Growing up in the age of uncertainty
Some anthropological comments on the case of Lombardy

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Abstract. This paper will focus on the cultural representations of the present economic crisis in young people living in Lombardy. It is based on the data gathered through 700 questionnaires administered to high-school senior students in that region during school year 2013/2014, as well as on 75 in-depth interviews with young people aged 18-31 living in Milan. Using those data concerning, on the one hand, young people considering whether to continue their study and, on the other hand, young people who completed their formal education and are now facing up to a challenging labour market, this paper puts forward some observations on "growing up in the age of uncertainty", i.e. on how the new generations represent their own future and their responsibility in making change possible.

1. Introduction

The considerations set out below originate from the university research program "Sustainable practices of everyday life in the context of the crisis: toward the integration of work consumption and participation" (Prin 2010-11) which aimed at starting an analysis of the strategies implemented by young people in order to tackle the crisis that has hit Italy since 2007/2008,

> a frame that, as we know, matches the acceleration of the social and cultural transformation which began at the end of the industrial era, the advent of digitalization, the spread of globalization and of neo-liberal policies, the growing importance of financial transactions in the economy alongside austerity policies causing many states to become hostage to sovereign debt

and to be deprived of their decision-making autonomy [Colombo, Rebughini, Leonini 2017, 9] [1].

In Italy young people are particularly affected by this phase of major historical and cultural change: in the age group 15-34 the unemployment rate has attained 24.3% [Istat 2015; Rizza, Maestripieri 2015]; 26.9% of young working people have a fixed-term employment contract [Istat 2015]; seven in ten Italians aged 18-34 still live at home with their parents [Eurostat 2017]. Given figures like these, the project discussed here aimed to analyse the adaptation and possible innovation scenarios and strategies emerging in daily life [Bovone, Lunghi 2017].

In this article I will use two types of data collected during the research carried out from 2013 to 2016.

The first data type was derived from a complex semi-structured questionnaire administered to 700 (350 female and 350 male) high-school senior students of the provinces of Milan, Pavia, Cremona, Lodi, Brescia and Varese [2]. The questionnaire comprised four sections and explored values, lifestyles, political affiliation and participation and, finally, representations of the future. In particular, the last section went into further detail on the theme of the economic crisis (asking to mention the «top five words that come to your mind when you think of the crisis»); sensitivity to the themes relating to protection of the environment; willingness to adopt sustainable forms of consumption; awareness of the thoughts on declining growth by the French anthropologist Serge Latouche [Latouche 2006] [3].

The questionnaires have been analysed taking into account two fundamental points. First of all, the age of the respondents: they were high school students who had just become of age, which is supposed to have an impact on their

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[1] Translated by the author. An overview of the state of the art on the subject, the PRIN project and its outcomes is provided in the mentioned book.

[2] One third of the students was attending a "Liceo" (a high school with an emphasis on classical, scientific, artistic or socio-pedagogical studies as the case may be), while the remaining two-thirds were attending different high schools (with an emphasis on business, agriculture or industry, or training schools for social work, tourism, graphic design and business economics). Fifty students stated they were not Italian citizens, they came mostly from Albania, Rumania, India, Morocco and Central and Southern America (Ecuador, Salvador and Peru); forty-three of them were attending training schools.

[3] In general, the respondents' compliance was acceptable.

Still, a marked tendency to polarization has emerged, in that some were actively committed to filling out the questionnaire in all of the spaces available and were courageous enough to tell their personal stories and provide lengthy reasoning, whereas others simply «dropped out», left blanks and jotted down random or provocative answers. This polarization in «taking the floor» seems to reflect the present situation of the juvenile world, characterized by an increasingly skilled and well-equipped minority versus the others who tend to drift into marginalization.

The questionnaire has not been administered on a statistical basis; rather, it is based on snowball sampling and is aimed to detect insights for analysis and critical thinking.

knowledge, their sense of belonging and their representation of the future. The second point is the inevitable gap between representations of reality and actual practices. Because of it questionnaires have to be considered as a partial and limited means and, as such, have to be used only in full awareness that any instrument of analysis is selective when representing a given phenomenon [Duranti 1997], so as to highlight some of its properties. In our case, the questionnaire enables us to have access, broadly speaking, to the semantics and the discourse young people move in while shaping their future.

Despite these two limitations, the data gathered appear to be an interesting starting point: indeed, going through a situation of persisting crisis when approaching adulthood and defining one's own identity may have a profound effect on the formation of the system of meanings which (will) guide one's thoughts and actions in the world. Moreover, the cognitive and ethical categories used can be decisive in setting up effective participation and recognition strategies as well as in expanding one's horizons when aspiring to a better future [Appadurai 2013].

The second group of data comes from seventy-five interviews with 18-31 year-olds from Milan area who completed their formal education in the years 2007-2010 and hence approached the labour market during its deep downturn. Half of them have a training school certificate; the remainder have a BA or MA university degree.

Essentially, we conducted in-depth interviews and heard the accounts of transformations and adaptations in four areas: job search and evaluation of one's current work position; changes in lifestyle, forms of participation in social and political life and perception of the crisis (where crisis is meant as a set of constraints and opportunities). Through these interviews we have gathered information on the strategies used by young people who have almost completed their formal education, find themselves in a context of crisis and therefore have to decide how to cope with it every single day.

Starting from these elements (relating, on the one hand, to the young who are deciding what to do in the future and therefore need to imagine the context in which they will live and, on the other hand, to the young who have already completed their formal education and hence have to tackle the crisis in order to survive), I wish to put forth my comments on "growing up in the age of uncertainty": how young people figure out their future and to which extent they believe themselves responsible for making change possible.

2. Living as if there were no crisis at all?

From the first three sections of the questionnaire we derived information on the background for the cultural representations of the crisis of the young high-school senior students interviewed, who had just become of age.

We got the impression that this generation is strongly tied to ICT and in particular to images. In their opinion the most important objects in daily life are the smartphone, the pc, the i-pad and the gaming console as well as photographs, family albums and cameras. Communication seems to take place through visual thinking -— seeing and being seen, taking pictures and being photographed – significant affections and relations are expressed and "stored" through images, one's personal identity and relations are kept alive using images (as it is the case with Instagram and Whatsapp) [Jenkins 2006; Bagnara, Mesenzani, 2010]. This technological generation, though, is still anchored to traditional values such as family, friendship, love, education, honesty/sincerity. The dominating values are the ones that hinge upon affections, on all that is well-known and the family. Whether the young have grown up with the paradigm of the Internet, mobility, travel and experimentation or of sedentariness [Pasqualini 2011; Rosina 2011], this element does not substantially change their set of values, which remains strongly rooted in stability and tradition and displays a hierarchy of values that were typical of the young Italians of thirty years ago [Cavalli, De Lillo 1988].

The gathered data confirm the scenario of a generation which is scarcely interested in political participation. They seem to have accepted that politics has a low ethical profile and the situation cannot be changed. When there is no *vis polemica*, the general attitude appears to be the one expressed by a Milanese girl attending a training school and living with her mother:

> I think I am still young and perhaps immature in some regards, I live my life as it comes, and despite this I know what it means when you have to give up certain things. I will have time to get interested in everything around me, may be sometime in the future.

The scarce interest shown in participation is an aspect of the continuous deferral of decision-making in life (which the interviewees are allowed to do even when their families have limited economic resources and little social support).

No mention is made of any forms of unconventional political participation [Norris 2007] even though, since the interviewees are "always online", we do not know if they are keeping alive some form of remote participation in movements or associations. Assuming that political belonging and commitment are somehow being re-defined and expressed through the new technologies, those who are redefining these forms of political belonging and commitment have not yet found the words to tell this story. Also references to voluntary work are actually quite rare - perhaps because the respondents are still too young.

Rather, young people thoroughly express the ongoing process of individualization of life stories in contemporary society [Beck 1986]: they

express aspirations and desires. Their parents actually support them in every decision, since they are more concerned about their children's "happiness" and "fulfilment" than about the development of appropriate employment strategies in this delicate time or about acting as an alternative generation [Biscaldi 2009; Lanz, Tagliabue, Marzana 2013; Marta, Marzana, Alfieri 2013].

Considering the first three sections of the questionnaire – values, lifestyles and forms of participation – the economic crisis does not appear to have had an impact, as it can be inferred from the respondents' reference values, the places they go to, the way they spend their time, as well as from their lifestyle (that appears to be studded with small purchases and forms of entertainment – the so-called happy hour, lotteries, gaming halls, cinema and sports) and from the steady use of social networks.

None of the respondents made direct and explicit reference to the economic crisis, at least in terms of belonging to political parties or to religious faith (which are not considered as a possible response) or in the description of their life project, which does not appear to be questioned or having to be redefined in the light of the problematic economic context.

The description of their lifestyle, in line with an affluent society, is in striking contrast with the statements they made in the subsequent sections as well as with the alarmed tones used and it appears to point out a gap between practices, timing and relations in their daily life and what they actually express when explicitly asked about the present "crisis".

Neither the respondents aged 18-31 describe a daily life of deprivation or some frustration in their consumerist attitude, regardless the differences in the economic capital of their families; they rather, describe how they have learnt to self-regulate and to come up with smart solutions in order to cope with the present situation in their daily life. It is fundamental for them to feel that they can rely on the material support of their parents, but this kind of support probably plays down the expectations or any other claim of welfare.

> I do cycling and I am a passionate collector, but as I am still living with my parents I can set aside my earnings, I am not a spendthrift. I do go on holiday, I go out in the evening, I have everything I want. If I lived on my own it would be difficult. Now, just to give you the pattern, my monthly take-home pay is € 1,200 plus some additional amounts for occasional work; however, I am sure that I can rely on a fixed monthly sum of € 1,200. If you put it aside, it is an excellent sum, but if I had to spend 60% of it to pay the rent and charges perhaps I would need to cut my expenses. (M, 27 years old, master degree, clerical worker)

> The rent has always been paid by them and of course now they are paying for the mortgage … as for the rest I try to pay my own expenses, but by all means I could not do much without the economic support of my parents. (F, 29 years old, bachelor degree, graphic designer)

> You cannot compare the present with the past. True, some certainties are gone, but … also thanks to the fact that we can rely on our parents we can live these years of transition taking some risks also when it comes to our job. (F, 30 years old, bachelor degree, free-lancer)

The historical period young people are living in is not interpreted in terms of generational or ideological change and does not appear to be able to generate a reactive or revolutionary project; rather, it is part of a strongly individualized vision in which any individual is asked to re-read and re-adapt his/her life project, to analyse him/herself, maybe also to feel guilty for not being adequate, or to rely upon his/her proactivity, if not altogether good luck. The crisis is not interpreted through any "political" categories and the respondents use "biographic" ones instead; there is no idea of the future, only the present exists and there is no consistency, but rather flexibility and open-mindedness:

> As to hard facts, true, once there were more opportunities, but, then, who cares. This is our time, there are fewer opportunities, let us find the ones we have … and then you have to create opportunities, if you are smart you will find something, if you waste too much time complaining it means that you do not want – or you are not able– to do things (M, 31 years old, graduate, consultant).

> You have to be able to adapt to today's rapid changes, you cannot just think you are living in the same world in which the previous generations used to live, you have to be able to adapt to this situation (M, 28 years old, master degree, clerical worker).

> I cannot … I do not want to picture myself in some years' time. I want to live these experiences day after day. I leave the future to the future. It will just come … when it comes (F, 21 years old, training school certificate, secretary).

> The future: well…, I actually cannot imagine … I mean, what will happen … it is no use to have expectations or to say: oh my goodness now I have to do this because in any case …. how are you to know? I don't know ... I mean, today I like one thing, maybe tomorrow I will like something else. How am I to tell? (F, 27 years old, bachelor degree, temp worker).

> I have had the good fortune of being allowed to do what I liked. I mean, I have always made my choices thinking of what I wanted to do in that particular moment, what I felt like doing at that very moment. And so, little by little, things came along by themselves, they happened just like that (F, 29 years old, master degree, teacher).

> True, damn! I am here saying: what have I done until the age of 30? It seems to me that I have done nothing. I mean, I am thinking of my parents who had two children out of three at the age of 30, my father had already established his business, he had two properties … I mean, fair enough, I am here, living in a 40sqm flat, I have just graduated, I have had 2000 jobs, but in the end there is not much in my pockets … (F, 30 years old, master degree, unemployed).

An individualized interpretation of their situation prevails, requiring personal and situational tactics: you have to focus entirely on your ability to solve "your

own" situation, rather than aspire to social transformation. These elements confirm the argument proposed by Amalia Signorelli:

> If one lives with them and listens to them, one would say that for the young, at least until they are such, the main trouble does not arise out of the uncertainty of their living conditions. Each individual or each couple has its own tricks to cope with the lack of money: jobs and temp work, saving on any kind of consumption, reuse, recycle, social purchases, loans and barter. More often than not a fair amount of self-mockery and peer solidarity can sweeten the pill […]. On one condition, though: you have to stay superficial, to live your life day by day or even hour by hour, without asking too many whys and without looking ahead too much. The critical point, the obstacle that it is better to avoid because it is almost impossible to overcome, is planning. This generation cannot plan. Young people cannot set up a plan now. If they try and make an attempt, the outcomes are mostly disappointing or even catastrophic [Signorelli 2016, 78-79][4].

3. Inside the crisis: normalization, adaptability and relief of responsibility

When expressly asked about the crisis, one would say that for the young respondents the crisis is an ordinary situation: it is not an exceptional condition you have to handle, it is not an emergency; rather, it is a situation in which you have to live.

Like all phenomena that have become ordinary, the crisis has also become "natural" and "inevitable" – it is not something that need to be explained and understood, but something that "explains" and "justifies" many other factors: it explains why you don't find a job or a house, why you cannot form a family or you have to postpone important decisions …

It is a situation that, not being an "expert", you decide not to understand; you prefer to rely upon your resourcefulness instead and to nurture the idea that since the world is changing one has to adapt to it.

> But what is this crisis? Do you know that I do not know? I mean, I can't see such a huge change compared to some years ago. In my opinion it is a matter of perception. People have got sick and tired and have decided that they are suffering the crisis (M, 20 years old, training school certificate, unemployed).

> People are always talking about the crisis … 'how are you doing? You know, the crisis…' I mean … me too, I think ... I mean, economy falls, it's true, but people go to the pub nonetheless. People go on holiday despite it … and so what is the crisis? (F, 27 years old, bachelor degree, temp worker).

> So, how shall I put it … it is not an easy time, for sure it is not an easy time … [...] it is … useless to keep looking back and say damn! …the world is … this time is just like that, hopefully things can change sooner or later, like it happens in any time, … one is not always pessimistic, does not always see the

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[4] Translated by the author.

dark side of things … otherwise one feels blue, that's just how things are …
(M, 27 years old, master degree, clerical worker).

In the fourth part of the questionnaire administered to high-school students we asked them to associate five words to the notion of crisis.

The words chosen by the respondents can be said to fall into five main semantic fields.

The prevailing one is the one we could define as being, strictly speaking, related to the economy, i.e.to unemployment, poverty, indebtedness, the banks' responsibility. In their representations this theme is associated, at times, to the suicides of bankrupt entrepreneurs or to elderly people who are driven to steal in supermarkets out of necessity. This semantic field describes reality as it is presented by the media, just like it is, unfiltered and without comments. It is very generic, it reiterates common-sense words and discourse [Baretta, Nizzoli 2016]. The following strings are an example of it:

> little money, no work, change country
>
> debt, suicide, money, unemployment
>
> Finance Act, work, unemployment, money, stock exchange
>
> Lack of money, inflation, cuts in public spending, unemployment, poverty
>
> China (they steal our ideas), work, money, unemployed

This semantic field is based on the removal of the cultural dimension. As Amalia Signorelli [2016] wrote, one of the limits of the current explanations is naturalistic reductionism, i.e. a description of the crisis in purely economic or even financial terms, which results in cancelling the cultural and human dimensions and consequently avoiding any reasoning on the political responsibilities and tasks. The fact that the crisis is viewed only in terms of data is at the same time a consequence and a cause of this inability to plan for the future.

The second recurrent semantic field relates to corruption, i.e. corrupt politics, tax evasion, bribes and lack of values. The following expressions recur: greedy politicians, corruption, scandals, "magnamagna" (over-eagerly procuring money, used for illegal or at least dodgy practices), thieves. The tones used here are less neutral and more polemic, often bordering on the vernacular. The following strings are an example of it:

> bastard, penniless politicians
>
> politics (steal); politics (misgovernment); politics (steal from the poor to feed the rich); politics (they are selfish and greed); politics (for the 4 reasons)
>
> disgust, dishonesty, falsehood, thieves, corruption
>
> negroes, Indians, work, steal, mafia
>
> money, work, unemployment, foreigners (it is their fault)

The fact that respondents blame corrupt politics can be read as a marked tendency to relieve individuals of their responsibility: if the politicians, the corrupt, the multinationals, the previous generations are to blame, then young people are relieved of responsibility for their actions and there is nothing they can do to improve the situation:

> it is not my generation that is responsible for it, but my parents' one (F, Italian, Liceo scientifico, father is a doctor, mother is a clerical worker);

> the big global scenarios are to blame, and there is nothing I can do for it (M, Italian, Liceo scientifico, parents are clerical workers).

It is interesting to note the widespread sense of the uselessness of individual protesting and of the meaninglessness of individuals, which is based on some sort of recognition that society prevails over individuals:

> I am young and there is not much that I can do. In my opinion it is the consumeristic society I live in that is more to blame (M, Italian, Liceo scientifico, mother is a doctor, father is a university professor);

> the responsibility of individuals in this context is meaningless (F, Italian, Liceo scientifico, parents are clerical workers).

This attitude actually nips in the bud the individuals' ability to take action and does not suit the notion of democratic participation the network is supposed to provide. Young people seem to lack the repertoire of metaphorical, symbolic and organizational tools required to "take the floor" and claim a recognition through the language of political participation. They also seem to lack the landmarks required to organize some form of dissent or reaction.

Moreover, out of the 700 young respondents, only four have heard of and more or less know something about the notion of degrowth. When asked «If you do not know it [the notion of degrowth] what do you believe it refers to?», the expression degrowth is mostly associated to demographic decline, to a condition of psychological instability, to a general malaise within society. For almost all of the interviewees the lacking or declining economic development immediately drives people to a negative evaluation. The logical connection these youngsters continuously repeat is the condition of unhappiness and negativity that the lack of economic growth and of access to consumption inevitably entails. Happiness is linked to progress and progress in turn, is linked to consumption whereas the lack of progress and of consumption results in uncertainty and fear.

The third semantic field is related to the family under two slightly different aspects. The family of origin is deemed to be the only resource to survive; the future family young people wish to have one day is difficult to form. This semantic field emphasizes the affective dimension stuck between one's family

of origin, which is "always supportive", and the fact that "it would be risky to start a family". This is a recurring statement exemplified by the following strings:

> Families, children, money, politicians, indifference
>
> damaged family, bankruptcy, social degradation
>
> money, world, difficult family, work
>
> money, family as a certainty, work, the young having difficulties, saving (to overcome the crisis)
>
> shit, resist, experiences, mother (my salvation), work

The fourth semantic field represents the crisis from an emotional viewpoint: desperation, immobility, absence of any expectations, impossibility to find a way out. The young vent their feelings and the discomfort they feel. This semantic field expresses the situation of anguish and immobility, described as having no solution:

> shame, disgust, embarrassment, sadness, mistrust
>
> dissatisfaction, rage, disappointment, sadness, inertia
>
> sadness, fear, decline, ignorance, difficulty
>
> rampant, oppressive, immoral, hopeless
>
> Italy, depression, anxiety, burnt passions, obligation

The fifth semantic field is focused on the young seen as being particularly penalized by the situation. Recurring expressions are: penalized youngsters, useless formal education certificate, young people without a future. This semantic field hinges on the contrast between generations. Choosing a ticket abroad is viewed as the only possibility of redemption. The following strings are an example:

> No work, poverty, zero future, abroad, they do not allow my self-fulfilment
>
> unemployment, uselessness of formal education certificate, the elderly who do not retire
>
> (no) work; (little) money; (hit) youngsters; dark (future); few possibilities
>
> no money, young unemployed, solution abroad, no future for the young, only the most skilled will survive
>
> what a drag, I will be a temp worker, I'm leaving, decay

There is a sixth, more limited, tendency which includes namely those who deny the existence of the crisis and downplay it or maintain that it is a hype, a plot: «I firmly believe that this crisis does exist and will continue to exist because someone wanted it as it is necessary to pursue certain goals» (M, Italian, Liceo biologico); «many not-so-severe situations are exaggerated and inflated» (F, Italian, Liceo sociopsicopedagogico, father is an IT engineer, mother is a free-lancer); «at times the media profit from the most tragic aspects

of the crisis and emphasize them» (M, Italian, training school, father is a tiler, mother is a bartender); «if there really were a crisis, how could you explain all these i-phone sales, designer garments, expensive cars on our roads?» (M, Italian, Liceo scientifico, father is a teacher). The following strings are typical:

> choice it's all bullshit
>
> well, there is no crisis at all
>
> work, the young, discomfort, exaggeration
>
> cyclical, inflated, go on with changes
>
> contrived, implications, it has always been like this

In our group of students only eighteen out of seven hundred proposed a reactive and proactive vision which suggests some ability to use resources and strategies of innovation. In the five words used to describe the crisis there are also some reactive and proactive elements.

Let us read the word change: «without change it is not possible to leave the crisis behind us» (M, Italian, Liceo sociopsicopedagogico, mother is a clerical worker); the crisis is an «opportunity to change» (F, Italian, training school for social work, parents are clerical workers) something we «have to get out of quickly» (M, Italian, Liceo artistico, mother is a teacher, father is an IT programmer).

The semantic field of "reforms" has come up: the interviewees mentioned the «need for effective reforms to tackle the crisis» (M, Italian, Liceo scientifico, mother is a teacher); innovation «each young person should react thinking of the possible innovations of the economic system in which he/she lives» (F, Italian, Liceo scientifico, mother is a teacher, father is retired), but also a possible revolution «we should say enough is enough and start changing things our way» (F, Italian, training school for graphic designers, mother is a housewife, father a blue collar worker).

The terms "courage" and "commitment" have come up: it takes «courage, strength to stand up again» (F, Italian, Liceo scientifico, mother is a housewife, father is a clerical worker); «the crisis can stimulate young people to put themselves at stake, to make efforts to really get out of this situation of instability» (F, Italian, Liceo classico, mother is a teacher, father is a free-lancer); «only the most skilled and the smartest will survive. It takes a huge commitment» (F, Moroccan, training school).

The interviewees mentioned also solidarity and simplicity: «helping the others and working every day in view of future recovery» (F, Moldovan, Liceo scientifico, mother is a housemaid, father is a blue collar worker); «a positive aspect of the crisis: buy less and be content with what you have» (F, Italian, Liceo sociopsicopedagogico, mother is an employee, father a driver).

As for the features of these innovators: most of them are females, almost all of them attend a Liceo (15 out of 18) and come from families with a

higher cultural capital. All of them want to attend university and their families approve and support this choice. They go to the same places where their peers go, share the same passion for images and the same language relating to minor consumption, but they also master the communication skills required to write a well-reasoned text and were able to express themselves clearly and knowingly in our questionnaire, defining their position without shunning discussion.

4. Leaving uncertainty behind?

As Appadurai [2004] reminded us, one of the worst forms of poverty is the lack of resources to set up a protest, be able to express one's point of view, be listened to and hence aspire to a better future and have this aspiration recognized. Indeed, the capacity to aspire generates a future in daily life: it unties us from a dull present so that we can see problems as resources instead.

While this capacity is characterised by a practical aspect (in order to aspire to something you actually need to have a plan and determine how to implement it), it also has a cultural aspect because when planning the future one takes part in the image that society, or the part of it in which one identifies oneself, has of the future, of what is feasible and permissible to ask for.

In the current situation young people are evidence of the symbolic dominance of the present: the difficulty to set their own individual wishes and collective aspirations beyond the present, in a political dimension.

Italian society has brought about a sense of lack of alternatives and a need for adaptation which are still being transmitted to people; as a result, planning activities have been considerably reduced. Hence the acceptance of life uncertainty, the belief that merits are scarcely taken into consideration, the widespread relief from responsibility [Agnoli 2014; Antonini 2014].

Moreover, this capacity to aspire is combined to and at the same time is the expression of «a society of adults that appears not to need the ideas and energies of the young»[5] [Bettin-Lattes 2002, 11].

Since we have recorded the difficulty young people experience in recognizing themselves in the traditional channels of political participation and in working out new forms of expression through the use of technologies, it would be useful to question the role society assigns to the young generations and the space made available to them to participate and intervene [Boeri, Galasso 2007). A lot of educational experiences have been transformed into confined spaces which generate scientific competences, but do not generate social skills that can be spent elsewhere; the languages of school education are closed-ended, often focused on the mechanical transmission of competences but not

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[5] Translated by the author.

apt to provide new terms and new perspectives. As such, these languages are not able to help the young enhance their capacity to consider themselves active players with an appropriate level of agency.

In this research we have verified that the mere knowledge of a pattern of thought that is different from the dominating (economic) pattern – obviously not a niche one, but widespread and broadly debated by now – is completely ignored (including by young people attending high schools with an emphasis on social and pedagogical studies) [6].

While it is true that individual and generational identity in times of crisis is formed through the ways we respond to uncertainty, the general picture we are faced with appears to be deeply worrying in all respects: the young seem to be stuck between two opposite images, i.e. the lack of certainty and the precariousness on the one hand and the unilinear evolutionist paradigm, the myth of progress, which conceives happiness in terms of build-up of assets, knowledge and relationships on the other hand.

The young are telling us that a society of uncertainty is coming into being, one where inconsistency, ability to adapt and resourcefulness are increasingly perceived as being necessary to survive, whereas consistency, stability, memory of the past and strong planning have become untenable and inconvenient values if not actually dangerous obstructions. It is no use to be consistent:

> The young are in a specific position in which staying connected is more important than being consistent, being mobile is more useful than being inflexibly loyal to a pattern. They occupy a social space in which daily relationships require the ability to adjust, translate and transform. It is in this continuous work of adaptation and manipulation that we can hope to manage uncertainty and turn it into an opportunity [Rebughini, Colombo, Leonini 2017, 54][7].

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[6] The knowledge of the degrowth paradigm was chosen because it is widespread and well known as an alternative form of thinking, not because we wanted to maintain that it is a valid one.
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