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Study of the transition to adulthood for Italian young people: Between crossing the threshold in an orderly way and individualising biographical paths

This article analyses the specific aspects of the transition of young Italians into adulthood. We have observed that the extension of youth in Europe and of the tendency of the young to stay at the family home tends to be more accentuated in Italy (and Southern Europe) than in other places. Additionally, Italian sociologists focus on the transformation of the intergenerational relations, paying attention to the great freedom awarded to the young and the absence of limitations. On the other hand, factors such as the weakness of the political policies aimed at the young and the obstacles found in the rental market have not been deeply analysed. Even if there is a large consensus about the importance of familiar socialisation with the young, the ways to move on to adulthood confront those researchers who defend the appearance of an individualisation of trajectories with those who believe that the stages of their transition are most of the time ordered in accordance with a precise sequence: end of studies, joining the labour market, leaving the family home, marriage and birth of the first child.

Key words: Young adults, «extended» family, «typical» sequences, «atypical» sequences

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to analyse the forms of transition of the Italian young into adulthood, paying attention to their specificity regarding the European context. Even though we have observed an extension of youth all over Europe, the Italian young (and the young in other countries in Southern Europe) seem to tend to stay at the family home more than young people in other countries (Cavalli and Galland, 1993). In order to study this phenomenon we have often given certain explanations indicating that the cause is the difficulty to start working. Nevertheless, this thesis has been abandoned due to the high number of young people with long-term contracts who still live with their parents. In addition to this, many authors have focused on the family and its internal performance to study this trend. Certain expressions such as *famiglia lunga* (extended family) and *giovani adulti* (young adults) have become popular to talk about this trend to stay with the family (Donati, 1988). If the analysis of the transition into adulthood has generated a large number of researches in the field of family studies, other factors have been forgotten, especially those referring to the lack of social policies oriented towards helping the young to become independent and the crisis in the rental market. Additionally, and although it may seem like a paradox, for a long time there has been a public debate on the social effects of the dependence of the young on their families. Even though it is quite recent, there has been a despicable lack of interest on behalf of the

Administration and the public powers regarding the analysis proposed by social sciences (Rauty, 1989; Cavalli, 2002).

Having remembered the different versions of the theories about the transition to describe this phenomenon, we will focus on the 5 studies undertaken through questionnaires made by the IARD Research Institute between 1983 and 2000 (1) about other quantitative studies developed by large organisations. It is important to note that, even though they follow the same protocols, the interpretations about the individualisation of the biographical trajectories in the transition to adulthood are different in these researches. On the other hand, there seems to be a wide consensus about the temporary social and demographical consequences of the extension of youth.

2. New and old theories about the transition into adulthood

After a preliminary sociological research phase about youth dedicated to the generational conflict and the forms of juvenile culture (between 1940 and the first decade of 1970), during the last thirty years the matter of transition into adulthood has reached an important place (Saraceno, 1986; Cicchelli and Merico, 2001; Merico, 2002; 2004). We can even state that this focus has managed to attract almost exclusively the attention of youth sociology, although a large part of it tends to be confused with the study of this transition.

It is interesting to note that most studies on this phenomenon have taken a point of view provided by John Modell, Frank Fustenberg and Theodore Hershberg (1976) consisting in studying the step into adult life, analysing the moment when five thresholds are crossed: leaving the educational system, joining the labour market, leaving the family home, marriage and the formation of a new family with the birth of children. From now on the referential figure will be formed by these thresholds. However, these three authors insisted on the fact that even though it is not certain that all people share the same calendar for the transition into adulthood, it seems heuristic to state that each society defines its own rules in relation to adulthood and the way it is reached. These thresholds have been useful on one hand to locate the “sequence” that for a long time characterised its normal paths, that is to say, those paths that were socially acknowledged and legitimate for the transition into adulthood (Hogan, 1978; Marini, 1984) and, on the other, to analyse this step by referring to two axes: the first one is familiar and matrimonial and the second one is educational and professional (Galland, 1990, 2000).

The latest advances in research have emphasised the deep transformations experienced by the entrance into adulthood since the war ended (Hogan and Astone, 1986). This way, we can notice a postponement of the ages to take the step and cross the threshold, thus leading to an extension of youth (Keniston, 1968, 1971). Even though it has followed different temporalities and modes, this phenomenon has ended up by affecting all western countries (Fussel, 2002). More specifically, we are witnessing a significant transformation of the way to move up the ranks towards adulthood: transition along two axes (educational-professional and familiar-matrimonial) will not take place in a synchronised manner, as the first one is taken much

(1)
Special thanks to those in charge of the IARD studies for providing us with the data presented in this article.

earlier than the second one (Modell *et alii*, 1976; Galland, 2000; Iedema *et alii*, 1997). In a more general way, it is obvious that the localisation of a “normal biography” must take into consideration variations in gender, social position and ethnic origins (Pisati, 2002).

Another point of view focuses the attention on the individualisation of the biographical trajectories (Beck, 1986) and the transformations of juvenile temporalities (Leccardi, 2005a, 2005b). Three elements indicate the impossibility of the social frameworks to determine from now on the individual destinations. Firstly, the increasing division of experiences leads to multiple possible careers. This creates a strong uncertainty regarding the future and can create in the individual the impression that he/she has no control over destiny (Evans and Furlong, 2000). Secondly, the paths can be reversible because crossing the threshold is nothing definite. Individuals can go back and forth between situations that used to be exclusive in the educational-familiar axis or the familiar-matrimonial axis. Some sociologists use the *yo-yo trajectories* to define this constant oscillation (Egris, 2001; du Bois-Reymond and López Blasco, 2004). Thirdly, in this context of great differentiation of social systems, the increase of unemployment, of flexibility and of the lack of connections between training and the labour market, young people can continue at the same time with their education and have a part-time internship or a flexible job, for instance. To sum up, where the sequences and orders were normalised in the *steps to adulthood* now we can see a multiplicity, a reversibility and a simultaneity of the *situations of young adults*.

3. Researchers' point of view about the transition into adulthood in Italy

In the field of Italian youth sociology, studies about the transition into adulthood have a privileged place. This transition has usually identified the paradigm of sequences, either covering the entire 20th century or looking at the last 30 years. Even if there is a wide consensus about the delay in leaving home and about the role played by the family in this transition into adulthood, there are certain differences regarding the temporary transformation of life paths. Some state that in Italy too there are some more individualised biographical paths, whereas others deny this hypothesis. What is to be emphasised is that fact that both theses are actually opposed, especially regarding data interpretation; however, both resort to the same research guidelines that compare a biographical trajectory to a route along certain limited, ordered and exclusive stages.

3.1. A century of transitions into adulthood

Since 1997 few longitudinal studies have been made amongst Italian families (ILFI). These data allow us to analyse the transformation of the rhythm of transition into adulthood in this country during the 20th century (Schizzerotto, 2002). Here we have proved (Table 1) that not all classical indicators of this transition (the leaving home factor has not been considered) follow the same evolution when the data are compared for the group of Italians born between 1910 and 1927 and those born between 1958 and 1967. Both in the case of men and women, the axis of training and professions follows a linear growth: the average age to leave the educational system and the average age to join the labour market go up irregularly (2)

(2) These results only converge taking into account working women, as the average figure for the entire female population shows non-linear movement in growth and a reduction of the addition into the labour market.

On the contrary, the marriage and familiar axis takes a U-shaped curb. Until 1950 the age for marriage and birth of the first child went down. Then, these two factors started to be postponed.

Table 1. **Average age to obtain the diploma, get the first job, marry and have the first child** (per generations and sexes).

| | Average age to leave school | | Average age to get the first job | | Average age to get married | | Average age to have the first child | |
|---------|-----------------------------|-------|----------------------------------|--------|----------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------|-------|
| | Men | Women | Men | Women* | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| 1910-27 | 12,1 | 10,7 | 15,8 | 15,7 | 28,6 | 24,8 | 30,5 | 26,5 |
| 1928-37 | 13,7 | 11,2 | 16,6 | 17,6 | 28,2 | 24,4 | 30,2 | 26,3 |
| 1938-47 | 15,1 | 13,6 | 17,4 | 18,2 | 27,2 | 23,8 | 29,1 | 25,6 |
| 1948-57 | 18,1 | 15,7 | 18,8 | 18,7 | 26,6 | 22,9 | 29,0 | 25,0 |
| 1958-67 | 18,7 | 18,1 | 20,2 | 19,6 | 28,5 | 24,8 | 31,9 | 28,3 |
| 1968-79 | 19,6 | 19,7 | 21,5 | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| Total | 17,3 | 15,1 | 19,4 | 18,5 | 27,8 | 24,4 | 30,2 | 26,5 |

Source: Pisati, 2002

* These data refer only to women who have had at least one job.

** There are no data because over half of the interviewed did not have to cross a threshold subjected to studies.

If young Italians choose now to postpone their entry into adulthood in the familiar aspects it is due to the comparison with the generations born after World War II. These data allow us to make another comment. Taking as an indicator the “width” (3) of youth, the U-shaped curb followed seems to weaken the thesis according to which the extension of this stage of life is a phenomenon connected to current times; on the contrary, we could also suggest the hypothesis that the extension of youth is a feature of the periods of recession, whereas we can see a shorter duration throughout the period of economic growth and social welfare (Pisati, 2002).

3.2. The long stay of the young at the family home

The trend to postpone the entrance into adulthood appeared in the mid-20th century becomes confirmed when we bear in mind the studies collecting data for more recent groups. To begin with, let's refer to the studies undertaken by the IARD Institute. (4) In addition to this, from the 80s, including the generations born at the end of the 50s, we can see a postponement of the adult age applicable to all indicators (Table 2). Up until the age of 20, young Italians who leave the educational system form a minority that becomes steadily reduced from the age of 30. Within the next age group (20-24), the percentages of those who stay in higher education are globally stable and are different in the next age group: it is also true that in the year 2000, 12.5% of those over 30 still continued to receive training. This comes to show that the age to enter the labour market is postponed and that a fourth of the young people over 30 admits not having had a job yet (Buzzi, 2002).

Leaving the family home is being gradually postponed: in the year 2000 only 3 out of every 10 young people had left home between the ages of 25 and 29, whereas in 1992 the percentage was 40%. Also, almost a third of those young people between the ages of 30-34 lived with their parents when the last survey was done. There is an observable difference between the behaviours shown by Italian young people and their peers, who leave earlier in other continental and Northern European countries, but behave similarly to young people in other Southern European countries (Chambaz, 2001;

(3) «Width» here indicates the period between the average age to leave school and the average age to have the first child (Pisati, 2002).

(4) This institute has been doing a study every four years since 1983 through a questionnaire about the situation of the young in Italy (Cavalli *et alii*, 1984; Cavalli-de Lillo, 1987; 1992; Buzzi, Cavalli and de Lillo, 1996; 2000). The interviewees were aged between 15 and 24 for the studies carried out in 1983, 1987 and 1992; aged between 15 and 29 in 1996 and aged between 15 and 34 in 2000.

Corijn and Klijzing, 2001). These data about leaving the family home late are confirmed in this section dedicated to Italy in the retrospective study entitled *Family and Fertility Survey (FFS)*: from the 1946-1950 group to the 1961-1965 group, the average age to leave home goes from 24.6 to 27.1 in men and 22.8 to 25.2 in women (Billari and Ongaro, 1999). From the second half of the 50s, men have been the ones to postpone leaving home and women followed five years later. Regarding those people born between 1946 and 1975, both in men and women, the postponement coincides mostly with the formation of a family. In 1995, three quarters of those who had left did it because they started having their own families: 10% for professional reasons, 9% for educational reasons and 7% for other reasons.

As opposed to other countries where the opposition between saying at home and residential independence loses little by little its pertinence due to its morphological complexity (Cicchelli, 2001a), in Italy it is still alive. Leaving the family home is done as one gets married and young Italians go straight from living at home to having their own family, without experimenting and living on their own or with a partner in an independent home (Ongaro, 2001; Rusconi, 2004). According to a study done by the *Istituto di Ricerche sulla Popolazione (IRP)* in 1998, those males aged 20-34 living on their own only totalled 5%, a percentage that in the case of women totalled 3%. These proportions vary notably when referring to those young people with jobs (6% and 5%, respectively). Cohabiting with friends hardly ever takes place: 2.5% of males and 2% of females (Bonifazi *et alii*, 1999). Also, unmarried couples are not common (Castiglioni, 1999), as Italians prefer marriage as a means to get together (Angeli, Pillati and Rettaroli, 1999). Data issued by the IARD confirm these dominating models as a transition from the family to the creation of another new family without any other form of cohabiting in between, which shows a reduction in the number of young marriages in Italy (Buzzi, 2002).

This way we understand that almost four out of every ten people interviewed had not had any children yet. Also, «estimated in general terms, but probably very efficient ones, if the transition of the three stages is an indicator that one has reached the category of an adult, then we must consider that 98% of Italians aged 18-20, 94% aged 21-24, 73% aged 25-29 and 35% aged 30-34 are *not* adults» (Buzzi, 2002, p. 27). The analysis of these data allows us to confirm the hypothesis according to which during the last 30 years there has been a postponement of the ages to cross the threshold in Italy too and therefore youth is extended. More specifically, here we can see not only a sliding in the crossing of the threshold, but also a re-structuring process: between 1996 and 2000, the time needed to find a job after leaving school was shortened, whereas the time to join the labour market and have a family was extended.

Table 2. **Postponement of the entry into adulthood** (% of interviewees crossing the threshold).

| Stages of transition | Age of the interviewees | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 15-17 years | 18-20 years | 21-24 years | 25-29 years | 30-34 years |
| <i>Leaving the educational system</i> | | | | | |
| 1983 | 16,7 | 39,4 | 46,1 | - | - |
| 1987 | 11,0 | 30,8 | 44,6 | - | - |
| 1992 | 5,6 | 25,8 | 38,0 | 53,1 | - |
| 1996 | 7,2 | 32,1 | 49,7 | 75,6 | - |
| 2000 | 6,8 | 29,8 | 49,2 | 70,9 | 87,5 |
| <i>Insertion into the labour market</i> | | | | | |
| 1983 | 5,4 | 18,1 | 29,7 | - | - |
| 1987 | 4,6 | 15,6 | 32,7 | - | - |
| 1992 | 4,6 | 15,1 | 35,0 | 49,7 | - |
| 1996 | 1,5 | 10,7 | 26,6 | 43,9 | - |
| 2000 | 2,3 | 21,2 | 39,2 | 57,4 | 74,1 |
| <i>Leaving the family home</i> | | | | | |
| 1983 | 0,1 | 2,3 | 13,5 | - | - |
| 1987 | 0,3 | 2,5 | 12,5 | - | - |
| 1992 | 0,0 | 3,0 | 10,2 | 39,0 | - |
| 1996 | 0,0 | 2,4 | 8,5 | 36,2 | - |
| 2000 | 0,3 | 2,4 | 6,1 | 30,3 | 67,7 |
| <i>Marriage/cohabiting</i> | | | | | |
| 1983 | 0,0 | 20,2 | 20,2 | - | - |
| 1987 | 0,1 | 15,3 | 15,3 | - | - |
| 1992 | 0,0 | 11,4 | 11,4 | 35,5 | - |
| 1996 | 0,0 | 6,8 | 6,8 | 31,9 | - |
| 2000 | 0,3 | 4,8 | 4,8 | 23,7 | 61,9 |
| <i>Birth of the first child</i> | | | | | |
| 1983 | 0,0 | 12,2 | 12,2 | - | - |
| 1987 | 0,4 | 10,4 | 10,4 | - | - |
| 1992 | 0,0 | 5,0 | 5,0 | 20,6 | - |
| 1996 | 2,0 | 5,0 | 5,0 | 21,6 | - |
| 2000 | 0,0 | 3,0 | 3,0 | 12,2 | 45,2 |

Source: Buzzi, 2002, 26

4. From juvenile unemployment to relationships: the extended family

How can we explain this extension of Italian youth and, especially, the postponement of leaving the home? There is no doubt that there are some factors in Italy like in other European countries, such as the extension of education and democratisation of higher education, greater precariousness in jobs and uncertainty in the labour market, a transformation of the intergenerational relations - in the sense that authority has been weakened - and a greater margin for young people to manoeuvre (from Singly, 2000; Cicchelli, 2001b; from Singly and Cicchelli, 2003; Biggart *et alii*, 2004).

The particularly high proportions of youth unemployment, especially amongst young women and in the southern regions of the country (Pugliese, 1992; Cortese, 2000), make us take this factor into consideration; however, there are four other considerations that encourage researchers to look for other explanations. Firstly, the postponement of the age to marry and have the first child is usually more common in the richest Italian regions (Buzzi, Cavalli and de Lillo, 2002). Secondly, 40% of youngsters living at home admit that they have a job (Bonifazi *et alii*, 1999; Facchini, 2002). Thirdly, two fifths of those people interviewed for the IARD study believe that their salary would be enough to live in an independent flat, but only 23% of them declared having attempted to do this (Facchini, 2002). Lastly, in 1998, the most popular sentences repeated by one out of every two Italians who lived at the family home (aged 18-34) was «I'm fine this way and I still have my autonomy». Only 17% of the interviewees justified their stay because they did not have a paid job (Carrà Mittini, 2001).

This is why we understand that sociologists look at how the familiar sphere works. From this point of view, from adolescence and as long as the individual belongs to the family, it is understood that familiar socialisation is a process for the insertion of the younger members in the generations, in a process that witnesses a complex *association* both for parents and children, and which demands reciprocal support. Researchers have shown an interest in the ways young people and their parents interact, and the territory that the latter dominate in their families (Scabini and Rossi, 1997). The reconsideration of intergenerational relations can be understood well provided the broad freedom margins that young adults have and their low levels of participation in house work (Facchini, 2002). More specifically, the proportions of young people who can have friends over, choose their friends without their parents' opinion and choose the places they usually go to total 80%. There are, however, certain differences in gender, age and place of residence, but the image suggests a great freedom to move both in the domestic environment and the public scope. The more freedom, the greater proportion of young people who are happy to stay with their parents. The implication of young people in domestic life is quite low, especially for men: less than three out of every ten men take part in tasks like shopping, cooking, ironing, running errands and doing paperwork (Facchini, 2002, 176). Also, the financial contribution made by those who have a job to the family budget is quite limited. We must not forget that there is a large number of young people who want to continue living at home due to socio-economic reasons, but in the case of other young people it is due to the family atmosphere (Scabini and Cigoli, 1997).

We could possibly ask ourselves whether there is an alternative to the model of the extended family, but the answer is no. However, the last study done by the IARD proves that the marginal situation must not be forgotten. We still have an early abandonment of the family home and marriage, basic elements of the *traditional* Italian model of transition into adulthood. (5) These behaviours refer quite frequently to young people who belong to lower classes, live in small villages and start working soon. Additionally, we have already seen that there are some young people who live in their own homes but are not married yet (Facchini, 2002). This is the case especially of young people belonging to the middle and upper classes of Italian society who live in the urban centres of the central and southern regions. It is obviously too late to know whether this new behaviour will become an alternative to the extended family, in which case it would be an intermediate stage between the traditional and future models.

5. «Typical sequences», «atypical sequences»

Has the extension of youth brought a modification in the calendar of transition into adulthood? Some authors calculate that this transition is made in Italy according to a strictly ordered itinerary: «the ideal route towards the obtention of autonomy in Italy is formed by several stages: first, the end of studies and joining the labour market and then marriage. This group of events tends to form today, more than ever, a succession following a strict chronological order, with a more linear and less flexible model of transition into adulthood compared to other countries» (Decanini and Palomba, p. 10). Two sources can be mentioned confirming the existence of a «normal biography» formed by sequences and followed by

(5) However, historical demography studies have shown that it is difficult to speak about an Italian model of an age to get married, due to great regional differences (Rettaroli, 1992).

most young people. The first one corresponds to the analysis of the groups proposed by the I.L.F.I. The latter has tried to check effectively whether, as decades go by, the itinerary that begins at the end of studies, followed by the addition into the labour market and completed with marriage and the birth of their first child has always followed the same order. The «typical sequences» are those paths that respect the previously mentioned calendar and the «atypical sequences» are the remaining cases. This way we compare the groups of male Italians born between 1910 and 1927 with the rest until 1958-1962, and it becomes obvious that the set of typical sequences is the most important one: even though they might vary a little, their values match around seven out of every ten cases. In the case of women, it is confirmed that the dominant model is the one respecting the calendar although bearing in mind that this distinguishes their paths from those of males', the percentage of typical sequences grows significantly and regularly: from 21% in the case of women born before 1927 to 33% in the case of those born between 1958 and 1962. This increase is due especially to the fact that more women have joined the labour market before continuing with their studies (and therefore, before marrying and having children) (Pisati, 2002, p. 136). The second source corresponds to a second use of data issued by the I.A.R.D. Excluding those individuals who have not crossed any thresholds, the percentage of those who have managed to follow a regular path or are currently doing so totals 53.2% in the case of men and 45.3% in the case of women. 10.7% of men and 18.8% of women follow a regular path.

Besides this dominating model, however, we can also confirm some important elements that prove a transformation of the paths into adulthood, which have become more individualised. Firstly, and should circumstances remain the same, the more discriminatory variable about accessing adult life following an «atypical» path is the school diploma. Having a *laurea* diploma (equivalent to four or five years of higher education, depending on the degree) increases these chances by 30% in men. In the case of women, it is by 44% (Pisati, 2002). Also, some answers to the I.A.R.D. questionnaire are valuable indicators of a modification in the postponement of the future, as people seem to award greater importance to having an open future and the modifiable options: thus, 7 out of every 10 people interviewed considered the final options as a risk («one has to leave many doors open in life») and 6 out of every 10 think it is possible to go back and change («even the most important choices are never valid forever, you can always go back»). On the other hand, the multiplicity of situations experienced by the young is translated into the possibility of a plural definition: thus, 15% of workers living with their parents define themselves a students, as well as 21% of those who live with their new family but do not have a job, and 9% of those in the same situation but working. A qualitative study done by Monica Santoro (2004) confirms that these data indicate through certain factors the level of simultaneity of the situations experienced and how the consequences are reversible. In the Italian scope, which was characterised some years ago by a wide range of training possibilities, young people tend to take over intermediate positions between youth and adulthood that include several conditions of the labour markets as well as the training options.

6. Fears shown by researchers and weak points of the social debate

In Italy the world of research is trying to encourage the social debate on the effects of this extension of the dependence of the young on their parents, as the Italian media seem not to care much about this matter. They focus on adolescence and more brutal forms of violence (including the frequent parricides appeared in the press) or more bewildering types of apathy.

When we talk about the means that young people must be provided with to help them become a resource for the future society, we refer to the traditional agent in charge of Italian youth: the family. The State does not take part in this debate due to the weakness of family policies since the Republic began and the marginal role of the public powers in the definition of private life. If we try to summarise the main changes of the family rights known in Italy during the 70s (like in other European countries), we will see that the Italian State participates less than its peers from continental Europe in the categorisation of private life (Saraceno, 1998). This can be clearly seen in the fact that family aids are less generous (Lévy, 1998). Even if the fecundity rate in Italy is the one of the lowest in the world and this has been debated by many demographers (Dalla Zuanna, 2000), there has been no support to correct this situation.

The subject of young adults is posed in connection with this problem regarding the birth rate, as a later entry of women into maternity has negative consequences on their final descendants (Palomba, 1999). In Italy, most women have a child after getting married, as cohabiting outside wedlock is not common and people hardly ever leave home before getting married (De Sandre, Pinelli et Santini, 1997). That is why it is about addressing natality in the framework of a wider debate on relations between generations. Provided that the family is one of the resources needed to move into adulthood, it becomes an ambivalent institution. As there are no other regulating institutions and mechanisms, it is the only one providing material and identifying solid resources, and it is assigned the tasks of socialisation and material, emotional and symbolic support. Therefore, at the same time we have the formation of a joint association between parents and children based on dialogue and a reciprocal attention at the time that large complexities arise regarding the social effects of this approximation. Many fear that an excess in family will prevent a generational separation and influence young people's capacity to become integrated in the world of adults and parents to put a deadline to their socialisation task (Cavalli, 1997; Scabini and Rossi, 1997). If a family is too welcoming it may not offer the young the conditions they need to reach definite independence levels. Those young people who are not able to reach a real *generational transition* guaranteeing their access to the parent category live in this state of social ungravity without having to worry about the risks behind an intergenerational change. These issues are framed in a more general diagnosis about the weakening in relation with the future, the absence of a project amongst the young and how they fall back on the present. (6)

(6)

Italian youth sociology has worked hard to study the relations of young people throughout time. See Cavalli, 1985; Garelli, 1984; Donati and Colozzi, 1997; and in the case of women, Leccardi, 1996.

7. Some final comments

We would like to finish this article about the transition into adulthood amongst young Italians by focusing on some data extracted from research.

The data used by Italian sociologists to this study this phenomenon are obtained from a research protocol that matches most of them to the localisation of sequences throughout life. If we study the paths according to the way we cross the well-known conventional thresholds, few are the elements that allow us to see diversions in the paths, returning to the fact that several categories may be joined. A young person may have an unstable job or spend all his/her time on new training before joining the labour market. People can be autonomous and dependent at the same time (from Singly, 2000; Cicchelli and Martin, 2004). The complexity of the situations a young person can conform at the same time, including private life, is not included in questionnaires, which are inspired in the sequential paradigm of the transition into adulthood. Thus, possibly the tool used by researchers for the last 30 years to analyse the types of changes into adulthood in Italy may have hidden the appearance of a greater individualisation of biographical paths, a phenomenon that, on the other hand, has been noticed through indices.

We can imagine that Italian society is also subjected to the same historical changes than the rest of European countries; not bearing in mind this element would mean condemning young Italians to an invincible otherness that would not allow them to find any common areas with other cultural fields. Nevertheless, it is necessary to modify this universal view with a large dose of particularism, as we will probably not be able to reduce the importance of the role that the history of this country has played. Let's see two examples to this need to take an intermediate position between universalism and particularism, (Breviglieri and Cicchelli, *to be published*). Firstly, if in the Italian case, like in the rest of Southern Europe, the extension of youth does not consider the existence of a period of life between the source family and the new family, researchers must make an effort to create the construction of autonomy of the young in a framework where there are no elements to mark the social ungravity and experimentation phase and where one enters adulthood in an institutionalised manner. Therefore, two are the possibilities: either in Italy young people access adult life straight away without experiencing freedom, so they would not be like the French, German or British young people, or else they can experience this stage of life without having to experience a lack of familiar socialisation. This is why it is necessary to revise the continental and insular definition of social experimentation to understand the Italian reality (Cassano, 1998; Cicchelli, 2001c). Instead of defending that the definition assigned to autonomy as the basis of an individual is not at all like the one found in other countries due to an incomplete transition of Italians into modernity, we suggest that another path be followed: maybe the sense awarded to links and their maintenance is different and there might be no contrast between autonomy and dependence. How can we explain then the fact that Italian young people do not complain about their extended dependence on one part and seem to make a virtue out of need on the other? Secondly, as we have already seen, the local translation of the European phenomenon of youth extension is produced in the name of a family specificity that had already been taken into consideration a long time ago and had been condemned in other fields as an Italian cultural aspect. (7) Now, we must not allow this explanation to become an indication of a cultural specificity, as it would stop us from taking into consideration the role played by the main factors that have been left aside for a long time, such as the great absence of Italy in the public offers directed to youth or the lack of offers on houses for rent. In other words, we

(7)
On this section, see the extensive critique about «amoral familiarism» written by American anthropologist Edward Banfield (1958) to characterise the negative impact of the southern families on the participation of individuals in the public scope.

must bear in mind that the use of the category of the extended family reactivates and confirms certain conceptions about the role of the private scope in the socialisation of young people, about the place of the interventions of the public scope to deal with its dysfunction, and about the contract (in terms of rights and duties) between generations.

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