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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DIFFERENTLY COLLECTIVE

Youth Activism in Italian University Associations

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ABSTRACT: This paper deals with the “ordinary life” of non-institutional university participation and more specifically addresses Italian university student organizations, a neglected entity in youth participation research. We set this case study in a wider research agenda that critically reviews the use of concepts of “second modernity” to interpret contemporary youth participation and focuses on the situated emerging collective forms of youth participation in times of a complicated transition to adulthood. University student organizations are empirically studied through a longitudinal panel qualitative analysis (1st round: 2013; 2nd round: 2016) based upon a non-probabilistic sample of organizations and activists in the cities of Pisa and Florence. Both qualitative comparative analysis and qualitative content analysis are conducted. Our situated and exploratory study suggests that the term ‘reflexive’ cannot be opposed to the term ‘collective’ when we focus on (youth) participation. The differently collective participatory style of the interviewed youngsters becomes particularly original when the associative strategy includes an emerging economic and professionalizing activity.

KEYWORDS: Associations, Student, Non-Institutional Participation, Second Modernity, Individual/Collective

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1. Introduction

This paper deals with the “ordinary life” of non-institutional university participation and more specifically addresses university student organizations, a neglected entity in youth participation research. Although social movements, volunteering and higher education scholars have developed a peculiar interest in student participation, university student organizations working outside the delegation system during low-conflict moments have rarely been scrutinized to date. Institutional knowledge (e.g. coming from university or governmental sources) about them also remains scarce.

These are significant gaps within existing youth participation studies. Limiting our consideration to the Italian context, student organizations seem numerous in each university city and their activities appear wide and continuous. Moreover, studying this case can be particularly interesting to grasp how associational activism, personal and professional aspirations and context constraints connect each other and feed a “differently collective” practice of participation.

We set this case study in a wider research agenda that consider the reverse side of the individualized participation hypothesis and focuses on the situated emerging collective forms of youth participation in times of a complicated transition to adulthood. This agenda flows from and aims at critically reviewing the use of concepts of “second modernity” to interpret contemporary youth participation. Framing them in a modernist and interactionist frame (Dawson 2012) seems a promising way to maintain their power and avoid the risks of over-simplifying reality and obscuring dynamics, continuities and ambivalences in contemporary youth participation.

University student organizations are empirically studied through a longitudinal panel qualitative analysis (1st round: 2013; 2nd round: 2016) based upon a non-probabilistic

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sample of university student organizations (i.e. originally founded and composed by students) and students activists in the cities of Pisa and Florence. Data from interviews with activists and documents have been elaborated mainly through qualitative comparative analysis and qualitative content analysis.

The first section critically reviews the use of some “second modernity” concepts in youth participation studies and illustrates the crucial coordinates of our research approach. In the second section, we scrutinize the contributions of social movements, volunteering and higher education studies to university student participation, before the third section introduces our research methods. The subsequent sections illustrate the empirical research results, first regarding organizations and then students activists. Finally, the conclusion section attempts to derive the most important lessons of our case study for youth participation studies.

2. Differently collective. Towards a situated research approach on youth participation

In the last 15 years, scholars have fed two alternative major views on youth participation: some have worked under a ‘political disengagement hypothesis’, according to which youth political participation would have declined in contemporary societies and this would endanger democracy; and others under a ‘political transformations hypothesis’, according to which youth political participation has not declined but transformed and this would allow democracy to renew. According to the first (pessimistic) view, the focus has been on what young people no longer do (e.g. electoral turn-out), whereas in the second (optimistic) one the focus has been on what they do differently (e.g. online participation) (Farthing 2010).

Scholars working under the ‘political transformation hypothesis’ seem to share many points. They have generally criticized others for exerting a hegemony on government and media representation of youth, being insensitive to the epochal changes of youth participation, having an extremely narrow vision of political participation and using top-down, survey-based methodologies, which “impose a conception of politics and political participation upon respondents” (O’Toole et al. 2003: 47). Common to this field is also the preference for theoretical efforts aimed at redefining contemporary youth political participation, as well as qualitative case studies. Moreover, second/reflexive modernity theories seem to have been the mainstream reference in this field (O’Toole et al. 2003; Manning 2014). The contribution of Ulrich Beck in particular attracted significant attention in youth studies in the 2000s (Woodman 2009; Robert 2010, 2012; Threadgold 2011). Studies on “differently participatory young people” have used second/reflexive

modernity assumptions mainly as a general approach and conceptual source to grasp the deeply new nature of politics within contemporary (western) societies and identify the crucial coordinates of changing youth participation.

Crucial to this reflection is the orientation to explore youth participation outside of political institutions. While political institutions, their collective actors (political parties, trade unions, etc.) and logics were the pivotal centre of first modernity participation, a “non-institutional renaissance of the political” (Beck 1994: 17) characterizes second modernity. According to Beck’s “sub-politics” proposal (Beck 1994: 16-23), in contemporary (western) societies politically-relevant processes happen in different and dispersed domains, are promoted by non-traditionally political actors and often result unpredictable and uncontrollable by state authorities. The break of the iron cage of modern politics opens up and expands the boundaries of the political (Holzer, Sørensen 2003; Sørensen, Christiansen 2013: 94) and allows “shaping society from below” (Beck 1994: 23).

Beck’s proposal significantly meets the interpretations of authoritative political scientists such as Inglehart’s vision on post-materialist politics (Inglehart 1990), Barnes and Kaase’s classic on unconventional participation (Barnes, Kaase 1979) and more recently Norris’s view on reinvented political activism (Norris 2002), but is more radical. It is not a simply matter of substituting a collective actor (political party) with another (social movement organization), an issue (materialist issues) with another (post-materialist), a kind of action (conventional repertoires) with another (unconventional). In second modernity, defining the actors, issues, actions, etc. having a political status in advance and from the top-down seems inappropriate. In Beck’s terms - as well as for Giddens (1991) - second modernity politics is significantly centered upon reflexivity, ordinary life and individualization.

Reflexivity and individualization are two key components of the subject and life-based second modern politics. According to Giddens (1991), traditional references assisting the self-definition of subjects are much weaker in second modernity than before, making it much more difficult to build a personal identity and a satisfying biography. In Giddens’ terms (Giddens 1991), the typical post-traditional politics deals more with life choices (“life politics”) than life chances (“emancipatory politics”). “Life politics” is a permanent discussion that the subject develops about how he/she should live to better express his/her “do-it-yourself biography” in societies that have lost their certainties.

Despite their global success, second modernity hypotheses have proven problematic in their translation into empirical research designs. Beck and Giddens have engaged very little in empirical research and have only used weak empirical sources (Dawson 2012:

307-308), leaving others to develop empirical research based on their theoretical proposals.² Although contemporary empirical studies on “new” youth participation have been robustly inspired by second modernity proposals, they have cooled down the path-breaking character of the latter and finally have made clear some fallacies.

Part of these problems is specifically related to the use of individualism as a key concept in interpreting youth participation. Quantitative investigations into youth participation have showed that although the youth political repertoire can be considered more individualized than in the past to some extent, the structural and cultural conditions influence the new political activities (Ødegård, Berglund 2008) and youth should not be inevitably considered as the vanguard of new political individualized styles (Harris et al., 2010). Qualitative case studies seem to generally indicate that in concrete youth contemporary (sub-)political mobilizations, second modernity elements meet more traditional ones such as collective reflexivity and identity, materialist political values, political opportunity structure, etc., thus creating original mixes (Rheingans, Hollands 2013; Vinken, Diepstraten 2010; Riley et al. 2010; Haenfler et al. 2012)³. Overall, these studies seem to confirm the modernist and interactionist criticism of second modernity individualism reviewed by Dawson (2012), namely that second modernity theorists seem to have exaggerated the impact of detraditionalization process and overlooked the circumstance that individualism is “socially situated”, “culturally embedded” and “temporarily dependent” (ivi: 310).

The results of empirical investigations on youth participation in the last ten years allow critically reviewing the effective contribution that the second modernity “paradigm” can offer to this research field and beyond. Theories of second modernity seem to have enabled youth participation studies, while on the other hand they seem to have downgraded them. The use of concepts like sub-politics, life-politics, individualism and reflexivity has been precious to take seriously some general societal change trends in participatory studies and shape the dissatisfaction for overly-narrow definitions of the political. They have actually helped to open a new season of youth participation studies by preparing the ground for the study under the “political transformations hypothesis”. How-

² In applying second modernity theory to empirical studies on politics, researchers have particularly referenced individualism to interpret emerging forms and trends of contemporary political participation. Among the most successful cases, Micheletti (2003) has framed political consumerism as “individualized collective action” and Van Deth and Maloney (2012) have considered “low cost individualistic participation” as one of the crucial dimensions of contemporary societies.

³ An exception is Manning (2013), who has exalted youth “individualized political engagement” by focusing on the ways in which single young people politicise their daily lives and decisions.

ever, within this field, empirical results have shown that they risk over-simplifying a complex reality and hypostatizing youth individualized participation by obscuring dynamics, continuities and ambivalences.

Although the concepts of the second modernity can importantly inspire a research program on (youth) participation, the use that we make of these concepts is inscribed within a modernist and interactionist frame (see also Guidi 2014a; Guidi, Cordella 2014; Guidi, Popolla 2014). Three elements contribute to define it.

First, our focus is not on the individualization of youth participation in second modernity, but rather its emerging collective forms. Although we welcome the suggestions on the non-institutional reinvention of participation, sub-/life-politics and - more cautiously - individualism, our starting point is that even in a radically new modernity, a strictly individualized participation cannot exist because the processes of meaning generation and action coordination between different people would be impossible. Against the view of a radical de-collectivization of participation, we find it more reasonable to hypothesize that participation can be supported by a range of very different collective processes and that the forms of participation can be differentiated depending on the ways in which people organize themselves to make their own actions (differently?) collective. This reverse side of the individualization hypothesis is believed as a contribution to move beyond the negative/destruens definitions of participation (unconventional, post-modern, non-institutional, etc.). This does not mean focusing on participation organizations but rather participation organizing (Weick 1995), not on the collective as a formal structure but rather as an emerging process.

Second, our approach to youth participation tries to take seriously and problematically into account the co-existence of agency and structural constraints. We address youth participation's current non-institutional practices as being embedded within the typical socio-economic and socio-cultural constraints of contemporary youth condition. Research on youth participation practices should take into account an ample scope of constraints, being open to considering a potentially bidirectional relationship (\Leftrightarrow) between youth condition and youth participation.

From a *socio-economic* perspective, in recent decades youth has progressively become a vulnerable segment of European societies (Guidi 2014b). At least since the 1990s, the transition from adolescence to adulthood has been observed as shifting from a linear path transition (education \Rightarrow employment \Rightarrow marriage \Rightarrow procreation) to a «yo-yo transition» (Walther 2006) where young people are observed to swing between autonomy - which is expected in adulthood - and (economic) dependence - which is typical of adolescence - for a long time. In this scenario, every milestone of adulthood is considered uncertain, whereby 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, Wyn 2013). This general shift seems significant to echo epochal transformations within contemporary societies, especially in terms of new social risks (Beck 1992; Taylor-Gooby 2004), although the differences between segments of the youth population and between contexts of transition to adulthood should not be disregarded. Class and place still seem to be important in shaping youth transitions (MacDonald et al. 2005), national and sub-national welfare policies are very differentiated (Walther 2006) and national economic systems and family traditions have a significantly impact on the path towards independence (Lesnard et al. 2011). The 2008 crisis, global recession and austerity politics have exacerbated the existing difficulties facing European young people, especially in some countries like Italy where the transition to adulthood has become particularly uncertain and frustrating (Cordella, Masi 2012; Schizzerotto, Trivellato, Sartor 2011; De Luigi, Rizza 2011).

From a *socio-cultural* perspective, the theories of second modernity have importantly allowed observing that contemporary (western) young people build their own political identities in a more de-standardized and precarious way than in the past, through the reference to many and contradictory sources in multi-scale, low-coherence and open-ended processes, letting young people the task of interpreting diverse experiences in order to establish their coherent biographies (Lash 1990; Beck 2000; Bauman 2003). Giving these multifaceted processes, a meaningful order is all but obvious because in the present-centered contemporary societies the times of practices are extremely compressed and the margins for a personal re-elaboration and a collective identification are reduced (Leccardi 2009). Following these suggestions, in contemporary societies the answers to the Greenstein's fundamental question of political socialization studies regarding "who learns what from whom under what circumstances with what effects?" (Greenstein 1965: 13, quoted in Abendschön 2013: 1) need to be searched, dealing with a wide constellation of subjects, meanings, practices and contexts. Nevertheless, in the fragmented processes of youth (sub-)political learning, some allegedly modern sources such as family, job, religion, school and place are demonstrated as still holding relevance (Walkerdine, Bansel 2010; Greil, Davidman 2007; Christiano 2007; Probyn 2003; Torney-Purt et al. 2004).

Third, our study on youth participation is situated in time, space and within specific youth targets and environments. Second modernity studies on youth are often generally addressed to "young people" as if this label *per sé* segments a homogeneous population category. Although we accept considering contemporary (western) youth as the most "second modern target" (i.e. the population segment among which second modernity trends should be more evident) (Bettin Lattes 2001), we do not underestimate the notion that economic, social and cultural capital stocks are unequally distributed among

young people. They are not equal because social long-lasting stratification also concerns the youth population. Italian studies have clearly shown that contemporary youth significantly differs depending on family class, gender, educational qualification and residence area (Buzzi, Cavalli, de Lillo 2007; Garelli, Palmonari, Sciolla 2006; Gasperoni 2002; Schizzerotto 2002).

3. Student participation and university associations in Italy

University student participation has been addressed by different strands of literature, mainly within social movements, volunteering and higher education studies. Despite being helpful in shedding light on some aspects, the current state of research seems to only partially satisfy our purposes.

Compared to other organizations, university student movements have been studied sporadically owing to their fragmentation, territorial peculiarity, discontinuity, the quick activists' turnover and the consequent difficulty in building a long-lasting collective memory (della Porta 2010: 9-11). Moreover, social movements studies have almost exclusively dealt with student protests and worked under the questionable assumption of biographical availability. At least from the 1970s onwards, students have been considered particularly inclined towards non-institutional forms of participation owing to their low familial and occupational commitments, thus increasing the amount of time and energy available for activism and reducing the risks associated (Mc Adam 1988). Life-cycle theories applied to social movements studies could confirm this assumption (Fillieule 2013), although recent empirical analyses have complicated the scenario. Young people seem to participate less than middle-aged people who have the heaviest work and family responsibilities, whereby the availability to non-institutional forms of participation does not seem to be significantly related to workloads and context features - such as economic dependence on one's family or the family consideration of the activity - are assumed to be important for the younger (Beyerlein, Hipp 2006; Beyerlein, Bergstrand 2013; Xiao, McCright 2014). More generally, the student biographical availability hypothesis should face with contemporary university student condition, which can be considered less favorable for activism compared with the 1970s. Limiting our focus to Italy, we can observe that university reforms (D.M. 509/1999, D.M. 270/2004, D.L. 180/2008, L.133/2010) have exerted a considerable pressure in incentivizing students to finish their studies quickly. Moreover, especially from 2008 onwards, the reduced value of the educational qualification, the employment crisis and the rising precariousness in the labor

market have pushed Italian university students to actively and carefully build the professional, personal and reputational conditions for a job as soon as possible (Almalaurea 2014; Migliavacca 2013). Italian labor market and welfare policies have given them a little help in the last ten years at least, while families have reduced their capacity to support long transition-to-work paths (Cordella, Masi 2012). Although the condition of university students is actually original and can be favorable to generate peculiar participation opportunities, context constraints should not be underestimated and addressed explicitly by scholars.

Moreover, the interest of social movements scholars in university students has been rather limited and focused on protest mobilizations against university reforms. At the global level, recent studies have addressed protest mobilizations against austerity in university and secondary education policies (Ibrahim 2013; Rheingans, Hollands 2013; Bellei et al. 2014; Guzman-Concha 2012; Giroux 2013), whereas in Italy recent investigations in this field have dealt with the “Onda” movement active against the university reform in 2008-2010 (Caruso et al. 2010a; Zamponi 2011, 2012). As a result, social movement studies have overlooked what can be called the “ordinary life” of non-institutional university participation. As clearly shown by the mentioned studies [see especially Caruso et al. (2010b) for the Italian Onda movement], student protest dynamics are exceptional and scarcely representative of students’ continuing forms of participation. The latter could eventually be interpreted as a latency phase of the university student movement (Melucci 1996). An alternative interpretation is that when students do not mobilize through protest campaigns against university reforms they are not simply disengaged but rather differently mobilized, namely in other fields or arenas, through different logics and/or by adopting less visible activities.

International literature on student volunteering has significantly grown in recent years (Kang 2001; Hustinx et al. 2005, 2010, 2012; Cusick 2007; Holdsworth 2010; Haski-Leventhal et al. 2008; Ghose, Kassam 2014). Here, students have been considered a peculiar youth population target for national and international comparative surveys, in Western and non-Western contexts. To date, these studies have mainly focused on the fundamental characters of the students involved (social background, academic field, perceived benefits, motivations for volunteering, etc.) and their voluntary activities (type of activity, frequency, sector, etc.). They have not addressed voluntary activities developed within university contexts but the whole voluntary activities that the individual young respondents undertake. Although the specific foci and methods of these contributions only partially meet our research interest, this literature helps to problematize the reference to motivations to volunteering and the perceived benefits. All of the contributions based on studies in Western societies show that the meanings that students associate with their voluntary activities are both self- and other-oriented. Employability discourse

applied to higher education volunteering programs - which is particularly strong in the current US and UK contexts (Holdsworth, Quinn 2010, 2012; Holdsworth, Brewis 2014) - does not seem to saturate the collective imagination of student volunteers, although altruistic motivations are insufficient to explain their action.

Student participation has also been significantly addressed within the field of higher education studies (Luescher-Mamashela 2010, 2013; Klemencic 2014, Rochford 2014). The interest here has been to understand how students contribute to decision-making at the university and the national policy level. Scholars have focused on student representative organizations in the universities' participatory governance processes (namely the "ordinary life" of institutional university participation) and sometimes the contentious politics of higher education (e.g. Bégin-Caouette, Jones 2014). This strand of literature is rather far from our research interest, although it helps to better set our investigation in a peculiar institutional environment where students are neither simply recipients of university services nor outsiders of decision-making. Echoing what has been proposed for the political macro context (Barnes, Kaase 1979), these contributions also help to clearly distinguish conventional/institutional university participation practices and unconventional ones.

Although all of these strands of literature have significantly developed knowledge about student participation, this brief review allows observing that non-institutional "ordinary" university student participation has been almost totally ignored by Italian and other countries scholars to date. Within the Italian context, this seems to reflect a significant lack at least for a couple of reasons. *First*, this neglected side of youth participation merits attention owing to its quantitative size. Italian universities and university cities are rich in political, cultural, social and recreational initiatives organized by students for students and the public. Student associations and groups working outside the representation activity - the most visible entities of non-institutional "ordinary" university student participation - are numerous in Italy. There is a deficit of institutional knowledge about them, although a simple query on the main Italian universities websites shows each university city is the working context for tens of students' associations and groups, whose activities appear to be highly differentiated and continuing. *Second*, non-institutional "ordinary" university student participation can be considered an interesting case study for our research agenda. Given their socio-economic and cultural profile (Gasparoni 2000; Checchi 2001; Almalaurea 2014), Italian university students can be considered the central target of second modernity and post-materialist trends. The university experience could be expected to encourage a temporary, highly reflexive, creative, individualized participation. Moreover, since the university context is crucial for Italian middle- and upper-class transition to adulthood, this site of participation can significantly show

how associational activism, personal and professional aspirations and context constraints connect each other in a *differently collective* practice.

4. Research methods

Non-institutional “ordinary” university student participation has been empirically explored in the contexts of Pisa and Florence, in Tuscany. These two universities cities share many common points. Although Italian local political cultures are in transition, Tuscany is one of the most important regions of the so-called “red area”. This is generally characterized in terms of high civic inclinations and good institutional performances (Caciagli 2010; Florida 2011; Trigilia 1986). In Pisa and Florence, university student protest mobilizations have been particularly intense from the 1970s onwards. Both universities are medium-sized (about 50,000 students each), they are known in Italy for their good quality and they attract many students from Southern regions. Both are under the authority of the Tuscany Region - especially important for the right to education services - and the Italian University Ministry.

Here, we have conducted a longitudinal panel qualitative analysis among a non-probabilistic sample of university student organizations (i.e. founded and composed by students) and activists⁴. A snowball sampling method (Biernacki, Waldorf 1981) was necessary because there is no dependable population list of organizations working outside of the student delegation system. Data recollection was carried out in 2012/2013 (first round) and 2016 (second round). Table 1 illustrates the number of organizations and activists included in each round and Appendix 1 contains a brief description of the organizations. The reduced number of organizations in the second round is due to the end of the activities of one organization (Rufi) and the impossibility - after many attempts - to meet the activists of a further two (RiotVan, Artaud).

Tab.1. Number of organizations and activists interviewed

| | <i>Organizations</i> | <i>Activists</i> |
|--------------|----------------------|------------------|
| First round | 16 | 34 |
| Second round | 13 | 18 |

⁴ The organizations are Aula Studio Pacinotti, Collettivo Artaud, Collettivo Aula R, Collettivo LeGrif, Collettivo Out of Line, Gruppo Universitario S.Frediano, Prendocasa, Radio eco, Teatro Rossi Aperto, Ingegneria Senza Frontiere in Pisa and Collettivo Lettere e Filosofia, Gruppo GLBTI, Gruppo Universitario S.Frediano, Ingegneria Senza Frontiere, NoDump, RiotVan and Rufi in Florence.

Table 2. Dimensions, variables and values for the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (three values)

| <i>Organizational characters</i> | |
|--|---|
| 1. Legal formalization | No legal formalization (0); Hybrid (0,5); Full legal formalization (1) |
| 2. Economic asset | Through self-financing activities only (0); Hybrid (0,5); Through external funds (1) |
| 3. Headquarter | The organization is hosted (0); Hybrid (0,5); Autonomous headquarter (1) |
| 4. Membership | No members' registration (0); Hybrid (0,5); Members are formally registered (1) |
| 5. Work remuneration | No remuneration (0); Hybrid (0,5); Some members formally remunerated (1) |
| <i>Collaboration networks</i> | |
| 1. Collab. with local public institutions (except University) | a) no (0) / yes (1); b) (if a=1) limited (0) / ample (1) c) (if a=1) not significant (0) / sufficiently significative (0,5) / very significative (1) |
| 2. Collab. with University (political, administrative and teaching body) | a) no (0) / yes (1) b) (if a=1) limited (0) / ample (1) c) (if a=1) not significant (0) / sufficiently significative (0,5) / very significative (1) |
| 3. Collab. with local organizations (except public institutions) | a) no (0) / yes (1) b) (if a=1) limited (0) / ample (1) c) (if a=1) not significant (0) / sufficiently significative (0,5) / very significative (1) d) (if a=1) similar organizations (0) / different organizations more (1) |
| 4. Collab. with extra-territorial organizations | a) no (0) / yes (1) b) (if a=1) limited (0) / ample (1) c) (if a=1) not significant (0) / sufficiently significative (0,5) / very significative (1) |

In both rounds, semi-structured qualitative interviews with activists of the same organization (individually or in small groups) and the analysis of the documents produced by organizations (flyers, websites, blogs, etc.) were used. First round interviews features the organization, the activities and the activists' stories and experience as the main points, whereas the second round ones were focused on the changes in these aspects.

We have elaborated the data in three steps. First, after the interviews' transcript, we have integrated them through the document analysis and elaborated all the data up to a summary descriptive report of each organization and the classification of the organizations depending on the collective action type, activities' target and organizations' origins. Second, we have used a three-value fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (Ragin 2009) to study the crucial organizational characters and the collaboration networks. Here, we have essentially worked through the polarities 'high/low organizational structuration' and 'composite/limited collaboration network' and have operationalized them as depicted in Table 2.

In attributing the score to each organization, we have used a Delphi process between us to reach a consensus. After having generated the dataset, we have built a 'structuration index' (range 0-5) and a 'collaboration index' (range 0-10) and four collaboration sub-indexes through a simple additional procedure, before standardizing them to help the comparison. *Third*, we have conducted a qualitative content analysis of activists' interviews (Zhang, Wildemuth 2009) to grasp minor standardizable aspects of the collective organizing and activists' experiences in depth.

5. The university student organizations in Pisa and Florence

Pisa and Florence university student organizations are heterogeneous in terms of their collective action type, activities target and origins. The correspondences between these three elements are weak. A "negative" type of collective action (i.e. opposition activities in virtual and real squares) characterizes a small minority of organizations, "positive" repertoire (i.e. non-institutional services, such as study room management, cultural initiatives, etc.) half, whereas a robust minority acts through a mixed repertoire. Although university turnover is faster than in the past, the activities of university organizations are continuing over time. Only two organizations out of sixteen have finished their activities, one due to the end of a public fund and the other because the students activists who were more involved in the organizing have moved to other cities.

The collective action is very often deeply rooted within the ordinary life of the activists (as students, photo amateurs, women, people with housing problems, etc.), although this orientation does not support paths towards individual or club forms of participation.

The activities' target of the university student organizations is only partially the university students. An ampler public target (generalized - the city, global South communities - or segmented - psychiatric users, homeless people) often takes the position of university students or is added to them. The more recently-founded organizations are more multi-targets than the other ones. The clear public orientation of these organizations conciliates with the life orientation of activists.

The processes through which the organizations emerge are also heterogeneous and appear to be threefold. First, some organizations are created *ex novo* by the students. In this case, a specific occasion of university life (a degree course, a university call for tender, a study room) works as an incubator or accelerator. Second, some organizations emerge from the recent separation of some activists from a previous group in which they were involved. The separation is not necessarily conflictual and the type and activities of the emerging organization are rather different from those of the previous groups. Third, other organizations have explicit antecedents in previous student activities and groups in the past (e.g. the 1990s Pantera student movement or international cooperation activities). These insert into the tradition and continue the activities of the previous ones, although they sometimes innovate some crucial elements. Overall, our data on the foundation processes highlights the continuities more than the ruptures with the past and more the past-in-the-present than the simple present. Each organization has a collective history prior to its creation. This is stronger in the second and third cases and weaker in the first case, although antecedents are present in all of the foundation stories of the organizations.

The organizations have a weak structuration level overall (see Table 3), but what seems more relevant is that they seem to manage their own structuration dynamics in a reflexive, creative and instrumental way. Ten of the sixteen organizations present low scores of 'structuration index' (below 2.5, the average value). In particular, our sample of organizations is characterized by the absence of an autonomous headquarter and work remuneration and has a weakly formalized membership. Having a legal formalization is significantly connected to the chance of receiving external funds from the university, local public institutions or private entities. Students do not refuse to give their own group a legal formalization *per sé*, although they only seem to do it when it enables securing money to carry out their activities. Sometimes this dynamic includes a functional differentiation process. In three cases, the students have created a distinct legally formalized organization (both non-profit and for-profit) to manage external funds and they have kept the starting group informal or weakly structured.

Although university organizations are low-structured, they can manage highly complex and non-episodic activities, such as a radio or international cooperation project.

They do not require creativity and energy alone, but also resources like taking responsibility, cooperation, continuity, competences and a careful evaluation of context constraints.

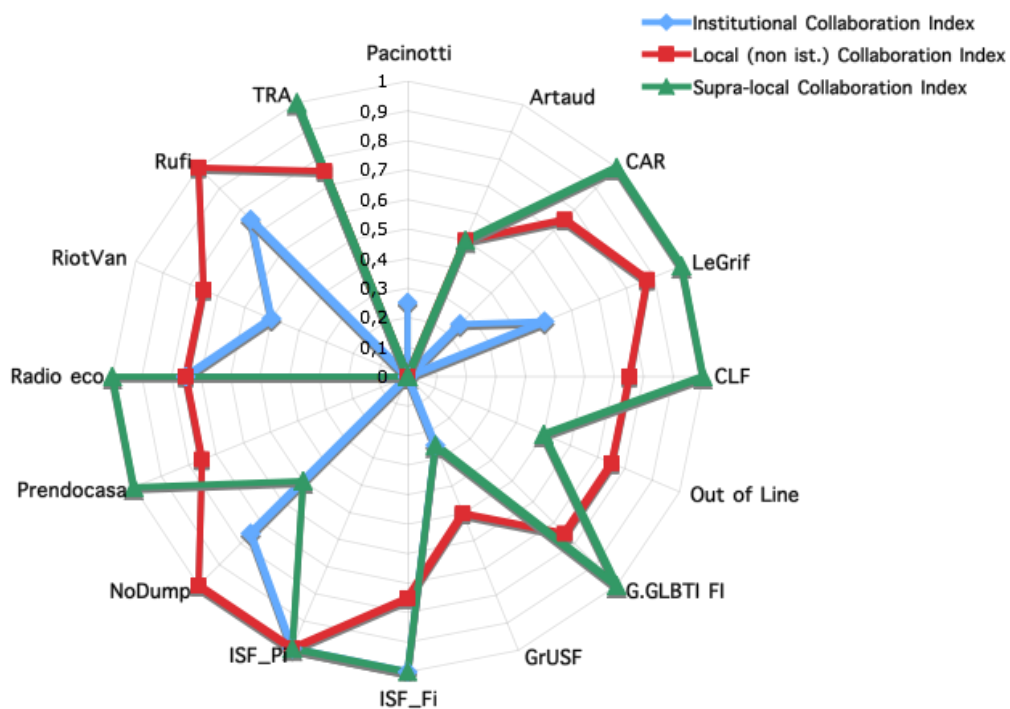
Table 3. Structuration level of University student organizations

| Organization | <i>Structuration Index Score (0-5)</i> |
|--|--|
| Aula Studio Pacinotti (PI) | 0 |
| Collettivo Artaud (PI) | 0 |
| Collettivo Aula R (PI) | 0,5 |
| Collettivo LeGrif (PI) | 1 |
| Collettivo Lettere e Filosofia (CLF) (FI) | 0,5 |
| Collettivo Out of Line (PI) | 0,5 |
| Gruppo GLBTI (FI) | 0 |
| Gruppo Universitario S.Frediano (GrUSF) (PI) | 2 |
| Isf (FI) | 2,5 |
| Isf (PI) | 3 |
| NoDump (FI) | 3,5 |
| Prendocasa (PI) | 1 |
| Radio eco (PI) | 3 |
| RiotVan (FI) | 5 |
| Rufi (FI) | 4 |
| Teatro Rossi Aperto (TRA) (PI) | 1 |

We have also investigated the collaboration networks of the organizations by exploring the quantity and quality of collaborative relationships with the university, local public institutions, local non-public organizations and supra-local organizations (Graph 1). Our data shows that university student organizations are selective in collaborating with the

university and they cultivate broad and significant local and national collaborations with other actors. Six of the sixteen organizations have only marginal or no collaborations with the university, whereas fifteen have significant collaborations with local organizations (0.5 score in the standardized index or more). The inclination towards supra-local collaborations is also clear: only three organizations have no significant collaborations in this field (less than 0.5). A majority of organizations have some institutional collaborations (10 organizations in 16), although only a minority are significant and strong. The last trend characterizes both the more protest-oriented organizations and the “positively” active ones.

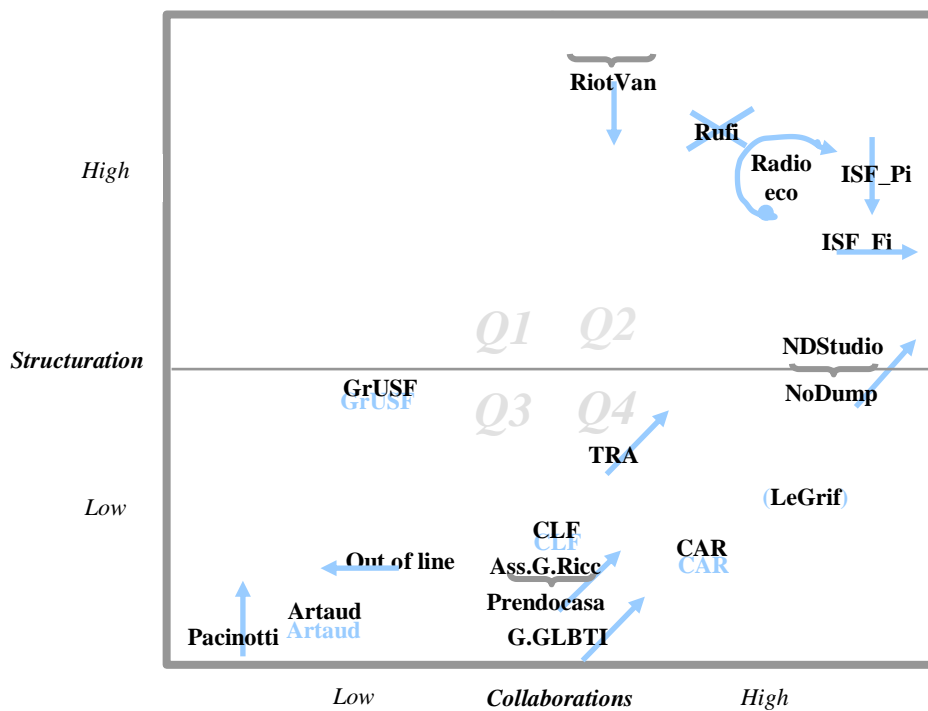
Graph 1. Non-University collaborations of University student organizations



The longitudinal panel research design also allows understanding the most relevant changes of the organizations from 2013 to 2016. Figure 1 synthesizes the changes

by situating the organizations within a 'Collaboration x Structuration' plane where the 2013 positions of each organization are in black and the sky-blue signs represent the change trajectories. As already mentioned, one organization (Rufi) has ceased its activities, which began thanks to a Tuscany Region fund. Moreover, one (LeGrif) presents itself as being "hibernated" in 2016. All of the other organizations still exist and work after three years. Five (Prendo Casa; NoDump; G.Glbt, Radio eco, TRA) have significantly grown both in structuration and collaborations. Peculiarly, NoDump has achieved this by generating NDStudio, through which three activists received significant work remuneration in 2015/2016, while Radio eco has achieved it through a radical activists' turnover and growth. Two organizations have developed in one dimension: one (Pacinotti) has increased its structuration and one (ISF-Fi) its collaborations. Four organizations (Artaud, CAR, GrUSF, CLF) have not been interested by any significant transformation in structuration and collaborations. Two organizations (RiotVan; ISF-Pi) have experienced a structuration reduction, mainly because they have lost their autonomous or semi-autonomous headquarters. One (Out of Line) has reduced its collaborations, mainly due to a more general lower intensity of social movement organizations activities in Pisa.

Figure 1. Evolution in structuration and collaborations 2013 (black, starting point) / 2016 (skyblue)



Overall, we can note that the general trend of the university student organizations from 2013 to 2016 has been characterized by stability and growth, despite the activists' turnover, youth condition worsening and the austerity age. In 2016, the organizations mainly situate in Q2 and Q4 in the 'Collaboration x Structuration' plane (Figure 1), whereby they show a relevant and growing collaborations network and a growing - albeit not necessarily high - structuration level.

6. Differently collective. What the students say

The thematic analysis of interviews with young people involved in university associations has allowed us to explore "subjective" aspects of the students' mobilization, namely individual motivations and orientations at the origin of their engagement, transformations of their motives over time, emerging modes of belonging, repertoires of action as ways to give a meaning to the difficult context of constraints and opportunities in which their action takes place. Accordingly, we will focus on these points in the next sections.

6.1 Service providers, challengers or everyday makers: Keep calm and Do It Yourselfes

The individual narratives that we have collected show different sources at the origin of the activists' commitment. The entry in an organization results not unfrequently from chance occurrences linked to encounters or accidents, often in the margins of an event. While joining an organization is rarely a long-pondered decision, all of the interviewees use specific words to explain their personal involvement, which is always described as an act of free and voluntary choice. Young activists' engagement clearly appears as a form of "reflexive participation" (Hustinx, Lammertyn 2003), dependent on a free and voluntary choice.

For student "collectives", the act of associating may keep track of long-term projects of social transformation aspiring to "subvert the system" (CAR). However, for most of the people whom we encountered, the motivation to participate is clearly rooted in their own individual condition. They decide to create a new group - or enter into an existing one - to respond to a distress, a desire or a specific concern, whether about the lack of opportunities for aggregation (Pacinotti), affordable housing (Prendocasa) or a scarcely professionalizing education received within the university (RiotVan, ISF-Fi).

Almost none of our interviewees identify the origin of their commitment as being in

the “interest of others” and less far away describe themselves as being a “self-sacrificing” volunteer. Nonetheless, their narratives show a close intertwining of different types of orientations: personal interest and the pursuit of solidarity do not seem mutually exclusive sources of determination. Whether it is a personal experience of psychiatrization (Artaud), a house eviction (Prendocasa) or a common passion for photography (Out of Line), the individual search for personal fulfillment and identity does not preclude the presence of more collective visions, responsibility-taking and modes of conduct. Our stories explicitly highlight that increasingly individual commitment does not go parallel with a withdrawal from social context or a complete concentration on oneself.

In most of the cases, discomfort is addressed through a personal mobilization that gives priority to the creation - in a collective and cooperative way - of new ‘positive opportunities’ for oneself and those who experience the same situation. Accordingly, students’ response is neither exit nor only voice reclaiming for the intervention of established governing authorities. The associations that we met show different levels of opposition to the political system; instead, their form of action draws upon the tradition of self-organization: they invest their energies in concrete projects, striving to contribute to well-being and life satisfaction *here* and *now*.

Individual logic of personal growth and socio-political activation are generally interrelated and mutually supportive in the narratives of commitment, while in some cases it is the professional development to assume a central relevance (Riotvan, ISF-Fi).

... I had already known something about the ISF and one day I asked my roommates: "Excuse me, could I come to one of your meetings?". They said: "Sure, it's open to everyone!" I went there and I liked it, maybe also because I already knew half of the people I met there. And in short, it started very well, everything was like a 'bomb', so much excitement. All the way up was nice, but specifically it gave my university experience a meaning (...) the ISF did keep me, or better reinvigorated, my attachment to the university, it made me desire to learn more things and be able to really do them. There was also the aspect of being part of some project, of giving help (...) But for me ISF was also a response to the need to understand what to do. (Activist_3, ISF-Fi)

However, not all of the activists have broken with the twentieth-century model of commitment, as radically stated in Beck’s theory of “freedom’s children” (2000). Participation as a 'moral obligation' has not disappeared and the interviews reveal several examples in which one’s own individual biography is embedded in role behavior at least partially pre-defined.

... I started to be part of a collective in high school. Later, I approached this collective in my first-year of university, but became part of it in the year of the achievement of my first degree.

It was the "pre-Onda" (phase), we were very few. I am very proud of my past in high school, we were very active, we also did occupations with long terms goals. (...) At the high school most of the people did it because it was trending. It was normal to be left-wing, there was a subculture that facilitated you. I also had a group of friends who were interested, we were attracted to the aesthetic aspect rather than to the ideological one, it was a "middle level culture." I have not been trained, my parents were left-wing people and they gave me a minimum cultural education, but my father stopped doing activism long before I was born and he has never spoken to me about that. Now I feel it more like a duty, even though with some satisfaction ... I feel it more like a moral obligation. (Activist_2, CLF)

6.2 Friendships, skills and a dash of politics

Activism can have different outcomes depending on the group structure, the issues addressed and the types of collective action. In almost all of the cases, organizations emerge as important venues for socialization. A clear continuum can be drawn between the associative experience and close bonds of friendship that someone likens to "a second family" (Activist_5, ISF-Fi; Activist_3, NoDump). Primary ties of affection characterize the initial state of the commitment and endure over long periods of time, even when associations extend and differentiate their membership. Participating for the sake of "being together" seems a constant for the students whom we met, while for someone this dimension has a value that tends to surpass in importance the issue banding a group.

From here (the association) so many relationships have come out, so many! Many friendships! (Activist_1, Pacinotti)

Most of my acquaintances, namely, the strongest friendships were finally born there, also because there are not many other places for aggregation (Activist_1, CAR)

More specifically, students' organizations provide a remarkable opportunity to integrate into city life off-site students, who can express their commitment, as well as finding a group of peers to overcome loneliness and share time far from home.

There is someone from Leghorn, some others from Pisa, and the rest is composed of people like me, who are off-site. We could say about a 50% of people coming from Pisa/Leghorn and another 50% of off-site people. Off-site students are easily attracted, since as an off-site *you need a group*, to confront with other people, so there's an extra boost; whereas local people are mainly pushed by a political identity element (Activist_1, CAR)

Once again, the stories of activists confirm that for contemporary young people collective identification is a much more mobile, situated, temporary and reversible process, although at the same time their narratives seem to deny the post-modern hypothesis of evaporating identities.

In most cases, the way of “being a part of” (Cotta 1979) that puts young activists at ease is defined by strong affective ties and weak ideological ones, by freedom of expression and a low level of formal structuration and by a sense of obligation more similar to the informal correctness used among friends than to the loyalty to a cause. Pleasures and obligations that actually persuade young people to bound together seem far from militancy styles typical of the ‘old’ as well as the ‘new’ social movements.

The idea is that everyone should bring as much as he/she can and as much as she/wants. It’s a matter of responsibility [...] Here our times are self-determined and our work is not subject to a hierarchy (Activist_1, TRA)

However, in less recently-founded associations (i.e. CLF in Florence and CAR in Pisa), the process of collective identification still rely on ideological sources that are shared and recognized. The “being a part of” that can be observed in these sets is more cohesive and based on collective elements that precede the group of associates.

In our interviews, the associations clearly emerge as sites of learning and empowering. In some cases, the associations are described as a sort of “safe space” (Eliasoph 2013), giving people the conditions in which they can testify their ideas about society and start a process of self-discovery that has consequences on how they act. This is particularly evident for the members of predominantly inward-looking groups, such as the feminist collective and the GLBTI group.

The guys who have passed from the group... you can see it! That is to say, if you meet them outside they know how to respond to a situation, they know how to handle a situation such as the homophobia incidents (even the small ones and even inside the gay community), they can explain why we should not say such things. Those are the ones who will later become activists at school, at home, at work [...] the sense of the group was indeed that of a meeting place (Activist_1, G.GLBTI)

The organizing experience gives the participants the possibilities to practice their capabilities and recognize what we could term a sort of “political potential”, whereby young people become more conscious and thus they can collectively “make a difference” (Activist_1, LeGrif). In other cases, the associations help young people to develop their own individual ideas about society, enabling them to “connect the dots” and see how an issue is related to another in what could be seen as a political learning process.

University gives only a technical and a scientific support [to the engineer training]. At a certain point we have felt the lack of a supplement, of a *broader vision* of what we would have done later, as engineers in society. (...) The basic idea is to create an engineer, not only a technical, but *also a responsible citizen*. (Activist_1, ISF-Pi)

If several interviewees insist upon the outcomes that they have derived from their engagements, activists from more radical groups reveal a kind of embarrassment in making links between what they term as “militancy” and competences development, desiring preserving an idea of participation as being uncontaminated and unselfish.

You do politics for the sake of politics; You do not do politics for further steps. (Activist_1, CAR)

Nonetheless, most of the young people believe that involvement in organizing produces an informal learning that will be relevant for their future. Teamwork, time management and public speaking are only some of the skills that they mentioned.

[In association I have learned] ... teamwork and how to welcome others, then perhaps ... (the association) helps you to learn out how to organize things, how to find time in your life, but also how to organize a conference , how to relate to a person older than you, who may be a keynote speaker, it allows you to find the space or ... for example... many times we do not know how to do a certain thing, then reflecting all together we find different solutions, it enables us to speak in front of so many people and then to have a dialog ... so maybe it helps you putting aside your shyness. (Activist_1, GrUSF)

In the cases mentioned above, skills and competences appear as a by-product of self-organization, while in other examples the link between participation and professional skills development is constitutive of the association itself. The organization – similar to an entrepreneurial project – becomes a tool to deliberately build a career and increase one’s employability. Therefore, for example, the Riotvan Association was born to enable members to experiment themselves as journalists, ISF (Engineering without borders) deals with the figure of the engineer in training and NoDump aspires to create new opportunities for architects and designers.

We feel very much like entrepreneurs. (...) We are not a company but to get where we are now and to do everything we have done so far, of course, we should have an entrepreneurial spirit. (...) For four years we went on with volunteer force and passion. Now the association has a VAT number, we have got bills and payments in order and we can make *this become our*

job (...) We are already doing what we would want to do when we will grow up! [laugh] (Activists_1, 2, 3, RiotVan)

NoDump is also a project about becoming a solid structure that could become a job for all (...) a real job in life. Of course, that will take time (*laughs*) (...) As students the important experience was cutting our teeth while studying, that is beginning to understand on our own, with our own forces, how to behave, how to work, how we can relate to an institution, how to strive ... and just to say "ok, how can I go to a company to involve them in a project they will be probably not interested in? "(...) do our best to involve people, to create a project, along with other ... and do it yourself! (Activists_1, 2, NoDump)

Close attention must be paid to the relationship between the agency components and the context constraints in which participation occurs. Depending on the type of social structure in which groups are embedded, different meanings and patterns of involvement can be discerned. In some cases, as we have seen the associative work is primarily inward-oriented and the association and collective action has an internal function (G.GLBTI, GrUSF).

In the case of student collectives, activism draws upon a socio-cultural context referring to the new left radicalism tradition, to its values, languages and models of interpretation of reality, although different collectives rework and reinvent their territorial and cultural roots in different ways and with different levels of conflict with previous generation activists.

In other cases, the influence of the specific context shows a greater and direct influence on youth activation. What acquires significance in some cases is the weak inclusion of young people in the labor market, which worsened after the 2007 financial crisis. The connection between participatory experience and the current difficulty in finding a job and earning an income is one of the most evident signs of the changing relations between youth and participation. In some cases, participation in association is explicitly considered as an instrument for skills development, networking or an occasion to engage practice in activities that can enhance students' capability to secure future jobs or facilitate a social enterprise. Facing a world of adults and institutions that are unreliable and anachronistic, do-it-yourself activism emerges as the most effective logic of action for some of our interviewees.

From this perspective, university is not only the forum where some students make direct experience of the limits of the educational system, but also a site of opportunities for further future development. For some organizations - namely ISF-Fi, RiotVan, NoDump and Radioeco - the university context acts as an accelerator of youth aggregation that is useful to improve employment opportunities.

6.3 How long does the present moment actually last?

The second round of interviews that we conducted in 2016 was particularly interesting to grasp some specific traits of youth activism and observe how the associations have changed over time. For many of the young people whom we met, the three years of interlude that separate the rounds correspond to the end of their own (or other activists) university course and their entry into the labor market. This transition has been highly uncertain and precarious for someone (e.g. CAR), while being more encouraging for others. Sometimes the skills developed through the associative experience have proven useful (e.g. Radio eco, NoDump).

I have studied economics, and when I left the radio, I left, to go to work in a sector, let's say, in which the knowledge tools that I have approached at the radio -something hybrid between what a computer technician and an economist can study - gave me the opportunity to enter in the labor environment much better. I mean, working on the web and coming from the web with a web radio, I have had the opportunity to apply some advertising and economic dynamics that I learnt with the radio [...] (Activist_1, Radio eco)

Consider that someone has gone quite far away, P. writes for the "Fatto quotidiano", V. is now working as journalist for "Il Mattino". (Activist_2, Radio eco)

Sometimes the end of university has coincided with withdraws from the group and sometimes with a change of role within it (e.g. Radio eco, ISF-Pi), while in two cases the forms of participation have become less tied to physical proximity: the Internet now plays a decisive role in holding the group together when its members are scattered across different parts of Italy and Europe (e.g. Out of Line, CAR, Radio eco).

We have problems with distance. Operationally we exchange email, do meetings on Skype once a week (although sometimes we are not able to do it) ... now we do less "general convocations" and more focused meetings with fewer people. [...] It is because, in a certain way, we have grown up: one of us works in Turin, another is in Paris, S. and A. work, another is a student but a serious one ...not like me ... (*laughs*) ...then we tried to change a little the kind of work and we make a deeper thematic work... it is simpler because of our challenges, but also because the Pisan movement has not the same influx than before (Activist_1, Out of Line).

However, only in a very few cases has the end of the university experience meant a complete depletion of the activists' need/desire to participate. For some of the people whom we met, associative connections are not so "loose" and tend to look like the stable

relationships of old-fashioned activists. In some places and for some people, such a form of involvement is indeed still possible: activists do not necessarily operate on the short line. Accordingly, for example, the old founders of Radio eco still “remain in the orbit” of the association after finishing their studies, the engineer of ISF-Pi boasts twelve years of commitment and the member of Prendocasa defines his engagement as “a constant and continuous presence” with a “total level of seriousness”.

Regarding the associations, most of them have proven capable of redefining and re-inventing themselves (their membership, organization, action repertoire) according to the changing environment in which the groups operate. This sort of “resilience ability” seems to be confirmed by the fact that only few associations have become inactive or totally disappeared.

Collective LeGrif is one of them: despite the collective having not met for several years, the young women whom we met define it as “hibernated” and in “stand-by”, refusing to decree its end and interpreting the actual phase as always being reversible. In their narratives, the group has stopped its activities at a certain moment and it is not easy for the activists to understand how and when it has occurred: life has simply shifted elsewhere. In this case, the group seems to be more similar to an occasion-bound unit, a concatenation of interpersonal encounter, rather than a structured team.

So, the LeGrif Collective for me is not completely dead, we can say. In the sense that I always hope that there will be a future for us; however, actually, we do not meet, so we're not “actively participating”, we do not participate... (Activist_1, LeGrif)

The collective ... is in standby, a long standby that I do not know if it will end, but for me, for me, is on standby, is hibernated at this time. (Activist_2, LeGrif)

And why? How have you entered in this phase? (Interviewer)

For me it was due to some changes in my life, in the sense that, at a certain moment, I was doing 1,500 things, I had 1,500 [places of] militancy and belongings and after I started -not to work – it was community service indeed... but that came later, [it was] for a series of personal thrusts linked to have many commitments, that have reduced my time and then led to the current configuration of my life. (Activist_2, LeGrif)

Not all of the associations have such a “liquid nature” and indeed show a certain capacity to act with continuity over time, at least at the moment. Of course, the evolution of the different organizations is not unidirectional.

In the case of Aula Studio Pacinotti, the change of the institutional environment has entered into conflict with the original identity of the association. In fact, after a beginning stage of high and spontaneous participation, the group took the direction of a sort

of “forced formalization” and some of the activists turned into “spokespersons” for the interface with the university. Increased resources invested by the university in the building restoration resulted in an increasingly regulate and controlled environment, with a great reduction of the role and the action space of the association, whose members’ positions is now equated to a sort of experienced customers.

How was this move from self-organization to the University management? (Interviewer)

It depends on the aspects that you evaluate, at an organizational level the arrival of the university has brought more funding, not always well managed, that’s well known... who runs the structure without attending it, often does not know its problems. (Activist_2, Pacinotti)

Have you been consulted at that time? (Interviewer)

Sometimes it happened and sometimes it didn’t, it depends ... for the purchasing of the tables or garden equipment we are taken more into consideration *because as users, we can give advice for buying*, from experience we know which material deteriorate more rapidly or which are the highest affluence peaks. (Activist_2, Pacinotti)

So you do not mind more of the building maintenance? (Interviewer)

No, as a result of this step everything is delegated to the central administration ... We really cannot touch anything, it’s a matter of accident and insurance. (Activist_2, Pacinotti)

Other interviews tell us of more positive evolutions. Some people (i.e. Radio eco, ISF) emphasized that the associations have been able to secure an almost entire turnover of the membership as well as the leadership, selected through a group decision-making process. However, “new energies” have arrived and change is considered “in the nature of things”.

Naturally, in a certain sense. Opportunely, our group had the strength, the ability to change its management. It is not easy to innovate the association management. The old members are all gone, gone to a better academic or personal life, while students, who are the core of the radio have taken their place with regular elections ... Who came off remained inevitably in the orbit (Activist_1, Radio Eco)

For ISF-Pi, the foundation of a second-level association - ISF Italy - and the definition of a coordination of the strategies at the national level was the occasion to problematize its original status of a volunteering association, finally refusing to become a more professionalized ONG.

We decided not to do cooperation as a job; if you want to make it, you go elsewhere. This point was shared after a long period of reflection which led to decide that in all the statutes

there is an article that make it explicit. Now we have ISF Italy, the initial enthusiasm didn't pass away, but now it has its associative roles. It has a president, a board etc. The network has been always seen as a horizontal one and now, instead... (Activist_1, ISF-Pi)

The choice whether to be involved in the market seems to be a key question for more than one association. The collective of photographers Out of Line perceived the commercial context as irreconcilable with their critical work. Indeed, even if it is not easy "to secure the material conditions" for their projects as they have lost the ability to access university funding, any hybridization seem to be excluded at the moment.

In other cases, (i.e. RiotVan, NoDump), young people have gradually expanded the activities of their association, aiming to "put in value" their skills and experiences. Young people clearly equate their association to a "start-up", which transforms into a market-oriented commercial enterprise. For example, NoDump founded a professional studio called ND Studio (where ND is NoDump), which works on the "commercial contracts" gained through the association and ensures adequate incomes for the three partners. The attempt to turn the association into a job is now made more explicit, although something similar to an entrepreneurial spirit has been recognized as distinctive since its very beginning. The "functional differentiation" between studio and association appears particularly original and does not weaken the latter.

Would you identify yourselves as entrepreneurs, somehow? (Interviewer)

Well, absolutely yes, in the Olivetti's way ... as my grandfather who is the one who invented "Pongo" (a trademark), used to tell me "create welfare around you". In NoDump nobody works *for* someone and everyone works *with* someone. And it's the same with NDStudio, identical. This is a crucial point: to do what we do, to get ahead, you must have suffered, you have to find the strength in the experience of being under someone earlier, working for him/her, someone who orders you what to do, in a dimension where you are an employee, take the money and shut up. Almost all those in NoDump have this experience and, therefore have that reaction ... I do not know how to explain myself... working together worth more than the final product... people who work on things, they go all out... we are like a mutual aid society ... this is the coolest thing about the studio and the association too: you do only what you can control. (Activist_3, NoDump)

6. Conclusions

Contrary to what one might learn from the wide debate on second modernity participation, our small, situated and exploratory study on university student organizations suggests that the term 'reflexive' cannot be opposed to the term 'collective' when we

focus on (youth) participation. University student organizations can be clearly framed as reflexive forms of participation, although they are clearly also collective. Taking modern/traditional participation as the starting point, we should recognize that the participation that students express through these organizations is reflexive and *differently collective*.

One could object that since we have studied student activists groups, observing that they are collective is tautological. However, we believe that this is not the case. These groups are not pre-existing but they intentionally emerge as collective answers to individual needs from the university students, who are supposed to be massively individualized as “exposed to” second modernity trends. Students do not answer to their personal needs individually or through a traditional collective organization, but rather through the creation of (relatively) new organizations. It seems to make clear that within the do-it-yourself biographies of post-traditional youth there can be room for a do-it-yourself activism having emerging collective forms. In our case study, the collective is both objective (a recognizable long-lasting organization) and subjective (a personal feeling of some post-traditional activists who define their organization as a “family”). They shape their own organization in a reflexive way to face some typical problems of their condition in a wide range of situations, some ordinary (such as by working-at-distance when many activists have moved into other cities) or exceptional (such as to “gem” a second organization from the original one to remunerate the activists’ work).

Future studies - preferably at a supra-regional scale - could shed further light on the peculiar co-existence of the collective, the individual and the reflexive into youth associations and the emerging definitions of the political in the shadow of economic crisis and the complicated transition to adulthood. In our case study, building a bottom-up and peer-to-peer collective seems the best strategy to let individuality develop and react to the hardship of the context.

The differently collective participatory style of the interviewed youngsters becomes particularly original when the associative strategy includes an emerging economic and professionalizing activity. To date, scholars have often observed that young volunteers can gain competences and network contacts from associations, improving their own possibilities to get a job (Day, Devlin 1998; Prouteau, Wolff 2006; Wilson, Musick 2003). Our differently collective activists go further and make their economic and professionalizing activities a political action.

They explicitly tackle social problems and current institutional gaps but do not conventionally follow the voice strategy (Hirschman, 1980). The economic and professionalizing activities are interpreted as the most effective form of protest. These represent a strategy to give the activists themselves a desirable chance in hard times and aspire to

give peers analogous opportunities. Despite being realistic and continuing, these activities are managed and regenerated according to non-hierarchical logics, in a pattern balancing affective ties, effectiveness and individuality development. As one of the interviewees recognizes, this emerging form of political action looks somewhat like that of an early-twentieth-century mutual aid society, although - coherently to second modern transformations - here individuality deeply shapes both the dissatisfaction and the reaction. However, making individuality really free to express and develop does not mean to playing alone without any constraint or tie, but rather building a different, more tailored collective.

By revising Peter Berger's metaphor (1996), which opposed the modern collective and unidirectional train to the second modern own private car as a way to satisfy the need to move, we could conclude that the youth whom we interviewed are building a new self-designed collective means of transport to travel. They are not changing the world, although is this not an emerging collective and reflexive form of the contemporary political?

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