

## **Foreign adolescents at school: a research in Turin**

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*Abstract:* The study of integration processes, specifically focusing on the educational field, has reached a crucial stage with the emergence of the second generation. This paper focuses on the relation between a specific group of foreign adolescents, the so-called 1.5 generation, and schools. On the one hand, interviews and group discussions with students highlight how they build their socio-integration paths and, on the other hand, focus groups with teachers stress how schools try (or don't try) to re-define themselves towards a more complex and heterogeneous school population.

*Key words:* Education, 1.5 generation, migration, school-organization.

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### **Introduction**

The children of immigrants are now a numerically and educationally significant component of many European school districts.

In fact, more than two million migrant children within the EU are under the age of 16, facing the problems of fitting into different educational systems (Sopemi 2008). According to the main policy interest in the

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integration issue both at national and international levels, increasing attention is dedicated to their education, identified as being a powerful tool in their integration process (Heath, Rethon and Kilpi 2008; Lucassen and Feldman 2006). Paying attention to the education of immigrant children from before they enter the school system is essential for promoting their integration, as is stressed in the “Common basic principles on integration policy”, adopted by the European Council in 2004, where education is considered a priority area of intervention, especially to support children’s educational achievements and to prevent early school-leaving. Several documents from European institutions stress the importance in promoting migrant pupils’ school integration and to fight against the risk of their social and labour market exclusion. So, in recent years, numerous initiatives and projects have been developed at local level to support children of immigrants in education, with measures ranging from language acquisition to vocational training.

Unfortunately, the performance of these children generally lags behind in all school success indicators: higher percentages of them drop out, they repeat classes more frequently, and are concentrated in the least challenging educational courses (Crul and Vermeulen 2003; Crul and Heering 2009). Nevertheless, after decades of immigration to European countries, immigrant groups still tend to show rather poor levels of education and training. There has been some improvement in education for the second generation, compared to the first generation, but the main picture is still one of structural disadvantage in education and vocational and professional qualifications.

The educational gap between them and the children of native-born parents is of great concern to local institutions and national governments. There is an ongoing debate about whether the members of the ‘new second generation’ are able to move up the educational ladder or whether they will form a new underclass in Europe’s largest cities (Modood 2004; Wicker, Fibbi and Haug 2003).

The field of education has the capacity to counteract - all at the same time - structural, cultural and ‘common identity’ marginalization. Recent North American (Massey and Denton 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Kasinitz, Mollenknopf and Waters 2004) and European research (Heckmann, Lederer and Worbs 2001; van Zanten 2001) on 2.0 and 1.5 generations indicates that the vast majority of immigrant children –

regardless of ethnic origin – aspire to college degrees and professional-level occupations. In this respect they mirror the aspiration profile of American- or European Union-born youth. However, many of these children grow up in conditions of severe disadvantage and face major impediments to attaining their goals. This strong discrepancy between their aspirations and the resources for attaining goals has led some researchers (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) to suggest that the second generation may be trapped between low-skill/income jobs and the education histories of their parents and their own aspirations.

To combat the risk of school failure, relevant policies and significant actions have always been carried out at sub-national levels. Local authorities have developed projects, initiatives and policies, involving schools, associations, NGOs and immigrants' communities, to improve the education and training of migrant youth (Allemann-Ghionda 1997). This sector deals with the more general context of local integration policies. According to Heckmann and Wolf (2006) and Ricucci (2007), some European cities (e.g. Frankfurt, Stuttgart) and districts (e.g. the Swiss Cantons of Neuchatel and Fribourg) have set up action programmes for local integration policies in recent years, including the organization of special integration offices within the municipal administration and the establishment of working groups and councils (Gogolin and Jochum 2009; Zay 2008; Zay 2009).

### **Half-Italians: born overseas, growing up in Italy**

Until now, the majority of minors have arrived in Italy for family reasons. This means that their age at the time they left their country acquires significance. In fact, unlike the strict second generation - defined as the generation which is born where parents have migrated - foreign adolescents born elsewhere share with their parents their country of origin, language and culture, although they differ in other aspects. Therefore, how can we define these adolescent minors who have certain characteristics that would compare with first generation migrants and yet are projected – and partly socialized – within a context different from where they were born and partially grew up? Some Italian authors (e.g. Ambrosini 2006; Dalla Zuanna, Farina and Strozza, 2009; Casacchia, et. al., 2008) use Rumabut's

(1997) classification of the '1.5' generation. In the ongoing debate, increasing attention is being paid to the heterogeneous universe of immigrant minors: studies by Mantovani (2008), Pocaterra et al. (2008) and Ravecca (2009) divide them into immigrant children or children of immigrants (individuals from birth to age 18 who come to Italy with their parents: they can be further divided into the '1.25', '1.5' and '1.75' generations), second generation immigrants (the Italian-born children of first-generation immigrants), unaccompanied minors<sup>2</sup>, Roma minors (they belong to different ethnic groups, often with Italian nationality); minors applying for asylum (they are beneficiaries of humanitarian reception).

The discriminating variable is immigration age and, generally, the phase of the growth path in which the minor was when he left his homeland. Therefore, the minors who went through primary socialization in their own birth-country and then migrated before reaching school age are presumably comparable to a second generation: in fact, they are often defined as such (Manco 1999; Driessen and Dekkers 1997). Those who arrived with an already-formed luggage of norms, values, behaviour, albeit not yet put into practice, are more remote from the second generation, and are placed in the middle of a path – either linear or impervious – that leads from parents to peers, either autochthonous or from the same country, but born within the new context (Zhou 1997).

From the viewpoint of those thinking in terms of those young people «in the middle» or «half-way through», the definition of «1.5 minors» enables us to move more easily in the intricate world of identity and plurality of assimilation and interaction processes that these minors experience in the inside world (family and origins) and outer world (school, peer group and either the host society or the birth society). This definition is not universally accepted or shared in the scientific debate. Recent studies (Comitato oltre il razzismo 2006; Comitato oltre il razzismo 2008; Ricucci 2010) have demonstrated that the living context (i.e. family social conditions, family composition, local context where people live, characteristics of local integration policies) intervenes in integration paths more than the generational group to which one belongs.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Italian legislation an 'unaccompanied minor' is a minor who does not hold Italian citizenship or that of another EU Member State; he/she has not applied for asylum but he/she is in Italy for other reasons, without assistance or legal representation on behalf of his/her parents or other legally responsible adults in accordance with Italian law.

Foreign adolescents are a heterogeneous universe: their biographies are more complex than they're being born overseas. It is true that their migratory experience represents a heavy marker that can interfere with their life-course, but they are more than foreigners. They are first of all adolescents and they have to face a "double transition", i.e. the passage to both the adult age and the host society (Camurati e Gulli 2009: 10). Two passages that day by day define these young people as "half Italians, because they become adults as well as their Italian peers: in fact, according to Eve (2009), it is not important to look at what adolescents' and young foreigners' generational group is, but what kind of environments they have contact with (e.g. schools, associations, peer groups). IN the meantime, foreign adolescents take a distance from their Italian peers because of their past and their difficult access to Italian citizenship. In other words, they are in the middle of a pathway, from what they were in their countries (and what the host society thinks they should be) and what they both are and will be in Italy.

### **The research: brief methodological notes**

What's happening in the Italian cities? What are the experiences and integration paths of young migrants? The various phases of welcoming, insertion, integration and then either school success or failure are crucial in order to better understand how students with migratory backgrounds (or migrants themselves) are defining their careers, both at school and in the labour market. In other words, does school integration promote highly-qualified education paths or encourage "downward assimilation" (Portes and Zhou 1993)? How do foreigners consider it? How does school redefine itself in the light of the new characteristics of the school population (e. g. place of birth, family socio-economic conditions, language spoken at home)? To try to answer these questions, a qualitative study has been designed. Specifically, research which I carried out in 2007-2009 was focussed on: 1) outlining the current schooling situation of migrant students; 2) identifying practices for solving key issues emerging in the national (and international) debate on migrant school – and subsequent labour-market – integration: lack of language proficiency, differences in school curricula, difficulties in school-parent relationships, teaching of

languages of origin. Thanks to the collaboration of schools and associations (both ethnic and intercultural), I've interviewed, on the one hand, 30 migrant pupils, boys and girls, 16-24 years old, mainly from Morocco, the Philippines and Rumania and with various backgrounds (social, educational, age of arrival in Italy). On the other hand, I've listened to the institutional voice of teachers: 5 focus groups were led to understand how schools organize themselves to guarantee equal opportunities for all students and how teachers consider migrant students. To sum up, the empirical collected material refers to a) interviews with young people, whom I've met both in various high schools and vocational schools in Turin and in intercultural youth centres; b) two focus groups with young people to discuss results emerging from interviews; c) focus groups with teachers, mainly involved in their school activities in the specific activity of welcoming and inclusion of foreign students.

This research is not representative of the Italian context, but it can be considered as a 'case study', focussed on a specific area (Turin), with local characteristics and a long history of managing immigration flows, starting with the experience of Italians coming from the South in the 1960s. In this article I present some findings from this research.

#### *An overview of the Turin context*

Over the last 30 years (with an acceleration over the last decade), Turin (in the north-west of Italy) has experienced different migration waves due to various impulses and motivations, less temporary and more inclined to permanent settling. According to the data of the Statistics Office of the Municipality of Turin, by the end of 2007 there were 103,795 foreign residents, equal to 11.4% of the entire resident population. It is a population that comes from over 150 countries. The main nationalities are Romanian, Moroccan, Peruvian, Chinese, Albanian and Filipino.

Immigration from Eastern European countries is, nowadays, the most dynamic, thanks among other things to the latest procedure of the emergence of moonlighting (the so-called "Bossi-Fini legalization"), which allowed the emergence of a large number of people who got into the country illegally together with the legal ones (Rava 2007).

Every year it becomes clearer that the foreigners' presence in Turin, as in the rest of the region and in Italy, is more and more a structural phenomenon. The labour market, household life, the structure of services

and schools, the organization of cultural and religious spaces and the requests for political participation represent some of the areas of society characterized (and sometimes modified in their organization) by work, activities and everyday routines of immigrants well-adapted to the socio-economic fabric of the city (Ricucci 2008).

Table 1. Main nationalities of foreign documented citizens in Turin. Data on February 2009

Country of origin	Number of foreigners	% on the total of foreign residents
Romania	41,159	39.7
Morocco	16,416	15.8
Peru	6,364	6.1
Albania	5,050	4.9
China	4,305	4.1

Source: elaboration on City data.

At the same time family reunification has balanced the gender dimension, although there are ethnic communities strongly characterized by gender: Peruvians and Filipinos (women are the great majority), Senegalese (mainly men).

If we analyse the age structure of the immigrant population, we find that it is composed essentially of young people. According to the person in charge of the Statistics Office of the Municipality of Turin: “We notice a preponderance of immigrants in Turin around 30 years old (30.7% on the total of foreign people in 2007, with an increase of 31.5% on 2005) and a substantial equal tendency in the composition of the other age ranges” (Rava 2007: 81).

Migrants’ insertion in the labour market is not equally distributed in the various economic sectors. The highest concentration of immigrant workers is found in domestic labour, where over half of employees (an estimate, according to Inail data) are immigrants (Di Monaco 2008). There is also an increasing number of self-employed (Fieri 2008).

With regard to religion, Islam represented the main religious affiliation among immigrants up to 2003: since that year, the increasing arrivals from Eastern Europe have gradually changed the religious scenario. Even if Muslims now represent the second religious group among immigrants, they continue to attract the attention of the media and Italians in general.

In Turin, foreign minors have long been the focus of public officers' reflections and actions, of voluntarism and of NGOs. At the beginning of the 1990s, the attention paid to foreign minors, especially adolescents from Morocco and Albania, led to the experimentation of specific methods of reception in co-operation with the city administration, education departments, police and prosecutors' offices and juvenile courts.

*Young people who have arrived recently or have been reunited with their parents after years of separation during which they were looked after by grandparents or uncles, or who were born in Italy but are and feel like cultural and legal foreigners ... are often young people who are seeking a balance between two worlds, hence between two cultures (sometimes two very different cultures) or a synthesis between their past and their future, or simply young people intent on building their own identity (Teacher in high school).*

However, this was only a part of the adolescents living in the city: there were also minors present in the city to join their family members, who were less well known to the public services.

## **Findings**

### *A general portrait*

All the interviewees appeared to be well inserted into Italian society<sup>3</sup>: they speak Italian, enroll in schools, have mixed friend groups of friends with whom they speak Italian language, participate at both intercultural activities and initiatives in their free time. However, their sense of belonging to this country was weak and was undermined by a strong sense of attachment to their country of origin. This sense of disconnection derived from the challenge of learning either of the official languages or the fact that they were not born in Italy.

To briefly outline the characteristics of the young people whom I interviewed, the section below presents a summary of answers to questions

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<sup>3</sup> Recent Italian surveys on foreign adolescents consider the following issues in order to identify the level of their insertion into/participation in the Italian society: enrollment at school; characteristics of peer groups; language spoken with peers and in free-time activities.

aimed at finding out their attitude towards some issues dealing with the integration process in Italy:

- The general perception of the Italian context was positive. Freedom and opportunity were among the "best things" about Italy for the members of the focus group. Italy's integration policies were described as another likeable facet of Italy, as the immigrants felt that there were no pressures to abandon their roots;

- When asked to talk about the things they did not like about Italy, the participants appeared to have some problems. Many young immigrants did not like the consumer culture and the unrestrained pursuit of wealth and status symbols;

- Many young immigrants also acknowledged that the integration process was harder on their parents than on themselves. It is apparent that the frustrations felt by their parents had a significant impact on the young people: all the interviewees agree with the high expectations of their parents towards their school success and favourable labour-market insertion. All Romanians share the difficult task of changing the social status of their families;

- Almost all young immigrants (especially among Filipinos) said that it was very important for them to maintain their culture, heritage and language. While the degree to which the participants attempted to maintain their own cultures varied, many were unconcerned about whether they would be able to do so;

- Racism came up spontaneously in all the interviews and the two group discussions. Among the interviewees, the younger immigrants (16-19, mainly students) indicated that it was difficult for them to tell whether discrimination by authority figures was based on the fact that they were immigrants (e.g. Romanians) or because they were members of a visible minority (e.g. Filipinos). The older participants (20-24 with some employment experience), particularly males, indicated discrimination in their attempts to find employment. However, many felt that this was not a serious problem in Italy. They compared Italy to other nations and noted that Italy's tolerance for multiculturalism lessened the problems of racism. Several participants felt that efforts to promote tolerance and understanding should be focussed on schools and aimed at both teachers and students. Romanians stress the need for training courses to explain to Italians the difference between Romanians and Roma.

Table 2. Attitudes toward some issues dealing with the integration process in Turin. Comparison among three groups. (+) means a positive attitude and (-) a negative one.

	Moroccans	Filipinos	Romanians
Attachment to their countries	-	+	-
Attitude toward maintaining their culture	+	+	-
Perception of Italy	+/-	+/-	-
Evaluation of Italian integration policies	+	+	-
Experiences of racism	-	-	+

Analysing the stories of the young people interviewed, the integration efforts are obvious and so is the desire to be well-educated, especially by those minors who arrived in Italy with an educational background:

*“I arrived in July and in September my mother enrolled me in Grade 10. I spent my summer studying Italian, watching television, to learn: I wanted to be as good as I was in Romania”* (F, Romanian, 17-year-old)

*“I enrolled in high school because I want to be a doctor, like my mother. Now she is a waitress, I don’t want to become like her just because I am a foreigner”* (F, Romanian, 18-year-old)

*“ I arrived three years ago; the beginnings were very difficult because everything was different from what I learned by myself. Sometimes, at school, I wanted to cry, to run away and never come back, even though my school friends in Grade 9 were kind and when I understood the language a bit more and was able to communicate, I went out with them. When I arrived I studied a lot and I was the best in the class”* (M, Filipino, 18-year-old)

From these stories, the relevance of family and the significance assigned to education as an instrument of integration into Italian society is obvious. However, if the family is capable of representing a resource to support education efforts, sometimes it transforms into a heavy load for the definition of schooling paths as well as of education withdrawal. Personal inclinations are replaced by parents’ economic needs and worries as they prefer to guide their children towards careers that ensure quick access to the labour market. Within the Italian context, foreign adolescents mainly attend vocational institutes because these are considered as less demanding and

more useful to job placement (therefore suitable for foreigners) as well as because the institutes are also attended by fellow nationals.

*“I enrolled in this school because I already knew other kids coming here. To be the only Moroccan in a class, I couldn’t bear it”* (M, Moroccan, 17-year-old)

*“When I arrived I went to the high school director to enrol and he told me the school was too difficult for us foreigners, so he sent me to the vocational institute”* (M, Moroccan, 18-year-old)

*How do schools organize (or not) themselves in responding to a new student population?*

The research paid attention to schooling because in the analysis of migratory phenomena (Reynolds, and Cuttance 1992; Fuller and Hannum 2002; Luciak 2004), school integration and intervention politics towards young foreigners are a crucial issue. In fact, if on the one hand schooling integration represents a stabilizing indicator of attendance and redefinition of the migratory project, on the other hand it contributes to the shaping of future generations. Schooling, traditionally a socializing organization, has been among the first institutes to be forced to reinvent themselves because it is involved in immigration issues. It is especially within a progressing school system that foreign adolescents develop their integration path and strengthen their identity. These are non-linear processes and are strongly influenced by numerous variables: being born in Italy or recently arrived, language fluency, the family reference context, school reception politics, etc.

In Italy, attention to migrant pupils, or those belonging to an ethnic minority, especially at lower secondary school level, has been acknowledged as crucial for the definition of integration paths. In fact, it is exactly at this level that the bases for subsequent schooling are built: without language support, an educational basis, etc. foreign minors arriving from abroad when 11-14 years old risk pursuing exclusively vocational education.

It is by now obvious that dealing with school integration problems means entering a multi-faceted and constantly evolving world, in which there are numerous actors: teachers, autochthonous and allochthonous students, native and migrant families, cultural mediators, associations, local

government operators, etc. The research, analysis and definition of methods and activities must take into account each school-involved actor's viewpoint in order to develop efficient projects, responding to foreign students' requirements, compatible with the local education system.

Findings from discussions with teachers in my study confirm what has already been written in previous research which ascertained that the institutional setting is extremely important for the future opportunities of young generations (Fravega and Queirolo Palmas 2003; Besozzi and Colombo 2007). Speaking about the institutional setting, Coleman (2005) underlined that while education plays an important role in people's lives, contributing to determine class status, degree of social mobility and attitudes, it is not necessarily the only determining cause of inequalities or the key to equal access to highly-qualified labour opportunities. This of course does not mean that other role-players, such as parents and teachers, should be forgotten. Following Coleman's teachings, schools in Turin have developed projects and initiatives addressed not only to students, but also to parents: the idea, as has been stressed in all the focus groups, is to promote school integration thanks to a co-operative approach, where schools (and teachers) should collaborate with parents, volunteers, cultural mediators and associations working in the same area. The focus is not only on the single student, but also on families, both immigrant and Italian, who have to learn, on the one hand, what it means to go to school in Italy and, on the other hand, how to interact with immigrants.

In this way, schools have begun to re-enforce their attention to families, promoting their relations with the institutional educational setting.

In many cases, schools encounter difficulties in communicating with parents because of their lack of knowledge of the educational system and the changes it has undergone. Sometimes, even among native families, language represents a barrier, though certainly not the only one.

*"Being an immigrant is not in itself an obstacle to results. It depends on the family, on the school's involvement, on your social class: language is important; and if the parents don't speak the language, how can they help their children?"*  
(Secondary school teacher)

*"How are the interviews with the families going? If foreign families speak Italian or another European language, I can manage; otherwise I get a pupil to help me. We have rung the cultural mediators twice but they didn't help us. I*

*would also like to organize an Italian course for parents”* (secondary school teacher)

Until recently, language teachers fulfilled the role of school/family mediators and were often asked to bridge the gap between parents and teachers (Besozzi 2005).

Providing school support means also supporting school attainment. Data show that some students (e.g. pupils of Roma background, pupils with disabilities, pupils coming from families with a low economic capital, pupils with a migratory background) have performance and social integration problems within their class (Miur 2006; Miur 2007; Miur 2008). In order to help compensate for both these and other problems, some initiatives and projects have been funded in recent years: to support migrant pupils' school integration (language courses, cultural mediators, translations of educational materials and definition of leaflets explaining the characteristics of the Italian school system); to improve the relationship between schools and migrant families, and to organize training courses for teachers to develop new methodologies and define new instruments for teaching in a multicultural class.

Focussing on the last group of initiatives, with regard to teachers, training courses have been organized to improve teaching ability in a multiple-complex context, which is characterized by pupils with various and numerous needs: psychological, physical, cultural and social. As teachers often have to become “youth workers, educators, social assistants”, they need to improve their skills to better understand the generation of “the risk society”, as Beck dubs it (Beck 2002).

Thus, the training courses offered to teachers can be distinguished as:

a) Training courses to promote pupils' understanding of life in a multicultural society.

As socio-educational research indicates (Kellerhalls and Montadon 1991; Palmonari 2001), adolescents' identity definition and social integration sway between a strongly emotional cultural system within the family context and a network of strong and prevailing social symbols and meanings in the host society, outside the family. For adolescents, the immigrant, or immigrant's children's status, involves a greater chance of facing difficulties as compared to the full realization of one's own self as well as a greater likelihood of remaining at the fringe of society (Eldering and Kloppogge 1989; Elliott, Payne and Ploesch 2997).

b) Training courses for teachers to develop new methodologies and define new instruments for teaching in a multicultural class, first of all for teaching Italian as a Second Language. Numerous courses were set up at local level in order to give new instruments to teachers, but the outcomes are not so positive. Teachers involved were few: a competence that should be specific to each teacher, their core ability yet it is considered part of the background of (only) the literature teachers;

c) Collaboration with professionals (e.g. counsellors, psychologists, youth workers) inside and outside the school. The idea is to create a “school community”, integrated in the neighbourhood, and able to educate pupils to live in society, by working on both their empowerment and their social skills, according to a wider concept of teaching and school education (Gobbo 2008; Fele and Paoletti 2003)<sup>4</sup>.

It is interesting to note that more than 90% of the initiatives dealing with foreign students (language courses, learning support, psychological help) are developed through a partnership among local authorities, school, NGOs and associations (both intercultural and ethnic). This kind of partnership enlightens one of the main characteristics of the Turin (and also of the Italian) scenario in the migration field: in a situation of a lack of institutional initiatives, there is great self-promotion of associations and the third sector. In this way, some needs, dealing with the increasing number of migrants, have been satisfied just in time. The negative side effect of this *modus operandi* is the fragility of this kind of initiatives: they are carried out under annual funding, without either any continuity or any final evaluation of the efficacy of the actions. Focusing on schools’ initiatives is a good example of this way of acting.

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<sup>4</sup> The Turin “Magic Carpet” (Tappeto volante) can be considered a good practice in this context. Among its objectives is the creation of a social and educational context in which all the subjects in the area (council, schools, associations) share an educational project focussed on the integration of resources and on the involvement of all family units and children living in such an area. Thanks to this project, schools have built paths in synergy with neighbourhood public and private institutions, whose co-operation has helped to renew educational methodology with a powerful cultural project based on creativity and on the global dimension of culture and cohabitation. The main intervention lines concern not just strictly educational activities, but the connection and relationship with parents, the limitation of the level of academic withdrawal and failure, the study of and search for instruments favouring citizens’ participation in school life.

*Growing up at school: living the present and building the future.*

School represents the *passpartout* to understand how the socio-economic integration paths are oriented. Education becomes the most important element in defining both successful socio-economic integration and an ascendant mobility for young people. In this view, migrant adolescents face a double challenge: on the one hand, they are looking for good education and on the other hand they have to fight against discrimination and prejudices.

Some interviews have stressed a kind of parents' obsession about education and school success. It happens especially among families coming from Eastern Europe, where the parents' high level of qualification represents an important resource for the young people. They grow up in families with a high cultural level, where there is a great awareness of the importance of good qualifications and education. This is why, nowadays, we're facing two interesting phenomena: 1) migrant families leave schools where the rate of migrant pupils is growing and 2) negative perceptions of Moroccans and Maghrebians are growing among migrants from other countries.

*"When I arrived, my mother wanted to enroll me in a high school, because I was enrolled in this kind of school in Rumania, but when she went to get information (in a school), the secretary told her that there were vocational courses where students could succeed without sufficient Italian knowledge. So, I did a hairdresser course. After a few months, a friend of my mother told us that there are high schools in Turin where foreign students are enrolled and helped with their Italian. I changed school immediately. And now I'm very happy"* (F, Romanian, 18-year-old)

These words introduce a key issue: teachers' socio-representations of foreign pupils. There is a group of teachers who consider all foreign pupils in the same way as pupils characterized by: lack of education (even if they have been educated in Italian schools), a poor socio-economic family context, only interested in very rapid insertion in the labour market. This image, maybe true at the beginning of the migratory phenomenon in Italy (when pupils were mostly Maghrebians, living with fathers, in a poor context), is continually changing and evolving. In the same classes teachers are faced with second generations and neo-arrivals, with over ten different nationalities, differentiated by years of presence in Italy, educational paths,

languages spoken. It is a dangerous attitude that can become discrimination, condemning foreign pupils to seek only educational careers with a low profile.

*“I remember a teacher of Italian in the last class of high school. She was surprised while evaluating as very good a composition of mine. She was ignorant: I was the best in my class: we foreigners are sometimes better than Italians and maybe this fact is not appreciated by teachers. We are supported when we arrive, when we need help and when we cannot “disturb” and “interact” with the school career of Italians”* (F, Moroccan, 19-year-old).

*“Sometimes in the class, someone says that we foreigners are better treated than Italians because we are foreigners and teachers don’t check us when we speak and don’t evaluate us in the same way as them. Maybe it is true at the beginning: I remember that when I arrived, I spent a lot of hours away from my classroom learning Italian. But, after a few months I began to follow the school programme as well as my classmates. My first compositions were substandard, but, step by step, my performance increased. Thanks to my mother, who encouraged me to read books in Italian and to study, I’m now a university student: I study engineering like my father, but I don’t know whether I’ll work in Italy or go back to Rumania, because in Italy Rumanians are discriminated against. Generally I don’t speak Rumanian when I’m in public areas or on the bus and I’ll ask my parents to speak English when we are together”* (M, Romanian, 20 years old).

It is sometimes the lack of language proficiency that cancels all the educational paths and the brilliant school careers developed abroad.

*“It seems that in our countries there aren’t any schools. Teachers don’t know that our schools are stricter than Italian schools. We have to study very hard. It is impossible to walk around during the lessons and nobody arrives in the classroom after the teacher”* (F, Romanian, 18-year-old).

*“At school I was enrolled in an Italian language course. One day, I came back into my class during the math lesson and I solved the problems without difficulty. Everybody seemed astonished: in my country I enrolled at grammar school (liceo) in the fourth class, now I’m in the second class of a vocational school”* (M, Romanian, 17-year-old).

It seems that at school teachers separate Italians and foreigners, without paying attention to the various characteristics of pupils.

*“In the same conditions, pupils coming from abroad have the same results as Italians. I don’t believe that a reasonable teacher could expect great results from pupils just arrived from China or the Philippines. I wonder about this, but unfortunately it happens, even in my school. Foreign students are highly motivated and their families use every opportunity both at school and in their leisure time to support their school career”* (Italian teacher in high school).

Thinking of their future, all the interviewees seem to be disillusioned. They know that in their case the school path can be harder than for their Italian colleagues.

*“In Italy it is not as in France, where foreigners are a normal experience. Here if a Moroccan boy with a degree applies for a white collar job, it seems strange. When you go into the labour offices there are few foreigners. Only if you go to a restaurant or a bar you can meet migrant workers. It is clear: you start in this way and then you may proceed to obtain better positions”* (M, Moroccan, 19-year-old)

*“When I arrived in the third class at high school, the teacher of Italian treated me as a child. Some teachers think that we immigrants are without culture only because we were forced to leave our countries. It is true, at the beginning we don’t know the language, but now I’m the best in my class. Maybe teachers should pay more attention to the Italians. When I declare my desire to go to university, some Italians answer that it will be useless because I’ll be a foreigner forever. I want to have a degree and then leave Italy: here, there is no space for us. Italians want us only as caregivers, but our mothers accept this job only to allow us to study, to go to university. My mother has a degree in Economics”* (F, Romanian, 19-year-old).

This quotation introduces another issue: the risk of occupational segregation facing specific ethnic groups. For example, young females want to escape from the jobs held by their mothers. They don’t want to do the same work as their parents: they are aware that their parents have had to accept low-paid jobs, abandoning their qualifications, abilities and previous careers. But, when these students think of their future they imagine becoming doctors, lawyers, and engineers. Generally they don’t choose the marginal and invisible strategy of insertion in Italian society.

Synthesizing the above findings, it is possible to identify a kind of typology. I refer, partially, to the work which Tajfel and Turner (Chun,

Balls Organista and Marin 2003) have already done in describing the strategies used by immigrants to build their integration paths.

Following Tajfel's theory, it is possible to identify in the Turin experience a preference for the first strategy. All young interviewees share the idea of improving their lives: they recognize the value of education but in the meantime they are aware of daily difficulties at school, both from teachers and peers. They aspire to the professions but they have learnt that Italian society will deny them the upward social mobility by giving them only the same jobs as their parents (i.e. caregivers, cleaners, peddlers, housekeepers and gardeners).

Due to the recent history of migration and the lack of strong ethnic communities, young people are trying to define an individual integration path in Italian society based on three pillars: 1) school success; 2) positive interaction with their origins and 3) developing intercultural/bilingual competences.

Young people I've met - who aren't a statistically representative sample - are aware of the importance of learning Italian as well as acquiring qualifications and abilities for the best possible interaction with Italian society. In the meantime they are aware of their identity, of being different from others with regard to citizenship, and of the negative attitude of Italians. In other words, these results coincide with more recent studies carried out in Italy on foreign adolescents (Colombo, Romaneschi and Marchetti 2009; Dalla Zuanna, Farina and Strozza 2009; Eve 2009). More specifically, these young people should be defined, according to Ricucci (2010), as "half-Italians", that is, people who share values and lifestyles both with their Italian peers and with their parents and ethnic communities, and who don't share the same rights as Italians but are aware of having the same duties: they perceive themselves as under-developed personalities.

## **Conclusions**

Data resulting from this empirical research allow us to outline a picture of foreign adolescents that could be used also in other Italian contexts in order to better understand the heterogeneous universe of an increasing proportion of the population resident in Italy (Istat 2007; Billari and Dalla Zuanna 2008; Golini 2008).

Many foreign adolescents and young migrants are creating individual identities combining elements of both cultures and countries. Examples of this ability to assume bicultural behaviour are the juvenile associations set up in Italy by the children of immigrants: Young Muslims of Italy, Second Generation Network, The Association of Filipino Youth and The Chinese Youth Association are some examples of youths with migratory backgrounds working towards improving their living conditions. Nevertheless, some of these young people experience downward mobility and they gamble on school success to improve their social conditions. Unfortunately, the Italian context is not prepared for this. The complementary presence of the migrant population in the labour market (united to the idea of the German figure of “guest-worker”) is accepted. The possibility of people born or grown up in Italy, speaking Italian, sharing Italian culture and rooting for Italian soccer teams, becoming competitors for the same qualified job position, is on the horizon. Some interviewees are involved in youth associations and participate in youth projects, where discussions on their future in Italy are frequent. The issue of their insertion in the labour market, the probable difficulties encountered and possible discrimination are on the agenda: these issues are strictly connected to the complex issue of citizenship status. Being born in Italy to foreign parents does not mean being Italian citizens: following the *jus sanguinis*, these boys and girls are foreigners and they can apply for Italian citizenship when they reach 18 and can demonstrate that they have lived in Italy without interruption for 18 years. There is also discrimination on the basis of country of origin: being Filipinos or Romanians, Moroccans or Senegalese does not mean the same thing. Till now being Moroccan has been more difficult than being Filipino, even if their command of the Italian language is perfect and their skills are highly developed. For these adolescents becoming adults in this context is harder than it is for Italians due both to their migratory background and the societal attitude towards them. This is why the partnership between schools and associations, the idea of building an educational community beyond schools, is important. The socio-educational world in general seems still ill-prepared to tackle – and even notice at times – the specific relevance of diversity and cultural, religious and family feelings of belonging along these adolescents’ growth paths. In these conditions, adolescents’ growth paths can dilate inter-generational gaps and negatively affect assimilation and integration paths.

Another important outcome of the partnership between schools and associations is the opportunity to help foreign adolescents (legal and illegal, EU citizens or not) to reflect on their condition in Italy, on their migratory experience and on their future (stay in Italy or return). In this way foreign adolescents have a meeting place waiting for them, where they can feel free to speak and in the meantime feel accepted and appreciated.

*“They are adolescents who ask for help in understanding and are looking for teachers, leaders and coaches to support them and be reference points along their development path: work, family conflict, confrontation with school, peer group, educational choices, etc. Many families are attentive and try to help their children especially when they arrive as adolescents, although sometimes they are too strict, due to fear and dread of interpreting their parental role in a wrong way. Therefore, conflict, arguments and running away from home start; attention must be paid to these dramas and action must be taken to establish a relationship between school, family and free time”* (a teacher in permanent education at a local centre).

In other words, as data from the empirical research carried out in a specific Italian context underline, a synergic co-operation between school – whose training and educational tasks play a fundamental role in fighting emargination – and informal socialization and meeting venues (which are a natural complement to schooling) is essential, because it is through interpersonal relationships, working together and the sharing of playing and leisure environments that adolescents’ development and growth within a cultural context thrive.

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