

# Youth through social sciences. A kaleidoscopic view

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*The article's intention is to stimulate the identification, among the scientific literature that covers youth, of coordinates of synthesis. Different trans-disciplinary paths of research, that are partially overlapping in scientific reflection, are synoptically presented to offer some elements for the elaboration of a perspective that sees in youth not only a field of research, but a starting point to contribute to the study of social change.*

## **Youth, from field of research to perspective**

In an attempt to reflect on the way in which sociological study on youth is conducted, it is important, first of all, to establish if Youth Studies represent a defined field of research where it is possible to exercise interpretative resources of various nature, or an autonomous research perspective that focuses, especially but not exclusively, on a specific portion of society. The scientific literature of reference appears to show a propensity towards the first option: youth and young people – at times, the two terms are inaccurately considered synonyms<sup>1</sup> – define a particular field within society, with their own personal traits, that differentiate them from others. The affirmation of sociological interest on this subject within international sociology associations (see *supra*) appears to support this tendency, showing how youth studies differentiate themselves among the conceptual constellation that consists of education, childhood and ageing. Sociology of youth's affirmation path emerges from the necessity to define the specific object of its study in a clearer way: it consists, after all, of a well-established process that different disciplines have undertaken at the time

<sup>1</sup> This article will not linger on the distinction between youth and young people nor on the use of the two terms in scientific literature. It is not, however, useless to remark what is clearly evident: “youth” refers to a specific phase in the course of life, while “young people” refer to equally specific social agents that intervene in social change.

of their methodological foundation and, in these, of multiple points of view. If, therefore, youth consists of a specific field of research, it seems important to gather some of its characteristic traits. It is a field that, *prima facie*, presents at least four characterizing factors, considering European Youth Studies: it is extraordinarily vast, it is of very high institutional interest, it offers many specific phenomenons to analyse, it is in the interest of many different disciplines of social science. It should immediately be cleared that the scope of the field of interest is in no way tied to the amount of young population in European societies: in the Old Europe, in fact, it appears rather modest and decreasing in number<sup>2</sup>. Instead, the field of research is very extended because it interests the processes of reproduction of society on all levels: economical, political and cultural. This is also the reason behind the substantial interest on behalf of the institutions, not only educational ones, that necessarily hold these processes in high regard. Within this field, as many phenomenons as those that make up the sphere of everyday life are noticeable: from school to work, from friendship to sentimental relations, from family to intergenerational relations, from religious faith to political values, from consumption to spare time, from solidarity to individualism, from interaction with society to the formation of ones own personal individual identity and many more. Each one of these fields, that represents one or more specific phenomenons to analyse, is open to being considered in relation to youth condition. With such a wide array of reasons that make this field of research so scientifically rich, it does not surprise that there are multiple disciplines of social science that cover the subject of youth.

Each of these characterizing factors, however, poses a couple of specular issues. The wideness of this research field could generate erroneous hypostatisation of the dynamics tied to specific contexts or phenomenons, neglecting the heightened internal differentiation of the youth universe, on one side, or limit the interpretation of youth condition to targeted case studies that offer little relevant empirical contribution on a more generic theoretic level, on the other. The very high institutional interest, that translates into an approach that tends towards policies, can focus its attention on the deviant or anomic

<sup>2</sup> Provisional data offered by Eurostat shows that in 2013 the percentage of European population (28 countries) consisting of ages between 15 and 24 was 11,5% of a total of approximately 505 and half million inhabitants. Considering youth population, for conciseness and merely quantitative means, as part of this cohort, one can notice how it is the smallest amount compared to the rest of the population (without considering the percentage, 5,1%, that is over 80 years old): 0-14: 15,6%; 25-49: 35%; 50-64: 19,7%; 65-79: 13,1%. One can notice how the amount of 15-24 year-olds has drastically reduced itself of at least one decimal point since the beginning of the new millennium ([ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/population-demography-migration-projections/population-data/main-tables](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/population-demography-migration-projections/population-data/main-tables)).

traits of newer generations, favouring a paternalistic attitude (at times benevolent, at times punitive) on one side, or on the difficulties – circumstantial or structural – shown by youth to fully reach adult roles, favouring an excessively supportive attitude, on the other. In both cases the chosen approach appears to be only partly capable of grasping the younger portion of the population in a selective way, considering well defined subgroups or specific traits, and only depicts a partial image of youth. Furthermore, the institutional tension tends to generally perceive youth condition in an overall problematic way, considering the spoilage that, time and time again, separates it from the ideal type of adult condition. The multiplicity of phenomenons that develop inside of this field of research offers further issues, partially similar to those deriving from the heightened institutional interest. This field's prosperity could favour a hyper-specialisation in well-established phenomenons, making it rather difficult to reassemble the dynamics that are noticeable for each of these into a coherent picture on one side, or the reduction of the discussed phenomenon to a juvenile one, overlooking the way in which the other cohorts that are part of the referred context are also interested into it, on the other. Lastly, the fact that various disciplines other than sociology – as social psychology, social history, anthropology, political science and demography – cover this field of research, however certainly strengthening the comprehension of youth, also produces many doubts in the adoption, at times in a simplistic manner, of analytic categories elaborated in different disciplinary contexts, and in the receiving of medium-term results through paths of research structured with different objectives.

These problematic aspects could represent a solid ground for most of the methodological criticism Youth Studies might receive: these studies have, in fact, rapidly proliferated in the past decades, offering a sort of *manteau d'arlequin* where it is difficult to draw up an overall view.

This article's intention is to stimulate the elaboration of these coordinates while suggesting a map of paths of research that, in retrospect, can be identified in the scientific literature of reference. These paths are very clearly distinguished to present some of their characterising factors as they are often overlapping and interconnected in sociological reflection. Four paths of research shall be identified in the attempt to highlight the research question that stimulates each one's development and initial disciplinary and conceptual texture. This – illustrative and incomplete – exercise's objective is to move towards an autonomous research perspective, inspired by the Research Network on Youth and Generation of the European Sociological Association, to allow the production of more resources, to better acknowledge an understanding of a social change that is capable of surpassing the uncertain limits of youth. It is strongly believed, in fact, that the moving from a field of research to a research

perspective consists of one of the fundamental steps towards the affirmation – and further structuration – of Youth Studies within the European scenario.

### *Paths of research*

The affirmation of Youth. The first path of research is developed with the objective of analysing youth's affirmation process in contemporary societies: in which ways has society produced youth? Assuming this as research question implies surveying the dynamics that intervened in the differentiation of youth as a new phase in the course of life. This path of research is of a macro-sociological kind and considers youth as a portion of the population: the observation and the analysis of this new portion of society is developed in tight correlation with the need to face the criticalities that accompany the youth-phenomenon. The importance of historic contextualisation qualifies this path of research: together with infancy (Ariès 1960) – maybe earlier – youth is also “discovered” in modern times.

The discontinuity marked by the rapid Napoleonic phase and the launch of the industrialisation process, is crucial for the formation of youth in Europe. The eighteenth century ends with the affirmation of a growingly nationalistic sentiment that accompanies the principle that all capable citizens have the right and the obligation to defend their country: compulsory enlistment finds its place in almost all European countries, as well as voluntary one – usually backed by a need of autonomy or sustenance –, strengthening the young composition of armies. This phenomenon goes on at least until Napoleon's definitive demise (1815) moment from which a progressive reduction of armed forces begins – at least until the twentieth century –. The rationalisation of armed forces favours the exit of its younger component, that offers lack of discipline – and in relation to this – a higher mortality rate in combat. The expulsion of the younger elements is sided by the elaboration, on their own behalf, of complex pre-military training processes (Loriga 1994). In the meantime, in Europe, the long process of educational re-elaboration is taking its place: the principle according to which it is necessary to educate a child and an adolescent – indiscriminately – to *homme honnete* or *gentleman* values, in order to favour socialisation and integration in a society divided in orders and classes, is progressively replaced by the right to education and by its mandatory aspect accompanied by a new pedagogic culture that aims at building integrated but autonomous personalities. The severe respect towards authority gives way to a metabolisation of the sense of discipline that requires an extension of the schooling age (Marrou 1948; Cavalli 1980; Caron 1994). Very briefly, the exit of younger elements from the military at the beginning of the

nineteenth century and the partial assimilation of these into a renewed educational system prototype, begins not only the affirmation process of youth in Europe, but also its internal differentiation: and it is especially starting from this century that school attendance intertwines with social background, pushing schooling onto a binary course that envisions a school for the masses (primary education) on one side, and high schools and colleges for the middle class (secondary education), on the other (Ariès 1960). It should not be forgotten how these dynamics take place during the unstoppable industrial acceleration that indirectly starts pressuring the scholastic organisation to increasingly obtain competence from young people in formation, and even more, starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, a progressive regulation of minor labour begins in factories escorted by the first investigations on the correlation between factory labour and physical deformities as well as urban poverty (Gillis 1974).

Following this path of research the affirmation of youth in Europe revolves around the intersection of three macro-phenomenons: war, education and work. Inadequacy from a physical point of view – in factory labour – and in discipline – from a military setting – is received by the institutional level that favours the emergence of youth from the rest of society. The institutional elaboration of youth immediately transmits an ascriptive connotation to it: incompleteness. This incompleteness – that does not necessarily transmit into a social issue – requires, on the behalf of the institutions, some guided efforts: from here we have the realisation of an institutional approach to youth, leading to the definition of policies, that focuses on the relationship between youth and the rest of society. The contribution of social demography to this path of research denotes its relevance through the elaboration and the use of the concept of cohort (Henry 1966) that perfectly lends itself to the planning of policies: a cohort is a group of individuals, within a specified population, that has experienced the same event in the same period of time (Ryder 1965). The cohort, therefore, identifies a macro-unit of observation in which it is possible to find, on an aggregate level, the real characteristics of demographic experiences lived on an individual level (Santini 1992).

Political action of youth. The second path of research develops around the objective to analyse how youth intervenes in society through political action: how does youth change society? This question of research implies a survey of the young portion of society's forms of involvement in the public sphere and their political protagonism. This path of research is of a meso-sociological kind and considers youth as a group actor: the observation and analysis of youth groups develops in relation to political change. This path of research is qualified by its political aspect: political action of youth groups is considered for its innovative value compared to the rest of the population (Habermas *et al.* 1961).

The elaboration of this path of research is stimulated by the studies on youth cultures that strongly affirm themselves in urban contexts of the beginning of the twentieth century: during the 20's the school of Chicago begins a pioneeristic overseas research commitment – soon to be systematic – on the *gangs* of turbulent adolescents that populate some of the metropolis' neighbourhoods. It consists of an “interstitial” social group, with an internal solidarity and its own characteristics that make up an organised and not formalised autonomous organisation (Park, Burgess and McKenzie 1925). These emerging group identities soon become object of the privileged research of the Cultural Studies that, elaborating new categories such as “subculture” and “youth culture” (Hebdige 1979), focus on its innovative and partially alternative capacity: groups like the Teddy boys, the Mods and Punks consist, in fact, of a merely symbolic violation of social order without engaging in delinquency (Brake 1980). The analysis of youth subcultures efficiently fits into the use of the concept of generation from a political point of view, already masterfully suggested by Karl Mannheim (1928-1929). Mannheim attempts to clarify the nature of the social bond that ties individuals in a generational ensemble and the substance of its specificity compared to the phenomenon of the formation of tangible groups. The generational collocation based on being born and growing up in a certain time and period implies a limited amount of possible experiences that can be lived and developed or that can be compressed and nullified: for the realisation of this generational bond, however, it is necessary that individuals born in the same period and in a homogeneous historical and cultural context, take part in one common destiny. In this case the actors belonging to the same generation take part in the problems of their times with full consciousness and responsibility. This does not prevent the possibility of having different points of view: within the same generational bond there could, therefore, be more than one units of a generation. The core that bestows its consistency and from which coherent behaviours, with a tendency to innovation or to conservation, emerge, true “entelechies”, consists of well-established political values that develop in even smaller contexts, such as real groups where effective bonds and direct interactions take place. These are the groups that allow the realisation of historical change (Ortega y Gasset 1947; Jennings and Niemi 1981). Different political generations that have alternated themselves from the end of World War I until now offer their own peculiar characteristics, strongly connected to their specific context of reference, and express a complex and various phenomenology, also from a political participation-disinterest standpoint (Bettin Lattes 2008). Scientific reflection has widely received the most significant political expressions of some generations – particularly the one of 1968 – promoting the affirmation of an articulated branch of studies on social movements – and later new so-

cial movements – (Melucci 1982; Braungart and Braungart 1993; Kriesi *et al.* 1995; della Porta and Diani 1997; Diani and McAdam 2003). This branch of studies soon made itself independent from the in-depth analysis of youth and, in particular, student composition that laid its foundations (Habermas *et. al.* 1961; Lipset 1967; Touraine 1969).

Following this path of research, then, the intervention of youth within their own society establishes itself through the elaboration of new political values in the context of groups of equals joined together by belonging to the same generation. Even in this case, a primary aspect of youth is identifiable: the noticeable visibility – noisy and violent at times – with which political dispute manifests itself and that characterises youth's political behaviour. This aspect still influences the research on the relation between youth and the political sphere, highlighting time and time again – occasionally reproducing scientifically infertile echoes – the absence or, at least, the reduction of that political passion in contemporary generations.

The transformations of youth. The third path of research develops with the objective of capturing how youth modifies itself in the face of social change: how does being young change? This question implies a survey of social phenomenons that intervene in the re-elaboration of youth as a phase in the course of life as well as unprecedented forms of personal identity development in the process of transition to adulthood in a different context compared to the past. This path is of a micro-sociological type of research and considers youth as individual actors: the observation and the analysis of young subjects develop in correlation with social change. A psycho-anthropological connotation defines this branch of research: the transition towards adulthood is considered in light of the biography of the individual actor (Mitterauer 1986).

The elaboration of this path of research begins from the fundamental studies of Jean Piaget (1923) who immediately recognised the importance of social interaction in the theory of development – even if this has rarely emerged from the research inspired by his work (Chapman 1986) –. Based on how children build and organize their own knowledge, evolutive psychology arrives to the point of defining youth as the final phase (from the age of 20 to 25) of the process of development and organisation that an individual begins at birth. This is characterised by sexual maturity and the progressive achievement of individual autonomy and of personal responsibilities. Developmental age is marked by moments of crisis where one's own vision of the world has to face newer, more complex, forms of reality (both interiorly and exteriorly); different processes of maturation that involve the emotional, cognitive, moral and social dimensions are attempted, and this last one is to be intended as the ability to experience a satisfactory social relationship based on past experiences that an individual has stored by taking them from others and has shared with

them and from the dynamic balance of aggressiveness, dominance, dependency, isolation, cooperation, collaboration and idea of one's self that through all of this has been reached (Galimberti 1999). However apparently well defined the boundaries of youth may be considered, chronological age is not enough to be a *marker* of a phase in the cycle of life – or “life-course”, as sociologists prefer (Bagnasco, Barbagli and Cavalli 1997; Giele and Elder 1998) –: the definitions of age are, in fact, of scarce use in the understanding of challenges and risks that from time to time a subject has to face, considering how many categories of life overlap (Hendry and Kloep 2003). In this sense it is more common to speak of first adult age (from around 20 to 40 years of age) anticipated by adolescence (from ages 12 to 20) and followed by intermediate adult age (from ages 40 to 65) (Erikson 1986). Youth, therefore, especially assumes the aspects of a transitional phase, even if manifesting its own personal characteristics, the axis of which is leaning more towards its successive phase as it stabilizes some traits that will reveal themselves as a characteristic of adult personality: there appears to be much better continuity between the first and intermediate adult age rather than between adolescence and the first adult age (Rutter and Rutter 1995). It is, however, anthropology that concentrates its attention mostly on the transition into adulthood, focusing this discontinuity through “rites of passage” based on the typical aspects of the modern age: it consists of one of those ceremonies that mark and accompany the transition from one phase of life to another, simplifying the changes of condition without violent shocks to society or grinding halts to individual and collective life (Gennep 1909). These rituals have a similar structure and articulate themselves in three moments: in the first one, of “separation”, a person abandons previous positions and forms of behaviour; in the second, of “margin”, the subject is neither in one place nor the other, finding himself in an intermediate space; in the third, of “aggregation”, an individual is reintroduced into society through a relatively stable positioning. Rites of passage have been sociologically re-elaborated into the system of “levels”, in other words, of subsequent, linear and definitive – from job positioning to the separation of the original family up to the construction of an autonomous family – acquisitions. The social change that has taken place in European societies during the past decades has radically impaired this interpretative scheme on the basis of the continuous renegotiation of these limits: scientific literature has in this way developed different configurations of youth (Cieslik and Pollock 2002; Arnett 2004 and 2014; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Furlong 2009 and 2013; Kelly and Kamp 2014) that, while highlighting its progressive extension on one side, focuses its attention on the processes of building individual identities starting from biographies (Giddens 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1994; Leccardi and Ruspini 2006).



Following this branch of research, the transformations of youth as a phase of life-course take place at the bottom of the social change that remodels the contexts of reference and implies noteworthy – and unprecedented for previous generations – efforts in building one’s own personal identity. Its lengthening is a characterising factor of today’s youth with everything it implies in the process of renovation of adult roles. Based on this, research considers the variety of existential strategies – in an everyday life perspective – offered by the universe of youth as an attempt of answering to new social conditions.

### *Towards a new perspective*

The three paths that have briefly been presented lead the studies towards specific fields inside the universe of youth: the first one is functional to the elaboration of social policies aimed at the younger portion of population, the second one stimulates the interpretation of the political sphere and of their transformations, the third one analyses the new morphologies of everyday life and intergenerational relations.

Each of the paths seems to be both stimulating and enriching to take. Actually, the three subjects, appear to be crossed, in a however different measure, by a common latent objective: the integration of new generations in society. The path that covers the affirmation of youth offers this objective in a rather explicit way: it covers, in fact, the relations between youth and society and, in particular, how the processes that take place in it relating to affirmation can be interpreted for the elaboration of *ad hoc* policies. The point of view from which the relations between society and the universe of youth are received, centres on the incompleteness of new generations, the interpretation of which oscillates between being considered, at times, a resource, and at times a problem. The current circumstance, in particular beginning with the economical and financial crisis in Europe, is especially directed at focusing on the social problem of youth unemployment. The path that covers youth’s political action, once again poses the question of the integration of new generations, even if in a much less evident manner: it covers, in fact, the political action of youth, emerging from a partially autonomous elaboration of new political values, impacts on the political system and culture of society. The viewpoint with which the interactions between youth’s political action and society’s political sphere are prevalently captured, lingers on mobilisation, especially of confrontationalist nature, especially considering its presence or absence from the public sphere: this also implies re-discussing about how the progressive individualisation in contemporary societies could realise the solidarity necessary in the formation of group collective consciousnesses. The current circumstance, considering the

scarce – and ulteriorly diminishing – political participation rate among youth, especially suggests concentrating on the absence from the political sphere. The path that covers the transformations of youth also, indirectly, poses the question of integration: it covers, in fact, how the processes of transition to adulthood have changed – looking further into the phenomenon of youth’s lengthening – and the implications of which are for individual biographies. The point of view from which these dynamics are usually looked at, inside of the sphere of everyday life, implies that the tension between autonomy and dependency is at the centre of the realisation of individual identities. The current circumstance, considering the reduction in the number of marriages or in the exits of individuals from their families of origin together with the slow rate of exchange of old generations with new ones in positions of a certain relevance within society – just for the sake of using two sketchy, but not improper, indicators – brings us to highlighting how youth’s condition is today penalised compared to the past.

An overall penalisation, therefore, appears to emerge as a summary representation of the paths of research; the contingent situation of penalisation of youth condition, appears to consist of, in fact, the coordinate of value guiding the research in this field. In short: it is necessary to study youth as a weak subject. Considering as solid the reasons to sustain this, it appears beneficial, for heuristic means, to mark the elements of an ulterior path of research – looking to affirm itself – to favour the elaboration of a research perspective. This intends to put a sociology of contingency on youth condition side by side with a sociology that aims at “unveiling society and interpreting its change” (SMP 2010, 4). A first step in this direction is to consider how the latent objective of the presented paths of research – of the integration of youth within society – could be synthesised into a perspective oriented to the reproduction of society. The expression wishes to highlight – in Touraine’s terms (1965) – as the predominant interest is the observation, the description, the interpretation of the phenomena relative to the youth universe in relation to society’s ability to transform itself, adapting to the changes that interest it without deviating significantly from the well-established structure on which it is based. A perspective of this kind tends to maintain a certain normative aspect that comes from the fact that it – necessarily – adopts the criteria for the understanding of contemporary juvenile universe, an ideal type elaborated from the current “adult” society – and, in this sense, accomplished – or starting from the youth of previous generations. This perspective undoubtedly poses some advantages as well as some limits. Among the first, without delving too much into the specifics of each path of research, the possibility to control the hypotheses that have been formulated around generational transformations and intergenerational relations is without a doubt of a certain relevance. Among the second, the scarce possibility of advancing new hypotheses on the change of society referring to

its fundamental structures. In this sense it is believed that sociology of change would gain fruitful incentive from a perspective elaborated from the naturally innovative – however still potential – characteristics of new generations. A perspective that covers new generations aimed, therefore, at the production of society, in other words, at the innovating processes – including the apparently absent ones – that, somewhat problematically, are activated by youth as an alternative or as an integration of the traditional means that defined it. This does not mean only considering the conformity or otherness of youth – in its proactive or inactive aspect – compared to the rest of society, but researching – and imagining – the heritage and the implications of both one and the other, in all of their unedited composition, within social texture (tab. 1).

Table 1: *Youth Studies – Perspectives and paths of research*

Path of research	Perspective			
	Reproduction of society			Production of society
	Affirmation of youth	Political action of youth	Transformations of youth	Social change
<i>Question of research</i>	How society produced youth	How youth intervenes in society through political action	How youth transforms in relation to social change	How society changes
<i>Approach to the field of research</i>	Portion of the population	Group actors	Individual actors	Cultural incubator
<i>Conceptual matrix</i>	War, education, work	Subculture, political generation, social change	Transition to adulthood, lengthening of youth, identity	Europeanisation, social reflexivity, “socialità ristretta”
<i>Specific field of observation</i>	Policies	Political sphere	Everyday life	Social change
<i>Interpretative tangles</i>	Youth/society: incompleteness of youth (resource/ problem)	Collective consciousness/ individualism: presence/absence of youth’s political participation	Autonomy/ dependency: new generation’s penalisation	Overcoming the dichotomic criteria

A viable path of research within this perspective assumes social change as its primary research question: how does contemporary society change? This path aims at combining different levels of sociological research – macro, meso and micro – considering new generations in relation to other segments of the population, other groups, institutions and phenomena that compose and

qualify the rest of their contemporary society: the analysis of this field should focus its attention – to differentiate itself from the other perspective – not as much on the influences of consolidated factors on weaker subjects in a short/medium period of time – as, for example, youth's flexibilisation of work on the building of a personal family – rather than the transformations of these factors in a medium/long period in the face of their prolonged exposure to subjects of that type – covering, therefore, how work, its ethic, its social and socialising function can change –. In this path of research, new generations, or better, the relations that these have with other generations and with what they bear, are considered a social incubator, where a tendency to change is developed. These tendencies are naturally destined to completely affirm themselves: many would result in being absorbed by the processes of reproduction of society. This practice, however, would allow the running of unprecedented and sociologically stimulating scenarios.

The starting conceptual matrix for a path of research on social change connected to a field of research on new generations could also be identified and developed around three phenomenons. In first place, Europeanisation. This macro phenomenon qualifies a group of contiguous contemporary societies in a growing manner: this does not imply that the twenty eight countries of the European Union are homogeneous and simplistically comparable (Bettin Lattes and Recchi 2005). However, the belonging to the Union and the juridical, economical, cultural and political processes that come from it all merge into a deep transformative tension that has been affecting European societies in different ways and for a long time (Delanty 2013; Therborn 2010; Eder and Spohn 2005). The economical crisis of the past few years has further strengthened this tension. The phenomenon that translates into another conceptual benchmark for this branch of research is the growth of social reflexivity. Reflexivity means the characteristic for which social practices are constantly examined and reformed – through its progressive elaboration (Gouldner 1970; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Burawoy 2003) – in light of the new data concerning these same operations, substantially altering its character. This way the social sphere assumes the ability of being a centre for the re-elaboration of not only the information but also of all the operations that begin from and return to it. This has always happened in all cultures, but in contemporary societies the revision of conventions becomes a radical phenomenon that applies, in principle, to all aspects of human life (Giddens 1991; Giddens, Beck and Lash 1994). Social reflexivity is a continuous re-discussion of society's planning and of its dynamic and unstable current configuration. In short, reflexivity, affects social change as it re-discusses the foundations of society (Bauman 2000). This process, however, should be intended not as a well thought out and planned transformation in the name of a strategic acting, but as an uncontrollable and

unforeseeable change. The operations and the well established certainties introduced by enlightened dialectic and the affirmation of industrial society, lose their institutional standpoints. The mentioned dynamism is for a great deal increased by the globalisation phenomenon. The third phenomenon-concept to bond this path of research with is tied to the affirmation of the younger portion of the “socialità ristretta” population (de Lillo 2002)<sup>3</sup>: young generations’ system of values, which revolves around their private life, progressively tends to the sphere of interpersonal relations – especially the friendly and affective ones together with the familiar ones – of collective employment at the expense of collective participation, especially political one. However, it appears that recently, the reclusion to privacy and avoiding the values of collective life favouring the I, are slowly reducing or inverting their tendency (de Lillo 2007, 153). It should still be established if this tendency goes beyond national borders – the survey conducted by de Lillo is only referred to a sample of young Italians – and characterises other portions of the European youth population.

Europeanisation, social reflexivity and “socialità ristretta” consist, therefore, of the starting grounds for the elaboration of an ulterior path of research that is able to go beyond the interpretative point of view of young generations, based on a dichotomic criteria that, however still allowing important in-depth analyses on youth condition, does not effectively answer the – as of today, dramatically crucial – need of effectively capturing the coordinates of change in contemporary European societies. Investing on this path of research and on the perspective that inspires it, it is believed that it will be possible to elaborate kaleidoscopic scenarios of societies on their way to affirmation.

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to Bettin Lattes’ article inside of this issue for the concept of “socialità ristretta”.

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