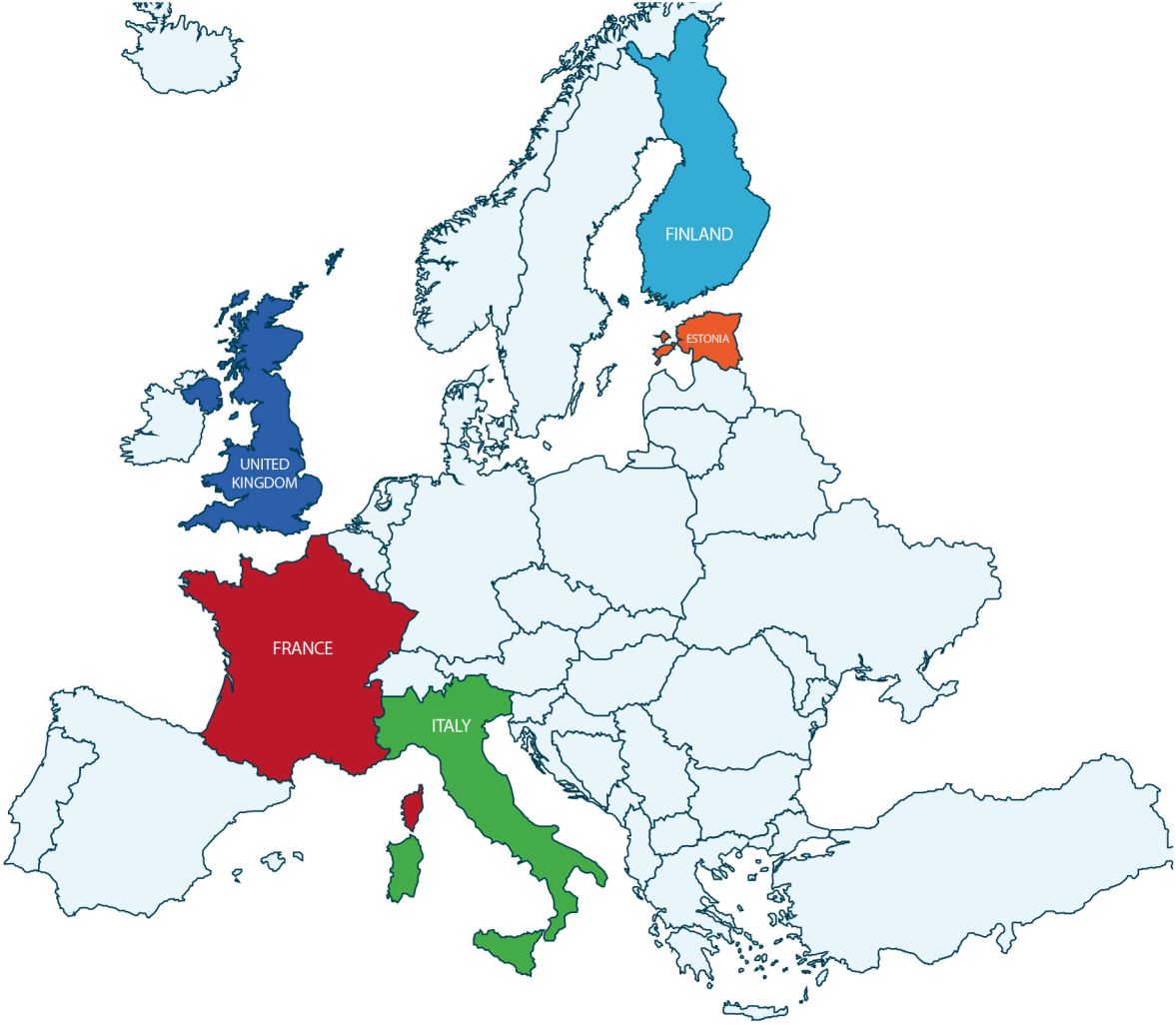

The Impact of Youth Work in Europe: A Study of Five European Countries

Edited by Jon Ord with Marc Carletti, Susan Cooper, Christophe Dansac, Daniele Morciano, Lasse Siurala and Marti Taru

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Dedicated to
all the young people
who shared their stories

Contents

Chapter 5:
Youth Work in Italy

By Daniele Morciano

Historical overview

To begin, it is important to point out that the term 'youth work' has limited currency in Italy, and is not explicitly recognised within public or policy discourse. However, there are a number of practices and institutions which can be compared favourably with what comes under the banner of youth work in other European countries, particularly those countries within this study. The history of 'youth work' in Italy is primarily the history of association-based youth education outside schooling (Baris, 2011; Cruciani, 2011; Dal Toso, 1995; Dogliani, 2003; Fincardi and Papa, 2007). This is mainly located within what is best described as the Third (or Voluntary) Sector.

Earlier origins were in the out-of-school leisure activities adopted in the early 1900s, often by the upper classes, as a means of educating young people in the values of Nationalism or as a form of religious education (Fincardi and Papa, 2007). The secular pacifist Scouting Association (*the Ragazzi Esploratori Italiani*), founded in 1910, also provides a significant marker. However, this movement quickly divided into a Catholic wing integrated within the church (*Associazione Scoutistica Cattolica Italiana*) and the nationalistic *Corpo Nazionale dei Giovani Esplorator*. The latter was a form of paramilitary association supported by the official national patriotic network (Trova, 1986).

Similar youth associations were also promoted by socialist and communist political movements to provide new spaces for young people within the new parties. Youth associations among the working classes developed 'People's Houses', which were places to integrate political education with leisure activities. These developed within the tradition of mutual aid, association and worker cooperatives and developed from the 1850s onwards (Degl'Innocenti, 2012).

The role of the Third Sector was cemented in the immediate post-war period when the state began to recognise the third sector as a key provider. This was a direct response, by the state, to the previous widespread and systematic totalitarian state intervention established by the Fascist regime prior to and during the Second World War. The Fascist movement placed youth at the heart of its political programme, with the goal to exploit young people's vitality for an expansionist and militarist national strategy (Dogliani, 2003). To this end, the Fascists placed an emphasis on mass youth education in young people's leisure time, alongside a gradual suppression or marginalisation of the traditional youth associations. This was done in combination with the exploitation of schools as a means of ideological indoctrination (La Rovere, 2002).

The anti-Fascist resistance and the post-war reconstruction can be considered a key marker in the history of youth participation in Italy, with the gradual emergence of youth as a 'social subject'. For example, the *Fronte della Gioventù* (FGD) aimed to become a mass anti-Fascist youth organisation open to different political parties, including the Catholic spheres.

However, the spirit of social cohesion promoted by the FGD did not survive the Cold War, and effectively ended up in competition with the Catholic youth education organisations. For example, the political victory of the *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) in 1948 led to the breakaway of the *Alleanza Giovanile del Fronte Democratico e Popolare* (formed from a merger of the FDG and other youth organisations on the left)[1] and the Catholic *Movimento Giovanile Cristiano per la Pace*. The ideological contrast between East and West was symbolically reflected in Italy by the division between the religious and communist youth movements. On the one hand was the Catholic Scout movement, which had been re-established after the war following its forced closure by the Fascist regime, and on the other the *Associazione Pionieri d'Italia* (API), established in 1950 in Milan following an associative model adopted internationally by the Communist movement. The API would end up being strongly opposed by the Catholic Church and *Democrazia Cristiana* due to its atheist pedagogical orientation. Therefore, without ever becoming a mass organisation as in other Communist countries, the API disbanded in 1960.

Post-war Catholic youth education in Italy could count not only on the newly reconstituted Scout movement, but also on the *Gioventù Italiana di Azione Cattolica* (GIAC). GIAC had had a continued presence among young people despite Fascism, since during the Second World War it had become 'the largest organisation of Italian Catholic laity and, at the same time, one of the strongest youth movements in the country' (Boscato, 2011: 249).

Pluralistic youth work, developed by not-for-profit associations after the Second World War, was often linked with (mainly left-wing) political parties as well as (mostly Catholic) religious institutions, and developed thanks to some limited direct public funding. Allied to the increasing trust in the Third Sector to develop publically funded youth centres was a policy of non-interference in such 'youth-led' spaces – although there was a tendency to isolate them when they were considered excessively critical of the *status quo*, as happened, for example, during the student protests in the 1960s and 70s (Cruciani, 2011).

Despite the immediate focus on participation in the post-war period – on experiences shared by young people and adults coming from both political and religious organisations during the post-war reconstruction – the 1950s were dominated by an increasing cultural climate of adultism, where the priority of the new democratic order seemed to be avoiding any possible sources of inter-generational conflict. Importantly in this regard, the Fascist regime seems to have left a tacit fear that mass youth participation would be seduced by new political movements of totalitarian orientation (Dogliani, 2003). However, in this climate young people began to claim the right to be recognised as active 'social subjects'. Often inspired by new cultural stimuli from Europe, influenced strongly by the '*Angry Young Men*' (Taylor, 1962), this emerging 'youth culture' contributed to the process of secularization of Italian society.

The generational divide intensified in the 1960s, characterised by the student protests. This created a tremor within what could be described as youth work organisations – those involved in informal education and the engagement of young people outside formal institutions. During this time the student movement developed autonomously based on the direct initiative of young people, developing participative practices and becoming intensely critical of youth organisations linked to political parties or the church hierarchy. Anti-authoritarianism became the watchword of this new youth culture, where institutions (above all schools)

[1] Including UISP (Unione Italiana Sport Per tutti).

came to be seen as agents of the reproduction 'of bourgeois values such as authority, order, meritocracy, respectability' (Dal Toso, 2011: 85).

The new youth culture also influenced the Catholic youth associations. Both *Azione Cattolica* (which established a youth wing in the 1960s) and the Scout associations (AGI, ASCI) found themselves being criticised for the centralised decision-making power of the ecclesiastical hierarchy as well as their political complicity with the *Democrazia Cristiana*. Greater recognition of local communities (dioceses, parishes) and a de-politicization of the educational and social commitment of the participants was urged at a local level. This resulted in greater attention being paid to young people as individuals, to the enhancement of their talents, and their active contribution to the community. This was seen as a breakthrough in the educational proposals of *Azione Cattolica*. Similarly, the pedagogical principles of non-directivity, co-management and co-education (what would later be referred to as *peer education*) began to spread within the Scouting sphere.

The climate of violence that would follow during the 1970s, as well as the sense of failure or betrayal of the ideals pursued by the youth movement of the 1960s, contributed to widespread negative attitudes towards any kind of 'totalitarian ideology' within the youth sector. Sociological studies on youth and society from the 1970s highlight a process of anthropological mutation in which the values of 'naturalness or secularity' replace the 'transcendent' (the political or religious). (Dal Toso, 2011).

Dal Toso (2011) suggests several core elements of the new forms of youth participation which begin to emerge during young people's leisure time. These include:

- The 'intrinsic value' of the efforts to address current social problems (of disarmament, peace, environmental protection, women's rights, marginalization and social fragility)

- The importance of involving young people in voluntary work (until the founding of the civilian service as an alternative to military service)

- Community and associative life understood as a tool for meeting social needs and relationships, as well as a tool for engagement and social action

- The decline of youth participation in organisations related to the political parties as an expression of a widespread need for the 'socialization of politics understood not as militancy within a party' (Dal Toso, 2011, p. 185)

From the 1980s ideological or religious pluralism gradually became widely accepted, but this merely compounded the difficulties in establishing a common, shared understanding about the principles of youth work practice. However, within this pluralist practice there has been a tendency to limit the education of young people in critical thinking – and the promotion of freedom of choice – replacing it by an adherence to specific religious or political ideology. As a result, one of the main peculiarities of youth work in Italy is that practice tends to reflect the interests of the youth work organisation, not necessarily that of the young person. This problem is further compounded by the insecure foundations of 'professional' youth work.

Key policy documents that have shaped youth work

The 1980s witnessed a notable intervention by the State with the launch of explicit youth policies. This could be seen as an attempt to respond to the variation of practice identified above. However, these new initiatives were mainly situated within the wider social policy priorities of local authorities, and therefore primarily focused on a reparative approach to health issues or a wide range of 'youth issues' which were perceived as social problems (such as delinquency, early school leaving, alcohol abuse, drug addiction, sexual education, teenage pregnancy and unemployment) (Bazzanella, 2010) – what has in some discourses become known as targeted youth work.

This occurred, for example, with the *Progetti Giovani*, and soon after with the *Centri di Aggregazione Giovanile* (CAG)[2]. Until the 1990s the *Progetti Giovani* youth projects were, for example, promoted by more than half of the local councils in areas or cities with over 10,000 inhabitants. They developed from the need to address issues facing young people; the Progetti Giovani have often provided meeting spaces where young people could express their creativity, but also places where informal education on particular issues could take place (e.g. drugs and alcohol, sexuality etc.). The 1980s and 90s also saw the spread of the national *Centri di Aggregazione Giovanile* (CAG), centres funded by the L.285/97 law which, by the year 2000, had created around nine hundred projects across the country. These projects represented 35% of the total expenditure of the aforementioned L. 285/97 law. Research on the issue is still lacking in Italy, however, despite the growth of such initiatives in both urban areas and more rural town councils. In 2006 the presence of 1,400 youth spaces was estimated at a national level (Bazzanella, 2010).

Another significant milestone was the reorganisation of the social services system initiated by Law 328/2000.[3] This placed the centres for young people in the sphere of social and health local services. However, management of the new centres was still mainly entrusted to Third Sector organisations.

Much of the 'youth work' practice in these early youth centres predominantly focused on the prevention and control of 'perceived' youth problems, within the wider policy assumption that young people should be supported during their transition to adulthood. The prevailing orientation was therefore to compensate for 'individual failings' that were preventing the full social integration of young people into adult society; namely by focusing on basic and vocational skills, information and guidance, addressing issues harmful to health, and the promotion of a sense of responsibility or civic virtue.

However, this was followed by a new progressive era of youth policy at the turn of the century, which was more emancipatory and youth-led, allied to the widespread construction of new youth centres across the country. This initiative, oriented toward youth empowerment and emancipation, was launched in 2006, when a Ministry of Youth was established for the first time together with a new national fund for youth policies. This has led to financing the development of new public youth spaces in cooperation with the Third Sector.

Increased powers granted to the regions in the field of youth policy also stimulated new programming directed towards overcoming the fragmentation and localism of educational work in youth centres or in the voluntary sector at a municipal level. Through the tools provided

[2] Funded by Law 285/1997 (*Provisions for the promotion of rights and opportunities for childhood and adolescence*).

[3] (*Framework law for the realisation of the integrated system of interventions and social services*).

by the Framework Programme Agreements (APQ) of 2006, new youth policy interventions began to build upon principles of cooperation between central government, regions and organisations operating in the youth sector. Importantly, the APQ held a different vision of its work, which saw young people as active citizens able to express their own unique potential at a young age – a vision attempting to overcome the dominant discourse previously underpinning publicly funded youth work, which had been based on compensating for perceived individual deficiencies that hamper the transition to adulthood.

Examples of this new era of youth policy included financing the development of new public youth spaces under Third Sector management, such as the *Laboratori Urbani Giovanili* in Apulia (Morciano et al., 2013; Morciano, 2015), *Visioni Urbane* in Basilicata and the *Officine dell'arte* in Lazio. The peculiarity of these spaces is represented by their attempt to provide learning experiences closely connected with young people and explicitly focused on young people's interests, motivations, passions and projects. These new spaces contain a plurality of resources (equipment, information, relationship networks, learning experiences etc.) that young people can use in order to create their own projects or collaborate in the implementation of existing projects. An underlying principle is the attempt to diversify the range of services on offer and develop opportunities for the active use of the spaces, ranging from the ability to cultivate a hobby to the realization of projects aimed at business creation. These new centres therefore tend to develop as *incubators* of new projects based on youth initiative, through the internal creation of a *hub* of diverse range of both tangible and intangible resources.

This new era of publicly supported and funded 'centre-based youth work' would however be short lived, and would soon be faced with the challenge of drastic cuts to its dedicated public funding. For example, the annual budget of €130 million in 2006 was reduced to €13 million by 2014. Italy's youth work provision, like that of the UK (as we saw in Chapter 2), has been hit hard by the impact of the global financial crisis and so-called 'austerity'. The abolition of the Ministry of Youth in 2011 is further evidence of this uncertain period for youth work and youth policy in Italy.

The ongoing challenge for these new youth centres is that of breaking away from a dependence on public funding through the diversification of financial resources (through, for example, the sale of products or services, identifying donors and sponsors, public commissioning, crowdfunding etc.) while avoiding management geared towards the creation of a market which would put at risk their social mission.

The lack of national support for 'youth work' in Italy includes a lack of public recognition or regulation of the specific professional role of the youth worker or the youth informal educator. A number of regulated professions in the sphere of education are recognised by the State in Italy (such as professional educator, socio-cultural educator, community worker, social worker), but as in France (see Chapter 6) these are not specifically focused on young people. The creation of a professionalised youth work training and certification system regulated by the State on the basis of specific accreditation systems (as, for example, in countries such as the UK, Finland, Ireland and Sweden) also seems a challenge that the various associations and institutions in Italy are still failing to tackle (Bazzanella, 2010; Dunne et al., 2014). What happens in Italy is that the different political or religious associations tend to train educators

within their respective ideological traditions. Experience in the field is often the only viable pathway for specialising in youth work. This shortage seems indicative of how a vision still prevails in Italy of youth work understood as a practice based primarily on voluntary and 'front line' activity, education oriented towards specific (religious or political) ideologies, or the ability to plan and implement projects financed by EU youth policy programmes.

The result is a considerable legislative *vacuum* in Italian youth policy at a national level. However, within this context there is the delivery of some high quality youth work, either in the form of out-of-school youth education (often in the religious sphere), in the many youth spaces geared towards youth participation and empowerment, or through the youth sub-cultures developing youth-led projects oriented by a radical opposition to the political and economic system.

Key features of practice

The religious or faith-based sector remains a key player in Italian youth work. This is dominated by the Catholic educational spaces known as 'parish oratories', in which religious education is combined with recreational activities and initiatives in social volunteering. The *Forum Oratori Italiani* (FOI) was established in 2009 in order to support the development of the 6,500 oratories designed as 'reception spaces, for time dedicated to the younger generation, of meaningful pathways that aim towards the growth of the entire being, human and spiritual' (Forum Oratori Italiani, 2017). An indication of the scale of the opportunities offered by the Catholic oratories is that they compare in number to first grade middle schools (which number 7,247) (ISTAT, 2011). Among the best known is the educational tradition inspired by St. Giovanni Bosco, still followed by the Salesian Society. Specific areas dedicated to the informal education of young people are found within *Azione Cattolica*, the oldest Catholic Association in Italy (founded in 1867), which has local branches in almost every diocese (219 of 226) with 360,000 members.

The largest Scouting association in Italy, the *Associazione Guide e Scouts Cattolici Italiani* (AGESCI), is also explicitly Catholic and has more than 180,000 members. The AGESCI refers to itself as 'a youth education association that aims to contribute to the development of the individual in their free time, according to the principles and methods of Scouting' (Agesci, 2017). Conversely, non-Catholic Scouting in the form of the *Corpo Nazionale Giovani Esploratori ed Esploratrici Italiani* (CNGEI) is explicitly anchored to the principles of secularism, presenting its objectives as promoting 'secular educational action, independent of any religious beliefs or political ideologies, which engages young people in the obtaining and deepening of personal choices' (CNGEI, 2016). They have around 12,000 members.

Some Catholic youth associations have a clearer orientation towards political commitment – for example, the *Giovani delle Acli*, a movement active in the *Associazione Cristiana dei Lavoratori Italiani*. They aim to promote 'the aggregation of young people under 32 years of age in educational courses and political training, civil commitment and active citizenship'. *Associanimazione* is another Catholic association particularly committed to the promotion and development of youth workers' skills through the practices of social animation or association. One major initiative on a national level involved the organisation of five occurrences

of the 'National Meeting for Operators of Centres, Spaces and Youth Aggregation Contexts' between 2005 and 2013. Finally, another significant Catholic presence can also be identified in not-for-profit services for young people. In order to estimate such a presence, a census by the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI) revealed that ecclesiastical institutions that manage health, social care and education facilities in Italy numbered 14,241 in 2011 (CEI, 2011), almost 40% of the total not-for-profit sector of 36,010 (ISTAT, 2011).

In the secular sector the *Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana* (ARCI, 2017) is one of the largest national networks of cultural spaces engaged on a political and social level. ARCI defines itself as the 'heir to a tradition and a long history of mutual association, of the popular and anti-Fascist movements which helped build and consolidate democracy founded on the Italian Constitution' (ARCI, 2017). In 2011 it counted 4,987 local branches, of which 1,020 (21%) were youth associations (Monticelli, Pincella and Bassoli, 2011). In 2013 ARCI numbered 1,115,747 members (ARCI, 2013). The national mission contains commitments to 'new generations and youth creativity' (along with culture, welfare, immigration, law and the Mafia, the environment, peace and international cooperation). Until recently ARCI had not developed an educational tradition explicitly aimed at young people. However, it has a growing awareness of the educational value of its activities for young people. In 2013 in its annual report ARCI began to consider itself as an association of 'a strong inter-generational nature that … never really put into focus, let alone valued [its work with young people]'. In the same year, stemming from this development ARCI produced its own 'Pedagogical Manifesto' on childhood and adolescence, while implementing the '*Giovani in circolo*' project for the creation of a network of clubs run by young people under 35 years of age. The pedagogical manifesto recognizes the presence of 'a movement of associations, clubs and committees within ARCI that, in recent years, has given rise to (formal, non-formal and informal) educational and training pathways'.

Other explicitly educational associations involving young people (as well as children) include *Arciragazzi*, founded in 1983 and federated with ARCI. *Arciragazzi* has around eighty affiliated clubs in almost all Italian regions, in addition to ten social cooperatives for the management of foster homes for children and adolescents, educational services and training (Arciragazzi, 2017).

There is also a strong tradition within youth culture in Italy of opposition to the establishment and dominant institutions, which is critical of the dominant models of economic development. Developed from the 1970s, those initiatives can be found in a number of self-managed social centres and spaces. Distinctive features of these spaces include self-management, autonomy from institutions, employment, as well as the re-use of public spaces for activities ranging from cultural production to social action. Although primarily born from radical leftist movements, there are also some right-wing social centres, such as those that gave rise to the Casa Pound political movement of the extreme right. The historical political youth organisations of the right came together in 1996 in *Azione Giovani*, which in turn merged with *Giovane Italia* in 2009, connected to the *Partito della Libertà*.

Measurement and evaluation of youth work and the influence of European youth work policy

The recent government initiatives to create new youth work centres and the brief attempt to formulate a national youth policy were unable to generate sufficient momentum to create a strong identity for youth work in Italy. During the last two decades the European Union has provided a range of support measures for the development of youth work competences, skills and practices, of which Italy has been a notable beneficiary. For example, the Youth programme 2000–2006 and Youth in Action programme 2007–2013 (European Union, 2007) provided a range of support measures for the training of youth workers, which included support for capacity building in the field of youth. However, despite a number of projects supported by these European Union programmes, in Italy there is still no specific national public policy or programme with the specific purpose to develop youth work professionals, services, practices or evaluation. As highlighted in the last European Union report on youth work in Europe (Dunne et al., 2014), the priority assigned to youth work by the national government seems to be 'slightly increasing … [however] no law defining or regulating youth work [exists] and youth work is generally not perceived as a policy priority' (Dunne et al., 2014: 216).

Equally importantly, however, particularly in the context of Italy, Dunne acknowledges that 'given the decentralised nature [of youth work], it is more important what is happening at local level' (ibid.). Despite the lack public national support, training projects for professional youth workers have started to be implemented at local level in recent years (e.g *Associanimazione*[4]). However, these training opportunities are not linked to any public accreditation or recognition framework. As stated in the last European Union youth work report: 'it is not only the scarcity of training prospects in some cases, but also where opportunities exist, gaining recognition or having those experiences validated. Any training system that sets standards should ideally be coupled with recognition for practitioners, whether this is in the form of recognising individual competencies or the issuing of a certification' (Dunne et al., 2014: 128).

In Italy there is an emerging trend for the creation of new spaces both for and with young people, where coaching, tutoring or mentoring is provided to help young people in the implementation of a project in a career-related sphere (such as business creation), in their leisure time (such as developing a hobby or interest) or social commitment (such as volunteering). Some of these new youth spaces have a specific focus such as the Fab Labs, which are spaces dedicated to digital media production (e.g. utilising 3D printers), art-based youth centres, or new sports-based spaces (such as parkour) and community hubs based on co-working principles. In these emerging new spaces, youth work is at risk of being limited to guidance on practical issues and facilitating activities, rather than being concerned with reflection and dialogue of a social and political nature. There is therefore a danger that a fundamental shift in ethos could take place from the creation of a relational space in which the youth worker and young people *co-construc*t meanings (*sense-making*) to the development of technical abilities to produce specific results (*productio*n).

This variety of provision causes difficulties when research in the youth sector aims to 'identify the pedagogical choices that guide the internal life of associations' (Dal Toso, 2011: 286). Despite participation in associations continuing to significantly affect the free time of

[4] Youth work courses such as School for youth and community were work implemented by the Bollenti Spiriti programme, as well as the project 'Youth worker, an unknown job'.

young people (Forum Nazionale Giovani, 2010; Leone, 2011), as noted earlier, youth work in these youth associations tends to reflect the concerns and interests of the associations themselves and is not necessarily person-centred and dedicated to the creation of independent critical thinking. In part, also for this reason, Italy still lacks evaluative research on the effects that participation in projects, services and associative spaces during leisure time can have on the educational life paths of young people.

To conclude, despite the insufficient professional recognition of youth workers, there is some recognition of the pluralistic 'youth work' provision within the Third Sector, although this seems to have failed to encourage either the development of a common professional base for youth workers or a tradition of evaluation or research on youth work outcomes or methods (Morciano, 2015). Evaluation of youth work practice is still in its infancy, although conversely youth workers in Italy have a high degree of autonomy and are largely immune from managerial interference and bureaucratic regimes which often impede rather than develop practice (Ord, 2012).

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