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The Impact of the Coronavirus on the Life Trajectories of Young People and the Emotional Consequences. A Comparative Analysis in Five European Countries

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The Impact of the Coronavirus on the Life Trajectories of Young People and the Emotional Consequences. A Comparative Analysis in Five European Countries

Diego Mesa

Abstract: The study investigates the emotional impact on young people in five countries resulting from the choice to postpone the implementation of some resolutions concerning work and family due to the Pandemic. A quantitative analysis is proposed based on an online survey carried out in the period April-May 2020 on 6,000 young people aged 18-34 from 5 European countries (Italy, Spain, UK, France and Germany). The questions refer to different life markers: leaving the family of origin, cohabitation, marriage, the choice of having a child, looking for a job or changing the current job, changing house and city. Compared to other countries, young Italians show higher levels of renunciation of planned projects and high negative moods. The intensity of negative moods (frustration, anxiety, discomfort, disorientation...) increases, passing from those who do not have any short-term change plans, to those who have them and intend to carry them out as planned, to those who have had to temporally review their programs to those who have abandoned them. The results of a multiple regression show the significant effects of country of residence, education, employment status and relationship status on negative emotional states.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Youth transitions, Emotional states, Comparative research, Life plans

1. Rethinking life transitions of young people in time of the Coronavirus

The global health emergency of the Coronavirus has had a huge impact on the lives of people around the world. This study intends to investigate how the pandemic has affected the emotional state of young people and their life projects in five of the principal Western European countries affected by the Coronavirus: Italy, Spain, Germany, France and the United Kingdom. Italy, in particular, is the first European state to have faced the outbreak of the pandemic and to have implemented drastic containment measures such as lock-down periods at a national or regional level starting from March 2020.

If, on the one hand, young people are among the least affected segments of the population from the point of view of health, on the other, they are among the most affected by the consequences that the pandemic has produced in terms of fewer opportunities of education and work (Oecd, 2020). In terms of the possibilities of local, national and international mobility, they were significantly penalized, as a result of the restrictions that particularly concerned students and those who did not carry out activities considered to be a priority.

In other words, the Coronavirus emergency has produced a radical historical discontinuity in social and economic systems with negative effects on the daily life of populations.

In light of this new scenario, a reflection is required on the impact on the life trajectories of young people as well as on the adequacy of the interpretative models with which to approach the phenomenon.

The starting point of classical studies in this area is the idea that becoming an adult on a social level involves a series of life changes (transitions) according to an ideal trajectory that goes from a condition of dependence and cohabitation with the family of origin to a status of economic independence, housing autonomy and the establishment of a family (Modell, Furstemberg & Hershberg, 1976).

Some authors have shown the significant variability of transition models according to the different geographical macro-areas of origin along with the social and cultural conditions of young people (Cavalli & Galland, 1996). It has been noted, for example, that in the countries of the Mediterranean area and above all in Italy, young people stay much longer in their family of origin (Cicchelli & Galland, 2009). This does not mean, according to this interpretation, that they do not become adults, but that they become adults following their specific model (Cuzzocrea, Bello & Kazepov, 2020). According to others, the speed and pervasiveness of social changes of late modernity have led to a greater individualization of life paths, with a consequent decline of the concept of normal biography in favour of an idea of a choice or do-it-yourself biography (Beck 2000). However, the substantial emphasis on the excess of pos-

sibilities and the self-determination of individuals risks providing a distorted and poorly contextualized representation of the life trajectories of young people, proposing a generalization of the de-standardization of transitions rather than clarifying the differences and analyzing the reasons (Brannen & Nilsen, 2005; Brückner & Mayer, 2005).

In agreement with other authors (Walther, 2012; Besozzi, 2009), this study proposes not to abandon the idea of youth as a transition to adult life, but to rethink this transition in procedural and not normative terms. Work and family relations continue to represent relevant areas of achievement for most young people today even if they are not the only ones.

There is a need to adopt a more extensive concept of transition (Roberts, 2018) capable of embracing different spheres of life (school-working, housing, family, but also associative and political participation and lifestyle consumption...). Moreover, it is important to consider life trajectories from the point of view of young people: the perception of their situation, their ultimate concerns and their plans for change in the short and medium term.

Starting from a non-reductionist vision of the mutual influence of structure and agency (Archer, 2003) it is assumed that i) the macro-social factors contribute to configuring the situation in which II) the social actors find themselves making choices and acting and then III) the outcomes of these actions (such as proactive choices) have, at an aggregate level, effects on the macro-social level.

In this perspective, it is important to study in greater detail the way in which young people make (or postpone) decisions concerning their lives and to consider different subjective and objective factors that intervene in the decision-making process.

2. How young people make choices in their life trajectories

In time of the Coronavirus not only do researchers need to rethink on the life paths of young people, but also young people themselves are more inclined to reflect themselves on what they want and what they can do in the current situation. The uncertainty generated by the health crisis forces them to readjust their behaviour day by day and to constantly review their practical projects. This is a pre-existing process that has been accelerated by the pandemic. The continuous social and cultural morphogenesis of contemporary societies entails a continuous change in life situations as well as a consequent fragmentation and multiplication of the processes of choice. This does not necessarily involve a renunciation of the assumption of a design perspective but a change in how the subjects reflectively mediate between the constraints/resources of the context and their fundamental concerns.

In other words, this complex situation stresses the crucial role of reflexivity in planning a biography and adapting to changes (Leccardi, 2005). In Archer's perspective, the assumption underlying the decision-making and practical processes of the actors is their reflexivity, understood as "the regular exercise of the mental capacity, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their contexts (social) and vice versa" (2009, p. 111). The ability to consider oneself as the object of one's reflection is the prerequisite for the deliberative processes that lead to individual action: awareness of one's concern, the choice of action projects, the consolidation of practices in one's own *modus vivendi*. This position is far from utilitarian approaches and rational choice theories that describe decision making in terms of an abstract cost-benefit calculation. In this view, the self-awareness that underlies decision making stems from people's internal conversation, in other words, the concrete way in which people converse between self (subject) and self (object of reflection) whenever practical questions arise and decisions need to be made, whether they concern simple problems of everyday life whether they refer to basic choices (Archer, 2003).

3. The role of emotions and moods on decision-making processes

Specifically, this work intends to study in greater detail the role that emotions and emotional states assume in the decision-making processes regarding life changes that take shape through internal conversations.

In time of the Coronavirus, the question is what is the emotional condition of young people a few months after the onset of the pandemic and how much negative emotions and emotional states are linked to their life plans in the short term.

From a theoretical point of view, the question of the role played by emotional aspects in social life is as controversial as that of their status.

The conceptualisation of the status of emotions ranges from positivist views that consider them mainly as organic phenomena to visions that emphasise their nature of socially constructed products (Kemper, 1981). Although there is no consensus on classifications, recent perspectives tend to distinguish primary emotions, which are more universal and close to the physiological bases of human beings, from the more characterised and culturally differentiated ones that are developed through socialisation. Different degrees of structuring are also distinguished. Moods are described as a set of feelings that can vary in intensity and duration, and usually involve more than one emotion (Lane & Terry, 2000).

In accordance with this way of articulating the question, it is assumed that human emotions are complex emergent phenomena involving both the organic level (body-nervous system) and the level of sensory information

about the self, social others and the environment, as well as the cognitive level (Williams, 2001).

Regarding the role of the emotional component in social life, classical sociological theory, on the one hand, recognises the importance of the affective dimension in social relations, especially in primary groups and community networks, while on the other, emotionality is associated with forms of action which, like habitual actions, are endowed with little rationality (Weber, 1992, Pareto, 1964). In other words, the ambivalence of the reason-emotion relationship is also present in contemporary psychological theories that highlight the existence in decision-making processes of automatic, intuitive and affective mental processes on the one hand, and controlled, deliberate and cognitive processes on the other (Kanheman & Frederick 2002), which would be at the basis of automatic or controlled social behaviour (Chaiken & Trope, 1999). Some authors have articulated the reasoning by proposing a multi-process model that provides different levels of impact of the emotional states in decision-making processes depending on the task, the decision-making context and the characteristics of the subject. Forgas (1995) identifies four different information processing strategies, each characterised by a particular influence of mood on the judgement. In *direct access*, mostly used when the stimulus is familiar, the subject uses previously processed responses independent of mood. In *motivated processing*, processing depends on motivational factors associated more with the emotional state than with the situation. In *heuristic processing*, adopted in situations where the individual has no particular motivation or purpose, the mood may serve to select decision processes already available in memory. *Substantive processing* is a more accurate and in-depth type of processing adopted for atypical, unusual and complex tasks in which the emotional state activates information in memory that influences the evaluation of the situation. Some authors have shown that the negative mood facilitates the adoption of this strategy, favouring an in-depth and analytical analysis of the decision-making situation (Frijda, 1986).

Choices related to life changes (changing home, job, family status, country...) are more congruent with the last type of situation.

This study therefore assumes that emotional states, i.e. complexes of relatively stable emotions, can play an active a synergetic role in life decisions, acting not only implicitly and automatically, but also emerging in inner conversation as “emotional commentaries on the situation” and support of deliberative processes (Archer, 2000). This inner dialogue between thoughts and feelings is the precondition for the subject to develop a certain level of awareness of his or her emotional states and eventually to make them an object of communication with the others.

We assume that, following the changes in scenario generated by the pandemic, a significant proportion of young people have been pressured into

revising their life plans in the short term by postponing some choices already made or postponing them indefinitely, with the option of abandonment being strongly associated with negative moods.

A few months after the beginning of the health emergency, starting from a non-regulatory view of the processes of transition to adult life, we wanted to investigate four main questions:

- i) in which spheres of life have young people most planned changes in the short term?
- ii) in which spheres of life have they most expressed the intention to postpone or abandon their planned projects?
- iii) to what extent the abandonment of plans in the different spheres is associated with negative moods?
- iv) in addition to the project changes imposed by the pandemic, what macro-social, social status and personal factors influence the negative mood of young people?

4. Data and methods

The study is based on data from an international survey on the state of the new generations in the age of the Coronavirus and on post-pandemic expectations, which was funded by the Osservatorio Giovani dell'Istituto Giuseppe Toniolo di Studi Superiori and carried out by Ipsos (a multinational market research and consulting firm) between the end of March and the beginning of April 2020 (Toniolo, 2020). The target of the survey was a representative sample of young people aged 18-34: about 2000 in Italy and 1000 in each of the other major European countries: Germany, France, Spain and the United Kingdom.

Five sphere of life were considered. For each domain, one or two life plans were taken into account for a total of eight items.

Table 1- Sphere of life and life plans explored

Spheres of life	Life plans
Housing	Going to live on your own Changing houses
Couple and family life	Going to live with a partner Getting married Having/conceiving a child
Job	Looking for work Changing jobs
Geographical mobility	Changing cities/towns

To explore question i) the propensity or otherwise of young people to assume one or more decisions in these sphere of life during the 2020s was surveyed.

To explore question ii) those who responded positively were asked if the Coronavirus emergency had interfered with their life plans, where “plan” means the life plans listed in the table. The possible answers were: “No, the plan is still in place for 2020”; “The plan is still in place but I have had to postpone it”; “For now, I have abandoned the plan”.

The moods of young people were surveyed with the Italian Mood Scale (ITAMS) (Quartiroli, Terry & Fogarty, 2017). This tool is the Italian adaptation of the Brunel Mood Scale, BRUMS (Terry et al., 1999). The ITAMS is made up of 24 items that refer to different moods (such as “tense”, “strong”, “exhausted” or “uncertain”) divided into six dimensions: anger, confusion, depression, fatigue, tension and strength. Participants were asked: “Today, on a scale of one to ten, to what extent do you feel ...”. Items were measured on a ten-point Likert scale from one (“Not at all”) to ten (“A lot”).

For question iii) the variations of the average of the emotional states in relation to the choice of maintaining, postponing or abandoning the life plans were compared. To investigate question iv) six multiple regressions, one for each of the six emotional dimensions of ITAMS, were carried out with the aim of measuring the cumulative effect of the decisions on life plans and the incidence of macro-social, contextual and personal factors.

5. Results: changes in choice and emotional states

5.1. The propensity to change on life trajectories

A first glance at Table 2 shows that “not planned” is the prevalent answer to projects in the pipeline for 2020 considered in all the items. It does not mean that the majority of young people have planned anything. Combining the answers of all the items, only 24.1% of the respondents do not have any plans.

Table 2 - Events that were being planned in 2020 before the pandemic broke out by country (percentage values)

	Italy	Germany	France	Spain	UK
Going to live on your own					
1. Not planned	64.5	73.3	67.2	73.0	73.8
2. I was considering it but hadn't made any plans	22.5	20.6	16.9	15.8	14.6
3. Yes. I was planning on it	13.1	6.1	15.9	11.2	11.6

Changing houses					
1. Not planned	62.4	64.8	62.7	63.0	58.5
2. I was considering it but hadn't made any plans	22.4	22.1	18.6	18.2	22.6
3. Yes. I was planning on it	15.2	13.1	18.7	18.8	18.9
Going to live with a partner					
1. Not planned	70.0	74.9	68.8	72.6	78.0
2. I was considering it but hadn't made any plans	18.5	15.5	12.5	15.1	10.6
3. Yes. I was planning on it	11.5	9.6	18.7	12.3	11.4
Getting married					
1. Not planned	76.8	79.0	80.6	79.8	79.2
2. I was considering it but hadn't made any plans	16.8	14.2	11.8	12.4	12.2
3. Yes. I was planning on it	6.5	6.8	7.6	7.8	8.6
Having/conceiving a child					
1. Not planned	73.4	78.6	72.5	78.4	76.4
2. I was considering it but hadn't made any plans	17.5	14.4	15.7	13.2	12.9
3. Yes. I was planning on it	9.2	7.0	11.8	8.4	10.7
Looking for work					
1. Not planned	47.7	59.1	51.7	44.3	56.2
2. I was considering it but hadn't made any plans	26.5	20.1	19.3	18.7	19.0
3. Yes. I was planning on it	25.9	20.8	29.0	36.9	24.8
Changing jobs					
1. Not planned	63.1	56.5	63.7	68.3	62.0
2. I was considering it but hadn't made any plans	23.1	23.7	17.6	15.8	18.8
3. Yes. I was planning on it	13.9	19.8	18.7	15.9	19.2
Changing cities/towns					
1. Not planned	69.7	71.2	66.2	71.9	73.3
2. I was considering it but hadn't made any plans	19.8	18.6	18.2	15.9	17.8
3. Yes. I was planning on it	10.5	10.2	15.6	12.2	8.9

N. = 6000

Looking more analytically at the answer “not planned”, it emerges that young people most frequently state that they have no plans for change in 2020 in the sphere of couple and family life: going to live with a partner, getting married and having/conceiving a child. This situation is quite common in all the countries surveyed. The main difference is in the decision to cohabit, with a difference of more than nine percentage points between young people in the United Kingdom, who have the highest share of respondents without cohabitation plans, and young people in France, who conversely have the lowest share. At an intermediate level, there are the decisions to go to live alone and change the city or country. The most significant difference concerns the choice to live alone, where young people from Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom plan less than the French and Italians. The three items with the lowest “not planned” response rates are moving house, changing job and first of all looking for a job. The most significant differences regard the employment sphere. In the search for a job, the Germans say more frequently that they have no plans and the Spaniards have the lowest percentages. On the contrary, the situation is reversed in the choice of changing job. This can be explained by the fact that the share of German respondents who are already employed (66%) is much higher than that of the Spaniards (48.2%). Considering the positive response modes, it is clear that young Italians are the most undecided: they have the highest frequency of answers “I was considering the but hadn’t made any plans” in five out of the eight fields. In the remaining two (changing jobs and house), they are in second place. Concerning concretely defined plans, German young people have the lowest percentage of projects in six out of the eight fields.

5.2. How life plans have changed since the Coronavirus

The young people who stated that they had considered or planned changes in 2020 were asked, for each area, whether their planning intentions had been confirmed, postponed or abandoned. Table 3 does not show any significant differences in the frequency distributions of the answers on the different items. “Postponing” is the prevailing strategy in all the life domains.

Table 3 - Possible modification of the plan following the coronavirus emergency by country¹ (percentage values out of the total of young people who considered their achievement during the year)²

	Italy	Germany	France	Spain	UK	Total
Going to live on your own						
Confirmed	19.7	30.6	31.6	19.3	25.2	24.1
Postponed	45.6	46.3	55.3	51.5	50.8	49.0
Abandoned	34.7	23.1	13.1	29.3	24.0	26.8
Going to live with a partner						
Confirmed	23.2	36.9	41.5	26.4	30.6	30.2
Postponed	43.3	50.4	43.7	52.7	51.6	47.1
Abandoned	33.5	12.7	14.8	20.9	17.8	22.7
Getting married						
Confirmed	16.6	28.9	18.0	20.2	24.9	20.7
Postponed	43.0	53.6	58.8	57.1	50.7	50.6
Abandoned	40.4	17.5	23.2	22.7	24.4	28.6
Having/conceiving a child						
Confirmed	25.6	30.8	32.0	21.3	23.0	26.5
Postponed	38.0	55.1	50.5	49.5	57.9	47.7
Abandoned	36.5	14.0	17.5	29.2	19.1	25.8
Looking for work						
Confirmed	24.8	34.0	39.3	36.5	26.9	31.0
Postponed	46.2	54.3	51.7	52.0	56.0	50.8
Abandoned	28.9	11.7	9.1	11.5	17.1	18.2
Changing jobs						
Confirmed	20.5	35.4	34.7	28.0	25.5	27.6
Postponed	43.6	53.6	52.9	54.1	52.6	50.1
Abandoned	35.9	11.0	12.4	17.9	21.8	22.3
Changing houses						

¹ For a detailed commentary on the results of the items related to family sphere, see Rosina 2020.

² "Going to live on your own" N. = 1839, "Going to live with a partner" N. = 1657, "Getting married" N. = 1250, "Having/conceiving a child" N. = 1473, "Looking for work" N. = 2934, "Changing jobs" N. = 2232, "Changing houses" N. = 2261, "Changing cities/towns" N. = 1782.

Confirmed	17.6	34.7	31.4	22.2	21.7	24.0
Postponed	47.8	48.6	54.7	53.5	56.6	51.6
Abandoned	34.6	16.8	13.9	24.3	21.7	24.4
Changing cities/ towns						
Confirmed	15.5	34.3	29.3	22.3	27.7	24.1
Postponed	45.5	45.0	51.8	60.6	54.3	50.3
Abandoned	39.0	20.8	18.9	17.0	18.0	25.6

Finding a job and moving in with others have a slightly higher percentage of confirmed plans. There are, however, more marked differences between the states.

The most evident fact concerns the fragility of the project choices of young Italians, who have the lowest percentages of confirmed projects in seven out of the eight life plans. Young Italians also have the highest percentages of project abandonment in all the areas of life. French and German young people show a higher overall retention of project intentions. Both have the highest percentage of confirmations in four items. Additionally, the Germans have the lowest drop-out rates in four items and the French in three. Cohabitation projects have the highest confirmation rate in Germany, France and the UK. In Italy, the decision to have children is in the first place, in Spain the projects to find a job. The most sacrificed projects in Italy, France and the UK concern marriage. In Germany, the choice to live alone is given up more, in Spain the choice to have children.

5.3. Moods and plans for change

Table 3 shows the average ITAMS perception scores in each country. The scale ranged from one to ten, meaning that a score of 5.5 or higher indicates, on average, the increasing presence of that emotion or mood.

The emotional state generally appears to be low or just below average. The lowest perceived emotional states are anger and confusion, while those with significantly higher values are tension and especially strength. It is indicative that the dimension with the highest average is the one with the most positive valence. However, the analyses do demonstrate significant differences between countries. Italians describe five moods as more intense than their counterparts in other countries.

The sixth dimension, strength, has a positive connotation and is perceived with greater intensity by young French people who also express the lowest average of fatigue. Young Germans express the lowest averages of anger, confusion, depression and tension. Respondents from the United Kingdom have the lowest values of strength.

Table 4 - Dimensions of ITAMS by Country

		Anger	Confusion	Depression	Fatigue	Tension	Strength
Italy	Mean	4,986	5,072	5,014	5,163	5,818	5,554
	Std. dev.	2,141	2,098	2,261	2,129	2,094	1,666
UK	Mean	3,954	4,233	4,246	4,666	4,822	4,622
	Std. dev.	2,098	1,978	2,229	2,179	2,241	1,585
Germany	Mean	3,513	3,635	3,760	4,681	4,131	5,182
	Std. dev.	1,982	1,923	2,071	1,972	1,972	1,742
France	Mean	3,683	3,988	4,084	4,179	4,910	5,709
	Std. dev.	1,996	1,974	2,096	1,973	2,122	1,679
Spain	Mean	4,130	4,341	4,680	4,684	5,205	5,067
	Std. dev.	2,144	2,138	2,304	2,086	2,146	1,656
Total	Mean	4,209	4,390	4,466	4,756	5,117	5,281
	Std. dev.	2,164	2,104	2,255	2,106	2,193	1,706

N = 6000

If we cross the answers concerning the propensity to plan with the emotional states, we observe a recurring pattern: young people who decided to postpone their plans are in first place for emotional intensity. This is followed in descending order by the young people who decided to postpone their projects and then those who confirmed their projects. The only exception is the emotional state of vigour, which is more intensely associated with those who confirmed their plans to move in together, have a child, change house or city. The young people who did not express any plans were in all the spheres with the lowest degree of emotional intensity.

Table 5 shows the emotional states of those who decided to abandon their life plans.

There are three life decisions in which the most intense emotional states are recorded, with all referring to couple relationships: marriage, the project of having a child and above all cohabitation. The abandonment of cohabitation projects sees five emotional dimensions out of six with averages above the threshold score of 5.5. Tension is the emotional dimension most intensely associated with the abandonment of projects in all the spheres of life.

Table 5 - Dimensions of ITAMS by choice to abandon projects³

		Anger	Confusion	Depression	Fatigue	Tension	Strength
Going to live on your own	Mean	5,098	5,157	5,291	5,301	5,813	5,499
	Std. dev.	2,117	2,073	2,236	2,105	2,138	1,735
Going to live with a partner	Mean	5,337	5,377	5,506	5,500	5,985	5,524
	Std. dev.	2,251	2,132	2,354	2,232	2,161	1,859
Getting married	Mean	5,221	5,319	5,311	5,597	6,064	5,639
	Std. dev.	2,254	2,129	2,369	2,188	2,218	1,714
Having/ conceiving a child	Mean	5,180	5,171	5,411	5,486	6,069	5,471
	Std. dev.	2,290	2,156	2,272	2,187	2,137	1,825
Looking for work	Mean	5,133	5,266	5,357	5,408	5,891	5,322
	Std. dev.	2,200	2,113	2,229	2,167	2,134	1,705
Changing jobs	Mean	5,122	5,085	5,228	5,249	5,827	5,396
	Std. dev.	2,198	2,126	2,282	2,204	2,182	1,733
Changing houses	Mean	5,052	5,168	5,205	5,333	5,800	5,400
	Std. dev.	2,209	2,032	2,258	2,101	2,143	1,828
Changing cities/ towns	Mean	5,017	5,021	5,134	5,248	5,667	5,387
	Std. dev.	2,206	2,036	2,299	2,139	2,137	1,799

5.4. Factors influencing moods

After an initial descriptive analysis, we move on to exploratory analysis of the factors influencing the formation of the investigated moods. The explanatory variables are indicated in Table 6.

Firstly, two individual variables are considered: gender and age; secondly, the cultural background represented by the educational qualification. This is followed by the variables defining the respondents' current living conditions in the spheres of school-work career, housing independence and living together. The influence of the macro-social context through the country of

³ "Going to live on your own" N. = 494, "Going to live with a partner" N. = 376, "Getting married N. = 365, "Having/conceiving a child N. = 381, "Looking for work N. = 533, "Changing jobs N. = 498, "Changing houses N° = 551, "Changing cities/towns N° = 456.

origin is also considered. Finally, the influence of the propensity to plan is also assessed as an indicator of young people's agency.

Table 6 - Independent variables included in multiple regression

Independent variables	%
Gender	
Male (reference)	50.8
Female	49.2
Age	
18-23 years (reference)	24.8
24-29 years	39.3
30-34 years	35.9
Educational attainment	
Primary education (reference)	21.5
Secondary education	49.1
Tertiary education	29.4
Main activity	
Only worker (reference)	43.0
Only student	23.1
Student&worker	12.4
Neet	21.5
Living condition 1	
Living not alone (reference)	85.3
Living alone	14.7
Living condition 2	
Don't live with parents (reference)	61.3
Living with parents	38.7
Living condition 3	
Don't live with partner (reference)	59.4
Living with partner	40.6
Parenting	
No child (reference)	80.2
They have children	19.8
Cowtry	
Italy (reference)	33.2

UK	16.7
Germany	16.7
France	16.7
Spain	16.7
Propensity to plan	
No plan (reference)	24.1
All plans confirmed	17.9
Some plans confirmed, some postponed or abandoned	44.8
All plans abandoned	13.2

N. = 6000

Table 7 shows the results of six multiple regressions. Each model takes a specific emotional dimension of ITAMS as the dependent variable (scale of 1 to 10)⁴ and estimates the regression coefficients of the qualitative dummy variables described in table 6.

Table 7 - Results of multiple regressions of six dimensions of ITAMS

	Anger	Confusion	Depression	Fatigue	Tension	Strength
Independent variables						
Gender						
Male	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Female	,022*	,074***	,093***	,127***	,121***	-,184***
Age						
18-23 years	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
24-29 years	,016	,004	,028*	,019	,047*	,020
30-34 years	,014	,012	,049*	,004	,059**	,005
Educational attainment						
Primary education	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Secondary education	-,033*	-,027*	-,043*	-,067***	-,037*	-,046*
Tertiary education	-,059***	-,025	-,066***	-,053**	-,041*	-,013
Main activity						
Only worker	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.

⁴ The mean and standard deviations of the dependent variables are shown in the row of totals in Table 4.

Only student	,025	,083***	,055***	,064***	,027*	-,020
Student&worker	,069***	,081***	,063***	,050***	,055***	,047**
Neet	,047***	,055***	,069***	,042**	,049***	-,097***
Living condition 1						
Living not alone	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Living alone	,043**	,036*	,031	,055**	,015	,020
Living condition 2						
Don't live with parents	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Living with parents	,012	,018	,016	,026	,004	,003
Living condition 3						
Don't live with partner	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Living with partner	,000	,001	-,018	,041*	-,011	,068**
Parenting						
No child	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
They have children	,052***	,020	,010	,061***	,051***	,048**
Country						
Italy	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
UK	-,165***	-,130***	-,103***	-,074***	-,157***	-,219***
Germany	-,238***	-,234***	-,182***	-,066***	-,264***	-,102***
France	-,209***	-,175***	-,129***	-,164***	-,138***	,023
Spain	-,147***	-,132***	-,053***	-,087***	-,104***	-,115***
Propensity to plan						
No plan	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
All plans confirmed	,009	,032*	,019	,022	,014	,011
Some plans confirmed, some postponed or aband.	,166***	,173***	,161***	,120***	,135***	-,005
All plans abandoned	,124***	,122***	,126***	,094***	,122***	-,002
Pseudo-R2	,108	,102	,088	,066	,118	,102
(Robust standard errors)	***p<0.01, ** p<0.05, *p<0.1					

N = 6000

Regarding personal characteristics, gender appears to have a significant relationship with all the moods investigated. Women tend to state that they feel less vigour and more intensity in all the other emotional states, in particular, they feel more fatigue and tension. Conversely, there is no significant effect of age, apart from a greater level of tension among young people in the 30-34 age group. A higher level of education helps to reduce anger, depression and fatigue. Having a job is a protective factor against negative moods. Students tend to be at a higher risk of confusion, depression and fatigue. Working students and NEETs show higher levels of intensity in all the states surveyed, with the difference that working students feel more vigorous while NEETs feel less so.

With regard to living conditions, the effects are less significant overall. The most significant effect concerns young people with children, who express anger, fatigue, tension and strength more strongly.

Net of the effects of the other variables, the data of the country of origin show how the condition of living in Italy is highly associated with a greater emotional intensity of both positive and negative states. At the opposite extreme, the German context has the greatest effect of containing negative emotional states.

Together with gender and country of origin, the propensity to plan is the factor most significantly associated with emotional states. With the exception of vigour, where this factor is not significant, in all the other cases the situation that arouses the greatest emotional intensity is that of those who have decided to go ahead with some projects and abandon others. Young people who have abandoned all projects also express higher levels of negative emotions than those who have no projects, but the incidence is lower.

6. Conclusions

The results of this work clarify some aspects of the initial questions and, at the same time, open up new ones.

Regarding the life projects planned by young people before the Coronavirus emergency, the data show a similar ranking in the countries surveyed, with work-related choices in the first place, followed by housing-related projects (changing house, changing city and moving out to live alone), and finally couple and family projects. This finding is consistent with the long-term tendency of young Europeans to invest more time than in the past in their studies and in entering the labour market, postponing the choices of stabilising the couple and forming a family.

This does not mean that choices in couple and family sphere are not valued as important. Proof of this is the fact that among those who had made

plans before the pandemic, the choice to live together and the choice to work are the most confirmed.

Overall, the Coronavirus emergency is likely to have a devastating impact on young people's life plans. A few months after the beginning of the health emergency, in the different life spheres considered, young people revised their decisions are for the worse by between 70% and 85%.

Looking at the impact on mood, the choices regarding life as a couple plays a central role. The highest emotional costs regard the choices of abandoning, first of all, the plans to live together, and secondly, the intentions of marriage or procreative choices that had been made before the Coronavirus.

In terms of decision-making processes, the data collected offer some confirmation of the role that negative emotional states play in the formulation of choices, in line with the hypothesis of the substantive processing of information, i.e. with the idea that mood contributes in this situation to activating more in-depth decision-making processes. First of all, the lowest level of negative emotional states occurs when young people do not express any plans for change.

Negative emotional energy is slightly greater among those who have made a decision and on the one hand, they have to withstand the tension necessary to achieve the goal, on the other, they have to deal with the emotional costs of any failure. This last reason is probably the basis of the higher level of negative mood among those who postpone and especially abandon a project.

The question in this case is: what consequences will there be on the mood if the structural lack of opportunities to realise one's own projects continues for a long time? And what consequences will there be for the agency of young people?

The perspective with which we try to interpret these data sees emotions as emergent properties of people that move them to action or inaction. Emotions are intertwined with people's sociality and their contexts and are not reducible to them (Archer, 2000).

Looking at the results of the regression analysis, we shall therefore try to formulate some interpretative hypotheses, taking as our main explanatory criterion the role played by the various factors in the reflexive processes through which individual young people rework their experiences and try to mediate between their concerns, others and reality. Proceeding in concentric circles and examining what has emerged about the relationships between the outer spheres, emotional states and life plans and then come to the relationships with individual traits.

At the macro-social level, the comparative analysis of the five countries showed significant differences both with respect to the choices of change in the various spheres of life and the emotional states expressed by young

people in the different countries. A significant part of these differences can be attributed to the impact of the pandemic in the various countries. The case of Italy, the first European country in which the contagion spread on a large scale, is emblematic in this respect, where the structural worsening of life chances, the increased uncertainty and the media climate arouse more negative emotions and lead young people to revise their short-term plans downwards more than in other countries.

However, it would be an oversimplification to attribute the cause of the differences to this event alone. The health emergency has further highlighted some criticalities historically present in the Italian system in terms of the welfare regime, access to the labour market and social inclusion of young people. Young Italians already showed greater uncertainty in making definite plans before the Coronavirus emergency broke out.

Taking into consideration the characteristics closest to the living conditions and life courses of young people, the direct relationship between low education and negative mood can be explained, net of other indirect benefits, by the possibility that a longer schooling period offers to developing cultural tools for understanding and decoding complex situations and greater opportunities for engagement and participation in social and civic life. Here, too, educational inequalities risk reproducing new forms of disadvantage that result in fewer opportunities for action.

From the point of view of the main activity, workers are the category with the lowest emotional burden, when compared to students, student workers and NEETs. It is not difficult to imagine the reason for this. Despite the difficulties linked to the uncertainty and precariousness of the labour market, having a job is still a fundamental aspect of young people's plans for autonomy. The search for a job is one of the areas in which young people are most active and proactive, even during the Pandemic.

It is also understandable that those who have children experience both negative and positive emotional states with greater intensity.

The greater propensity of women to express negative emotional states opens the way to various hypotheses that should be further investigated such as the greater possibility given to women by gender education to express their emotionality, different form of reflexivity or fears of an increase of gender inequality caused by the pandemic.

The elements collected in this exploratory investigation and the hypotheses formulated open the reflection to further investigations which, given the specific nature of the object, should be carried out through qualitative tools aimed at investigating in greater detail the decision-making processes regarding life courses and the role played by emotional states.

An aspect that should be investigated concerns the possible different roles that emotional states play in the decision-making processes regarding

the working sphere, which also includes instrumental as well as expressive motivations, with respect to the sphere of the couple and family relationships or other spheres like social participation in which the emotional bond is one of the founding assumptions.

Another aspect concerns the emotionally intense situation of those who have to deal with conflicting choices in different spheres of life such as accepting a full-time job or job away from home, moving in together or pursuing an artistic project.

On a more general level, it would be significant to monitor the evolution of the emotional condition of young people in the various countries as the pandemic progresses to verify the intensity and level of structuring of negative emotional states, along with the consequences in terms of engagement/disengagement on the individual and collective levels.

Net of these questions, the effects of the scenario on the life courses of young people in the medium-long term risk being highly critical if exceptional structural measures are not implemented that allow young people to have a better chance of realizing their life projects, whatever they may be.

In other words, navigation in the open sea, a plastic image of the de-standardized and individualized paths of young people at the beginning of the millennium (Evans & Furlog, 2000), risks turning into during the time of the Coronavirus a navigation through an ice sea, where young people can theoretically go everywhere, but in practice, can advance more slowly and at cost of great sacrifices.

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