



# 'Rooted mobilities' in young people's narratives of the future: A peripheral case

Current Sociology

1–18

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DOI: 10.1177/0011392118776357

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## Abstract

Youth research recognises that the struggles typical of the transition to adulthood can no longer be assumed to occur 'at home'. However, few investigations have focused on how the imagination of mobility shapes that which is not home yet but which may later become so. To address this lacuna, this article engages with how the imagination of the future of young people is entrenched with 'motility', namely, the possibility for a type of movement that arises out of a specific relationship with one's current context. Focusing on Sardinian youth, the article problematises the strong mobility orientation which can occur through the unfolding of an imagined continuous 'lived' relationship with Sardinia. The author calls this 'rooted mobility'. The article discusses the limits that accompany such mobility, and the potential for social action that emerges, framing narratives of the future within the conditions of peripherality in which young Sardinians live. The article draws on 341 essays on the topic of the future collected from students in their penultimate year of school.

## Keywords

Imagination of the future, mobility, motility, peripherality, place, rooted mobilities, youth

## Introduction

There is an extensive body of research on uncertainty in young people's lives, and it focuses primarily on the difficulties encountered in the transition to adulthood in different spheres of life, private or public. While there is growing scholarly recognition that

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this transition can no longer be assumed to occur 'at home', much work remains to determine how that which is not 'home' *yet* is seen in young people's imagination of the future. This process may entail the place of origin being revisited through an imagined mobility. Young people may imagine themselves to be mobile as part of the exercise of a broader reflexivity with respect to possible futures that are constructed as alternatives to the constraints of the contexts which they occupy in the present. Therefore, the question of *where* the struggle of transition will occur assumes central importance, along with the specific construction of youth identity with respect to possible places to inhabit and the forms of mobility that enable exploration.

Youth mobility has often been explored through a Bourdieusian approach. Within this framework, mobility is seen as 'embodied cultural capital' (Holdsworth, 2006) that expresses values, aspirations and life goals. Along these lines, Allen and Hollingworth (2013) emphasise that place-based dispositions are incorporated into young people's work aspirations in a similar manner to class dispositions. Cairns et al. (2013) discuss the role of habitus in transmitting the appropriate values and necessary social and economic resources to enable mobility in the first place. Farrugia et al. (2014) describe a continuous relationship between place, habitus and reflexivity, in which young people's plans for their futures articulate dispositions acquired through immersion in their families and local environments. Going beyond this debate, this article engages more specifically with the role of the *imagination* of mobility for young people, pushing further the general claim that 'one cannot imagine the future without place' (Prince, 2014: 700).

Looking at the 'spatial reflexivity' of young people in transition, i.e. how they 'incorporat[e] a geographical dimension into the transition to adulthood' (Cairns, 2014: 6), is therefore a starting point for this article. The recent growth of interest in forms of mobile life has fuelled youth mobility research, departing from the notion that physical distances have shrunk in the management of our lives. This is especially relevant for young people because mobility may open possibilities for explorations, if not for migration. However, this is not necessarily the case, and choices may be reversible and temporary precisely because of the specific stage in the lifecourse at which young people find themselves. Especially for young people who live in peripheral areas, the attainment of adulthood may become easier to imagine through mobility (Cuzzocrea and Mandich, 2016), even if the possibility of mobility remains a locus of inequality for young people, an 'arena' through which the 'asymmetries of power relations' are played out as a result of the influence of gender, class and race (Findlay et al., 2015: 398).

In this article, I take up the challenge of investigating how the imagination of mobility shapes both the fashioning of youth identities and the social construction of their context of origin, with particular attention to conditions of peripherality. In doing so, while I position my work within the field of youth transition literature, I will also critically refer to the 'mobility turn' in the social sciences (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2000), both fields having grown exponentially in the last 10 years. Studying the 'spatial contours' within young people's narratives (Farrugia et al., 2014: 1036) might be understood to fall within calls for a 'spatial turn' (Thrift, 2006) which has been slower to arrive in sociology than elsewhere (Prince, 2014). Pilkington and Johnson (2003) state, after Massey (1998), that an interest in peripheral youth began in the 1990s (2003: 259–260). More attention to the spatial dimension of young people's identities is required, given its

capacity to shed light on the characteristics of social structures (Findlay et al., 2015; Shildrick et al., 2009).

The mobility turn suggests that young people's aspirations have the potential to be liberated from the assumption of local embeddedness. These aspirations should be based on the appreciation of the positive potential of moving but also on the careful problematisation of some if its underpinnings (Cairns et al., 2017). A *tout court* promotion of mobility has received criticism in part because it is necessarily based on the ideal of a 'neoliberal subject', namely, a subject that is supposedly capable *and* willing to move in all circumstances and timeframes (Yoon, 2014). This article seeks to reflect on the role of imagined mobilities for youths who come from peripheral areas. I explore the potential of the concept of motility (Flamm and Kaufmann, 2006; Kaufmann, 2010) in this field, as I shall illustrate in next section, and I will follow this with a discussion of the significance of peripherality for the emergence of rooted mobilities.

### **Theoretical perspective: Mobility and motility in the context of youth transitions**

Giddens's (1991) notion that identity is a 'project' involving continuous choice-making suggests that the individual must produce meanings, which in turn should imply an awareness of *where* he/she can make a difference in the world. However, this suggestion would have to be understood as a complication of Giddens's work, rather than an inherent part of it, as the author famously argued that contemporary identities are disembedded from place. Interpretations of youth transition within this 'choice biography' paradigm contemplate, among other things, a period of self-exploration, which has been challenged following the economic crisis that hit Europe after 2008. In a recent analysis of why young Poles moved to the UK immediately after completing their education, Grabowska says that they 'do not see migration as a gap year. They see it as real work' (2016: 1438). Transitions that had been assumed to involve mobility, such as the residential transitions of university students (Holdsworth, 2006), have simply ceased to occur in some contexts.

Botterill (2014) suggests three 'ruptures' to the individualisation thesis, reflecting the process of migration over the lifecourse: 'moving out', 'keeping in touch' and 'coming back'. This typology suggests that the mobility is relational and that we should analyse it alongside family dynamics rather than separately (see also Holdsworth, 2013). Cicchelli (2012) describes a 'cosmopolitan Bildung', whereby he identifies the mechanism through which exchange students elaborate encounters with 'other' cultures, through an orientation map where each of the directions refers to cardinal points. However, young people may employ adaptive strategies and decide interchangeably whether to be mobile or not in a relatively short period of time, thus dismantling the presupposed cosmopolitanism–localism dyad (Thomson and Taylor, 2005), especially in areas characterised by a history of outgoing migration (Ní Laoire, 2007). Ceryl Evans problematises the notion that 'place attachment' and 'spatial mobility' are necessarily mutually exclusive (2016: 501). In a study based in South Wales, she found individuals to have local but high aspirations, meaning that place attachment did not imply 'a serious hindrance to the "successful" realization of young people's aspirations' (2016: 502).

While 'ordinariness' is indeed prevalent in the case study of Sardinian young people I explore in this article (Mandich, forthcoming), such analyses seem to imply that there is no mobile youth *per se*.

There is a rich discussion regarding how the imagination of youth might be seen. Such approaches can treat youth imaginations as ambitions (Skrbis et al., 2014), intentions (Bjarnason, 2009; Cairns and Smyth, 2011), dreams (Andrews, 2014), or hopes and ambitions in opposition to plans (Brannen and Nilsen, 2007). When thought in conjunction with the possibility of being mobile, the imagination of the future assumes defined characteristics for young people supposedly concerned with making a transition to adulthood (Cuzzocrea and Mandich, 2016) through undergoing a process of 'in-betweenness' (Baas, 2012). In this article, I specifically aim to revisit the imagination of mobility through the concept of motility, already used with reference to young people (Skelton, 2013). Kaufmann (2002, 2010) argues that one should not look only at the forms of mobility that are put into practice but also at the array of possibilities behind enacted forms of mobility. More precisely, Flamm and Kaufmann specify that this dimension of mobility entails consideration of 'how an individual or group takes possession of the realm of possibilities for mobility and builds on it to develop personal projects' (2006: 168). In this sense, looking at imagined mobility as forms of motility presupposes the highlighting of the cultural resources that people see and recognise: 'motility is comprised of all the factors that define the potential to be mobile in space', being the result of both personal experiences and the assimilation of collective representations (Flamm and Kaufmann, 2006: 169).

In the original conceptualisation that was offered by these two authors, motility has three dimensions. The first, *access*, defines the availability of possibilities for mobility beyond mere spatial considerations, i.e. public access to resources and opportunities (Kellerman, 2012). The second, *competence*, refers to mobility-related skills and abilities, at both the individual and societal levels (Kaufmann, 2002: 40). It includes three groups of skills: physical (ability to move); acquired (for instance, obtaining a driver's licence or language knowledge); and organisational (activities and planning). The third relates to forms of *cognitive appropriation*, namely to the ways in which agents consider mobility possibilities as the result of aspirations and needs. Cognitive appropriation is connected to strategies, values, representations and habits. This framework allows mobility to be analysed as articulated with local contexts.

Motility focuses on 'the reasons behind the choice of tools and localisations' (Flamm and Kaufmann, 2006: 169), but 'takes on more meaning' as possibilities for mobility increase (Kaufmann, 2011: 40). The possibilities that are entailed in such choices are central to this concept, as 'motility is described as the capacity of an actor to move socially and spatially'; but it becomes mobility when there is 'an intention to move' (Canzler et al., 2008: 3). Ultimately, the transformation of motility into mobility 'is built through the compromises made between aspirations, projects and lifestyle and is linked to multiple logics of actions' (Kaufmann, 2002: 45). I will now turn to discuss the case study to which this conceptual framework will be applied.

## The project: A peripheral case study

### *The imagination of mobility in peripheral contexts*

While the global fluidity of contemporary capital has created a mobility discourse for young people, this comes with specific connotations for youth in peripheral locations, for whom mobility may be employed to ‘circumnavigate disadvantage’ (Cairns, 2014), ‘as an alternative way to achieve inclusion’ (Azaola, 2012), to obtain permanent residence status in a country with higher standards of living (Baas, 2012), or as a general ‘entry ticket’ (Cuzzocrea and Mandich, 2016). European integration has not eliminated differences in accessing mobility, ‘especially in culturally and economically marginalised areas’ (Bjarnason, 2009:150, my emphasis). Young people in rural areas might ‘construct themselves through the valorisation of the local’ (Farrugia et al., 2014: 1039; Haukanes, 2013; Liechty, 1995; O’Connor, 2005; Wierenga, 2008): low migration among youth is expected among those who have strong ties with friends and family or with their community as a whole, and national identity is also associated with lower emigration potential (Bjarnason, 2009: 150–159). Issues related to periphery and global dynamics, albeit with updated meanings, have again started to be discussed with regard to young people (Pilkington and Johnson, 2003). In this strand of literature, youth subjectivities are the result of ‘new and creative articulations of local resources and global cultural flows’ (Farrugia et al., 2014: 1050). There is therefore sufficient scope to identify some common issues among young people who live in peripheral societies within Europe, who are used to the idea of moving in search of better opportunities. Generally, the relationship between young people and place is characterised by heterogeneous feelings of connection to place such as the symbolic and the emotional (Pilkington, 2012), and belonging and not belonging (Ní Laoire, 2007).

### *The case study*

It is in this scenario that the Sardinian case study must be located. As the object of a lively debate (Brigaglia, 2017; Onnis, 2013), Sardinia has strong cultural connotations (Arlacchi, 2007). These are to be framed within a specific national context (Bello and Cuzzocrea, 2018), but also partially diverge. For instance, traditional social structures are such that there is a deficit of individualism (Oppo, 1990) while the family is a central resource; yet, some have talked about Sardinia possessing a different kind of familism than that of the rest of Southern Italy (Pinna, 1971), with group solidarity being based on egalitarian traits and social differences occurring along the axes of gender and age rather than on economic capital (Anfossi, 1968).<sup>1</sup>

Today, youth conditions are serious. According to the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT, 2015), the rate of youth unemployment in Sardinia is higher than in the rest of the country (54% vs 42.4% nationally), as is the percentage of NEETs (not in education, employment, or training) (28% vs 23% nationally). After a period that was dominated by the hope and promise of the new economy (Ferrucci and Porcheddu, 2004; Mandich, 2009b; Mongili, 2015), the conditions for Sardinian youth have once again become stagnant.

Recent research has emphasised ‘how place-based experiences, such as belonging, aversion, and entrapment may be internalised and encoded into possible selves, thus producing emplaced future self-concept’ (Prince, 2014: 697). For inhabitants of an island who have obvious difficulties in commuting but also travelling more generally and are heavily dependent on governmental transportation policies, the dilemma of whether to leave or not to places where these limitations are not issues, is obviously central (Lyon and Crow, 2012). Leaving might be seen as a way to flourish as a young adult, and in fact national statistics indicate a stable flow of emigrants: for instance, during 2015, 2577 Sardinians moved out their residence, with a great number of them being between 18 and 34 of age, and fairly balanced by gender (Fondazione Migrantes, 2016). Indeed, as Pilkington and Johnson state, ‘if peripheral youthful “choices” are restricted at the material level, we also need to raise questions of mental and emotional horizons, of active fantasy, of planning, but also of hope and despair’ (2003: 276).

This article develops an analysis of the material collected in the *ifuture* research project. Funded by the Region of Sardinia, the project was designed to investigate narratives of the future that were produced by young Sardinians in order to investigate how they seem able to identify and activate resources. To this end, 341 essays were collected in 2013 from 18-year-old students who were attending their penultimate year of school. The students were asked to write an essay in which they imagined being 90 and to narrate their future lives as they might look back over them.<sup>2</sup> There were 253 essays collected in Cagliari, which is the main city in Sardinia (located on the southern coast); the remaining were collected in Nuoro, a city in the island’s interior (located in the mountains). There were more females (63%) in the sample due to some of the chosen schools being predominantly female. Given that social background was not an initial focus of this project, no information was asked in this regard, but in Italy schools broadly indicate social background. We approached students attending both classical lyceum (CL, usually chosen by middle-class students oriented towards continuing with university studies) and technical schools (respectively: RAG, a school oriented to the accountancy path; NAV, a school oriented to a naval career; TF, a school oriented to biology-based and health professions; MAG, a school oriented to a teaching career in elementary schools; and LS, linguistic schools). When ‘NU’ appears, it denotes that the essays have been collected in Nuoro.

The students were reassured about confidentiality. The lengths of the essays vary considerably. The original Italian texts were translated into English by the author of this article only for the purposes of citation. A qualitative approach based on essays has been used in other countries too (Elliott, 2010; Heggli et al., 2013; Nugin, 2014) and presents several strengths, but also challenges. In an early phase of analysis, all essays were thematically coded using NVivo 10 in order to organise the rich range of insights offered by the material. In relation to mobility in particular, a descriptive coding frame was used in order to capture the most relevant dimensions (Cuzzocrea and Mandich, 2016). A small research team was involved in the formulation and revision of descriptive codes. Students were not involved in this phase but were invited to (and participated eagerly in) an open day in one of the schools, where preliminary findings were presented and discussed. Some of the classes were later involved in follow-up focus groups, whose analysis is not included in this article. Due to space restrictions, in this article I aim only

to capture the variety of insights contained in the essays in relation to the peculiar inter-connection between mobility and immobility, which I define as ‘rooted mobility’.

## **Tensions between mobility and immobility: ‘Rooted mobility’**

The imagination of mobility is often entrenched in traditions of local emigration and may differ depending on the context under study, at times with identifiable gender differences (Elliott, 2010; Gordon et al., 2005). Moreover, the experience of a moment of economic development or depression can also profoundly change a young person’s views and expectations (O’Connor, 2014). In the present case study, forms of mobility imagined by participants are very pervasive (Cuzzocrea and Mandich, 2016). They mostly coalesce around the idea of mobility as an ‘entry ticket’ to bypass uncertainty and difficulty, without further identification of how this happens. More generally, they are portrayed as opportunities for self-experimentation and self-growth and are therefore crucial for the transition to adulthood. However, within this context, especially in the essays that were collected in Nuoro, there seem to be two sharply diverging positions: on the one hand, there are those who want to stay. They clearly define this as their strongest achievement, as Sardinia, and especially the closest neighbourhood where they live, are ‘soul places’ with which they identify. This place already contains everything that they feel they need in life. On the other hand, there are those who are anxious to complete school to escape from what is perceived to be an oppressive environment. Youth identities emerging in these ways are the result of forms of mobilities and immobilities that develop together and that are prerequisites for one another, as in these two cases:

I had been in London for few months, then in Barcelona, then in Greece and two or three other countries. In those years I had several jobs, from waitress to cook, baby sitter and many others. In this way I finally learnt both English and Spanish, which have always been my favourite languages. At the beginning I wanted to stay in Madrid but since I was too tied to my island, I came back here to Sardinia. (TF F 59)

I have always liked to travel and I would have liked to live somewhere else, but I have always been very tied to my family, therefore I searched for a job in my city. It was not easy at all to find a position, because in those years in Italy there was a strong crisis and unemployment was very widespread. (TF F 99)

In Sardinia, there is a tradition of emigrating for work purposes: this spans across several generations, and it has more recently become a forced choice for educated people, resulting in a serious brain drain phenomenon. I suggest that it feels normal for the students who wrote the essays to emigrate at some point, as several people in the previous generation have done so and as a significant number of those who are slightly older, such as elder siblings, are also likely to have done so. However, mobility often occurs alongside points of tension:

Even if I adored travelling I have never wanted to move outside of Sardinia, I was born here and here I stay. (TF F 44)



I got married the year after that and I was offered a job in London, and together with my husband we moved. London was fantastic, but I liked more the air of the small village. (TF F 41)

In the area of Nuoro what scared me the most was exactly that attitude of making new things into something terrible, something to be scared of. But travelling, however, I have understood that there is much to see, to know and to discover. I have understood the values and the beauty of my land only after leaving it. (NU CL M 1)

Ambitions come to be realised outside of Sardinia; however, they do not come into existence without referring back to Sardinia. On the contrary, students seem to bring pieces of Sardinia with them along the way through a peculiar mode of appropriation that keeps the place alive and close by while their lives unfold. The way in which such 'rooted mobilities' seem to occur is threefold.

The first modality is the imagination of frequent visits to Sardinia. Sardinia is the locus where family gathers in the students' imagined future and where it has gathered for generations. It crystallises the family bonds in a symbolic unity that allows them to put aside broader uncertainties. This is perhaps unsurprising (Ní Laoire, 2007: 336). That family is a 'safe bubble' is consistent with Italian familism; the family is found in this specific locality, and it characterises the sort of transition that young people imagine for their immediate future, as in the excerpt below:

I had always dreamt of opening a restaurant in Germany on my own and, as the years passed, I managed to earn good money. In the meantime, I felt far away from my family and I thought how much I would have liked to come back to Italy, to my friends and parents. But I realised that if I had continued to work and managed to realise myself I would not have had any problems anymore and I could have gone to visit them any time I wanted. (TF M 23)

I desired nothing else from life than realising myself through work and travel, travel and travel. My job, however, as an ophthalmologist, did not allow me to move too much from my practice, if not for some doctoral degrees. I have always wanted to study and get a degree at the University of Medicine in Spain but I feared getting too attached to that country and hardly coming back anymore to my hometown, therefore I filed the idea away and I put my feet on the ground. (CL F 23)

The possibility of imagining a future outside of Sardinia is tied to the ability to maintain this relationship with it throughout the years, in a physical as well as personal sense. Through this, Sardinia is imagined as being very present in the students' everyday lives, as an 'everyday matter'; one student states that 'as soon as [he] could [he] went back to [his] island to [his] parents', as '[he] never really separated from [his] roots even in the busiest periods of [his] life' (NU CL M 20).

It is pertinent to question whether the island of Sardinia may elicit a reaction of this kind – also found, for instance, in a study on youth from an area of Sardinia called Armungia (Tiragallo, 2001). In a study based in South Wales, Ceryl Evans also describes a similar phenomenon: 'young people's spatial horizons were distinctively not characterised by insular orientations to place, but rather, strong aspirations to be geographically



mobile, albeit, remaining not too far away from the Rhondda in the future, in order to pursue their aspirations' (2016: 507). Mobility is thus not disconnected from roots; the need to leave is not separated from the need to belong and feel that place: 'for some, this resulted in the juxtaposition of "escape" aspirations with expressions of intense loyalty and attachment to the Rhondda, which underpinned their longings to "stay local" ' (Evans, 2016: 508). Sinkkonen (2013) has also discussed the concept of attachment and identification to a home district among 17-year-olds and found that social identity is intertwined with a sense of belonging<sup>3</sup> (2013: 530).

Conflicting aspirations are thus suggested within imagined mobilities. The material that was collected in Sardinia also allows us to go further than this, suggesting specific ways in which the relationship with the island is kept alive. Travelling outside of Sardinia is much easier for today's youth than it was only 15 years ago due to inexpensive air travel and institutional mobility programmes. However, this recent development contextually reiterates the importance of attachment and underscores that there is not necessarily emotional disengagement when considering the possibility of leaving. The fact that the students imagine occasions to visit Sardinia is itself important, especially given the scope of the questions that they were asked to address in the essay, which, I reiterate here, did not explicitly ask the participants to discuss mobility.

One can also see a highly concrete materiality in the students' relationships with the territory – in one case a specific beach, a specific house, the one that was owned by her grandparents:

Every summer we used to go to Sardinia to spend the vacation in a beach house inherited from my grandparents. (TF F 59)

The experience of visiting and returning is filled with memories from the good old days, in a continuous line with the family history. Sardinia is seen as a place where important things occur throughout a lifetime, and this is the second way through which the relationship with the island is kept alive:

In one of our visits to Sardinia we got married and had a baby girl. (TF F 45)

I was thirty when we made the decision to get married, obviously the wedding was celebrated in our small village with the people dearest to us and our friends, everything was splendid, the most beautiful day of my life. (NU CL F 7)

Therefore, the kind of mobility about which the students are talking here is relational, similarly to Findlay et al.'s suggestions (2015) and Cuervo and Wyn's work (2014) in different studies. An element of collectivity is found in some other studies of youth transitions (Aaltonen, 2013; Cuzzocrea and Collins, 2015; Ní Laoire, 2007) but here this collectivity further characterises mobilities as 'rooted mobilities'. This dimension of rooted mobility also reflects the traditional absence of a clear class structure in Sardinian traditional society, and further characterises this case study against others.

The third way through which these mobilities keep the relationship with the place alive is by connecting and confining movement to the realm of working aspirations.

Explorations outside may be seen as necessary for self-development, especially at a young age; this is especially interesting for the study of youth transitions. However, the private sphere is often imagined to take precedence at certain points, and with that the idea of returning home. This is how a female student from Nuoro imagines her experience in Pisa:

We did not want our baby to live in Pisa, away from [his] grandparents, in a country which we did not feel our own. So, after some years, I asked to be transferred to Cagliari, where we moved to. (NU CL F 25)

Another female student imagines a period of distress and repeatedly names Sardinia:

My husband got seriously ill and he left me. Given that, I went back to my country of origin, to my land. (NU F 6)

In the following excerpt, the list 'my country, my family, and my friends' situates well the sequences through which such a belonging develops:

I got married at 25 and I decided to open a restaurant with my wife, the business went very well every day, things went beautifully, I was very proud of myself, even if I missed my country, my family and my friends who unfortunately I was only able to hear by phone. (NU M 12)

In a case study of young people in Auckland that investigated how young people experience local and urban mobilities and immobilities, Skelton (2013: 469) also recognises a series of ambivalences in the processes of relationality and identity formation. However, it is certainly striking that the students aspire to move back to Sardinia after retirement. In the following excerpt – which also contains the sequence 'my country, my family and my friends' – the sequence of feelings is made explicit:

I had been away for 30 years and now I wanted to enjoy the second part of my life with my family. I know, it sounds strange, but nostalgia for my country, my family and my friends – even if I loved France very much – became increasingly stronger and unbearable at some point. (TF F 11)

I did not want to leave my home country, the place which grew me and to which I am tied sharing my same soul. I wanted to leave to come back. To leave to learn and improve my land which I loved and I still love. (CL F 17)

Policy makers have been mostly preoccupied about the reasons for departure but not for returning (Dako-Gyeke, 2016: 170). The youth investigated in this latter study did not plan to return, while Mandich has noted elsewhere, from these data, that out of 341 essays, 90 mentioned the issue of retirement (Mandich, forthcoming). However, the issue of returning 'one day' has also been noted in other studies as something that is mentioned by young people themselves (Botterill, 2014), or else by other actors who are involved with young people, for instance, youth workers (Nugin, 2014). It is not illogical to note that an 18-year-old's imaginations of the future could easily have skipped this

aspect completely and focused instead on the explorations and freedom which should be more typical of the position they occupy in the lifecourse.

## Discussion: Peripherality and motility

Having considered how the empirical material shows an interconnection of mobility and immobility in young Sardinians' narratives of the future, I now discuss how motility may help us to understand this interconnection and the specific configuration of peripherality that emerges from it, in the hope that the concept of motility facilitates our understanding of the possibilities that seem available to young people, and the competences that they would need to achieve them. I will then discuss briefly the dimensions of motility presented earlier in the theoretical section: access, competence and cognitive appropriation of space.

Results relating to the dimension of *access* are as yet poorly defined. For instance, it is not clear why Pisa (quoted by NU CL F 25 in the previous section) should be seen as a city of opportunity and precisely what added value Pisa has to offer to students over and above a Sardinian city. Admittedly, Pisa is on the continent (and is thus better connected), and it has plenty of history and architecture, but it is nevertheless a small city, and several Sardinian sites also have a lot to offer in terms of architecture and history. However, in the year preceding this study, a budget airline began to offer connections from two Sardinian cities to Pisa with several daily routes, and although such policies depend on market strategies that can be very volatile, they have the potential to change the perception of distance and access. The design of this project did not include a follow-up, so it is only possible to speculate on how this change has affected young people's views. However, the dimension of access is necessarily significant for young people who are based on an island with scarce economic opportunities, regardless of the potential of the use of IT, which may in part shorten distances. Moreover, the inconsistency of the ways in which the students socially construct their own landscape should raise concerns about potential vulnerability, whether it is based on negotiations by regional authorities with private companies or ties with friends and relatives who have migrated before them, should this imagination ever be transformed into plans of action, as Cairns has warned (2014).

The dimension of *competence* further reveals some concerns that are tied to the peripherality of Sardinia's young people and the general lack of information upon which they construct their imagination of the future. While cities such as London appear to offer solutions, without further specifications of how this occurs ('London was fantastic', TF F 41), the overall information to which visiting students refer might be incomplete in the best cases or naive (as in the case of TF M 23, who simply relies on hard work) and often wrong (as in the case of CL F 23, who imagines enrolling in the 'University of Medicine in Spain' and practising as a doctor *while* engaging in doctoral programmes). This naivety should raise strong concerns about their ability to cope with the structures of opportunity, and most of all about the utility of youth employment services, especially considering massive recent efforts to direct youth policies towards an activation approach.

However, from the perspective of *cognitive appropriation*, narratives collected are significant. The statement 'I wanted to leave to come back' (CL F 17) is a highly emotional

statement, one that reconstructs a willingness to exist within the local environment and which therefore tells an implicit story about the context in which the narratives have been collected: opportunities and constraints, absences and presence, departure and return. Emotions and feelings are kept for private issues which develop in the island over the course of time. The professional self is important insofar as these young people are also able to demonstrate that they can make it, but not as a valuable achievement overall.

I agree with Pilkington and Johnson, who argue that the variety of ‘diverse peripheral responses to cultural globalization’ (2003: 270) depends on ‘local histories and the heritage of older strategies of survival’ (2003: 260). In the Sardinian case, there is an established tradition of emigration and considering whether to stay or to go is an obvious issue (Tiragallo, 2001). Additionally, this dimension of motility reminds us of another aspect of naivety in young’s people accounts of rooted mobility, especially with reference to relational motility: they tend to mention meaningful relationships with significant others in Sardinia but at the same time tend to disregard the fact that spending a lifetime outside of Sardinia would imply the establishment of other relationships elsewhere, which will plausibly become meaningful too. Therefore the dimension of ‘cognitive appropriation’ seems to fail on one side.

Italian politicians have often labelled youth as selfish, ‘choosy’ ‘bamboccioni’; Poletti, current Minister of Labour, even said ‘it’s good that [many young Italians] have [gone away], because this country won’t suffer anymore from having them around’.<sup>4</sup> In 2014, the administration of a small municipality offered economic incentives to young unemployed people to emigrate to another EU country.<sup>5</sup> This measure is not quoted directly in the material analysed in this article, yet I bring it to the discussion to demonstrate the types of highly contestable measures that might be conceived of in such areas and the types of discourses that may be offered. It also demonstrates that issues of mobility and immobility are often more political than mobility scholarship seems to suggest and that perhaps they should be reframed in terms of wider citizenship. While young people’s narratives demonstrate that they are not passively ‘carried away’, they remain peripheral within their own periphery, and the control that they exercise is instead explicated in terms of control over the details of their private lives, such as mentioning the names of daughters and sons – sometimes of nieces and nephews.

## Conclusions

I could not agree more with Camarero and Oliva, who argue that ‘mobility has condensed the meaning of modernity into a social imaginary ... that reveals a particular ideology related to the way we act on the world’ (2008: 344). However, within that, I also take up Pilkington and Johnson’s call for a ‘global/local studies situated in peripheries, that take seriously the meanings young people attach to their cultural practices’ (2003: 259). For them, peripheral is ‘something more’ than ‘local’ (2003: 260), in that we must ‘recognis[e] the spatially-organised power relations involved and also the situated nature and layering of peripherality’ (2003: 261). In the Sardinian case study discussed here, mobility is thought of as possible because it contextually refers to immobility, as powerfully noted by the student who wishes to ‘leave’ but qualifies the desire by adding ‘in order to come back’. The two dimensions intertwine closely, suggesting ‘rooted mobilities’, which I

characterise here as a complication of a ‘cosmopolitanism–localism’ (Thomson and Taylor, 2005), and/or ‘belonging–not belonging’ (Ní Laoire, 2007) dyad.

Cuervo has stressed the problems of seeing the rural through a deficit lens (2014). It is relevant to consider how mobilities are represented beyond a simplistic attribution of success and failure to staying or leaving (Farrugia, 2015), given that ‘the fact of movement, the represented meanings attached to it, and the experienced practice are all connected’ (Cresswell, 2010: 21). Moreover, forms of mobility are political in the sense that they ‘are implicated in the production of power and relations of domination’ (2010: 20). Particular patterns of movement make sense together for ‘spatially reflexive’ youth and, in turn, entail specific forms of the ‘politics of mobility’, which are made of ‘movement, representations and practices’ (Cresswell, 2010: 19). Political dissatisfaction has been presented as a possible cause of mobility even in a democratic context (Bygnes and Flipó, 2017), and there is certainly a role for political discontent in migration decision-making more generally. In the case of Sardinia, these dynamics may help to understand experiences of peripherality, intended as a specific cultural configuration and societal equilibrium. In general, ‘the inclusion of place in identity development processes’ arises from the ‘recognition that physical environments are not inert backdrops against which social life unfolds, but rather it is in the transactions between people and their everyday socio-physical environments that identity is created’ (Prince, 2014: 698).

I have attempted to show how the imagination of mobility is tied to a lived relationship with the context of origin, through its own particular forms, in the case under investigation. The concept of motility may help us to better understand the tensions between mobility and immobility and the way in which peripherality is constructed in narrating the future. This finding may be aligned with an attempt to reconcile rootedness and cosmopolitanism (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013), and falls within a wider proposal to keep the dialogue alive in matters of international migration flow, playing on issues of belonging/not belonging (Ní Laoire, 2007). However, in the analysis of peripherality, the interlinkage between mobility and immobility also reveals ambivalences in terms of hope and nihilism with regard to an imagined future. The spaces these youth refer to for their overall realisation and capacity for action also take on unexpected forms of marginalisation and exclusion. This makes Cuervo’s (2014) suggestion of looking at issues of equality/inequality for young people in peripheral areas as social groups rather than individuals very relevant. Unpacking the issues that are related to such disruptions is an important starting point for the discussion of participation in public life and the development of full citizenship in what has become a very challenging time for young people wanting to express their views in the world while facing the so-called ‘mobility imperative’.

## Funding

The article is part of a project that has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 665958 to conduct research at the University of Erfurt, as MWK (Max-Weber-Kolleg) Fellow. It also partially draws from research funded previously by ‘P.O.R. SARDEGNA F.S.E. 2007-2013 – Obiettivo competitività regionale e occupazione, Asse IV Capitale umano, Linea di Attività 1.3.1’ at the University of Cagliari.

## Notes

1. Mandich summarises these traits in her synthesis of Sardinia as a ‘post-conventional context’ (2009a).
2. The students received the following prompt: ‘Imagine you are 90. Looking back at your life until that point, describe what happened to you. There is no need to invent something that is unlikely to happen. Simply tell the story of your life, how according to you it could have unfolded. Clearly, you cannot know what is going to happen to you, but you should try to describe how things could go if things go how you think or wish. Try to tell the whole of your life from the moment in which you finish school. Write as much as you think is needed.’
3. Five dimensions were identified here: attachment to the home district; familiarity with the home district; importance of place of residence; chances to exert influence; and roots.
4. This declaration is dated 19 December 2016.
5. Programme ‘Adesso Parto’ [‘Now I Leave’], Municipality of Elmas, October 2014.

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## Author biography

Valentina Cuzzocrea (MA and PhD, University of Essex, UK) is Senior Assistant Professor in Sociology at the University of Cagliari, Italy. Her main research interests are youth, youth transitions, and time and space in youth transitions, including mobility. She has recently coordinated the European Sociological Association (ESA) Research Network on Youth and Generation. Her articles appear in *Young*, *Journal of Youth Studies*, *The British Journal of Sociology*, *City and Society*, *Space and Culture*, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, *Time and Society*, *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia* and *Sociologia del Lavoro*. She teaches in the area of advanced sociology and methods.

## Résumé

La recherche actuelle sur la jeunesse reconnaît qu'il n'est plus possible de considérer que les luttes caractérisant le passage à l'âge adulte interviennent « à la maison ». Pourtant, peu d'études ont été consacrées à la manière dont l'imaginaire de la mobilité définit ce qui n'est pas encore « chez soi » mais pourrait le devenir plus tard. Pour combler cette lacune, nous analysons dans cet article comment l'imaginaire du futur des jeunes gens s'inscrit dans la « motilité », à savoir, la possibilité d'un type de mouvement qui résulte d'un rapport particulier avec notre situation actuelle. À partir du cas particulier de la jeunesse sarde, l'article problématise la tendance à une forte mobilité qu'on peut observer dans le contexte d'un rapport « vécu » continu imaginé avec la Sardaigne. C'est ce que j'appelle la « mobilité enracinée ». J'examine les limites qui vont avec une telle mobilité, et l'action sociale potentielle qui en ressort, en identifiant les récits du futur tels qu'ils apparaissent dans le contexte de périphérialité dans lequel vivent les

jeunes Sardes. L'article s'appuie sur 341 essais sur le thème du futur collectés auprès d'étudiants de dernière année de lycée.

### **Mots-clés**

Imagination du futur, jeunesse, lieu, mobilité, mobilités enracinées, motilité, périphéralité

### **Resumen**

La investigación sobre juventud reconoce que ya no se puede suponer que las luchas típicas de la transición a la edad adulta ocurran 'en casa'. Sin embargo, pocas investigaciones han abordado cómo la imaginación de la movilidad configura lo que sin ser *todavía* el hogar puede llegar a serlo más adelante. Para abordar esta laguna, este artículo aborda cómo la imaginación del futuro de los jóvenes está arraigada en la 'motilidad', es decir, la posibilidad de un tipo de movimiento que surge de una relación específica con el contexto personal. Centrándose en la juventud de Cerdeña, el artículo problematiza la fuerte orientación hacia la movilidad que puede darse a través del desarrollo de una continua relación imaginaria 'vívida' con Cerdeña, a la que se denomina 'movilidad enraizada'. Igualmente, se discuten los límites que acompañan a dicha movilidad y el potencial de acción social que emerge, enmarcando las narrativas del futuro en las condiciones de periferia en que viven los jóvenes sardos. El artículo se basa en 341 ensayos sobre el tema del futuro recogidos de los estudiantes en su penúltimo año de escuela.

### **Palabras clave**

Imaginación del futuro, juventud, lugar, movilidad, movilidad enraizada, motilidad, periferia