Youth Policies in Europe: big changes after the big crisis? An explorative analysis

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The paper deals with current innovation trajectories in European youth policies. It is aimed at exploring European Union policy addresses on youth condition and the youth policies of four EU Member Countries (Germany, Denmark, United Kingdom, Italy) belonging to different welfare and youth transition regimes. Although the analysis is explorative and the results must be considered preliminary only, a minimalist and workfare-based policy approach seems to characterize European youth policies in times of crisis. This confirms that social changes are not enough per sé to generate policy interventionism. The European relative political inertia against the hard effects of post-2008 crisis risks to further strengthen inequalities among social groups, age groups and countries.

Introduction

In the last decades youth has progressively become a vulnerable segment of European societies. Although change of youth condition in Europe should be addressed as a long-term and wide question, 2008 crisis, recession and austerity politics have exacerbated the already existing difficulties of European young people, especially in some countries (Eurofound 2014; Oecd 2014). In the aftermath of 2008 crisis, the transition to adulthood has been and continues to be uncertain and frustrating for more and more European young people (Cordella and Masi 2012; Heinz 2009).

The worsening of youth condition is harshly weighing on the supporting agencies as well. European families, above all in Southern Europe countries, have growing responsibilities towards their children and less resources to support them. Moreover the costs public institution agencies currently have for youth unemployment seem considerable (for UK see: Macmillan 2012).

More generally, the worsening of youth condition matters with the future of European societies. The European Commission (EC) explicitly underlined that bad youth condition can weaken global competitiveness of Europe (EC 2012a). Moreover, the precarious transition to adulthood clearly impedes

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and/or delays procreation, further altering the already critical European demographic balance and pensions system sustainability (EC 2012b). The consequences of current economic hardship on youth include also a loss of confidence, an undermining of trust and expectations, an increasing risk of social exclusion and disengagement from society (Eurofound 2014).

The scope of these consequences significantly questions European public policies. Although recent European political discourse has significantly focused on youth problems and youth studies have been growing at least since the 1990s, the attention of literature on post-crisis European youth policies has been so far rather low[1].

This paper deals with current innovation trajectories in European youth policies. It is aimed at exploring European Union (EU) policy addresses on youth condition and the youth policies of four EU Member Countries (Germany, Denmark, United Kingdom, Italy) belonging to different welfare and youth transition regimes (Esping Andersen 1990; Ferrera 1996; Walther 2006). The results of my analysis must be considered only preliminary and provisional and they especially call for stronger supporting evidences in the next future.

In the following paragraph, I will provide some assumptions on welfare and youth policies innovation. Then I will explore changes in EU level political addresses on youth and innovations of youth policies in Denmark, Germany, United Kingdom (here mainly in England), and Italy. The results are discussed in the last paragraph.

Changing welfare and youth policies: what is at stake, how innovation works

In post II World War Western Europe, public policies – and peculiarly welfare policies – have been one of the most powerful and legitimate devices to redistribute powers between different groups in society preserving individual freedom. The "founding fathers" of contemporary welfare policies dedicated great attention to this point. John M. Keynes and Karl Polanyi addressed the socially devastating power of self-regulating market economy and *laissez-faire* ideologies, calling for a counter-movement, political criteria and robust instruments to intervene in market economy (Keynes 1991 [1932]; Polanyi 1944). The notion of social citizenship (Marshall 2009 [1950]) had a pivotal

[1] As a result of a systematic review through the International Bibliography of Social Sciences, only 9 articles in some way dealing with the transformations of post-2007 European youth policies were found at the end of April 2014.

importance in the building of post II World War Western European welfare systems. In Marshall's view, social citizenship drives welfare public policies to guarantee equal conditions for exercising the right to be different, which means making freedom of individual choice a real possibility for all. Social citizenship based welfare public policies are thus expected to modify the distribution of inherited powers, providing the most disadvantaged people the means to be effectively and basically free as well as the most advantaged ones.

Nevertheless, in the last decades the redistributive mission of European (and not only) welfare policies seems to be at stake. Since the late 1970s/early 1980s "the EU as a whole has failed to make a significant reduction in the proportion of its citizens living at risk of poverty" (Atkinson 2013: 2). More recently EU has not succeeded to tackle the social impact of 2008 crisis. Oecd data (Oecd 2014) showed that in many European countries the income of the poorest 10% of the population declined or increased less than that of the richest 10% in 2007-2011 period. As a result, European societies currently undergo the highest inequality levels since the 1970s/1980s (Atkinson 2013).

European youth seems to have been involved into an impoverishment path more than other age groups in the aftermath of 2008 crisis. According to Oecd (2014) data, the distribution of disposable incomes among the European young, adult and elderly people has been changing since 2007 (see tab. 1). In the Euro area, the already high proportion of young people at risk of poverty has further and almost linearly grown in the last years. As a result, young people currently seem the age group at the highest risk of poverty in the Euro area (see figure 1). According to Oecd long-term analysis, youth seems to have replaced the elderly as the group experiencing the greater risk of income poverty (Oecd 2014).

Table 1: *Annual percentage changes in disposable incomes 2007 and 2011 by age groups*

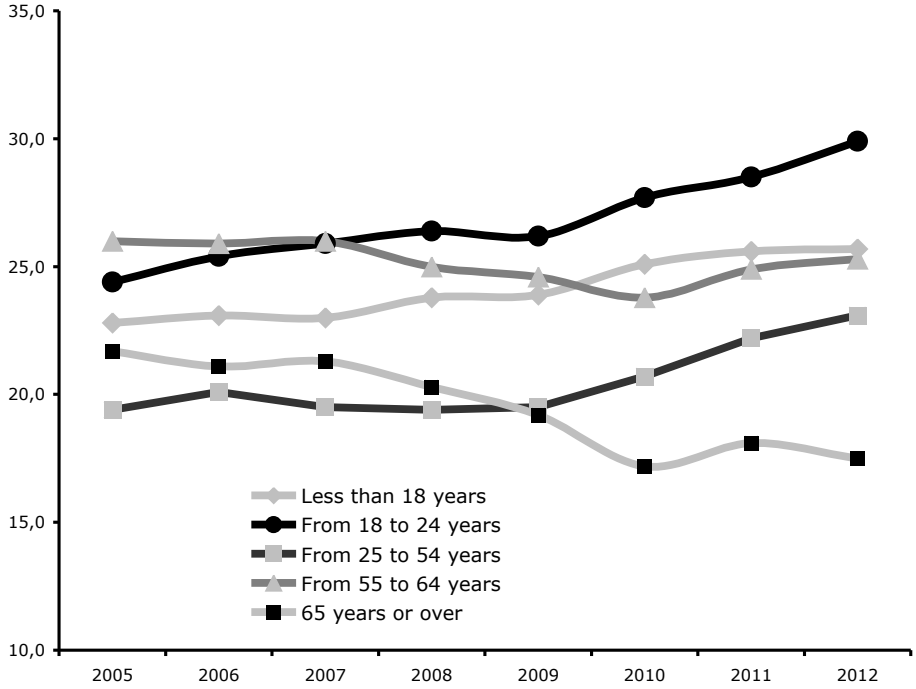
	Total	Young (18-25)	Adult (26-65)	Elderly (Over 65)
Denmark	+0,3	-0,7	+0,4	+1,3
Sweden	+2,5	+3,6	+2,0	+3,5
Germany	+0,4	+0,1	+0,3	+0,3
France	+0,3	+0,2	+0,2	+1,0
United Kingdom	-1,5	-1,7	-2,0	+0,2
Ireland	-5,6	-7,2	-5,6	-1,8
Italy	-1,5	-1,0	-1,8	+0,2
Spain	-3,6	-4,9	-3,9	-0,2

Source: Elaboration from OECD 2014.

Current socio-economic worsening of youth condition in Europe can be framed in some longer and wider trends about youth (see also the other contributions of this monographic issue). At least since the 1990s youth transition from adolescence to adulthood has been observed shifting from a linear path transition (education => employment => marriage => procreation) to a de-standardised, fragmented, prolonged and vulnerable transition. The scope of this shift has been considered so wide that since first 2000s the most part of European young people would live a sort of "yo-yo transition" (Walther 2006): they would swing between autonomy – that is expected in adulthood – and (economic) dependence – that is typical of adolescence – for a much longer period than before. In this scenario, every adulthood milestone is considered uncertain, the steps to adulthood can be reversible and misaligned [(education) <=> (employment) <=> (marriage) <=> (procreation)] and finally, the meanings of being young and adult seem to be at stake (Woodman and Wyn 2013).

Although this general shift seems significantly to echo epochal transformations within contemporary societies, especially in terms of new social risks (Beck 1992; Taylor-Gooby 2004), the differences between segments of youth population and between contexts of transition to adulthood should not be disregarded.

Figure 1: *People at risk of poverty by age in Euro Area (18 countries)*



Source: Eurostat – Income and Living Conditions.

More than before, European youth probably shares a common values framework, but class and place seem to be still important in shaping youth transitions (MacDonald *et al.* 2005). Moreover, welfare policies sometimes strengthen some existing inequalities in youth population instead of contrasting them (Coussée *et al.* 2009). National economic systems, public policies and family traditions have a significantly impact on the path towards independence (Lesnard 2011).

In Walther's (2006) proposal, four youth transitions regimes existed in Europe before the 2008 crisis. Nordic countries are considered the champions of the *universalistic transition regime*. It is mainly based on a comprehensive school system; flexible training standards; State social security provisions; low risks and high female employment regime; and a concept of youth as personal development. The UK is the archetype for *liberal transition regime*. Here the focus of transition policies is mainly employability; individual rights and responsibilities count more than collective provisions; training options have flexible and low standards; the level of benefits are low; employment regime is flexible; risky and high female, and youth is expected to be replaced as soon as possible by economic independence. The *employment-centred transition regime* accounts for the continental countries, such as Germany, France and the Netherlands. This regime is characterized by a selectively organized school system aimed at allocating youth in different occupational careers and by a highly regulated employment regime. Here labour market and social security system are divided into a highly standardized and protected core and outsiders; youth is mainly considered in terms of allocation to social and occupational positions. On the other hand, southern European countries (such as Italy, Spain, Portugal) are the models of a *sub-protective youth transition regime*. The latter does not provide choice, flexibility or security, and it is centred on family support. Here youth is a long waiting phase; employment regime is low female and highly risky; school is structured comprehensively until the end of compulsory education, but the rate of early school leaving is high.

Nevertheless, these transition regimes are not static. Walther (2006) reported some transformations in the Nordic countries (with a strengthening of individualized labour market integration) and in the continental countries (with the introduction of workfare elements) in the first 2000s. What is happening under the pressure of 2008 crisis? Are EU and national policies for youth changing and eventually, how?

How public policies changes happen. Some general assumptions

Understanding how policy changes happen is all but obvious. Some scholars welcomed exogenous pressure driven models of change (Streeck and Thelen 2005).

Here institutions are supposed to ordinarily work in an inertial way cyclically interrupted by shocking shifts ("critical junctures") coming from outside (e.g.: energy crises, financial earthquakes, great recessions, changes in cultural values, global competition...). This approach has been criticized to excessively simplify the question of change and to neglect the importance of intra-institutional features and dynamics for policies innovation (Mahoney and Thelen 2010).

According to other authoritative scholars, post-1980s and post-2007 policy changes have been driven by well recognisable forces and intentions. Gallino (2012) argued the post-1980s scenario resulted from a new and inverted class struggle that global capital and its references in political arena have been conducting since the early 1980s to recover the lost power in the *trente glorieuses* of Welfare States. Woodman and Wyn (2013) follow a similar hypothesis on youth policies changes, arguing that neo-liberal hegemony clearly oriented national reforms towards self-entrepreneurship, deregulation of labour market and marketization of education systems.

Some penetrating hypotheses on policy changes come from the new-institutionalist tradition. Here public policy innovation is supposed to happen within a complex framework where previous intra-institutional dynamics and their results matter (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Policy innovation is expected to be *path-dependent* and the impact of external pressure (such as an economic crisis) on policy change is considered to be eventually hard but *indirect*.

This does not mean innovation is impossible: existing frameworks constrain innovation, but they do not prevent it. Innovators can follow different strategies of change (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). Conservative constituencies can be overcome not only through explicit and visible actions (as a reform plan); an "hidden politics" of change can sometimes be more effective (Hacker 2004). Following Hacker, one can argue that when public policies do not significantly change after a socio-economic change altering the distribution of powers, a *de facto* reform has been carried out. In other words, political inertia in times of social change can produce and legitimate new distribution of powers in society as well as a "positive" political intervention.

The current framework of national policies innovation is further complicated by the so-called "rescaling" processes (Kazepov 2010). Sovra-institutional actors – EU included – have a growing role in orienting national and sub-national policies. They sometimes ask for specific reforms and directly act to incentivize them through "positive" (e.g.: financial supports) and/or "negative" (e.g.: sanctions threat) instruments. They also affect policy change dynamics more indirectly, for example spreading reform paradigms and policy ideas (Campbell and Pederson 2010).

Nevertheless, the processes of national and local implementation of higher scale political addresses are all but obvious (Gherardi and Lippi 2000; Pipan

and Czarniawska 2010; Guidi 2011). Assessing the impact of a single EU variable on the processes of national policy change is extremely difficult because the latter depends on many and different features. The adoption of a strict top-down approach in the study of the relationships between EU actors and national policies is largely unsatisfying (Radaelli 2002).

An overview of the developments of EU Youth Policies

The processes towards a EU youth policy engaged different actors and needed time (Williamson 2007). After a slow *statu nascenti* period (from 1968 to 1980s), the first EU programmes for youth begun to be implemented from 1988 and a process of reviewing national youth policy started in the second half of the 1990s (Williamson 2007).

The first consolidation of EU youth policy happened through the White Paper on youth launched by EC in 2001, after a one year consultation. The White Paper proposed a framework for EU countries consisting of two components: (1) increasing cooperation between EU countries; (2) taking greater account of the youth factor in sectoral policies. Four priorities characterized the former component: youth participation in public life; information on European affairs; voluntary service; better knowledge on youth. On the other hand, the latter consisted in a call for taking youth problems more into account in all the policies (such as employment, education, racism, health, etc.) (EC 2001).

Indeed, the White Paper has been considered the most important EU level document on youth up to 2011 (Williamson 2007; Cicchelli 2011). According to Cicchelli (2011), the White Paper set active citizenship at the top of EU political agenda on youth and inspired both the "Youth" (2000-2006) and the "Youth in Action" (2007-2013) EU programmes. Using the terms of Loncle and Muniglia (2011), the White Paper included only the "soft" policies in the specific field of EU youth policy and left the "hard" policies impacting on youth (employment, education...) to other processes and authorities.

The EU developed a specific and "harder" interest in youth along the implementation process of the Lisbon Strategy. The latter was launched by EC in 2000 with the aim to make the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. Within the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy, the Council of Europe adopted the European Pact for Youth (Council of EU 2005), which mainly emphasised the need to give young people the skills to contribute to competitiveness, growth and social cohesion (Williamson 2011). According to the Commission of the European Communities (2005: 11),

> Adoption of the European Pact for Youth has complemented the development of the active citizenship of young people [...] by taking on board the concerns of youth within the policies that support the Lisbon partnership for growth and jobs.

A wide consultation process promoted by European Parliament in 2009 revealed that 2001-2009 EU actions on youth were only partially satisfying. In response to this, the Commission of the European Communities proposed to set out a strategy for the future of youth policies in Europe, the so-called new "EU Youth Strategy (2010-2018)" (Commission of the European Communities 2009; Council of EU 2009). It has included eight fields of action: (1) Education and training; (2) Employment & entrepreneurship; (3) Health & well-being; (4) Participation; (5) Voluntary activities; (6) Social inclusion; (7) Youth & the world; (8) Creativity & culture.

The first cycle evaluation report announced the priority of the following triennium: "strengthening the link between the renewed framework and Europe 2020" (Council of EU-EC 2012: 13).

> Member States should in particular target young people who are not in employment, education or training [...]. They should undertake more efforts to increase young people's access to work, apprenticeships and traineeships and improve their employability (*Ivi*: 14).

Although EU institutions have not given up the programs already planned under the whole EU Youth Strategy, they seem more and more to have targeted youth unemployment as policy priority. The 2012 Annual Growth Survey (EC 2011a) considered urgent "tackling unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis" especially on youth. Three emergencies were especially underlined: unemployment, temporary work and early-school leaving. EU-level specific proposals included "a 'Youth Opportunities Initiative' (YOI) to boost youth employment, in particular access to a first job, apprenticeships and internships" (EC 2011a: 18).

In adopting YOI, EC strongly recommended to the Member States the so-called "Youth Guarantee" (YG). It is presented as

> a new approach to tackling youth unemployment which ensures that all young people under 25 – whether registered with employment services or not – get a good-quality, concrete offer within 4 months of them leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. The good-quality offer should be for a job, apprenticeship, traineeship, or continued education and be adapted to each individual need and situation (ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079).

EU institutions have stronger supported YG in 2013. In February 2013, the Council has proposed a "Youth Employment Initiative" (YEI) with a budget of € 6 billion over seven years (2014-2020). YEI is particularly focused on Neet young people and allows the Member Countries with above 25% youth unemployment rate to be eligible for extra funding to implement YG (EC 2013a). In April 2013, the Council (Council of EU 2013) has endorsed YG defining some general guidelines for national implementation. Firstly, YG is expected to better work in the context of a partnership-based approach, bringing together various stakeholders in the design and implementation. Secondly, the use of early intervention and activation measures is recommended. Thirdly, EU institutions advise to address mismatches between the skills required by the labour market and those of unemployed or inactive young people. Fourthly, national budgets should prioritise youth and last, assessment and monitoring are considered important.

A claim for reforms has accompanied these developments. The EC President and European Commissioner for Employment, the Social Affairs and Inclusion have considered YG as "the best way for Member States to help young people to get a job and to reduce the unacceptable levels of youth unemployment" and have called explicitly for Member States "to put in place the structural reforms and infrastructure to make the YG a reality as soon as possible" (EC 2013b). The national implementation phase of YG has started in the early 2014.

Youth policies in four European countries: an overview

Comparing national youth policies in Europe is problematic at least for the different definitions of youth (including children or not, including over 24 years old or not) and the different national policy traditions (Iard 2001: 57-61). In my explorative comparative analysis, I will not consider the national policies for children and I will mainly focus on the transition to adulthood policies (Cordella and Masi 2012).

Denmark

Youth policies framework in Denmark seems to be highly decentralised (Helve 2011). Regions and Municipalities are in charge of most services for young people. The municipalities have a role both by themselves and through local Youth Councils that are funded by Municipalities, but independent. Moreover, the municipalities have recently been the field of relevant participatory experimentations (Dam 2010: 233-235).

The key-actor at national level is the Ministry of Education which coordinates Government's Youth Committee including eight further Ministries. According to Dam (2010: 229), this framework mainly reveals the weakness of the Danish youth policies: they seem to be "more like a soft coordination of youth-related measures across different ministries than a planning and implementation of an overall youth policy" (Dam 2010: 231). The national advocacy of youth interests in Denmark is guaranteed by numerous youth organizations and by some representative organs, such as the Danish Youth Council (the umbrella organisation for about 70 voluntary children and youth organisations) and the Network of Youth Councils (the umbrella organisation for local Youth Councils) (Haarder 2008: 64-65).

The national youth policies in 2008-2009 have been centred around two main objectives: (1) providing all young people an education in order to be prepared for the labour market and for further education; (2) turning Danish young people into democratic active citizens (Haarder 2008: 60-61). The integration of young people, especially of non-Danish origins, has received special attention and has mainly been addressed through education campaigns (Haarder 2008: 67-68).

Prioritising the active citizenship of youth and recognising a key-role to education both recall some of the most important elements in the Danish model of youth policies (Helve 2011; Walther 2006). Nevertheless, it has been argued that the focus of Danish youth policies has shifted "from participatory stimulation to educational demands" since 2009 (Dam 2010: 231).

More generally, a new round of reforms has been developed by different national governments since 2009[2]. Young people are one of the main targets of "Cash Benefit Reform" and the reform of flexi-job scheme (Danish Government, 2013: 17). These reforms have been based on the principles already inspiring the "active turn" in Danish welfare policies in the middle-1990s (Abrahamson 2009). They have been presented by the social democrat Danish Finance Minister as a way to move "away from giving people cash to giving them opportunities and education" (Simons 2014).

Although Denmark has adopted EU YG, it does not seem to have significantly innovated neither the programs nor the approaches of Danish youth policies (Danish Ministry of Employment 2014: 13-17)[3]. The measures included in the EU YG Danish Implementation Plan had been already enacted

[2] In the aftermath of 2008 crisis, Denmark has had a left-wing government up to March 2009, then a right-wing one from April 2009 to September 2011 and again a left-wing government from October 2011.

[3] According to Higgins (2012, 11) Denmark has been the first European country to introduce Youth Guarantee in 1990.

following both the traditional patterns of national policies and the pillars of 2009-2014 reforms (Danish Ministry of Employment 2014: 10). On these bases, Denmark provides 15-17 and 18-29 years old people with a complete coverage in case of unemployment and education gaps[4]. Clear and secure times for each measure are guaranteed.

Education is considered the key-resource to reach the objectives of EU Youth Strategy. Danish education system is based on the dual system (alternation between school and apprenticeship in an enterprise), the Youth Guidance Centres (monitoring the competencies and orienting youth) and Production Schools (developing the competencies of the young people below 25 years old who do not have any qualifications to enter in secondary education). Beyond education, Denmark eases the transition for youth into the labour market through six measures (Trainee efforts for graduates; Wage subsidy jobs; Enterprise trainings; Job rotations; Upgradings in connection with an employment; Internship centres). They are addressed to different kinds of young people and are managed by Job Centres. Youth Units allow the coordination of services for youth (Danish Ministry of Employment 2014).

Germany

In Germany federal government, the Länders and the municipalities share the responsibilities of youth policies. Länders and municipalities are the main players in implementing youth policies and providing assistance services to youth (Bendit 2010; Wondratschek 2014). At the federal level, a Ministry has in charge youth policy, senior citizens, women, and family affairs. The role of the Ministry of youth has been considered typically marginal (Bendit 2010: 335), although an integration process with Federal Ministries of education, labour market, social, health, justice, regional policies seems to have been strengthened in the last years (Wondratschek 2014).

German youth policies seem to follow the well-known new corporativist pattern: policies design and implementation often result from the cooperation between public agencies and civil society organizations (such as youth associations, Ngos, trade unions, churches...) (Bendit 2010). Councils on youth policies exist at federal, regional and local level.

Both Bendit (2010) and Wondratschek (2014) have highlighted that the fight against right-wing extremism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, violence and terrorism has been one of the major tasks of German youth policy in the last

[4] EU YG scheme covers youth until 25 years old. Denmark employment policies have extended the threshold up to 29.

years. The programmes running under the Ministry for youth in 2014 have mainly included initiatives for disadvantaged youth, migrant youth and extreme right young people. In the field of youth welfare policies, Bendit (2010: 337-338) has observed a growing support to young families since 2006.

However, German youth policies have received several criticisms. They have been considered almost insignificant (Lucking-Michel 2009), weak, static and only complementary to stronger policies, such as the educational ones (Bendit 2010: 347). The level of youth policy integration would be still unsatisfying, many measures aimed at contrasting poverty among young people would have been ineffective, while better results seem to have been achieved on youth social participation (Bendit 2010: 347-348). Bendit has also noted an instrumental shift in German youth policies. They would be more and more strictly focused on integrating young people into the labour market and less and less addressed to socially empower them (*Ivi*: 348).

Although the impact of mid-2000s labour market reforms should not be underestimated (Cinalli and Giugni 2013), Germany seemingly follows a path-dependent approach in implementing EU YG programs[5]. Since this country tackled effectively the impacts of 2008 crisis on youth, it seems to be strengthening the already existing measures (mainly vocational education and dual system) in order to further reduce youth unemployment rates. The YG is in Germany a way "to amplify the downward trend in youth unemployment" (German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2014: 15).

The fight against Neets (considered one of the key-challenge in current Germany and centre-staged in EU YG as well) is based on previous initiatives (such as "Jugend Starken", began in 2007) (German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 2014: 19-20). The initiatives for young disabled people and young migrant people in the German YG Implementation Plan mainly come from previous programs (such as Integration through Training Programme, begun in 2005), although some adjustments have been planned for the next years (*Ivi:* 35-36).

The Guidelines of the EU YG calling for a partnership approach and an early intervention have been easily settled into the already existing governance framework. The so-called "Schulewirtschaft" alliance between schools, business and job centres continues to be the successful locally-based coalition initiative for youth occupation (*Ivi:* 21). The EU YG funds are supposed to continue the existing measures and, where possible, to marginally expand

[5] From 2005, Angela Merkel and CDU-CSU are the key-players of German governments. 2005-2009 Angela Merkel government was supported by a CDU-CSU/SPD coalition (grand coalition), 2009-2013 Angela Merkel government by a CDU-CSU/FDP coalition and Angela Merkel current government by CDU-CSU/SPD coalition again.

them on the basis of some local experimentations developed since 2010 (*Ivi:* 23-29). The implementation of the YG in the field of training is expected to be embedded within the National Pact for Career Training and Skilled Manpower Development that has been developed by the Federal Government and the main industry organisations in the past ten years (*Ivi:* 29-30).

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have "devolved administrations". Although youth policy on the whole is considered to be included in the "devolved matters", the distribution of powers seems to be more complicated since education, training, health, housing and social services are "devolved matters" and employment is a "reserved matter" to the UK Parliament (except in Northern Ireland). Moreover, the local authorities have an important role in the implementation of the UK youth policies and thus, it seems to be a complex policy field whose competences are divided.

Youth was centred-stage in the agenda of 1997-2010 New Labour governments (Mizen 2003) and seems to be for Tory-Liberal Coalition government (2011-on) as well. The "Education and Inspection Act" (2006) and especially the "New Deal for Young People" (1998) have been considered the most important national youth policies plans under the New Labour governments (Youth Partnership 2010; Nativel 2011)[6]. The Tory-Liberal Coalition government launched three plans for youth in 2011: "Positive for Youth"; "Building Engagement, Building Futures" and "Opening Doors; Breaking Barriers".

"Positive for Youth" (HM Government 2011a) deals with many 13-19 years old people related questions. In terms of approach, the document underlines the new cross-sectional approach of English youth policies, the active role of neighborhood, communities and voluntary organizations in designing and implementing youth services, and the importance to facilitate youth participation at local level. In terms of initiatives, the Plan includes support schemes to parents and carers, interventions to help young people in learning; finding a job; building a character; developing a sense of belonging; being in health, and initiatives for protecting the most vulnerable people and preventing youth crime. The Plan has been strongly criticized by some authoritative professionals for the scarce attention to structural changes (such as poverty, inequality and lack of jobs) and excessive shift of responsibilities from State to families, volunteering and communities (Buckland 2013; Davies 2011).

[6] Mizen (2003) has reckoned the latter as a prime example of the importance New Labour recognised to human capital development for competitiveness and growth.

As "improving social mobility is the principal goal of the Coalition Government's social policy" (HM Government 2011b: 3), the Plan "Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers' has a pivotal importance. It is based on a four phases life cycle approach that is expected to make "life chances more equal at the critical points for social mobility" (*Ivi:* 6). The measures for transition years (16-24 years old) are mainly aimed at raising attainment in schools, facilitating higher education for disadvantaged young people, and supporting the transition of young people to work. From 2015, all English young people will remain in education or training to age 18. They will be able to choose among full-time education, work-based learning, or (if they are employed, self-employed or volunteering) part-time education or training. Vocational education is strengthened through new University Technical Colleges (sponsored by Universities and heavily influenced by local and national employers) and the existing apprenticeship programmes are extended. As for the transition school-to-work, the Plan sets out an all-age service providing advice on careers, skills and the labour market.

The current UK Government has dedicated a special attention to Neet young people through the Plan "Building Engagement, Building Futures" (HM Government 2011c). The most changes are about 18-24 year olds young people. A stronger engagement in education and training is mainly expected through the institution of a National Careers Service, a new apprenticeship programme, further education and training opportunities. The Plan supports 18-24 year olds employment mainly through a more partnership-based and personalized approach of the Job Centres, as well as work experiences, work clubs, sector-based work academies and pre-Employment Training. The 18-24 year olds on inactive benefits and in disadvantaged groups are mainly supported with a renewed compact between the government and Voluntary and Community Sector.

Moreover, a new Youth Contract to help get young people learning or earning is presented as a key element in the Government approach. The Youth Contract consists of an offer of a Work Experience or sector-based work academy place for every unemployed 18-24 year old who wants one (HM Government 2011c: 8). It is driven by a clear principle:

> As we are providing more support and more opportunities for young people, we also expect more in return. Those failing to engage positively with the Youth Contract will be considered for Mandatory Work Activity. Those who drop out of a Work Experience place or a subsidised (or other) job without good reason will lose their benefits (*Ivi:* 8).

The UK Government has criticized the "EU generally inflexible approach" on YG and has decided to not implement it mainly because "many

of the measures recommended under the YG are already in place in the UK" (House of Commons 2013). Nevertheless, this choice only partially counts for the whole UK. Diverging from the UK government view, the Scottish Parliament has welcomed the YG in March 2014 and the Welsh Parliament has included the YG into its own "Youth Engagement and Progression Framework" (Welsh Government 2013 and 2014).

Italy

Youth policies have never been centred-stage in the political Italian agenda. However, three clusters of youth policies can be identified in the last decades. In the 1980s and 1990s, the Italian youth policies mainly focused on drug and youth deviant behaviour (Campagnoli 2010a). Some attention has been paid to youth participation and empowerment from 2000s in a sort of "new deal of Italian youth policies" (Campagnoli 2010b; Pasqualini 2010; Cordella and Guidi 2012). In the last years the political discourse has been more and more focused on the difficulties of youth in the labour market. The 15-24 years old unemployment rate has constantly been higher than the general population one (Mingione and Pugliese 2010), but it has further significantly increased up to more than 40%. Beyond unemployment, the increase of Neet young people, the precarious employment, the rising mismatch and over-education, and the low wage levels have made the young and the young adult people condition very hard in Italy (Guidi 2014).

Both the Head of State and the last three Prime Ministers (Mario Monti, Enrico Letta and more recently Matteo Renzi) explicitly and repeatedly have defined youth as one of the most important targets for national policies. Nevertheless, 2009-2014 Italian youth policies have been as weak as before, if not even weaker. Although some innovations exist at the local level[7], they continue to be uncertain, unequal, and fragmented. Moreover, the Italian local active labour market policies have been progressively weakened by national retrenchment programs hit by political instability, and last but not least, disoriented by the progressive suppression of the local public bodies ("Province") that had held the competencies since the second half of the 1990s.

In the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, families have been more and more the pivotal supporting institution for Italian youth. Nevertheless, they have had to tackle the broader impacts of economic recession and austerity politics at the

[7] Since 2001, Italian Regions have been more autonomous than before in designing and implementing youth policies. This has allowed some Regions (e.g.: Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Puglia) to experiment new transition to adulthood policies (Cordella and Masi 2013).

same time. As a result, poor and at risk of poverty families have significantly grown (Istat 2014).

In this scenario, the Italian Government has considered the EU YG "an important innovation in European initiatives on youth policies" (Italian Ministry of Employment and Social Policies 2013: 1) and has endorsed the YG as a positive "structural reform". The Italian YG Implementation Plan is thus aimed both to tackle the employment emergency and to lay the foundation for a permanent guarantee system.

The Plan is detailed about the target population of YG. Unemployed and Neet 15-24 years old people (in 2012 more than 6 millions on the whole), and secondly 15-29 years old young people in the same conditions (in 2012 more than 9 millions) are the priority. Neet people are further differentiated between people who have or do not have a formal qualification and people who are looking or not for an employment. Moreover, the targets have been considered and quantified on regional scale.

Coherently to the Italian public administration structure, the implementation responsibilities are divided between central government and regional governments. The former is expected to adopt the national plan and to carry out some general actions (public communication, monitoring...), whereas the Regions are expected to implement national addresses with a significative room of manoevre. Some further tasks (e.g.: incentives regulation) are shared between them. A national Coordination Unit (composed by three Ministries, Youth Department, Regions, Province and the national coordination of local Chambers of commerce) is created and the involvement of further actors (such as third sector organizations, National Social Welfare Institute – INPS, private employment agencies) is envisaged.

The Italian YG Plan also focuses on the interventions. First of all, public communication actions are expected. Secondly, local public services should arrange a "welcome phase" to present the potential recipients the schemes and will evaluate young people in terms of work availability, qualifications, and skills. Thirdly, local public service and recipient are expected to sign a "service agreement", which is an individualized project aimed at integrating the recipient in labour market or at concluding the training. Fourthly, local public services are expected to provide recipients with the support. The Plan defines 7 supporting measures: (1) enterprise bonus to give young people a temporary work; (2) apprenticeship; (3) internship; (4) civil service; (5) support to a business start-up; (6) incentives to transnational mobility; (7) training programs (19).

However, as the Plan states, these measures already exist in Italy and the EU YG funds are simply expected to extend them. The Plan also underlines that Italy already introduced a youth guarantee scheme for unemployed peo-

ple in 2000-2002 (Italian Laws n. 181/2000 and n. 297/2002), but as the Plan itself acknowledges, it has not so far been effective.

Current trends in European youth policies. Some provisional conclusions

The analysis I conducted is only explorative and provisional. Further works should better address the existing relationships among local, national and supranational levels of current youth policies. A bottom-up analysis focusing on the practice implementation of youth policies could be considered a convenient approach (Cordella and Guidi 2012).

On the basis of this draft overview, it appears the EU action has had a role in the emergence and developments of a European youth policy. On the one hand, the 2001 EU White Paper, the EU programmes "Youth" and "Youth in action" have significantly contributed to the emergence of a "soft" youth policy. It has mainly meant dealing with post-modern matters (such as participation, active citizenship, tolerance…) through soft instruments (information, orientation, facultative involvement in projects...) at EU and national level. On the other hand, the EU has called for youth within Lisbon and Europe 2020 Strategy. It has mainly meant a focus on education, training and employment. So, from the early 2000s, youth policy at EU and national level seems to be an heterogeneous and contended field in which "soft" and usually ancillary policies coexist with "hard" and usually centre-staged policies (Loncle and Muniglia 2011).

In the aftermath of the 2008 crisis some hardening of EU youth policies seems to have been produced. The EU have continued to support the existing "soft" youth policies programmes, but especially from 2011 the most important EU initiatives in the field of youth ("Youth Opportunities Initiative", "Youth Employment Initiative", "Youth Guarantee") have been about education, training and transition to work and have been mainly addressed Neet young people.

Nevertheless, the growing EU action on the "hard" side of youth policies in hard times seems to have been more incremental than path-breaking. Similarly to what happened before the 2008 crisis, the EU programmes have continued to tackle youth unemployment through supply-side based interventions, mainly focusing on employability and skills of youth (Lahusen *et al.* 2013). On the contrary, few energies have been dedicated to design a more comprehensive strategy against youth unemployment and very limited emphasis has been put on the quality of work, job creation and social security although these are clear emergencies (Lahusen *et al.* 2013; MacDonald 2011). A "minimalist policy approach of precarious protection"

(Lahusen *et al.* 2013: 300) seems to characterize current European youth policies. This confirms that current social changes are not enough to generate policy interventionism.

The explorative analysis in four countries (Denmark, Germany, UK and Italy) shows that the pluralization of actors and government levels, the integration of different youth related policies and the growing attention to transition to work measures are converging trends in post-2007 European national youth policies.

National traditions seem however to play a key-role in shaping both the processes and the outcomes of current youth policies in Europe. This seems particularly clear with regard to the EU YG national implementation processes. Previous dynamics and framework of national policy-making are significantly influencing the EU YG implementation. It seems to confirm the hypothesis of path-dependency in public policies. It also seems to show that the EU YG, as actually designed and financed at EU level, are not succeeding in contrasting the social impact of crisis on youth in those European countries with a traditionally sub-protective youth transition regime.

This result supports the argument of an unchanged validity of Walther (2006) transition regimes proposal. Nevertheless, as Walther himself noted, a (neo)liberal shift in universal model seems to be underway. It is particularly the case of Denmark that is further reinforcing the 1990s turn to workfare (Torfing 1999; Kildal 2001).

Indeed, the outcome of these trends in current youth policies should not be disregarded. The absence of big changes in youth policies after the big crisis does not mean that nothing is changing. Following Hacker's (2004) proposal, the European relative political inertia against the hard effects of post-2008 crisis on European societies is likely to generate a "hidden reform" in the social distribution of powers. The incremental continuation of a minimalist and workfare-based policy approach in times of crisis risks to further strengthen inequalities among social groups, age groups and countries. In short, they seem to further weaken the social citizenship-based European welfare systems as well as the European youth condition.

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