

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



Symposium

NAVIGATING TRANSITIONS

Adapting policy to young people's changing realities

Tirana 21-23 June 2022

Understanding, Problematizing and Rethinking Youth Transitions to Adulthood

Ilaria Pitti, University of Bologna (Italy)



If we continue to speak the same language to each other, we will reproduce the same story.

– Luce Irigaray

Introduction

Within the individual life course that spans between the birth and the end of life, youth has been traditionally interpreted as a phase of preparation for adulthood, that is as a moment of transition in which individuals are meant to acquire, practice, and master the social capacities that are commonly associated with the adult status: maturity, responsibility, and independence. This conceptualization of youth implies an idea of adulthood as a desirable goal and, as a matter of fact, in most societies around the world becoming adult grants individuals with the rights and the privileges of a full membership. As the passage from youth to adulthood symbolically marks the abandonment of a condition of dependence and the achievement of a condition of independence, the achievement of the adult status impacts on the possibility to be recognized as mature, autonomous, responsible, and complete subjects by the communities we belong to. In pre-modern times, societies marked the passage from youth to adulthood through spectacular and highly symbolic “rites of passage” aimed at proving one’s strength, maturity, responsibility (and virility) and the passage was commonly signaled through permanent corporal modifications such as tattoo and scars (Van Gennep, 1909; Turner, 1969). In modern societies five main life events are commonly used to assess the (successful) completion of the transition. The end of the schooling phase (independently from the acquired educational degree), the entry into the world of work (with a stable job), the exit from the parental houses, the starting of a new family through marriage or cohabitation, and the birth of the first child represent the thresholds that every young person is expected to trespass to achieve the adult status. These events develop along two main axes which refer, respectively, to the *public sphere* - from school to professional career - and to the *private sphere* - from life in the family of origin to independent life in one’s own family - and, as for the premodern rites of passage, each of them is supposed to *permanently* mark the abandonment of youth and the entrance in adulthood (Pitti & Tuorto, 2020).

Although these markers of adulthood are common to many societies in the Global North and Global South, the timing of this process is regulated in each society and historical period by specific norms that establish the most appropriate ages for the transition and type of sequence (Elder, 1975). Moreover, several factors can condition single events within the path of transition or the entire path of transition: “micro-social factors” such as individual and family characteristics (e.g., class of belonging, national origin, level of education, etc.), as well as “macro-social factors” like the institutional configurations of the labor market, the welfare state and the family models prevailing at a given socio-historical moment within specific

geographical contexts (Williamson & Coffey, 1999; Feixa et al., 2016; Cooper et al., 2021). Indeed, youth transitions are profoundly influenced by the socio-historical scenario in which they develop, which constantly redefines the contents and boundaries of youth and adulthood, as well as the very possibility of these life phases' existence.

As both youth and adulthood are social constructs, the understanding of the transition between them always implies to reflect on the processes that, in each society and historical time, define *how* the transition must occur and *when* it can be considered complete, as well as on the different possibilities of achieving a complete adult status granted to different social demographics on the basis, for example, of gender (e.g., for many young women the possibility of being independent are hindered by norms limiting their access to property) or disability (e.g., for many people with disabilities the possibilities of being independent are hindered by the lack of services). In this perspective, exploring transitions to adulthood implies to study the paths through which young people grow up and reach the adult status, analyze these paths' duration and linearity, reflect on the intersectional influences of gender, class, race, and other variables on youth transitions, analyze the events through which each society marks the passage from youth to adulthood, as well as to reflect on these markers' validity (Blatterer, 2010; Pitti, 2017).

Understanding (contemporary changes in) youth transitions to adulthood

For a brief period between the end of Second World War and the late '70s, transitions to adulthood appeared an ordered and institutionally guided path, at least for a segment of the youth population in Western societies. Between the '50s and the '70s, most middle-class young men would, in fact, easily, quickly, and orderly achieve the five markers of adulthood thanks to an institutional and cultural system that strongly encouraged and sustained this process.

After the Second World War, Western economies went through an unprecedented period of growth which was sustained by high levels of social expenditure, the achievement of full employment, and the expansion of welfare state. In this context, the consolidation of a labor market based on long-term contracts and steady hierarchical career progressions allowed workers to be able to count on a widely predictable career path, marked by standardized intermediate stages and retirement as a certain destination. These social conditions were supported by a system of values (structured around the nuclear family based on marriage) that was scarcely contested at least until the 1960s. While the social context granted most of the youth population with vast opportunities to successfully trespass the thresholds of transition to adult life, the value sphere - also through media - contributed to making these thresholds a widely shared ambition (Côté 2000; Crawford 2007). Between the '50s and the '70s, the classic markers of adulthood were something concretely tangible and reachable for a large part of the (male) population of Western countries and precisely this closeness between ideals and reality has contributed at transforming these thresholds in a standard through which measuring the achievement of adulthood. Drawing on Blatter (2010), it is possible to argue that "when long-term fulltime work was within reach for the majority and early marriage and parenthood so

common, the meaning of being ‘grown up’ was perfectly clear, and the attainment of the classic markers brought with them the recognition of adult status”.

However, since the ‘80s and particularly since the ‘90s, research has revealed the profound transformations occurred to youth transitions in contemporary society. Scholars suggest that a processes of deinstitutionalization of life courses has introduced several elements of differentiation in youth paths of transitions to adulthood. Compared to their peers of previous decades, who entered the adult world rapidly and following a largely predictable path, contemporary young people face a more uncertain social context in which transitions become more complex and differentiated while the full achievement of the adult status becomes less certain and less stable.

Nowadays it is more likely that the end of the studies follows the start of work or life as a couple, that the birth of a child precedes marriage, or that periods of independent living are interrupted by returns to one’s family home. Unlike in the past, professional fulfillment no longer necessarily coincides with family fulfillment and the time between the end of studies and the formation of an autonomous family is extended. In this perspective the life moments in which youth can be ‘broken down’ (i.e., the phases of professional attempts, of friendship and couple sociality and of housing arrangements) are more flexibly combined than in the past (Galland, 2010). Next to these processes of differentiation, structural changes in the labor market (e.g., job flexibility) and welfare systems (e.g., reduction in social expenditures) have made it more difficult for young people to construct a coherent biographical project (Beck, 1986). The lengthening of the cohabitation between parents and children that has been observed across Europe, for example, reflect the protracted condition of economic and professional instability experienced by young generations since the ‘80s (Unt et al., 2021). To define the experiences of contemporary young people, Mayer (1994) coined the expression of “postponed generation”. Other authors, emphasizing the alternation of steps forward and backward along the adult path, have spoken of yo-yo transitions (Biggart & Walther, 2005) or used the metaphor of the boomerang (Mitchell, 2006) to indicate the loss of relevance of traditional passing markers and the change in meaning that these markers have assumed among young people. More than a path from a starting point to a safe point of arrival, contemporary youth transitions would be distinguished for their potential “reversibility” (Benasso & Magaraggia, 2019).

It must be noted that the deinstitutionalization of life courses responds to structural changes as much as to a demand coming from individuals, who attach greater importance to the possibility of change, of resuming interrupted paths, of starting over both in the work and in the family field. Decisive in determining these new orientations were the changes in individual choices that characterized the “second demographic transition” thanks, above all, to the increased participation of women in the job market, the diffusion of models of family alternative to the marriage, and the decrease in reproduction. Because of the changed scenario, a new course of life has emerged in particular for young women whose lifepaths no longer univocally marked by reproductive tasks and more individualized, also following the increase in the level of education and reduced dependence on the family (Blatterer, 2010).

In this light, contemporary youth transitions to adulthood would be characterized by more freedom, as well as by more risks and would then combine conditions of dependence proper of the youth condition, with responsibility and capacity/necessity of choice proper of the adult status.

Acknowledging the blurring lines between youth and adulthood, Arnett (2004) talks about contemporary youth as “emerging adulthood” and identifies some features that characterize the individual development process today: the identity exploration that continues even after adolescence, the instability connected to the prolonged search for one’s own place in the world, the focus on the self, on one’s own resources and objectives, the feeling of precariousness, and the phase of possibilities understood as a dynamic period of evaluation of the different opportunities available. Emphasis is given by Arnett to the element of experimentation, of being “in between”: during their youth, contemporary young people would have more opportunities to focus on themselves, engage in training and work opportunities as well as in premarital ties without having to direct their biography towards a definitive status. The postponement of the ages and stages would free them from social constraints and allows them to cultivate individual aspects of their personality. According to this thesis, the expanded construction of a new adulthood affects young people from all Western countries with further convergence processes taking place outside the Western context.

In line with the “emerging adulthood” model, some authors have shed light on the development of a “new adulthood”. According to this perspective, the condition of today’s young people is not so much characterized by the postponement of transitions as by the fact that they find themselves having to manage a strong pressure to anticipate, to quickly take control of their biographies to cope with the uncertainties. In the current historical-social order, therefore, a new way of *being* an adult would emerge. For Wyn and Woodman (2007) typical aspects of the new adulthood are the responsibility, the choice between different options, the balance between spheres of life as a protective mechanism against job instability, the enhancement of extra-family relationships in response to the weakening and thinning of the family units. Within this model, adulthood would lose the character of a stable and definitive condition and would rather manifest itself, on a psychological level, as a subjective maturation process that occurs in the absence of traditional status markers and essentially starting from a mental condition (Blatterer, 2010).

Problematizing youth transitions and their final goal

According to these perspectives, the blurring boundaries between youth and adulthood, the extension of the duration of the youth phase, as well as the tight and narrow spaces of a present marked by economic, political, social, health and environmental crises have increased young people’s difficulties in finding and imagining one’s own space, both individually and collectively. From being a phase of preparation for adult life youth is today mostly an uncertain condition and enjoys today a less clear status than yesterday. What does it mean to be “young”? What “social functions” does the youth phase play in the individual life path? When does youth

begin and when does it end? If in the past the family, the school, the labor market, and the other traditional institutions of modernity have been able to provide socially elaborate answers to these and other questions, today it is more and more young people who must give - autonomously and with resources they have - meaning and value to youth.

However, as traditional paths of transitions to adulthood become less binding than in the past, but also less stable, also the goal of youth transitions – adulthood – become a less defined and more problematic status. When we speak of “adult” are we referring to a married person or can a person living alone be considered adult too? Does one’s economic condition or placement in the labor market matter in this definition? Is it enough to refer to psychological maturity or to the age of majority? What impact do regressive events such as job loss, returning home, leaving the life of a couple have on the adult status? What it means to be an adult today and through which changes of status this event can be established is neither clear nor univocally determined. Indeed, although being characterised by an increased freedom of choice, in contemporary transitions to adulthood is often an uncomfortable and undefined experience for an increasing number of young people. In different parts of the world, scholars, media, and politicians have elaborated the labels of the lost generation, the threatened generation, the betrayed generation, the condemned generation to describe the various difficulties that young people are experiencing in achieving one or more of the traditional markers of adulthood. Indeed, research shows that young people encounter today more difficulties in achieving economic and existential autonomy than previous generations of youth and that these difficulties are involving today also segments of the youth population that experienced smoother transitions in the past, such as middle-class youth living in the Global North.

Unemployment, economic instability, and in-work poverty have become common experiences for young people today who are asked to find their place in society moving within a “Darwinian labor market” that requires to continuously adjust to increasingly lower standard. Although education still is a protective factor, the devaluation of educational titles has been denounced everywhere and leads many young people to accept jobs for which they are overeducated and, in countries where student loans are common, to get into debt they may not be able to solve. Confronted with low, risky incomes, many young people cannot or do not want to risk making investments in building their life independently from their family of origin, by renting or buying a house or by starting their own family.

The pandemic seems to have made it even harder for young people to find their way toward adulthood. The countrywide lockdowns, containment measures, and travel restrictions to halt the spread of COVID-19, which affected many aspects of daily life, have had a significant impact on young people. This covers the provision of young people’s education and training as well as their entry into the labour market. Over 1.5 billion students — or 90% of the world’s student population— were affected by school closures during the epidemic, according to estimates from the United Nations Programme for Youth (UN 2020). According to the ILO report (2020): “this experience quickly smashed the most basic of expectations in most countries around the world – that youth have the capacity to anticipate and control their educational futures”. The UNESCO predicts that 24 million students who have already interrupted their educations may never resume them. Regarding young people’s employment,

the ILO report notes that more than one in six young people worldwide had lost their jobs because of the pandemic. More than 267 million young people found themselves in the NEET category before the crisis, and 68 million of them were unemployed. Between February and April 2020, young people's labour participation rates declined in several ways. Eurostat estimates that 2 million of young Europeans aged 15-29 lost their jobs in 2020 and employment rates today are still lower than the one of 2019. Youth employment in Europe for the age group 15-24 fell from 33.4 % to 31.2 % (-2.2 pp.) while the decline in overall employment rates (20-64) was less pronounced (-1.4 pp.). The Global Initiative for Good Jobs for Youth conducted the Global Survey on Youth and COVID-19 in May 2020, and preliminary results showed that even young people who had not lost their jobs had less work, with an average 23% drop in working hours. The prospect of (re)entering the labour market becomes more difficult due to competition for jobs as hours of employment and the quantity of job opportunities decline and people spend more time unemployed. In this situation, the youth who were already labelled as NEET will face stiff competition for jobs from young people who are more educated, more experienced, and hence more easily employable. According to ILO (2020), there is a big risk of generational "scarring", as young individuals experience long stretches of unemployment and inactivity, struggle to re-enter the workforce, and possibly get passed by younger, more qualified cohorts.

The global COVID-19 outbreak, the lockdown and social isolation that followed, as well as rising economic insecurity, also have led to a decline in mental health and wellbeing. Responses to lockdown policies have resulted in business closures and layoffs, which has increased mental health problems, particularly anxiety, stress, and despair among young people. Lockdowns and other social distancing measures have also harmed mental health and wellbeing by destroying social relationships. Given that mental health has an impact on educational attainment, job entry and retention, and relationships in general, the effects of the worsening of youth mental health could be dramatic.

It must also be remembered that young people's experiences with the pandemic have varied. It is necessary to consider inequalities based on class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and migration history. For instance, research reveals that young women have been more severely impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic than older women or young men. The pandemic has impacted young women by changing employment, reducing incomes, and increasing domestic and caring responsibilities.

The global pandemic seems so to have deepened difficulties and inequalities that were already problematic before and to have made the five markers of adulthood even more unachievable than "before".

But what does "before" *really* mean? When did the problem with transitions to adulthood started? Although the multiple social, economic, political, democratic, and environmental crises that have characterized the first twenty years of this century could lead to think that young people's difficulties in navigating transitions are a new phenomenon, this is hardly the case.

In 2018, observing the condition of youth in the world of the 2008-global financial crisis, Sarah Pickard and Judith Bessant wrote that “for many young people the reality of their (everyday) lives differs quite radically from [the] expectation for a better future. Too many young people confront minimal employment prospects, inadequate basic services, high levels of debt, shortage of affordable adequate housing, a lack of access to (affordable) education”. However, already in 2003, Andy Furlong pointed that “over the last couple of decades, youth transitions have become increasingly protracted and, seemingly, more complex. Routes which were once viewed as linear and predictable are seen as having been replaced by a set of movements which are less predictable and involve frequent breaks, backtracking and the blending of statuses”. But in 1995, Lynne Chisholm (1993) already used the expression of “broken transitions” to refer to the increasing difficulties experienced by youth in accessing the labor market and the consequences of this on other spheres of their lives and in the early ‘80s, Carlo Buzzi (1986) warned about the “fall of the traditional ways of moving from youth to adulthood” observing the transitions of young people in Italy, France, and Spain. In sum, it’s at least 40 years that research in the Global North is denouncing the growing difficulties encountered by youth in their paths towards adulthood. At the same time, different studies (Swartz et al. 2021) have demonstrated that complete, linear, and smooth transitions to adulthood have always been a *mirage* for most young people living in the Global South, as well as for young women, young people with disabilities and other more fragile segments of the youth population everywhere.

Rethinking youth transitions

Despite being increasingly problematic and problematized, the classic idea of transitions to adulthood based on the five traditional markers still represents a relevant normative model in contemporary societies. In this perspective, Lee (2001) has suggested that the path of transition to adulthood traced by the five markers constitute a “standard model of adulthood”. Indeed, the ordered and clear sequence of events of the transition based on the completion of studies, stable employment, independent living, cohabitation, and parenthood remain the main model against which contemporary young people are expected to navigate their transitions from youth to adulthood. Although consolidated in the short period of time between the ‘50s and the ‘70s and despite having become increasingly unachievable in the following decades, the standard model of adulthood has never been really abandoned and adopted by adults and institutions as a measure to assess young people’s maturity. Moreover, despite being based on the experience of white middle class young men of the Global North, this standard has become a guiding model for adult maturity whose validity has been generalized to women, minorities, youth belonging to low-income families, and young people in non-industrialized countries. The institutionalization and generalization of the standard model of adulthood produces a series of consequences for young people.

First, the *struggle experienced by young people in achieving the standard model of adult rarely foster a debate on the limits of the model* against the changes occurred in the contemporary era (e.g., the dismantling of wage-based labor market, the increased flexibilization) and rarely result in an acknowledgement of the fact that the different life conditions from which different

young people start their paths of transition may make the achievement of that standard impossible. Indeed, even when changes in transitions to adulthood are acknowledged, the prevailing readings emphasize the dimension of choice by subjects asked to find their ways amongst an increasingly wide range of possibilities. Many scholars have observed that the deinstitutionalization of career opportunities, the possibility of autonomously constructing one's own biography concerns only a part of the youth world, the one best equipped to face the transformations taking place (Plug & du Bois-Reymond, 2005). Indeed, the possibility to postpone adult responsibilities and the ability to manage risks remain highly dependent on structural, environmental, and cultural influences, as well as on the resources of the system of relationships in which one is embedded (Côté, 2014; Bynner, 2005). In this context, to grasp the complexity of contemporary youth transitions, it is necessary to adopt an intersectional perspective, looking at the different ways in which young people achieve adulthood in relation to gender, educational qualification, condition of origin, ethnicity, and other factors.

Secondly, thinking transitions through this standard model *negates that young people have always achieved adulthood in many ways*. Indeed, despite being based on the experience of white middle class young men in the Global North between the '50 and the '70s, this standard has become a guiding model for adult maturity whose validity has been generalized to women, minorities, youth belonging to low-income families, and young people in non-industrialized countries. Indeed, young women's transitions to adulthood, for example, have always been much more linked to the family sphere than to the world of work. If this is certainly due to difficulties in accessing the job market, it also resulted in the identification of different markers of adulthood. Similarly, research conducted on young people in rural areas and Roma young people and young people in the Global South has shown that leaving the parental house isn't always a necessary step towards adulthood. Cohabitation between generations and taking care of each other are, in fact, practices of adulthood for many young people around the world. By generalising a way of becoming and being adult that was experienced only by a small segment of the youth population of a small part of the globe for a short period of time, society has failed to recognize young people's multiple ways of navigating transitions and multiple ways of being adults. Alternative strategies of navigation and ways of living adulthood have for long remained invisible or experienced misrecognition. Indeed, the standard model of adulthood creates hierarchies within the youth population: young people who cannot or who don't want to follow the standard are frequently stigmatized as childish, lazy, lacking drive or ambition.

Thirdly, the assumption of the model of adulthood based on the five markers as the only legitimate model for successful transitions *limit adults' and institutions' capacity to recognize and support new configurations of adulthood elaborated by young generations*. Indeed, experiencing the discrepancy between what the standard model of adulthood prescribes and what current socio-historical conditions allow, young people elaborate new ways of "feeling" and "being" adults through their everyday practices and in their daily contexts (Burnett, 2010; Pitti, 2017). Experiences of co-housing, emerging models of relationships and non-hierarchical networks of professional collaboration developed by young people while trying to find their place in society entail a (more or less conscious) critique to the standard model of adulthood and its potential oppressive nature for all those who don't want or can't follow its normative

ideal (Kelly et al. 2019). While the standard model of adulthood has originated from a societal culture based on competition, unlimited use of resources, and inequalities that privileged certain segments of the (youth) population over others, by changing adulthood, contemporary young generations' alternative configurations of adulthood have the potential to sustain also a fairer and more equal idea of society.

Finally, the standard model of adulthood also *institutionalizes a cognitive hierarchy between youth and adulthood* as stages of the life course. By linking the idea of maturity to the achievement of adulthood through the five markers, the model fails to acknowledge that youth transitions are much more than just a run towards adulthood. The standard model of adulthood, indeed, emphasizes the relevance of the achievement of the goals over the relevance of the process through which adulthood is achieved. By giving more importance to the goal than to the journey, the conceptualization of transitions to adulthood through the standard model enforces a narrative of competition - adulthood is something that must be achieved, not learnt, not experienced, not created, not imagined – and hides the relational nature of adulthood – indeed, looking at processes allows to recognize the role that young people's relationships, communities and collectivities play in the transition to adulthood.

In conclusion, as research suggest that the standard model of adulthood represents an increasing unachievable ideal for many young people around the world, we need to think how this model can be re-elaborated to include young people's different paths, experiences, sensitivities, and idea of future.

Next to recognizing the long-standing young people's problems in navigating transitions, these reflections encourage a broader of deeper problematization of our understanding of youth transitions to adulthood and invite us to rethink it. Having discussed the limits, as well as the risks connected through thinking transitions to adulthood only through the standard model, what can be done to move forward? Should the idea of transitions be abandoned, or should it be reimagined? And if so, what kind of knowledge and policies we need? There are no easy answers to these questions. However, the adjustment of policies to young people's changing reality necessary implies to re-adjust contemporary ideas of adulthood and to build a more 'update' and inclusive idea of transitions to adulthood and of adulthood itself.

This would imply, first and foremost, to *rediscover and reclaim the true meaning of transitions*. Indeed, the metaphor of transition is one of the most powerful ways of understanding youth. Conveying an idea of youth as a transitory state, the metaphor of transition has the capacity to stress the most intuitive characteristics of this age of life as well as to clearly define its goal. Talking of youth as a transition means recognising in-betweenness, liminality, undefinition as key features of this age, as well as to acknowledge the social meaningfulness of youth "immaturity", understood as a possibility for openness and experimentation. The metaphor of youth as a transition to adulthood has not only a powerful descriptive capacity, but also an ability to acknowledge the social value and social functions of youth.

Rediscovering this metaphor would imply to elaborate knowledge and especially policies to help young people to reclaim their right to be young, that is a right to achieve adulthood, but also a right to experiment through the journey, a right to fail, a right to carefreeness, a right to messiness. Especially when dealing with times of multiple and continuous crises, where the scenario faced by young people changes every day, policy should be first and foremost flexible and adjustable to different young people's needs.

On a second level, elaborating a more updated and more inclusive idea of transitions to adulthood implies *giving visibility to alternative ways of navigating transitions* elaborated by contemporary young people. This is an invitation to give more attention – in both knowledge and policies – to ideas of adulthood that young people are producing in every day and political practices, but also to recognise that new perspectives on adulthood might emerge from practices and spaces that we normally do not consider as related to transitions to adulthood.

Young people's commitment for the environment, for example, is not just a matter of civic and political participation but has also to do with their idea of transitions. Indeed, that commitment entails an idea of future and thus, also an idea of adulthood. By questioning the current model of growth and its effects on the planet, young people are also questioning the centrality that economy has in defining who is recognised as an adult and who is not. The standard model of transition to adulthood, by placing work and economic independence as a key step to achieve most of the other markers developed from and sustained the very modern illusion of achieving happiness through a continuous expansion of economy. Another example of alternative idea of adulthood can be recognised in young people's increasing attention on mental health that we see every day in social media. Tik Tok and Instagram are full of contents produced by young people to increase awareness on mental health. This attention has to do with their present and the struggle they're facing in their everyday life, but it has also to do with their futures as these practices prefigure an adult identity that is more complex, more reflexive, more self-aware, if you want truer, than the one that the standard model of transitions proposes. These every day and political practices are young people responses to their changed realities that should be acknowledged in the elaboration of youth policies. This implies to increase research on young people's ideas of future and of adulthood, to look for young people's ideas of future and adulthood also in spheres we are not used to conceive as connected to transitions, such as youth cultures, youth practices in the social media, youth politics, and to assess the coherence of all policies against the ideas of adulthood and of future that young people are prefiguring today.

Finally, building a more updated and more inclusive understanding of transitions to adulthood implies *elaborating new ways of assessing maturity*. The confusion between transitions to adulthood and the standard model of adulthood has led many scholars and policymakers to forget that the real goal of youth transitions should be achieving maturity and that the markers of adulthood that we have chosen are the means, rather than the goals. In this perspective, there seems to be a need to place the issue of maturity back at the center of the debate by both recognizing young people's new strategies for feeling mature and by elaborating new ways for assessing or measuring maturity. Solutions to this challenging need could come from the observation of those marginal segments of the young population that have never been able to

reach adulthood, and thus maturity, in the way proposed by the standard model of adulthood. Drawing on the Black feminist scholar bell hook, this perspective implies to recognize that marginality can be “much more than a site of deprivation” (hooks 1989, 21) as living in a marginal position can catalyze a capacity to recognize contradictions and unsolved issues in current societal arrangements. In this light, marginality “offers to one the possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds” (Ibid.). Practices of adulthood elaborated by marginalized young people, in this light, should be interpreted by scholars and policy makers not just as problematic strategies of adjustment, something to solve, but also as “a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance,” (Ibid.) where a counterhegemonic discourse on adulthood is elaborated. Looking at young women, for example, we can learn that maturity has also to do with the capacity to care for others and the world around us; a capacity that does not depend on one’s position in the labor market and that should be encouraged through more investments on policies and infrastructures promoting young people’s civic inclusion through engagement and participation.

In conclusion, adjusting policies to young people’s changing realities means, first and foremost, to learn from young people by deepening our knowledges on their new grammars of adulthood and by promoting policies able to recognize young people’s multiple languages of adulthood.

References

- Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road From The Late Teens Through The Twenties*, Oxford University Press.
- Beck, U. (1986). *Risikogesellschaft: Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne*, Suhrkamp.
- Benasso, S., Magaraggia, S. (2019). In Transition... Where to? Rethinking Life Stages and Intergenerational Relations of Italian Youth, *Societies*, 9(1):7-16.
- Biggart, A., Walther, A. (2005). Coping with Yo-Yo Transitions: Young Adults' Struggle for Support, between Family and State in Comparative Perspective. In C. Leccardi and E. Ruspini (eds), *A New Youth? Young People, Generations and Family Life*, Ashgate Publishing, pp. 41-62.
- Burnett, J., (2010) (eds.). *Contemporary Adulthood. Calendars, Cartographies and Construction*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Buzzi, C. (1986). Gli itinerari giovanili verso nuovi sistemi di significat. In F.Ferrarotti, G.Bianchi, A.Melucci, C.Calvaruso, C.Buzzi, F.Garelli, M.Pollo, G.Milanesi (eds.), *Ipotesi sui giovani*, Borla, p. 17-37.
- Bynner, J. (2005). *Rethinking the Youth Phase of the Life-Course: The Case for Emerging Adulthood?*. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8 (4): 367-84.
- Chisholm, L. (1993). Youth transitions in Britain on the threshold of a 'New Europe', *Journal of Education Policy*,8:1, 29-41.
- Côté, J. (2014). The Dangerous Myth of Emerging Adulthood: An Evidence- Based Critique of a Flawed Developmental Theory, *Applied Developmental Science*, 18 (4):177-88.
- Côté, J. E. (2000). *Arrested Adulthood: The Changing Nature Of Maturity And Identity*, New York University Press.
- Crawford, K. (2007). *Adult themes. Rewriting the rules of adulthood*, Macmillan Australia.
- Edler, G. H. (1975). Age Differentiation and the Life Course. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1, 65-190.
- Feixa, C., Leccardi, C., & Nilan, P. (2016). *Youth, Space and Time. Agoras and Chronotopes in the Global City*. Brill.
- Furlong, A. (2016). *Routledge Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood*. Routledge.
- Galland, O. (2010), Une Nouvelle Classe d'Age?, *Ethnologie française*, 40, 5-10.
- Hall, T., Coffey, A., & Williamson, H. (1999). Self, Space and Place: Youth Identities and Citizenship. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 20(4), 501–513.
- ILO (2020). *Youth and Covid-19. Impacts on Jobs, Education, Rights and Mental Wellbeing*. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_753026.pdf
- Kelly, P., Campbell, P., & Howei, L. (2019). *Rethinking Young People's Marginalisation: Beyond Neo-liberal Futures?* Routledge.
- Lee, N. (2001). *Childhood and Society. Growing Up in an Age of Uncertainty*, Open University Press.
- Mayer, K. U. (1994). The Postponed Generation: Economic, Political, Social and Cultural Determinants of Changes in Life Course Regime, in H. A. Becker, P. L. J. Hermkens (eds.), *Solidarity of Generations: Demographic, Economic and Social Change, and Its Consequences*, Publishing Thesis, pp. 47-70.
- Mitchell, B. A. (2006). The Boomerang Age from Childhood to Adulthood: Emergent Trends and Issues for Aging Families, *Canadian Studies in Population*, 33(2): 155-78.
- Pickard, S., Bessant, J. (2018). *Young People Re-Generating Politics in Times of Crises*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pitti, I. (2017). What Does Being an Adult Mean? Comparing Young People's and Adults' Representations of Adulthood, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 20, 1225–1241.
- Pitti, I., Tuorto, D. (2020). *I Giovani nella Società Contemporanea. Identità e Trasformazioni*. Carocci.

- Plug, W., Dubois-Reymond, M. (2005). Young People and Their Contemporary Labour Market Values. In H. Bradley, J. van Hoof (eds.), *Young People in Europe: Labour Markets and Citizenship*, Policy Press, pp. 65-81.
- Swartz, S., Cooper, A., Batan, C., Kropff Causa, L. (2021). The *Oxford Handbook of Global South Youth Studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Aldine de Gruyter.
- United Nations (2020). *Youth Flash. Special Issue on Covi-19*, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/04/YOUTH-FLASH-Special-issue-on-COVID-19-1.pdf>
- Unt, M., Gebel, M., Bertolini, S., Deliyanni-Kouimtzi, V., Hof äcker D. (eds.) (2021). *Social Exclusion of Youth in Europe. The Multifaceted Consequences of Labour Market Insecurity*. Policy Press.
- Van Gennep, A. (1909/1960). *Rites of passage*. Routledge.
- Walther, A. (2006). Regimes of Youth Transitions: Choice, Flexibility and Security in Young People's Experiences Across Different European Contexts. *Young*, 14(2).
- Wyn, J., Woodman, D. (2007). Researching Youth in a Context of Social Change: A Reply to Roberts, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 10(3):373-81.