2018 Social practices and lifestyles in Italian youth cultures

Article *in* Journal of Modern Italian Studies · January 2018

DOI: 10.1080/1354571X.2017.1409537

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ISSN: 1354-571X (Print) 1469-9583 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmis20

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To cite this article: Carlo Genova (2018) Social practices and lifestyles in Italian youth cultures, Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 23:1, 75-92, DOI: 10.1080/1354571X.2017.1409537

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2017.1409537

JOURNAL OF MODERN ITALIAN STUDIES, 2018
VOL. 23, NO. 1, 75–92
https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2017.1409537

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Social practices and lifestyles in Italian youth cultures

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, social research on youth in Italy has explored a wide range of issues through different interpretative and methodological approaches. However, there are very few studies that seek to identify the keynote features of the juvenile condition. This article argues that collective identities and forms of identification among youth are shaped more and more frequently through the sharing of social practices, of the meanings connected to these practices, and of more comprehensive lifestyles. With reference to four main fields (sport, music, politics, religion) and focusing on youth cultures, it analyses the connections between behaviours, attitudes, values and representations of youth actively involved in each of these different fields. The aim is to identify transversal processes through which young people today elaborate and adopt social practices and cultural profiles, create new social forms, and develop innovative signification processes.

KEYWORDS Youth cultures; lifestyles; music; sport; politics; religion

Youth in Italy and its representations over time

Youth has not always existed, at least not in people's minds. As we know, the idea of youth as a specific phase of individual biography is not a stable cultural fact throughout history, and the recognition of the peculiarity of this biographical stage represents rather the result of a long process (Ariès 1962; Mitterauer 1992; Levi and Schmitt 1994; Cieslik and Simpson 2013). Similarly, the recognition of the existence of this 'youth phase' in the biography of each individual has not always been connected with the idea of a 'youth universe' as a collective social actor.

Considering in particular social representations[1] of youth emerging in Italy in recent decades, we can easily observe that they have changed noticeably, so much so that it is possible to identify four main phases (Cavalli and Leccardi 1997; Cristofori 1997; Santambrogio 2002). In the first phase (1950–67), youth was still not a social subject in social representations (neither among youth itself

nor among adults). The term 'youth' was mainly used just to identify a step in the cycle of life, a step characterized by the progressive adoption of relevantly standardized behavioural and cultural models substantially correspondent to adult ones. Youth was then understood as a temporary state of transition towards adulthood, in some cases characterized by nonconformist or even deviant behaviour, either because of rejecting dominant adult models or difficulty in adapting to them. In the second phase (1968–80), youth was progressively understood as a generation, as a collective actor, involved on the one hand in a political conflict, and on the other hand in a wider generational and existential conflict. An example of the first profile are the young people involved in the 1968 movements, whose protest was interpreted as a claim of 'social relevance', whose conflicts were understood as being connected with social position and social class cleavage, and whose political action also embraced the private sphere of life. An example of the second profile are those of 1977 movements, who based their collective identity on their marginality, on their feeling and presenting themselves 'against' because 'different' from dominant social components and cultural models; their conflicts were rooted in a wider set of existential dimensions (gender, nature, identity), components of that private sphere of life which now becomes political. In the third phase (1981–99), youth first fully asserts itself as one of the fundamental sectors of the population, because of its liminality between social innovation and social disease, and then loses this social centrality. Youth is described now as bearer of requests and needs in a dialogue with the 'adult world', but is characterized by vaguer tones that at the same time are more opaque and more invisible than in the past. Finally, in the fourth phase (since 2000), moving from a progressive 'juvenilization' of society, the youth condition seems to become a trait that can potentially be referred to any other age group, being connected not so much with individual age but more with a set of attitudes and behaviour. The consequence is a growing confusion between generations and a growing difficulty in identifying precise thresholds.

This evolution of the social representations of youth in Italy is reflected in the evolution of social research on youth in the same context (Di Nallo and Secondulfo 1986, Chap. 2; Merico 2004; Abbruzzese and Pretto 2009, Chap. 1; Cavalli and Leccardi 2013). The earliest research on youth appeared in Italy in the mid-1950s and was part of a wider recovery of sociological studies after their weakening under fascism. At the beginning, there were no studies explicitly dedicated to youth, but youth formed specific parts of wider community studies and research into social change. In this period, moving from the perception of growing generational differentiation, various studies on the specific features of young people were conducted with a focus on specific territorial contexts and topics, often employing a narrative methodological approach (Grasso 1954; Cavalli 1959; Baglioni 1962). At the core of this research was first of all an analysis of the concrete experiences of youth, that contained no precise theoretical hypotheses or explicit reflections on the boundaries of this category

but focused on the emergence of the youth issue as a social problem, directly connected with the socialization processes to adult roles and with the potential limits of these processes. The overall aim seems to be the reconstruction of a profile of youth viewed, on one hand, in relation to its integration into adult socio-cultural models and, on the other, with its emergent forms of conflicts. In the first perspective, a considerable section of young people was seen to be ready to internalize predominant cultural models if sufficient support and sufficient autonomy were guaranteed by society. In the second perspective, the focus was on the diffusion of deviancy and delinquency among sectors of youth; the difficulties in their relations with parents, teachers and the political system were deeply analysed.

In the mid-1960s, sociological research placed greater emphasis on the separation between youth and adults, and on different forms of social conflict that were seen as characteristics peculiar to an entire generation (Alfassio-Grimaldi and Bertoni 1964; Bianchi and Ellena 1973). However, as a consequence of a strongly homogeneous depiction of youth, the conflict paradigm tended to become a general interpretative model of the juvenile condition: youth was consequently described as a quite autonomous universe, internally compact and alternative to adults (Ardigò 1966; Livolsi 1967). In a sort of circular mechanism, conflict was then considered both as an outcome of cultural innovation and as a driving force in the modernization process.

In the 1970s, studies on youth grew in number and, significantly, developed in two different directions. The first was characterized by extensive surveys that aimed to reconstruct an overall portrait of youth and embraced a growing number of topics (Luzzato Fegiz 1970; Scarpati 1973; Tullio-Altan 1974; Tullio-Altan and Marradi 1976). The second consisted of research on smaller samples with narrower thematic focuses, often dedicated to the analysis of deviant behaviour, the relationship between youth and politics and the involvement of youth in institutional forms of social participation.

From the early 1980s, new issues and perspectives emerged in youth research, partly as a consequence of a weaker 'public visibility' of this social sector, and of a shift from the idea of youth as a collective subject to the idea of youth as a process. As a result of the decline of collective movements, several sociologists talked about youth returning to the boundaries of the private sphere (Allum and Diamanti 1986), while others talked about how the politicization of everyday life and the emergence of new ways of participation with a new connection between private and public were transforming the public presence of youth (Ricolfi and Sciolla 1980). A great deal of empirical research was dedicated to the analysis of specific territorial contexts that covered a wider set of topics that were more concerned with showing the internal complexity of the youth universe than developing wider interpretative conclusions (Cavalli et al. 1984; Cavalli and De Lillo 1988).

The 1980s and 1990s also saw a shift from the idea of youth as a process, as a sequence of steps with a predictable outcome, to the idea of youth as a condition, as a 'waiting' situation with an unpredictable result (Cavalli 1980). The juvenile period was no longer considered a linear path towards the assumption of adult roles, but a period of experimentation with different activities and different roles. The young individual was first of all understood as a subject who was building personal identity through everyday life, in the present, developing, in parallel or in sequence, different memberships and temporary identifications (Garelli 1984; Cavalli 1985; Melucci 1991). Attempts to develop unitary and consistent portraits of youth were now abandoned, while the range of dimensions analyses expanded (Cavalli and De Lillo 1993; Buzzi, Cavalli, and De Lillo 1997, 2002). Hence the emergence of interest in youth lifestyles (see Faggiano 2003, 2007) and lifestyles studies (see Berzano and Genova 2015, first part), so that youth came to be perceived as an internally heterogeneous universe, characterized by multiple differences and actually made up of an aggregation of delimited contexts.

In the early 2000s, these processes became clearer and were linked with trans-disciplinary reflection on the consequences of globalization. Concepts such as 'uncertainty', 'risk' and 'choice', which emerged as distinctive descriptors of the millennial society, were now adopted and given new emphasis as traits peculiar to the juvenile condition (Cesareo 2005; Garelli, Palmonari, and Sciolla 2006; Buzzi, Cavalli, and De Lillo 2007). Research showed that symbolic events in the passage to adult life (educational attainment, occupational attainment, residential independence, birth of a child) were being postponed more and more and the age boundaries were moved to include in the concept of 'young adults' those up to the age of 40.

Erosion of unitary representations of youth, on the one hand, and thematic sectorialization of the study of juvenile condition on the other, have been the two most distinctive features of recent studies. But what are the reasons for this? There are probably at least two: first, a process of specialization of scholarly perspectives that are less and less open to overly broad and/or vague interpretations and more and more concerned with focusing on specific topics and analyses that are studied in depth, even if this gives rise to difficulties in dialogue with other research and other scholars that goes beyond a common interest in youth; second, the increased complexities of the juvenile condition in Italian society in recent years, consistent with the wider global social changes of this period that are well summarized by authors such as Bauman, Beck, Dahrendorf, and Giddens.

The main traits of social change highlighted by scholars are the weakening, on one hand, of representations (how people think reality is) and values (how people think reality should be), and on the other hand, of social position (ascribed capitals and socialization processes).[2] This weakening concerns the role of these elements as wellsprings of resources and behavioural models and

as explanatory factors of behaviours, memberships and collective identities. These tendencies seem to act in particular among youth, maybe as a result of an additive, or multiplicative process between cohort effects and generational effects (Cesareo 2005; Genova 2014).

The recognition of these processes is widespread among scholars, and past social and scientific representations of youth are now explicitly criticized, but alternative proposals about the distinctive traits of contemporary youth and how these traits can be explained are neither clear nor widely agreed upon. Hence, the aim of this article is to develop a hypothesis about the processes through which young people nowadays elaborate and adopt social practices and create new social forms. The following pages will focus on four thematic fields: politics, religion, music and sport. Politics and religion represent two fields traditionally considered value-oriented (the former often understood as being more connected with hetero-oriented values, the latter with more auto-oriented ones); music and sport, instead, are traditionally considered taste-oriented fields. Values concern what people think is relevant; tastes concern what people like.

The analysis focuses on specific youth cultures[3] in each of these fields, and is based on the results of qualitative and quantitative research conducted over the last 15 years. Three main dimensions considered here are behaviours, social position and interpretative frames, to see how socialization paths, resources, representations, values and tastes interplay with actions. Obviously, the intention of this analysis is not the elaboration of an in-depth portrait of Italian youth, either in general or referring to each of the four considered fields (on which a vast research literature exists), but only the identification of possible transversal traits and processes in youth cultures that have received little attention, focusing on specific forms of youth involvement in each field. Each section will reflect on circumscribed phenomena, contextualized with more general tendencies in the field of reference.

Youth cultures in four fields: looking for distinctive traits

Music

A huge amount of research shows that music has been, and still is, a core topic in youth biographies and in youth cultures (Bennett 2000; Laughey 2006; Bloustein and Peters 2011; The Subcultures Network 2014), and in Italy too this relevance is confirmed (Gasperoni, Marconi, and Santoro 2004; Cicerchia 2013; Savonardo 2013; IFPI and IPSOS 2016).[4] Many young people spend a significant part of their daily lives listening to and 'watching' music, talking and reading about music, and some of them also playing and making music, in the very different forms that this activity has developed. Most scholars substantially agree that, while not every young person is a music follower, for nearly all young people music represents a fundamental element of self-expression and social positioning.

Pop and rock music have for some decades been the most widespread styles among Italian youth, but since youth cultures tend to develop with reference to more specific music styles, this article will focus on electronic music and heavy metal. These two styles have been chosen not because they are followed by the majority of youth, but because in Italy they have developed significant local and national *scenes* and because they represent (with rap/hip-hop, reggae/ska and punk) important landmarks in general for young people in their positioning in the overall music field.[5]

Young people encounter their elective music genres during the early years of adolescence, and their relationships with peers have a strong influence on this process, whereas the relevance of the family context is weaker. Information shared among friends' networks continues to be, as in the past, the main channel for first contact with artists and genres, whereas today these networks are less relevant for the circulation of music and have been largely substituted by the web (the friends' network becomes more relevant in this sense later, when involvement in a music scene stimulates the search for more uncommon products, unavailable in the mainstream digital networks). However, youth involvement in a music scene is about sharing not only the consumption of music but also participation in live events, and often activities, places, clothing styles, languages and virtual spaces. From a shared preference for a specific musical genre, in these cases young people develop collective identities, processes of identification and paths of social participation, marked by the sharing of social practices pertinent to different fields of everyday life. These identities and identifications, however, can be greatly differentiated and very complex: personal involvement in a music scene is not necessarily all-absorbing and exclusive; transitions through different scenes are common; boundaries between scenes are often fuzzy and porous. Significantly, the emergence during recent decades of crossings and contaminations has created problems for considering the music field as being constituted of distinct music scenes. Nevertheless, for young people involved in a music scene, these distinctions are still relevant today and this representation of the field still strongly influences the emergence of musical youth cultures.

Sport

Sport is undoubtedly important in understanding the condition of youth today. A wide and growing part of this sector of the population is involved in at least one form of sport, and belonging to sports associations is still today the most widespread type of formal membership among young people.[6] Given that most young people who practise a sport have regular involvement in this activity, in Italy as well as in several other European countries, sport remains one of the most relevant axes for the study of young people (Kremer, Trew, and Ogle 1997; Green 2010; Green and Smith 2016).

As is well known, among Italian youth soccer is the main male activity, while gymnastics, aerobics, fitness and water sports are the main female activities. The different practices are connected with different biographical paths: individuals begin to play soccer and/or engage in water sports during childhood under the influence of their parents, while floor exercises are often started during adolescence, when (not by accident) another classic female sport, volleyball, is often abandoned. However, two further elements must be considered. The first is that the overall set of youth sports is strongly differentiated. Besides these widespread sports, there are many others, each of them involving relatively small sectors of youth but all together engaging a considerable number of young people. The second and very relevant feature is that a growing number of young people are nowadays involved in a range of newly emerging sports, such as skateboarding, parkour, rollerblading, BMX, street boulder etc., that present a privileged viewpoint on the contemporary relationship between youth and sport because of the ways in which these sports reflect sensibilities peculiar to this sector of the population.

These new sports[7] reveal distinctive practices that are peculiar to the most recent generations (Wheaton 2004, 2012). They are mostly activities started not during childhood but during adolescence, although young people in practising them often have the opportunity to use abilities previously acquired through more traditional sports. The influence of parents is weaker in these cases, whereas two other channels are more relevant, and often interact with one another: peer group and the media. A specific sport is usually 'discovered' by meeting people already involved in it or through watching videos on television or more often on websites such as YouTube (what is more, involvement in these practices often continues to be combined with consumption, and often production, of videos subsequently uploaded on these websites). Furthermore, participation in these sports does not generally start through attendance at schools and courses (still quite rare, although now growing in number) but through imitation of expert practitioners met in the 'spots' or seen in the videos.

The experience of practising the sport, although individual in itself, is then filtered not only by acquired media imagery but also by direct interaction with a group of practitioners; contact and learning these practices develop in the absence of 'vertical' paths of education and socialization; the practice is conducted mainly outside structured environments, such as associations, organizations or leagues (even though a growing number of corporations are working on the institutionalization of these sports).[8] In fact, these new sports often explicitly call into question the very principles of discipline and competition typical of traditional sports, and offer alternative principles such as experimentation, expressivity and fun. Both the modalities of learning and the logic of the practice, together with its places (mostly informal and not specifically designated), tend to be free from the rigidity of traditional disciplines so as to leave much more space for individual taste.[9] Consequently, involvement in each sport is

not exclusive but rather tends to develop in individual or collective plural sets, considering each activity as complementary to the others in the satisfaction of the complex tastes and needs of the young practitioners. Indeed, sharing of a sport is often combined with the sharing of clothing styles, musical preferences, meeting places and leisure activities, with the emergence of scenes and collectivities that are characterized by hybrid traits, fluid memberships and soft boundaries.

Politics and participation

Politics and participation are not among the core interests of Italian young people, few of whom assign these topics much importance in their scale of values. This is similarly the case in other European countries (Spannring, Ogris, and Gaiser 2008; Utter 2011; Loncle et al. 2012; Cammaerts et al. 2015). All recent surveys show that very few young people in Italy believe that politics is important in their life, and equally few claim that they are personally involved in politics. Even considering the recent wave of mobilization across Europe (Memoli and Vassallo 2016), and more generally the emergent forms of political activism, most young people continue to stand aloof from politics. It seems that in the political field, some sort of short circuit is occurring. On the one hand, most young people have a 'noble' image of what politics should be and understand politics mainly as action designed to put into effect individual and social values. On the other hand, the majority of youth have a strongly institutional image of 'doing politics', principally considering it as fulfilling elective political roles, being involved in a party, voting or perhaps participating in demonstrations. At the same time, however, very often young people have little trust in national political institutions and politicians, and equally often little knowledge of or ability to express judgements about national parties or to find their own position in the right-centre-left scheme. Consequently, even if most young people say they are interested in politics, keep themselves informed about it and talk about it, the majority keep politics at a 'safe distance' and do not join institutional organizations or non-institutional political groups or movements (Genova 2010; Bichi 2013; European Commission 2013, 2015).

When the focus is on 'civic and social' engagement, however, the view changes. This topic arouses more interest, although without having a high value for young people. However, most young people have much more trust in figures and organizations active in this field, whether local associations of social engagement or local social movements (potentially directly known) and international associations and movements. Finally, personal engagement in this field is more common among youth, whether through belonging to organized groups or simply participating in collective events.

Considering youth participation in associations and movements of both political and civic-social inspiration, it is possible to highlight some specific traits. The

beginning of this engagement is only weakly influenced by parents and family, who are relevant actors for the transmission of interests and sensibilities, and sometimes of values, but weak agencies for the reproduction of specific forms of engagement. Peers and friends are much more relevant as promoters not only of social sensibilities but also, and in particular, of experiences of participation; in this case, however, each actor is more explicitly at the same time producer and receiver of influences. Secondly, it is interesting to observe that individual reasons for engagement are strongly differentiated and often combine hetero-oriented elements (being active subjects, expressing and promoting one's own sensibilities, propagating a lifestyle) and auto-oriented elements (searching for new experiences, needs of self-expression and self-realization, acquiring competences, finding new friends) without an absolute predominance of one perspective. Partly as a consequence of these traits, individuals do not develop strong and exclusive forms of identification with groups and associations of engagement, but rather temporary and plural forms: they belong to a group as long as it is able to satisfy their personal needs; thereafter they often serenely decide to move elsewhere. More generally, and coherently, at the basis of these forms of participation there are no clear, structured collective representations about 'what reality is' and 'what reality should be', about recognition of the main problems of contemporary society and their possible solutions, but at most some shared sensibilities for specific topics. On the contrary, the modalities of intervention, and the banal practices of everyday life, often represent a relevant glue for these groups, together with the network of relationships among members. These everyday practices in particular seem to be very relevant, and, from this point of view, musical preferences and clothing style, together with the boycott of some specific brands and the purchase of products connected with fair trade or with movements' self-productions, are the main elements of collective identification and recognition (Genova 2008).

Religion and faith

Turning finally to the relationship of Italian youth with religion and faith, behind what seems to be uniformity and stability a much more complex and changeable picture takes shape, particularly in comparison with the rest of Europe (Ziebertz and Kay 2005–2009; Collins-Mayo and Dandelion 2010; Giordan 2010).[10] If the majority of young people continue to declare their adherence to the Catholic religion, nearly half of the population declare different positions, and this represents a strong decrease compared with recent decades. Transition through a Catholic milieu during childhood and/or adolescence is still very common (although progressively declining), but this transition is not always connected either with the retention of a Catholic identity or in particular with subsequent active religious involvement. But beyond declarations of belonging, main traditional forms of religious participation (such as regular attendance at mass

or engagement in a religious group or association) are able to engage only a narrow sector of Italian youth.

This does not mean that youth is substantially unconnected with religion. In fact, only a minority of young people declare that religion is not relevant in their life, while a considerable number express explicit interest in the spiritual dimension of life. The reality is rather that this interest and this relevance tend to be expressed through innovative ways and practices, different from the traditional ones, and often more individualized than, or in any case external to, rigid and structured forms. To better understand the peculiar traits of contemporary youth's religious involvement, the style of youth participation in prevalent Catholic religious groups and associations is instructive.

For these young people, family, parish and school still represent the main agencies of religious socialization. Family is obviously the starting point, as the context in which youth first meets religious belief and sensibilities and as the actor that introduces children to the parish, the first context in terms of religious participation and religious engagement and the place where youth often also meet religious groups and associations. For some of these young people, school too offers relevant opportunities, both as a milieu where religious sensibilities are popular (several religious activists studied in religious schools) and as a further context in which religious groups and associations are presented and sometimes hosted. Nevertheless, these elements do not appear as vertically transmitted cultural models but rather as chances and possibilities subsequently filtered by individual choices. Only a small minority develop forms of religious engagement after adolescence; the specific form of engagement chosen by individuals is often different from the ones they met through their families or at school, and is strongly influenced by personal cultural preferences. Involvement in a group is not a stable result of a linear process started during childhood, but instead appears as a temporary and reversible haven of a personal journey often marked by discontinuities, interruptions and plural or serial belongings.

The motivations too for these forms of participation are similarly various and complex: the search for a space to cultivate one's own religiosity, the desire to train and gain experience, a sensibility for social engagement, the desire to be 'active subjects', the desire for new friendships, are all relevant factors, more or less co-existent and interacting, without universal scales of relevance. The choice of a specific reference group is consequently influenced conjointly by personal evaluation of its spirituality, its activities and the profile of its members; and the same elements also influence the choice between staying in the group or moving to another one.

Similarly, the forms of collective identification, mutual recognition and cohesion can be strongly differentiated. If the religious belief and the specific 'spirituality' of the group is very often relevant, the collective activities, the aims of the group and its style of intervention may be just as relevant or even more so. In some cases, values, sensibilities and representations, although outside of

great, consistent 'narratives', can be the catalysts. In others, the same role can be performed by habits, styles of consumption, interests, leisure preferences, sometimes through collective rituals, sometimes through shared individual practices. And it is not possible to identify a universal ranking of relevance among these different elements.

Youth cultures in Italy: a matter of lifestyles

The four fields considered in the previous section are usually investigated in the social sciences through different and separate approaches. Undeniably, in each of these fields it is possible to observe specific components and dynamics that stimulate the analysis of different dimensions. A transversal reading of the different youth cultures previously discussed is consequently neither so common nor so simple, because of the complexity of the different phenomena considered, and because of the risk of wrongly reducing this complexity through the adoption of analytical categories that lead to an over-interpretation of the phenomena. However, simply considering the main traits that emerged as distinctive of youth attitudes and behaviours in the cases discussed above, five transversal knots and a net seem to emerge as peculiar elements of contemporary Italian youth cultures.

The first knot is represented by the socialization processes through which young people approach the milieux and activities of the different fields. Without forgetting the peculiarity of each field, it is possible to say that these processes are more and more 'horizontal', developing among peers, with each actor involved both as transmitter and receiver. Family maintains a relevant role in all the different fields, particularly during childhood, but it seems more efficient in the transmission of general cultural sensibilities than in reproducing specific behavioural models. School increasingly appears as a context of experimentation, a milieu of opportunities, more than a setting of reproduction of specific ethical models. And traditional mass media are now used together with more interactive media and through a reception that is often collectively shared and discussed among peers. The net of friends and peers emerges, thus, as the main context of socialization, with the consequent weakening of 'vertical' forms of cultural transmission.

The second knot is conceptually parallel and concerns the frames that young people give as the basis of their actions, which can less and less be interpreted through the more-or-less explicit dichotomy between values and tastes, long treated as independent and almost opposite concepts. In all aspects of youth cultures herein considered, this opposition appeared hardly acceptable, and independence also seems debatable. Social sciences often made the more-or-less implicit assumption that in some fields (politics, social engagement, religion) individual choices are mainly influenced by values, belief and representations, whereas in other fields (music, sport, arts) individual choices are

chiefly connected with tastes. Judging from research findings considered here, this assumption is no longer acceptable. The distinction between hetero-oriented and auto-oriented motivation in youth actions is doubtful, considering their co-existence, their complex forms of interaction. More broadly, the existence itself of a sharp distinction between tastes and values as drivers of action is thus challenged by the results of the research considered here, which points instead to the hybrid modalities of their co-existence and confusion.

The previous paragraphs show clearly that the activities characterizing the different youth cultures are connected to socialization processes and interpretative frames and often develop in collective, co-ordinated and organized contexts and processes. The organizational issue is thus the third knot. In all the fields considered, young people act outside strongly institutionalized and hierarchic groups; youth explicitly prefer fluid, dynamic and horizontal milieux. If any form of co-ordinated action surely implies the reciprocal adaptation of individual preferences, however, youth currently attach as much relevance to these preferences as to the aims and the interests of the group. Consequently, referring to individual involvement in groups and associations, temporary and permanent interruptions of the participation are mainly accepted as licit and normal possibilities. Moreover, the relevance attached to the satisfaction of individual needs strategically derives partly from the identification of this satisfaction as a fundamental factor for the cohesion of the group and for a more effective involvement of individuals in its activities. Consequently, on the one hand, a strong and continuous experimentation of organizational forms, able to balance different individual sensibilities among them and with the aims of the group, is carried on; on the other hand, a correspondent weak presence of youth in groups and organizations not very sensitive to these issues can be observed. For the same reason, only a few groups and associations have courses or formal paths of integration for potential new members.

Not surprisingly then, and this is the fourth knot, identities and memberships in different youth cultures show corresponding transversal distinctive traits. What mainly emerges are forms of involvement that, in a synchronous perspective, do not require exclusivity and accept as normal and licit the co-presence in more than one context, and in a diachronic perspective embrace serial involvement in different groups and the reversibility of choices. Concepts such as belonging and identification can thus only approximately describe the cognitive connection of youth with the contexts, the networks, the activities they are involved in. Moreover, on the basis of the data previously presented, it becomes especially clear that, in all the different fields considered here, within the groups the 'glue' is not necessarily shared values or collective aims or formal activities, but also, and often above all, shared tastes and sensibilities, collateral and informal activities, and those common, ordinary, everyday social practices spontaneously adopted by individuals but at the same time often collectively known and recognized by the group.

The practices, their specific meanings, and sometimes their overall sense: here is the fifth and last knot. What, in the different fields, characterizes youth action is the importance attributed to the level of action; to the collective and formal activities that officially 'define' the existence of the group, but also to those repeated, more informal actions, apparently banal but full of meanings, although often not made explicit and unreflective, usually defined as 'social practices' (Ansart 1999). So, relevant elements as well as collective identities and processes of identification are often based on the sharing of these practices. This centrality of social practices is apparently paradoxical, bearing in mind that the composition and the activities of the group, as has been underlined, can in all the different fields considerably change over time, even in fairly short cycles, being declined in groups with fluid organizational models and fast transitions. This paradox is, however, only apparent when considering that these practices consist not only of the official activities of the groups but also, and especially, of personal practices, seemingly not very significant but actually strongly distinctive (or at least considered strongly distinctive by the members of the groups), which characterize the individuals outside the formal boundaries of the group and its formal activities. On the basis of the five knots highlighted as peculiar to the youth presence in the four fields considered in this article, lifestyle seems then to emerge as the prevalent social form for these youth cultures. This is the net for the five knots.

Lifestyles are here intended as sets of practices, with unitary sense and relational meaning, which are distinctive models shared within collectivities. These practices and meanings cannot be understood simply as the translation either of values and representations or of capital and cultural models deriving from individuals' social position, because they derive from more complex processes of signification actively developed, individually and collectively, by the actors (Berzano and Genova 2015, Chap. 9). In all the different fields previously considered, it is precisely through the sharing of these lifestyles that young people mainly cultivate their values and tastes, their sensibilities, and at the same time say, to themselves and to others, who they think they are, who they think they are similar to, and who they think they are different from, expressing in this manner their position in this society and their way of being part of it.[11] Lifestyle is therefore the fundamental keynote proposed here to interpret these socio-cultural forms that are able to create social bonds in many different sectors of youth, going largely beyond strong, clearly defined collective social memberships and cultural belongings, and building these social bonds on the simple sharing of practices and meanings, of actions and thoughts that seem to have at their core the search for new and innovative forms of balance between the expression of personal individuality and the search for connection with other people.

Notes

1. A social representation is here intended as a description and a narrative about an object shared by a set of individuals. Obviously, in each historical moment, different social representations of an object can co-exist in a specific social context. In the following paragraphs, the article will present those social representations of Italian youth that literature considers predominant in each of the periods analysed.
2. Ascribed capitals are resources that individuals receive, as a sort of heritage, by family and by surrounding social context, independently of their actions and merits. Socialization is the process through which individuals internalize cultural elements of the overall social context in which they live.
3. 'Youth cultures' is used here as a sensitizing concept (Blumer 1954) to refer to sets of cultural practices through which young people express shared sensibilities, identities, identifications and social positioning (Buchmann 2001). The adoption of an analytical approach based on the 'fields' perspective is here an explicit choice. This approach is strongly rooted in this area of study, both in quantitative and qualitative research, and given that the aim of this article is the individuation of transversal paths in different youth cultures, precisely the adoption of a fields-based approach can be useful to develop this comparative analysis. For the same reason, referring to each of the four fields under investigation, the specific practices that will be considered have been chosen partly because there is no overlap among them, in particular between religion and politics on the one hand and music and sport on the other. This is the reason why interesting but crossover phenomena, such as political music, religiously inspired volunteering, politically inspired football 'ultras', and others, have been omitted from the analysis: the aim is to show that even in less crossover cultures it is possible to observe complex and transversal frames of meanings as drivers of participation.
4. What has significantly changed during recent years are the modalities of music consumption – especially as a consequence of technological innovation – so that at the moment digital music files and web platforms are the main listening and sharing channels (Magaudda 2012).
5. Research on the relationship between youth and music does not have a strong tradition in Italy, and even now it attracts little interest among scholars. Consequently, analysis of this issue is faced with a dearth of empirical data. The following paragraphs will be based on the works previously cited and on data collected by the author – mainly through qualitative interviews, participant observation and document analysis – about the scenes of rave parties, electronic music and metal music, partially presented in Cepernich, Genova, and Massaro (2005), Berzano and Genova (2010, Chap. 7), Genova (2013), and partially still unpublished.
6. Research on youth and sport has not a strong tradition in Italy, and is quite fragmented. The reflections presented in this section have been developed considering the 2006 Statistics National Institute (ISTAT) research into 'Citizens and leisure time', the 2013 ISTAT research into 'Aspects of everyday life', personal analysis of the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) and Italian Union Sport for Everybody (UISP) membership data.
7. The following paragraphs are based on original data (qualitative interviews with practitioners, participant observation, document analysis) collected through research into new sports – in particular skateboard, parkour and street boulder

– shared with Raffaella Ferrero Camoletto (see Ferrero Camoletto, Sterchele, and Genova 2015; Genova 2016; Ferrero Camoletto and Genova 2017).

8. On this issue, see Ferrero Camoletto, Sterchele, and Genova (2015) and Sterchele et al. (2017).
9. Recalling what Ferrero Camoletto (2005) named the post-sport and corporal logic of 'postmodern sport'.
10. The following paragraphs are based on qualitative and qualitative data on the relationship between youth and religion presented in Berzano, Genova, and Pace (2005), Garelli (2006), Genova (2006), Triani (2014) and Garelli (2016), and on still unpublished qualitative data – mainly interviews – collected by the author about youth activism in religious groups.
11. An extensive debate exists about the conceptual categories through which contemporary youth cultures are interpreted in this perspective; useful introductory readings on this issue are Muggleton and Weinzierl (2003), Bennett and Kahn-Harris (2004), Hodkinson and Deicke (2007) and The Subcultures Network (2014). Among the most recent publications on the approaches in the study of youth cultures, see also Buckingham, Bragg, and Kehily (2014), Poyntz and Kennelly (2015), Woodman and Bennett (2015) and Blackman and Kempson (2016).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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