

## **The Informal Choices of Italian Young People: between increase and erosion of family cultural capital**

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**Abstract:** This essay deals with leisure and non-schooling time, meant as informal educational opportunities for Italian young adolescents, more specifically with respect to identification and individuation processes which are at the base of it. Moreover, it is argued that leisure time, meant as time for the self might act as enhancing and increasing factor of cultural family capital, while under different conditions, on the contrary, it becomes a process of choice that spoils rather than it erodes the patrimony of ascribed cultural family resources, as similarly happens to formal educational choices. The paper aims to focus on the value attributed to leisure non schooling time by exploring to what extent and from what kind of contextual factors – in continuity or discontinuity with the meaning value attributed to school time – it might increase/erode/spoil the initial cultural patrimony. Such objective will move from the results of a recent national investigation “*Life Chances and significant adults in the educational and professional choices of adolescents*”.

**Keywords:** Young adolescent, leisure time, human capital, social capital

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### Theoretical frame

Leisure and not schooling time, meant as informal educational opportunities (Mongelli, 2006; Mongelli, Scardigno, 2008; Mongelli, 2009) might become significant and often strategic chances for the identity construction process of Italian young adolescents, more specifically with respect to identification and individuation processes which are at the base of it (Sciolla 1983; 1995). Moreover, leisure time, meant as time for the self might act as enhancing and increasing factor of cultural family capital (Scardigno, 2009), while under different conditions, on the contrary, it becomes a process of choice that spoils rather than it erodes (Putnam, 2004) the patrimony of ascribed cultural family resources, as similarly happens to formal educational choices (Besozzi, 2009; Lazzarini, 2009; Santagati, 2009). The paper aims to focus on the value attributed to leisure non schooling time by exploring to what extent and from what kind of contextual factors – in continuity or discontinuity with the meaning value attributed to school time - it might increase/erode/spoil the initial cultural patrimony. Such objective will move from the results of a recent national investigation “Life Chances and significant adults in the educational and professional choices of adolescents”<sup>2</sup>.

Then, nowadays youngsters’ leisure time could be meant as a life time-span, which is actually free from the bounds, generally imposed by the parents (Colozzi, Giovannini, 2003; Mesa, 2003). Therefore, it represents a chance to explore, to experiment and to make sense of experience with a higher degree of awareness and autonomy (Cesareo, 2005). Moreover, leisure time is a space where young people have the opportunity to recompose their personal and social identity, often fragmented and challenged by the different domains of formal, informal and non formal socialization. Then, leisure time is a *time for the self* (Balbo, 1995, Ambrosini, 2004; Merico, 2007) where needs and expectations of adolescents are actually expressions of their *personal and ultimate*

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<sup>2</sup> The research has been coordinated by Elena Besozzi – Catholic University of Milan – and carried out together with the Universities of Bergamo, Torino, Salerno, Bari. The results of the research are collected in the book edited by E. Besozzi (2009) “*Between dreams and reality. Adolescents and life chances in different local contexts*” published by Carocci, Rome.

*concerns* (Archer 2006), as a consequence of the transition, happened already at the end of 80ies from leisure time meant as consumption time to leisure time meant as self experimentation, as time for identity (Bovone, Mora, 1997), a time for choices where relational and communication skills are developed, thus challenging the self in light with the weakening of adults' pressure toward the process of growth (Besozzi, 1997).

The aim is then to investigate what factors, both individual and contextual, might enhance a potential resource as that of leisure time making it an actual resource for the construction of identity, that is as life chance (Dahrendorf, 2003), starting from the relevance recently attributed to informal education for the construction of the cultural biographies of young people. In line with such assumptions, the Prin research has observed the choices which characterize leisure time of Italian adolescents<sup>3</sup> moving from the following question: Could the kind of options chosen to spend leisure time enhance the original cultural and social capital of youngsters or is it simply influenced by them? Could these options be a further *chance* for Italian young people and for their cultural biographies? In view of the above, the research has moved from the most recent theoretical models on cultural reproduction which have showed empirical evidences in the field of formal educational choices (Brint, 2002; Ballarino, Checchi, 2006) as to verify if they could explain also the processes of informal choices. In other word, the research has attempted at investigating if the opportunities of the extra-educational context, both those who manifest an explicit educational dimension – this is the case of the non-schooling activities- as well as those belonging to leisure time – which have a more informal nature being also very important for self construction processes- might be considered possible moderators of the deterministic relationship between ascribed status - parents' educational status and adolescents' choices (Gambetta, 1990; Schizzerotto, 2002).

The paper is articulated into two sections. In the first section, the most recent Italian literature on the relationship between cultural and social capital and adolescents' leisure time fruition practices is reviewed. Most of the studies reviewed, run within the last 20 years, highlight the trend according to which adolescents choose autonomously their leisure time activities, often disconfirming their parents' expectations.

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<sup>3</sup> The research has investigated the different domains of choice: the formal choice of education, the professional choices, the choices of leisure time.

In the second section, the paper examines the main results of the research<sup>4</sup>. In line with the literature the collected data show that leisure time options are influenced by the cultural and social capital of the family. Nonetheless, the relationship between constructs is not a deterministic one, as for example it happens with reference to formal educational choices. In this frame, a very important role is played by the urban context that is where young people live, in terms of actual opportunities and enhancement of life chance, as well by young people's autonomy and self determination in defining actual opportunities and then to multiply one's own life chances.

### **1980 and 1990: the studies on “conditioned choice”**

The first group of Italian researches on young people<sup>5</sup> published in the 80ies depicts leisure time as fruition of even not essential goods consumption. Such representation is partly produced by the socio-cultural change brought about by capitalism. The process of self actualization of individuals finds concretely in leisure time a place of merit; through leisure time, meant “in the sense of time freed by work and production”, young people, actually belonging to the society of “affluent consumption” (Cavalli, 1990), tend to be exempted by the responsibilities and to exhibit their own status. The degree of satisfaction toward one's own leisure time is directly proportional to the availability of resources to show off the life style. In this sense, the role of context becomes fundamental since it offers opportunities to increase purchasing and consumption power. Therefore, the stronger conditioning is played by cultural and economical heritage, as predictors of the personal satisfaction toward one's own leisure time.

The role of the subject is so strongly conditioned by the actual possibilities offered by the context in terms of opportunities to gain a different and better status as compared with the family of origin, especially

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<sup>4</sup> In the qualitative phase have been interviewed 38 triads of teachers – students – parents in the municipalities of Bari, Bergamo, Milano, Salerno, Torino. In the quantitative phase the questionnaire has been given to more than 1200 students in the same municipalities.

<sup>5</sup> See among others (Calabrò 1986; Cavalli 1984; Cavalli 1990; Faggiano 2003).

in the case of young adolescents belonging to lower classes and living in the *Mezzogiorno*.

The most differentiated behaviors are registered with reference to gender. More specifically, while females prefer to spend their leisure time at school reading and/or enjoying other kind of cultural consumptions, males play sport and listen to music. As long as females gain autonomy from their origin family they tend to show a more playful consumption. A feature of the samples belonging to the south of Italy, is the high percentage of the subjects “excluded” from cultural consumption, even in those families who have a higher cultural capital, thus leading to the question of the relationship between the structural lacking of opportunities in the south of Italy and the decision making processes<sup>6</sup>.

Actually, the media influence the cultural consumptions of young people in these years. Especially the research quoted show a strong correlation between types of cultural consumption and newspaper reading practices. In brief, those who read a lot show consumption styles with a high cultural content those who read a few show a lighter cultural consumption style. The same thing is not valid for TV ex position: actually, there is a selective TV consumption, oriented to information and not only to entertainment and leisure. Briefly, as it emerges also from the work by Calabrò (1986) and by M. P. Faggiano (2003) young people in the 80ies and 90ies are represented in an *ambivalent*<sup>7</sup> sense and the youth condition refers to the idea of a crisis status, of conflict and rebellion, to a process of growth often uncertain and problematic where the category of unease seems to prevail on reflexive ability and on aware action.

Finally, the choices about leisure time’s fruition are fundamentally disengaged and the planning qualities and the aspirations referred to life projects of adolescents are profoundly linked to the starting point conditions and to the social and cultural capital of origin. It prevails a deterministic model as a key to interpret young people’s fruition of extra-school time, a model which interprets the choices of *no-schooling* (but also those of schooling) as strongly influenced by ascribed categories, by context conditions, by family expectations and finally by actual

<sup>6</sup> We refer to the topic of amoral familism highlighted by Putnam (2004) and most recently by Cartocci (2006) and Cassano (2007).

<sup>7</sup> It is not a case that the most recurrent metaphor within the semantic analysis performer by Faggiano with reference to youth condition (cfr. the study quoted) is that of “X generation” that is a riddle for adult generation.

possibilities of “consumption” owed by adolescents: they will choose leisure time’s opportunity which lead to the ostentation of the acquired status through professional autonomy, rather than preferring an educational use of informal opportunities.

*After the 90s: leisure time as an “autonomous choice”*

A first important consideration refers to the impact of the structural change happened within this decade (1990 – 2000) that characterize the youth condition – the so called “prolonged moratorium”<sup>8</sup> (Cavalli, Galland, 1996) thus increasing the difficulty in undertaking the role of “adult”<sup>9</sup>. In this sense, even the fruition of time – as time of training – goes out of the stiff borders of educational participation and cross other active domains (school, work, tendency to form associations, personal training, etc). The investigations performed by the Iard within these years still highlight the great influence played by social origin on school and educational choices of Italian youngster, as well as a relevant impact of gender and social context. The differences in the opportunity to have access to educational chances by young people are persistent and still linked to ascribed factors (social status, income and cultural and social family capital), as well as to territorial factors (as for instance the differences between North and South in terms of diffusion of ICT in the educational and school contexts).

As for the social identity and personal biography, young people seem to manifest a demand for reassembling, which is a typical feature of the Italian society (Diamanti, 1999), even with respect to different territorial references (local, national and global). In the specific domain of cultural consumptions and of fruition of informal opportunities, this decade marks a change in the choices which is very relevant to our research aims. More specifically, young generations are still greatly influenced by social ascribed choices. Nonetheless gender and context differences for example do not have a determinant role any more. The Iard research confirms the presence of a consistent associative participation in Italy: almost half of the

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<sup>8</sup> See (Cavalli A., Buzzi A. 2002); (Faggiano M.P. 2003) among others.

<sup>9</sup> The sample of young people involved in the two investigations run in the 80ies was made up by youngster aged between 15 and 24 years, in the following studies the Iard has undertaken in the 90ies the range was extended until 29 for the first and 34 years for the second as to be sure to observe the coming to the last step of the transition to adulthood (e.g. the birth of a son).

young people interviewed have declared his involvement in at least one association.

The kind of associations which are mostly attended by young people are sport, religious, cultural and voluntary associations. Moreover, with respect to any past investigation there is an increase in the importance attributed to socially engaged associations in contrast with associations devoted to leisure and fruition. As for gender differences, males show a higher tendency to engage in associations as they declare the contemporary participation to different kind of associations. While there is still a small difference between North and South, as for the experience of extra-familiar and informal socialization (work, school, voluntary work, etc).

The role played by the family background is still untouched. The cultural capital owned by the family and the social class are crucial to the participation to associative life of the young people interviewed by the Iard (lower degrees of associationism in the working class, higher degrees in the blue collars). More than on the mere associationism, our attention should be focused on the participation styles showed by young Italians and then to the features of membership and devotion. In this sense, religious associations are those who develop a higher degree of activism in terms of responsibility and engagement, in contrast with political associations, where, since the 80ies, there is a constant decrease in youngsters' participation. Associationism might be considered a dimension of the wider construct "social youth participation". Then the empirical evidences collected within the last decade mark that the quality of leisure time of young people is represented as a significant individual variable, which might contribute to explain, together with some others (age, gender, education, occupational status, affective life, peer relationship), *the style of social youth participation*.

With respect to all the previous studies, young people belonging to this decade actually consume less the so called pervasive cultural products (TV, radio and magazines) while are more attracted by niche consumptions (libraries, museums, debates) thus denoting a more autonomous and less conditioned consumption, free from the symbolic values of the origin family. This result is probably linked to a more general qualitative amelioration of the cultural menu, less influenced by generalist media, as well as to a possible enhancing of the individual abilities in making choices.

As for the territorial differences there are many interesting key points. A part of the studies considered (Persichella, 2003)] still represent the regional differences of cultural consumptions and of non formal opportunities' offer as a risk for the *digital divide* and for new forms of functional illiteracy. This is the classical structural *civic deficit* of the *Mezzogiorno* as to mention Cartocci (2006)<sup>10</sup>. Other studies, as for instance that by Davide La Valle (2006), have reconstructed the trend in the participation to associations in Italy through some survey data. They show how, starting from the same level of education and from similar professional activities, the difference between North and South decreases and almost disappears. In other words, once neutralized through multiple regression analysis, the effect of some control variables (education, gender and age) the difference between Puglia and Lombardia as for the probability to participate is almost absent on a statistical level and this is true for all regions in the south of Italy, except for Sicilia, Abruzzo and Campania. If then we insert the control variable "professional position" then the North-South difference stays significant only for the region Campania.

This does not mean that Banfield's assumptions on familism recently recalled by Besozzi (2007) are no more valid. Probably as La Valle states the weight of cultural equipment partly contribute to explain the deficit of civic virtues expressed by the South of Italy, since there still persist what Dahrendorf (2003) calls *provisions*, that is the material resources and the different conditions of the labor market as well as of occupational structure. Then, fortunately since long the South of Italy has overcome this condition of "subjection" from the North (Cassano, 2007; Veneziani, 2007) even in terms of participation and social engagement; while it is still engaged in redeeming from the occupational condition which is still strongly disadvantageous with respect to that of the Third Italy.

Coming back to leisure time's options, the most recent research studies mark this transition toward the autonomy of choice and of fruition of informal time as a personal resource, especially with reference to females (Besozzi, 2003). The last Iard report (2007) highlights that in front of a general sense of mistrust in the institutions and of a diffused difficulty experienced by young people to develop future plans and personal projects, it emerge a higher importance attributed to leisure time and friendship

<sup>10</sup> The deficit is measured through the density of associations devoted to voluntarism, which is lower in the South than in the North.

(from 45% to 55% in the last 20 years). This result underlines a shift in the Italian youngsters' interests from collective engagement toward the so-called *restricted sociality* and the adhesion to more individualistic values (health, family, freedom). The previous Iard research on youngsters' associative behavior (2004) had already showed that the 70% of the Italian young population took part actively to the initiatives of organized groups and/or associations. The percentage rate of participation decreased with age: from 15 to 17 years of age, almost the 52% of young people interviewed participated prevalently to sport association and Church groups, while the percentage decreased to 34% between 18 and 20 years of age, and to 27% between 30 and 34. A stable data was the poor engagement in politics as well as a formal adhesion to a any party.

If we have a look at the results considered by Diego Mesa (2003) a break in the traditional schemata about the use young people make of their leisure time is evident. Males and females enjoy their leisure and informal time with the same intensity, though pursuing different modalities. Computer and play-station are the main entertainment opportunity for males, as through these they experience home as a virtual place, while females are very much attracted by non formal places generally far from adults, as to experiment with their personal identity. Basically, a difference in socialization styles is confirmed, while a difference in the places devoted to leisure time gradually loses meaning.

More specifically, this research (Colozzi, Giovannini, 2003) shows how leisure time could be interpreted as a self *managed time*, according to the adolescent's perspective. Such assumption gives a more active role to youngsters, thus freeing them from the consideration, which is of course not objectively demonstrable, that parental control might act as warrant and protection from any kind of risk. In the same direction goes the international research to which Cesare Rivoltella (2006) has took part on the representation and appropriation of digital media (internet, mobile phones, videogames) of a sample of young adolescents aged between 12 and 18 years in 10 European countries. This research show that young people are quite aware about the risks and that they are able to use and manage technology, while the representation of the risk is the result of adults' projections.

Research studies depict adolescents as expert and aware subjects, who "use" media in relation with different possible destinations of consumption, computer and internet to seek information, mobile phone to communicate,

videogames to amuse them. Leisure time is then the most adequate occasion and resource to develop a virtual universe which is valid not only for the adolescent, who actually is aware of the risks implied by internet and therefore exert a sort of self regulation, even answering to a reduction of parental control. Research studies exclude the possibility of a pathological relationship, marked by dependence and/or by a technological determinism, between adolescents and the internet. The most popular image is that of a “normalized” technology, it is part of daily life as well as many other things.

Even the research by Ambrosini (2004) highlights how extra-school activities might represent, specifically for immigrant students, a very important component of the offer of integration opportunities given by the local society. Of course it is not a substitute for the institutional responsibilities, though it might side and collaborate with them, thus involving other resources of the local context. What makes more efficient any service in terms of integration is then the “individual capacity of students to use the system of opportunities given by the extra-school”, in many cases even not specifically organized. Somehow is the action of young adolescents, and in particular of those who have a well integrated family behind them, to activate a virtuous circle in the extra-school system.

### **Cultural and family capital and leisure time options in the Prin research 2005-2008.**

Recent research on leisure time management describes a *bricoleur* adolescent, autonomous and aware of his own informal time: internet, as any other opportunity in leisure time fruition is in the foreground or in the background depending on contingent needs and demands. Then leisure time’s uses might be influenced by the social representations of adults and by the family cultural capital. Nonetheless, any young people’s choice depends on individual expectations and desires. New cultural consumptions endow youngsters with new competences, in terms of self regulation and self management and decrease the power of parental control and protection. In a sense, it could be argued that young people’s *potentialities of choice* are in the middle more than adults’ *offer capabilities*. Therefore, parents’ task is even less decisive in as for control and protection functions; rather it

is stronger in terms of spurs and incentives to the formal and informal development of self management skills.

As for the research “Life chances and significant adults in the educational and professional choices of young adolescents” youngsters’ leisure time informal choices in the several geographical contexts involved, seem to be influenced by family cultural and social capital, even in light with such self-regulation skill that, as highlighted by a review of the most recent previous studies, characterizes Italian (and not only) youth as for informal choices. Our hypothesis, as previously mentioned, is that cultural and social capital of family might influence informal choices, without determining them in absolute terms. Rather, they are the expression of a mix of factors, such as the territorial opportunities, the meanings young people attribute to different options, the system of bounds and resources any individual could count on (Dahrendorf, 2003), the modalities through which all these different aspects combine with cultural and social ascribed capital.

#### *The qualitative data*

The national Prin research “Life chances and significant adults in the school and professional choices of adolescents. A comparison between north and south” has developed within the time span of two years (2006-2008) and has took place in the five local units involved: Bari, Bergamo, Milano, Salerno and Torino, following a common methodological ground which is qual-quantitative<sup>11</sup>. The qualitative investigation has collected in-depth interviews with 38 triads of parents – students and teachers in the five local units. The analysis of data has been performed with the aid of the computer software Atlas-ti, which has allowed dividing the complex contents of the interviews in thematic areas and subthemes repeatedly codified and systematically analyzed by the research équipe in line with the different hypothesis. The output produced has granted the possibility to make comparisons about the contents of the interviews in the triads about common themes (the choice of a specific school, informal choices, value system of reference, future projects, professional choices) as well as transversal comparisons with respect with structural variables such as age, gender, territorial context and of course ascribed cultural capital. The

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<sup>11</sup> See to this purpose the methodological appendix by M. Colombo (2009) in the book edited by E. Besozzi (2009).

analysis of qualitative materials<sup>12</sup> has confirmed the substantial polarization between the choice of lyceum as for students with higher ascribed capital, n.17, and the choice of technical and professional school as for young people with lower cultural and economical capital, n. 21, where n. 14 out of 16 interviewed people are foreign youngster. Single exception is a foreign student living in Salerno who although having a graduated mother has chosen to attend a professional school.

Already during the exploratory phase of the research, formal choices have confirmed continuity between cultural capital and actions, thus highlighting its decisive influencing role. Nonetheless, the analysis of the reports of the interviews has showed the relevance of subjective and motivational aspects, as well as the role played by those variables linked to the system of territorial offer. Then any choice cannot be interpreted in deterministic terms as a response to high/low of cultural capital, rather it is the result of a linear trend which reproduces itself with respect to discontinuity. How much does such discontinuity produce an increase rather than a spoil of family capital has been object of further investigation by all research units (Besozzi, 2009; Santagati, 2009; Lazzarini, 2009).

On the other hand, if we observe informal choices, the emerged frame is not homogeneous at all and the starting hypothesis find the first important empirical confirmations even if partial. A transversal result, common to all the territorial contexts involved, refers to the fruition, rather generalized, of leisure time as consumption time devoted to the self and to one's own interests and desires, both when leisure time is a non active time (I stay at home, I watch television, I do nothing) and when leisure time is time for social engagement. Any fruition choice is linked to one's own interests, it is a kind of choice that express the desire and awareness to suit personal needs, which of course are conditioned by the family but not always are in continuity with it.

Overall immigrant female adolescents declare to use leisure time to answer to a need for identity integration. In this case, leisure time activities are the most immediate answer to a need for belonging, then to a need to feel part of a network of relationships which is wider than that offered by school, then often experienced as suffocating. This is the case of Alice, from Ruanda, who lives the encounter with the other during leisure time as

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<sup>12</sup> The distribution of triads according to the territorial contexts is the following: Bari (7), Bergamo (5), Milano (10), Salerno (n. 10) e Torino (n. 6)

a sort of mirror of the self which facilitates the processes of construction of her social identity:

“I spend my leisure time reading, travelling, as much as I can afford it, going round in the city since I am here not since long and I still have to visit Milan, I work as a voluntary, the Mato Grosso operation, at the moment I work with City Cibo, we collect foods in schools and take it to these associations of people in need. I love to know other people, I hear their stories, since it is a way to live another life”.

As for informal choices, it emerges a differentiated function of cultural family capital, even in the same territorial context<sup>13</sup>. Times it could even condition the type of cultural fruition as well as the type of informal choice, times it might increase and enhance itself, times it risks even to get spoiled.

*The hypothesis of increase* finds confirmation by those non isolated cases where in front of a low original cultural capital, the adolescent makes informal choices which are discontinuous with this condition, thus becoming opportunities to enhance and increase the network of relationships and social capital, which will allow him/her to find a new and autonomous way to personal and professional actualization. Here is what a parent with primary school said about the use of leisure time of his son:

“yes, before the swimming coach’s license, he has continued knowing other people, as for example presidential charges of the Coni; through the acquaintances he had made during leisure time’s activities he has had a job at the municipal swimming pool, I could have never succeed in helping him more, my husband does not like to see other people since he is tired”.

*The hypothesis of Inertia* is often confirmed, mostly by those cases where the symbolic values of the parents are very pervasive, especially within those foreign families, where one’s own ethnical identity represents a strong inner element of social cohesion: “my daughter should become someone that is why she is attending a lyceum”. Such strong value hinders and prevents other kind of choices, especially those made in leisure time, experienced as potential diversion’s sources from any educational success project, then as completely centered on a domain giving credentials which are formally valid for the acquisition and/or for the acknowledgement of a

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<sup>13</sup> As showed later, this will be confirmed also by cluster analysis.

status: “my father says: she does not devote too much time to study if she starts playing volleyball then we will finally loose her” (interview to an Albanian student attending a lyceum in Bari)

Finally, *the hypothesis of Spoil* finds a validation by those cases where the original cultural, social and economical capital acts simply which keeps up the family status, thus pushing young people to make choices that actually spoil the ascribed potential. As a result they break up with any of their parents’ expectations and depict themselves as disengaged. It happens mostly for those young people with a very high cultural, social and economical capital. Emblematic is the case of Gaspare, 15 years old, who belongs to an upper class family, with a very high cultural capital and attend the scientific lyceum. After having changed school because of many relational problems with the teachers, Gaspare has chosen to engage his leisure time only in a playful way, in open discontinuity with his family expectations tuned on the need to keep up the position:

“During leisure time I like to go shopping! I know, I do nothing to help the others, but I give my help at home. I have done everything in my life and what I did has been enough, five years swimming, one year piano and guitar, basketball, volleyball, design, decoupage, but I am tired, as I was a child I was obliged to do the things my parents said to me could help to have a break. Now I want to walk on my own legs, I want to go out alone, I want to find my own independence slowly, I want to be quiet, to watch TV, to watch a film, to go to the cinema with my friends”.

Basically, qualitative data confirm the validity of the frame of hypothesis at the base of any interpretation of informal choices, then if on the one hand they signal the continuity between family capital and leisure time options, on the other they express a different conclusion about the relationship between these two variables with respect to the meaning and value attributed by youngsters to one’s own leisure time, meant more in detail as a time free from school and family and then devoted to one’s own interests. Finally, it emerges - in both hypothesis that of increase as well as that of spoil of ascribed cultural capital – a meaning of leisure time which is basically a *time for the self* (Belloni, 1994) which frees adolescents from protection and control of parents and attribute to informal choices times a value that enhances one’s own original resources times a detachment from

family expectations that ultimately might lead to the erosion of the cultural and social ascribed capital.

*The quantitative data*

The quantitative investigation has adopted a structured questionnaire which has been given to a sample of students attending the fourth and the fifth year of secondary school divided into different educational pathways (classical, scientific, technical, professional, etc.). The sample was made up of 1294 units collected into 72 classes and distributed proportionally in the five territorial units.

Besides a first level one-way analysis, a multidimensional analysis has been performed as to allow different comparisons between variables and then the construction of synthetic indexes, such as for example the associative participation index – very relevant as to investigate informal choices - and the significance of peer network index. Such indexes have been crossed with structural variables, as for instance ascribed cultural capital. Moreover, as to catch the differences between choices a multiple correspondences analysis has been performed (MCA), which has allowed to examine which variables are decisive with respect to informal choices in leisure time. In this sense, the analysis of the quantitative data explain more precisely the relationship between informal choices and structural variables (gender, social and cultural capital, urban area, age and educational pathway). A first significant data is a substantial and generalized attribution of *engagement* and of *openness to novelty* associated to leisure time's choices, in each of the urban areas involved, more than a feeling of solitude, sadness and boredom (tables 1).

The acknowledgement of leisure time as a possibility to develop decision making skills and the diffused presence of void situations (“I do not know what to do”) in leisure time are two striking data. As for leisure time's activities, the option to practice sport is one of the most recurrent data among the boys interviewed (less girls): 59,6% of lyceum's students, 61,2% of students attending technical schools and 53,1% of youngsters attending professional schools state they practice sport *for passion*, or simply because *sport makes them feel good*. Moreover, data show how adolescents are actually expression of a *music generation*, listen to pop music everyday even through mobile phone owned by more than the 70% of the interviewed. In the mean time, this generation neither goes to concerts nor play musical instruments. New technologies and via internet

communication systems (chat, msn, skype, etc) have replaced Tv consumption, which is rather residual in almost all the educational pathways and urban areas investigated, signaling how the actual breaking element of the deterministic chain family cultural capital – adolescents' choices is essentially the media consumption, which is common and transversal to structural variables and to territorial belongings of the young people involved in the research (Iorio, 2009; Merico, Scardigno, 2009). If these are the elements who allow tracing a common profile of the adolescents interviewed, the most interesting differences could be found in the comparison between urban areas rather than between gender or educational pathway. There are significant differences between municipalities, in general more in the North than in the South, with respect to the cultural habits of the interviewed. More specifically, a rather low and generalized frequency has been registered with reference to museum and library visiting and in general to cultural manifestations' participation.

Tab. 1 How do you feel in your leisure time? According to the municipality- percentage

	BA	BG	MI	SA	TO	Sum
Bored	5,5	8,2	9,1	10,5	11,0	8,9
Sad	3,5	2,3	2,7	5,5	3,1	3,4
Alone	7,0	7,0	5,0	5,1	6,2	6,1
I don't know what to do	15,1	12,5	15,3	17,6	12,8	14,6
Responsible	2,5	9,3	8,3	3,9	6,6	6,2
Engaged	21,6	27,2	20,9	18,8	26,9	23,1
Able to decide	19,1	19,1	20,9	16,0	14,5	17,9
Open to news	19,1	12,8	14,2	19,1	15,0	16,0
Curious	6,5	1,6	3,5	3,5	4,0	3,8
	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
	0	0	0	0	0	0

Though this result, the feelings of engagement and openness to novelty associated with leisure time are not connected with a high associative participation and this is valid for almost all the urban areas investigated, except for Bergamo, where the participation level is 33,2% (tables 2).

The analysis of the results with reference to the relationship between social and economical status, gender, and educational pathway shows how

a low participation is not associated with a low status, rather as much as the latter increase the lower associative participation becomes (59,6%).

As might be observed, moving from the second to the fourth classes, students are even less willing to engage in groups and association, the lyceum's students as well as young people attending technical and professional schools. More specifically, girls register the higher values with reference to *significance of peer network* (tables 3).

Tab. 2 Municipalities according to associative participation

Associative participation	BA	BG	MI	SA	TO	Sum
Absent	18,6	10,8	16,1	22,0	21,7	17,6
Low	54,3	56,0	55,9	54,8	52,6	54,9
Mid-high	27,1	33,2	28,0	23,2	25,7	27,5
<i>Totale</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100

Tab. 3 Gender according to significance of peer network

Significance of peer network	M	F	Sum
Low	29,2	19,2	23,5
Average	40,3	39,0	39,5
High	30,5	41,8	37,0
	100	100	100

Tab. 4 Comparison between significance of peer network and status

		Educational pathway			Status		
		Lyceum	Technical school	Professional school	low	Medium	high
		%	%	%	%	%	%
Significance of Peer network	Low	21,8%	27,8%	22,5%	22,0%	26,3%	20,4%
	Medium	39,2%	38,3%	41,8%	42,3%	38,1%	38,5%
	High	39,0%	33,9%	35,7%	35,7%	35,6%	41,1%
	Sum	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

The quantitative data and more specifically the comparison between the status and associative participation indexes (which might be linked to a “disengaged” type of informal choice) confirm the impossibility to accept *tout court* the hypothesis of a linear relationship between high/low original status and participation/non participation choices. More specifically, the comparison between status and significance of peer network highlight how the choice to attribute centrality to friendship is transversal to the original social status.

Finally, the data presented aim at validating the hypothesis which is at the base of the whole research that is the non direct consequentiality between socio-cultural family background and adolescents’ typology of informal engagement. The behavioral trends of the young people interviewed are not foreseeable simply in terms of ascribed cultural capital: though very important, it does not play an exclusive role. Actually, a significant element is young people’s ability to manage one’s own cultural and social resources in terms of opportunities for enhancement and increase, more than for inertia and spoil.

### **A possible typology of informal choices of Italian young people**

The MCA, performed in the final step of the investigation, has very much contributed to examine the factors which might allow explaining formal and informal choices could not be simply structural variables, as for instance the original social and economical equipment, which taken alone has a lower predictive power than cultural equipment.

Actually, if on the one hand the MCA confirms the relationship between status and formal and informal choices, on the other has highlighted how those adolescents who passively use their leisure time are certainly those with a low family capital, as well as those who have a lower educational success and with a higher index for inclination to transgression, all factors who might autonomously affect choices as well as low ascribed cultural capital.

In other words, to feel passive during leisure time is a distinctive feature of young people with a lower cultural capital, but even, as showed by the general *cluster analysis*, for instance of the first group of adolescents (133 subjects), lyceum’s students with a high cultural capital, prevalently females, religious, who at school feel engaged and stressed, often nervous

and who cannot succeed in translating free time into active engagement. Rather they limit themselves in to a playful consumption. Actually, they do not make any voluntary activity, they do not participate to any association, they do not attend church, and they do not practice sport and use their own leisure time to listen to the music, to go to the cinema and to go out with friends.

The MCA results confirm the inertia hypothesis as well as the spoil hypothesis about the original capital. This evidence is particularly tangible when analyzing the choices of the second group of adolescents (271 subjects), lyceum's students, prevalently males, who declare they do not feel active in their leisure time. Actually they do not take part in any association, they do not lend any voluntary work, and they simply surf in the internet, take a walk with friends, practice sport and go shopping as all the other groups of adolescents, also as those with low cultural capital. The two subgroups identify more easily a category of choices which could be labeled "playful", in the sense that they do not enhance leisure time as a resource thus recalling the playful young people<sup>14</sup> of the Iard researches published in the 1990s (Cavalli, de Lillo, 1990).

Leisure time's choices of the third group of adolescents (172 subjects) seems to confirm the hypothesis of an increase of the original capital, since it does not limit itself to practice sport, to play a musical instrument, to feel one's own self active. Actually this group takes part to sport clubs, goes to the church, is engaged in voluntary activities (both for altruistic motivations as well as for selfish motivations), reads newspapers and has already had a remunerated working experience. These are the cultivated and playful young people of the Iard typology who make informal choices which mix young consumption with engaged and cultivated consumption.

The fourth group (153 subjects) makes leisure time's choices which seem to be expression of a need to mark one's own self, a time useful to mark differences: these are young lyceum's students, with high cultural capital, non religious, who declare themselves fond of shopping, who do not like to go to the cinema, who prefer reading, playing instruments and with a low index for media consumption. We could consider such choices, always referring to the Iard categorization, as cultivated and engaged choices.

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<sup>14</sup> The Iard category of playful young people refers to those youngsters who register high rates of "young consumption" and low rates of "cultural consumption".

The other two groups of adolescents (in sum 413 subjects), all with a low cultural capital, do confirm basically the hypothesis of linearity in leisure time's choices, but though this they do not make more disengaged choices as compared with their peers with a higher capital: they do not attend the church, they do not engage in voluntary activities, they surf in the internet with friends, they often go to the cinema, and also like go shopping. To these elements a lower educational success and a higher index for inclination to transgression are associated. Such elements recall a typology of informal choice that considers leisure time as a potential resource, which actually neither increase nor spoil the original capital. It is a way to consider no schooling time as the answer to a personal and subjective need. According to the Iard typology this is the pure "playful" type who prefers a light and disengaged consumption, although not more passive than the first subgroup.

Finally the last group (152 subjects) is a picture of social marginality: it is made up of young people, mostly foreigners, who do not have internet connection, who do not read, who do not practice sport, do not go to the cinema, do not make any voluntary activity, do not go shopping and look like to their peers just because they like listening to rock and pop music. According to the Iard typology, this group could be labeled the "excluded". In the 90ies in this group non students and non workers were overrepresented, while these data show that a higher percentage of this group is made up of young foreign students.

Then, the typology of choices which emerges from the ACM analysis shows how the whole of subjective, structural and contextual factors might combine and influence the decision making process thus translating into a final choice of leisure time's fruition. In other words, the original capital implies informal choices which are in continuity among them and combines itself with other factors, such as the territorial context, which once more reveals itself decisive not as a structural condition, rather as a system of opportunities enhancing or inhibiting any options.

### **Toward a reflexive choice**

The research presented in this paper has confirmed the hypothesis of a significant relationship between leisure time options and family capital, more specifically highlighting the role of cultural capital. Nonetheless, it is

not possible to explain leisure time options simply in terms of continuity with the social and cultural ascribed condition. The hypothesis of an increase finds confirmation as long as leisure time is meant as an actual *chance*, that is when, as it happens more often in the third group of MCA, young people succeed in using the original capital by combining it with other factors, such as the opportunity of the territorial system, the resources of the context, one's own tension toward realization, the non simply self referential aspiration to develop a successful life project also thorough the educational opportunity given by *non schooling* activities.

On the other hand, if young people do not show an active involvement and engagement, the original capital risks to go spoiled or to disappear. To avoid such risk, which has important implication for the human capital of a society, it is highly relevant to attribute value and significant to informal activities, thus developing a conception and a practice of leisure time as an actual autonomous and aware choice (Norbert Elias, 1986). Such effort will activate a *process of synthesis* between what is nearer to *one's own interests* and to what the context offers, between the time for the self and the time to dedicate to institutions, coming to a deliberative and aware stance on the value of the individual choice which highlights a reflexive competence. Future research will address further analysis aimed at explaining the confirmations rather than the research hypothesis carried out by the present contribution, through empirical investigations which might focus on the topic of reflexivity with reference to informal choices of Italian young people.

What the research has clearly highlighted is the centrality of youngsters' ability to discern between different media and opportunities, thus acting reflexively upon one's own trajectories of life. In view of the above, with reference to the educational processes any difference between formality and non formality drawn through the category of intentionality loses validity in such a multicultural and multimedia society. Rather, it could be useful to develop a perspective, which would consider the intentionality which guides young people's informal choices as a feature own to adolescents, that is free from the control of adults as well as from the influence of any structural variables and therefore fully active and engaged in several forms of inner autonomous and aware conversations (Archer, 2006). In this direction, the research, which highlights also important situations of disadvantage and deprivation (the excluded of the cluster), recalls institutional responsibilities as for the construction of a

system of informal and formal opportunities as to reduce the effects of social inequalities for ascribed conditions.

A conclusion can be drawn with reference to the wider topic of social capital investigated all through the presented research. It is a resource to enhance not simply for young people but also for the significant adult who operates in the formal and informal contexts where the crucial choices of youngsters are made. These considerations go back to a wider topic which refers to the relationship between schooling and non schooling and the opening to the theme of an “integrated educational system”, not only to the dynamics of the subsystems of formal education, rather to the continuity and reciprocal reinforcement of the subsystems of formal, non formal and informal education as to enhance the whole cultural capital an individual who is training him/her self might rely upon even when his/her ascribed conditions are disadvantageous. As Gamoran et al. (2000, p. 51) write with reference to the responsibilities the school has in the creation of a new social capital: «social resources in a school is a form of social capital, refers to trust, expectations, shared understandings, and a sense of obligations that may characterize networks of relationship among educators».

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