

Relational dynamics and youth participation in Italy

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This study analyzes changes in political participation among Italian youth. The main hypothesis is that relations are key in understanding and explaining the propensity towards social involvement and political participation. We used both official data and data collected through a survey representing almost all the Italian regions. An interesting aspect of this analysis is that it explains how youth participation can increase despite the mistrust in the institutions.

Introduction

The crisis of political participation among Italian youth, which has been widespread since the Nineties, seems recently to have been replaced by an increase in involvement in specific spheres, excluding conventional participation. We notice, in particular, that since the Eighties there has been an increase in social youth participation and volunteering and this is in fact the current trend.

This work aims to describe and try to understand the dynamics underlying these changes/continuities in participation, analyzing the subtended cognitive and relational processes. Firstly we analyze national data sources (Itanes, Istat), then we focus specifically on data from the analysis carried out in 2012/13 which refers to young Italian university students. The results show recent growth in youth commitment but an amplification in local differences in different parts of Italy. This may depend on the complexity of the underlying relational, social and cognitive dynamics.

The concept of “social cohesion” has been defined in many different ways that have also influenced its operational profile. With regard to the goal of this study, it was decided to define this concept following the proposal of Chan (Chan *et al.* 2006). He defines it as consisting of 4 features: two objective dimensions (political and social participation) and two subjective dimensions (social and institutional trust). Participation is therefore an indicator of social cohesion and the relational dimension affects the propensity to participate.

Other studies have shown that the 4 dimensions are strongly associated with each other and – in the case of young people (Gozzo 2013) – with relational dynamics (Lockwood 1999).

It is assumed that the growth in participation is associated with high levels of confidence (Newton 2007 and 2011). Furthermore the relational dynamics encourage or restrict this involvement, enabling or hindering the effective social integration of young people in a society. The paradox is that in Italy there is an increase in young people's political participation, in spite of the growing crisis of institutional trust. A similar condition emerges in Britain (Henn *et al.* 2012). However, self-confidence is widespread in Italy, such as the perception of new “opportunities” to participate. There is also an increase in political competence (an indicator of “invisible participation”).

The crisis of institutional trust may, therefore, be compensated by an increase in self-confidence. The aggregate (macro level) may hide the persistence – on the subjective level (micro) – of an actual association between institutional trust, even in its current state of crisis, and political participation. The role played by relational dynamics is, in any case, clear.

Elster focuses on the subjective states. He notices that the choice of action depends primarily on opportunities for action, both actual and perceived. Opportunities are the first “filter” of actions and depend not only on the dynamics related to the phase of the life cycle, but also on the social and relational context. The second “filter” of action only emerges after the constraint of opportunities has been overcome, and implies the presence of an alignment or misalignment between the desires and beliefs felt by each subject. Cognitive and affective dynamics are attributable to this second dimension (Elster 2007).

It seems that among young people a need for unconventional and self-oriented participation, stemming from the decision to take direct action to change social reality has increased. This kind of choice does not imply trust in political institutions so much as trust in direct democracy and the capacity and opportunities, it offers to act in order to affect political and social reality. Conventional participation, however, is mostly associated with institutional trust.

The theoretical model applied to verify the hypothesis refers to the identification of the generative mechanisms of social action, here defined in relation to the increase in young people's political participation. This theoretical model is particularly useful. It distinguishes between a micro-analytical level, that is the system of action, and a macro-level concerning some additive combination or non-additive composition, namely an emergent effect of micro-behaviors (Hedström *et al.* 2009).

The micro dimension includes dynamics due to the spread of self-confidence and social and institutional trust, while the macro dimension refers to the increase in participation. The relational component regulates the transi-

tion from micro to macro, while the increase in levels of education and the rapid growth of youth unemployment are structural factors – external to the model – which are attributable to the first factor mentioned by Elster: the presence and perception of opportunities for action.

The growth of youth unemployment and the spread of higher levels of instruction are, effectively, factors that may directly or indirectly influence participation, which is also organized or promoted through the new media.

These phenomena are related to the sphere of Opportunities, while the second filter defined by Elster, or alignment between Beliefs and Desires, is represented by the micro level of analysis. The micro-micro level dynamic implies the path from individual motivations to the diffusion of social attitudes and behaviors, by means of relational features, related to the dynamics of interaction.

Youth Participation in Italy. An heterogeneous universe

The subject of this work is youth participation. It is seen as a “dependent variable” compared to the independent ones represented by Opportunities, Desires and Beliefs, defined in a relational view. I try to explain the current configuration of juvenile involvement through these features. However, there are different kinds of participation, so the first question is: what are we defining as “participation”?

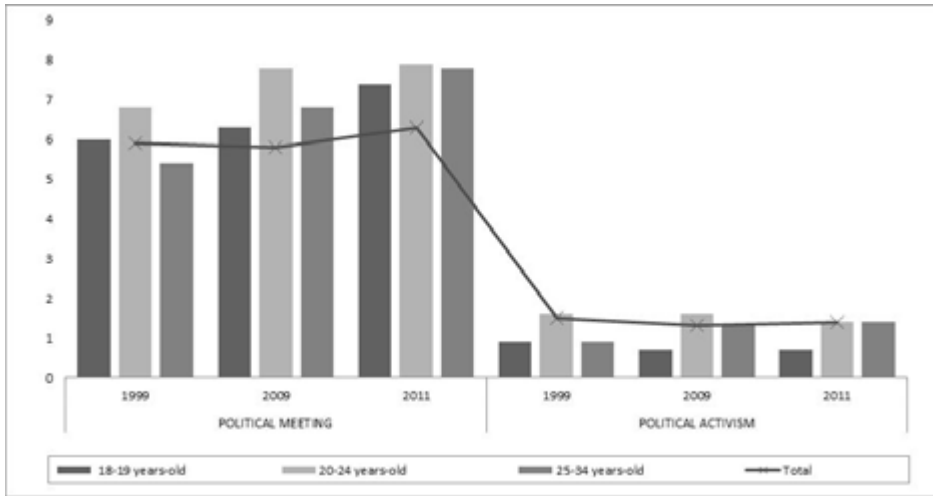
Istat data on political participation permits the identification of trends in Italian youth participation, selecting specific indicators. This analysis shows a clear increase in the self-determined political participation of youth between 1999 and 2011, but this trend is not generalizable to all actions, nor evenly distributed for all age groups (fig. 1). Youth mobilization concerning conventional political acts and, in particular, activism in parties remains stable or decreases.

Youth involvement increases if we consider unconventional actions such as participation in demonstrations, rallies and political debates (fig. 2).

New generations show a marked increase in indirect and unconventional political involvement. Participation in demonstrations, in particular, is a typical action of “juvenile” mobilization and this indicator shows a further increase among young people.

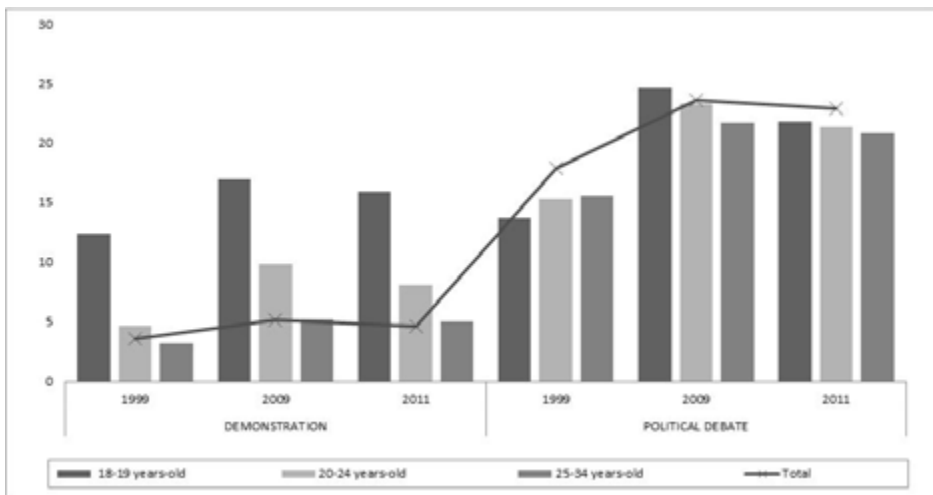
Interest in political debates is another trait that characterizes young people but this trend has changed over time. During the Nineties interest in debates grew with increasing age. In 2009 there was a reversal of the trend. Now the young are more involved than young-adults, those approaching adulthood. This trend is also confirmed by the 2011 data. How, then, can this change be accounted for?

Figure 1: Indicators of conventional political participation: 1999-2011 (% within each category)



Source: Surveys Istat – *Partecipazione politica* (1999 and 2009) and *La vita quotidiana* (2011).

Figure 2: Indicators of unconventional political participation: 1999-2011 (% within each category)



Source: Surveys Istat – *Partecipazione politica* (1999 and 2009) and *La vita quotidiana* (2011).

There may be different cases. We need to consider both the effect of mobilization via the web and reaction to growing economic disparities. Probably a mixture of these elements is responsible. The change in youth participation clearly implies a more general response to the economic and political crisis and a strong solidarity between generations. Young people opt for direct involvement thanks also to the encouragement of adults and, in a tense political climate, they ask for answers or work to improve their condition. The importance of relational dynamics is increasingly evident. This is also evident considering the trend of Istat reports.

The Istat data show that the main agents of political socialization are, for young people, relatives and friends. Although the political influence of friends and acquaintances is particularly strong, it is clear that the relatives are an important channel, especially for the younger ones. Just for the very young, in 2011, the incidence increases dramatically (the difference with respect to friends is reduced from 10 to 7 percentage-points). Further studies have shown that the influence of the close context of the family is even stronger and actually predictable when considering the decisions of young people to participate directly.

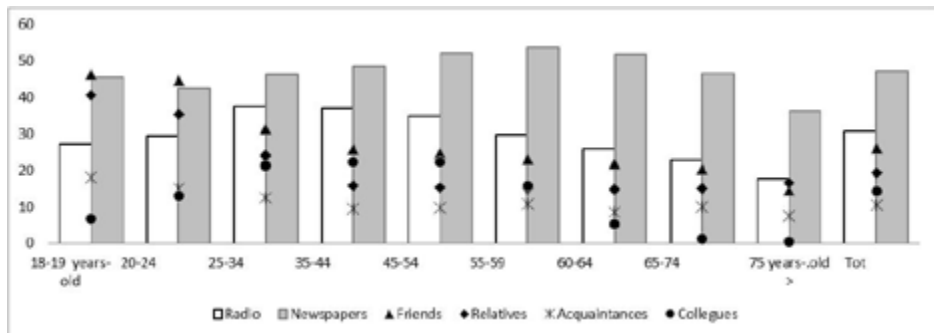
Table 1: *Significance of relatives and friends as channels of political information (%)*

AGE	RELATIVES			FRIENDS		
	1999	2009	2011	1999	2009	2011
18-19	22,9	33,8	40,7	31,7	42,6	46,4
20-24	18,5	31,4	35,5	29,6	38,3	44,7
25-34	13,2	23,8	24,1	22,7	29,7	31,3
35-44	10,3	17,2	15,8	19,4	24,2	25,8
45-54	10,2	13,9	15,4	19,2	22,7	24,9
55-59	10,9	14,6	15,2	17,7	21,9	23,2
60-64	11,0	14,1	14,9	19,1	22,3	21,9
65-74	10,4	14,6	15,2	15,7	20,9	20,5
75 and more	12,4	17,5	16,6	10,9	15,2	14,6
Total	12,5	18,8	19,3	20,1	24,9	26,2

Source: Surveys Istat – *Partecipazione politica* (1999 and 2009) and *La vita quotidiana* (2011).

These results show that the choices of participation and political competence does not only depend on family relationships. They are also affected (in fact, mainly influenced) by friendships and other relationships. The objective is to analyze just how much and whether the various relational types can affect youth participation. Analysis of the mechanisms that generate involvement in politics shows that the affection underlying relational dynamics prevails over purely instrumental reasons. A clue to this mechanism emerges when one considers the influence of the channels of political information (fig. 3).

Figure 3: *Traditional media and ties as instruments of political information – 2011 (%)*



Source: Surveys Istat – *La vita quotidiana* (2011).

The Istat data show the strong influence on young people of direct links, particularly noticeable compared to traditional information channels (fig. 3). Young people are not characterized by an increased incidence of traditional information tools, but by the importance attributed to relational dynamics and, in particular, to friends and family. The incidence of intimate ties as channels of information (but not necessarily political pressure) decreases with age, while the reference to the weak ties (Granovetter 1983; Huckfeldt *et al.* 1993 and 1995; Alesina *et al.* 2011) increases.

The Istat data, however, does not take into account the influence of new media and, in particular, the web as a tool for communication, information and political influence. The Web, in fact, has become increasingly important as a vehicle for political information, utilized in particular by young people. Consequently, the Istat data would probably need an update or a “correction”.

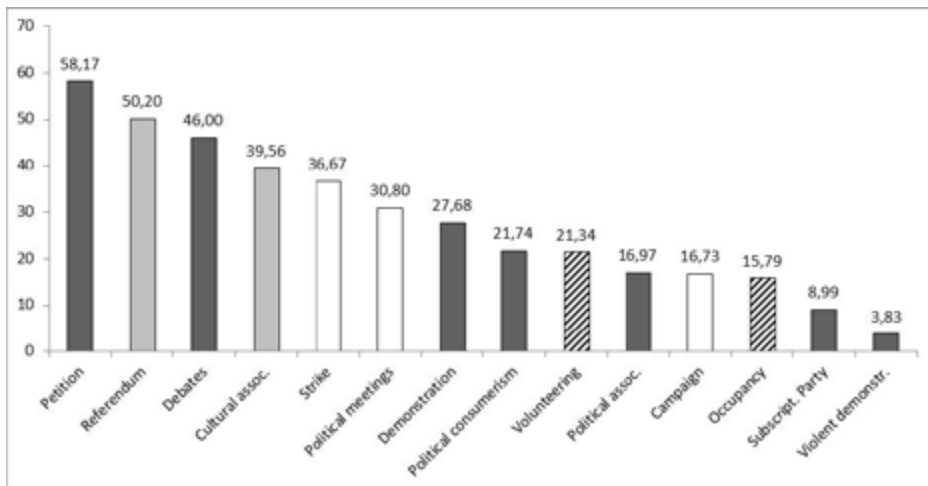
The participation of college students

The research carried out on Italian college students enables us to deepen the analysis and make it more specific, by considering the incidence of vari-

ous forms of participation and taking into account the reference target: educated subjects and particularly those interested in social and political issues. The data permits the comparison of different forms of participation (even those partially neglected by Istat), in order to obtain a more accurate assessment of “self-determined” or “other-determined” (Ryan *et al.* 2000) involvement.

The data was analyzed in order to reproduce the different participative dimensions identified by the literature (Randall 1987; Loera *et al.* 2004; Lamprinou 2013). Istat surveys do not include all the activities considered but include all features, even using some variables as proxies. Distinction is made between conventional forms of participation (registration of political parties, participation in election campaigns) and self-determined involvement (strikes, petitions, participation in a referendum, parades, critical consumerism), as well as illegal protests (occupations, violent demonstrations), latent or invisible participation (meetings, listening to political debates) and associative choices (fig. 4).

Figure 4: *Types of political participation widespread among college students (%)**



* White bars refer the tendency to form associations, the two-colored bars indicate action of “invisible” participation. Activities of conventional political participation are in grey, while dark bars refer to unconventional, self-directed actions.

The results confirm the emergence of a greater predisposition toward self-determined participation. Indirect participation in political debates is typically a high-competence activity that is often cited, in contrast to the rarer and rarer conventional participation. In order to understand the causes of this peculiar orientation of youth participation, I decided to investigate the relational sources of participation or exclusion.

Trust and strong ties

A first relational dimension which affects political involvement is identification in a community. This is the origin of civic sense and the main cause of trust in people or institutions (Putnam 1994), but the most recent national Italian study (Itanes 2008; Demos 2013) confirm the crisis of trust in political institutions. The naissance of disaffection has a structural genesis and is not related to cohorts of age, but young people are particularly cynical towards political institutions. Confidence in institutions seems to have been replaced by a growing cynicism. Curiously, rather than indifference and apathy, this attitude creates youth involvement and demand for participation. The cynicism, in fact, is generated by a mixture between a sense of “internal” efficacy and a perception of “external” inefficiency and it can, therefore, produce high levels of direct involvement.

The latest Demos data indicates that young people (under 34 years old) do not trust the institutions of representative democracy and this attitude emerges to a greater extent for this age group than for adults. Diamanti notes that the youth in 2011 are not more confident than adults, in contrast to the trend found in 2006 (Diamanti 2013). The same trend is detected through Itanes’ data: the feeling of distrust and dissatisfaction toward political actors, political parties and their leaders has grown in the whole society, but in a more evident way among young people.

It is quite usual to hear that young people act as a sounding board of society (Bettin Lattes 1999). From this point of view, youth disaffection is a mirror for collective political resentment, with no strong differences compared to adults but, unlike those, young people are not simply resigned or frustrated persons. The principle current trend in youth involvement shows that – compared with data detected in early years – political disenchantment does not cause disaffection but, rather, encourages participation.

The latest national polls (Diamanti 2013) indicate that more than 40% of young people are directly involved in political or social projects, including solidarity and environmental action. It seems, therefore, questionable to hypothesize a general crisis of “juvenile participation”. Political disaffection or complete rejection of the political dimension were prevalent features until the Nineties. This dimension is gradually replaced by proactive orientations, mainly referable to non-conventional, social or invisible actions.

A surplus of youth involvement is not the result of greater institutional trust and it does not seem to arise from an increase in generalized trust (Stzompka 2000; Newton 2007; Newton *et al.* 2011) but it arises from a desire to promote social change, which requires a direct commitment.

The research carried out on a sample of Italian university students¹ allows us to enhance these considerations by observing the level of education. We obtain lower percentages of generalized trust, compared to national data. It seems that – according with Itanes' and Demos' data – the lower confidence of young people is counterbalanced by an increase of trust in international institutions.

Another distinguishing trait refers to the high youth confidence towards the mayor of the city, probably the result of increasing commitment to the local dimension. Consequentially, political trust has not totally collapsed, but is focused on a local or international dimension, while there is a lack in institutional trust and cognitive involvement when we look for the national level. The interpersonal feature also shows an increase in confidence referred mainly to the “strong” ties (Granovetter 1983) but it is difficult to assess whether this is a generational trait or a common, Italian trait (Banfield 1958; Putnam 1994). On the other hand, considering the kind of links that influence the politic choices of the respondents, parents and friends have a great – and almost equal – importance (fig. 5).

Adults have similar ideas, compared with those of friends, much more often than young people. This trait persists regardless of the issue (fig. 6), while the influence of parents has fewer differences compared with the cohort of age.

If we look at the proportion of subjects thinking like their parents or friends (fig. 6), we note the greater importance of parents. Excluding religion, moreover, adults tend to declare a greater *homophily* as regards their friends. Parents play a primary role as points of reference for life choices and behavior of young people who, however, show independence of judgment in the field of ethical issues.

The autonomy in ethic choices is, probably, the result of an increase in self-determination among young people, related to cognitive features (increasing education levels, empowerment, political competence and direct participation).

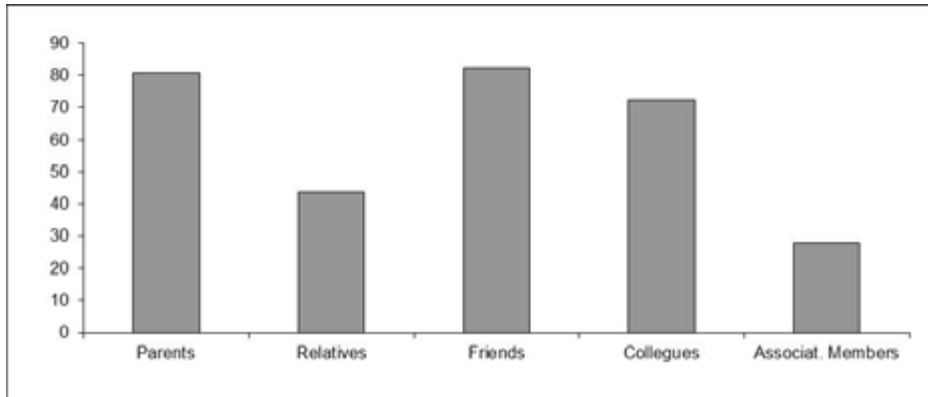
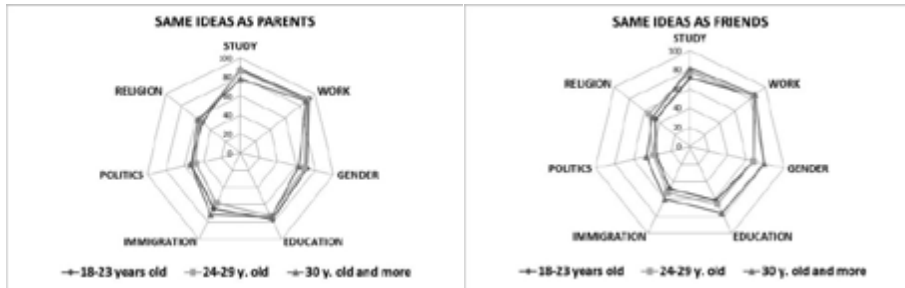
¹ Our Data are about a survey carried out on 1.389 students belonging to Italian humanistic universities. The Universities were selected with the aim to include the most part of Italian Regions and to represent both three-year and specialized students. We selected from one to three courses for each Department (depending on the greatness of each University). All students attending each course were contacted, but not everybody accepted the interview. Finally, the proportion of respondents obtained was distributed by geographic area with a slight over-representation of Florence (due to the importance of the university) and a under-representation of Padua, Udine and Cagliari (departments where the number of students is lower). The sample includes 478 men and 907 women while 913 respondents were 18 – 23 years old. The average age is 24 years old. The selected sample has connotations that reflect, in general, typical traits of Italian university students.

Table 2: *Propensity to general and institutional trust (%)*

Trust on...	Age				Trust on...	Age			
	18-24	25-29	30 and more	Total		18-24	25-29	30 and more	Total
<i>N. (a.v.)</i>	(913)	(362)	(114)	(1.389)	<i>N. (a.v.)</i>	(913)	(362)	(114)	(1.389)
<i>People</i>					<i>International political institutions</i>				
Always	1,3	1,4	3,5	1,5	Always	10,0	7,0	9,0	9,2
Sometimes	29,7	33,6	42,5	31,5	Sometimes	56,8	53,5	60,7	56,1
Rarely	44,6	47,7	36,8	44,9	Rarely	23,0	25,2	21,4	23,5
Never	22,4	16,4	14,9	20,3	Never	8,6	9,8	6,7	8,8
I don't know	2,0	0,9	2,3	1,8	I don't know	1,6	4,5	2,2	2,4
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>National political institutions</i>					<i>Mayor</i>				
Always	0,2	0,56	0	0,3	Always	4,8	4,2	9,1	4,9
Sometimes	25,3	26,26	35,2	26,2	Sometimes	34,7	33,0	46,6	35,0
Rarely	49,5	45,81	51,2	48,6	Rarely	30,2	31,1	21,6	29,9
Never	23,8	26,54	13,6	23,9	Never	20,9	22,7	15,9	21,1
I don't know	1,2	0,83	0	1,0	I don't know	9,4	9,0	6,8	9,1
<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>100</i>

The relational dimension

Can significant relationships (so-defined by each interviewed) have a direct influence on participation choices? Relational dynamics can be traced back to political participation by adopting two different points of view. The first (looking at macro dynamics) analyzes the amount and typology of relationships among people in society and defines relationships as a community-resource, the result of individual integration in a social context. These studies have a strong ethical component. Participation is considered as one indicator of more general concepts, such as “integration”, “social cohesion” or “social capital” (Putnam 1994 and 2000; Lookwood 1999; Chan *et al.* 2006). The second point of view (micro level) refers to typology (kin/non kin ties) and structure (network analysis indices) of individual ego-networks and aims to locate the kind of ties/nets related to high individual involvement (Huckfeldt *et al.* 1993;

Figure 5: *Ties with medium-high influence on youth political opinion (%)*Figure 6: *Influence of parents/friends opinions on youth choices (%)*

Chiesi 1999; Salvini 2007 and 2013). This latter perspective needs to take into consideration different mechanisms related to age and generations (for example, socialization effects and kin ties are more important for young people and women). The two dynamics are both important phenomena and are related each other (it is clear that micro-genesis affects macro building, with consequent spread of social and political participation).

The paradox we want to understand is why Italian young people show an increase in social and political involvement without a proportional increase in social/institutional trust. If we assume that the relational dimension mediates between subjective and objective features of social cohesion (Chan *et al.* 2006), it is possible to look for an answer in relational dynamics.

Network analysis is applied focusing on the micro-genesis of the increase in youth political participation. I applied two kinds of relational measure. I studied both the structure of networks that college students indicate as “important” or “significant ties”, and personal characteristics of each interlocutor with whom the interviewee says they confide in.

Network analysis tools are applied with the aim of analyzing the structure of significant networks, that is those networks made of ties spreading information and participation for respondents.

The structural analysis of ego-networks is determined by asking college students with whom they usually talk about politics. I hypothesize that those who refer only or mainly to kin ties, tend to structure “bond” ties, with links that protect only in-group membership. These kinds of networks are not helpful if you want to construct a community sense or if you want to promote social and political trust (and so the increase of participation). Instead, the tendency to form groups or associations, getting in touch with other people, is an indicator of social cohesion as a community resource (Huckfeldt *et al.* 1995; Putnam 1994 and 2000) and an indicator of self-determination and social capital as an individual resource (Bourdieu 1958; Burt 2000; Lin 2001). People who prefer to talk about politics with members of associations or colleagues have a surplus in relational tools and this is due to the presence of non-kin ties, such as weak ties (Granovetter 1983). The main presence of kin ties implies, more frequently, a lack in heterogeneous informative channels, small mobilization and “other-determination” (Alesina *et al.* 2011).

I hypothesize that weak ties, when confidants are *bridges* among different clusters, improve and increase the quantity of disposable information, which is why subjects with a lack of non kin ties have fewer opportunities and information (Salvini 2005). Different kinds of networks and relational resources favor the emergence of a *bridging* social capital, which is a more appropriate resource for democratic participation, compared to *bonding* social capital, and is compatible with a high level of social cohesion. In order to verify these hypotheses, I compare Network Analysis results with trust and political involvement of each respondent.

Network Analysis measures are applied to cognitive nets constituted by a maximum amount of 10 interlocutors, frequently contacted by respondents. I distinguished two kinds of measures. The first is for the structure of ego-networks, which are detectable by means of network analysis tools. The second is for the characteristics of interlocutors, synthesized by specific indexes. Both measures have been calculated for each network and for each respondent. With respect to the networks, I selected information about size, density, and centrality (tab. 3).

The second kind of measure relates to the qualitative characteristics described by the respondents for each node. The selected information are: gender of each interlocutor; relationship between the respondent and his/her confidant, coded by distinguishing between strong or weak ties (Granovetter 1983) and the individual’s propensity to influence or to be influenced by each confidant’s political ideas.

Table 3: *Significance of the main Network Analysis key measures*

N.A. index	Computational procedure	Significance
<i>Size</i>	Number of nodes	Number of selected confidants
<i>Density</i>	A measure of a closed network. The fewer nodes in the network, the more likely it will be a higher density	Propensity for communication among people within the nets. This measure increases when the ego-nets have principally strong ties and / or few confidants
<i>2StepR</i>	This index measures the presence of pairs of nodes with an intermediary	Average number of interlocutors who have good propensity to contact each other, assuming the heterogeneity of ties within the network
<i>Broker</i>	Intermediation capacity of each node. This index detects the presence of nodes with a structural advantage caused by their position within the network	Networks characterized by greater size and presence of brokers
<i>Degree centrality</i>	This measure is a result of the “calculation of degrees”, i.e. by the number of adjacent nodes. The measure is derived from the calculation of the number of direct ties that connect individuals within the network	The node with the highest rank is, metaphorically, a place in the group where “things happen”. The actors with a low degree represent the peripheral positions in the network.
<i>In-degree</i>	The centrality of each node depends on the number of nodes that select it.	Index of prestige. The centrality of each node depends on the number of choices that the node has received.
<i>Out-degree</i>	The centrality of each node depends on the number of other nodes that it selected	Measure of Sociability. This index shows the vulnerability of a subject, measured in terms of the request for help/information to other nodes but also its propensity to sociability.
<i>Closeness centrality</i>	This measure is the opposite of distance among nodes. Distance in a graph is measured through the number of intermediaries among nodes. The more a node is close to all others, the more it has a high closeness index.	A person is much more central as s/he is in a position to interact quickly (having few but well-connected intermediaries) with the other actors. A high index value means, on a structural level, that all or most of the actors are connected to each other, directly or through a broker.
<i>Betweenness centrality</i>	Betweenness centrality relates to the interposition of an actor on “paths” that connect all pairs of nodes in the network.	Node that acts as a “bridge” or connection between subjects and/or groups.

Looking at the networks as a whole, the prevailing tendency is to be influenced by confidants and / or the spread of sociability (*out-degree*), rather than the identification of reference points within the ego-nets (*in-degree*). The direct ties (*degree*) are more common than the indirect ones (*closeness*) and this is confirmed by the lack of “structural intermediaries” (*betweenness*), although there is a wide number of intermediaries between pairs (*broker*, *2 step reach*).

Altogether, there is a similar proportion of strong and weak ties, so the networks do not appear to be characterized mainly by family ties. There is, rather, a certain heterogeneity in the composition of information channels (although trust is focused on the intimate bonds). The profile changes, however, notably by distinguishing three clusters identified with reference to the extension of ego-nets (tab. 4).

The *size* value is the number of selected interlocutors and it is the reference criterion to distinguish three relational structures: the isolated subjects (less than 4 cited contacts); the subjects with medium size ego-networks (from 4 to 6 contacts) and those with large ego-networks (7-10 contacts).

A first observation arises immediately: the second cluster is characterized by students who prefer intimate ties, and the third by those who favor weak ties. A second criticism relates to the number of these groups. The third cluster is less numerous but it includes 22% of respondents, so it is not a “marginal” group. The second cluster, the most numerous, includes 43% of respondents, while 35% of students (mostly “adults”) belong to the first. Young people constitute 48% of the second cluster. The third group cuts across age, with slightly higher proportions of young or adult. People belonging to this last group have extended and heterogeneous networks.

The higher propensity of respondents to refer to weak ties to acquire information and the presence of trustful attitudes are associated with the network size and the number of weak ties. This confirms the thesis that the propensity to trust is a resource, allowing access to information channels, participatory tools and relational dynamics (Gabriellini 2011). The gender of interlocutors does not affect these results, while noticeable is the impact of high political competence among confidants within the most extensive networks.

The first cluster, with isolated students, has limited values for all indices. The second cluster is characterized by an intermediate level with respect to the extension of the networks and the presence of subjects with relational structures focused on strong ties. Sociability subtended to the network (*out degree*) is similar to that recorded for the third cluster, but the presence of reference points or opinion leaders in the network is limited. This specificity becomes even more noticeable considering the *closeness* centrality. Finally, the *betweenness centrality* can be taken into account only for the third cluster.

Table 4: *Relational characteristics of the three clusters identified (average values)*

Relational clusters	CLUSTER 1	CLUSTER 2	CLUSTER 3
Network's characteristics	0-3 interlocutors	4-6 interlocutors	7-10 interlocutors
Ties	15.2	26.7	36.3
Density	0.89	2.89	10
2 step reach.	5.07	9.83	20.34
Broker	3.59	7.77	18.56
Out-degree	14.35	31.1	32.23
In-degree	10.12	24.31	28.54
In-closeness	10.46	20.45	36.11
Out-closeness	8.25	19.26	34.7
N ego Betweenness	0.13	1.7	3.84
Node's characteristics	0-3 interlocutors	4-6 interlocutors	7-10 interlocutors
Num. of interlocutors	2	5	9
Num. of reliable confidants	6	8	10
Num. of reliable strong ties	5	6	8
Num. of reliable weak ties	1	1	2
Self-determination*	0.79	1.61	2.61
Other-determination **	0.3	0.84	1.88
Number of strong ties	1.33	2.53	3.66
Number of weak ties	0.74	2.21	5.2
Num. of male interlocutors	1.08	2.47	4.64
Num. of female interloc.	1.01	2.28	4.41
Nodes with pol. comp.	1.42	3.05	5.57

* Number of interlocutors influenced by respondent.

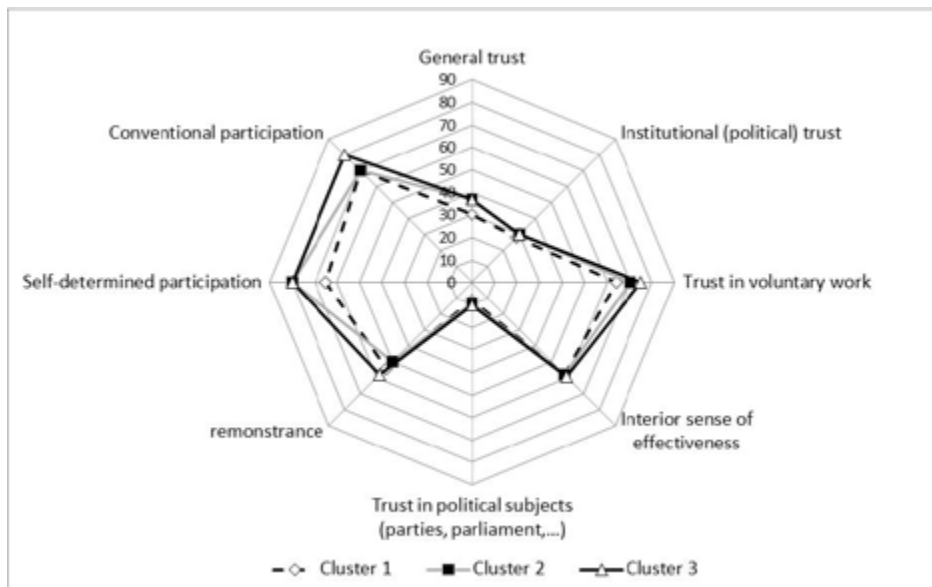
** Number of interlocutors who influence the respondent.

Looking at the qualitative dimension, we note that trust is mostly due to the presence of strong ties, rather than dependent on generalized trust. What are the effects according to changes in participation? Belonging to the third cluster is more strongly associated with the dynamics of participation than it

is to the cohort of age. Both young people and adults have a slightly higher proportion of belonging to this cluster. Consequently, it seems that relational dynamics arise as an explanatory factor for increased participation in a specific direction (fig. 7). In addition, the effect of age seems to be crossed with other causal factors such as levels of education and relational dynamics.

Those who belong to the third cluster are more oriented towards protest actions (marches, strikes) and less to conventional participation (members of political parties, campaigning, voting). The level of participation in self-directed actions (petitions, boycotts, referendum) is not common only among isolates. With regard to the motivational component, there is a lack in a sense of external efficacy (i.e., the perception that political institutions function effectively) while the sense of internal efficacy is widespread. The combination between high internal and low external efficacy is a coherent trait of cynicism. This attitude is specifically localized in relation to the perception of politics among young people with higher levels of education. The data is confirmed if we consider the trust in politicians, while there is a high level of trust in voluntary associations, particularly prevalent among those belonging to the third cluster.

Figure 7: *Relational clusters and other features (affective, cognitive and participatory dynamics)*



Features of youth participation

A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) model is applied in order to assess the connection between the typology of youth participation and other fea-

tures that affect youth involvement (namely, affective, cognitive and relational dynamics). PCA is a tool that permits the joint analysis of data. The solution emerges crossing different dimensions by mean of the correlation among variables² (tab. 5).

In order to assess the impact of the dynamics that are hidden using only monovariate or bivariate analysis, a model that focused in particular on the specific type of participation was created. The proposed analysis allows for the discrimination between two lines of youth participation: conventional and unconventional. Each is associated with specific characteristics and tends to polarize, in particular, attitudes to actual behavior. The result is a representation of what could be considered as two universes of participation, that are the expression of different dynamics.

This solution appears to be adequate. The selection of two factors (n=1.389 cases) can explain 31% of the overall variance, almost equally spread along the axes of the Cartesian plane. Affective, cognitive, and relational components also appear as all equally included in the solution (fig. 8).

The first dimension (represented by the abscissa) contrasts affective dynamics (trust and self-determined participation) and, above all, actions of protest. The propensity to trust in political institutions, in particular, is opposed to actions of protest and, in general, to self-direction (which can be considered as a typical youth attitude of involvement).

Note that this dimension is both characterized by a high propensity to use the internet for information and a high propensity to build meaningful relational networks (third relational cluster), a trend which contrasts with the negative semi-axis of the first dimension. This pole includes all other ways of getting information, making it a proper pole for traditional channels of information.

The second dimension (ordinate) represents the propensity towards political information *versus* relational isolation and shows a second way: conventional participation, associated with an attitude of trust towards others and towards parties (sense of external efficacy), opposed to relational isolation.

Excluding the relational dynamics, this second dimension opposes two models of involvement: self-directed and conventional participation. The first is conveyed mainly by trust in oneself and by web browsing, while the second

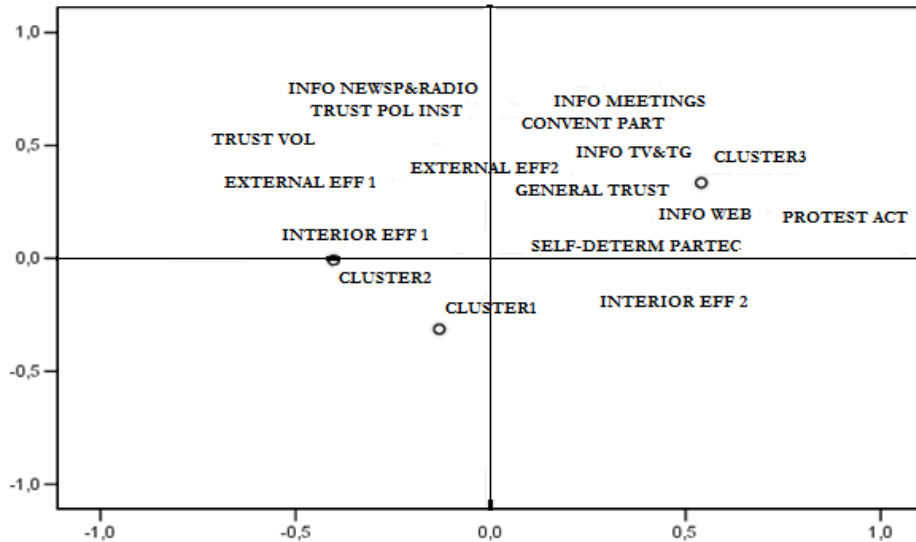
² The indicators have been calculated through dummy variables (dichotomous variables have been defined for each category of each categorical variables) or by summing categories showing a medium-high level of involvement/participation. Finally, we obtain variables that can be considered as metric data. Concerning other prerequisites for PCA application, the size of sample is higher than 300 cases and we introduce more than 3 variables for each factor, without outliers. Besides, the correlation matrix did not show too high or low indices of correlation.

Table 5: *Variables in PCA model*

Variable names	The meaning of variables	Questions or procedure (for index)
Cluster 1	Isolated people	INDEX: First relational cluster
Cluster 2	People with a prevalence of kin ties among their political confidants	INDEX: Second relational cluster
Cluster 3	People with a presence of kin & non kin ties among their political confidants	INDEX: Third relational cluster
GENERAL TRUST	People who trust in others	"I trust in people"
INTERIOR EFFIC 1	People who think they can affect political choices	"People can affect political decisions"
INTERIOR EFFIC 2	People who have political competence	"I understand political issues"
EXTERNAL EFF 1	People who think kindly of politicians	"I think that elected people act with responsibility"
EXTERNAL EFF 2	People who think political acts are effective	"I think the parties are interested in solving people's problems"
INFO TV & TG	People who detect political information by means of tv	"I acquire political information watching television and newscasts"
INFO NEWSP & RADIO	People who detect political information via radio and/or newspaper	"I acquire political information listening the radio / reading newspapers"
INFO MEETINGS	People who detect political information from meetings	"I acquire political information attending electoral meeting"
INFO WEB	People who detect political information on the web	"I acquire political information by web (social network, news, etc.)"
TRUST POL INST	People who trust in political action	"I trust in political associations"
TRUST VOL	People who trust in volunteering	"I trust in volunteering"
PROTEST ACT	Actions of political protest	INDEX: Protest activities (marches, manifestations, strikes, etc...)
CONVENT PART	Actions of political participation	INDEX: Activities of conventional political participation (to vote, to campaign, etc...)
SELF-DETERM PART	Self-determined political actions (individual actions with political significance)	INDEX: Self-determined participation (consumerism, signing petitions, signing for referendums)

cumulates traditional channels of information and institutional trust. Generalized trust is placed transversely with respect to this dichotomy, as well as the propensity to structure relationships.

Figure 8: *Graphical representation of the PCA model*

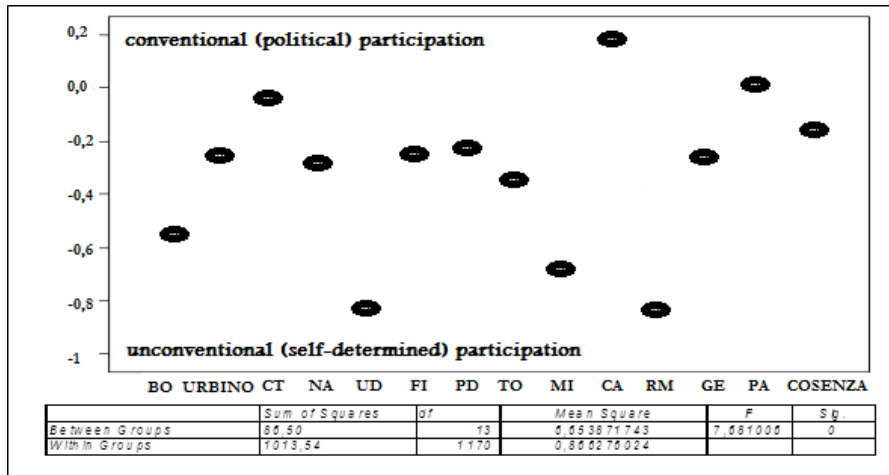


Factor scores recorded on this dimension do not show significant differences compared to the variance detected on a regional basis (Levene test), so you can get more information about the influence of any contextual effects by analysis of variance (fig. 9). The ANOVA allows, in particular, to link the different practices of participation to specific contextual effects (here detected considering the university in which students were enrolled).

Southern Italy and the islands areas (Catania, Cagliari, Palermo and Cosenza) are strongly characterized by conventional (traditional) forms of political participation, even taking into account the age factor. Participation is more heterogeneous in Urbino, Salerno, Padova, Torino and Genova. These are prestigious universities, located in small but central areas (except Torino). Finally, participation is primarily self-directed in Udine, Milano and Bologna, central and important areas.

The factor scores related to discrimination between forms of political participation have a distribution that approximates to the Gaussian (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test) and it is, therefore, possible to propose a regression model that allows us to assess the impact of additional dynamics on the propensity to conventional participation rather than self-directed participation (tab. 6).

Figure 9: ANOVA results and contextual effects



The structural dynamics only affect the choice of participation in a partial fashion. The presence of a stable job or not, in particular, does not seem to have any relevance. Age, male gender and higher levels of education are significantly correlated with the propensity to conventional participation. The causal relationship found for the structural dynamics is, however, limited, as well as the influence of family and friends, a sense of internal efficacy and the incidence of the context associated with southern or central Italy. We note, moreover, that the trust in volunteering (but not the actual involvement in voluntary associations) affects the dynamics of participation. Only the political associations certainly affect the propensity to conventional participation, rather than the self-directed model of participation. The propensity to conventional participation (rather than self-directed involvement) is mainly related to trust in political institutions – measured through the perception of institutional efficacy – and to trust in charitable organizations (voluntary work, the church).

Conclusion

This work highlights some traits of Italian youth's political participation and it does not show a crisis of participation, but rather the increasing importance of different participatory acts.

The picture that emerges shows increasing political skills among voters. The reference sample (consisting of university students) does not present pecu-

Table 6: *Regression model (dependent variable = factor scores of PCA model)*

Y = self-determined versus conventional participation	Unstandardized Coefficients		Std. Coeff.	t	Sign.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-2.47	0.12		-20.02	0.00
Gender (M)	0.08	0.04	0.04	1.96	0.05
Age	0.01	0.00	0.07	2.70	0.01
Degree	0.10	0.05	0.04	2.08	0.04
Regular job	0.05	0.08	0.02	0.68	0.49
Temporary job	0.05	0.04	0.02	1.18	0.24
Trust in internat. politics	0.37	0.04	0.18	9.34	0.00
Trust in church	0.41	0.04	0.20	9.63	0.00
Trust in volunteering	0.37	0.04	0.18	9.34	0.00
Trust in Mayor	0.31	0.04	0.16	8.10	0.00
Cultural associationism	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.84	0.40
Political associationism	0.32	0.05	0.12	6.00	0.00
Volunteering	0.02	0.05	0.01	0.40	0.69
Web - high pol. competence	0.07	0.01	0.15	7.45	0.00
Parents	0.21	0.05	0.09	4.32	0.00
Relatives	0.14	0.04	0.07	3.65	0.00
Friends	0.18	0.05	0.07	3.47	0.00
Colleagues	0.08	0.05	0.04	1.71	0.09
Member of associations	0.33	0.05	0.15	7.09	0.00
Interior efficacy	0.07	0.03	0.05	2.66	0.01
Institut. effic. (perception)	0.80	0.04	0.40	20.55	0.00
North-west	-0.03	0.05	-0.01	-0.62	0.53
North-east	-0.11	0.07	-0.03	-1.50	0.13
Centre	-0.12	0.06	-0.04	-1.99	0.05
Sud	0.15	0.05	0.07	2.97	0.00

R=0.8 R²=0.6

liar characteristics compared with national data on youth participation. The most relevant information obtained through the survey concerns relational, cognitive and affective dynamics.

Political socialization plays an important role in guiding youth participation. In particular, the influence of the peer group and parents is fundamental. These changes in participation propensity are characterized by the increasing rates of self-determined involvement and protest acts, while there is a reduction in conventional participation and, in particular, in party membership. Data about college students identified two features of participation: conventional and unconventional. Conventional participation contrasts with isolation but is connected with greater influence of kin ties, traditional channels of information and trust (especially towards political institutions). Unconventional participation is composed of acts of protest and self-directed involvement. Both unconventional dynamics seem to be spread not only among university students, but among young people. The analysis shows, in particular, how these two aspects of unconventional participation exhibit similar traits, as both are associated with a greater propensity to use new media and to structure extensive and heterogeneous ego-networks. Self-directed participation is, however, characterized by greater confidence in self and in others while protest action is opposed to institutional trust, regardless of whether it is political or social.

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