
Introduction

Italian youth in context – an analysis through multiple dimensions

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I Introduction

Italy is not a country for young people. This book provides a unique and in-depth collection of empirical and theoretical material that leads to this proposition, investigating the living conditions of young people in today's Italy. We aim to discuss the categories commonly used to depict youth in Italy, whilst taking into account the multifaceted and complex reality in which they have to cope in the present, as well as imagine and plan their future. In particular, the volume considers the coexistence of specific characteristics of the Italian scenario and more recent trends characterizing late capitalist societies. Amongst others, these include the compelling spread of neoliberal-inspired regulations, the impoverishment of the middle classes and heightening conditions of vulnerability and uncertainty. Through this book, we aim to disentangle the impact of global trends on Italian youth and discuss the specific configurations that are produced within this context.

Within the existing international research on Italian youth, contributions have been published by prominent Italian scholars mostly in articles and edited volumes. The themes that have been addressed relate to specific aspects of youth, from culture (for instance, see Varriale, 2016) to political cultures (Mammone and Veltri, 2010; Cento Bull, 2000; Garau, 2015) or school-to-work transitions (Pastore, 2017) and youth unemployment (Leonardi and Pica, 2015). However, to date there has been no single edited collection targeting Italian youth *per se*. In addition, the Italian case tends to feature extensively within comparative research, in contrast to other countries, perhaps increasingly so due to the more collaborative projects being pursued across Europe in recent years. Yet, we strongly believe that a specific focus on the multiple aspects of the conditions faced by young Italians is an important add-on to the existing international scholarships in the field.

In order to complete such a project, we invited authors to embed debates regarding young people in Italy within the international literature, with the aim of offering a precise account of the internal mechanisms that have so far seldom circulated outside Italy. The result is a composite and unprecedented

collection, in terms of issues covered, methods and theories used. To account for our approach, the structure of this introductory chapter is threefold: first, we introduce the rationale of this book project, its ambitions, and whence it derives, discussing the main issues that guided us in composing the collection and in developing the main analytical frame of reference. Second, we describe the book's tri-partite structure. In doing so, we present the structural contexts in which youth in Italy live and act and how they resonate – and differ – from other cases in Europe. Third, we present our overarching interpretations of the youth condition in Italy that emerged through the chapters and propose a debate that goes beyond the national boundaries. Although this interpretation is emerging from an insider's perspective, we are confident that it will link to international debates in a structured way.

2 Framework of reference for this book

Cavalli and Leccardi (2013) described youth studies in Italy as being composed of four seasons. The first season comprises of studies regarding those who were young in the fifties; the second season is concerned with youth up to the mid-sixties, characterized by political militancy; the third season is marked by widespread reflux to private life and a refusal of politics; and finally, the fourth season is concerned with issues relating to the transition to adulthood. More recently, this fourth season seems to have developed into some sort of fragmented – if not polarized – scenario, either accusing young people, infantilizing them or seeing them as victims of a system that structurally excludes them (see Visentin's discussion, 2018). In a recent interview, Leccardi et al. (2018) discussed how this intersects with studies of time in scholarly research. At the substantive and conceptual level, this also includes attention to the position of youth within the life-course as a 'structuring' element. At the level of public opinion, the debate is deeply entrenched and at times distorted by (mis)representations and/or accusations from the media and politicians who offload societal responsibility to individualized caricatures. To these points, sociologists have often answered by emphasizing the resourcefulness of young people, and how in the end they are able to 'surf' contingencies which are adverse to them (Colombo et al., 2018, see also Colombo and Rebughini, 2019; Bertolini et al., 2019; Leccardi, 2005; Cuzzocrea, 2012), or in Domaneschi's words (2019), they are 'sur-reflexive'. This interpretation is not only applicable to the Italian case. It is, in fact, tied to a wider discourse on 'choice biographies' and individualization, which has influenced several strands of social research. At the policy level, this has resulted into an emphasis on so-called activation policies. The idea of the 'entrepreneurial self' (Kelly, 2006) is popular within the international scenario and our concern is to shed light on how Italian youth studies tie in with these debates. In fact, some characteristics have become paradigmatic in the Italian case. For instance, it is not by chance that the famous label of 'young adults' – coined in relation to the findings of a comparative European project (EGRIS, 2001) – has been widely applied in relation in the

Italian case. Now a popular literature genre, as well as the name of an American movie (Reitman, 2011), and despite in fact being an oxymoron, the term is also an established label in youth studies, indicating a specific cohort experiencing an extreme delay in the transition into adulthood. Various other expressions have also been used simultaneously, which not only capture a sense of prolongation of transitions but also a mixture between lifestyles that are characteristic of different life stages, as for instance, ‘adultescente’ or ‘kidadult’, grasping the structural characteristics of the *problematique* in Italy and in the south European context. Along this line, there is also a specifically Italian expression ‘long family’ (Scabini and Donati, 1988), which refers to the prolonged cohabitation of grown-up children with their parents.

Generally, young people are characterized as being unable or unwilling to act independently. In particular, their dependency is depicted as being structured around the family, serving as an all-solving institution, compensating for functions that in other contexts are absorbed by the welfare state. It has been noted that this Italian characteristic is shared by other southern European countries (Andreotti et al., 2001; Naldini, 2003; Martin, 2015). We do not deny the importance that the family role plays elsewhere. For instance, in a 1992 book on the conditions of youth in the UK, Jones and Wallace (1992: 68) assume that despite the youth’s problems, they are going to be backed up by their families, and youth itself is defined as ‘a process of definition and redefinition, a *negotiation enacted between young people and their families*, their peers and the institutions of the wider societies’ (1992: 4, our emphasis). These definitions – made in relation to the context of another country and before the neoliberal agenda spread across Europe – highlight the importance of qualifying the Italian case and embedding it within wider debates, thus pinpointing its specificities.

Whilst young people throughout the rest of Europe are said to become adults by leaving their parents’ home, in Italy their transition to adulthood occurs most often *within* the family, that is, while still living within the parents’ home (Cicchelli and Galland, 2009). According to this interpretation, therefore, the issue is not that they do not become adults, as it may seem, but that they become adults through *their own modalities* and following *their own paths*. This is obviously a point in which both cultural aspects of the transition and more structural ones converge in determining what is normally referred to as ‘the delay of the transition’ (for Italy see: Pastore, 2017; Barbieri et al., 2015; Mauceri and Valentini, 2010). This prolongation or postponing of adulthood and the conditions through which it has changed over time have been studied in abundance through quantitative methods. In general, this seems to be a distinctive feature of Italian youth, to be considered in parallel with the above-mentioned capacity to be creative in inventing solutions.

2.1 Doing research on young people in Italy

Over the past decades, the characteristics of Italian youth we have briefly previously described have been in the spotlight mainly thanks to reports by the

IARD Institute, which carried out studies entitled ‘Reports on the condition of Italian youth’ every four years, throughout six editions. Some of the themes traditionally explored in these reports are friendship, gender dynamics, family formation, access to the labour market and religion. Also aiming to be nationally representative, recent years have seen the *Toniolo Institute*, another research centre based in Milan, taking onboard *the facto* – the production of reports, books and various papers addressing the youth condition in Italy. One of the latest pieces was devoted to ‘Generation Z’, that is, the current generation of young people (Alfieri et al., 2018). In addition, there are a number of studies that focus on the territorial realities within Italy, often at a regional level. However, given the massive disparity in socio-economic conditions across the country, in addition to the well-known south–north divide, they risk being of little help in attempting to construct a national scenario.

Overall, these reports tend to reproduce and sustain attention on the usual markers of adulthood, including both those that belong to both the private and the public sphere: completing one’s educational path, finding a relatively stable job, leaving the parental home and constituting a new family, and eventually having children. There is an underlying consensus that the transition to adulthood is accomplished when all, or the majority, of those markers have been met. Such a conception of youth sees youth as a ‘transitional subject’, or as a ‘subject in process’ (Talbur and Lesko, 2012: 3), from a condition of incompleteness and dependency to one of independence. As such, ‘transition’ is still defended as the ‘lead paradigm for the sociology of youth’ (see for instance Roberts, 2018).

Within scholarly literature, recent findings have started to pave the way for new interpretations, following the identification of new markers, or, alternatively, the reconsideration of old ones, and yet they still refer to this established framework. For instance, short-term mobility is increasingly seen as an important turning point in youth biographies (Cairns, 2014; Krzaklewska, 2019; Cuzzocrea and Mandich, 2016). It is once such changes have been made that important life decisions finally seem to be enacted, even in a framework of prolongation of youth and generalized delay of transition. This recent, broad attention on critically re-discussing markers is occurring across European countries and has justified a plethora of comparative studies. Scholz and Rennig (2019), for instance, compare and contrast young people belonging to the so-called ‘Generation Z’ in Europe (the ‘latest’ generation of young people), with a view to identifying the characteristics that define them. There is still much to be unveiled about this generation lives, including how they live and interpret the world around them. For instance, a comparative effort is of increasing importance with regard to how they experience the world through social media. Young people across various European countries enjoy different structural conditions of life and largely (or in part), on the basis of this, they reach adulthood at different paces and through different means.

Admittedly, in Italy young people suffer from particularly adverse socio-economic conditions. With a rate of 42.7% youth unemployment and 24.6%

of NEETs (Eurostat, 2019; Sergi et al., 2018), Italy ranks first in Europe for these measures, with Greece and Spain closely behind. These countries are all similarly affected by the inadequacy of what Ferrera calls the ‘Southern model of welfare system’ (Ferrera, 1996), referring to the well-known model of social welfare identified by Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999). This is characterized by low levels of welfare provision, poor redistributive policies and a highly unequal social structure, and relies on the family as one of the main forms of support (Andreotti et al., 2001; Kazepov, 2008). A high number of NEETs could be seen as a proxy of the marginality of young people within the labour market (Quintini and Martin, 2006).

Specifically with regard to youth studies, British sociologist Ken Roberts (2009) used the concept of ‘opportunity structure’ to refer to the system of inter-relationship between family background, education, labour market processes and employers’ recruitment practices. His approach balances structure and agency. Considering class influences in constructing a career in the UK, Roberts argues that ‘it has always been possible for some individuals, exercising individual agency, to break out from the main career routes, but the numbers able to break into specific destinations have always been governed and limited by the number of the relevant positions that are available’ (2009: 356). Raffe (2008) constructed a typology of youth transition regimes, which takes into consideration the educational system as well as the vocational system. In a recent assessment, Roberts (2018) suggests that the transition paradigm continue to be used, but more extensively, expanding from a focus on integration in the labour market only to other spheres of life. We are in favour of this approach and propose that our collection of essays is read in this vein, considering the integration of several domains, which are relevant to young people as constitutive analytical elements of youth opportunity structures.

An effort of this kind could also prevent further distortions. In studying young people in Italy, we see that some issues have become central at the risk of obscuring others that are also very important. For instance, a singular, widespread focus on NEETs, on which there is a wealth of studies (e.g. Sergi et al., 2018; Rosina, 2015), might distract from the troubles that the current generation of young people working in Italy today will likely encounter later in life due to the inadequate nature of retirement benefits that will be available to those who are young today. Therefore, the ‘quality’ of working conditions and benefits being offered to young people remain important to us, as well as issues pertaining to the high youth unemployment rate.

This structurally adverse situation is contrasted with a public perception that sometimes stresses the unwillingness of young people in Italy to grow up. Such stereotypes construct them as unresponsive to sacrifices and commitment (Bello and Cuzzocrea, 2018) and as ‘not mature enough’ (Pitti, 2017). These easily turn into prejudices that disregard the constraints to which they are confronted, and do not help their self-esteem or their engagement with public life. Whatever their merits or failings, such negative public representations of youth need to be updated, whilst also making a few changes in the policy scenario. *Strictu sensu*,

the scenario of opportunities available to young people, have changed substantially in Italy throughout the last decade due to a series of reforms introduced by various governments. Obviously, we do not have the space here to provide an exhaustive overview of all these changes but will mention just few of the most important ones in relation to young people.

2.2 The recent reform scenario in Italy

Under the leadership of the centre-left government (February 2014–December 2016) led by Matteo Renzi – the youngest prime minister Italy has ever had – several major reforms were approved. Of these, the *Buona Scuola* ('the good school', Law 107/2015) is of note. This is a complex reform which foresees several measures targeting the whole teaching-learning process and its governance. The reform increased schools' autonomy and flexibility, with the headteacher playing a leading (and strongly contested) role in hiring, evaluating, managing and rewarding teachers. Some of the other changes include the introduction of compulsory intervals in the labour market for each upper secondary school pupil, tax relief for those attending private, publicly recognized schools and a scheme that provided stable contracts for about 100,000 teachers, who had worked under precarious conditions that far. Before the bill was approved, fierce debate raged for several months amongst schools, trade unions, associations and politicians. A key point of the discussion was whether the reform was putting too much responsibility on schools without providing the necessary support for teachers and the other professionals involved. Critics also feared that there was a risk of fostering 'Matthew effects' (Merton, 1968), in other words benefitting students that were already well-off and therefore widening the gap between these and less-privileged ones. The law entered into force on 31 May 2017.

Another major reform initiated under the Renzi government was the *Jobs Act*, which was aimed to reduce both unemployment and the mass of short-term and temporary contracts that had proliferated during the preceding decades. In fact, the changing work arrangements can be traced back to the 'Pacchetto Treu' (Law 196/1997) when first elements of flexibilization of labour market regulation were introduced in Italy. Renzi's Jobs Act replaced a plethora of temporary contracts with a single, uniform contract, providing gradually increasing job protection over three years, ultimately leading to a permanent contract. The Jobs Act was presented in 2014 and 2015 as a major reform of the labour market, undermining the core of the Workers' Statute (1970) with its high protection of employment (although only of certain kinds of employment). Critics have argued that such changes have polarized 'old' and 'new' employees, therefore failing to simplify Italy's labour system or address the precarious conditions faced by some sectors of the workforce. Rather, it is argued that recent reforms have actually accentuated the process of the precarization.

Renzi's government also saw through the first steps in implementing the *Youth Guarantee*, a supranational measure launched by the European Council in 2013

and regulated in Italy through a National Implementation Plan (Law Decree of 28 June 2013). The measure has the explicit goal of fostering of an ‘active’, ‘innovative’ and ‘qualified’ workforce. In the Italian case, the Youth Guarantee attempts to address the gap between education and work experience, which is considered the primary cause of the exclusion of youth from employment. The measures and resources that were introduced aimed to reintegrate the young person into either the education system or the labour market, with a view to minimizing the associated ‘social risk’. Unfortunately, we do not have the space to discuss the impact and implementation of this measure in detail; however, it is interesting to note that whilst the measure was designed to target young people under the age of 25, in reality it tends to reach young people under the age of 29. This age discrepancy highlights the magnitude of extended precariousness in which young Italians are living.

Similar to the Youth Guarantee, there is also the ‘Reddito di Cittadinanza’ (Citizens’ income), which aims to integrate socially excluded people into the labour market through activation measures. This highly contested measure, introduced for the first time in Italy, guarantees a basic income to all, provided that they sign an ‘Agreement for work’ and an ‘Agreement for social inclusion’ (Law 26, 28 March 2019). It is one of the flagship measures of the Five Star Movement, realized under the first Conte Government (June 2018–September 2019) in order to tackle poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Though not specifically designed for young people, it has the potential to affect this group like no other measure before because for the first time access to benefits and services are guaranteed even for those who do not have an employment record.

These reforms define the historical landscape within which the new generation of young people grow up. Despite the intention of expanding young people’s inclusion in welfare redistributory measures, the extent to which these reforms will actually impact positively on the life of young people remains to be seen, especially considering the observation that further flexibilization and precariousness are in fact produced. Moreover, the resulting ‘opportunity structures’ seem to reinforce rather than counteract the social fragmentation and differentiation between privileged and disadvantaged youth. Many research projects have been undertaken to evaluate the impact of these reforms (Ballarino et al., 2014; Barbieri and Scherer, 2009; Barone and Ruggera, 2015), the findings of which broadly confirm the scenario we have outlined above.

In addition to these, there have been many debates surrounding access to citizenship – definitely a contentious topic. According to Garau (2015), Italy is currently facing the same challenges that traditional receiving countries encountered decades earlier. However, the fact that it was late to join other hosting countries and that the numbers of migrants population remained below the European average for decades have heavily influenced the debate on migration as well as the nature of migration policies put forward by the various governments (Garau, 2015:8). In this regard, the progressive normalization of anti-migrant discourses under the motto ‘prima gli italiani’ (namely, ‘Italians first’) has played a huge

part throughout the previous governments, in line with extremization and anti-migration policies in other European countries.

In Italy, restrictive measures have been a huge obstacle for many young people belonging to second generations, preventing them for many decades to have a fully-fledged presence on the political scene, the economic life and in civil society at large. In fact, the Italian law on citizenship (Law 5 February 1992, n. 91) is based on the principle of *ius sanguinis*, meaning that newborn children take the citizenship of their parents. It may make a huge difference for those children of migrants who, despite being born and raised in Italy, going to Italian schools and spending their whole life with Italian peers, are not being given access to the same opportunities as siblings of national Italians (e.g. they cannot take part to elections if they do not acquire the Italian citizenship when they turn 18), and in any case they have to wait until they turn 18 to start the procedure of acquisition of citizenship. Only as late as in 2013, during the Letta government, some amendments were passed to ease the way to the acquisition of the Italian citizenship for these young people, mainly by simplifying the requirements to proof legal residence in the country, which used to be a heavy burden on their shoulders (Law 98/2013) (Bello, 2018). Right after, during the Renzi government (2014–2016), an attempt to reverse the importance of the *ius soli* over the *ius sanguinis* was initiated, but the law was not passed in the end.

With an awareness of this potential line of segregation concerning young people of immigrant origin, in this book we refer to all young people living in Italy. The issue of acquiring citizenship has specific traits bounded by Italian legislation and the overall political climate; however, such matters have become a common preoccupation, with increasing intolerance and anti-immigration feelings, reaching a climax (the so-called ‘immigrants crisis’) in relation to the issue of the Italian southern border as an immediate entrance to the European Union territory for those coming from Africa. This is hardly surprising given that similar tensions are arising throughout Europe, a clear example of which can be seen in relation to Brexit in the UK. Considering the overall conditions, we believe in an integrated view of the different elements that constitute ‘opportunity structures’ (in Roberts’s terms, 2009) that will help us in reading and interpreting young people’s conditions.

3 Why this edited volume?

One important factor that motivated us to publish this collection is the state of existing scholarship on youth in contemporary Italy. It is a fragmented field of study, prone to hybridization and cross-disciplinary confrontation. This situation reflects the traditional divisions in theoretical and methodological approaches in the study of the youth condition. From a research point of view, for instance, we have the counterposition between a laic and a confessional (mainly Catholic inspired) tradition. From a methodological point of view, we have the divide between qualitative and quantitative methods, with some mix methods approach,

attempting to bridge the divide. On top of this, disciplinary boundaries and the control of intradisciplinary scientific production – which is at the basis of local and national scholarly evaluation in Italy – strongly conflict with the very idea of open debate. As a result, mainstream youth-related policies or measures seldom engage with the findings of research conducted on the very same topics. Consequently, whilst strong research traditions, such as studies on youth and temporalities, have proven to be productive and tackle important issues at length, for instance, the prolongation of the transitions to adulthood (see for instance Leccardi et al., 2018 for a review), the impact of these contributions may have been diminished by a debate collapsed within the national scenario. Moreover, at times, language barriers may also hinder the spread of excellent research conducted within Italy.

Another important factor is the absence of meaningful national discussion of youth policies and of the study of youth. Such a forum for discussion could contribute to the homogenization of terminology, fostering an interest in young people. Indeed, Italy does not have a national youth law. Although youth are protected by the Italian constitution (art. 31), regions have legislative and executive powers on youth matters, resulting in a territorially fragmented and unbalanced landscape of rights and duties. The excellent youth work conducted in some regions is unlikely to produce results in other regions or spread transversally.

Before describing the structure of the volume, it is worth mentioning that this book is the second step in a wider project that started with the publication of the special issue ‘Making space for youth in Italian studies’ in the international *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, edited in 2018 by two of the editors of this collection (Bello and Cuzzocrea), and where the third editor of this collection (Kazepov) contributed with a co-authored article. Going deeper into that interdisciplinary investigation, and including more contributors, this collection allows us to unpack three dimensions, which we present in the following section. Authors have engaged with the international debates, resulting in the first collection of its kind specifically about Italian youth, and the book aims also at contributing both to the development of a less fragmented field of youth studies in Italy, and to the international debate on ‘youth studies’ more generally.

4 Structure of the book: three dimensions as analytical lenses to understand Italian youth

Bringing together a variety of approaches and methods, the authors of this collection analyse Italian youth through the lenses of three dimensions: (1) activism, participation and citizenship; (2) work, employment and careers; and (3) moves, transitions and representations. These dimensions are the analytical building blocks for challenging stereotypes and unveiling misinterpretations and taken-for-granted assumptions that portray young people in Italy as selfish, ‘choosy’, unwilling to make sacrifices, or to commit and manage an independent life. These prejudices often underplay the role of the

constraints they are facing in the transition to adulthood. By unveiling them, we aim to better understand the challenges and resources of young people in Italy (and beyond).

The first section of this volume, entitled ‘Activism, participation and citizenship’, is devoted to exploring a variety of forms of youth engagement in public life. Given the difficulties young people face in making a living and obtaining decent employment, this dimension is of utmost importance to understanding their living conditions in the country today. It also helps us in framing their potential and willingness for action. By investigating these forms of participation, we can see how young people’s low formal participation – which is usually taken as a proxy for disengagement – is counterbalanced by ‘other’ forms of participation. An interest in non-formal participation is growing across Europe (see for instance Pickard and Bessant, 2015; Fraser, 2010). This section includes debates on factors that can lead young people to exclusion (e.g. lack of Italian citizenship, a specific sexual orientation and gender identity). Bearing in mind that Italy is a country marked by a strong presence of the Catholic Church and the resurgence of control over bodies by some right-oriented politicians, these aspects are worth keeping in mind of as they are likely to affect decisions and choices.

The chapters in this section of the volume discuss the ways in which youth try to organize themselves through conventional and non-conventional patterns of political participation. The multitude of options contributes to challenging the stereotypes that see youth in Italy as disengaged and taking a distance from the political sphere and seeking refuge in the private realm. This mainstream image was called ‘reflux’ (*riflusso*) – especially in the 80s – and became hard to correct (Galli della Loggia, 1980).

The chapter entitled ‘Young people and politics in Italy in a time of populism’ by Elisa Lello sheds light on engagement amongst young people in Italy who have withdrawn from mainstream politics. According to Lello’s findings, young people react in different ways to their slightly older counterparts (whom the author refers to as the ‘in-between cohort’) and seem to be in favour of a technocratic kind of politics. This difference is said to be due to the differing political, economic and cultural environments in which they have been socialized. By disentangling these contextual dimensions, this chapter shows how comparing and contrasting two different generations of young people may be an effective way of investigating both changes in certain contexts and generational changes. Massimiliano Andretta and Donatella della Porta, in their chapter ‘When Millennials protest: youth activism in Italy’ provide a complementary perspective to the one described by Lello. They show that despite the challenges they face, young people do in fact engage in politics through what Nancy Fraser would call ‘non-conventional’ forms of participation. Drawing on the extensive international expertise of the authors, this chapter offers a snapshot of youth participation and will be useful to readers who need a compass in this field. One interesting aspect is how, though

anti-austerity mobilizations in Italy have not originated from young people as they have in other countries (e.g. Spain), they have indeed become engaged in these kinds of protests from a certain point onwards. Drawing on quantitative data, the authors were able to explore how young citizens overcame barriers of marginalization, network and develop collective identities. It would be interesting to see how developments, inside and outside of Italy, are resonating in Italy, especially in the light of the spreading environmental movement inspired by the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, which has characterized itself from the beginning as a youth movement – acting, for instance, through school strikes.

Albanesi, Cicognani, and Zani's chapter, entitled 'Discourses and practices of citizenship among young people of different ethnic background living in Italy', chimes with all other chapters in the collection in that it delves into the lives of young people of different ethnic backgrounds, expanding on how they construct their representation of citizenship in Italy. Viewed with a social psychology lens, the authors show that the notion of citizenship is not straightforward but embedded within a broader social, cultural, political, economic and historical context, which goes beyond Marshall's conception of it (Marshall, 1964), based on civil, political and social rights. In fact, the five dimensions that are identified (legal or admittance, instrumental, belonging, everyday practices and participatory) mirror concrete strategies that young people use to deal with their marginalized status in the Italian context. Lastly, Anna Lavizzari's chapter 'Strategy, performance and gender: an interactionist understanding of young activists within the Italian LGBTB movement and the Catholic countermovement' touches upon the changing Italian religious and sociopolitical context through the lenses of young individual activists within the LGBT movement and the Catholic countermovement. It shows how, through non-conventional political participation, youth in Italy contribute to shaping the current debate on gender equality and sexual citizenship.

In the second section, 'Work, employment and careers', we address the challenges encountered by youth when trying to access the labour market and obtain a relatively stable position, the scarcity of which is said to have effects not only on the short-term, but also on the medium term. In assessing the concept of precarity at the international level, Alberti et al. (2018) disagree with the famous standing by Standing (2011), which assert that a 'class' of precariat can be identified. They state that this perspective is problematic since, focusing on the idea of one particular segment of population, it is not enough to analyse how global transformations transversally pertain post-work society. Indeed, these authors propose developing the concept of 'precarization as a process', in which both objective conditions and subjective experiences are integrated, whilst shedding light on drivers, patterns and forms of precarization. This reframing aims to capture situations of precarization across contexts. The authors explicitly refer to the Italian case, together with the French one, in the context of protest within the urban service sector in the early 2000s

(Alberti et al., 2018: 448). Such arguments can help us better understand the conditions that young adults face today in Italy. The section devoted to the labour market invites a reflection of this kind.

The chapter by Lara Maestripieri deals with the ‘social investment challenge’, specifically looking at policies affecting young Italians and their impact. The underlying principle is the principle that sustainable economic growth can be achieved through social and educational policies aimed at investing in the younger generations. The chapter deals with an apparent paradox: despite the decreasing number of young people in Italy due to demographic changes – the opportunities available to them to fulfil their aspirations also decrease, putting them in a condition of multilayered marginality – a phenomenon that Caltabiano and Rosina (2018) have called ‘dejuvenation’. Moreover, at the same time as they experience growing difficulty in entering the labour market, once they are employed they are more likely to be overqualified and take lower quality jobs, characterized by a higher degree of destandardization. The analysis is conducted by Maestripieri on the basis of two recent policy reforms (apprenticeships in Higher Education and Youth Guarantee) and show the potential impacts that go beyond the immediate implementation of these policies.

In their chapter ‘The synchrony of temporary young workers: employment discontinuity, income discontinuity, and new social inequalities in Italy’, Bertolini and Moiso discuss young people’s first steps into the labour market, focusing on employment and income discontinuity, which tend to overlap in the Italian case. This happens to precarious workers, despite possessing various levels of knowledge and specialization, and in ways that differ from other European countries. The chapter therefore depicts an Italian specificity, determining what the authors call new types of ‘social areas at risk’. They discuss the strategies enacted by young people in such circumstances, encompassing the micro and macro level, and discussing housing orientation. In the light of the new policy guaranteeing citizens a basic income, it will be crucial to see if and how this equilibrium will be revisited. We therefore envisage subsequent studies to develop this line of research, in order to see if the measure has had an impact on youth disadvantage.

The chapter by Filandri and Nazio ‘Young graduates’ access to the labour market: cumulative or trade-off effects between occupational level, contracts and wages’ also has precarity at its core, although from a different and more specific perspective, with its focus on the relationship between occupational level, contracts and wages among young graduates in Italy. Of all European countries, Italy is characterized as having one of the highest degrees of uncertainty in terms of career entrance, coupled with high rates of youth unemployment and non-standard jobs and a very low level of state support for the unemployed. Within this institutional framework, starting a career with a job that is in line with one’s educational credentials may help offset the risk of entering into the ‘bad jobs’ trap, where an initial disadvantage in the labour market may have lasting, detrimental effects on long-term employment outcomes, such as employment prospects, wages and upward job mobility. The strategies implemented in these circumstances are at

the core of the chapter. Against many studies across the EU investigating similar mechanisms, in the Italian case, it is found that the family background contributes to the stratification of the employment strategies pursued by young people.

The last chapter in this section, entitled ‘When age is academically constructed: the endless status of “young researchers” in Italy’, identifies the characteristics of constructing an academic career in Italy, in two different areas of study (science technology engineering mathematics [STEM], and social sciences and humanities [SSH]). This chapter takes a different perspective from the preceding chapters, putting a focus on the social construction of ‘youth’ while constructing a career. These are analysed to discuss how differences are played out in the two scientific domains analysed. The authors of this chapter – Rossella Bozzon, Annalisa Murgia and Caterina Peroni – draw on qualitative material to explain the different meanings attributed to age, both at the institutional level and in the everyday life of two academic departments, taken here as organizational contexts. The broader structural context in which these dynamics develop is the season of reforms in Italian academia, which was launched with the aim of rejuvenating the universities’ staff, which have changed profoundly since the Gelmini Reform in 2010. The chapter takes account of these background changes, whilst also giving some insights on the construction of an early career in relation to cultural environments.

Looking at discourses, the notion of youth has a strong potential in regulating social life (Ostrowicka, 2019). Therefore, the third section of the book deals with ‘Moves, transitions and representations’. This is a heterogeneous section that tackles the framework of transitions to adulthood in differing ways. In the [first chapter](#) of this section, entitled ‘Young Italians: individualization, uncertainty and reconquering the future’, Carmen Leccardi talks about how we see a contraction of the temporal horizon and the way in which this affects the experiences of young people. The chapter also examines the concepts of individualization and uncertainty in a context of social acceleration. Young people are expected to devote their energies to construct their own biographies, and the chapter details the kinds of coping strategies that they employ, which are highly complex – thus suggesting high competences and reflexivity. Leccardi suggests that ‘migration’ should be seen as one such strategy, and indeed this has become a growing area of research within the field of youth transitions. Within this section, the concept of ‘moving’ refers to both the geographical and representational sense. The two meanings may converge, as youth literature has started to indicate recently: by moving, young people see changes as possible in their lives (Cuzzocrea and Mandich, 2016).

In the chapter ‘Pathways toward adulthood in times of crisis: reflexivity, resources and agency among young Neapolitan’ by Antonella Spanò and Markieta Domecka, they specifically focus on the case of young Neapolitans. Whilst the theoretical framework used is very similar to Leccardi’s, revolving around the concept of reflexivity in planning a biography, the case study taken in this chapter is one that leads us to consider a major divide between the north

and south of the country, and in particular the specific conditions of an area, such as Naples. Therefore, it allows us to reflect on specific lines of class inequalities, and the possibility of agency, which is affected by the amount of available resources. As an example, four cases are discussed in depth.

The divide between north and south is taken forward also in the chapter ‘From South to North: internal student migration in Italy’ by Dalit Contini, Federica Cugnata and Andrea Scagni. The authors provide a comprehensive picture of the students’ and graduates’ mobility flows in Italy using data of two cross-sectional national-level surveys carried out by the Italian Statistical Institute (ISTAT), the Survey on Upper Secondary Graduates and the Survey on University Graduates. The internal mobility of southern students to northern regions and their migratory behaviour after graduation can be seen as a kind of brain drain. The problem is that internal migration (usually from south to north) does not contemplate returns. There is also the issue of overseas mobility, which has a serious impact on the resources available within Italy in the medium and long term.

In the final chapter ‘Becoming an adult in the new millennium: how the transition to adulthood has changed’ by Monica Santoro, the transition into adulthood for young Italians is presented through the results of two qualitative studies, carried out in 2003 and 2013, respectively. The chapter highlights how, in 2003, participants generally lived with their parents and were experiencing uncertainty in the labour market. In contrast, the participants in 2013 showed greater capacity to plan for their future and conveyed reasonable confidence in their possibilities. While the two results are not directly comparable, it is striking that the condition of uncertainty did not seem to undermine the projects or decisions of young people in the latter research. In both studies, social and cultural capital were important resources in defining transitional paths. The chapter shows that throughout the decade, youth conditions underwent deep change, providing some hints on the directions of change. The chapter also confirms – as do all of the chapters – that the capacity to adapt is revealed as key in the transition processes.

5 Conclusions

Since the global economic crisis of 2008, researchers interested in youth have begun investigating the effects upon young people, in particular with regard to the austerity measures that were subsequently implemented. It makes sense to ask similar questions specifically in relation to the Italian case. However, we do not provide definitive answers throughout this volume; rather, we offer the tools that can help us to better understand the conditions within which young people develop coping strategies. We think that the Italian specificities are better understood when a number of relevant dimensions are considered together, and that the importance of each cannot be properly understood without considering them within this wider context. Such factors include the role of the family, the position

of young people within the labour market and their experiences of work, and wider issues of identity, citizenship and participation. In this sense, we fully agree with the position of Roberts (2018), who suggests a more integrated approach in order to assist us in identifying the ‘transition regime’ (Raffe, 2008) that characterizes the Italian case.

Reflecting on how conditions have worsened, with opportunities becoming even more limited further still for some young people whilst extending them for others, it may be especially useful to reflect on other ‘transition regimes’. From the analyses of the various authors throughout this volume, it becomes evident that further institutional support is needed within Italy in order to increase the chances of young people participating fully in social and economic life. Though the chapters have not introduced new categories with which to interpret youth, they have illustrated how the scenario is becoming increasingly difficult for them. In a similar way, Schoon and Bynner (2017) found that the recession has not so much qualitatively *altered* but rather *intensified* the impact of pre-existing economic and social difficulties on youth in the US, Germany and the UK.

The German historian Reinhart Koselleck (1972–1997) warned that ‘crisis’ is an inflated concept. He also argued that the very concept refers to the idea that the time to solve issues is shrinking, so that something must be done immediately. Our concern is that if the contextual conditions worsen further still, young people will no longer be masters of change. The transformation can be likened to the metaphor of ‘boiling frogs’ used by Noam Chomsky (2014). Various commentators have used this metaphor to describe the way in which the adverse labour market conditions and the associated social and economic environment are becoming ‘normal’ in the perceptions of young people, and the younger they are the more normal they become. By contrasting two (recent) cohorts of young people, the chapters clearly show this trend.

However, the chapters in this collection also contain some positive developments. For instance, observation on recent mobilization show (forthcoming) stress that NEETs in Italy do not have a lower degree of political participation compared to those in the labour market, as would be expected (Andretta and Bracciale, forthcoming). This suggests us that it is perhaps *inside* categories (like the NEETs category) that we have to (re)-imagine new roles for young people in counteracting the crises, austerity and wider social-economic difficulties, questioning established ways of looking at them. The movement *Friday for the Future*, inspired by the young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, could perhaps lead one to believe that the (relative) marginalization of young people, in Italy and around the globe, may turn into some visible requests of change on behalf of a generation. Clearly, it is the intersection of various dimensions that composes the experience of youth and adulthood and the transition to adulthood: participation and work are amongst these. It is – we hope – within the capacity of young people and in the wider collectivities relevant to them to identify the means to rectify the boiled-frog syndrome.

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