



ITALIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Editor-in-Chief: Silvio Scanagatta | ISSN 2035-4983

Evaluating outcomes and mechanisms of non-formal education in youth centres

*Daniele Morciano**

Author information:

*Department of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Communication, University of Bari, Italy.

Contact author's email address

*daniele.morciano@uniba.it

Article first published online

February 2015

HOW TO CITE

Morciano, D. (2015). Evaluating outcomes and mechanisms of non-formal education in youth centres. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 7(1), 67-96.

Retrieved from <http://journals.padovauniversitypress.it/ijse/content/evaluating-mechanisms-and-outcomes-non-formal-education-youth-work>



PADOVA UNIVERSITY PRESS

Evaluating outcomes and mechanisms of non-formal education in youth centres¹

Daniele Morciano*

Abstract: The present paper aims to shed light on ways of dealing with the paradox of *formalizing the non-formal* that arises when youth work is required to operate on the basis of outcomes and target-based non-formal education programmes. Therefore, the potential of theory-based evaluation is argued to be an effective evaluation model, able to gather evidence of youth work outcomes and mechanisms by looking, moreover, into the complex and sometimes unpredictable processes of non-formal education and informal learning. A theoretical framework and a pattern of theory-based concepts are developed within the paper in order to help evaluation research to investigate those mechanisms through which the interplay between non-formal education and informal learning may lead to the strengthening of young people's agency in youth centres. Youth agency has been chosen as a possible youth work outcome in an attempt to go beyond an adult-centric view focused on the identification of those skills required in order to become an adult.

Keywords: non-formal education, youth work, theory-based evaluation, youth centres

¹ A different version of this article will be published in a book accepted for publication in the series *Innovation, Education and Society*. FrancoAngeli, Milano.

*Department of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Communication, University of Bari, Italy. E-mail daniele.morciano@uniba.it

Introduction

Over the last two decades, the European Commission (EC) has placed increasing priority on the professional development of youth workers, with particular attention on the validation of their skills and the development of innovative practice¹. Prior to the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe (CoE) had been promoting youth work training since the early 1970s, until the launch, in 2007, of the *European Portfolio for youth leaders and youth workers* as a tool designed to help identify and assess competences as well as set learning goals (Council of Europe, 2007) for youth work volunteers and professionals.

However, the current formulation of EU youth policy remains insufficient for a full understanding of the key-features of youth work (European Council, 2009; Dunne, 2014). In order to bridge this gap, the EC has tended to encourage the progressive professionalization of youth work as a necessary condition in order to assume a role that is both *widespread* among a plurality of intervention areas, *complementary* to the work of professionals specializing in these areas and *specialized* in providing non-formal education to young people. This definition of youth work is at the basis of EU programmes that have, in various ways, financed the activities and projects of youth work, such as the Youth in Action programme, the Youth on the Move initiative and the current Erasmus Plus programme.

In this context, the European Commission aims to develop “greater collaboration between youth policies and other policy areas such as education, employment, inclusion and health (...), with youth activities and youth work playing a supporting role (...)” (European Commission, 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, the latest EU report on youth work highlights that “cross-agency work is an arising trend, bringing both new challenges and opportunities. In this context it is important to understand what youth work can bring compared to other types of interventions and work together with these” (Dunne et al., 2014, p. 62).

¹ With regard to educational methodologies, specific tools and projects have been developed, many of which were organized in partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Commission. Specifically, training courses for youth workers were carried out (“ATTE-Advanced Training of Trainers in Europe” 2001-2003; “TALE-Trainers for Active Learning in Europe” 2008-2010), and specific methodological guidelines developed (“Manual for facilitators in non-formal education”, “Compass - A Manual on Human Rights Education with Young People” and the “Training-Kits” series).

The recognition of youth work as an educational agency and actor of youth policies seems strongly tied to the ability to demonstrate its specific working methods as well as the impact on the lives of young people (European Commission & Council of Europe, 2004; 2011). From the European debate on non-formal youth education there thus emerges a clear demand for *evidence-based* evaluation that social research is called upon to provide. Indeed, despite extensive research able to empirically test the association between youth work activities and outcomes, there is still a considerable lack of evidence on how programmes work in order to generate expected outcomes (Mahoney, Larson and Eccles, 2005; Eichas et al., 2010; Fouché et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2010).

A significant part of the identity of youth work and its distinctive characteristics arise from the European debate on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. This debate has, since 2004, progressively urged the recognition of youth work as a specialized *provider of non-formal and informal education* (Table 1)².

Organizations working within the field of youth work (public or private, formal and informal, run by adults and/or youth) are required to train young people in both basic skills that fall within the social and relational spheres (e.g. the teaching of values) and those relevant to employment. Educational objectives are thus specifically reconnected to the core competencies of the European framework on *lifelong learning* (language, mathematics, science and technology, digital, civic, business, cultural expression and self-learning skills) (European Parliament and European Council, 2006; Manuti

² Between December 2010 and February 2011, the European Commission launched an online consultation on the issue of recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The results of the consultation have been incorporated into a European Council Recommendation published in 2012. One of the first papers addressing non-formal education in the youth field is "Pathways towards Validation and Recognition of Education, Training & Learning in the Youth Field" and was released in February 2004 by the Youth Partnership between the European Commission and the European Council. This document was updated seven years later ("Pathways 2.0. Towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe"). In November 2011 the participants at the symposium "Recognition of youth work and non-formal learning/education in the youth field" shared a programme document in which attention is focused on the current challenges and common lines of action were established (14-16 November, 2011, European Youth Centre, Strasbourg). A recent document produced by the SALTO agency reports on the validation tools already in use or soon to be introduced (SALTO, 2011). Among the most widely known and disseminated at European level is Youthpass, used by around 130,000 young people participating in projects funded by Youth in Action.

et al., 2015).

In addition, thanks to the various programmes of the European Union and the Council of Europe, the non-formal education activities carried out within the field of youth work have been increasingly linked to European citizenship projects based on the exchange between young people from different European countries (*international youth work*) (ISS, 2008; Jacobone & Moro, 2014).

Table 1 – Youth work as an agency of non-formal education in the European Union

Contexts:	-	Predominantly other than those of state schools
	-	Complementary to state education when it involves students at risk
Objectives:	-	Teaching of values
	-	Participation
	-	Key-skills relevant to lifelong learning
	-	Ability to increase employment opportunities
	-	Entrepreneurial skills
	-	European citizenship
Methods:	-	<i>Informal learning</i>
	-	Learner-centred approaches
	-	Activation of emotional dynamics, social learning and application
	-	Voluntary participation
	-	Priority to the interests, needs and aspirations of young people
Resources to be shared with formal education:	-	Expertise in <i>learner-centred</i> educational methods
	-	Validation tools for non-formal and informal skills
Settings:	-	Specially equipped permanent locations (centre-based youth work), e.g. youth centres
	-	Temporary spaces chosen for carrying out specific activities (<i>outdoor youth work</i>), e.g. parks, summer camps, sports areas etc.
	-	Informal contexts where young people spend their free time (<i>detached youth work</i>)
	-	Formal educational contexts in which a service or youth work project is carried out (<i>school-based youth work</i>)
Operators:	-	Organizations created and run by the young
	-	Organizations working for the young
	-	Informal groups
	-	Public youth services

With regard to educational methods, youth work places particular importance on unstructured learning that may occur spontaneously during leisure time (*informal learning*). In addition, the dynamics of social and emotional learning experiences are given greater priority in youth work, in contrast to that which takes place in formal education organized by schools,

focusing leverage primarily on cognitive resources. The educational methods of youth work therefore place particular emphasis on the centrality of the learner and the voluntary nature of participation.

A further peculiarity of youth work is the ability to operate within different contexts, as well as combining them. Indeed, youth work activities may be carried out in specially equipped spaces for young people (*centre-based or indoor youth work*), in open spaces chosen for carrying out specific activities (*outdoor youth work*) and in spaces where young people spontaneously gather in their free time (*detached youth work*). Educational institutions may also identify an internal space where young people can interact with youth workers in their free time (*school-based youth work*) (Sapin, 2009). This latter category regards experiences in which schools and youth workers aim to bring together different educational methods. Indeed, the *learner-centred methods* practiced by youth workers represent also a potentially useful tool for teachers in the formal education to address the limitations of educational methods with little focus on the active participation of the learner.

The need of evidence-based evaluation: the paradox of formalizing the non-formal

The inability to demonstrate the distinctive contribution of youth work in comparison to other educational services (whether public or private) creates difficulty in successfully dealing with the issue of recognizing the non-formal education it provides. The activation of a virtuous circle between the recognition of non-formal skills on a political level (agenda setting), formal level (validation) and social level (recognition of value) (European Commission & Council of Europe, 2004, 2011) can not, therefore, be separated from the production of empirical evidence on the specific ways in which youth work operates. In the absence of such evidence, youth work will not be freed from the stereotypical image of educational work at the frontline that institutions tend to legitimize only when able to effectively deal with particularly problematic young people or pressing social emergencies.

Growing institutional pressure towards the evaluation of youth work is, however, likely to expose the risk of an excessive and somewhat paradoxical “formalization of non-formal education”. This move towards

formalization derives mainly from the growing demand for programmes that are designed in order to demonstrate the extent to which they are able to respond to the problems and needs of particular groups of young people (*target-based and outcomes-based programmes*). The case of England is, for example, emblematic of the increasing difficulty of continuing to grow in the field of educational practices inspired by *on the wing* approach (Davies & Merton, 2010), thus based on the spontaneity and unpredictability of the relationship between youth workers and the young. This compares with a growing demand for “evidence of the positive impact of the use of scarce resources” that “tends to encourage a narrow focus on those interventions that lead to more immediately demonstrable outcomes” (Davies & Merton, 2010, p. 5). In such programmes, there exists the risk that young people feel more like “users” or “passive consumers” than as an active part of a shared process with adults (Davies & Merton, 2010, p. 6).

This risk is seen by some as acceptable provided that the explanation of the theoretical and methodological foundations of youth work practices leads to demonstrated improvements in quality (European Commission & Council of Europe, 2011). However, the relational processes peculiar to youth work are characterized by a strong element of unpredictability, so that youth worker is forced towards seizing opportunities and addressing problems that arise during the live educational processes. Such processes particularly regard those activated when youth work is proposed to the young people as a “transitional space” (Winnicott, 1971) where, thanks to creative experience, they learn to deal with the tension between their inner world (self-actualization aspirations) and the request for adherence with external rules originating from institutions. The unique educational style of the youth worker is, furthermore, not based on the exercise of authority aiming to bring about expected change but, rather, on the creation of the conditions that facilitate growth and the activation of co-constructed pathways which are, by their very nature, open to not always predictable outcomes (Cameron & Moss, 2011).

For evaluative research, therefore, the challenge is that of evaluate the function of youth work while not being limited to the assumptions as explained by policy makers regarding expected effects and the activities that should generate them. Otherwise, it involves an outlook open to the exploration and interception of the unexpected consequences of a programme (Stame, 1998).

Such consequences may take the form of what Albert Hirschman refers

to as *hidden blessings* (Hirschman, 1990), namely experiences in which the actors of a programme find themselves in possession of a wider range of capabilities than they realized and find new solutions for dealing with a problem or difficulty. Unintended consequences can, moreover, also impact negatively on the smooth running of a programme. However, as argued by Hirschman (1990), the lack of results and the generation of effects opposite to those predicted or that generate new problems do not necessarily represent a failure but can induce the actors of a programme towards an imaginative endeavour, for example, decentralizing their perspective by identifying other issues on which to take action to solve an initial problem, or take advantage of the differences between opposing parties to move towards a shared vision.

The potential of theory-based evaluation

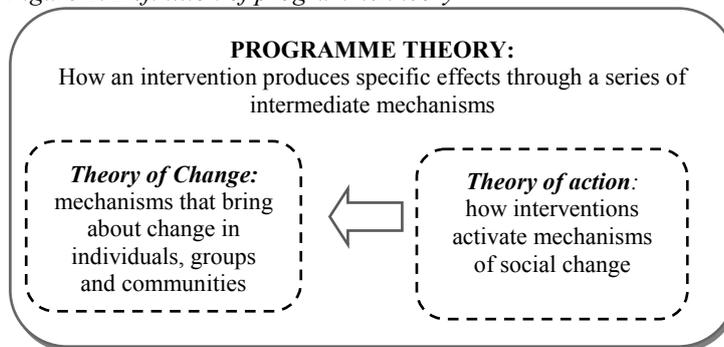
The model of theory-based evaluation (Weiss, 1997; Funnell & Rogers, 2011) and realistic evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Pawson, 2006) can be considered as particularly appropriate for investigating the causal and not always predictable sequential psycho-relational mechanisms eventually influencing *outcomes* in unexpected ways (Stame, 1998; Moro, 2009).

The model of realistic evaluation proposes, for example, the adoption of a conception of generative causality (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) oriented towards explaining how the dynamic combination between the different components of a programme may produce the expected outcomes. Realistic evaluation aims to understand how the results of a programme are influenced by a combination of contextual factors and intermediate mechanisms triggered during the implementation process. In particular, the intermediate mechanisms relate to the choice processes of the plurality of actors involved in a programme or service, as well as to the relational dynamics that are triggered between them. The diversity of the selection criteria and modalities of interaction may, in fact, direct the actors in benefiting from the opportunities offered by a programme according to different forms and intensities. At the same time, the realistic evaluation model attempts to take into account the specific contexts in which programmes are implemented. The formulation of research hypotheses cannot, however, neglect the consideration of how certain pre-existing (and potentially persistent) conditions can facilitate or hinder those programme

mechanisms able to produce the expected outcomes (Pawson, 2006; Moro, 2009).

The existing hypothesis according to which an intervention leads to certain results contributes to forming a “programme theory”. Funnel & Rogers (2011) have recently attempted to focus on the key components of theory-based evaluation (Figure 1). In order to explain how a series of interventions may produce certain effects, the authors argue that a programme theory should include a theory of social or individual change (*theory of change*) and a theory of how such change can be activated via an external intervention (*theory of action*).

Figure 1. Definition of programme theory



Theory-based evaluation is considered one of the most fruitful and valuable models from the viewpoint of actors involved in complex community interventions (Connel & Kubisch, 1998). Such operations are characterized by the involvement of local people in locating solutions for issues of public interest. Indeed, this form frequently characterizes the life-cycle of a youth projects at local level or the creation and development of a youth centres (*centre-based youth work*) when relying on the involvement of the local youth community. In addition, the educational work of the youth worker is characterized by the ability to flexibly respond to the needs and opportunities that may arise in the course of the educational relationship and that may change according to the specific circumstances of individual young people or groups (*case-oriented*). As suggested by Funnel & Rogers (2011), both interventions of community development

(*community capacity building*) and those proposing to adapt to individual situations (*case management programmes*) are presented as *complex programmes*, difficult to evaluate through experimental methods (Funnell & Rogers, 2011, pp. 69-91). Indeed, the latter are able to attribute the effects of a programme to determined interventions when the expected changes are already known, predetermined and limited to individual aspects. In addition, experimental methods are based on strong assumptions already verified by empirical research regarding the absence of other factors unrelated to the programme that may affect expected changes. Such programmes are classified as *simple* by Funnell & Rogers (2011) referring to the pre-defined linearity of the causal connection between an input and an outcome, combined with the absence of significant external interference³.

However, in community interventions or services sensitive to the specificity of their individual recipients, the objectives and activities initially planned may change as a result of the process of *empowerment* and learning itself. Neither are the actors involved in such processes predictable from the outset, nor the relationships established between them or the way in which they affect the performance of the programme. Consequently, evaluation must make use of heuristic tools capable of taking such changes on board and, consequently, updating the programme theory. Indeed, in *complex programmes* the programme theory includes assumptions that may be reconstructed largely retrospectively on the basis of the dynamics of change that have already occurred and been observed (Funnell & Rogers, 2011, p. 89).

Evaluating outcomes of non formal-education in youth work

Moving beyond adult-centric educational outcomes

A proposal for an operational definition of the outcomes of a non-formal education programme is that of the *5Cs model* as developed in the field of *Positive Youth Development* (Lerner et. al. 2009). This model identifies *life skills* that may “blossom” within young people during the course of the

³ For one of the few attempts to evaluate the impact of non-formal education through quasi-experimental methods, see: Gaus & Mueller (2011); Jacobone & Moro (2014).

transition to adulthood (*youth thriving*). Such skills are grouped into the following five general categories: the *Competence* category, including social and interpersonal skills (e.g. conflict resolution, etc.), cognitive skills (e.g. decision making), skills relating to personal health (e.g. diet) and career skills; the *Confidence* category, concerning the individual's positive perception of their own value and skills; the *Connection* category including skills related to the family, schooling, the community and peer groups; *Character* including the ability to respect social and cultural norms along with the individual's sense of morality and, finally, the *Caring/Compassion* category encompassing social solidarity and empathy skills.

This model would appear, on closer inspection, to be inspired by a functionalist and adult-centric view of relationships between education and society (Besozzi, 2006). Indeed, it is a model that appears to entrust education with the task of developing a range of skills among young people as a necessary condition for inclusion in the social order established and ruled by adults. It was noted, in this regard, that the practices guided by the Positive Youth Development paradigm are not particularly attentive to the structural factors affecting the unequal distribution of learning opportunities for the young (Cousseè, 2008, p. 114).

At the theoretical level, however, this model includes a sixth category that takes into account the ability to participate (*Contribution*). Participation is understood, in particular, as a commitment to the common good. *Youth activism* is, for instance, considered a specific form of commitment that may also lead to criticism of the structural inequalities that limit access to opportunities for growth and well-being (Lerner et. al., 2009). However, the maturation of skills in the five categories mentioned above (*Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, Caring*) is seen as a condition for maturing other skills related to social and political participation (*Contribution*). This model would thus appear to defer the possibility of participation to adulthood. Furthermore, it does not seem to consider that the active involvement of young people in participative experiences may lead them to question the social and cultural norms acquired at a young age (*Character*).

Should, however, the experience of participation be seen as possible even during the juvenile stage, the *Five Cs model* aids an understanding of how to contain the risk that such experience is limited to opposition, rejection or dispute as an end in itself. Indeed, such risk emerges from an oppositional tendency characteristic of the adolescence. Participation can,

however, represent the experience of knowledge and awareness of factors of social inequality inherited from the past and particularly resistant to change.

The *Five Cs model* can also be adapted in order to identify how participation may be lived as an experience of social emancipation. The skills of the *Character* category relate, for example, to the maturation of an awareness of the rules and the goals shared by a community (*Character*). Conversely, the skills in the *Competence* category include those of subjecting the standards and goals of the community to critical scrutiny, understanding how they tend to perpetuate inequality and to devise strategies to curb the negative impact on their life course. The self-confidence and ability to cultivate social relations as a means of accessing resources for growth are located within the *Confidence* and *Connection* categories. Finally, the experience of participation as a constructive contribution to social change cannot be achieved without surpassing the typically adolescent inclination towards egocentrism, not relativizing a point of view and not maturing an interest in the common good (*Caring/Compassion*).

Personal agency and agentic power outcomes

The youth centre may be conceived as an environment in which the young freely choose when to go, how long to stay, when to leave and if so, whether and when to return. Opportunities for growth encountered during this “free transition” may have an *emergent* and *cumulative* effect on their personal life trajectory. It is, at the same time, a *plural* impact inasmuch as it may affect different aspects and moments of individual growth.

Outcomes of centre-based youth work can be defined by drawing on psychological theories of *developmental tasks* (Havighrust, 1953, 1956) which have been for a long time a starting point to develop theories and models of transition to adulthood. These theories emphasize how the search for independence is a permanent feature of both adolescence and youth. The success of this research is related to the ability to acquire a series of cognitive, emotional and social skills in a consecutive manner.

Sociological research can, however, provide useful tools for investigating the innovative potential that lies in the tension between youth identity, social expectations and structural constraints (Merico, 2004; Verschelden et al., 2009; Morciano & Scardigno, 2014). As argued by

Barber (2007), adults expect young people to accept adult values and expect institutions to keep the young under control as a potential source of deviance and social disorder (adulthood). However, questioning the values and vision of the adult world stems from the desire towards self-realization even when this involves choices that are not in line with the expectations of the former. While from a psychological point of view the ability to deal with such conflict is one of the fundamental developmental tasks of the transition to adulthood, from a sociological perspective this area of tension between the youth life words and the sociostructural constraints encloses the potential for innovation that can engage within society and, indeed, become a factor of change (economic, social or cultural).

The theory of reflexivity (Archer, 2006) applied to educational processes may help to focus a theoretical model which pays closer attention to the possibility that young people affect the structural conditions that constrain their growth trajectories at a young age. Indeed, Archer's theory of reflexivity is oriented to consider both how individuals affect pre-existing structural conditions and how the latter change due to the individual reflective thought. Archer defines the reflective thought as "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa" (Archer, 2007, p. 4).

Maddalena Colombo has, for instance, adopted the theory of reflexivity of the social actor in a sociological study on educational choices (Colombo, 2011). Specifically, the author stresses the importance of defining a concept of individual *agency* that takes into account the ability to intentionally modify one's own life course. These skills lead the subject to deal with those structural variables that may act as a constraint or resource on both an individual level (e.g. gender membership, age, etc.) and on a social level (individual or family social and cultural capital, the limits imposed by geographical context etc.). Similarly, life course research defines agency as the individual's ability to influence the trajectory of an individual's own life (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). The adoption of this concept is based on the assumption that an individual is able to reflect on their own subjective abilities and their own life context. One can, for this reason, act deliberately in order to exploit the opportunities of one's own context as well as taking into account its limitations (Elder & Johnson, 2002).

In terms of the attempt to construct a theory on the functioning of youth work, the proposal of Maddalena Colombo helps to identify two

dimensions of the concept of agency: the cognitive and the social (Colombo, 2011, pp. 2-3). Agency may, on a cognitive level, be defined as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). This concept recalls the intensity with which individuals perceive themselves as capable in a given area, and how this perception may influence the decision to take up an educational programme and see it through successfully.

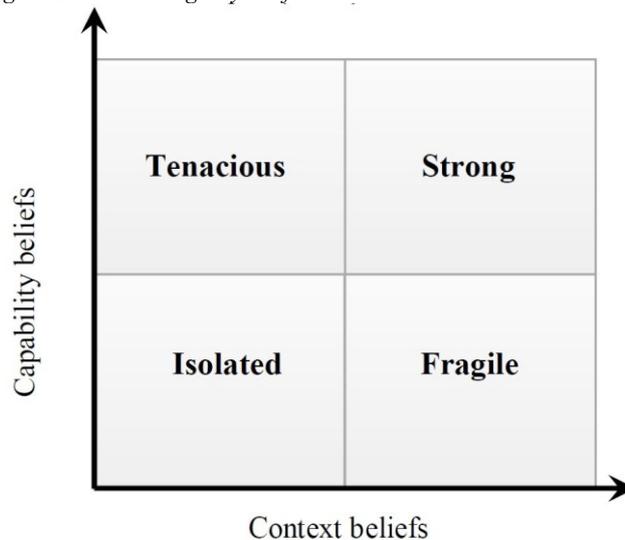
In social terms, Colombo defines *agency* as *agentic power*, i.e. the ability to change the structural conditions that prevent or restrict the actualization of individual or group potential. In summary, this distinction corresponds to that between the power of individual agency (*power of agency*) to influence the success of an educational programme, and the power to change the socio-structural conditions that prevent one from doing so (*agentic power*) (Campbell, 2009; Colombo, 2011). From this viewpoint, Donati & Archer (2010) have defined *agentic power* as a “generative process” in which the reflective thought of multiple individuals may succeed in modifying the existing social structures and replacing them with the new.

A possible operational definition of the concept of agency may begin from the intersection between the cognitive dimension (*power of agency*) and socio-structural dimension (*agentic power*). Specifically, the cognitive dimension may be defined as the self-perception of one’s own abilities (*capability beliefs*) and the socio-structural dimension as the perception of the degree of support that the subject perceives from the social context to which they belong (*context beliefs*) (Ford, 1999). Consequently, therefore, an individual may take into account both a cognitive factor associated with the possibility of influencing their life trajectory (Hitlin & Elder, 2007) as well as an indicator of subjective reflection on how to benefit from the opportunities available within their own life context as well as on how to generate new chances despite the sociostructural constraints (Archer, 2006). As can be seen from Figure 2, the intersection of these two dimensions provides four different profiles of individual agency, each characterized by the specific requirements for strengthening *agentic power*.

The “Strong” profile is, in particular, characterized by a more intense belief in one’s own skills that are, in turn, supported by networks of social belonging. This profile does not require *agentic power* as the social context recognizes and facilitates individual skills. At the other extreme, the “Fragile” profile tends to indicate a general sense of protection within social networks and, at the same time, greater difficulties in pursuing life

goals. The risk is, in this case, that social protection feeds dynamics of passive dependence. For those falling into this profile an increase of agentic power would, therefore, assist in disengaging from social protection should it prove an obstacle to change.

Figure 2. Personal Agency Profiles



Source: Adapted from Ford, 1999.

The “Tenacious” profile, however, represents those who feel more confident in their abilities even though it may prove futile in terms of support from their social context, and even creating conflict within it. This profile presents a more intense need for *agentic power* due to the necessity of creating new social relationships as carriers of effective resources for development. Finally, the “Isolated” profile is the most problematic as it lacks support networks and, at the same time, little confidence in internal resources. This profile presents the greatest need for *agentic power* and is faced with two possible pathways for change: learning how to deal with conditions of misalignment with the social context (change towards the “Tenacious” profile) or gaining access to social relations that help to develop a greater self-efficacy (change towards the “Strong” profile).

In addition to obtaining individual profiles of agency, longitudinal evaluation studies (i.e. multiple-single case study) could allow for a study of the dynamics of change from one profile to another. In quasi-experimental evaluation designs, for example, such dynamics of change are considered as a result resulting from the participation in a non-formal education programme (Morciano, 2012). Therefore, an effect of agency weakening can be associated with a decrease of one or both of the two dimensions of agency considered in Figure 2. This can be observed, for example, when a “Tenacious” profile regresses towards isolation due to a weakening of the proactive coping. Alternatively, the effect of an “unbalanced improvement” could include cases showing a tendency towards profiles with high values only in one of two dimensions. This occurs, for example, when an “isolated” subject tends towards a “fragile” profile inasmuch as only the trust in their own social networks had grown (“context beliefs” in Figure 2). Finally, the effect of “balanced improvement” can be considered in all cases in which an approach towards the “strong” profile was observed.

Evaluating mechanisms of non formal-education in youth work

The interplay between non-formal education and informal learning

Youth centres can be thought of as places where young people experience free time as “time for themselves” (Cavalli & Calabrò, 2008). This means providing young people the opportunity to seek direct contact with their deeper vocations in the spheres of employment, education, recreation or affection. Free time spent in youth centres may, therefore, take on a variety of forms that alternate and combine functions of recreational gratification, cultural promotion, training targeted at employment and the creation of social bonds. Youth centres can, for this reason, offer the experience of “semi-leisure” that straddle freely chosen activities and the acceptance of social commitments whether in the employment or civic field (Dumadezier, 1998).

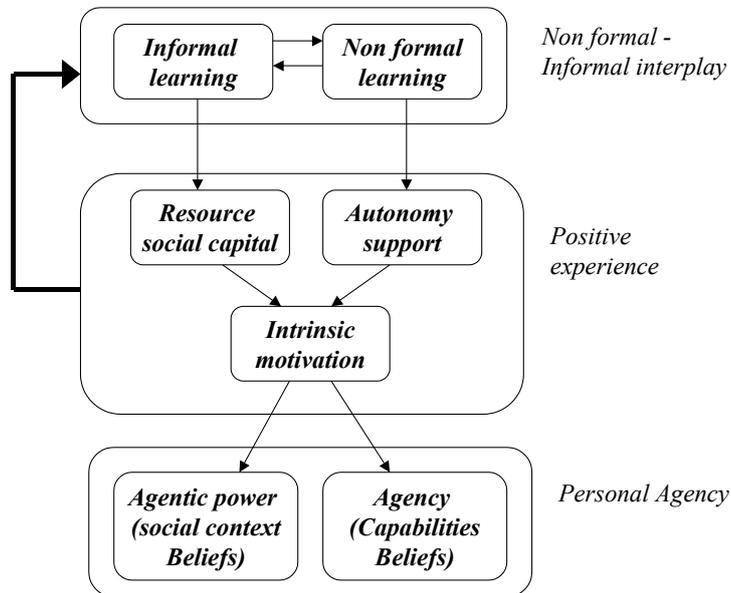
Such a perspective leads to the observation of the youth centres as environments in which informal learning and non-formal education experiences may co-exist. In particular, the *informal learning* dimension refers to the possibility of engaging with the youth centre in a spontaneous, autonomous and flexible manner. This therefore represents learning

experiences as not anchored to a specific body of organized knowledge (European Commission, 2001) involving the young on different levels (intellectual, emotive, value-based, applicative) (Beckett & Hager, 2002), and allows for a high level of perceived freedom as to what and how to learn (Falk, 2005).

The *non-formal* learning dimension refers, in turn, to more structured activities in terms of content and teaching methods (Dohn, 2010). Even in this case, however, learning objectives are expressed directly by the young on the basis of their interests, while relying on centre managers for the supply of necessary resources (classrooms, teachers, teaching materials, etc.) (Mocker & Spear, 1982). Furthermore, non-formal learning opportunities provide young people with the possibility to enter into a relationship with adults more frequently than informal learning opportunities. Indeed, the type of interaction between the young and those adult figures playing a role in non-formal educational processes (teachers, experts, career professionals etc.) forms the basis of several studies which have focused on the evaluation of youth work mechanisms (Smith et al., 2010; Sullivan et al., 2010; Rhodes, 2004). Such research tends to confirm the value of educational approaches able to foster autonomy and a freedom of choice among young participants. Similar approaches can help to transform certain patterns of educational relationships already faced by young people in other contexts and less inclined towards promoting autonomy. Such models can mature during educational experiences based on oppositional, overly protective or confusing relations that young people may experience within their families or at school (Lazzarini, 2009).

Starting from this view of a youth centre as a *semi-leisure* space featured on a dynamic interplay between non-formal education programmes and informal learning experiences, the study of the literature on youth work carried out in the present paper has helped to formulate hypotheses regarding causal links that lead the educational activities to affect personal agency. In particular, a virtuous circle is assumed that develops between non-formal education, informal learning and positive experiences (Figure 3). *Positive experiences* are defined as intrinsically motivated and in turn facilitated by two process factors: the ability of adults to encourage autonomy (autonomy support), and the generation of chance events perceived as new development resources accessed through the relationship with adults (resource social capital).

Figure 3. Theory of change on how non-formal education affects youth agency



The concepts embedded in the causal links designed in Figure 1 will be explained in more details in the following sections.

The Positive Experience mechanism

The concept of *positive experience* can help to investigate the way in which the combination of the experience of *independence* (characteristic of informal learning) and *interdependence* with the adult (more relevant to non-formal education) may increase personal agency of the young. From the perspective of *social pedagogy* this signifies highlighting the role of the adult who “facilitates a person’s increasing ability to access resources themselves” (Cameron & Moss, 2011, p. 44). Such a role requires the containment of the hierarchical component in the relationship between the young and educator in favour of an equal relationship in which each has both the power and responsibility to play their own active role in the design and implementation of the educational project (Cameron & Moss, 2011, p. 76).

More specifically, in *social pedagogy* the concept of *positive experience* refers to those experiences that have the power to exert a lasting positive

impact on the individual's life and, at the same time, improve the quality of everyday life (Cameron & Moss, 2011, p. 38). These experiences are, in particular, generated by four main factors: *empowerment* defined as the power to exercise change over one's life; a feeling of *happiness* in the present and a state of *well-being* in the long term (physical, mental, emotional and social); *relationships* able to foster autonomy and, at the same time, act as a guide and key for accessing new resources; *holistic learning* inasmuch as it is able to link different levels (emotional, cognitive, values, application) and contexts (formal, non-formal and informal) together (Cameron & Moss, 2011, p. 34-38)

Research on the practice of *Positive Youth Development* helps to define the concept of *positive experiences* on a more operational level. These experiences are, in particular, defined as "structured or transitional activities" taking place "within a framework that offers constraints, rules and goals" (Watts & Caldwell, 2008, p. 160). This line of research has identified two central dimensions of *structured activities* and numerous theoretical models for their study. The first dimension is identified on a subjective level and relates to the opportunity to freely select what and how to learn in line with motivations. The alternative analytical dimension, however, is placed on the relational level and refers to the presence of *adult leaders* able to encourage the empowerment of young people through stimulating (challenging) activities.

According to Watts and Caldwell (2008), research on intrinsic motivation or *self-determination* (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is particularly effective in investigating the subjective dimension of *structured activities*. In particular, building on the contribution from Grolnick, Deci & Ryan (1997), two sets of factors able to facilitate the development of internalized forms of motivation are identified. The first concerns the ability of adult educators to encourage empowerment within young people (*autonomy support*) providing opportunities for free choice and personal initiative. The second set of factors is associated with the definition of *resource social capital* as proposed by Fulkerson and Thompson (2008), namely defined as social relations able to facilitate access to new resources (Donati, 2006). From the perspective of a youth centre, these resources may be conceptualized, for example, as an opportunity to address one's own developmental tasks (Palmonari, 1997). In this regard, Grolnick, Deci and Ryan (1997) identify two specific factors of *resource social capital* that are activated in the educational relationship between the young and the adult:

on the one hand, the ability of the adult to agree upon guidelines, rules and expectations with the young in order to avoid confusion and clarify the means of accessing the opportunities offered by an educational project (*structure*) and, on the other, the constant tension towards the mobilization of resources relevant to the developmental tasks of young people (*interpersonal involvement*).

Intrinsic Motivation in Positive Experiences

The subjective dimension of *positive experience* is largely due to *intrinsic motivation*, a concept that refers to the different degrees of autonomy and involvement perceived by learners in educational contexts (Eshach, 2007). Specifically, various aspects of the subjective experiences of the young during free time educational activities can be associated with the more general concept of intrinsic motivation. Table 2 summarizes the descriptive and predictive variables of intrinsic motivation as they emerge from within the proposal of Waterman, Schwartz & Conti (2008) and from research on intrinsic motivation in non-formal youth education (Watts & Caldwell, 2008).

Table 2. Positive experience: dimensions of intrinsic motivation

<i>Predictive variables</i>	<i>Descriptive variables</i>
- High level of self-determination in the choices and perceptions of their own abilities	- Enjoyment
- Possession of values oriented towards self-realization	- Interest
- Youth initiative	- Feelings of personal expressiveness;
- The presence of a high level of "sense of challenge" and a high level of self-efficacy	- Flow

The theory on self-determination helps to identify in which way individual choices are influenced by external factors or result from internal motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This theory was adopted in order to study the varying degrees of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation that drive young people to participate in non-formal and informal education during their leisure time (Grolnick, Deci & Ryan, 1997). Extrinsic motivation (or external regulation) denotes those choices that meet the expectations expressed mainly by others. Such expectations may be dictated by adults with an educational role, by peers and from any other external source of support that may be needed or those whose absence is feared. Differently,

an experience is intrinsically motivated when choosing to live it for pleasure and the personal satisfaction it brings.

Between the predictor variables of intrinsic motivation, the possession of values that are geared towards the development of potential and the achievement of significant personal goals has also been drawn upon (Waterman, Schwartz & Conti, 2008). Furthermore, an activity carried out with a high sense of self-efficacy is more likely to be seen as the result of the will of the individual. In particular, research on youth development has identified an opportunity to promote educational experiences with which young people can identify in the activities specifically promoted by young people themselves (*youth initiative*) Waterman, Schwartz & Conti, 2008). Such activities are characterized by a desire to engage in a goal perceived as *challenging* (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003).

In addition to predictive factors, research on intrinsic motivation has identified a set of indicators for its recognition and description. These indicators specifically refer to four key dimensions: *pleasure and enjoyment*; *autonomy*, which in turn may be associated with the aptitude to choose between different options (*interest*), and the sense of freedom from external pressures (*free-choice learning*); *competence* and the sense of self-efficacy in the activities in which one is involved; *self-expression* which includes feelings of intense involvement, vitality, completeness, self-realization, significant for activities regarding a personal profile.

Continuing with the reading of Table 2, the *flow* theory as proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1988) suggests the anchoring of intrinsically motivated participation experiences to two interrelated factors: the perception of challenging activities as they are able to test skills (*challenges*); the sense of self-efficacy with respect to the skills required to carry out the proposed activities (*self-perceived capacity to meet challenges*). The experience of *flow* emerges when an individual perceives of a task as challenging and, at the same time, feels they have the ability to carry out the task in hand. The subjective experience is, in contrast, dominated by boredom (when skills are superior to challenges) or feelings of inadequacy (when the challenges require more skill than those apparently possessed).

Flow theory is drawn upon due to its importance in the creation of theoretical models on the participation of young people in free-time educational activities. Such models include, for example, the “Three Cs” model of Jans & De Backer (2001), which adds the sense of *Connection* to the two factors identified by *flow* theory (*Challenge, Capacity*). This third

factor refers back to the concept of *resource social capital*, described as the sense of being “connected with and supported by humans, communities, ideas, movements, a range of thoughts, organization, etc. in order to work together on the challenge” (Jans & De Backer, 2001, p. 6).

Autonomy support and resource social capital

Self-determination theory defines the concept of autonomy support as that which occurs when a “person in a position of authority (e.g. a teacher, a health care provider or manager) takes the other’s (e.g. a student’s, the patient’s or a subordinate’s) perspective, acknowledges the other’s feeling and perception, provides the other with the information and choice, and minimizes the use of pressure and control” (Williams & Deci, 1996, p. 767). Similarly, Grolnick et al. (1997) have defined autonomy support as the “degree to which parents value and use techniques that encourage choice, self-initiation, and participation in making decisions” (Grolnick et al., 1997, p. 148).

At the other extreme, the educational style that emphasizes control tends to exert pressure in order to “behave in particular ways, either through coercive or seductive techniques that generally include implicit or explicit rewards or punishments” (Black & Deci, 2000, p. 742).

Several studies have confirmed that an autonomy supportive educational style contributes to promoting intrinsically motivated learning experiences precisely because they satisfy the need to exercise a choice consistent with personal motivations (Pierro et al., 2009). Grolnick et al. (1997) recall, however, the risk of confusing the concept of autonomy with that of independence. Indeed, being independent refers to the condition in which individuals must rely on themselves rather than on the assistance of others. Such autonomy does not, however, imply that young individuals find themselves in a state of complete detachment from adult figures with an educational role. Rather, these authors emphasize the importance of the adult becoming a resource for the young, relying on them in order to experience learning as a process that encourages the expression of ideas, the choice between different options, the spirit of initiative and accountability. For this reason, the bond of trust with the adult is a necessary condition for experiencing a sense of autonomy, as “to be related to others means that one will be emotionally reliant on them, and the reliance can serve to support one’s sense of autonomy” (Grolnick et al., 1997, p. 155).

The literature on *youth work* insists on the importance of creating new environments in which the young may enter into a relationship with adults able to convey useful resources for growth (Verschelden et al., 2009, Smith, 1988, 1999). Creating such a relationship means feeding a brand of social capital conceived as providing better access to new resources made possible by the educational relationship (Lin, 2001). The relationship between the young and the adult can, therefore, generate “relational goods” based on reciprocity and trust (Donati & Tronca, 2008). In order to investigate such a relationship it is therefore particularly useful to adopt a definition of social capital that examines the resources that may be accessed through social relations (*resource social capital*) rather than the moral resources that collectively act with functions of social integration (*normative social capital*) (Dika & Singh, 2002; Donati, 2006; Fulkerson & Thompson, 2008).

Conceived in terms of relational resources, social capital can, therefore, contribute towards building an evaluation of the success of a non-formal education experience that not only takes into account inherited resources (cultural, economic and social capital of the beneficiaries and the family of origin) but also of the new capital being developed during the experience. Indeed, if the creation of new social capital is defined as the access to new resources *embedded* in relationships and social interactions, the process may be observed as an increase in *life chances*, defined as opportunities for personal growth, the fulfilment of capabilities, desires and hopes (Dahrendorf, 1981). In terms of a *youth work* service, there is, therefore, the need to identify the conditions in which *life chances* develop.

The concept of the chance event

In order to define the concept of life chances on a more operational and micro-relational level, it is useful to adopt the notion of the chance-event, i.e. the type of events generated by social interactions that may have a positive effect on the trajectories of the life of an individual (Shanahan & Porfeli, 2007). The fluidity and dynamicity of the environments created in youth work centres focuses attention on their ability to generate unplanned events that may potentially develop into an opportunity. The studies of “life courses” (Ross, 2005) that deal with life events, able to generate an impact on educational and career paths are particularly useful from this

perspective⁴. Drawing on the psychology of the life cycle such events can be defined as a chance event when occurring as “life events that instigate change” (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Of specific interest within the scope of investigating the complex and not always predictable educational processes that occurs in youth work centres is the study of how they may give opportunities for “non-normative” live events (Baltes, 1980). These events typically require changes, possibly independently from the “role expectations” associated with age. The theory of *planned happenstance* (Mitchell, Levin & Krumboltz, 1999) may, for instance, be adopted in order to study how unexpected events can become resources for learning and the career of the individual. According to this theory, the recognition of *chance events* can, for example, be facilitated by certain personality traits such as curiosity, an exploratory attitude or optimism (Mitchell et al., 1999; Hitlin & Elder, 2007).

Taking into account the chance events generated by the youth centre is to study in which way the experiences of informal and non-formal learning affect the life trajectories of young people. Indeed, even when based on free choice, it is possible that the experiences of a youth centre are reduced to marginal gratification in a limited timeframe and limited to an enclosed space. A similar risk of self-importance may lead to a weakening of the educational function of such centres. This risk arises, for example, when adults play a purely instrumental role in the centre (e.g. the maintenance of a recording studio), when one becomes “trapped” in the centre due to the lack of direction towards other services in the area or when the centre tends to follow youth trends as dictated by the market (Biondo, 2001). Such risks can be addressed through socio-educational approaches able to help young people to reflect on how to learn from the learning experiences lived in the centre. In this way, the centre may help in creating chance events in the sense that they bring about changes that are perceived as possible by the young (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Research on positive youth development has, in this regard, called for a greater attention to those experiences concentrated in a timeframe that aim to involve the young in an emotionally intense experience (*high-density experiences*). Such experiences may have the power to bring about *turning points* in the lives of young people (Krasnor, 2008).

⁴ See also Carolina M. (2010) and Bright Jim E. H. et al. (2009).

In addition to the presence of a targeted activity of socio-educational animation, it may be assumed that the generation of chance events is somehow associated with the occurrence and the variety of activities offered by the centre and has an impact on the activation of social relations. This hypothesis takes into account the strict derivation of chance events from socio-relational dynamics (Shanahan & Porfeli, 2007). This implies that such events are important for the individual to the extent that they are associated with social interactions perceived as significant. Educational environments created in a youth work centre can, from this perspective, be viewed as “micro-settings where consistent groupings of adults and youth meet over multiple sessions for the same learning purpose (Smith et al., 2010, p. 359).

Conclusion

This paper has allowed for the reconstruction of a detailed theory of change that, drawing on psychological and sociological theories in the field of youth education, has attempted to explain how the interplay between non-formal education and informal learning in centre-based youth work can have an impact on the life paths of young people. It is thus demonstrated how the special educational relationship of youth work can be explained on a theoretical-conceptual level, even when identifying the characteristics of informality and focusing on the discovery of capabilities and unexpected potential. The present paper is, therefore, an attempt to provide both youth centres and youth workers with tools to defend themselves against accusations of superficiality, improvisation, lack of professionalism and an inability to demonstrate the effects of their actions.

In terms of evaluation research, this paper highlights the risks of focusing youth work evaluation primarily on expected and more readily measurable outcomes, while neglecting the emerging or unexpected effects that may arise from the process of interaction between the young and youth worker (Cooper, 2012). In other words, the risk is that of evaluating the effectiveness of youth work in terms of solutions to youth problems as predetermined by political and adult-centric priorities imposed from above. This leads to the potential loss of the opportunity to evaluate how a youth centre is able to make available resources and unexpected opportunities that can be revealed by the individual experience of young people, group

dynamics, creative processes, in the informal and spontaneous relationships between young people and youth workers and in the ability of the latter to accompany the young in order to intentionally shape their own life trajectory. The risk of losing the *unexpected emerging in the process* of youth work led Jon Ord to question whether “it makes more sense to plan for opportunities and not outcomes” and to argue that evaluator “should not necessarily be able to predict with any degree of certainty what those outcomes may, or may not, be until the process of youth work has developed, and the work *unfolded*” (Ord, 2012)⁵.

Undoubtedly, the very nature of youth work governed by the principles of social pedagogy and educational *accompaniment* (Cameron & Moss, 2011) poses methodological issues specific to evaluative research. Indeed, in this form of youth work, young people are free to decide whether and when to enter into a relationship with the youth worker and whether to trust in them due to their independence from institutional constraints and ability to tune into young people’s needs and desires. Evaluation research based on a clear institutional mandate and guided by experimental evaluation design risks, for example, meeting significant resistance on the part of young people and youth workers themselves. Evaluative research may, therefore, better grasp the impact of youth work by adopting methods more closely associated with action research and the active involvement of young people (Comfort et al., 2006; Smith, 2006; Cooper, 2012), as in the evaluation model focusing on utilization (Patton, 1997) or through responsive and constructivist evaluation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). It is above all for a research design oriented by these evaluation models that this paper has developed a theoretical framework and a set of theory-grounded concepts as tools for evaluating non-formal education in youth work.

References

- Archer, M. S. (2006). *La conversazione interiore. Come nasce l'agire sociale*. Milano: Erickson.
- Archer, M. S. (2007). *Making our way through the world: Human reflexivity and social mobility*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

⁵ Chapter 6, Kindle Edition.

- Baltes, P. B. & Baltes, M. M. (1980). Plasticity and variability in psychological aging: methodological and theoretical issues. In G. E. Gurski (Ed.), *Determining the effect of aging on the central nervous system*. (pp. 41-60). Berlin: Schering.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.
- Barber, T. (2006). *Choice, Voice and Engagement. An Exploration of Models and Methods which promote active Youth Citizenship in the new Europe*. Paper presented at the seminar *Young people and Active European Citizenship*, Budapest, 23-25 November, 2006, retrieved December 13, 2014, from <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/it/web/youth-partnership/seminar-young-people-and-active-european-citizenship>.
- Beckett, D., & Hager, P. (2002). *Life, Work And Learning: Practice in Postmodernity*. London: Routledge.
- Biondo, D. (2001). La promozione dell'esperienza del gruppo in adolescenza. *Adolescenza e psicoanalisi*. Retrieved October 5, 2014, from <http://www.psychomedia.it/aep/2002/numero-2/biondo.htm>.
- Black, A. E., & Deci, E. L. (2000). The effects of instructors' autonomy support and students' autonomous motivation on learning organic chemistry: A self-determination theory perspective, *Science Education*, 84, 740-756.
- Bright, J. E. H., Pryora, R. G. L., Chanb, E. W. M., & Rijantob, J. (2009). Chance events in career development: influence, control and multiplicity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 75(1), 14-25.
- Cameron, C., & Moss, P. (2011). *Social Pedagogy and working with children and young people. Where care and education meet*. London: Jessica Kinglsey Publishers.
- Campbell, C. (2009). Distinguishing the Power of Agency from agentic power: a note on Weber and the 'black box' of personal agency. *Sociological Theory*, 27(4), 405-418.
- Carolina, M. (2010). Do all roads lead to Rome? Effect of educational trajectories on educational transitions. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 28(1), 23-44.
- Cavalli, A., & Calabrò, A. (2008). *Il tempo dei giovani*. Milano: Ledizioni.
- Colombo, M. (2011). Educational choices in action: young Italians as reflexive agents and the role of significant adults. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 1, 14-48.
- Comfort, H., Merton, B., Payne, M., & Flint, W. (2006). *Capturing the evidences. Tools and processes for recognising and recording the impact of youth work*. Leicester: The National Youth Agency publishing.
- Connel, J. P., & Kubisch, A. (1998). Applying a Theory of Change Approach to the Evaluation of Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Progress, Prospects, and Problems, In K. Fulbright-Anderson, A. C. Kubisch, & J. P., Connel (Eds.), *New Approach To Evaluating Community Initiatives: vol. II, Theory, Measurement and Analysis* (pp. 14-44). Washington: The Anspen Institute.
- Cooper, S. (2012). Evaluation: ensuring accountability or improving practice? In J. Ord (Ed.), *Critical Issues in Youth Work Management* (kindle edition). Oxon: Routledge.
- Council of Europe (2007). *European Portfolio for youth leaders and youth workers*, Council of Europe publishing: Strasbourg.
- Council of the European Union (2009). *Council Resolution on a Renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)*. *Journal of the European Union*, C 311/1. Retrieved December 2014 from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32009G1219%2801%29&from=EN>.
- Coussée, F. (2008). *A century of youth work policy*. Gent: Academia Press.

- Csikszentmihaiyi, M. (1988). The flow experience and its significance for human psychology. In M. Csikszentmihaiyi & I. S. Csikszentmihaiyi (Eds.), *Optimal experience: Psychological studies of flow in consciousness* (pp. 15-35). New York: Cambridge.
- Davies, B., & Merton, B. (2010) *Straws in the Wind. The State of Youth Work Practice in a Changing Policy Environment. Phase 2*, research report, De Montfort University. Retrieved October 2014 from <http://www.dmu.ac.uk/documents/health-and-life-sciences-documents/research/strawsinthewind-finalreport-october2010.pdf>.
- Dika, S. L., Singh, K., & Tech, V. (2002). Applications of social capital in educational literature: a critical synthesis. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(1), 31-6072
- Dohn, N. B. (2010). The formality of learning science in everyday life: a conceptual literature review. *NorDiNa: Nordic Studies In Science Education*, 6(2), 144-154
- Donati, P. (2006). L'approccio relazionale al capitale sociale. *Sociologia e Politiche Sociali*, 10(1), 9-39.
- Donati, P., & Archer, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Riflessività modernizzazione e società civile*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Donati, P., & Tronca, L. (2008). *Il capitale sociale degli italiani. Le radici familiari, comunitarie e associative del civismo*. Milano: Franco Angeli.
- Dumazedier, J. (1978). *Sociologia del tempo libero*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Dunne, A., Ulicna, D., Murphy, L., & Golubeva, M. (2014). *Working with young people: the value of youth work in the European Union*. Brussels: European Commission.
- Dworkin, J., Larson, R., & Hansen, D. (2003). Adolescents accounts of growth experiences in youth activities, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 32(1), 17-26.
- Eichas, K., Albrecht, R. E., Garcia, A. J., Ritchie, R. A., Varela, A., Garcia, A., Rinaldi, R., Wang, R., Montgomery, M. J., Silverman, W. K., Jaccard, J., & Kurtines, W. M. (2010). Mediators of Positive Youth Development Intervention Change: Promoting Change in Positive and Problem Outcomes?. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 39 (4), 211-237.
- Elder, G. H. & Johnson, M. K. Jr. (2002). The life course and aging: Challenges, lessons, and new directions. In R.A. Jr. Settersten (Ed.), *Invitation to the life course: Toward new understandings of later life* (pp. 49-81), Amityville, NY: Baywood.
- Eshach, H. (2007). Bridging In-school and Out-of-school Learning: Formal, Non-Formal, and Informal Education. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 16(2), 171-190.
- European Commission (2001). *Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality*, COM 678 final. Retrieved November 2014, from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0678:FIN:EN:PDF>
- European Commission (2009). *An EU Strategy for Youth – Investing and Empowering. A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities*, COM 200. Retrieved October, 2014, from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52009DC0200>
- European Commission & Council of Europe (2004). *Pathways towards Validation and Recognition of Education, Training & Learning in the Youth Field*. Strasbourg and Brussels: Partnership European Commission & Council of Europe Youth Research. Retrieved October 2014, from http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/1668227/Pathways_towards_validati.pdf/caf83fd5-b4db-4b56-a1ab-3b1178e182db

- European Commission & Council of Europe (2011). *Pathways 2.0. Towards recognition of non-formal learning/education and of youth work in Europe*. Strasbourg and Brussels: Partnership between the European Commission and the Council of Europe in the youth field. Retrieved October 2014, from http://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/1017981/3084932/Pathways_II_towards_recognition_of_non-formal_learning_Jan_2011.pdf/6af26afb-daff-4543-9253-da26460f8908.
- European Parliament & European Council (2006). *Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key competences for lifelong learning*, Official Journal L 394 of 30.12.2006
- Falk, J. H. (2005). Free-choice environmental learning: framing the discussion. *Environmental Education Research*, 11(3), 265-280.
- Ford, M. E. (1999). Thriving With Social Purpose: An Integrative Approach to the Development of Optimal Human Functioning. *Educational Psychologist*, 42(3), 153-171.
- Fouché, C. B., Elliott, K. J., Mundy-Mcpherson, S., Jordan, V., & Bingham, T. (2010). *A systematic Review on the Impact of Youth Work for Young People*, Research Report, Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Youth Development and the Health Research Council of New Zealand Partnership Programme.
- Fulkerson, G. M., & Thompson, G. H. (2008). The Evolution of a Contested Concept: A Meta-Analysis of Social Capital Definitions and Trends, 1988-2006. *Sociological Inquiry*, 78 (4), 536-557.
- Funnell, S. C. & Rogers, P. J. (2011). *Purposeful program theory. Effective use of theories of change and logic models*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Gaus, H., & Mueller, C.E. (2011). Evaluating Free-Choice Climate Education Interventions Applying Propensity Score Matching. *Evaluation Review* 35 (6), 673-722.
- Grolnick, W. S., Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1997). Internalization within the family: The self-determination theory perspective. In: Grusec, J.E & Kticzynski L. (eds) *Parenting and children's internalization of values: A handbook of contemporary theory* (pp. 135-161). New York: Wiley.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y.S. (1989). *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Havighurst, R. J. (1953). *Human development and education*. New York: Longman.
- Havighurst, R. J. (1956). Research on the Developmental-Task Concept. *The School Review* 64(5), 215-223.
- Hirschman, A.O. (1990). *Come far passare le riforme*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Hitlin, S., & Elder, G.H. Jr. (2007). Agency: an empirical model of an abstract concept. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 11, 33-67.
- Jacobone, V., & Moro, G. (2014). Evaluating the impact of the Erasmus programme: skills and European identity. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 40(2), 309-328.
- Jans, M., & De Backer, K. (2002). *Youth-work and Social Participation. Elements for a practical theory*. Project JeP!, Brussels: Flemish Youth Council.
- Krasnor, L. R. (2008). Future Directions in Youth Involvement Research. *Social Development*, 18(2), 497-509.
- Lazzarini, G. (2009). Il capitale sociale della famiglia, chance per i figli. In E. Besozzi (Ed.), *Tra sogni e realtà. Gli adolescenti e la transizione alla vita adulta* (pp. 37-49). Roma: Carocci.

- Lerner, J. V., Phelps, E., Forman, Y., & Bowers, E. P. (2009). Positive Youth Development. In R. M. Lerner & L.D. Steinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology, Individual Bases of Adolescent Development*, Hoboken New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Lin, N. (2001). *Social capital. A Theory of Social Structure*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mahoney, J. L., Larson, R. W., & Eccles, J. S. (2005). *Organized activities as contexts of development. Extracurricular activities, after-school and community programs*. Mahawah New Jersey: LEA Publishers.
- Manuti, A., Pastore, S., Scardigno, A. F., Giancaspro, M. L., & Morciano, D. (2015). Formal and informal learning in the workplace: a research review. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 19, 1–17. doi: 10.1111/ijtd.12044
- Merico, M. (2004). *Giovani e società*. Roma: Carocci.
- Mitchell, K. E., Levin, A. S., & Krumboltz, J. D. (1999). Planned happenstance: Constructing unexpected career opportunities. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 77, 115-124.
- Mocker, D. W., & Spear, G. E. (1982). *Lifelong Learning: formal, nonformal, informal and self-directed*. Columbus, Ohio: ERIC Claringhouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education.
- Morciano, D. (2012). *Youth-work and young people's agency in a Mediterranean context: an evaluation research in the South of Italy*, *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 4 (2), 100-120, Retrieved from http://www.ijse.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/2012_2_7.pdf
- Morciano, D., & Scardigno, F. (2014). The identity of youth work as an agent of social equality. *Italian Journal of Sociology of Education*, 6(1), 25-52. Retrieved from http://www.ijse.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014_1_2.pdf
- Moro, G. (2009). *La valutazione delle politiche pubbliche*. Roma: Carocci.
- Ord, J. (2012). Planning: for opportunities not outcomes. In J. Ord (Ed.), *Critical Issues in Youth Work Management* (kindle edition). Oxon: Routledge,
- Palmonari, A. (1997). *Psicologia dell'adolescenza*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Patton, M. Q. (1997). *Utilization-Focused Evaluation. The New Century Text*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pawson, R. (2006). *Evidence-Based Policy. A Realist Perspective*. London: Sage.
- Pawson, R., & Tilley, N. (1997). *Realistic Evaluation*. London: Sage.
- Pierro, A., Presagh, F., Higgins, T. E., & Kruglanski, A. W. (2006). Regulatory mode preferences for autonomy supporting versus controlling instructional styles. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 79, 599-615.
- Rhodes, J. E. (2004). The critical ingredient: caring youth-staff relationships in after-school settings. *New Direction for Youth Development*, 101, 145–161
- Ross, M. (2005). The Structure of the Life Course: Classic Issues and Current Controversies. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 9, 3-24
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68-78.
- SALTO (2011). *Recognition of youth work and non-formal and informal learning within the field of youth. Current Development on the European level*. Retrieved September 2013, from <http://www.salto-youth.net/rc/training-and-cooperation/recognition/>.

- Sapin, K. (2009). *Essential Skills for Youth Work Practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Scardigno, A. F., & Manuti, A. (2011). *Giovani che partecipano. Una ricerca sulle politiche giovanili della regione Puglia*. Aracne.
- Schlossberg, N. K., Waters, E. B., & Goodman, J. (1995). *Counselling adults in transitions: linking practice with theory*. New York: Springer.
- Shanahan, M. J., & Porfeli, E. J. (2007). Chance events in the life course. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 11, 97-119.
- Smith, C., Peck, S. C., Denault, A. S., Blazevski, J., & Akiva, T. (2010). Quality at the Point of Service: Profiles of Practice in After-School Settings. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45, 358-369.
- Smith, M. K. (2006) Evaluation. In: *Encyclopaedia of informal education*, www.infed.org/biblio/b-eval.htm (accessed January 2012).
- Smith M. K. (1988) *Developing Youth Work. Informal education, mutual aid and popular practice*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Smith, M. K. (1999). Youth work: An introduction. *Encyclopedia of informal education*. Retrieved September 2014 from www.infed.org/youthwork/b-yw.htm.
- Stame, N. (1998). *L'esperienza della valutazione*. Roma: Seam.
- Sullivan, P. J., & Larson, R. W. (2010). Connecting Youth to High-Resource Adults: Lessons From Effective Youth Programs. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 25(1), 99-123.
- Verschelden, G., Coussée, F., Van de Walle, T., & Williamson, H. (2009). *The history of youth work in Europe and its relevance for youth policy today*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Waterman, A. S., Schwartz, S. J., & Conti, R. (2008). The implications of two conceptions of happiness, hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonia for the understanding of intrinsic motivation. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9, 41-79.
- Watts, C. E., & Caldwell, L. L. (2008). Self-Determination and Free Time Activity Participation as Predictors of Initiative. *Journal of Leisure*, 40(1), 136-181.
- Weiss, C. (1997). How can Theory-Based Evaluation make greater head-way? *Evaluation Review*, 21(4), 501-524.
- Williams, G. C., & Deci, E. L. (1996). Internalization of biopsychosocial values by medical students: A test of self-determination theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 767-779.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Gioco e realtà*. Milano: Armando Editore.