying element of political activity. The instrumental dimension of political engagement appears to also have a more formative content (learning useful things) than opportunistic (meeting important people and being successful).

Figure 1. **Being politically active means...**
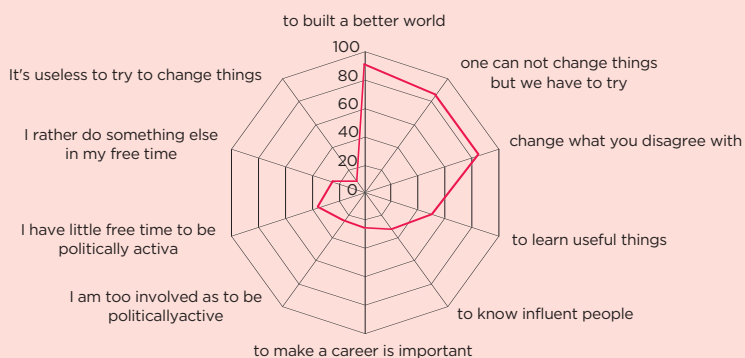
Source: Colloca (2007: 47), data only for Italians.

The dynamics of changing the meanings that structure the field of political action are even more apparent if we analyze the forms of political participation of Italian youth. The data in Chart 2 are undeniably proof that those who have absolutely no political involvement make up a minority of young people. There is also a clear tendency to combine forms of

conventional participation (casting a vote) with non-conventional forms, including radical forms: almost 45% of the youth surveyed. In other words, contrary to what is often superficially portrayed by the media, Italian young people are not only willing to participate, but they also question the traditional limit between the different types of political participation. We must point out that the logic that associates various types of participation does not exclude classical voting, rather it could be said that when electoral participation takes on a meaning other than the traditional one, it also becomes another instrument for expressing one's personal position. The interpretations of this redefinition can be diverse: on one hand, some claim that by associating vote casting with non-conventional practices Italian youth are indicating that the traditional political system is still relevant (Ferrero Camoletto – Loera, 2006); on the other hand, if we put this data into the wider European context, it is possible to deduct that the tendency to combine typologically different practices is a common practise shared by the majority of European youth and that such a combination is strongly related to a change in what it means to be politically active. Change towards a participation that is "more defined by the act of taking part, through specific forms of action that are granted a certain self-expressive value, than by the act of belonging to and, therefore, identifying with a group and feeling solidarity with the other participants. A motivation for acting that apparently depends on a 'contextual knowledge that depends on the issues' that has as its correlate a strong pragmatism and a deep sense of immediate value (Habermas, 2006: 85-92), for which one intervenes on the political stage, almost exclusively, to state specific concerns, essentially those that best express one's own subjectivity [...] The border between conventional participation and non-conventional participation is extremely weak, and is more and more often crossed by transformational processes, producing forms of unorthodox participation that are, nevertheless, considered legitimate and socially accepted. Especially amongst the younger generations familiarity with some forms of participation, and their recurrence, can make them as institutional as party affiliation or casting a vote" (Colloca, 2007:46).

Table 2. **Types of political youth participation (%)** (2)

No participation	15,5
Only non conventional participation	18,8
Only vote	20,8
Vote and moderate non conventional participation	20,8
Vote and non conventional radical participation	23,1

Source: Ferrero Camoletto – Loera (2006: 168)

(2)
The derived typology of the crossing of the three dichotomies: a) in case we had elections today, availability towards valid vote in contrast with abstention or invalid vote; b) availability in contrast with no availability towards non conventional moderated forms of political participation; c) availability in contrast to availability towards forms of non conventional radical political participation (not authorized and/or violent), Ferrero Camoletto – Loera (2006: 167)

As we know, a relevant factor in developing forms of political participation is the family's political socialization. It is interesting to observe that whilst almost all of Italy's youth (94%) see themselves reflected in the values transmitted by their parents and 70% share the social opinions they received from their parents, 48% of them differ from their parents' political positions. The relevant aspect with respect to one's family is not so much their political identity as the level of interest in politics and the political conversations

between parents and offspring. When both parents are either interested or not interested, the transmission is much stronger than when one is interested and the other is not. This means that both interest and lack of interest can be transmitted (Ferrero Camoletto – Loera, 2006: 178-179) (3). In other words, more than identity, what seems to be at stake here is the relevance of politics in the horizon of one's values and familiar notions. Undoubtedly, politicized parents are more likely to orient their children towards community related values and issues as well as towards the affirmative Yes; however, another important aspect is the dalogue between parents and children and the chance to talk about topics of political interest. In this respect, we must underline the high level of political communication that Italian youth have with their families. Almost two out of three Italians (64%) claim that they talk about politics more than just occasionally with at least one of their parents. According to the data of the *Euyoupart* survey, Italians are the most likely to speak with their about politics; followed closely by the Germans (60%) and the Austrians (54%). A little under half of French youth (46%) (4). These four countries show a greater politicization in their family relations than the others. Moreover, according to other data the young people of these countries also show higher levels of political awareness and political engagement. Even in a context of different family models, and therefore of different forms of father-son relationships, the traditional culture of participative democratic politics may be responsible for maintaining high levels of intrafamiliar political communication. In an era when traditional forms of political identity are losing their efficiency, family relationships, due to the specific makeup, represent a chance to elaborate points of view or opinions about politics and about politicians or even rejection of the logic and practices of the political system, such as the ideological position or participation in demonstrations.

We must put the case of Italy into context by taking into consideration at least two factors that affect the socialization towards the family's political notions. The first factor refers to the deep fracture that was opened in the forms of transmitting political culture during the nineties, with the consequences of the scandal known as *Mani pulite.* The "explosion" of the political system and of the links between values, identities and political membership has configured a situation in which the young people do not find the relation between the political notions and values of their parents and the actors and dynamics of the politico-institutional system. The research of that period has brought to light that television has played a much greater role in the political socialization than in the recent past. The second factor precisely refers to the role of television in political information. From the survey *Euyoupart* we deduce that it is the Italian youth who are the greatest "consumers" of televised political information. Under the light of these two elements we can understand why the particularly heightened intensity of the family conversations about politics is not necessarily associated with the confidence towards politics and the politicians. These changes mark certain dimensions whose relevance has been proven more than once in the research on political socialization.

The growing importance of individual independence as a key-value of the family relations reinforces the role of family political socialization, changing it. In different forms, the family seems to supply the young Italians above all, more than with value and political identities, with knowledge schemes and communicative competence conditions from which the young manifest their

(3)
Among children of both parents not interested 86% is not interested and 14% is interested; among children of both parents interested 61% are interested and 39% are not interested; among the children of parents were one parent is interested and the other is not 38% is interested and 62% are not.

(4)
The data in relation to the other countries of the survey are: Slovakia 44%; Finland 41%, United Kingdom 40%, Estonia 37%.

own forms of interest for politics and of political participation, even through an articulation and complexity proportional to the variety of the extra-family relations and experiences. In this sense it seems sociologically more pertinent to consider the so-called "crisis of values" not as an external phenomenon that is being imposed on the individual, but as a relational and communicative condition that individual rely upon to express the perceived unrest when contrasting criteria to judge social reality. It is a discontent that can be observed as an argument at the micro level of the interpersonal relations as at the macro level of institutional contexts. At the level of interpersonal relations the "crisis of values" is manifested through the difficulty of having to consider that with those with whom you maintain permanent relations –in family or among friends– do not share our judgement and opinions and that that hiatus requires a continuous work of argumentation and justification of the formulated judgments and of the undertaken actions. What people experiment under these circumstances is not an individual unrest of loss of values, but the decline of the form of sharing certain values or set of values. In a sense only apparently paradoxical we can say that the "crisis of values" is the consequence not of the aim, but of the multiplication of values. Moreover it is the plurality of values what obliges to use rational reasoning to obtain the consensus for one's own justifications.

The loss of weight of the institutionalized reasons and therefore recognised as valid by all, pushes on to the shoulders of the individual the need of a certain search of consensus through rational reasons, there is the unrest. Therefore, the experience and communication point of view shows us how, beyond the "crisis of values", we can observe a double process of rationalization of the forms of sharing the values and the individualization of its making. In this slide there is a displacement from the content to the cognitive form of the value that is of great importance to understand the political culture of the Italian youth. The knowledge assumes the cognitive competence features and the stress is displaced from the identity content to the political relevance and the possibilities of choosing and combining forms of political participation.

If we observe this phenomenon from the point of view of the macro-sociological level of the political institutions, what appears is a double tendency: on one hand an accentuation of the procedural logic of institutionalized decision making in relation with the reference to the criteria of values. The legitimization forms of the institutionalized decisions are references to rationalized versions of the values, such as tolerance to differences, more than to traditional forms of affirmation of an identity through the values. On the other hand in a more and more relevant way a tendency is promoted of youth political participation through the open form that sets in the first level experience, more than the elaboration of political identities. It is this new modality that it is convenient to deal with now.

Promotion of political participation of young people and intergenerational relations

As a considerable amount of theoretical and empirical literature pointed out already, in the present phase of modernity the belonging and collective identities are structured through a multiplicity of links, every one of which is often more subtle than those in the past. But plurality of links means

multiplicity of identities and also multiplicity of separations, of the forms of not being involved, but that does not mean that a lack of engagement is the only thing that defines the identity. What is the most specific colective identity feature in the present and it's making through participation is neither the engagement nor the lack of engagement: it is the possibility to choose between both. As has been pointed out in the new active practices of participation by the "individualized individual", "the non-membership (*désaffiliation*), the non-belonging (*désappartenance*) should always be possible [...] the modern subject searches for the balance between engagement and lack of engagement (F. de Singly, 2003: 69).

The engagement and the participation that are characterized by the fact of being elected mobilize a type of open and procedural identity that is being built in social relations en in reflexive communication forms, that is to say whose contents also include the way in which these same relations and communications are being developed. From that point of view participation is first of all social, that is oriented towards quality of the relations and the possibilities of expressing individual peculiarities that do not find space in the classic forms of political participation. Understood thus participation looks a lot like socialization, that is as a process that constitutes social links and is developed by individuals in a way that they are not aware of because of the simple fact of being part of networks of social relations. But what distinguishes the new forms of participation and engagement with social issues is that they are being promoted by the institutions and as such are intervention policies that are specifically oriented towards the youth.

We are talking of participation that pretends to modify the social construction processes of meanings and of youth identities. Young people are being invited to develop a role of action and proposals in decision-making processes and of shared development with the government entities of the territory. It is a shift in perspective –that however not always means a real change– in which the inequalities in the social construction of the collective identities are conceived as a social and relational process whose change implies a direct implication of the roles, adult as well as of the young, and a reflexive attitude of the actors in the development of the actions (decisions to be taken, projects to undertake). As a difference of traditional ways of participation –oriented towards change in the distribution of power and therefore centred on the asymmetric relation between those in authority and the young people as "externals" of the decision-making roles– the construction process of social meanings is continuous and without a decisive end and participation in that process is necessarily personal and limited to defined interventions/projects and times. These new forms of participation bring with them a concept of citizenship and its exercises that is characterized by its shifting of perspective in which the pre-eminence of political institutions over society ceases its way to the community and to social dynamics that develop in every day life and that also are publicly relevant as a possibility to express individual particularities. Without taking away none of the traditional laws and norms this shifting brings us, on one hand, to redefine citizenship from the experience that one can have of it; and on the other, as an activity promoted by the local governmental institutions in a frame of youth politics in the territory, becomes an instrument of re-legitimization of political institutions and its relation with civil society. As a reference criterion for the processes of transmitting values and knowledge, the attention given to experimentation makes it possible to go beyond the

asymmetry of roles and the corresponding reduction of citizens to the form of the principles and norms, for example, of traditional civic instruction.

The second aspect of this concept of citizenship refers to the role played –at various levels– by local political institutions in Italy that are promoting social participation as a part of youth politics. The fragmented and plural character of these initiatives allows us to observe various forms of participation and youth commitment, which cover a range of at least three different conceptions of participation: from interventions explicitly aimed at "getting youth involved in politics again" and at underlining the importance of institutions as a community meeting place, even the most de-institutionalized forms of co-operation between adults and youth and of discussions between institutions and society, including the form of "tutored promotion" of young people's autonomy.

In Italy the participation of the young in the decision taking processes is essentially promoted through the Youth Councils (*Consigli dei Giovani*) and the *Forum*. The first are organized on a municipal level and constitute forms of relations for the young with the institutions that govern the city, particularly with the municipal Corporation (*Consiglio comunale*). The second, addressing especially young associations or those that care for young people, are organized with different organizational criteria and may be articulated at various territorial levels: municipal, provincial and regional. Moreover in 2004 the *Forum Nazionale Giovani* was created.

As happens also in other countries the organizational forms of the youth councils may be different. In Italy the councils have developed according to two different concepts of youth participation that corresponds with the two reference models mentioned, one by the "Associazione "Democraczia in Erba" (C. Pagliarini, 1996; V. Baruzzi and A.Baldoni, 2003), the other in a context of reflections initiated in Italy by the urban-designer Francesco Tonucci (1996) and later developed independently by the "Centro psicopedagogico per la Pace" of Piacenza (Coslo Marangon, 2000).

The first model is characterized by the importance that the representative political institutions are given in the promotion of participation. The youth councils are organized in close relation with the municipal council for adults, which is its promoter and direct reference. The councils existing under this model in all over Italy are close to 500, most of them in cities with less then 25.000 inhabitants (5). To those we also have to add some "Parlamenti regionali dei giovani", for example in the Toscana and Piamonte, are constituted through an election system of young representatives of all superior schools of the region (6). The municipal councils of the youth care of the young people until 16-18 years of age (in some cases up to 25 years) and are instituted in the Town Halls: 60% of the councils are organized according to the same rules than the adult's council: election of its members and organization through working commissions that include internal duties and a formal hierarchy among the members. In some cases the Council is presided by a young *Sindaco*, in others by an adult that can be the mayor of the city, the young affairs councillor or anyone responsible for the sector. The work issues are selected in 50% of the cases by the adults only by adults and young people in 20% of the cases and the other 30% of the cases are exclusively decided by young people. The working method reproduces those of the political institutions, with sessions organized around an order of the day, structured interventions on the base of turns and reports of the

(5)
There are no official data on these forms of participation, however we could say that apart from the 500 active councils in 2001, another 250 have previously been started and dissolved, what proves the difficulties they have to face. Only in the Lazio region between 2006 and 2007 38 new youth council have been constituted in as many cities.

(6)
At national level it was in May 2006 for the first time that in Italy the *Ministero per le Politiche Giovanili e delle Attività Sportive* was created, that counts among its objectives the constitution of the *Consiglio Nazionale dei Giovani* and the promotion of the *Consigli dei Giovani* at a local level with the same structure. Moreover, with the law of February 2007, the *Agenzia nazionale per i giovani* has been created. On 28th of April in 2007 the first *Incontro Nazionale dei Consigli dei Giovani* took place. These are initiatives whose impact cannot be established yet as they have hardly started to function.

meetings. There are joint meetings between the Youth Council and the Municipal Corporation during which the young people make proposals and formulate demands to the adults on youth policies. The regional Parliaments are structured similarly, having as their reference point the regional Council. Thus, this model is based on the concept of participation that is defined above all as a learning process of the procedures and of the dynamics of politico-institutional confrontations. The young people are given the possibility of having a "political experience as an educational condition" (Baruzzi, 2003, 60): participation is not an aim in itself, but is understood as a medium to educate the young people in the exercise of politics. In this attempt to "make young people live" the experience of municipal Corporations some identity meanings of, still rooted, traditional character are being reaffirmed: the young people are being invited by the adults to participate in the institutional dynamics as not competent and therefore as external to it. The educational expectations linked to this model of the councils manifest the importance that is conferred on to the cognitive dimension of the acquisition of political competence as a means to express one's own ideas and as a formative process that should favour a renewed interest for politics.

Even if this orientation is based on the fact that the young people involved are between 8 and 16 years of age the concept of participation as education is still a fundamental element of this model. However in this attitude there is a great risk of producing an education for the citizenship as imitation of the adults by the young people. In effect, the social construction of the meanings is a complex game of relations between the roles and between the persons and the asymmetric form of the relation between adults and young people that is typical of this model can relevantly condition the way the meanings of the participation experience; it thus happens because, as rightly has been pointed out before, "in most of the projects developed in that way it is the young people themselves who, adapting to the expectations of the agents, orient spontaneously the communication to this technical and impersonal form. Therefore, the objectives of communication and semantics are defined substantially in a unilateral way by the adult world" (Dreossi, 2003: 290) and the participation of the young is substantiated by confirming the meanings developed by the adults.

In the second mode of youth councils they are conceived as possible porters of a different point of view from that of the adults. This difference is assumed as a basis of participation that one wants to promote. In Italy the youth councils inspired in this second model are clearly a minority in relation with those that follow the first. There are no data available for it, but to have an idea one can say they are only a few dozens in all over Italy. The organizational features are oriented to promote the possibility of personal expression of the young that are part of it. Habitually the councils are constituted by projects developed by associations and shared with schools and local institutions. There are no elections and participation is free. In this case the aim is not to reproduce the dynamics of institutional places of political confrontation, but to constitute "an organism in which the young may make their voice heard in relation with territorial problems, in particular in relation with the problems that affect them (Cosolo Marangon, 2000: 33). This model requires that the adults that have set in place the Council get involved in it as promoters, with the double objective of forming groups of young people that know how to work on issues selected autonomously and

that they are capable of presenting proposals and projects to the institutional speaker (often the municipal Corporation). As the Council internally is not organized hierarchically in the initial phase the promoter has the function of favouring the mutual knowledge of the young that participate in the council and to create a relational context of confidence and collaboration.

Later comes the phase of defining the issues that is developed by walks through the neighbourhood so as to collect observations and elements for reflection over the state of the territory and the conditions of life. From the analysis of these observations and the common debate the issue or the issues are selected around which the work is going to be organized by the Council, creating if need be commissions. After that the common work has to get them to formulate some proposals and projects (for example the recovery of degraded urban areas through the creation of meeting spaces or for playing for the young and children) that at the end are going to be presented formally in a meeting with the local administrators and/or the municipal Corporation. In some cases the development of the projects have required some changes of certain aspects through a work of revision in which have participated the young with the administrators.

In difference to the first model, in which the participation is conceived as a learning of the political institutions procedures, in the second model the emphasis is put on the community, and the participation of the young is developed as a praxis of the citizen of the community itself through initiatives that include entering in relations with the institutions of local government and associations that are part of civil society. The relation between adults and the young are also seen in the frame of cooperation, even if respecting the differences of the respective roles. In this sense the local institutions are considered the partners of the youth councils not because they constitute the centre of the collective life, but as a part, important one, of the community. The political experience that the young acquire through the councils inspired in this model is undoubtedly less procedural and is more oriented to the development of social relations of cooperation between individuals that share the belonging to the same community and an interest for the quality of interior life.

A different form of promoting young people's participation is the young *Forum*. Addressed at young people between 18 to 30 years and articulated at different territorial and institutional levels (municipal, provincial and regional), the forums develop two basic functions: representation of the young associations or that take care of young people and organization of initiatives and projects. Many regional laws include the constitution of forums as partners at the different levels of government of the territory and in the last years in Italy a greater promotion of these forms of participation is taking place. Habitually the forums are financed by the Town Hall, that allows for the organization of events, meetings and demonstrations; in its relation with the institutions the forums develop the function of speaking partner for the definition of policies for the young people. This function is developed through organizing periodical meetings –even if only once a year– with a consulting character in which above all members of the associations world participate to debate, discuss and approve guideline documents and to debate with the administrators responsible for the youth policies in the institutions.

In a similar way, but at a little higher level the Forum Nazionale Giovani, founded in 2004 by 40 associations, including many youth movements of the political parties, has as its aim to represent Italy at international meetings of the participation organisms and the role of speaker partner of Parliament and of the Government for the issues related with youth politics. To sum it up in a few words, one may say that the young people that participate in these initiatives are a very reduced segment of the young world and above all at the higher levels of representation, constitute a strata "in learning" of the future directive class, may it be in the associational or at political level.

Thus in general terms we may observe that in the participation practices to which we have referred participation may be promoted asymmetrically or well in a shared way between adults and young people. This is particularly evident as in reference to the communicational modalities as well as in the social construction of the roles and the meanings. The asymmetrical communicative form that is most easily accepted in the promotion of participation is the one of education. In those cases the participation is an instrument of learning that has as its aim, in a more or less conscientious way, the transfer of competences that are considered may "complement" the young's identity. On the contrary, the participation according to the shared communicative form has two important innovative features. The first being the reflective character of communication: the participation is already mobilized in the communication, "through the reflection about the concept itself of participation, through its explicit problematization in the area of the project" (Cuconato 2004: 110). In this way the conditions of participation are not taken for granted, allowing the expression of individual and subjective peculiarities in the context of the participation. The second innovative feature, strongly related to the first, refers to the consideration of the young people as competent individuals that may contribute in an original way to the development of social processes of collective interest. This second aspect implies that the adults have to be capable of listening to what the young mean to say and also to take the participation of the young people seriously for the communicative definition of the role of the adults.

In the social construction of the roles and the meanings, in the relation between the adults as politico-institutional actors and the young as actors of civil society, the asymmetric character of the relation gives a fundamental role to the politico-representative institutions. From this perspective it is the institutional "centre" who "opens up" to the young to eliminate the distance that separates them from the social practiceand their lifestyle, and that develops youth policies as an instrument of consensus production and forms of legitimization on behalf of sectors of society less and less interested in the logic of institutional politics. The asymmetry of the roles adult/young people is thus structuring the relations between institutions and civil society, linking political competence to institutional logic and, through these, to the roles of adults. This is how one can understand the constitution of the fora as speker partners of the local institutions responsible of the youth policies. The young are included, as young people, through an institutionalized form of representation of the young world. In other words the institutions appear as open to recognise the specificity of the young but only under the condition of being able to define "young people" in terms of speaker partners of the adult roles, that is, one more time as "different" of the adults and their roles and in consequence as "incomplete", "incompetent" and "needing education".

If we consider the other model, in a similar way to what has already been said in relation to the communication, also in the construction of the roles and the institutional meanings the shared relation becomes that possibility that opens up at the moment the asymmetry between the roles does not make the recognition of the values of participation impossible in those that are by definition external to the institutions. This requires a change in the logic, in which the politico-institutional actor does not play the role of decider in a direct way, but succeeds in transforming the decision into a process in which the addressees of the decisions participate, becoming a promoter, guarantee and defender of the process (Bobbio, 2002). That means that the design of youth policies together with the young people themselves cannot be undertaken by requesting the young to attend an institutional meeting, but changes becoming an activity that is developed inside a system of peer relations between the different actors. Therefore we see a perspective develop in the youth policies in a frame of a decentralized system that is lacking a traditional political-institutional centre and made possible by the participation of the young themselves. This is a radical change that makes possible an institutional configuration where the institutions co-operate with the young people as to identify and confront their problems together with them. One has to underline that this change does not dissolve the specificity of the institutions, but it redirects them to a later level of intervention and more abstract one. As a fact, in the co-operation work to produce and realize the youth policies the local institutions continue to share the "support, service and promotion of who contributes to generate public well being; maintaining the subsidiary principle with the civil society; guarantee the quality of the services and universal access to them" (Prandini, 2004:50).

In conclusion, considered from a general perspective, the conditions and forms of youth political participation in Italy show the signs of an intense transformation process, as much as referred to the logic and pre-existing modalities as well as to — more deeply — as far as the semantic structure of the policies and meanings of the political categories. To summarize, to a structural change it seems is associated a change more specifically cultural that requires a critical rethinking equipped with the interpretational keys usually used. In a sociological key the problem of the distance of the young people and data that show how that question may be understood in its complexity only through a research work, that making the centre of the analysis of the political meanings and of the forms of political participation, allows to displace the attention from the politico-institutional dimension of politics to the area of the youth political behaviours and to the relations of that behaviour with the institutional roles (Muxel; Benedicto2007)

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