

Talking about school and values. Educational expectations, values and beliefs of European young people

*Francesca Setiffi*¹

Abstract: The essay analyses the results of an exploratory research in order to point out the differences between males and females in relation to school priorities and the composition of their system of values. The data come from a European research, - PACT -, carried out in 2009². After having observed the distribution of school performance among social classes, the different perception of their future in those students with a negative scholastic performance is presented and some reflections about the values *set* of young Europeans are offered. The analysis shows clearly the importance given to knowledge as a value for its power to improve one's possibilities in achieving one's future, distinguishing it from personal culture as a value perceived as less useful in the social context of adult future life. School is considered by students both as social institution and social experience, and it is mainly legitimated in its function of social training for adult life.

Keywords: educational expectations, values, knowledge, european young people

¹ Department of Sociology, University of Padua, via Cesarotti 12/13 – 35123, Padova (Italy). Email: francesca.setiffi@unipd.it

² See note at the end.

Introduction

This essay analyses school, one of the main agencies of socialization, through the recording of the students' opinions and expectations, and also takes into consideration the distribution of school performance both in the parents' social class and the students' future social class, in the end it describes the values *set* of young Europeans. The difference between males and females will be used to highlight similarities and differences among students. This work will try to answer the following questions: Are there gender differences in the students' expectations from the scholastic system? Is school socially legitimated to young people? How is school performance distributed among social classes? What role do values play? What is the value of availability of knowledge?

School performance will be drawn from academic achievement, understood subjectively (the student's opinion) and considered objectively (the opinion of the teacher as related by the student) and the opinions of the students about the future usefulness of scholastic knowledge in relation with:

- revelation of sectors in which it will be possible to profit by scholastic training (work, daily life, family, friendships and social relationships);
- comprehension of the priorities which young people think scholastic institutions must have ("to provide an adequate number of competencies", "to provide the ability to know how to live together and collaborate with others", "to make the student able to see a profound sense to their own lives").

Subsequently, the distribution of the school performance among social classes will be analysed and some considerations about the possible influence in influencing the values of young Europeans will be offered. The analysis of the data will be closed taking into account the values system of the European students underlining similarities and differences between males and females³ and of country of origin. Although we are aware of the

³ Besozzi underlines (2003) that the use of the "sex" variable, in order to understand the differences concerning the direction of value and school performance of the students at the beginning, at the end or during their school years reduces the possibilities to know the gender distinction. She underlines: "What eludes comprehension, once again, is the dynamic relationship between sexes and inside each sex, but also the complex web connecting development and other different related fields [...]. Gender is communication and this communication is a social and individual resource crucial to the growing process, both in the

explanatory value of the “gender” variable, compared to the “sex” variable, which, as Besozzi sustains (2003), implies an explanatory value superior to the distinction male sex – female sex, the choice to divide the samples in males and females was suitable to underline the many converging points and some substantial differences of opinion among the young Europeans.

The aim is, therefore, to reconstruct the values universe of young Europeans which gives significance to their actions, not exclusively in the scholastic/formative context but, in the broadest social context. From a close examination which places at the centre of attention the role played by scholastic institutions, we can expand the vision of the investigation, which is no longer focused on the individual’s relationship to the school or to his values system, but to depart from the individual to contextualize him within his socio-relational universe.

School as seen by the students: opinions and expectations

According to Brint (1998) in contemporary societies school education is meant to achieve three distinct objectives: the transmission of knowledge, socialization and social selection. The transmission of knowledge is a function connected to the build-up of human capital⁴, socialization is a process of transmission of values and behavioural habits and finally the social selection is an activity to identify those who will take over the prestigious positions in society⁵.

relationships between generations, and in adult present and future reality.” (pp. 10-11).

⁴ School cannot be considered the only agency of “production” of human capital, likewise the working environment is not the only one where human capital is valuable. As Scanagatta says (2010): “the spheres in which the HC can be evaluated are many. The family naturally is the principal nucleus of the evaluation of ability, but in reality it is anything but identifiable. The role played by school, by associations and by the work environment is as much as a priority, because in any case it creates an interdependence and an integration between the spheres which makes them all co-producers of the environmental situation in which the subject lives. In all these spheres it is possible to create CS, by way of relationships and the interchanges that occur. It is evident nevertheless that the person that ‘builds’ these relationships and these interchanges, acts thanks to the HC they possess and that represents their wealth.” (p. 40).

⁵ The importance of the concept of human capital, in its formation of the combination of knowledge-competence, can be found in the contributions by Schizzerotto and Barone (2006). According to the Authors the main functions of school are: instruction, (the transmission of knowledge), formation (the transmission of competence) and education (the

The research analyses the opinion and the expectations of the students, as they are the first school interlocutors, on the outcomes of the scholastic system. The data on scholastic performance are different from the concept of human capital, as concerns analysis. The aim is not to define how the human capital influences the choices about future life, but how a different distribution of scholastic performance can influence differently the opinions young Europeans have about their future. The decision to analyse exclusively scholastic performance, separated from human capital, is strictly connected with the necessity to keep distinct the two levels of analysis. One level, considering scholastic performance, of explorative research, the other, based on human capital, to predict future behaviours.

The choice to start an explorative research⁶ is due to the decision to gather scholastic performance data directly from the students, even if we are aware of the existence of at least three important international surveys aimed at estimating comparatively the quality of the “human capital” of the students⁷: PIRLS (Progress in international reading literacy study), TIMMS (Trend in international mathematics and science study), carried out by IEA (International association for the evaluation of educational achievement), and the survey PISA (Programme for international student assesment), coordinated by OCSE. After these preliminary remarks, the scholastic performance gathered by the survey does not compare the young people performances in the different European Countries because it would be deceptive to compare that *stock* of competences and knowledge defined as human capital (setting aside the learning systems of the single Countries and the level of acquired competences).

The data about scholastic performance, as well as the recording of “national human capital” (distribution of population according to

transmission of a body of values to direct individual and collective action).

⁶ A way to take into consideration the human capital, in its combination of building up both knowledge and competences, with a predictive aim is to value its influence in determining the wellbeing of individuals and of society as a whole. The present work will not consider the causes of social inequalities (social class, ethnic group, gender) which influence the creation of capital. After having showed the distribution of the scholastic performance among social classes we will offer a different interpretation of the dissimilar perception concerning the future between those who have a positive or negative scholastic performance.

⁷ For closer examination, see Cipollone & Sestito (2010).

educational qualifications), does not have the aim of pointing out the influence of *non schooling* activities (Scardigno, 2009), of “outside school” socialization and in broader terms of the relationship between social capital and educational successes⁸ (Maccarini, 2010) but it has the distinctive quality to synthesize the relationship between school and student; a snapshot of the level of acquisition of knowledge conveyed by education (regardless of the comparative method).

It is evident the connection between scholastic performance and human capital. Even distinguishing from their different explanatory nature, the considerations on the relationship connecting school-values-young people will move from the assumption that scholastic performance is an empirical approximation of the concept of human capital.

We can now delve into, through bivariate analysis, the subjective and objective evaluations of scholastic performance and the values they believe in. Concerning the formation of human capital in the school environment, more than 60% of young people declare to have good performance (69.6% for males and 64.1% for females). If then from the subjective evaluation of performance we move to objective evaluation, we see that, for males, the perception of their own scholastic results is underestimated. 71.3% of them declare to have received good/excellent evaluations by their teachers, demonstrating a “prudent” behaviour in defining their scholastic position. The behaviour of females is different in that they overestimate their scholastic performance (if only by 1.7 percentage points). This evidence is

⁸ According to Maccarini (2010) the analysis of the reciprocal influences between social capital and education needs a double distinction. One distinction considers the social capital as a cause or outcome, the other places the social capital both in the individualistic-utilitarian paradigm and in the civil-community one. The Author underlines: «from the point of view of the system and the educational processes, the SC is *only one* of the structural conditionings, which, related to the others, produces a certain situational logic inside which education develops. From the point of view of SC itself, on the other hand, the educational process as a whole (with its processes and structures) represents only one of the structural conditionings, which, if related to others, produces a certain situational logic, which in its turn produces the increase or the decrease of that same SC for the society [...] Therefore, the connection between SC and education is actually considered as the interfering among different morphogenetic cycles» (pp. 47- 48). If, instead of considering the social capital as both cause and effect of the educational processes, we place it into the broader area of social relations, the social capital becomes an mapping index of the social resources present on the region. See on this subject: Di Nicola *et al.* (2010).

confirmed by the mean (tab.1) which for males is stated at 3.79 as their opinion of their scholastic performance and at 3.83, as expressed by their teachers. Females register an average value of 3.72 as their self evaluation, which drops to 3.63 registered by the teaching staff. Even with all due precaution, given the slight margin between self-evaluation and others' perception of their scholastic results, we note a tendency which sees males underestimate their performance and females overestimate it.

Table 1. Objective and subjective educational achievement

Sex		<i>In your opinion, how are you doing</i> <i>According to your teachers, how are</i>	
		<i>in school?</i>	<i>you doing in school?</i>
Male	Mean	3.79	3.83
	Std. Dev.	0.738	0.781
Female	Mean	3.72	3.63
	Std. Dev.	0.834	0.863
Total	Mean	3.76	3.74
	Std. Dev.	0.784	0.825
	N	2511	2517

Anova ($p < 0.01$).

Regarding, instead, the value of availability of knowledge acquired, one does not encounter significant differences between males and females⁹. For both, what they are learning at school will be useful in the workplace: males assign an average value of 3.85 while females assign 3.77 (*on a value scale from 1-not at all to 5- very much*). The capacity, instead, to exploit what they have learned at school to construct their future lives (beyond the context of work) registers lower average values: For your future daily life M 3.40 - F 3.37; For your future family M 3.17 – F 3.10; For future friendships M 2.97 - F 2.98; For future social relationships M 3.48 – 3.35. Since the age considered goes from 13 to 18 years, the average results should be read in order to understand what degree of usefulness is attached by the students to the knowledge acquired in the different degrees of compulsory education, apart from the kind of education (for ex. liceo, technical school, etc.). Therefore, school remains for young Europeans the

⁹ N = 2517.

formative vessel from which they acquire competencies toward the construction of their future professional lives.

On the other hand, social relations connected with the peer group are the relational area less involved in the usefulness of what “will be learned at school” and this is probably connected again with the conflict between “authoritarian socialization” and “outside school socialization”, in fact, the latter, lacking authoritative figures, “is opposed to” the rules of the adult world and lets thus the dictates of the peer world prevail (Brint, 1998).

After having analyzed the prediction young people make about the usefulness of school knowledge, we can take into consideration which, in their opinion, should be school priorities (tab. 2). For males, 32.7% think that schools should teach them “to know how to choose and know how to make concrete plans” and 23% hold that they should be taught how to give a “profound sense” to their lives. Among females, instead, even while agreeing with the males, 27.6% see the necessity for schools to provide the instruments tools necessary to know how to confront challenges (life choices), and in 25.7% of cases, they would like schools to give, more than the instruments to make sense of their lives (given that 15.7% confirm this), an “adequate number of competencies”.

Males seem to look to schools for the “compass” that can orientate them in the building of their future lives, while females seem to recognize such a necessity from among the formative priorities of school, looking for, instead, from formative institutions, the acquisition of competencies (whether they be understood as “formative wealth” or as “the development of the ability to make choices and choose useful projects”).

Males and females see school as a means to acquire knowledge; the former, though, they consider able to teach how to build their own life plans beyond their place in the working world. In this element, women seem more practically oriented toward obtaining competencies and knowledge, while males appear idealistically (almost romantically) oriented in considering school as “life director”.

A recent survey published by IARD, Argentin (2007) proceeds to a classification of the groups of motives guiding the students’ choices when enrolling at a secondary school or at university: “the personal ones, connected to cultural and personal growth, the useful ones, connected to the usefulness of their educational qualifications on the labour market and

eventually, the manipulated ones, when young people continue their studies according to ties imposed by their background or other interacting social elements, and not to achieve personal goals” (p. 52).

Table 2. Students' expectations about school¹⁰ (percentage values)*

<i>In your opinion what should be the priority of schools?</i>	<i>Sex</i>		
	Male	Female	Total
Provide a good store of competences	21.7	25.7	23.5
Help to develop the ability of making choices and choosing useful projects	32.7	27.6	30.4
Provide the ability of living and collaborating with others	16.4	20.1	18.1
Make it possible for the student to give a profound sense to his/her own life	23.0	15.7	19.7
I do not know	6.2	10.9	8.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	1376	1145	2521

*Chi-quadrato = 48,12; gl = 2; $p < 0.01$.

Although the data of the European research and those produced by IARD are not comparable neither in terms of the samples examined nor in terms of the final aim and scope of the research (and consequently of data gathering), two tendencies can be inferred. Males seem more inclined both to the acquisition of competences (instrumental motive), and to personal growth (expressive motive) while females seem more inclined to the use of their competences acquired at school in building their own future.

The instrumental motive (the transmission of knowledge and competence) represents the social legitimation of school as institution appointed to the transmission of human capital and two interviewees in ten (18%) expect to receive the basis to lay future social relations; this can be read as an extension of the “concept of citizenship” (Merico, 2007) which considers school as a social experience besides a social agency.

¹⁰ A former survey about the students' expectations has been carried out to understand if there were generational differences in giving to school a different *set* of priorities. Specifically, the item “to give a profound sense to one's life” grew of importance with the growing of the age of the students interviewed. As Scanagatta says (2009): “is part of the history of a collectivity which entrusted the pattern of its own social culture to structures of social organization able to give legitimization and consistency to the main aspects and from which they derived reassuring models and actions”. (p. 70).

Social classes and scholastic performance

After having analyzed the opinions and the expectations of the students about the school system and the future possibility to use the knowledge acquired during the educational process, we pass on to consider the distribution of the school performance among social classes of origin (family of origin) and their future social position¹¹.

As it is generally known in literature, the social class influences the scholastic performance and the opportunities of educational success¹². 46.1% of young people who place their family in a “low” class have a negative scholastic performance¹³ (tab. 3). Only 30% of those who belong to middle and high classes declare to have a low scholastic performance. Argentin says (2007) that a strong risk (so-called substantial risk) of scholastic dispersion is associated to the “male component of the student population, especially in the technical schools and coming from families of middle-low cultural origin.” (p. 66). Among the young Europeans who think they will belong to a “low” class in their adult life, 45.8% (tab. 4) states they have a poor scholastic performance. Almost half of those coming from or thinking of belonging to a low class in the future (in terms

¹¹ 2030 represents a turning point towards a post-carbon society (Scanagatta *et al.*, 2010) and this year has been considered in the analysis of the perception of the future social position because the age bracket of the students interviewed places most of them at the end of their compulsory education cycle. One of the two points of transition of life from “young” to “adult”, will have been reached, the end of education will be over. See: Merico (2004).

¹² In a recent vertical research carried out among the students of the British Columbia 1, 5 and 10 years after their graduation, the analysis of the correspondences showed that the students’ expectations, taken at the moment of graduation, were substantially the same in the following years. Moreover, the analyses revealed a close relationship among gender, social-economic status of the parents and educational attainment. See: Andres *et al.* (2007). On the subject of the parents’ participation to the educational process and its effects on scholastic performance and the relevance of the institutional context, see, as an example: Laureau (2003); Useem (1992); Pattaro (2010); Buchmann & Dalton (2002); Mistry R.S., *et al.* (2009); Weisgram, *et al.*, (2010); Mistry R.S., *et al.* (2009).

¹³ The division of the sample between students with a negative performance and students with a positive performance has been carried out on the reclassification of the variable measuring the self-perceived scholastic performance, the so-called subjective achievement (*supra*) – Question: *In your opinion, how are you doing at school?* The mode “negative performance” comes from the sum of the answers given to scholastic self-evaluation considered as “very bad”, “quite bad” and “so, so”, while the mode “positive performance” comes from the sum of the answers given as follows: “quite good” and “very good”.

of self-collocation) are a failure at school.

Table 3. Distribution of scholastic performance (subjective) according to their parents' social class*

Scholastic performance	Parents' social class							
	Bassa		Media		Alta		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Negative	46.1	118	33.7	387	29.6	809	33.3	809
Positive	53.9	138	66.3	761	70.4	1622	66.7	1622
Total	100.0	256	100.0	1027	100.0	2431	100.0	2431

*Chi-quadrato = 25.29; gl = 2; $p < 0.01$.

Table 4. Distribution of scholastic performance (subjective) according to the future social class (2030)*

Scholastic performance	Social class in 2030							
	Low		Average		High		Total	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Negative	45.8	88	37.1	351	28.6	372	33.2	811
Positive	54.2	104	62.9	596	71.4	930	66.8	1630
Total	100.0	192	100.0	947	100.0	1302	100.0	2441

*Chi-quadrato = 32.76; gl = 2; $p < 0.01$.

Table 5. Prospects of future scholastic performance - On a value scale from 1-not at all to 5-very much

To make your future better...	Scholastic Performance								
	Negative			Positive			Total		
	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev	N	Mean	Std. Dev	N
Personal culture	3.57	1.10	783	3.91	0.99	162	3.80	1.04	2411
Work	4.11	0.95	785	4.32	0.82	162	4.25	0.87	2409
Knowledge	4.08	0.98	773	4.23	0.87	161	4.18	0.91	2387
Family relationships	4.07	1.07	777	4.28	0.91	161	4.21	0.97	2395
Emotional relationships	3.80	1.08	783	4.00	0.94	162	3.93	0.99	2411
			5			8			9

Anova ($p < 0.01$).

The data show a general pessimistic perception regarding the future among the members of the low class, a datum becoming stronger if we consider the average points given to the values young people think will

improve their future (tab. 5). Considering all the items, young people with a low scholastic performance reach a lower average score¹⁴ if compared to those students doing well at school. A pessimism that could be the expression of a poor sense of confidence about the future, since it is not only a lack of confidence in the role of personal culture and knowledge but also a limited confidence both in the areas of restricted sociality (family) and in broader sociality (relational context).

Even if we do not know the causes of a poor scholastic performance, if they are due to a transitory or lasting phase in the student's biography, whether they are caused by the type of school attended or by a general lack of interest towards the subject matters studied, we can argue that a negative scholastic performance drives the subject to ascribe less value to the importance of personal culture as a means to design his/her own plans about future life.

Values and daily life

Young people accept the role of school in its power to provide them with the competences useful to the creation of their own future. This means that the direct users of the "social institution" do not question its function of socialization to adult life. Moving from "school" as an agency of socialization, we come to consider the role of "family"¹⁵ and "peer group"¹⁶ as agencies of socialization in the universe of values¹⁷ peculiar to young Europeans. If school had been analysed considering its (future) usefulness of competences, family and peer group appear on the contrary as the "most important things" for the young people. Values, those of the family and of friendships, that we could define as "private" and indicative above all of the age of the subjects for which "the domestic hearth" together with the "peer group" represent anchorage points for the construction of their future lives.

¹⁴ Except for the item "beauty" which on the contrary assumes an average value higher to the one given by the young people with a positive scholastic performance.

¹⁵ See also Kay, W.K. (2009); Lauglo, J. (2011); Karvonen, S., *et al.*, (2011).

¹⁶ For a cross-cultural research, see also: Cook, T.D., *et al.* (2009).

¹⁷ Refer to the works by Rauty (2007) to find an analysis of the cultural models of youth.

Without any distinction related to gender, *family*¹⁸ (M 4.82 – F 4.62) and the *group of peer*¹⁹ (M 4.80 – F 4.49), together with *health* (M 4.75 – F 4.48) and *work* (M 4.32 – F 4.24) emerge as the most important “values” in the life of young Europeans (tab. 6). The map of value priorities is composed in part by the network of relationships, created by family and friendship, and in part by the prospects of future life connected with the preservation of the psycho-physical wellbeing and the admission to the adult world; on one hand the primary network and on the other the relations and the individual capacities. In the hierarchy of values health²⁰ lies between the area of restricted socialization and the coming into the adult world, but, at the same time, it lies in a different space, from the semantic point of view, from the one occupied by leisure time activities. This means that being in “good health” is a concept related to the relationship network and to the carrying out of one’s work and it is not a value confined to free time or sport activities.

As already said, both the values of the relationship network and the values of self-realization do not show gender differences. They express the same attitude towards politics, religion and physical appearance²¹. Males and females assign a small importance to those values if compared to “materialistic”²² ones. Considering the core of personal values, politics (M

¹⁸ Referring in particular to the young people of the North-East of Italy, Secondulfo (2005) interprets the young people’s attitude towards the nucleus of school and family socialization recalling the concept of “marsupium family” that extends its bounds not only to the restricted circle of relatives including also the educational sphere. For a cross-cultural research, see also: Mauceri, S., Valentini, A. (2010).

¹⁹ Considering the age of our sample, it can be reasonably asserted that for the young people interviewed the “friendship-value” coincides with the peer group relationships.

²⁰ In a recent survey carried out by the IARD Institute, the “health” item, included for the first time in the survey about the values hierarchy (question: how important are in your life the things contained in this list), was top of the list, while the items “family” and “friendship” occupied lower positions. See: de Lillo (2007). Regarding to young people beliefs (15-30) see also: Eurobarometer (2007).

²¹ For an analysis of the value young people give to beauty and physical appearance, see the contribution by Viviani (2011) in this same journal.

²² Inglehart (1983), considering the theory of needs by Maslow, divides the values into two categories: the materialistic ones and the post-materialistic ones. The Scholar observes how, in post-industrial societies, there is a growing attention to the sense of community, participation and the quality of life opposed to the emphasis on financial security, on profit and on economic and political stability.

2.75 – F 2.89), a value connected with the desire to commit oneself to the good of the community, together with religion (M 2.75 – F 2.48), lies at the end of list of the most important aspects of life. If considering social commitment itself, that can be linked to the secondary social capital and deriving from a “good citizen’s virtues”, a person committed and responsible for the common good (Donati, 2003), both males and females place it in the final positions of the list.

In the process of continuing the reconstruction of the value scale of the youth, differences emerge between the genders. For males the fifth place is occupied by respect for the environment (4.19), the sixth by relaxation and free time (4.12), the seventh by studies and cultural activities (4.05), the eighth by sports activities (3.91). For females, we find relaxation and free time (4.19) in the fifth place, in the sixth place respect for the environment (3.91), in the seventh sports activities (3.90), and in the eighth studies and cultural activities (3.75). The tenth and eleventh positions are shared by males and females: the tenth is held by social assistance (M 3.91 – F 3.66)²³.

Another value that can be pointed out in the differences of genders is the respect for the environment. If on one hand males place it first in the list after those values that can be considered “strong” in the values system of young European people, on the other hand females give it the same importance as sport activities. Considering the values trend males are more open to environmental problems while females show less awareness towards problems different from personal fulfilment. This distinction is not confirmed when considering the value of social commitment, since average points are the same for males and females.

After having considered the values which are important for young people today, we will proceed pointing out similarities and differences among the values collected interviewing the students from four EU Countries²⁴: France, Germany, Italy and United Kingdom. The analysis perspective is different from the gender analysis because the interviewees were asked to imagine which of the given values could positively influence

²³ The item “money” will be not taken into account in the present essay. For a closer examination of the relationship between youth and money in contemporary society see the contribution by Rinaldi (2011) in the present journal.

²⁴ This is an under-sample. The countries considered in the research are: Austria, Belgium, Luxemburg, France, Germany, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and United Kingdom.

their future (tab. 7). On one hand sociality restricted to family environment together with work and knowledge are values shared by all European young people (with an average result superior to 4), on the other there are differences about the importance given to personal culture. It is now necessary to add a general remark on the relevance given to the “knowledge-value”²⁵ and to the “personal culture-value”. All young European people of the four nationalities consider knowledge²⁶ as a value that will improve the quality of their future life. A knowledge obviously acquired through the social institution that could be defined as “classic”²⁷, school, and according to the formative polycentrism (Cesareo, 1976; Giovannini, 1987) further on through a varied series of agencies of socialization. The knowledge value guides the young people’s choices and compared with the personal culture value, it is more connected with a variable and varied socialization. Variable because knowledge is settled if compared to economic, social and environmental matters (considering the subject of the research) and varied because many are the agencies of socialization from which to learn how to interpret everyday instability. As for personal culture, to which Italian and French people give the same average points around 4 while German and English people have lower average points, it is shaped by school and family, restricted sociality (*supra*). Italian and French young people show a semantic continuity of knowledge and cultural values while German and English young people consider the two dimensions as more separated.

A further element of meditation comes from the points given to the single values. Emotional relationships appear to hold a central position in the improvement of their future life for Italian and English students. On the other hand, French and German students consider them as quite important

²⁵ Using the known term of “society of knowledge”, Colombo (2005) suggests to re-introduce the theme of reflexivity, as «the ability of human thought to draw conclusions from the object of one’s thought» (p. 8).

²⁶ As anticipated in the introduction, the research aimed at analysing the level of knowledge of young Europeans in post-carbon society. Although the theme of knowledge was present in many questions of the questionnaire, we do not deem this choice influenced the answers of the interviewees in choosing more readily the “knowledge” item among those in the list. We think that the average points gathered can be interpreted as a tendency young people show towards the acquisition of competences more and more tied to their future usefulness.

²⁷ See the concept of “imperfect decentralization” Ribolzi (2000).

values (with average points lower than 4), but these values will not have a deep influence on the quality of their future. Wider sociality has a definite influence on the well-being in adult life for Italian and English young people while French and German ones consider this dimension less referable to the quality of adult life.

Values guide the attitudes and choices about future life of young European people and the central importance given to knowledge represents an attempt to reduce its complexity (Scanagatta, 2010) (or its excess)²⁸. Knowledge is one of the two key-dimensions of human capital, the other is competence. If knowledge is considered by young people a central dimension to improve their life, this means that they are inclined to understand, at least for what concerns the cognitive dimension, the importance of human capital in the realization of their plans about future life.

The legitimacy recognized to the school system, together with the importance held by knowledge, shows that young European people acknowledge school as the main element in the creation of their future. Even if, as hinted beforehand, the distinction between knowledge and personal culture implies a different weight of the diverse agencies of socialization in the formation of one's "cultural wealth" this does not mean that school does not influence life-paths either stressing or reducing social differences. On the other hand, the results point out how the scholastic system is considered, by its own users, as one of the main means to reach adult life.

²⁸ About the theme of surplus and young people consumption, the so-called "social machines" see: Scanagatta & Segatto (2007).

Table 6. Aspects of life according to their importance divided by type (average) - On a value scale from 1-not at all to 5- very much

		<i>How important are the following values for you ?²⁹</i>										
Sex		F1	F2	H	W	RE	FT	CI	SE	SA	R	P
Male	Mean	4.82	4.80	4.75	4.32	4.19	4.12	4.05	3.91	3.64	2.79	2.75
	Std. Dev.	0.522	0.508	0.549	0.716	0.791	0.804	0.739	0.818	0.970	1.215	1.058
	N	1376	1376	1370	1372	1372	1376	1366	1364	1376	1374	1368
Female	Mean	4.62	4.49	4.48	4.24	4.19	3.91	3.90	3.75	3.66	2.89	2.48
	Std. Dev.	0.767	0.847	0.819	0.776	0.839	0.985	1.025	0.960	0.939	1.244	1.395
	N	1137	1141	1139	1137	1139	1137	1137	1139	1133	1127	1135
Total	Mean	4.73	4.66	4.62	4.29	4.15	3.99	3.91	3.80	3.76	2.81	2.65
	Std. Dev.	0.652	0.700	0.698	0.745	0.820	0.928	0.860	0.883	1.003	1.147	1.308
	N	2513	2517	2509	2509	2515	2509	2513	2505	2497	2495	2509

ANOVA ($p < 0.01$).

Table 7. Aspects of life divided by Country (average) - On a value scale from 1-not at all to 5- very much

²⁹ F1 = Family; F2 = Friendship; W = Work; H = Health; CI = Cultural interests; SA = Sporting activities; SE = Social engagement; R = Religion; P = Politics; FT = Free time activities; RE = Respect of the environment.

To make your future better, how important are the following values ?³⁰

Country		PC	W	K	F	ER	Country		PC	W	K	F	ER
France	Mean	4.13	4.24	4.24	4.13	3.85	Italy	Mean	4.10	4.44	4.26	4.31	4.04
	Std. Dev.	0.928	0.869	0.938	1.004	1.009		Std. Dev.	0.867	0.724	0.829	0.846	0.914
	N	274	274	270	274	274		N	550	550	548	542	546
Germany		PC	W	K	F	ER	United Kingdom		PC	W	K	F	ER
	Mean	3.44	4.29	4.20	4.24	3.80		Mean	3.78	4.36	4.36	4.33	4.10
	Std. Dev.	1.068	0.792	0.796	0.958	0.964		Std. Dev.	1.056	0.892	0.906	1.019	1.061
	N	520	516	508	512	516	N	462	462	462	462	462	

		PC	W	K	F	ER
Total	Mean	3.83	4.35	4.26	4.27	3.96
	Std. Dev.	1.026	0.814	0.859	0.951	0.990
	N	1806	1802	1788	1790	1798

³⁰ PC = Personal culture W = Work; K = Knowledge; F = Family relationships; ER = Emotional Relationships. ANOVA (p<0.01).

Conclusions

Young European people legitimate school as a socialization agency in its function of transmission of knowledge and competences. The differences between males and females concern the different priorities offered by school. Males ask scholastic education to give them the instrumental and emotional means to create their own identity, while females are more interested to the future usefulness of scholastic knowledge, emphasizing their instrumental motives.

The distribution of scholastic performance among social classes shows that half of those coming from a lower class have a negative scholastic performance and all young people with a low scholastic performance have an uncertain vision of their future life when considering which aspects of life could improve their future. This mainly affects the value of personal culture that, showing lower average points if compared with those obtained by students with a positive scholastic performance, “denounces” a lack of confidence towards one’s own capacities, competences and abilities in influencing one’s future.

Knowledge as a “collective” commodity, which holds a different meaning for young people if compared with personal culture as “private commodity”, is considered a fundamental value to create their own future and to improve the quality of their life. The central role in their values system young people give to “common” knowledge can lead to two opposed exigencies. One is to receive from school the instruments to disentangle the complexity of “radicalized modernity” (Giddens, 1991) or of “second modernity” (Beck, 1999), the other is to give to knowledge itself an imaginary role of control of one’s uncertainty, derived by the development of one’s own identity and in general by the instability of the socio-economical global context.

Considering the available data we can assume that young people do not give to knowledge a unanimous meaning. The different levels of importance given to knowledge and culture makes us skeptical about young people’s capacity to turn their need for knowledge into effective knowledge ROSE (2011) but we think that this acknowledgment of value is in itself, together with the legitimation given to school as institution and socializative experience, a first step for continuing to consider it one of the main places of training for social life (and of the challenges) of tomorrow.

The data have been gathered for the European Project PACT (Pathway for Carbon Transitions), financed by the Seventh European Programme (project code 225503). Topic: Young People's Human Capital and Social Capital in a Post Carbon Social Life (2009-2011). The sample is composed by 42 schools and 187 classes in 11 Countries of the European Union. The students interviewed are between 13 and 18 years of age. The data were gathered according to CAWI (Computer Aided Web Interweing) and the questionnaire was given through the application of Limesurvey during the period 01/05/2009 - 30/10/2009.

References

- Andres L., *et al.* (2007). Educational Expectations, Parental Social Class, Gender and Postsecondary Attainment: a 10 year perspective. *Youth & Society*, 39. Doi: 10.1177/0044118X06296704.
- Argentin, G. (2007). Come funziona la scuola oggi: esperienze e opinioni dei giovani italiani. In C. Buzzi *et al.* (eds.). *Rapporto Giovani. Sesta indagine dell'Istituto IARD sulla condizione giovanile in Italia* (pp. 49 -81). Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Beck, U. (1999). *World risk society*. Uk: Polity Press.
- Besozzi, E. (ed.) (2003) *Il genere come risorsa comunicativa. Maschile e femminile nei processi di crescita*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Brint, S. (2006). *School and Societies*. Stanford University Press.
- Buchmann, C., & Dalton, B. (2002). Interpersonal influences and educational aspirations in 12 countries: The importance of institutional context. *Sociology of Education*, 75(2), pp. 99-122.
- Cesareo, V. (1976). *Sociologia e educazione*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.
- Colombo, M. (ed.) (2005). *Riflessività e creatività nelle professioni educative. Una prospettiva internazionale*. Milano: Vita & Pensiero.
- Cipollone P., & Sestito P. (2010). *Il capitale umano*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Cook, T.D., Deng, Y., Morgano, E. (2007). Friendship Influences During Early Adolescence: The Special Role of Friends' Grade Point Average. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 17, 325-356. doi: 10.1111/j.1532-7795.2007.00525.x
- de Lillo, A. (2007). I valori e l'atteggiamento verso la vita. In C. Buzzi *et al.* (eds.). *Rapporto Giovani. Sesta indagine dell'Istituto IARD sulla condizione giovanile in Italia* (pp. 139 – 232). Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Di Nicola, P., Stanzani, S., Tronca, L. (2010). *Forme e contenuti delle reti di sostegno. Il capitale sociale a Verona*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Donati, P. (ed.) (2003). *Famiglia e Capitale Sociale nella società italiana*. Milano: Ed. San Paolo.
- European Commission - Eurobarometer (2007). *Young Europeans. A survey among young people aged between 15-30 in the European Union*. Flash Eurobarometer, n. 202.

- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giovannini, G. (1987). I molti tempi, luoghi e attori della formazione. Un'analisi del policentrismo a partire dall'offerta. *Studi di Sociologia*, 1.
- Inglehart, R. (1983). *La rivoluzione silenziosa*. Milano: Rizzoli Editore.
- Karvonen, S., Young, R., West, P., Rahkonen, O. (2011). Value orientations among late modern youth – a cross-cultural study. *Journal of Youth Studies*. DOI:10.1080/13676261.2011.617734
- Kay, W.K. (2009). A key to the future the attitudes and values of adolescent Europeans. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 7(2), pp. 151-165
- Lauglo, J. (2011). Political socialization in the family and young people's educational achievement and ambition. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 32(1), pp. 53-74.
- Laureau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race and family life*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Mauceri, S., Valentini, A. (2010). The European delay in transition to parenthood: the Italian case. *International Review of Sociology*, 20(1), pp. 111-142.
- Merico, M. (2004). *Giovani e Società*. Roma: Carocci.
- Merico, M. (2007). Prospettive di analisi della cittadinanza giovanile. In R. Rauty (ed.). *Le vite dei giovani. Carriere. esperienze e modelli culturali* (pp. 433- 440). Salerno: Marlin.
- Mistry R.S., et. al. (2009). A Longitudinal Study of the Simultaneous Influence of Mothers' and Teachers' Educational Expectations on Low-income Youth's Academic Achievement. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 38(6), pp. 826-838, DOI: 10.1007/s10964-008-9300-0.
- Pattaro, C. (2010). *Scuola & migranti. Generazioni d migranti nella scuola e processi di integrazione informale*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Sjøberg, S., & Schreiner, C. (2010). The ROSE (The relevance of science education). <http://roseproject.no/network/countries/norway/eng/nor-Sjoberg-Schreiner-overview-2010.pdf> (Reserach report-University of Oslo).
- Ribolzi, L. (2000). *Il sistema ingessato* (2nd edition). Brescia: La Scuola.
- Rauty, R. (ed.) (2007). *Le vite dei giovani. Carriere. esperienze e modelli culturali*. Salerno: Marlin.
- Scanagatta, S. et al. (2010). *Young People's Human Capital and Social Capital in a Post Carbon Social Life*. Research report. Seventh European Research Programme: Pathways for Carbon Transitions (PACT).
- Scanagatta, S. (2010). *Total quality man. Globalization and Lifelong Living. Producing Capital in Personal Ecosystems*. Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Scanagatta, S., & Maccarini, A.M. (2009). *L'educazione come capitale sociale. Culture civili e percorsi educativi in Italia*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Scanagatta, S., & Segatto, B. (2007). *Le nuove macchine sociali. Giovani a scuola tra internet, cellulare e mode*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Scardigno, F. (2009). The Informal Choices of Italian Young People: between increase and erosion of family cultural capital. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 2, 230 - 252.
- Secondulfo, D. (2005). *La bella età. Giovani e valori nel nord-est di un'Italia che cambia*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.

- Schizzerotto, A., & Barone, C. (2006). *Sociologia dell'istruzione*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Useem, E.L. (1992). Middle Schools and math's groups: parent's involvement in children's placement. *Sociology of Education*, 5, 263-269.
- Weisgram, E.S., Bigler, R.S., Liben, L.S. (2010). Gender, Values, and Occupational Interests Among Children, Adolescents, and Adults. *Child Development*, 81, pp. 778-796. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01433.x