# Youth Work for Socio-Educational Challenges in the Mediterranean Context

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*Abstract*: The current youth condition reveals differences and inequalities related to issues regarding teaching, training and educational paths. Youth work is an area of unconventional intervention in which the non-formal educational approaches adopted are useful for addressing critical issues relating to the current delay in the stages of transition to adulthood. The postponement of life goals is typical of the Italian Mediterranean context and, in particular, of the Campania region, which represents the difficulties associated with the Southern areas. This study provides an overview of the perspectives of policies and issues dealt with in the debate that has developed over the last decade among scholars, professionals and policy-makers. The focus is on the challenge of educational policies aimed at supporting the creation of a personal and social identity and the identification of trajectories of growth of young people in the various spheres of realisation of one's life (education, work, family and social dimensions). The empirical part presents the results of a research study on the conception and prospects of development of youth work, providing the points of view of key actors of the strategic context and of the world of operators whose task is to implement youth policies at the national level and in the Campania region.

*Keywords:* youth conditions, Southern contexts, youth work, educational policies

## Introduction

It is frequently noted that theoretical perspectives and policy issues arising in the educational sphere draw attention to aspects that require analysis within the relative contexts, with an emphasis on socio-economic, territorial and also cultural characteristics and the temporal dimension. Social transformations currently related to phenomena concerning the younger generations are thus subject to attention.

In this regard, in public policies for young people the decisions, approaches and planning assume markedly differentiated forms in relation to geographical variables and are based on studies and empirical research that highlight the characteristics of these differences. In this article the operational definition of young people refers to the age group ranging from 18 to 35 years, considering both the main target of Italian youth policies and administrative system and, the range defined by the law 26/2016 approved in the Campania Region.

The comparative studies that take into account structural, institutional and economic factors are thus increased and importance is placed on the spheres of analysis that observe how the individual life paths of young people are influenced by the various modes of state intervention (policies and welfare services, economic models and the methods of organisation of work and family institutions etc.). Among the various authors, Walther (2006) focused on the possibility of identifying a link between individual biographical processes and national contextual structures, leading to the definition of a model of "transition regimes". Taking as reference the existing models (conservative, liberal and sociodemocratic) pointed out by Esping-Andersen (1990), there is the Mediterranean model that take into account the role of the state in social protection and on the development of good rate of welfare that is mainly based on monetary transfer rather than on supply of public services for young people/young adults (Bettio & Plantenga, 2004). Many Southern European countries, such as Italy, Spain and Portugal, fall under the so-called «sub-protective transition regime» (Walther, 2006) characterized by a low percentage of standard employment agreements and a high rate of living conditions not protected. These conditions created a dualistic welfare regime in which the family of origin and informal work play an important role. Therefore, research, aimed at analyzing differences in the condition of young people, in particular between northern and southern countries in a certain continental area and within a single country, is encreasing (Wallace & Kovacheva, 1998; Sgritta, 1999; Cavalli & Galland, 1995; Buzzi, 2002; Schizzerotto & Lucchini, 2004; and, on a regional basis, to provide a few examples: Accornero & Carmignani, 1986, Leccardi, 1994; Fantozzi, 2003; Abbruzzese, 2005; De Luigi, 2007).

Observing the social transformations that affect young people, differences and inequalities fully involve issues related to education, training and courses of study. This can be seen in the gradual establishment of the so-called 'Mediterranean model' (Galland, 1993)[1], which in the years of its conceptualization traced the changes of the young differences, compared to the previous ones, in a delay in the attainment of educational goals and a slowing down of the processes of economic independence and autonomy from the family of origin. In particular while the younger generations of the early twentieth century up to those of the early 60s showed more and more intolerance towards the forms of heterodirection of their behavior, and in particular in Italy, in the last decades of the century - and until today - they have become increasingly cautious towards choices that imply taking on commitments and responsibilities (Billari & Rosina, 2004; Micheli, 2000).

In Italy, the Mediterranean model confirms its actuality by identifying characters that in the millennials and their successors of the generation Z appear remarked, according to the longitudinal surveys of recent years (Reports on the youth condition in Italy, from 2013 to 2019; Sironi & Rosina, 2018) carried out at national level, and particularly in the Southern regions (Leone, 2019b). In fact, in the last 20 years, the persistence of the sequence «marriage-first child» has consolidated the phenomenon relating to the prolonged stay of young people in the family of origin, already identified by Galland (1993). Most European countries, with the exception of the Netherlands and Denmark, also experienced a percentage increase in young people living with their parents (Ongaro, 2003; Tuorto, 2002; Giuliano, 2002). This phenomenon, however, in Italy (and in other southern European countries, in particular Spain) has taken on peculiar characteristics, due to the involvement of young individuals with economic self-sufficiency. This has led to the return of old approaches, such as that of the «long family» (Donati & Scabini, 1988) and the «delay syndrome» (Livi Bacci, 1997), which find their own position in the Mediterranean model.

On the basis of these renewed living conditions of young people, the stages of transition to adulthood no longer follow a standard succession, especially in the achievement of individual goals within both educational and professional contexts. In this condition of "delay", the actors who participate in the transition phase are not only those traditionally involved in

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[1] Together with the Mediterranean model, the typology comprises a *North-European* and *French model*, where independence in terms of one's residence is followed by the creation of an autonomous family unit, and a *British* model, in which economic independence is soon achieved, with the individual's insertion in the work market at a young age, this being associated with the creation of a family life with a partner and an extension of the childless phase in the life cycle of the couple (ibidem, p. 6).

the academic or institutional scenario, but all those subjects active in the public space and in the youth sphere. The need to guide young people in their life choices, to support them in achieving personal goals, emphasized the role of youth workers and all those involved in many ways in the youth work. The youth workers, referred to in this article, present a variety of profiles and skills (e.g. social inclusion, addictions, deviance, citizenship, digital knowledge etc.).

This evolutionary scenario requires a redefinition of both: the actors with whom young people come into contact, and the youth work approaches, less and less tied to academic precepts and increasingly contaminated by the techniques and methodologies of non-formal education, always most used in Europe in various sectors. This work tries to understand how these changes have been implemented by youth and educational policies and how they can affect the living conditions of young people.

In the first part, there is a focus on the national context, providing a brief overview of the condition of young people in Italy and, comparatively, in the Campania region, focusing in particular on the spaces of intervention in educational paths.

In the second part, youth work is considered as a socio-educational policy of considerable interest, with respect to the Mediterranean characteristics that have emerged, as explored above, both nationally and in a southern region such as Campania.

Precisely in Campania have been identified many weak points in the paths of growth that emerge from delays in the transition to maturity, ranging from the definition of an individual's personal identity to the achievement of life goals. In this field, youth workers intervene to develop skills and competences, proposing new educational approaches and new forms of social support (e.g. social inclusion tools, which involve the use of music, theatre, social circus or sports, etc.), adapted to the specificity of the cases[2]. The latter are aimed at supporting and facilitating the search for work and independence, youth empowerment, and the development of social capital, through programmes which seek to prevent risky behaviour and to promote active citizenship.

The attention that should be dedicated to the work with young people is reinforced by the fact that in Campania, which in this regard precedes

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[2]  Two emblematic case studies, found on the Campania region, are: the social cooperative "Il Tappeto di Iqbal", operating in Naples neighborhoods and suburbs which present deep social degradation (such as Barra, San Giovanni a Teduccio and Ponticelli), which trought artistic activities, coming from the circus culture, and socio-educational actions, create news spaces of aggregation and alternative growth opportunity for young people; the social gym and the educational activities of Maestro Maddaloni, Olympic judo champion, who use sport to fight drugs spreading and illegality within Scampia area, one of Naples neighbourhood with the higher crime level.

other Italian regions, the non-formal approach of youth work has begun to be reflected in a legislative framework (Regione Campania, 2016).

This is a sphere which currently presents many different frameworks and viewpoints all over Europe - also according to the social and normative traditions of the various countries - but it remains, in Italian policy-making processes, at an embryonic stage. Therefore, later in the article, we will try to define the 'youth work' as concept and to identify all its main areas of activity, paying particular attention to the issue of non-formal learning and to the relationships between traditional and unconventional models, actors and educational contexts.

With respect to an interest in comprehending current spaces of public policy and intervention, the empirical base, presented on this paper, provides the points of view of key witnesses of the strategic context of youth policies at national level and in Campania region.

In this regard, the analysis of the interviews regarding the definition of youth work shows, on one side, the presence of some aspects of the matter that are still confuse, and on the other one the proliferation of different ideas among the political-institutional and social actors, working in the same area. This indicates the need to speed up the dialogue between policy maker and other actors involved in the field, and to create a common basis useful for promoting public governance that reflects the *magic triangle*, adopted in the context of European youth studies, which is based on three top items: policy making, relevant practices and research (Chisholm et al., 2011; Oliart & Feixa, 2012).

## Differences in the condition of young people in Italy and in the Campania region in the transition from the educational system to the labour market and with respect to life goals

The most recent research studies conducted in Italy consolidate the data which, for many years, and particularly on account of the effects of the global economic crisis occurring over the last decade, have presented a youth condition, which, for many reasons, is hampered with respect to its potential (cf., among various sources, Pasqualini, 2012, pp. 58-60; Gallino, 2014; Agnoli, 2014; Rosina, 2015; Bertolini *et al.*, 2017; Tosi, 2018, Sironi & Rosina, 2018, Pastore, 2019). The characteristics of the Mediterranean model are associated in particular with a delay occurring along all paths of realisation, at the professional level and in relation to life goals, and such situations are more deeply-rooted and more critical among the young people of the South (Leone, 2019a; 2019b).

In a comparison with the traditional models of transition (Modell *et al.,*1976) key changes are identified in the breakdown of the association

between the termination of formal studies and living at home with one's family and, subsequently, between work and the creation of one's own family (Galland, 1993); among the major issues a reversibility of stages is increasingly widespread (Shanahan, 2000; Walther et al., 2002; Côté & Levine, 2002; Leccardi, 2015).

Observing the data of the recent comparative Italy-Campania sample survey, conducted through the collaboration between the OCPG Youth Observatory of the University of Salerno and the Youth Observatory of the Toniolo Institute, the educational sphere, construed as an educational path allowing for the development of professional skills, constitutes the critical basis of the 'prolonged delay' with respect to transition to adulthood (Cavalli, 1996, p. 41). It is noted that an extension of the student status beyond the age of 25 occurs in 60% of the Italian sample and in 40% of the sample from the Campania region. Furthermore, it was found that 74% of respondents in Italy and 87% of those in the south (aged 20-35) are defined as students living with their parents. The high percentage of young students who live with their parents appears to be aggravated by the high percentage of students over the age of 25, indicative of a prolonged stay in the study path beyond the standard time.

Reflecting the Mediterranean model, the presence of a strong bond with the family, evident in the data, is linked to the extension of training phasef. The bond is indicated in the general picture revealed in Table 1: more than half of the population of young people in Italy live with their parents (23.6% of single subjects and 28.3% of young people in a stable relationship) and over 70% in Campania (31.4 % and 39.6%, respectively).

It is moreover noted that only 17.6% of young Italians have taken the step to live alone, and the percentage falls to 7.5% in Campania.

If on the one hand, apart from young people undergoing training, cohabitation with one's parents concerns above all young people who are seeking employment, as noted especially in the Campania sample (44.4% compared to 32.3% at the national level), on the other hand young people in the south often continue to live with their family of origin also when they are working and have established a stable affective bond (40.7% compared to 23.9% at the national level). Together with the extension of the training period during the phase in which young people traditionally seek/ find work, growth paths are also delayed with respect to the realization of personal autonomy and the emotional sphere. Indeed, in the two samples considered, about 40% of the respondents are single persons and only 18% have a child.

Table 1 - Education/work status with respect to relational conditions and accommodation

| Affective condition/ accommodation | | Education/working condition | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Campania | | | | Campania | | | |
| | | Ongoing training | Seeking work | Employed | Total | Ongoing training | Seeking work | Employed | Total |
| single, with family of origin | abs. val. | 292 | 181 | 243 | 716 | 122 | 123 | 69 | 314 |
| | % row | 40.8 | 25.3 | 33.9 | 100 | 38.9 | 39.2 | 22 | 100 |
| | % col. | 34.4 | 32.3 | 15 | 23.6 | 35.1 | 44.4 | 18.4 | 31.4 |
| stable bond / family of origin | abs. val. | 334 | 136 | 388 | 858 | 181 | 62 | 153 | 396 |
| | % row | 38.9 | 15.9 | 45.2 | 100 | 45.7 | 15.7 | 38.6 | 100 |
| | % col. | 39.3 | 24.2 | 23.9 | 28.3 | 52 | 22.4 | 40.7 | 39.6 |
| single / independent | abs. val. | 115 | 58 | 361 | 534 | 28 | 19 | 28 | 75 |
| | % row | 21.5 | 10.9 | 67.6 | 100 | 37.3 | 25.3 | 37.3 | 100 |
| | % col. | 13.5 | 10.3 | 22.2 | 17.6 | 8 | 6.9 | 7.4 | 7.5 |
| stable bond / independent | abs. val. | 48 | 14 | 94 | 156 | 5 | 1 | 19 | 25 |
| | % row | 30.8 | 9 | 60.3 | 100 | 20 | 4 | 76 | 100 |
| | % col. | 5.7 | 2.5 | 5.8 | 5.1 | 1.4 | .4 | 5.1 | 2.5 |
| stable bond in a new family | abs. val. | 60 | 172 | 538 | 770 | 12 | 72 | 107 | 191 |
| | % row | 7.8 | 22.3 | 69.9 | 100 | 6.3 | 37.7 | 56 | 100 |
| | % col. | 7.1 | 30.7 | 33.1 | 25.4 | 3.4 | 26.0 | 28.5 | 19.1 |
| Total | abs. val. | 849 | 561 | 1624 | 3034 | 348 | 277 | 376 | 100 |
| | % row | 28 | 18.5 | 53.5 | 100 | 34.8 | 27.7 | 37.6 | 100 |
| | % col. | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

*Source: Leone, 2019a.*

It would appear that these characteristics are linked to structural issues. Atypical and precarious forms of work offer no guarantees with respect to

choices concerning one's residential autonomy and independence from the family of origin, and in this respect the south and the Campania region are more seriously affected (Leone, 2016a; 2016b). These characteristics are linked to cultural factors typical of the South Italy, where the sense of belonging to a family is stronger (Ramella, 1999; Barbagli et al., 2003; Abbruzzese, 2005).

Differences between Italy as a whole and the Campania region are clearly evident in the values indicated in the 'independence' category; in the national sample these are twice as high as those relating to the regional sample (32.7% and 15.4%, respectively). In other words, young people who may consider themselves as autonomous (being self-sufficient thanks to their employment or their professional income and because they have left home and are thus free to manage their lives) are less than a third of the total statistical population in Italy and a sixth of the population in the South. Furthermore, it is possible to carry out a further division within the age range, between young people under and over 25 years old, residing in three different territorial areas of Italy. Among young people under the age of 25, both in the north and in central and southern Italy, less than 2% consider themselves fully independent. The percentages rise, consequently in the over 25 age group, in which more than 98% say they have achieved independence (Leone, 2019a).

Observing such a situation, it is, precisely, in the reduced numbers of young people who have achieved essential life goals that we may note the areas in which there is a greater need for educational policies, intended as intervention for the development of hard and soft skills, which may produce results in terms of autonomy, empowerment, leadership and activism in the public sphere. The latter two concepts of classical literature have been considered in relation to the Italian youth studies. Activism in the public sphere will therefore be considered with reference to the orientation of young people to others and diversity, as well as in relation to the participation in public life, or in the context of association. Similarly, the concept of leadership, as addressed in youth studies (Alfieri *et al.*, 2018) is defined as "self-promotion" and based on success and career. From the data, therefore, young people seem to be less and less oriented towards success and wealth. A status that certainly depends on the slowdown of the traditional stages discussed so far and which requires targeted interventions in the field of youth and education policies.

## Youth work as a socio-educational policy in the European and Mediterranean contexts

Although the importance of the role of youth work in the various sectors of youth is confirmed, a homogeneous and generally shared definition of the concept has not yet been achieved. However, there are many perspectives on the subject within the literature, which intertwine in a rather articulated

space-time debate. There is a common tendency to emphasize the relationship between volunteering and youth work, although the main objectives of youth work are quite clear: provide young people with opportunities and skills to build their future; develop the inclusion and social integration of young people. They are objectives that find space for action both in the social welfare system and in the educational one (Verschelden *et al.*, 2009). Other authors consider youth work as a real social construct that cannot be extrapolated from the social, political and economic context in which it develops, nor it can be exclusively reduced to its practical function. Rather, it identifies itself as a practice focused on satisfying individuals' personal needs and building relationships (Davies, 2005; Coussée, 2008). Among the different positions, however, one cannot neglect those that emphasize the relationship between youth work, non-formal education and youth participation, and their roles as incubators for youth innovation and their impact on young people's life trajectories (Chisholm, Kovacheva, Merico et al., 2011; Taru et al., 2014). In other cases, the youth work is considered as an «agent of social equality» that is fundamental in the process of building participatory networks among youth and youth workers, trying to prevent and fight mechanisms of social inequality (Morciano & Scardigno, 2014).

Furthermore, in particular in this paper, the position taken by Coburn and Wallace (2011) is shared, which despite confirming the constantly state of flux of youth work, states that it is wrong to consider all informal work with young people as youth work; that because there are substantial differences between "functional activities" (e.g. summer programs, football match) and "critical youth work activities", based on methodologies and on the competence of professionally qualified youth workers.

Furthermore, on the base of the international literature and on the European debate undertaken in recent decades on policies for young people, we have come to a definition of "youth work" that focuses attention on a type of intervention and work presenting a multi-functional and complex nature. All activities that fall within its range are undertaken to support the growth of young people at various levels of education and training and to promote and facilitate the construction of their personal identity, socialisation, their social inclusion and participation in democratic life.

On the basis of this definition, it does not mean that youth work activities replace the role of traditional education and training institutions rather the objectives of the youth work activities are oriented to facilitate and promote the achievement of life goals and to provide opportunities of professional growth for young people.

European institutions introduced national, regional and local programs which seek to promote non-formal paths of education, participatory practices parallel to traditional activities developed in scholastic contexts and new pro-

cesses of learning, also for the personal and social growth of young people. Reflection on these issues has entered the political and institutional agenda and is the subject of current debate among policy-makers at various territorial levels.

Despite the recent attention to the topic and the number of theoretical contributions, it is necessary to rethink the theoretical models to improve and accelerate the programming of policies to support youth work, especially at national level (cf., amongst others, Cooper, 2012).

In this regard, the founding theoretical contributions within the European context and in countries influenced by the British model of youth work may, in fact, be traced back to international literature produced between the 1970s and 1990s, in particular in the United Kingdom and in Australia (Butters & Newell, 1978; Smith, 1988; Hurley & Treacy, 1993; Cooper & White, 1994).

With respect to the British context, in the rest of Europe the recognition of a defined type of youth work appears less distinct. It seems to be associated to an intervention aimed at recovery young people from malaise and hardship and influenced by welfare conditions (IARD, 2001; Morciano, 2015 pp. 23-31). German tradition, instead, defines youth work, primarily, as a socio-pedagogical activity that contributes to the improvement of the society and young people (Coussée, 2008, pp. 9-13).

In Europe and South Europe, renewed attention to this subject is currently highly solicited as result of emerging criticalities in those areas. In fact - as observed above- the extension of the transition to adult life, the condition of young people economic dependence and the common sense of disorientation, reveal the need for new professional figures able to support young people growth, in terms of autonomy and empowerment.

On the one hand, the recurring issues concern new proposals relating to the manner in which the field should be defined; on the other one, the issues cover interests in specific themes. For example, many papers are focused on the role of non-formal education, methodologies and innovative tools, on the quality of work and methods for the evaluation of policies and practices and also on the remuneration and recognition of the identity of professionals engaged in this kind of work[3].

The attempt to define youth work and aspects connected to it was already evident in the reflections developed over half a century ago in the studies of Giesecke (1964) that concern the relationship between practice and theoretical approaches. Concerning the search for new identifying traits, it is possible to observe many point of view and evolution in different areas: in the British context an example is the evolution among the two versions of the manifesto

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[3] Some of the recent thematic contributions in this context: Jeff & Smith 2005; Corney 2006; Sercombe 2007; Young, 2006; Schulman & Davies 2007; Sapin 2009; Batsleer & Davies 2010; Morciano, Scardigno & Merico 2015.

for youth work proposed by Davies (2005; 2015); in Australia illustrative is the research promoted by the Queensland Youth Affairs Network, *What is Youth Work? Defining a Sector* (Archer, 2012).

Within the European context, the fundamental bases of youth work are defined in Resolution No. 327/01 of the Council of the European Union (2010), which identifies various aims within this field. Some of these are: the promotion of autonomy and fundamental value (e.g. human rights, democracy, equality, etc.) among young people; development of personal and professional skills; promotion of social participation, voluntary commitment and active citizenship; promotion of creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation among young people.

Then, youth work with the aim of supporting autonomy and taking responsibility, which also translates practically into fighting inactivity/unemployment, fully responds to the critical aspects of the transition to adulthood according to the Mediterranean model. In fact, from the Italian scenario of youth condition, reported in §2, emerge the difficulties for young people to take a step forward to achieve personal autonomy and economic independence and to the realization of emotional sphere.

In the Conclusion of the Council of the European Union (2013/C 168/03: point 7) it is stated that:

> "Youth work is a broad term covering a large scope of activities of a social, cultural, educational or political nature by, with and for young people. Increasingly, such activities also include sport and services for young people. Youth work belongs to the area of 'out-of-school' education, as well as specific leisure time activities managed by professional or voluntary youth workers and youth leaders. Youth work is organised in different ways (by youth-led organisations, organisations for youth, informal groups or through youth services and public authorities). It is delivered in different forms and settings (e.g., open-access, group-based, programme-based, outreach and detached) and is given shape at local, regional, national and European level".

In the study promoted by the European Commission on the value of youth work within the Union (Dunne *et al.*, 2014, p. 40) the variety of areas and measures is reaffirmed. The study, moreover, specifies its multidimensionality towards the inclusion of different actors with distinct background, experience and motivation. Then, two possible perspectives regarding 'targeting' are highlighted, one of these involving all young people and the other one just specific segments.

Among the documents dedicated to guidelines for strategies, priorities and methodologies, non-formal and informal learning processes are clearly referred to. References to such matters may be found in the 2004 and 2011 working papers of the European Commission and the Council of Europe,

Recommendation No. 398/01 of 2012 of the European Council and the publication of the European Commission of 2015, and Resolutions of the Council No. 183/02 of 2014 and No. 417/01 of 2015. Pertinent references are also to be found in thematic guidelines, such as the 2017 Council conclusions on smart youth work (2017/C 418/02), and those aimed at promoting, in a broader sense, participation in democratic processes and public life. (from the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life promoted in 2003 by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe to the focus established by the Council of the European Union with Resolution No. 169/01 in 2011).

Therefore, the European guidelines advocate cooperation and the development of integrated and inter-sectoral policies and call for assessment systems that will take into account the factors of complexity that are highlighted (Council Recommendation 212/C 398/01; Council conclusions 2013/C 168/03).

One of recent step in the field of youth work- 'The 2nd European Youth Work Convention' - provide an updated overview of the topics addressed in the presentations (2017): advancing participation, equal opportunities and voice; strengthening positive identities and belonging, agency and autonomy; developing 'soft' skills, competences and capabilities; enabling transitions to 'successful' adulthood, engaging in collaborative practice and cross-sectoral cooperation.

From what emerged during the second Convention, it is possible to trace a series of needs, i.e., a European Agenda for Youth Work, improvement of the quality of work and the standards of professional recognition, support for youth work with a knowledge-based approach, financial support for these policies, the sharing of concepts, approaches and practices for a cross-sectoral cooperation.

In conclusion, the empirical analysis §4, reflects aspects of youth work taken from the various positions - emerging from academic, professional and institutional references - mentioned on work with young people and, consequently, submits to the interviewees elements relating to various profiles of youth workers. In particular, the theoretical perspective of the *magic triangle* was taken into account, because it is shared the need to considerate an heterogeneity prospective of different actors, as well as the need to have a common knowledge base about youth work and its dimension.

## Focus on youth work in the context of youth policies at the Italian national level and in the Campania region

Youth work perspectives within Italian policy-making context encounters few references in previous works due to the virtual absence of state intervention in this area of public policy (Morciano, 2017), with the exception

of a few cases, such as action that was promoted and has been active since 2006 in the Apulia Region (Azzolini, 2017). Different is the attention given to the phenomenon at regional level, which led to several attempts to define the sector, its activities and the position of the actors involved.

Among other Italian regions, the empirical analysis of this work is focused on the attention dedicated to youth work from Campania region, which is the result of the recent regional law concerning young people, in which reference is also made to the professional value of youth work (Reg. Law 26 of 8/8/2016, art 3), and the existence in the area of critical life conditions of young people.

The planning and courses of action implemented between 2007 and 2011 are identified in the keywords 'information', 'participation', 'mobility' and 'training' (e.g. "Regional Youth Information System", development of citizenship school; activation of international masters through regional agreements). Until 2015 a priority was clearly established with respect to information services, strengthened within the framework of regional youth programmes, and there was increasing interest in youth creativity (emerging art forms, young talent, innovative projects and facilitated funding instruments). In the long-term plan extending to 2020 (Campania Region, 2018) the policy guidelines are redefined with an inter-departmental approach (youth policies, training, start-ups, innovation and internationalisation, work, tourism) with priority given to optimising human capital, the promotion of innovative projects, participation and leadership on the part of young people in territorial development, mobility, volunteering, active citizenship and non-formal and informal education.

These guidelines form part of the previously examined context (sect. 2), which may be summarized having reference to the more serious aspects of employment issues, with respect to initiating a career and also remaining occupied, and to delays in the acquisition of economic independence and autonomy with respect to one's family of origin and in the development of autonomous life goals as individuals and in the attempt to create new families. The action of youth workers, with its multiple possibilities, focuses on this area, and, in particular, on supporting personal growth and inclusion with respect to both widespread situations of risk and hardship and standard level of social and youth welfare (since, as it will be dipped later, the youth work is not considered just as a social practice in response to conditions of precarious socio-economic well-being. It is from these considerations that the research question, that supports the analysis path detailed below, derives. The question concerns the representation and the opinion that the social actors involved in the national and Campania youth policies have about youth work.

In particular, with the research conducted on the Campano case, we intend to analyse a heterogeneous group of policy makers – on the base of the origin of their own organization - thus understanding the different points of view and the areas of convergence and diversification of opinions.

This objective, as anticipated, is in line with the theoretical perspective of the magic triangle, since the investigation involved operational actors in the political, institutional, practical and theoretical fields.

At the same time the objective of the research derives from the fact that it is necessary to understand the *status quo* of the representation of youth work at national and regional level, to then intervene through the development of new theoretical models and the definition of new and specific youth policies.

The conceptual mapping of the study presents the following categories of analysis: definition of youth work, areas and goals of the intervention, actors involved and their relationships, and results achievable through the implemented activities.

The focus aims to identify the current point of view concerning youth work sustained by the principal actors at national level and in the Campania region who, for their institutional mission, professional competence and duties - as administrators, politicians and involved social parties - have a role in defining and implementing policies for young people.

At the country-wide level, ten first-hand, national-level observers were interviewed, 3 of whom were youth workers. The other 7 subjects are key figures within Italian policy-making in institutional structures specialising in the field of youth concerns or currently involved in formal discussions, in legislative processes regarding youth work and in national and European projects on the subject. These individuals include, for the central institutions, an official of the Youth Department; among public bodies connected to the European networks an official delegated by the director of the National Youth Agency (ANG) and the president of Eurodesk Italy; for youth organisations a member of the steering committee of the National Youth Forum and the president of a national youth association (Amesci); for the professional sector a Youth Policy expert from Formez PA and, for the socio-educational area, an expert coordinator of advanced national networks of non-formal education and social development activities.

Also at the Campania level, ten first-hand observers were interviewed: three youth workers from the Campania region and seven members representing the sections of the Support Group for the Strategic Orientation of regional youth policies ('GOS', Reg. Exec. Resolution 450 of 6/10/2015) and, that is, the highest political-institutional levels, and other actors involved in regional policies. The latter are the Councillor for Youth Policies,

the Head of the Department for Education, Research, Work and Social and Cultural Policies (DIRLPSC), the Director of the Youth Policies Operational Management Unit, an official of the Directorate General for Education, Training, Work and Youth Policies (DGIFLPG), the President of the Regional Youth Forum and two university lecturers.

The interviews were conducted at various times over the period 2016-2018 and the operation of collecting information was divided into two stages:

1. administration via e-mail of a structured questionnaire aimed at acquiring the opinion of first-hand observers of the key issues and the overall vision of youth work. The questionnaire had the function of presenting the subject of the research and acquiring basic information: i.e., definition of youth work, affected dimensions and expected impact, opinions concerning specific aspects of youth work. The latter have been identified in accordance with the six macro-dimensions, suggested in the Australian research aimed at defining youth work, (already mentioned in §3, Archer, 2012), useful for outlining aspects of individual growth (such as responses to individual needs, strengthening self-confidence and personality), social aspects (ethics, culture, rights and youth empowerment, collective identity etc.), together with more functional/operational aspects of youth work (methodologies, approaches, communicative and relational trajectories) (Table 2).

2. a telephone or face-to-face, non-directive and unstructured interview, having as its starting point the answers of the questionnaire and, as a point of reference, an outline of the topics to be explored, which might vary in relation to the particular interlocutors and the flow of discourse.

The use of in-depth interviews conducted in a non-standardised fashion made it possible to fully explore the points of view of the interviewees. The course of the interview included three general themes, in which the key issues addressed in sect. 3 are summarised:

- *spheres and aims of youth work*, areas of activity and typical objectives;
- *subjects involved in youth work*, the areas of intervention, the professional figures involved and assigned organisations;
- *expected impacts of youth work*, impact sectors and achievable results with respect to the youth target.

Table 2 - Dimensions and indicators for the definition of youth work

| PROMOTING STRENGTHS AND CHANGE | WORKING ETHICALLY |
|---|---|
| 1. Using a strengths based, solution focussed approach to our work with young people<br>2. Recognising the worth of all young people and building on their assets and strengths<br>3. Helping young people make their own choices and learn from their own experiences<br>4. Showing young people what is possible and helping them achieve their own goals<br>5. Helping young people who need it to navigate the best possible pathway in life.<br>6. Being role models ourselves: setting an example in our own community<br>7. Building young people's belief in the possibility of change and their capacity to contribute to positive social and individual change<br>8. Helping young people to adjust to change and harness opportunities | 1.Being conscious of our structural power as a Youth Worker, and not taking power over young people<br>2. Particularly recognising the cultural context of marginalised young people and taking responsibility for learning to work in a culturally appropriate way<br>3. Being responsible for what we do, being able to justify it and remaining careful of how we use our power and influence with young people and their families.<br>4. Being clear about our ethical responsibilities to ourselves, young people, families, communities, our organisation and within the broader sector.<br>5. Being proud of our identity as a Youth Worker: supporting one another, seeking to ensure new colleagues understand what Youth Work means and educating other workers or services about young people and about our role |
| **MEETING YOUNG PEOPLE'S NEEDS** | **PROMOTING YOUTH RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT** |
| 1. Providing proactive and holistic support to young people<br>2. Providing young people with linkages to other services and supporting them in accessing these<br>3. Providing practical, useful support to address young people's real situations and needs including being able to provide consistent, longer term services for young people who may require more intensive support.<br>4. Using an integrated and broad range of models, tools and approaches consistent with providing youth centred, culturally appropriate services and supports. This includes community development and peer based projects as well as personal support.<br>5. Providing flexible support for young people outside formal, statutory systems.<br>6. Being prepared to offer diverse, flexible services and work in a multi-skilled way. | 1. Respecting and promoting young people's rights<br>2. Ensuring young people's voices are heard within their families and the broader community<br>3. Being solid and proud defenders of "youth culture:" challenging negative assumptions made about young people in our communities.<br>4. Encouraging and supporting young people to be agents of change – both individually and collectively at both a personal and social level<br>5. Helping young people to understand their rights and resourcing young people to address breaches of their human rights<br>6. Lobbying the government to improve the situation for young people<br>7.Promoting the actual and potential contributions of young people to the wider community<br>8. Advocating young people's right to actively participate in community life and access their fair share of community resources |
| **CULTURE, PLACE AND IDENTITY** | **PROVIDING INFORMAL, YOUTH CENTRED SUPPORT** |
| 1. Supporting positive connections between young people, their families and the broader community<br>2. Recognising the diversity amongst young people, and listening to and valuing individual young people's needs, ideas, preferences and choices<br>3. Supporting the development of young people's identity as an individual, within their family and as part of broader communities<br>4. Encouraging and supporting young people to take responsibility as active global, national and local citizens<br>5. Advocating for young people within their family and community<br>6. Recognising the integral relationship between young people and their family, community and society<br>7. Recognising that young people identify with a range of different cultures and supporting them in developing their own cultural identity<br>8. Helping parents, adults and elders to understand young people | 1. Working at the young person's pace<br>2. Maintaining young people's confidentiality<br>3. Remaining open-minded about people's backgrounds and circumstances and treating each situation individually<br>4. Providing youth centred services and supports in a friendly and informal way<br>5. Being there for young people<br>6. Genuinely caring about young people |

*Source: Archer (2012)*

As regards the areas and aims of youth work all actors attributed maximum importance to objectives concerning the development of the human and social capital of young people, involvement in democratic, civic and cultural life and the creation of opportunities.

Support in personal growth draws attention to the acquisition of skills, knowledge and competence (human capital), autonomy and responsibility (empowerment) and relational resources (social capital) useful for social inclusion, the achievement of professional and economic goals and reaching stages relating to the transition to adulthood: "The activities of the operators assume particular importance at the moments of transition/rupture that mark their life trajectories and which require awareness, the assumption of responsibility, a definition/redefinition of one's life project" (DGIFLPG Directorate). In this regard, importance is attached to the function of 'facilitating the participation of young people in social, educational, informal training and mobility experiences, which may result in significant growth processes for an appropriate transition to adulthood'" (Youth Policies expert, Formez PA).

Furthermore, emphasis is placed on the purpose of promoting youth activism, conceived both in the perspective of individual development and for purposes of general interest:

> "The aims of youth work always present a dual purpose. The involvement of young people in participatory processes and in public life reflects democratic principles but also favours responsibility [...]to nurture resources for their personal development but, at the same time, also for the development of the community and territory of " (Head of Department, DIRLPSC).

The usefulness of youth work for all young people is jointly recognised by the interviewees. The heterogeneity present in the world of youth workers is linked to the different segments with which each operators works; thus, an interviewed youth worker:

> "Youth workers do not only act in the presence of hardship and to combat crime; they are also active in completely different contexts: hardship is experienced also by young people who are highly-educated and who struggle to become autonomous and who grow up with serious difficulties in building social capital and in their active inclusion in social and public life. It is also important to allow the value of young people to emerge and to take action not only to address malaise and hardship".

But there are other perspectives that attribute the main value of youth work in particular contexts that involved disadvantaged young people. In this sense educational work may be seen as the capacity to provide responses in the presence of specific critical issues:

"Letting them have a gym instead of simply helping them start off on life's journey means offering them a place to go every day, a point of reference that will always be there. [...] Working withpeople of different ages, totally different methods and strategies are required, and different solutions must be provided" (youth operator in a 'district at risk').

"Youth workers are highly motivated people; they are capable of listening to others and creating empathic relationships, but always retaining a good level of judgement and self-irony, and they are strongly oriented towards the protection of rights, adopting an 'advocacy' approach [...]in particular, in the case of young people who have to shoulder the burden of particular social disadvantages, especially in areas where urban poverty is concentrated" (University lecturer, GOS Strategic Orientation Group).

"A particular need for youth workers may be identified in all young people who have fewer opportunities to achieve emancipation in the context in which they live on account of material poverty, a lack of stimuli and information, a high level of conformism, and the remoteness of opportunities and services" (Expert on non-formal training processes).

"[A particular need for youth workers occurs] in young people with fewer opportunities and, for example, those with economic, educational, geographical, social, cultural difficulties and health issues" (Official at the Youth Department).

With regard to the typical areas of youth work activity, the key observers were asked to indicate the main *sphere* of intervention among the following: volunteering and area projects; art, music and creativity; free time and social life; forms of activism; non-formal learning; sports and physical activities. All of the respondents felt that the primary factor is non-formal learning, activities that are not specifically structured in terms of objectives, timing, resources and programmes (Cedefop, 2009).

Regarding the *subjects involved in youth work*, it is clear to the policy makers interviewed that the socio-educational operators are distinguished from the professionally recognized figures in the formal education. The sphere of education in the field of youth work was mainly associated with training models based on traditional programmes and methodologies (teacher-centred/classroom methods, workshop activities with a low level of interaction etc).

In fact, compared to the idea of innovative paths, the interviewees recognized the role of youth workers in non-formal learning field, giving back two prevailing perspectives. The first, based on "educational models" orient-

ed mainly at strengthening youth participation in the social and collective sphere, towards participatory practices and active citizenship as proposed by a member of Eurodesk Italy.

The second perspective goes beyond the strictly social or educational dimensions, but brings out the recognition of a 'leading figure' in the individual growing processes, which uses innovative methodologies:

> "In non-formal educational contexts youth workers must be able to adapt in a flexible manner to the needs of the young people they are assisting, creating for them or placing at their disposal contexts and opportunities for learning or for change. [...] In such protected contexts a young person can afford to make mistakes, acquire direct personal experience through learning methods different from those adopted in the scholastic and family environments" (official at ANG).

> "Youth workers must have a good knowledge of the young people environment they intend to assist. They should typically and constantly adopt an informal approach in their action so as to distance themselves from the [traditional] view and attitude of teachers that tends to alienate young people. [...]" (president of the Regional Youth Forum).

> "Youth worker is a person who operates together with and for young people, in formal and informal contexts, as a counsellor, coach, motivator and problem-solver, not necessarily in situations of distress (not a social worker)" (university lecturer, Regional Observatory of Youth Policies).

In a statement that combines institutional actors and unconventional educational paths, it is recognised as

> "very useful - and, indeed, necessary - to have a structured and not merely an occasional form of cooperation between actors operating in the field of education and training on the one hand, and also actors active in the area of extracurricular and formal supplementary education and, that is, civic life and the organisation of free time and recreational and cultural activities (the environment, culture, social life, theatre, individual expression, civic engagement, the spiritual-religious dimension, sport, etc.)" (Regional Councillor, Youth Policies).

All of the respondents support the importance of cooperative networking models.

> "The logic of networking is fundamental among actors in the private-social sector, at the public level and in voluntary associations. I don't believe in freelance youth workers who operate on their own. [...]" (Expert in non-formal training processes).

Among the different subject involved in the youth work sector, there are different types of organisation too. With respect to the types of organisation, all operators would tend to place value on the actors closest to their own category, whether this is an institution, an association, etc. The respondents linked to public administration bodies consider as relevant the contribution of public and youth centres and social services, ranking them higher than other associations; the latter, however, are compared mainly with the work of youth forums, by the representatives of the Forums themselves, by the ANG, Eurodesk and Amesci. Unlike the other respondents, the two latter groups, together with the Forums also consider as important the support of private subjects, such as agencies and for-profit youth centres.

The inability to define the professional boundaries of a youth worker derives from an attribution of transversal competences:

> "A youth worker is a social activator who works with young people within groups, organisations and local communities in order to facilitate the progressive emancipation of young people and their increasingly complete assumption of an adult role in society. These operators will have a varied background (teaching, sociology, social psychology, history, philosophy, economy, art) of a non-univocal nature. Their main area of intervention is the so-called 'non-formal' context [...] Youth workers will not necessarily be experts in artistic dimensions or 'language', but will be capable of involving other professionals, ensuring an experiential learning path. [...]" (Expert in non-formal training processes).

> "For example, linking the training, communication and information systems for youth workers would allow a positive 'contamination' of knowledge and skills held by the individual categories of actors. This sharing is indeed very useful as the activities of the youth worker are, in fact, kind of cross-border [...]" (president, Eurodesk Italy).

The last key issue addressed in the analysis regards the *expected impact* of youth work, which have been classified into social, welfare, ethical, civic and cultural impacts, all traceable in the interviews.

*Social impacts* of youth work are related to its ability of promoting strengths and social change, young people empowerment in terms of life choices and opportunities.

The *impact on welfare* is construed as corresponding to the offer of personalised support services. In the view of the respondents, the result is mainly constituted by a set of diversified and integrated instruments which are thus flexible and distinct from traditional institutional systems approaches. This view is expressed by the regional political-institutional actors, together with the ANG.

The *ethical impact* of youth work, instead, is reflected in the responsibilities of operators with respect to young people, families, communities and in the thoughtful and empathetic management of relationships with young people which will determine their growth.

Referring to the *civic impact*, the focus is oriented on the dimension of empowerment as a promotion of the rights of young people and their sense of responsibility; recognition of the role of young people as agents of change and access to dedicated resources is supported.

The dimension of *cultural impact* also highlights the importance of working on a sense of responsibility and civic activism, this time in order to build a territorial identity. In this regard with respect to the identification and variation of the commitment and responsibility of young people with respect to the various territorial areas of interest - global, national and local – there is a broad agreement among the interviewees.

## Conclusions

The diversity of the views encountered denotes a field that presents articulated and evolving aspects, confirming a relatively unconsolidated stage of reflection and elaboration of dedicated policies, at both the national and regional levels.

From the surveys certain characteristics emerge, however, which define youth work as it is conceived by the key witnesses who were interviewed:

- a positive vision of youth work, which is not deemed to be just a process for the prevention of risks; this is not an obvious position, especially considering the presence of interviewed policy makers in a region characterized by high crime rates, baby gang, social degradation and even educational poverty. Obviously, the so-called young people 'at risk' remain an important target of youth work, but its range of action is not reduced to that particular category.
- a transversal nature in terms of the recipients; it is not opportune to restrict youth work to segments of disadvantaged young people rather it should be extended to all members of the younger generations; indeed there is a recognition of a wider role of the youth worker with respect to the different targets, considering also its role in spreading among young people the importance of participation, activism, citizenship and youth empowerment.
- a concept of youth work linked more to the structuring of identity and social inclusion than to training activities, where the latter are conceived as simple practices aimed to transfer specific competences (such as soft skills, digital/linguistic competences, etc.);

- the cross-border nature of the profession, whereby distinctions existing between the public, private and third sectors are overcome, with a view to embracing a logic of cooperative networking.

This model requires greater interconnections between the different territorial levels, and among different institutional subjects, private and social actors.

This expansion of actors network, as emerged from the survey, in the field also requires greater sharing of the knowledge bases with respect to this area of policies. The transdisciplinary nature of the professional competence required in youth work and the indispensable role of experience in the field, empathic sensitivity and interpersonal skills. All professional traits that are difficult to gain with qualifications, mostly because theyare strictly related to aptitudes and skills that mature through practice.

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