Political Participation of Young People in Europe – Development of Indicators for Comparative Research in the European Union (EUYOUPART)

Deliverable 8: « Collection of Working Papers on Qualitative Research Findings»/ITALY

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All working papers are based on the qualitative research that was undertaken by the consortium partners in all participating countries in January and February 2004. The qualitative research consisted of 2 parts: Interviews with politically active young people and focus groups with politically non-active young people. Various approaches were taken to analyse the data.
The national working papers follow a common structure (themes) that was designed prior to the analyses. National results will form the basis for a comparative analysis of the qualitative results across countries.

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1 Section 1: Data Collection

1.1 Socio-demographic characteristics

1.1.1 Focus Group

Five focus groups were carried out. Four focus groups regarded non-active young people (two formed by females and two by males), while one focus group regarded young people active in “new politics”/unconventional forms of participation (the sex of participants was mixed).
Totally have been interviewed by focus group 29 young people, which distribution into the 5 groups is showed in the following table:

Table 1: focus group composition

NUMBER AND COMPOSITION OF FOCUS GROUPS				
1	2	3	4	5
5 females	5 females	7 males	5 males	5 females+2 males

The age of our sample ranges between 18 and 25.
As showed by the table 2, which indicate how the interviewed subjects are divided for the variables age and sex, the sex distribution reveals how the older sample is mostly composed by female and the younger sample is mostly composed by males.

Table 2: Age and sex of focus groups participant’s

	SEX	
AGE	Male	Female
18	3	2
19	4	
20	1	
21	2	
22	3	
23	1	4
24		3
25		6
total	14	15

Considering the sample distribution per level of education, our interviewees have a middle-high level of education (see table 3), in fact they attended or are attending between 12 and 18 years of school education.

Table 3: Educational level

	SEX	
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	Male	Female
Degree	1	3
High school	12	11
Compulsory school	1	1
total	14	15

Most of participant are still students and few of them are workers (see table 4). The educational level and the job of the participants have not been considered as determinant variables in the forming of the focus groups.

Table 4: job

	SEX	
JOB	Male	Female
Student	12	5
Workers	1	3
Student and workers	1	7
total	14	15

1.1.2 Individual Interviews

Five individual in-depth interviews have been also carried out to activist young people. The interviewees' characteristic have been selected as followings:

Young person active in conventional party politics
A 25 years old man, politically active in a national party (Alleanza Nazionale)[1].
Level of education/job: university student.

Young person active in unconventional ("new") politics

[1] A right-wing national party.

A 24 years old man, politically active in a unconventional politic movement.
Level of education/job: university student.

Young person active in school's council
A 18 years old man, politically active as students' representative at his school council.
Level of education/job: high school student.

Young person active in community group
A 25 years old woman, politically active in her local community (she belongs to a group which cooperates with the city council).
Level of education/job: degree, worker.

Young person that representing some peculiarities of our country
A 21 years old man, politically engaged in "Movimento Universitario Padano", a political university movement connected with the Lega Nord national party[2].
Level of education/job: university student.

1.2 Methodological issues

1.2.1 Focus Group interviewees recruitment

As regards subjects' recruitment, we used different strategies and methods in order to involve the most variable sample. We contacted the following organizations:

- *Youth Aggregation Centres,* which have been available to provide us many names of young people as well as information about their sex, age, school attended and eventually political participation.
- *Fondazione IARD – training area:* we asked some students attending the Fondazione IARD vocational courses, if they were willing to take part in the research;

Finally we used also the method of asking friends and workmate for referrals among their young acquaintances and friends.

To stimulate young people participation, we offered each participant some tickets-restaurant (total value of twenty euros). Nevertheless, many participants didn't come to the appointment.

Almost all the member of each focus group didn't know each other, in fact we formed the focus group avoiding that more than two participants knew each other.

[2] Lega Nord is a right wing national party.

Four focus groups have been carried out in the Fondazione IARD meeting rooms, only one focus group has been carried out nearby a Youth Aggregation Centre, in Cremona.

All the focus groups have been conducted by two Fondazione IARD researchers[3], one had a leading role concentrating on the general questions, and the other had a supporting role stimulating the groups through subthemes and specific issues. Both of them have also observed the psychosocial groups dynamics and the psychosocial aspect of the youth individual political behaviour.
The average duration of the focus group has been 80 minutes.
All the focus group have been tape- and video recorded and then full transcript.

1.2.2 Individual Interviews

The subject's recruitment methods were the same used for focus groups. 1) We recruited subjects through the collaboration of Young Aggregation Centres. 2) We asked Fondazione IARD students. 3) We reached young people through acquaintances and friends.

Like for focus groups we promised each participant four tickets- restaurant for a total of twenty euro, to encourage young people participation. Unlike for focus groups, in this case nobody missed the appointment.

All interviews were carried out in Fondazione IARD offices; just one interview was done in a Youth Aggregation Centre.

All the interviews were performed by one Fondazione IARD researcher. A particular attention was paid not to set up a kind of relationship based on one-up / one-down rules; the aim was to establish a peer relationship. Usually, this goal were reached; only in one case, it was difficult.

The average duration of the interviews has been 35 minutes.
Also all the interviewees have been tape- and video recorded and then full transcript.

[3] Gloria Cornolti and Fabio Cotti.

2 Section 2: Short summaries and observations on focus groups and interviews

2.1 Focus Groups: attitudes and behaviours

Since the recruitment phase through the phone contact we realized difficulties to convince people to participate at the interviews because of their disinterest on the politics issue or their fair not to be prepared to answer on this topic.
Obviously it happened overalls with no activist people group whose interviews have been mainly characterized by a initial cold attitude sometimes difficult to take off, due to the lack of knowledge on the topic, sometimes in the no active groups it was difficult to understand their construction of the topic's reality through their narrative language.
In general, the group of activist ("new politics") was more interested in the research topic, and consequently their attitude during the interviews was more dynamic and active. In this way, young activist people succeeded better in expressing their construction of reality, how they conceptualize "politics" and how they approach themselves to this topic. The positive group dynamic facilitate also the opinion exchange and comparison, contributing to enhance the willingness to participate and deepen the argue.

2.1.1 Focus Group number 1

We expected six non-active females, but one of them didn't come. Their age was the following: three were 25, one was 24 and one 23.
Only two of the interviewed knew each other. The focus group lasted approximately seventy minutes.
The participants were not interested in the research project, to a pint that they hardly seemed to listen. At first, the situation was more similar to an individual interview, in the sense that, when the interviewer displayed the theme, the participants tended to answer one at a time, without discussing with others. Moreover, we often had to introduce "sub-themes" and "issues" since the discussion needed to be continuously stimulated through questions. The following exclamation represents this "apathetic atmosphere" quite clearly: "I'm not interested in politics, when I hear someone speaking about politics, I usually go immediately away".

2.1.2 Focus Group number 2

Here, we expected six non-active females but, one of them, called one day saying that she would not come to the focus group because she was hill. Age was the following: one was 18, two were 23, one 24, one 25.

Also in this case just two of the interviewees knew each other. The focus group lasted about eighty minutes.
This group was a little bit more interested in the research project than the previous group, even if all of the participants were not really interested in “politics”. “Politics” was conceptualized as a strange business, hard to understand, and sometimes as a dirty game.

2.1.3 Focus Group number 3

This focus group was carried out with seven non-active males. The age of the participant was the following: two were 18, two were 19, two 22 and one 23.
None of the interviewees knew each other. Unexpectedly, during the interview, one participant revealed to be a member of a catholic movement. The focus group lasted nearly 120 minutes.
This was the only group – among those of non-active young people – who was really interested in our research and enthusiastic about taking part in it. Also, they had clearly conceptualized ideas about “politics” and its concerns. As a consequence, they discussed actively all the time, interacting with each other, confronting their points of view, and sometimes even quarrelling.

2.1.4 Focus Group number 4

We expected seven non-active males, but two of them didn’t come. The age was the following: one was 18, one was 20, two were 21 and one 22.
None of the interviewees knew each other. The focus group lasted approximately eighty minutes.
This group was similar to group number 2, in the sense that, even though the participant were not so interested in “politics”, they discussed actively confronting their points of view. However, the debate had often to be stimulated by introducing “sub-themes” and “issues”.

2.1.5 Focus Group number 5 (activists)

The participants were seven young people, five females and two males, with the following range of age: one female was 18, two males were 19, one female was 23, one female was 24, two females were 25.
Two of the interviewees knew each other. The focus group lasted about 120 minutes.
As said before, the group was really interested in our research project, so that discussion was lively all the time.

2.2 Individual Interviews: attitudes and behaviours

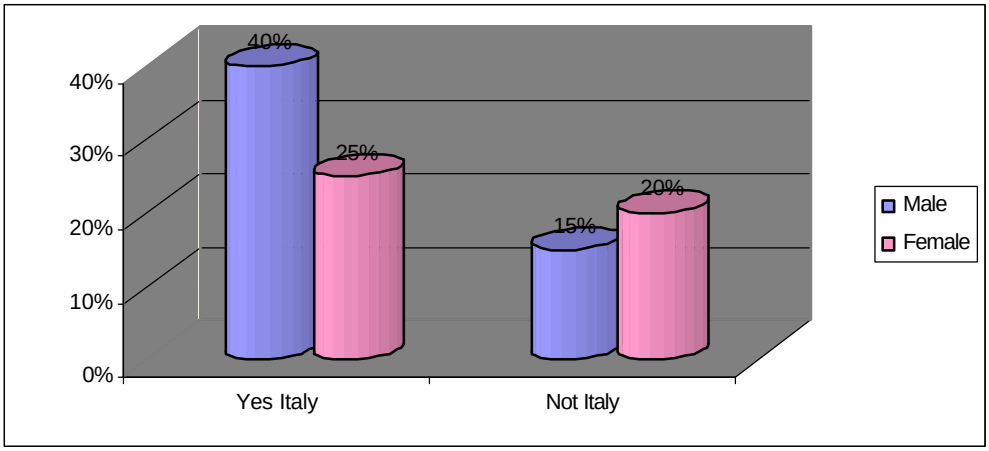
In general, all interviewees were interested in our research project and in “politics”. So, they were accessible, active and willing to show their interpretation and construction of reality; they were ready to show their thinking processes, ideas and conceptualizations about “politics”.

MAIN RESULTS

3 Section 3: Theme 1 – 'Belonging and Identity

3.1 Feelings of attachment

In order to give a global overview of what emerged about the sense of belonging the interviewees can be categorized according to their feelings towards Italy. These are some descriptive data. As you can see from the graphic reported below, with respect to the dichotomy attachment/non-attachment among the subject a sense of attachment prevailed. More precisely 65% of the subjects present feelings of attachment to Italy, whereas 35% do not. In the first group 40% of the subjects are male and 25 % are female; in the second group the percentage is 15% male and 20% female.



Such percentages are quite in line with the data presented by Fondazione IARD in the "Fifth IARD Report on Juvenile Condition in Italy"[4]. Also in the present research, the subjects expressed sense of belonging to Italy in the first instance and secondarily to their region. The sense of belonging to Europe is rather feeble.

3.1.1 Feelings of attachment to Italy

The analysis of the answers collected during the interviews reveals that identification with one's own Country mainly depends on two reasons. The first one, which is also more relevant, is the "cultural factor": as the following statements show, being Italian means to share the same uses, customs, tradition, language and history. It is worth notice that such experience implies the awareness of being an Italian citizen, that is for some of the subjects a precise sense of identity and responsibility.

[4] Fondazione IARD, *Giovani nel nuovo secolo: Quinto rapporto IARD sulla condizione giovanile in Italia*, 2002, Il Mulino.

Fna[5] *"What is stronger for me is the sense of Italy in general; it seems to me that I can identify with another Italian rather than with a foreigner, for example I have meals at a certain time, as other Italians do".*

Mna *"I don't have a strong sense of patriotism, but I'm proud of being Italian, I'm aware of being Italian, I feel I belong to it. One knows he's Italian because he has a whole culture behind".*

Mna *"There are some characteristics we have in common, some historical and cultural facts".*

Fa *"I feel Italian also because of a linguistic matter".*

The second reason is more complex: the sense of belonging to one's nation is felt to be an essential prerequisite for a possible identification on an international level. In other words, only if a strong identification with one's own country exists, it is possible in a second instance to build a broader sense of identification, which goes beyond national boundaries and reaches the whole planet. The statement reported below clearly illustrates this concept.

Mna *"I mainly feel Italian in the world, because I think that for you to feel citizen of the world you first need to feel a citizen of your nation, in the sense that, in my opinion, those who don't appreciate their country, for all the defects it can have, they will never be able to feel completely citizens f the world.*

Data present also another element of interest for the analysis of the sense of belonging to a Country. Many young people feel nation to be too a wide and abstract reality compared to their everyday experience, whereas they identify with the smaller and more concrete reality of region, felt to be closer. It is however important to underline that attachment to the region does not necessarily mean a region-*versus*-nation conflict, as there is a sort of parallelism between the two realities, one closer to everyday life, therefore known better, the other a more global reality, therefore a more abstract and distant one. Another clarification is also necessary: such juvenile experience does not correspond to identification with those regional movements that in Italy pursue political, economical and legislative autonomy.

Then it is more a sense of belonging to the place where one was born, in the form of a genuine bond to one's own roots. It is in such a context that the sense of citizenship and of social responsibility finds expression.

Fna *"To come from a certain region has a great meaning. Italia, but with the thought, the awareness of saying I live in Bergamo. With people from other regions I realize that there are differences in the experiences, but all of them can be traced back to the fact of being Italian".*

[5] Fna means *not activist female speaker*; Fa means *activist female speaker*. Mna means *not activist male speaker*; Ma means *activist male speaker*

Mna *"First of all I think to my small reality, to my town. It is more meaningful for me the fact hat I live in Lombardy or in a certain town, and this is part of identity. Then, as a second instance I'm also Italian".*

Mna *"I feel more an Italian citizen, particularly from the south of Italy: my parents are form the south, and maybe because I was born and I grew up with the constant presence of this never ending discussion about differences between North and South, about the fact that we, coming from the South, are very much closer to Mediterranean Countries, also in our character and personality, while people from the north have characteristics which are more similar to the Nordic countries - and this can be seen also from the characteristics of personality, of character – so I feel I belong more in the South. I feel I am an Italian citizen and I can feel very strongly my belonging to my land of origins, the South".*

3.1.2 No feelings of attachment to Italy

On the other hand, as mentioned before, a good amount of subjects (35%) does not feel any sense of belonging or identification with their own country. The analysis of such juvenile phenomenon results to be much more complex because the reasons are quite heterogeneous. Nevertheless, a common element can be spotted in a weaker perception of being an Italian citizen, with the consequent effect of feeling a minor subjection to a precise identity which would imply rights and duties.

In some cases it emerges a perception of Italy as a culturally fragmented nation. It is interesting to notice that still in nowadays society, which is definitely more mobile and elastic than it used to be (just consider how easily and frequently people travel either for work or for tourism within the nation), the young generation feels that different uses, traditions and mentality can be an obstacle for identification with united nation.

Moreover, despite massive migration from south to north in '50s "forced" integration, the main differences named by the subjects concerned a sharp division between North and South. The perception of belonging to one of the two dimensions prevents access to a unitary culture and such phenomenon is persistent, even though the young generations often have mixed roots.

Fna *"To be sincere, I don't feel such a sense of belonging to nation; other nations have stead, definite values, that are always the same, immutable. Italy seems a bit more variegated, it has no things you can't disregard. I mean, if we look at the South compared to the North there's a huge diversity so... as to "feeling Italian", well I don't feel Italian".*

Fna *"Actually, the fact of being Lombard, and so a regional reality, I feel it is a very different reality from that of, say, the South, so I do feel this difference,*

indeed. The regional difference, I probably feel it even more, certainly for mentality".

In other cases, such experiences of regional belonging are to be referred to the fact of doing a particular political activity, since such activity is perceived to be more "real" if collocated in one's own city. More over young people seem to trace back their political choices as well as their ideals to their particular city reality, which shapes, constructs and models life-styles and values. This concept is expressed more clearly in the following statement.

Fa *"For what concerns my experience of political activity, I feel I am from Milan, because anyway I've lived Milan environment and to be honest I find it different from other Italian environments, so in that I feel from Milan".*

Sometimes the individual microcosm is even more restricted. Feelings of national or regional attachment are out of question and the only strong bonds are with the part of the city they live in, with the group of friends and family.

Mna *"For what nation is concerned, I feel a very weak bond. So, just as I don't feel any bound with Europe, in the same way I don't feel any Italian bond at all. I'm more on the restricted side if I consider what concerns me, that is friends, family the group of people I know, somewhat my city... no much more than this".*

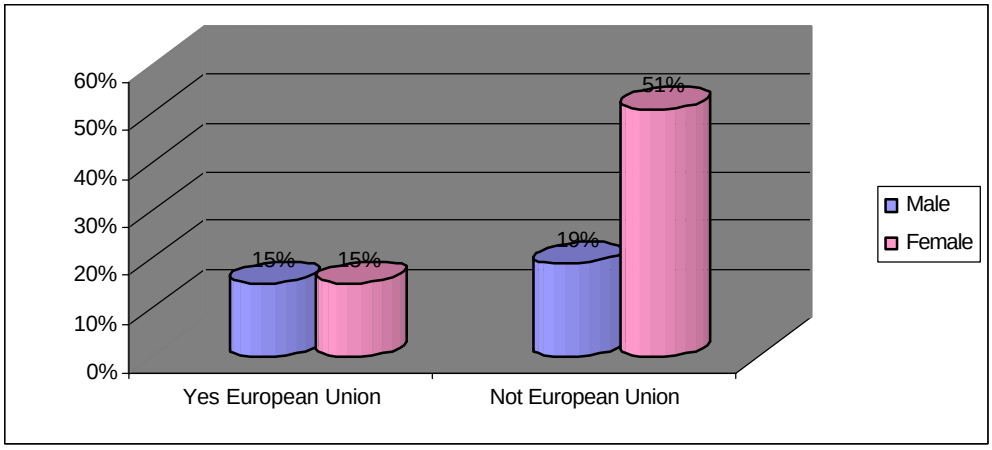
Finally, some subjects strongly contest the sense of belonging to a nation giving quite different reasons. National identity is not rejected in favour of sub-national differentiation but on the contrary to subscribe to a broader concept of belonging. While for some people, as mentioned before, the sense of belonging to a nation is seen as a prerequisite for identification on an international level, in this case the sense of belonging to a smaller community is felt to be in contrast with identification into a broader, more global reality. In other words, in order to be a citizen of the world you must not be "Italian"! It is the ideal of a united world without barriers, borders and divisions between peoples that indeed prevents any experience of belonging to one's Country.

Ma *"I'm a citizen of the world in exile in this country".*

3.2 Feelings of attachment and European Union

In general non-identification with Europe is what emerges from the young Italians' answers. This can depend on three different reasons: first a temporal one, that is the European Union is still too recent for the young generations to feel any strong sense of belonging. The second reason is of a cultural nature, as the European reality is felt to be far and extraneous because of the differences between its member states in terms of history, uses and traditions. Finally, the third reason is mainly political and can be traced back to an experience of impotence and passivity on the part of citizens towards the entrance of Italy into the European Union.

Again we present a categorization of the subjects in order to give a preliminary overview of the phenomenon. As can be seen from the graphic below about 70% of the interviewees claims not to feel identification with Europe. Within them, 51% of the total are male and 19% are female. Just about 30% of the subjects (15% male and 15% female) present a sense of belonging to Europe. In our case, a possible influence of the sex variable can be hypothesized, as females seem to feel a minor attachment to the European Union in comparison to males.



3.2.1 No feelings of attachment to the European Union

We now pass to analyze in the details the reasons for the lack of identification to Europe, also reporting some of the answers given by the interviewees.

The first aspect is the perception of the European reality as far, absent, with no direct relevance in everyday life. Therefore, in this case lack of identification does not reflect dissent, but simply an experience of extraneity and distance, which is concretely undeniable also for those who in theory agree with the Union as a political choice.

The temporal aspect is also particularly relevant: the European Union is considered too a recent historical-political event for young generations to identify with such a wide and differentiated new reality, considering that Italy in the first instance is often perceived as fragmented (refer to section 3, “Sense of belonging to Italy).

Another important element completes the picture described so far. The interviewees refer that since the advent of the European Union they have had neither time nor opportunity to see impressive changes in their life, apart from the single currency. Such change, however is not deemed relevant enough to shorten cultural distance from other countries, and thus to favour a real change in the processes of cultural-political identification.

The following citations will clarify what was discussed so far

Fna "*It's a reality which is external to our everyday experience, therefore, even though there is a certain interest, a certain awareness belonging to Europe is a young concept for us".*

Mna *"My everyday experience of belonging has not changed since we've entered Europe, maybe the only thing was Euro" (background laughs).*

Fna *" 'European', I don't feel that so much, because, why, maybe also because Europe was born such a short time ago that it hasn't entered our customs yet".*

Fna *"There's not a great sense of the European Union yet".*

Fna *"Social, linguistic and religious integration is on the way but has not come true yet. It will arrive, I hope; the project is a good project and as a matter of fact it exists. This thing is positive, as I said, but currently there's not a real European identity".*

Mna *"Because it is distant, because it's as if was not here yet, it's just been created, a sense of the European Union... a collective idea of EU is difficult to find".*

Fa *"I don't have a European belonging, probably more a sense of being from Milan, from Italy. But in respect to Europe, less, much less...I don't recognize myself in it".*

For some of the interviewees it is the great historical, political and cultural differentiation among the single states that makes the concept of a European reality so difficult and distant. Unlike the United States, that have been sharing history, politics and symbols (the flag for example), Europe is perceived as fragmented both from a political and a cultural point of view. For the same reason, being Italian is something *too* different than being French or Spanish, and it is not possible suddenly to *invent* a common sense of identification.

Fna *"We don't have anything in common with other European; anyway there are also differences on the cultural level, there are a lot. I rather think that single national cultures exist".*

Mna *"As far as the cultural background is concerned, it's a bit difficult for me to find one. If I stop and think 'What do I have in common with Europeans' sometimes it's difficult to find an answer. It' difficult to say what makes me similar to other Europeans apart from the single currency".*

Mna *"The difficult thing in this process is that every state belonging to Europe evolved as a state for a long time, a strong identity was formed, national borders, all that a state is, all the characteristics making a state...Trying to put all these things together and to amalgamate them, well it's not so easy. The war in Iraq, for example: the European Commission and the Council were supposed to decide whether there were the conditions to take a common position on an issue such the*

war in Iraq. In that moment we realized that there is no Europe but just the idea of the single member state.

Ma *"I can feel I am an Italian citizen, and not Spanish or French. May be the case is that Europe is still being constructed, it's not well defined yet, I think".*

In this respect, it is interesting to notice that sometimes the contact with other cultures does sharpen, instead of reducing the distance. This phenomenon is made clear in the next statement.

Fa *"I felt much more European before getting in touch with people from other countries. I mean having experience of other countries, I realized that I feel more Italian (than European), because I've seen big differences, I mean, I think we are very different".*

The sense of belonging to the European Union is further frustrated by the perception that it was "something imposed from above"; the interviewees feel great passivity on the part of Italian citizens towards Europe. The fact of not being called to participate in this political choice produced a sort of underestimation of the phenomenon, even in those cases that did not consider the political imposition necessarily as negative.

Fna *"I saw it as something that was imposed starting from a certain day. There is the single currency but there was no people will to create something".*

Fna *"But it's not a negative imposition, I mean...it's something that just happened, in the sense that it was not being looking for"*.

Another possible way to explain the lack of identification with the European Union is disagreement to the reasons that led to create such institution. For some people it was merely an economic interest; as a consequences EU is seen just as a sort of economic community, which has nothing to do with a broader idea of a political community.

Fna *"I don't feel I'm European, the European Union was born as an economic community".*

Ma *"I see the European Union as an economic community; at the moment it is politically very weak".*

Fa *"Now that I have lots of prejudices, I'm induced to think of it as an economic league, but if it implies also a uniformation of rights, then it is fine".*

Others think the European Union was created just as a political and economic reaction to the U.S. power. However, as we will see later, this aspect can result in a stronger identification with Europe.

Fna *“The role of the European Union is probably to uniform different countries that were more fragmented, in order to have an official answer to the United States”.*

Fna *“At the beginning I saw it as a sort of “affront” to the United States; I perceived Europe as a coalition against something, at first an economical coalition”.*

3.2.2 Presence of feelings of attachment to European Union

A smaller percentage of the subjects, on the other end, reports a positive sense of belonging to the European Union. Their reasons are clearer and more homogeneous, and they are often in contrast to the reasons for denying such sense of belonging.

According to the young people that identify with the European Union the cultural differences between the single states are not so clear-cut and diverging, particularly if compared with overseas realities. A sort of “common European culture” is described in the following statement:

Mna *“The European cultural background... is something you are aware of, I think, in the sense of a macro-culture. I mean, there’s a common past of traditions and uses. Under the surface we are very similar. If you only pass the ocean, there’s a very different mentality”.*

Mna *“I think what we have in common is certainly history and cultural tradition. It’s similar, it’s the same: what there is in Italy has entered Europe and what there is in Europe has entered Italy.*

Some of the subjects look at the recent abolition of “physical barriers” among the European states (e.g. customs and different currencies) as a fundamental variable towards the abolition of more abstract and cultural barriers as well, that would be a mental obstacle to a sense of global belonging.

Mna *“In the last two years I had the chance of travelling and I realized that now that you don’t have to stop if you want to go to another nation, I realized that such a lack of blocks arose in me this thought, I mean, - now Europe is more united, now Europe can be called a united country where I can go back and forth between nations without finding symbolic or physical blocks, such as customs for example”.*

Fa *“I feel I am more European than Italian. Travelling also to other countries...the common denominator I think is Europe, I mean the sense of belonging, the point of reference is Europe”.*

Finally, as mentioned before, perceiving Europe as contrasting the U.S.A. is an important stimulus to identification with the European Union.

Fna *"Feeling to be European...if in relation to something bigger, I don't know, say the Americans, then yes, I feel it strongly, I really feel the difference. Vice versa in relation to something smaller, I don't feel it".*

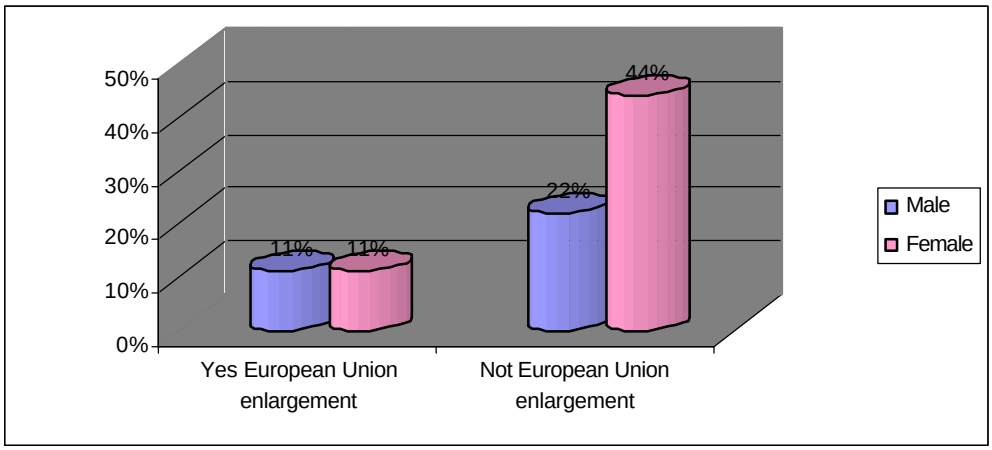
Fna *"It's a way of getting together so that your political choices have a weight on international politics. America does whatever she wants, I mean, it's not a bad if Europe can be perceived as somewhat more worthy".*

Fa *"I think it's a big opportunity and it is necessary. I mean, I feel the American colossus as too imposing; in my opinion Europe must get together and do something, otherwise we really risk being subdued".*

Mna *"It certainly has an economic role; anyway I think that if it succeeds in becoming an economic power, the way the U.S. are, this will produce economic wealth".*

3.2.3 Enlargement of the European Union

Coherently with the scarce sense of identification with the European Union, the interviewees revealed as well a certain lack of interest for a possible enlargement of the Union. About 60% of the subjects claims they are not at all interested in involving more states in the Union. This group accounts for 44% of the total females and 22% of males. Only 22% of the subjects show interest in this issue, with an even distribution between males (11%) and females (11%).



Even if in line of principle the enlargement of the European Union to other states is favourably considered, there are some factors that arouse fears and resistance. The economical and cultural aspects are particularly relevant: the countries that could be allowed into the Union are perceived as a potential element of destabilization for an already precarious balance, since they are poorer and different as for traditions, uses and customs, compared with the states that are already part of the Union.

Fna *"As to the enlargement of the European Union to other countries, I completely agree with that, but, I mean, the treatises sort of highlight the conditions that were set to join the Union... I have this feeling that - maybe I think in a too technical, practical way - but I see it as a sort of amnesty for the Eastern countries which enter Europe, and their economy is not comparable to ours".*

Mna *"One more state can help. Obviously at the beginning it can create some problems because - it's obvious - every change creates problems, but with time it can help. However, we must pay attention not to give in to a logic of indiscriminate access, that is whoever wants to enter and is more or less on target can be let in, and then next year it goes down in the parameters and drags Europe down".*

Fna *"Also they're countries with a different mentality compared to ours...I see them a bit different from western reality...They have had quite a different history".*

According to other subjects the enlargement of the European Union has a positive value of fraternity and aid, a "common feeling"; if we really want to feel European, we must be able to go beyond possible economical, cultural and political problems and be open to pursue real integration.

Fna *"Annexing these other countries that don't keep pace with our economies would be a positive thing, instead of seeing European Union just as currency".*

Fna *"These eastern countries have a different history, different traditions, but anyway new common ones can be created".*

Mna *"When we think about enlargement...for me we were sold the whole thing in a wrong way... when parameters are set it sounds as an association, a business, that needs to incorporate another business. Sure, they have to ask for parameters... so if we consider that under the economic profile, for me it's fine, but if we look at it from other points of view, then no, I can't see it. Certainly looking at Europe from other points of view, that is as a big family, a great alliance we don't have to set parameters; then we must establish that this is our family, with all the problems, with all its positive and negative aspects".*

3.2.4 Feelings of attachment to European Union: Synthesis

In synthesis we can say that at the moment expansion of European Union to other states is a too far concept for young people, who are still looking for meanings, motivation and implications concerning Italian membership of such institution.

Fna *"I'm not informed, actually I don't even have idea of the implications*"

3.3 Activities related to feelings of attachment

The answers collected during the interviews reveal that there is a general awareness of the possible interaction between the sense of belonging and whether one does, or does not, political activity. Nevertheless, this concept is conceived in extremely abstract and superficial terms, without any reference to concrete experiences. The following statement is highly representative of the kind of answers we received.

Mna *"It's obvious that your personal experiences of belonging, be they professed or not professed, whether inferred or presumed, they influence what you do".*

Lack of concrete examples should not be undervalued. In fact – as we will better discuss later - it can be traced back to a widespread poor interest in politics among the young people we interviewed.

Only a few answers reveal a partial awareness of social networks and other opportunities for becoming concretely active.

It can be observed that, once again, such practical examples can be referred to youth's identification with their everyday reality rather than to more global and abstract realities. The forms of social-political activity reported below, for example, are all referred to city, town or even district contexts.

Fna *"How can young people participate on a political level? If you are left-wing there are social centres... I don't move in that context but they exist. The Left offers youth more chances of political participation, a sort of sector socialization".*

Fna *"I often see that the city council organizes meetings also with political parties, meetings to discuss of political as well as social issues, then it's up to people whether they feel involved to take part into these activities. Then you read the sign and go away... it's mostly a matter of finding the stimulus to participate".*

Fna *"In my neighbourhood we have all known each other for ages, since we were children, we share also things of our past, I mean, it's always us. It's not an association, but anyway it's a group I belong to".*

4 Section 4: Theme 2 – 'Organised Activities/ Participation': Activities aside from political participation

4.1 Young people who describe themselves as not politically active: what does not permit to be politically active?

Through the focus groups we tried to understand the reasons why young Italian people do not take part in concrete political activity. A categorization of the answers led to identify three main reasons: offer of real opportunities of involvement perceived as poor, a sort of "discouragement" due to the gap between *ideals* and *reality* in the political scenario, and finally a widespread lack of interest among young people towards politics. We can therefore notice that some of the subjects blame external reality for the lack of youth's participation in politics (lack of concrete chances and opposition ideals/reality). Other subjects, on the other hand, consider the *individual* personally responsible for this attitude, denouncing a massive lack of interest that is nevertheless explained by *negative* external conditions (bribery, unfulfilled promises etc.).

4.1.1 Scarce local offer of concrete political involvement

We will now analyse the first reason, that is the perception of lack of concrete opportunities for young people to tale part in political activity.

The **first element** worth of notice is a feeling of general disinformation. According to some of the subjects information is *quantitatively* poor, with the result that even though there was interest and motivation, it would not be so easy to find information that allows to understand the political scenario. According to other subjects the problem is *qualitative* indeed: information is available but since it is distorted, incomplete and fragmented, it gives rise to confusion and mistrust. A certain awareness emerged as regards phenomena of information construction by the media, with the aim of orientating and manipulating citizens' attitudes and political opinions. Below are reported some representative examples.

Mna *"If you want to take part in active politics, I think there is little information".*

Mna *"I think he's completely right in saying there is little information because either a young person out of his free will takes an interest – and it will take time for him to find information – but anyway there's no...you don't get information just like that, you need to look for it and with determination too".*

Mna *"It requires extra effort to find what you are interested in, but... I mean, if then I happen to say to what extent what I get to know is true, then I... unfortunately it's difficult to say".*

Mna *"Also newspapers are often...I mean they're not neutral, so I think you can't trust some newspapers so much*".

The second element the emerged has to do with the condition of being young. According to some of the subjects the chances of participating in politics are almost exclusively reserved to adults. However, as most supporters of political parties and trade unions are adults, young people would feel a sense of exclusion and impotence.

Mna *"Active participation is complex because if you look at the age of people who take part in the trade unions, well, it's high: everybody is about 40 of 50, at least. Age can be an obstacle to active participation".*

4.1.2 Gap between ideals and reality

The **second reason** for lack of participation is the gap between ideals and reality. A sort of "disillusion" was found as to political choices relevance, aims and motivation, since, according to young people, they are not the expression of underlying ideals but just respond to economical and power interests. Moreover, the gap ideals-*versus*-reality is felt to affect also political discussions, in that there is no correspondence between ideals, values, utopias on the one hand and reality data and facts on the other.

Fna *"We discuss, but just about great ideals, not about what is in the news or current events, only on the ideal level"*

Fna "*You realize that in real events or in political decisions, ideals are not always in line with what is decided".*

Mna *"The point of contact between politics and society is not exactly a model for youths in their twenties. I mean, what youths see now is these people there, caring about their interests, earning their money and that's all. I don't believe it's just Italy, I think it's quite widespread, it is a split that can't be healed at the moment, and no one is even trying to heal it. So everybody goes there, bringing also their own interests... youths say – well, for me they're doing* nothing.

Mna *"The way we see it, I think, there's no will to solve our country's problems, no will to face the problems of the country together. The chair is a continual fight, not working together to solve problems but a continual fight".*

4.1.3 Widespread lack of interest

Finally we analyse the **third reason** emerging from our material. Many young people think that scarce youth participation should be explained in terms of

individual responsibility, because there are concrete opportunities of participation, but in spite of this a widespread lack of interest in politics persists.

Mna *"I think now there are lots of opportunities, but I'm not sure that people want to support a party or tale part in a demonstration; I think there are opportunities".*

Once again however, even if individual responsibility is acknowledged, in a sense it is the external world that is to blame for that. We will try to analyse this issue more in depth.

Once more mass media are negatively regarded. Someone believes the lack of interest depends on a sort of awareness about the mechanisms aimed at influencing citizens' attitudes and opinions, by means, for instance, of incomplete or non-neutral information. Also, someone pointed out how the programs mass media addresses to the juvenile target are meant to present models of thought and life styles that belong almost exclusively to the world of music and fashion so to divert youth's attention from the political world.

Mna *"There's a 'so-what' attitude which is spreading at exponential rhythm, in some cases due to the mass media that draw youth attention on other things. I blame media for youths' 'so-what' attitude towards politics".*

Mna *"Up to a point, I blame media for the lack of interest…they're not neutral".*

In someone else's opinion, lack of interest is a result of the previous generations *disillusion* (see for example the post '68 political scenario), as well as of the corruption spread in the world of politics. Young people are handed on a sort of resignation and weariness, originating in the combination of past ideals, goals never reached and unfulfilled promises. This kind of feelings, as can be expected, do not favour but indeed inhibit participation.

Mna *"I think the lack of interest is inside young people. It is due to the fact that parents got tired and so they don't hand down certain things anymore; maybe they got tired of politics and so they don't have neither will nor force to hand down certain things. So I think that youth lack of interest depends on this more than on media, then media have their influence…".*

Mna *"I loathe contemporary political parties, they are all corrupt, I say that openly, I think it is corruption that rules Italy. I mean, until when a party rises that doesn't pursue its interests, but pursues everybody's interest, I won't be more active than I am now".*

In some cases the mechanisms that arouse disillusion and frustration towards politics (striving for power, hierarchy, etc.) are found also within political communities where young people could take part in, with the effect that demotivation and lack of interest arise.

Fa *“I left certain groups because I realized that in the microcosm of students collectives, association, social centres there was a trend to recreate a structure that actually belongs to another tradition, say that of the Stalinist party, in a vertical sense... while in fact the intention was to create an horizontal situation, of collective participation. Instead I realised that often in many groups there’s a will, or even more, on the part of single persons to have the last word, to get the place at the head of the march, in a word, to get power, though a limited one. It’s just a matter of power, of leadership, I think”.*

A further reason for juvenile lack of interest is thought to be that youths are not so much prompted to action by actual needs as they used to be in the past. The comparative welfare western society has reached seems to determine a lack of problems against which it is worth struggling and taking position. Therefore it is not a matter of people but of real needs; if the same people were to face those problems “of the past”, such as establishing women rights and workers rights, they would probably fight as much as the previous generations did.

Mna *“In my opinion, as far as you don’t have big problems in your everyday life – I believe that 50 years ago there were problems we now don’t have to worry about – our main concern is the latest videogame, or going on a nice journey and anyway we don’t’ feel any real problems close to us. As a consequence, until the problem is not right there young people are indifferent, whereas our parents in the ’68 had quite serious problems and consequently they reacted more promptly. I believe that if this generation had to face a big problem, it would react”.*

Mna *“If something serious happens plenty of activities will certainly flourish, I think. As long as no particular events occur, you’re not prompted to actively enter political activity”.*

Mna *“However this is peculiar to Italians; Italians have always been the kind of people who won’t act until it is not profoundly touched from the events. He really needs to be deeply touched before he acts in politics.*

Finally, one remarkable aspect is the relation “political activity/work”. Such perceived dichotomy is interesting because it reveals poor awareness of the areas in which active participation is possible. It emerges that political activity is only conceived in connection with work related issues, such as precariousness, unemployment, pensions etc., while other areas such as health service and foreign politics are ignored. In a similar way, some students claim that their interest in politics as well as their will to act are limited to the field of education - a reality close to their experience – whereas political decisions concerning work, felt to be too remote, fail to prompt their action.

Mna “*Well, I’m surprised that work concerns are not so widespread, because anyway the things they decide now will affect us, so the fact that some young people don’t care... – I’m so young, I haven’t even started to work -... I see, but when you start to work, the decisions made now will be a burden on your back, so maybe it’s time you started to worry*”

Mna *“Maybe the lack of interest is because of work, because it’s something future, so many people think, as he said, that it’s far, so far that they can’t see it, whereas school, it is education, I mean education is my field... Work is too far, education is more likely to gather young people”.*

4.2 Relation between conventional and unconventional politics

Independently from actual participation in political initiatives, we were interested in the interviewees’ attitude towards different modalities of participation. In other words we proposed to understand their stance as regards the dichotomy “conventional forms of political participation” / “unconventional forms of political participation”, and the argument they provide for that. Examples of the formers are membership of political parties, while by the latters we mean to join collectives, forums etc.

From what emerged the main data is that young people, for the most part, tend to identify with **unconventional political forms**.

Fa *“In the contraposition formal-informal I take side with the informal. The activities I do deal with information, alternative information, organizing conferences, seminars, debates and then active promotion of fair trade, of alternative life-styles from trade to education, also alternative methodologies... And we happened to clash with the institution because of its being so formal. This is why we had this conference, where we asked two of the institution militants to explain how it works, and they didn’t explain that much”.*

Arguments provided are of different natures, we need to analyse them in detail.

According to some interviewees the reasons for not to join a party can depend either on the ignorance of the ideals underlying it, as well as of their concrete expression, or on “laziness”.

Fna *“I personally can’t identify with any party but I admit that’s because I ignore the ideals that single party express. Honestly I know there are different parties but as to the ideal which underlies it, I don’t know what it is, which are their positions about various themes, that I don’t know”.*

As to personal investment of energy, taking part in a demonstration is more “economical” and less binding than joining a party.

Fna *“In my opinion it’s just a matter of what’s easier; I can say I’m concerned about peace but I don’t take it as a personal concern of mine, I mean it’s not a problem for me to go to a march, whereas, say, joining a party can be more complex”.*

Another point is that by joining a party one risks of conforming completely to its ideals, loosing in a sense the ability of distinguishing among the various initiatives and even the freedom of choice.

Mna *"Joining a party means that generally speaking you have to agree with its ideas, whereas if you take part in a demonstration you just agree with that idea, it's more specific. If you join a party it means – Ok, I follow this part's ideology".*

Mna *"If you join a party you are less free in your choices because in a way you have to follow that idea, you have to comply with the that alignment's political line... you stop thinking in terms of issues, of your views, of what you tend to leave out or to choose".*

A last reason, already met before, is distrust of political parties initiatives, due to the incongruence between ideology and facts. Some of the subjects, for instance, claim they would be more likely to identify with a party if they saw concretely useful initiatives and fulfilled promises. In fact what they perceive is that parties offer just "beautiful words", without even being able to report "the real state of things".

Fna *"I don't participate in a formal way because I don't identify with any existing party; I can't say I am left wing or right wing or even with the centre, I mean, I've never asked myself. I've never seen, for what I can see, something concretely... in the sense that I don't identify in a specific party. I mean, if I saw a party doing lots of things I like, and I think it does something very good for the nation, then maybe..."*

Fa *"We happened to clash with the institution because of its being so formal. This is why we had this conference, where we asked two of the institution militants to explain how it works, and they didn't explain that much".*

Fa *"One thing is saying – let's refer to institutions and try to affect the political life-. In our town we organized this meeting with political representative, to say – this is our view, how are things in the parliament? – and what they reported was exactly that a link was missing between society and representatives (in this case they were members of the European Parliament)".*

The **distinction** conventional / unconventional forms of political activity is often perceived as a **radical**, and **almost irreconcilable**. The two modalities of participation are placed on totally different levels, even from a hierarchical point of view: the former, institutionalized, act from "above", far from people perception and are characterized by more "uniform" thinking; the latter, more of an informal kind, act from "below", promoting people awareness and independent thinking.

Contact between the two different realities depends on practical reasons rather than on a shared political ideology.

Fa *"One thing is institutional politics, quite another thing are us, the collectives. One thing is information from below - that is making all of us more aware, more informed -, a different thing is institution: we get in touch with institution because sometimes we need the room for our initiatives, we ask for the authorization and pay for it. We necessarily have to deal with institution. But for me and my group political activity, information and alternative information from below is different to*

institution, that is going into the palace and making decisions from the palace. I don't want to depreciate that, I'm not saying that all of the politicians are thieves, by no means I want to depreciate politics-from-the-palace, which is the mechanism ruling our country, but…(laughs)".

Fa *"This thing depends on the fact that it's taken for granted that the thing is univocal, I mean, if I'm politically active I must refer to a party or anyway I must have a party as a point of reference: it's not necessarily like that. You don't have to refer to... It's a job, a passion a will. There's not a gap between formal and informal… they're different levels in a sense… maybe informal – formal in a vertical sense, yes, but on the horizontal level, no, I can't see that, you see?... they're different levels".*

Fa *"When you work for a public service, you have to deal with institution, whatever it be, say the city Council, but even in Milan, the city council… Leoncavallo*[6] *itself has to deal with it, you can't help it. We are rooted in the local territory and any whatever we want to do, be it a centre, a place for immigrants accommodation, an advice centre, even materially, we always have to deal with institutions. In my opinion contact is compulsory in spite of everything".*

Ma *"It often happens that those in the institutions try to let their thought through, without caring for what people 'at the base'* say, and then continuity is broken".

On the other hand, some of the interviewees **don't think** that the conventional – unconventional distinction is a clear-cut one; the border line is in their opinion blurred and permeable.

For some people it's not a matter of taking a radical position; political action can alternatively take conventional or unconventional forms, through identification with a party (conventional political activity) or with a collective (unconventional political activity). The choice is made case by case on the basis of careful evaluation as to the compatibility of the party ideology with the collective's thought, with respect to a particular issue.

Ma *"We can join the party in the occasion of important demonstrations, but the core is the collective…we discuss whether to take part in the demonstration as a collective or under a party, it depends on the situation and on our respective positions towards the point at issue".*

In other cases unconventional forms of political activity are seen as preliminary to a more conventionally political action. In other words taking part in a demonstration or a group discussion, or joining a symbolical gesture (for example to hang out a flag with the colours of peace to show one's dissent to a military intervention) is a first less demanding step towards gaining awareness. From this first step motivation can result for a more active participation in conventional initiatives.

[6] One of the oldest social centres in Milan.

Mna *"Certainly, speaking with friends or also in your family about political topics is a kind of activity, it is form of interest and it's good for political action, it is participation all the same, and active participation. Then it depends, there are those who go on discussing and speaking, and there are others that transform that into practice, somehow organizing their ideas".*

Ma *"A collective can be considered political participation, because that's where political action concretely starts from".*

The shift from unconventional political activity to more conventional forms is possible only if the individual succeeds in keeping his/her interest alive, transforming an occasional symbolic gesture into a more concrete and lasting commitment.

Mna *"I think to last year, the peace flags on the balcony, a sort of awareness, an eye on external events, which may then arouse ideas in other people, people who then give an answers, that can be formal or informal, like hanging out a flag or taking part in a demonstration. So the passage from informal to formal participation, once informal answer are aroused – like hanging out a flag – well, then it's up to you, to work on yourself, on your groups, to give consistency to this informal answer or to this feeling, so that it's no just an answer there and then, but a form of…don't know how to put it…personal analysis or commitment, a search for information, all those things that won't let awareness fade".*

Finally, according to another position conventional and unconventional forms of political activity pursue the same goals through complementary roles and modalities. Parties carry out an institutional, formal function and have the tools to act from "above", in the parliament; collectives perform a social function from "below", in terms of awakening and information, in order to keep thought and interest alive, operating in more informal and recreative contexts. In contrast to what above observed, the relationship between the two forms of participation is not causal/temporal (unconventional forms of political participation as preliminary to identification with more conventional forms), since they exist on parallel lines.

Fa *"In my opinion, on the ideal level goals should be the same, that is to improve our society, and so a macro common goal. Then as to what was said before, unconventional politics acts from below -so information, alternative information, I'd rather say 'training', because I prefer it…- and conventional politics should legislate, it should make…In fact, I think that on the ideal level the goal is the same, that is to improve our society, therefore from "below" gradually upwards…Obvious, doing unconventional politics I have some instruments, if I were in parliament, maybe I'd be more powerful; probably it's a matter of instruments.*

Ma *"Personally I feel a bit the difference even if I try not to be so rigid, because anyway it's not set by a rule that those of the parties must have a certain attitude, also because these things belong to another times… Mostly they make it a bit hard for you, they've been there for longer, they're older than you, maybe they have*

more experience, but personally I've always disliked feeling such a difference. I reckon the party has the advantage of access to institutions, but I don't like feeling it as greatly different… Then in the collective the situation is more friendly and funny, because it's more spontaneous, so also the activities, I find them less demanding, maybe it's about organizing one-day initiatives, while a party, you know. What's better for your town…".

Fa *"I wouldn't put it in terms of formal-informal, maybe institutional/non-institutional, or however, those who are members of parties very often take part also in collectives and associations, and vice versa, so in my opinion there's no such boundaries, also because the head of the party is often not formal".*

4.3 Relationship individualism/group

Another important aspect we investigated as concerns political activism is how much importance is attached to the role of the individual and of the group.

Young people **do not feel a clear-cut contraposition** in the dichotomy individual/group: community is certainly more capable of influencing society and since it is determinant in achieving concrete changes, its political role is more important. Yet, the group presupposes the activism and social responsibility of every single member.

Fna *"Community is more important, but it clearly presupposes the commitment of the individual, of every single individual, so without that, the community doesn't exist".*

Fna *"In a way, the individual is necessary, but not enough".*

Mna *"The first thing is to start from yourself, ant then unity makes strength, you know, if an idea has lots of supporters, it is more likely to succeed".*

Fna *"I think that if you want to achieve something concretely, maybe the group is better, I mean, in order to solve a problem or to present a draft bill, I think group work is better".*

Mna "*If I think on an association, and its membership is of 10 people, it has a weight; if it is of 500 the weight is different and with 1000 the weight is still another. So individual participation is very important but for practical reasons* collective participation is more effective".

According to other subjects, the dialectics individual/group is dependent on the **way of conceiving politics**. If by "political acts" one means only those actions which bear a concrete and meaningful effect on social reality, then the role of the group is indisputable. Otherwise, if also small gestures - either symbolical or not -, attitudes and the stands one takes in everyday life (such as hanging out a flag for peace or buying fair-trade goods) are considered to be political activism, then the role of the individual is fundamental.

Fna *“If by politics we mean the big issues, etc, then, yes, the support of a group is necessary…but if by politics we mean also our behaviour, then the way I behave is political action”.*

Moreover, **the group** can be considered as a moment for discussion, analysis, awakening and information. That’s why in a way it stimulates in the individual, **a growth** of thoughts, motivations and social awareness.

Mna *“But the group, or anyway taking part in an organization is certainly important for the individual itself, in the sense that it offers an opportunity to measure your personal ideas with those of other people, that don’t necessarily belong to the same group, have your same views. Also the strength of the group is cultural, in the sense that it helps people who are part of it to take a step forward and to listen to others’ opinions. So personal motivation is certainly important but belonging to a group, I’m not saying it’s more important, but it is certainly more helpful.*

5 Section 5: Theme 3 – 'Politics/ Democracy'

5.1 What is politics/ democracy

An important topic widely discussed during the focus group is the perception of politics by young generations and consequently their meaning of politics as expression of democracy.

From the answers given, it basically emerges **confusion** about the concept of "politics", and a very little comprehension of the practical role played by politics in a democratic society; in any case, the indirect fact in common between almost all the answers is a **negative connotation** attributed to politics by young generations.
The deep rooted disinterestedness and dislike of young generation toward politics it is not surprising, as a matter of fact this data agree with a survey carried out some years ago by IARD foundation. The research pointed out the pronounced and progressive indifference towards politics of young Italians, so much as to insinuate an 'eclipse of politics'. From the data it emerges that about the 60% of young Italian generation was not interested in politics, and of this 60%, the 44% had a shocking experience in politics!
Let's now analyse in detail the reasons of this situation.

As a matter of fact politics is considered as something purely **abstract**, with no practical effects on real life, as something that cannot be define in practice; this experience lead us to the perception, as already seen, of a politics based on good purposes rather than actions and results.

Fna "*Well…if it is productive, if it tries to make things better, to make something positive, well… maybe it is not so positive as it concludes little, that is to say two opposite party, they tend to discuss rather than manage things concretely, well, maybe I see it in too abstract terms, that is, they speak, they discuss, and I don't see anything that is it is good for everything and everyone…"*
Fna *"Well, politics doesn't mean just I'm oppose to the other party, but also I have some goals and I try to reach them, at least in theory"*

It is also noticed the perception of politics as an **instrument of social regulation**, nevertheless it is a negative instrument, seen quite as a '**cheat'**, as it is moved by mechanism and aims not declared (for instance economic interests) rather than by real ideals.

Fna "*Under my point of view it is an instrument of social regulation while in regard to its connotation…it has a quite negative connotation, precisely because it should*

be an instrument based on ideals and then in the actual facts it became more like a matter of power concern with economy"

Furthermore, to damage the idea that young generation have on politics is the strong influence of the **Catholic Church**; in this occasion the problem is also settled on the dichotomy between ideal/reality*: "the Church is more concern with the power that can exert rather than people spirituality"*

Fna "*Under my point of view Italian and European politics in conditioned by…the Catholic Church…by the presence of the Vatican in Italy, I think it's a strong conditioning that influences…the Catholic Church has a political value*"

In the end, it is not to be underestimated the binomial **politics/corruption** often found in young people opinion; in particular it is denounced the alliance, and in some cases the total overlapping, between organised crime and political choice (foe example kickback, contract work, etc.).

Fna "*Particularly for what concern Italy, our History, it seems to me that political action has then been invalidate by economical questions, and also by mafia problems, by those things that are free from the idea of politics, from what politics should be and thus become just a mean for power, a mean to grant favouritism, thus for me this idea that flutters on the Italian politics gives an extremely negative connotation. Because then, in the actual fact, it does not pursue interests, ideals…but rather economical interests of power management that are taking hold. If there was less corruption it would be better*."

It is evident that from the meanings of politics shine the **disillusion toward the democracy concept** and real meaning.

For some, this negative connotation does not result from the disillusionment due to incoherence between ideals and reality, but it is implied in the concept of politics in itself. What leads human beings to aggregation is actually the necessity to improve their own personal condition, thus a sort of '**egoism'** that determines the clash between interest of different categories of people.

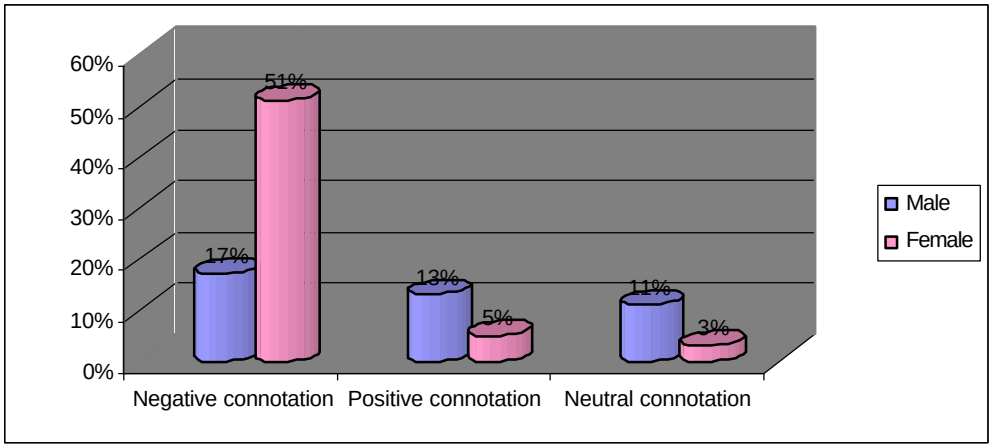
Mna "*Under my point of view mankind is basically selfish and tend to join a group that has a common ideology. This shared ideology it's the beginning of politics in itself that leads to improve the current situation of the individual and of the group, which is also completely different from the ideology of another group and thus are created parties. Anyway is the will to promote an action that would improve more and more our own condition*."

Furthermore it is not clear neither coherent the meaning of ' **political action'**. According to what has been referred by some of them, a social action has a political meaning when it comes from a party decision; according to others it is motivation that improves society and this is what can be defined political action; finally political action is identified with the realisation of an ideal.

Fna "*A political action is something said by a certain party, whether left or right wing.*"
Mna *"It is when we try to do something to change the state of things if it doesn't suit us, anyway to improve"*
Fna *" When it carries certain ideals, it is to say, if an action carries some ideals it has probably a political implication."*
Fna *"A political action is such when it is done in the attempt to have certain ideals or values to dominate. And politics is thus the confirmation of ideals and believes within the society and the will to attempt to put into practice this ideals in the management of society*."

Finally, to better comprehend the vision of politics by young generation, we asked them to express their opinion using a **metaphor**, (or if too difficult, using a brief sentence) as instrument of important significance to put into light the social building of behaviours and opinions.

We now give a general view of the data obtained, which, as it can be observed, do not need any further explanation! About the 68% of the answers gathered give to politics a negative connotation, among these 51% are provided by females and the 17% by males; only about the 18% of the answers see some positive aspects, among which the 13% was provided by males and the 5% by females; at last, about the 14% of the answers are neutral, the 11% provided by males and 3% by females. The most important data it is the possible influence of the sex variable: **females** actually tend to define politics in a **negative** way, while **males**, compared to females, generally show a more **positive** attitude.



We now give some examples of sentences with a negative connotation; as it can be pointed out, the main contents refer to confusion, hypocrisy, manipulation, lie, cunning, cheat, utopia, danger and mistrust.

Fna "*General confusion*"
Fna "*Manage, manipulate*"
Fna "*Confusion*"
Fna " *Confusion. A lot of talking but in the end*…"

Fna " *something negative, difficult to understand*"
Fna "*Cunning and hypocrisy*"
Fna "*commitment into something, but then I see this political men that change from left to right, that is…it seems to me that even they don't know what to do…there isn't any reliable figure, young people do not trust anyone"*
Fna *"I have no trust in them for they do not let me understand which side they are on, what they do not like about the others, and generally they do not let me understand…that's what I fear most, not to understand*".
Fna "*It seems to me that anyway this political representatives, do not represent people a lot*"
Mna " *To lie*"
Mna "*To feel winded up*"
Mna *"Political games quite ridiculous, in the sense that all this petty quarrels seen from the outside make me laugh"*
Mna " *A big theatre, I think the real utility is another one*…"
Mna "*Politics should be the main problem, man should be the main problem, society and the Nation should be in the centre, how to reach, how to solve this…while politics now it is not such. At the centre there's the Chair, the problem has become the medium to reach the Chair*"
Fa *" The chimera*"
Fa " *I think of a forest, that is, wealthy, blooming, rich of many things, but at the same time full of dangers, also, I don't know, I think of quicksands."*
Fa " *I think of the agorà, I mean the square, a utopian idea. That was my first thought*."
Fa "*I do not associate the word politics to positive things*"
Fa "*The world politics, I associate it to the Palace, to thieves*."

In the answers which give a positive connotation, politics it is associated to the idea of comparison, co-operation, energy, strength, starting up.

Fna "*To discuss about something together, a comparison*"
Mna "*I think of comparison and to work together*."
Mna "*Energy, dynamism, action*"
Mna "*Discussion, parties*"
Fna "*The rhinoceros, for it is what we have as symbolic, for it is a prehistoric animal, strong but also near, maternal…strong, that gets angry*".

Some replies simply reproduce stereotypes, such as "left/right" and do not show any connotation.

Mna *" I think of the left*"
Mna "*The first thing that came to my mind was left and right*"
Mna " *Bipolarity*"
Mna " *I think of some presidential imagines that can be found somewhere*."

5.2 Forms of conventional political aggregation, activities carried out.

Just a few concrete examples of conventional political activity emerged in the discussion. Most of the young people talked about taking part in demonstrations, in parades; just a few answers referred to vote; at last, someone has recognised that being simply informed is a possible form of political activity.

Generally speaking, for what concern **demonstrations**, it emerges **little conviction**, and **little consciousness** about the social and political significance involved, and so for the values, ideals, objectives.
Actually it seems that the main **motivation** for joining them is to conform to the spirit of the group, the perception, although vague, to express a human right and to share a general common ideal, however free from concrete real data. Since it is thought that this instrument of political activity has not large possibilities of success in real life, demonstrate is considered more as a way of being together with the people that share more or less the same ideals, value, lifestyle, and thus affirming behaviours and strengthening the **sense of belonging to a group.**

Fna "*Go to a demonstration…yes, yes, there was a bit of identification, I mean, the idea was that it could be our own right to demonstrate, that this can also be incisive, that's another story*"
Fna " *I did not go because I was convinced…that is, I went more for spirit of aggregation*."
Fna " *Recently I haven't taken place to any demonstration, but as I can see there is not a motivated interest behind it. Often is…well, to take part, so maybe I share the general idea behind it, but I don't know what there is really of…consciousness, to go and see if really I think like that*…".

In some cases it is not shown any political implication in the choice of going to a demonstration. Some of them declare to take part just because '*every one does'*, thus not to feel different or marginalized by the group of peers; some others even confess as sole motivation the possibility of not going to school.

Fna "*Especially at that age, when I was going to the high school, I felt as mine, rebellion risen in the classroom for our own problems, not for political ideals, that is I was going because my class was, I did not felt those ideals so close*"
Mna " *In my point of view most of the student go to demonstrations because they take place during school hours that they can miss*"
Mna "*All demonstrations should be abolished, you cannot miss school to go to a demonstration, it is just an excuse to miss school*"

Because of the scarce political motivation/consciousness ascribed to whom takes part in parades or demonstration, in certain cases, it is perceived as an important **instrument in the hand of politicians** in order to 'manipulate the masses', spread ideas, build up behaviours.

Mna "*Maybe someone plays just on the fact they can use a load of sheep, use sheep to gain the mass, using loads of sheep sometimes is useful to gather the*

mass. They come, they follow you, for the priority in that moment is to miss school…they know they can have that mass which despite the idea, the main theme, despite everything, will come to that demonstration, it will be there. The demonstration become a political strategy."

Just few individuals **claim the political role** played by demonstrating, underlying the possible social relevance of it. Furthermore they declare that between those who take part in parades there aren't just 'sheep' but also conscious individuals, informed and convinced; to underline the truthfulness of their conviction, they also state to participate mainly during their spare time.

Mna "*The problem in large numbers of people, is that there's the risk that we do something in a large number, and between those many, there's a part –that can be large or little- that goes just to join the load of sheep. That is I have experience of…go and ask even about demonstration on which you agree, listen to what people there say " great! I miss school!". Those are not few. There's a part which is there on a principle, with intelligence, they know why they are there, they are informed and want to be listened, others are there just to appear, to be stupid, I don't know…the action in itself has great relevance, but it can run the risk that people not sincere, can compromise also what the others are doing."*
Mna " *When I had to make a demonstration I've done it not during the school time, not to involve other spheres*."

About the **vote behaviour** it seems that participate to elections it is mainly a way to maintain an **historical memory** and exert a proper right rather then the real possibility to influence the political life of the country.

Mna " *I think that the first form of political involvement is that of voting, it's the first thing to do and maybe the most important for it allows us to exert our right. Thus to go voting, and then to participate is important, but to go voting and to be inform is what leads you from not participating to participate*."
Mna " *To say ' I won't vote, I'll leave the paper blank', it is anyway a fact not to forget our history : the right to vote has been obtained fighting, people that hide and do not vote are, in my point of view, people that ignore completely their own past*".

At last, according to others, the only fact of **being informed** on what happens in politics, it's an important way of activation for the single citizen.

Mna " *To take part is first of all to be informed, information about what is happening in the world, and thus try to understand things*".

5.3 Ways to political participation

We have tried to understand which are, according to young generations, the main ways of access to political participation offered by our society.

All the answers gave importance to the **sources of political information**, meant as opportunities of awakening, of comparison, where ideas, opinions, behaviours are born and are reinforced, as essential instrument for political activity and motivation.

The **school** is recognised as an important way of access to information about politics. Group discussions with teachers and schoolmates set up the main form of political awakening, of agreement/ disagreement with others. Besides, as it can be seen in the discussion about the singular interviews developed, precisely school represent the primary environment for political 'initiation'.

Fna " *At school we use to talk al lot, lay into each other, but I found it interesting*."
Fna " *In my last years at school I was involved in things about Europe, that also have contributed*."

None the less, there are also negative opinions about the role played by school in the building up of a 'political opinion' in the students. Some young people believe, actually, that often those moments of discussion were inconclusive and pointless as they were aimed to miss hours of teaching, and above all, to 'create a social look', some of them talk about the 'fashion of being *alternative'*; *alternative* means a category of people of the left wing, that usually goes to social centres, student collectives, organise squatting and takes over the running of the school, and is recognised by a way of dressing, by the kind of music listened, lifestyle, etc.- some others feel like victims of teachers that instead of helping the students to understand the world of politics and form personal opinions, were used to comment news stories imposing their own vision of reality.

Fa "*We used to join that group of alternatives, that was taking over the running of the school, and really, thinking about it, it was nothing, it became fashion. So that also was my beginning, not dedication, but posing*."
Fna "*We talked about it, that is, we listened the teachers…that is, is was sickening, I mean that he would anyway impose his ideas and comment what recently happened, but that wasn't talking, was more or less listening to his outlet, he gave me nothing, that did not help me to create a personal opinion, on the contrary, it was rather imposition, all his ideas, that was it*"

Another approach to politics is represented by **friendships**. To be connected with people, with whom share ideas and experiences in the political field, it seems to be the only possibility of connection between the everyday life and the abstract reality, distant and confused of a party.

Mna " *There are possibilities, but many times it is too difficult to get there, to be informed. According to me, I am a member of a party of which I did not even know the existence, but then through some friends of mine, of my town, I slowly managed to get in. What helped me to decide and made me say: "I'll register" is anyway to be close and to share the same ideas with other people rather then information, 'cause information in itself is fruitless, yes, there's a party and that's it.*"

Mass media are also considered important (television, newspaper, radio, etc), and above all the modern mass media (Internet). In fact these transmit a large amount of information about politics; however it is necessary to develop a strong critical skill to selection the information and be conscious that neutrality and truthfulness can be lacking.

Mna "*Under my point of you, we should use the information channels that may sometimes be informal or not updated, but are very good*."
Mna "*Internet is one of the ways of access, then if information is true or false, that's another story…of course, tv is not probably the best choice, as it cannot be too exposed, it does not have many spaces, but if someone is interested he can just write a name on a search engine in the Internet or buy a newspaper, I think we have the possibility to be informed, of course one has to work on that*."

Very few guys have recognised in the initiatives organised by social institutions a possible way of access to political activity. This data could witness a lack of initiative on the territory, giving at least one explanation for the lack of interest in politics which regards young generations and to the perception of the incompatibility between everyday life and politics.

Fna "*As I can see, the city council organises meetings for parties also, meeting to talk about political topics rather then social, then it is on people to get involved, to participate. Then you read the sign and pass it, there's no interest*."

5.4 Why do we dedicate ourselves to politics?

We should try now to understand in detail what are, according to whom we interview, the motivations that bring young generation to dedicate to politics.

As already noticed the most evident data is the presence of many **vague and abstract** replies, not detailed. For this we could assume that young generations, even those closer to politics, are more motivated by **the sense of belonging to a group** and the perception of the **sharing of ideals** rather then by an actual consciousness of the complex political mechanisms or by the knowledge of concrete replies.

Some of the replies obtained link the possible political commitment to the achievement of ideals, whether global, abstract, utopian; for instance, the subjects talk of the achievement of peace in terms of universal value, rather then refer to behaviours or actions undertaken to furnish concrete replies to precise problems.

Fna "*Peace*"

According to some, the commitment and the interest for politics seems to come from the influence exerted by representative of **juvenile culture**- singers, actors, television star- as, often, they propose political myth, ideals, symbols (Che Guevara, for instance), in some cases to express their own convictions, in other

cases to earn a slice of the market. Particularly, this behaviour is often related to the representative of the culture of the left wing.

Fna "*I think there are, I can see them often in the left wing. Like, I don't know, there are some singers who send political messages and thus can be figures that catalyse this interest also*."
Mna "*It is certainly so, for the messages sent by myths are important messages, which reach us first then other messages. You don't listen so much a politician or a parent as a singer*."
Fa "*I think that often in music, in the cinema, there's a little bit, a bit that I go to discover, and that is political participation*."

According to some, the huge use, superficial and sometime contradictory of certain political message, leads young people to identify with myth, symbols, ideals without the support of a real consciousness or knowledge of the real historical and political context.

Fna "*I think that some symbols are used for…not considering the value of the symbol in itself but just for….for instance if a fifteen years old guy wants to be a rebel and wears a pin with the face of Che Guevara on, without knowing who he was, what he had done, without knowing what this figure did, maybe he doesn't even know when he existed. Or maybe lots of things that wants to express a sense of belonging to something, without knowing what really*…"
Mna "*Well, it has happened often to me to see the image of Che Guevara associated to the image of peace, ok, that's fine, but the guy does not know that anyway that person has killed people, promoting a revolutionary war. Thus to link the flag of peace which promote non- violence with a violent action, to me is a contradiction. So it means that the two flags are associated in the mind of the individual as a symbol acquired unconsciously, given by mass media and often by singers. Thus a person should be informed first*."

Some other, instead, thinks that the so called juvenile culture is not such a decisive influence on political behaviours. Consequently it's not the messages sent by singers, or famous star, etc. to mould the opinion of young generations, but, on the contrary, it's the pre-existent political orientation to determine what music to listen to, which figure to identify with.

Fna "*To me it is not so direct the thing, that is, there aren't myth, or representative of political ideals…if there are it's a very soft thing. Then usually it is quite the contrary, if you are on a political side, that is, for instance who is leftist listen to certain songs, but this doesn't mean that if you listen to Guccini you become a member of the left party; you already have some ideals if you listen to him*."

There are some, moreover, who thinks that a real political commitment derives from testing a **need**, a real necessity; what brings someone to actually take part, is thus his direct experience, his personal history.

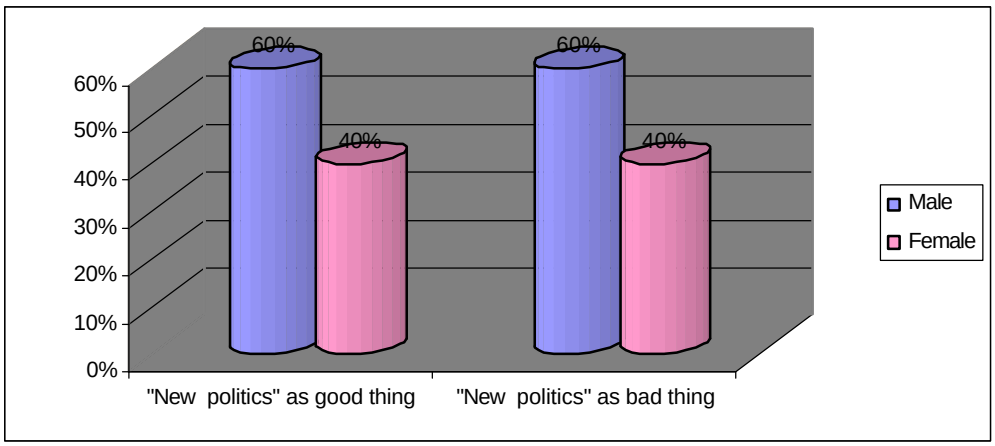
Fna "*Assistance for instance…I don't think there can be something that alone sets off a political activity…it is a matter of interests…I mean the individual, the individual with his own problem, maybe I want to assist old people 'cause I had serious problems in my family because an Alzheimer case, for instance*"

In the end, some of the subject declare of not being ready for a real political commitment, as they perceive social realities as too distant (such as job, pension, Health). As I had described already, the young people listened in the interview perceive the political commitment above all as linked with job environment.

Fna "*Maybe political commitment comes with time, with age, 'for maybe I've never been interested in politics, because I've never entered the job environment, I've not the problem of pension yet, of Health…"*
Fna "*The problem most related to young people could be work…but is still very far, now*"

5.5 The "new politics"

We can now examine the replies given by our interviewed dividing to categories: those that are for the 'new politics', and those who, on the contrary, does not express positive judgements. Thus, we can soon notice that the two sides are equal, in fact, about the 50% of the subjects, among which 60% male and 40% female expresses positive judgements, while another 50%, among which 60% are male and 40% are female, expresses negative judgement.



5.5.1 "New politics" as a good thing

Let's start to examine the motivation given by young generations about 'new politics'.

One of the main reason consists in taking a distance from traditional parties, that is to say from the classical form of making politics, which, as already argued, is perceived by young generations in a negative way. The matter of 'new politics' it is

out of the classical logic of parties, espousing **indirect values**; young people prefer to follow movements that permit to join universal values, rather then precise and ready made practical ideologies.

Fna " *It seems to me that these movements draw on values rather than precise ideologies, and it seems to me that there it can be found not the ready made party, but values in which we can believe, and thus, yes, these are the things that young generations look for, above all…maybe the fashion of left and right ideologies is finished*."
Fna "*Also because it is new, it has a new image, it is detached from parties, from the old attitude…just that's positive*."

The new political forms are noticed as closer to people, more '**within reach**'; each single individual can bring about his own contribution, in a **concrete** and direct manner, for instance through a reasoned consumerism (buying in fair-trade market or trying to boycott some multinational). Such actions are perceived as a real political act, different from the traditional ones, but of the same importance. Furthermore, those who support such a politics, do not perceive it solely as a way to contradict and deny the traditional politics, on the contrary, they feel the strong valences of new politics.

Mna "*The positive matter in this kind of participation is to be closer to people, more within reach."*
Mna "*The new ways of making politics, are important for me, for above all it involves a lot of people, and give more importance to the individual sensibility, the single individual feels to be called into question and through these ways says -I'm also here - and manage to grow as individual, to develop certain ideas*".
Mna "*I am strongly against multinationals in general and I think that anyone can boycott them choosing some sort of products rather then others. That is, there is the political act which is classified in a certain way and is the traditional political act, while this is a non- traditional political act*."
Mna "*I realised how important and strong it is. I think it is constructive and it is also supported and that there's a common idea, which is not just a way of being against, I think that on the contrary it contains proposals and also for what concern information it is often said that there are no news, but these associations, these nets bring forth many information and there's an agreement that goes beyond that of the common parties, that is to be against the old politics and look for the interest; I think it is very positive*."

5.5.2 'New politics' as bad thing

Some of the people interviewed do not give much importance to new politics because it is considered essentially a matter of **fashion**; finished the fashion of the moment, all these movement little by little will be incorporate by classical parties.

Fna "*It is fashionable to be leftist, and thus to be a no global, and I don't know how much…well, no global are all young men, I don't know if this thing will continue, I*

mean that then this no global elements will migrate in the old, well- established parties and in the end the no global position is, I don't know…"

Some others believe that this new movements are distinguished by **confusion**, little clearness and inconsistency, for this reason they will hardly make something in concrete.

Fna "*Well, it seems to me that is difficult for this movements to make something in concrete…they seems confused, for instance no global, the mess that occurred in Genoa, I mean is a contradiction*"

Some other interviewed still deny that all those forms of new politics can have a real identity, which movements would born just as **opposition** to traditional parties. Thus, they would not contain any proposal, but only opposite- destructive values; in this way they would also loose their political nature.

Mna "*They do not have their own structure, they are an opposition. Then you cannot create an association, an alliance, without your own idea: first you tell me what's your idea, you tell me what you think, what you want to do, you cannot come out of the blue saying: no, I'm against this, I don't like that, I do not want this to be done- this id pointless. You can't come out just saying no-. Tell me what you want to do to change the state of things. It is too easy, everyone can say, listen to other and say –no-. But tell me why you don't like it, tell me what you want to do to change. Then starting like that, I think, they will bring to nothing, they cannot even be considered new political movements, not forms of politics."*
Mna *"Under my point of view these new movements are copying their attitudes from the form of official politics we have nowadays. Their attitude is that of not proposing anything, but of opposing something to something else…this something that is opposing comes and says –no-. They say things to oppose to the government.*
Mna *"I think that the attitude should be that, you study the root, you study reality, the reality we have is this, we cannot destroy it, but we can change it making something positive. It is useless to stop and say- no, it doesn't work, that's a thief- destroy only create chaos."*
Mna *" These new political movements should act inside the system and not out of it. You must prostitute yourself, in a sense, you must choose how much though…*"

5.5.3 Is integration between conventional politics and non- conventional politics possible?

Some young people believe that integration is absolutely possible; institutional parties are able to gather the request coming from 'new politics'; even the individual, beginning from unconventional politics can, afterwards, starts a political path more structured. Furthermore, someone highlight that nowadays some of the left parties are already supporting and sharing the expressions of unconventional politics.

Mna "*According to me they can be linked without problems, it means that the ideas gradually came out during the social forum, anyway ideas shared among many, can also influence the choosing of a party, choosing of laws, decree also, then as far as I am concerned, they are also a large resource for parties, not only a mean for they form individuals".*
Mna "*Through this ways of participation the individual manage to begin a path in the traditional politics*".
Fna "*They are already integrated, that is certain political leader, for example, support some forms of civil disobedience, there isn't such a clear split, that is fair-trade market, social forum are supported, especially by the left wing, and particularly Bertinotti".*

Following this argument, some subjects state that, as a matter of fact, most of the new forms of politics should be ascribed to the left wing.

Fna "*As far as I'm concerned, it's closer to the left, that is, certain attitudes can be surely identified with the left. To wear ethnical clothes, or buy at the fair-trade market, or take part in certain demonstration, that's typically leftist*."

On the other hand, many subjects declare that the two things are not compatible, even though the motivation added are often different. Let's analyse those given more frequently.

Some subjects, clearly on the 'new politics' side, even consider that a more traditional politics, based on a right-left continuum, is doomed to disappear.

Mna "*Left and right ideals are doomed to die*".

Opposite situation is represented by those who, even affirming a substantial incompatibility, declare that what will disappear will be 'new politics'. The current democratic system, based on the present representative political system, is ultimately the most desirable form of democracy.

Mna "*Since there is a representative democracy and since it has not been found a way of making a better democracy, that's what we have, and it's clear that those people in the party, in politics go to parliament. Ways like social forum, can be groups of, groups of influence, it is to say, before no one knew what multinational were doing or what was happening in the so called south part of the world, no one gave a damn, while now it is well known. According to me the democratic system…I doubt that a so large upheaval, honestly I can't see any possibility…that is, the so called regime, the regime coming from the base has lost as we all could see, the regime coming from the above it's best not to came back, what is in between is the present democracy and maybe is the better thing*".

Some others think little profitable a possible integration, since thus the movement linked to the new politics would loose their peculiarity.

Fna "*I think that willingly, the hypothesis is not even included, otherwise certain episode would not have taken place, it means that if they had a different voice then the one granted, these alternative movements, would not be alternative*".

Some, agreeing that a possible integration would deprive 'new politics' of its peculiarity, state however that a sort of co-operation is necessary, even keeping each its own individuality and autonomy.

Fna "*I think that a co- operation is more profitable, to interact. Maybe, in fact, if they were integrated we would have to start over again from the beginning. And anyway next to the integration lots of alternative parties would born, opposite to this one. Maybe if each would maintain his autonomy, and point more towards interaction*…"
Mna "*More or less indirectly, with no doubt they can influence the traditional politics, they can influence it because this forms of politics have a practical implication compared to traditional politics. And under certain points of views they can be an example for traditional politics, but as far as I am concerned they are not trying to replace, to take the place of traditional politics*".

6 Section 6: Theme 4 – 'Political Participation'

6.1 Political participation of not activist young people

6.1.1 Nature and conceptualization of politics

As discussed in the previous Theme, young people not politically active are also, in the end, generally **disinterested** in politics. Moreover, as already explained, we cannot consider politically active all those subject that occasionally take part in demonstration; in fact, such behaviours are explained not by a genuine political interest, but by other reasons, such as the need of aggregation to the group of the peers, the pleasure to assume a moderately 'transgressive' role (typical adolescent behaviour), the need of searching, experimenting a new identity, etc. Participate to demonstrations and parades is a phenomenon that in Italy is always quite important, nevertheless, such an element, as argued above, cannot advance any evidence bent towards a genuine interest for politics by young generations. Moreover leaving out such forms of participation, not even the same young man and women are able to give convincing examples of a spontaneous political interest.

Some subjects are conscious of the quoted dynamics, and report that they consider the nature of young people political participation as something linked with fashion. To belong to a certain political party is, some times, 'fashionable', and consequently, a series of congruent behaviours is adopted, such as for example wear some sort of clothes. Such behaviours are considered by the same people sign of a widespread superficiality in the approach with politics, superficiality that can also have negative implications.

Fna " *It has to do with fashions, I mean that it's true there's lack of information, but many, especially those quite young, identify themselves with being leftist, in particularly then they dress in a certain way, share some popular ideas that are linked with freedom…but what just scared me sometimes is that in the end we don't have… we don't really know politics, but we are convinced to have this ideas, so this sometimes can be dangerous."*

6.1.2 Commitment, goals and sense of effectiveness

Not activist young people, being pervaded by a widespread sense of disinterestedness toward politics, do not perceive concrete goals in virtue of which lavish all their dedication.

Fna *"Young people political attitude is a bit…is quite disinterested"*

It still emerges a superficial attitude and a sort of wariness. The reason are the same argued in Theme 2, both a profound distrust towards the political class, and the thought that the split between ideals and reality is irremediable: although it exists positive values to believe in, it is not possible to carry them out into concrete programs.

Fna "*To me it looks like- I often hear- in general, but this to be translated into a political thought, in political action it never does. Maybe because, I don't know, the usual problems, distrust in the ruling class, etc. But there's a conviction, a uniformity about which are the values to believe in, but how to carry them out, in practice…very much in theory*".

Consequently, young people political activity, focused on ideals and values, can have a sort of social and cultural resonance, also because of a uniform participation; however the concrete realisation of these ideals it is perceived as not possible.

Fna "*Well, at least young people political activity has a resonance, then how much of this become concrete action in the practice that's another story. But to feel the right to be able to express your own opinions together with a community, is very important to me".*
Fna "*Yes, what you obtained on a concrete level then didn't change much. Probably motivation has its origins in feeling part of it*".

6.2 Political participation of activist young people

6.2.1 Nature and conceptualisation of politics

The nature of the commitment of unconventional young activist, varies according to goals which from time to time are foreshadowed. Summarising, the common denominator is to carry out activities that are towards citizens; there's the attempt to involve marginalized sectors of the civil society, such as working with convicts or immigrants. What is important is to do things starting from 'the basis', which are visible and involves common people.
The instruments can be different according to specified goals; for example civil disobedience it's an activity which assume a political value as it aims to disclose some of the unfair aspects of the civil society.

Fa "*Collective can be the political instrument in itself, to found a newspaper, to inform, to work with immigrants, with prisoners, and so politics at those levels uses an instruments that is the one of the collective…if on the contrary the goal it's closer and more concrete, the instrument are more various. If you want a place to*

stay, then the instrument is to begin a negotiation with the city council, if the place cannot be obtained then the instrument become squatting, then it depends on the goals, whether large or little…I think that civil disobedience aims to underline an aspect of society and to make an action of civil disobedience, in co-operation on a national, provincial level…"

Civil disobedience activities are always collective actions, and to be effective, they must be visible.

Fa "*Civil disobedience activities are actions purely collective, boycott actions, critical consumerism are actions that can be also done individually, even with a clear common goal, but are individual actions. Civil disobedience activities can be many, it depends, i don't know, against the leader of seclusion centres, reception centres, I don't know to climb over a gate*".
Ma "*To block the cash desk of a supermarket when prices are too expensive or to squat a deserted place because you need, for instance*…"
Fa "*It is important evidence, I mean that an action if effective if it bothers someone and it's visible*".

6.2.2 Commitment, goals and sense of effectiveness

An important aspect we have tried to investigate, is concerned with the nature of political commitment of the young unconventional activists: from where and for what reasons does political commitment emerge?
Surprisingly enough, the replies given by the subjects are not so much about politics, as they also would find it difficult to give some real political motivations. As can be seen from the citations quoted below, the argumentation, on the contrary, involves a philosophical and anthropological value: the main reason consists in an 'ethical spur' which nevertheless is not explained; it is an ethical and primordial motivation, deeply rooted in the human being, that pushes man to change a reality essentially unfair.

Ma "*Not to be passive, maybe*"
Ma "*A sort of ethical spur, ethical motivation - it comes from the fact, I think, that the world you have in front does not stick for the way things should go. To change a reality essentially unfair and wrong…not equal*".

The vision of a political activity strictly linked to the life of individuals springs out from such an epistemological approach; politics and life represent thus an inseparable alliance and consequently any human activity and any life choice has in itself a political value.

Fa "*For me anyway it's a vital spur, for anyway it is not easy to distinguish what is political…that is, I start by the assumption that, well, also what is personal is political and thus really under my point of view, any choice is political, what can I say, from what you buy in the supermarket, to any other choice…the travel you*

decide to undertake, the philosophy you what to follow, so it is something in which you find yourself immersed, that you practice both explicitly and implicitly, always".

Besides taking into account this 'ethical spur' as an element that can explain political activism, our subjects have underlined a widespread presence of "uneasiness"; such uneasiness, however, is not defined precisely in all its contents but, on the contrary, seems to be a quite vague concept. Even facing direct questions, young generations do not seem able to formalise better the conception.

Fa "*The feeling of uneasiness, a lack of practice, uneasiness that can be felt*".
Ma "*I mean, according to me there's something wrong and you try to find out what it is*".
Ma "*Your rights are under discussion*".

Another reason that leads young people to political participation concerns with the restriction of personal rights; however, also in this respect, a better definition of such a concept seems difficult. For instance, television censorship is quoted, but no concrete examples are given; equally the restriction of the right to participate is not discussed.

Fa "*I fight when I perceive a restriction of rights, thus of my right to participate; now I fight for I don't want the usual censorship to be active still and the same stuff on the Tv that cannot be seen, so I fight 'cause according to me now there's a strong restriction of our right to participate, for our right to work and thus I fight for things like that, for a restriction of rights*".

Political commitment is reinforced by the possibility to perceive your own action as effective. As pointed out by the citation quoted below, often effectiveness of an action is in her turn determined by the possibility of being visible and concrete. It is no accident that as said above, our subjects have quoted act of civil disobedience, which have just the peculiarity of being both visible and concrete.

Fa *" From the possibility to perceive the effectiveness of your own action I mean, if demonstrate and I fell that my demonstration can be effective and that the others listen to me; if I demonstrate and I don't have this feeling but I feel that it would be completely useless, I do not demonstrate".*
Ma *"According to me when people start to see that things can really change maybe they'll start to invest".*

Besides these motivations that we could define "external" (ethical reasons, social uneasiness, perception of a restriction of their own rights) other motivation are added which are absolutely 'internal'. One of these is their own personal history and in particular, the difficulties and personal uneasiness; political participation is thus an outlet, a discharge that has a personal origin.

Fa "*At the beginning when you're young it's always a personal need, an outlet, an uneasiness more internal than external*".

Fa "*According to me it concerns a series of personal experiences, lived personally, our own history*".

Another personal motivation that leads to political activism is an intense need for affiliation and belonging. In fact, someone state clearly that in the political group he found a 'second family', into which he can test himself and feel accepted. The need for belonging to the group of the peers develop the same function: a protected environment into which express themselves freely. Moreover such suggestions correspond perfectly with the literature about adolescence as a time in life in which the group of peers develop an essential role where the subject can test himself in a protected environment. Consequently it is possible that for some individuals the political group, to which they refer, develops this important functions.

Fa "*What I like is that I found, we can say, a second family in the groups I attend politically, because many times I was not at home thus we can say that I was spending the main part of the day with people that, as things stand, I've known for ten years, ten years we have done activities together, so we can say that…and then well, great emotions, great demonstrations*"
(she laughs)
Fa "*Under my point of view it is not uneasiness or the lack of something to lead toward politics, I don't know ' I have no money to buy clothes, it the cost of living…according to me it's a matter of belonging, at least as I have lived it, you don't begin with consciousness, you start because you want to belong to something, i think. Belong to something that it's bigger then you, in which you can put your vision, i don't know, to me it is a larger matter, to me the environment in which someone that wants to express himself can actually do it are few, very few, that is family, school are the first environment where our lives come into play, thus if in the family, as we all know, at a certain age communication is difficult, you turn to school, friends, to the group of peers, i mean it's clear that when you try to express yourself, I think that politics it the apotheosis of this*".
Fa "*Also for me it is a matter of belonging to a group…*"

For what concerns the constancy in the commitment put into political activities, the young people we listened seems to be divided in equal parts: some commit themselves to politics regularly, while others show more inconstant behaviours.

Ma *"It's a quite regular thing, I mean that, in the truth during the last year I have increased my commitment, for I like it, so in the end it becomes rewarding and it is difficult to give up…it' a drug"(laughs)*
Fa " *It is regular and it has its own place in my life, for this reason it is constant, I mean if it becomes everything…it is clear that if at a certain moment it becomes everything, then it soon turn into nothing, while I put an effort that has its own definite place, large but constant*".
Fa "*My commitment is quite discontinuous, I'm sorry for that, because anyway I am interested, but I do not turn it completely into facts. The attitude is however constant, the possibility to turn it into action no, it depends a lot from other priorities*".

Fa "*I am more inconstant. I have long period of commitment, so when I am saturated I understand that I'm going away for a long time*"
Ma "*The interest is constant, then obviously on the practical side, it varies according to my engagements, as it should be. There are some times that i feel more keen on…dedicating completely to politics, some other time I think: 'fuck this, I have so many other things!'*".

7 Section 7: Theme 5 – 'Opportunity Structures for Participation'

7.1 How did they become active in politics? Their story

Reading the stories told by our subjects, the main factor that move young people near politics emerges clearly, in fact, everyone explain that his interest began in the school, at first usually at the high school, then at the university. The privileged channels through which young people are involved in politics are friends and the group of peers; the possible official militancy in a Party is then a second step, it comes after a first, informal socialisation, socialisation that however is not carried out by organs or people directly linked with the Party, but on the contrary by young friends, maybe a bit older that are already involved in politics, but that however, does not refer to official position neither.
Two of the subjects, besides quoting the group of peers, refer to family as privileged place, designated for the transmission of belief and values with a political importance.

7.1.1 Young person active in conventional party politics

"*I approached politics when I was 15-16 years old, through a friend of mine that was involved…then I approached and took an interest in it. And so I couldn't wait to be 18 and to vote, I felt I must do it. I was already beginning to take an interest into politics. Then when I was 19 there had been a turning point, I met some guys in the university [Alleanza Nazionale], in short, basically, the university environment has formed me, for the village where I live [in Naples district] it's so little, there were 9000 inhabitants, thus in a little town somehow or other, you keep meeting the same people. While in university I compared myself with many different people, anyone with his view, anyone managed to bring in his own knowledge…above all, I grew up politically in the university. So I moved my first step in the university which has formed me, if we can say so. Actually, after that I have started, thanks to this guys…they set up an association called Azzurra and I took part in it. I was taking part in the editing of the association newspaper, I was helping when we had to organise seminars. The last year had been really rewarding, it was last year. Before leaving the University I said ' I present my candidature' for every year there were several elections and I offered for the student council. We supported, we distributed leaflets, we participated to all those conventions, but I've never offered my candidature for political or municipal elections, never, although it's my dream: I'd like to call myself into question, once more, it seems easy but you need commitment and courage, especially someone that has build a reputation during the years, then… to present a candidature…many say 'oh, yes, he's offered is candidature', while for me it's hard for you call into question all your past, all you've done, for if it goes wrong you must have the cheek, also because I think that*

politics has changed a bit, it is not as in the past, they were only trying to pursue their interests. This is my experience, in brief."

7.1.2 Young person active in unconventional ("new") politics

"*We have always talked a lot about politics at home, my father was militant in the Communist Party, then in the DS, he has also been candidate for Parliament for the Manifesto, so in general there has always been an interest, beginning from the family. My mom instead is on the catholic- social side, but there also there's a lot of attention for politics and collectivity. According to me, in particular, I think my first year in the high school has been the first time I've been a representative in the Institute, then meeting the student of other shool we thought to set up a student coordination, involving the whole city, in Bergamo, so the first phase were those two years, the last two years at the high school, devoted to organise this political group between schools: to promote protest for the students rights inside the school, and common platforms in the city to promote exchanges, till we get to the usual occupancies of the school. After which, for a couple of years I give up quite definitively.*
The reconciliation, let's say, with active politics, happened around the year 1999/2000, when with my ex- schoolmates we decide it was time to start up again and to work on what is the social conflict in the city. At that time there was a basement in the suburbs, where we run, there were three of us, for a year and a half, a…it's difficult to explain, it was a cultural club. In the truth, above all we were promoting the circulation of international militant texts and records, so we couldn't have…those was the first years of the internet, we couldn't have access to it, and we manage to obtain stuff and printed things by mail…lots of material about ecology or international politics. That was more or less the year of Genoa, all these people around the club, it should be a sort of shop, where to spread ideas, education, where you can meet people, and it works as one of the district shops, where probably you don't sell that stuff, but if you raise interest, you probably keep it alive, and after all it was not selling, but promote the meeting, the real priority. It helped to move lot of guys we use to go out with near politics, people that had taken their course, and so we started to attend the assembly of the social centre in Bergamo, which is only one, and it's a group where I still feel comfortable, even though things have changed now. There has been Seattle, there have been Prague, I've been to Nizza, to Genoa, and there who has some interests is safe, there has been the reaction of the no global and we've found ourselves, that is, I have found myself involved in this. This is my story which brought me, more or less, to the present state of things."

7.1.3 Young person active on school's council

"When I was in High School there were some older youths that I knew because, well, they stood at elections, they took part in the life of the school. Then in fourth grade I had the opportunity of being class representative and anyway I was in touch with the school's representatives because they were my friends. Then, in

fifth grade, I made a decisive shift, two boys, a year younger than me, friends of mine, and I, just through talking about it, decided to stand and we tried and we got something like 300 votes out of six hundred, therefore all three of us, and a fourth one from another electoral list won against everyone else.
There were election lists which had political connotations, but we, notwithstanding the fact that we all hold the same ideas [leftist], it is better not to take sides because once you have a strong political view , the youths perhaps become distrustful. And also when you have a clearly defined political position, the other candidates who have opposite views to yours can attack you more easily."

7.1.4 Young person that represents some peculiarities of our country

"Within the family we always talked about politics even if none of us had ever been a member of a political party. I recall these discussions taking place since I was a child and I began to take part in them from when I was about 10 years old. For me everything was a game with all the different parties and the different factions. The first time I took a clear and wide interest in politics was in secondary school, when we took part in a discussion about this person, who at the time I couldn't quite understand who he was and whose name was Umberto Bossi, and about the possibility of introducing reforms in the state etc. There was an argument in the class. But I continued in getting interested in politics and became truly a League supporter at the age of 13. I remember reading a really silly comic magazine which I don't read anymore and which was called "Il Leghista". When I took a definite stand and I understood who I was, what I wanted, what were my cultural roots and I really took a stand, I was 14 years old and did the march to the Po in 1996, the 15th September 96. A split took place at home with my mum and my dad attacking me because they thought my views were rather stupid without any ideals or commonsense. However, when I was 15 a defining change occurred, I had become fed up of being always attacked at home so I decided to become involved more actively in politics and become a member of the local branch of the league. I become a member in May '98 and decided to remain a member only for a while. I wanted to express my ideas in a more active way and in May 1998 I entered the Novate section of the league and it was a sea change. My membership continued until I was 17. In the meantime I had become the head of the student movement for the province of Ticino in the padana region. Initially, the movement had only a few members, but in a few years we reached a membership of 50/60 people, we did a demonstration in Legnano, overall the results were good they included the distribution of leaflets and taking part in afternoon meetings, meetings inside the schools, advice on the purchase of books and newspaper articles. When I first voted it was a beautiful moment, it was a very long night but it marked a definitive change: indeed, soon after my eighteenth birthday, the 20th July 2001 to be precise, I became a member of the Education Commission. Therefore, on 1st September I stepped down from the position of student coordinator for the province of Ticino in the padana region and became also head of the youth section of the Northern League of Novate. 2001, 2002 and 2003 have been years of training in how the commissions and the different offices in Novate worked. And now we will have elections in June and I am a candidate for the town council".

7.1.5 Young person active in a community group

"My town is very small, it has only 4000 people, therefore, we all know each other. Since I was a teenager I had contacts with people who are now town counsellors, therefore I have always been involved in the towns' affairs; initially I was in a youth cultural association funded by the town council, which organized parties, concerts etc, therefore, I was in a privileged position, as a user who is being funded, who is being financed by the town. After that the Social Services counsellor stood for mayor and tried to get us involved with his party; a number of young people who had been active took part in this new project. In the beginning it was only out of interest, out of curiosity, as a way to become involved in politics; after that I joined the group which now has the counsellor who has now been elected mayor.
It is a civic electoral list, therefore non-political…but it has a leftist inclination, even though officially it was non-political. I must say that in the last local elections our electoral list has remained a civic list and is currently a civic list, meaning that in it there are people with different political views…whilst the other side has set up a party political list which consisted of Forza Italia and the League."

7.2 Why do they take part in this activity?

All five interviewees make their values and ideals the foundation for their political involvement. The values they believe in are what motivates them and makes them active. In all the interviews it emerges a very clear and strong belief in the ideals that are the basis of their activities. Although their ideals may not differ greatly between them, they express different concerns. For instance, the youth who is active in a conventional party (Alleanza Nazionale) often talks about freedom, friendship and mutual support, whilst the young man who is involved in a non-conventional organization would like a new more functional society, which implies the common good, social justice at the level of the community, and making all the citizens take part in this effort to reach the common good. The youth who is a School Representative is more concerned in getting his fellow students actively involved in the decisions taken by the student committees; in other words he tries to confront the lack of interest in politics which affects young people. Lastly, the young man who is a member of a federalist movement (Lega Nord), puts the common good of his local community as the most important factor in which he believes, emphasizing the role of historical and cultural aspects as a social conscience, even though he sees the future of his community in a wider European context.

7.2.1 Young person active in conventional party politics

"The aims are to support, to try to bring…to give one's own practical support to the party [Alleanza Nazionale]; for example, when organizing demonstrations whether they were cultural, songs, it was necessary, lets be clear about this, that the message to be sent out was exactly that: the party name. It was sheer marketing of politics.

The value is the opportunity of expressing one's own ideas…in a clear and in an unequivocal way without any lies .Politics gives you certain values which you believe in, such as freedom, friendship, mutual support, which everybody have but I think they need to be sought because they are hidden within ourselves. Because one may say, yes I am sympathetic to something, but how can you be so if you stay at home? I give my support when, at a food collection and distribution stand, I distribute the food. In that way I am giving my support but no – yes I am sympathetic if I am sociable and I stay at home doing nothing – (he laughs). Therefore, the values have to be nurtured in this way, they have to be continuously nourished otherwise they get lost."

7.2.2 Young person active in unconventional ("new") politics

"What I do is useful above all for myself because I get the satisfaction of building a functional model, a different one from that which society promotes, that is, individualism, exasperated social fragmentation, therefore, what we are doing is building networks which I think is useful because they give a sense of purpose to society or at least in the society one find's himself living in. There is a common and true sense of social justice, one in which we feel responsible for the world we live in; then everyone has his own opinions and political views which may also be very different within the same group, so, in whatever way, a common path is built aimed at giving a different model of society."

7.2.3 Young person active on school's council

"Having student representatives is, without any doubt essential, also because in the school council there are teachers and parents, so there is no one to put forward the students' interests. The aim is to work for the good of the students, therefore, to call student councils and overcome the lack of interest of the youths. It is unusual that the students get interested in the problems, that is, to make them understand that when you organize a school meeting on drugs, rather than on the Moratti Reform, these are school hours, which are not a waste of time, it is not a time to stay at home."

7.2.4 Young person that represents some peculiarities of our country

"The most important value is the respect for our local community and for its traditions, so as to gradually become more independent, untying the Padanian community from its links with the central government and allow Brussels to introduce a subsidiarity to the local communities thus putting the Italian capital, Rome, in the background."

7.3 Feelings of Effectiveness

On analysing the interviews, it appears that the young men and women questioned (four out of five) have some doubts on their real ability to influence and affect events. Surprisingly, vis-à-vis to a real, active and substantial effort there isn't a corresponding sense of achievement, but, on the contrary, there is low morale. There are different reasons for this, but the most significant of these are given below. Sometimes the excessive red tape is an obstacle to political activism, while in other situations it is the widespread indifference of people (a reflection of the consumer society we live in) to induce a low morale.

7.3.1 Young person active in conventional party politics

"What is the probability of really changing things?...well high, but realistically there is only a small probability, but it is necessary to persevere, because even if there are only a few chances we have to bet on them, the main thing is to be able to say you have made an effort, whatever the outcome. Organizing a meeting may seem easy, but then you may encounter logistical and financial problems, but the main thing is to try, if it doesn't work out it doesn't matter, next time will be better, you can't always win."

7.3.2 Young person on school council

"In young people there is a profound lack of interest in these things or in getting involved in them, most of today's youngsters don't have much to say on current affairs, rather than having their own opinion…I mean, even when you go in a class you give a talk and then you ask- does anybody want to express their opinion?- nobody ever puts their hands up: the reason for this is, to a certain extent, the society we live in, because everything is moving towards consumerism, towards being a consumer and it makes people indifferent and uninterested to public life activities. I mean, the person who follows fashion who is trendy is much more attractive than the one who actively participates in activities which in ten, twenty years time may affect your life or that of your children."

7.4 Pictures of Social society and its mobilization

The perception of society, with its positive and negative aspects and the ways it way be improved, vary markedly between the interviewees.
Lets start by analysing the material from the young man who is active in conventional politics. He expresses a strong desire to change certain aspects of society in relation to how it views politics, in particular, he would like his contemporaries to be more interested in it and to stop seeing it as something "dirty". The method which he proposes is something which is already part of politics itself, namely, that young people shouldn't object to politics but get closer to it, and try to improve it from within through the institutional channels.

The ideas of the young man involved in non-conventional politics are rather different. He starts with the assumption that conventional and non-conventional politics are incompatible with each other; this view stems from his idea of society. Infact, the interviewee, thinks that citizens should regain a role in decision-making, through direct action, direct involvement and a greater sense of social responsibility; politics, therefore, must start from below, from basic social bonds, only in this way can society be directly involved. Thus, the current approach of personalizing politics, emphasizing the role of the single man, must give way to a society which, having regained a decision-making role, is capable of representing itself.
Both the youth who is school representative and the young woman, who is a political activist in her own local council, suggest a form of democratic participation which would make the citizen more actively involved in the running of government; goal would be the common good and the protection of the weaker members of society.
The activist in the typical Italian movement (Lega Nord) sees the emphasis of the regional differences at the level of culture, customs and traditions as the natural and true basis of society; such a society would gain even more recognition in the European Union. Thus, it is by highlighting the unique regional traditions that society, within the wider context of the European Union, will find its true meaning and recognition. Only by emphasizing the importance of these territorial individual entities and through comprehension and respect it will be possible to achieve true equality; in this way the citizen will feel that he counts more, he is more respected and therefore more involved in society.

7.4.1 Young person active in conventional politics

"When I hear young men saying – No, I won't vote, for me politics is something dirty- you know always the same arguments, but ultimately the people who govern us is political class politicians, so try to improve it, even in your own small way. For me, the fact that young people are reluctant to vote or don't care to get involved in politics is a negative thing, because only by being inside it you can see the positive and negative aspects."

7.4.2 Young person active in unconventional ("new") politics

"I have always believed in direct democracy, in a person being directly and actively involved, in making people more responsible towards their equals and to the principle that no one can represent me unquestionably; thus I can delegate my decisions, which is typical of institutional politics; thus I express my opinion with my vote and after 5 years I express it again taking my support away and giving it to someone else, this doesn't go with my desire to take part in those events which can change the world, and, in the same way that I don't want someone to do it for me, I don't want to do it for others. Compared to what I do I can see the powerful anti-political basis, within the crisis of political parties and the personalization of politics. For this reason I think that institutional politics can be used as something

that can to be referred to, but also something that has to be exploited, trying to get inside its workings, trying to emphasize its contradictions, trying to give back to the citizen his right of taking decisions.
I would like to see non-conventional politics becoming prominent, see a form of politics which is not as it is now, I mean, certainly, in the present social phase people are not interested in politics, current politics is that of television. Although at a national level it may be harder to achieve, I think that, at the local level, for things we are familiar with and we know require doing, no one other than the local people can deal with it. Thus, non-conventional politics is closer to the people, there is a need to start again from the base in order to change the present type of politics. There is an unreconcileable split, because if I say there is an increase in political participation and in the decision-making processes I will never be in a position to say – one day we will heal this split and then go back to the present system; because if the current system used to have the ability to keep it tied to its popular base, for instance, in the parties of the masses in which there used to be an exchange of views, even if fictitious, between the base and the top, now such a system promotes the electoral campaign, in marketing terms, it sees politics through television and, as a result, the real needs of the people become ignored."

7.4.3 Young person active on school's council

"Politics is the active participation of a citizen in the running of government, that is, it is the conscious realization that one is part of the state, part of a nation, in anyway you should be involved; I mean, in a democracy everyone should take part…that would be one's right to take a decision…"

7.4.4 Young person active in community group

"My interest arises at first from a sense of obligation towards the community, meaning that, it is a small town, everyone knows each other and the idea is that to improve that situation or the situation in general terms, someone has to become involved and active, initially by providing help. The whole idea is to help us understand better the situation or say what things can be done to improve it; therefore, it begins as a desire to try and bring some ideas, some reasoning, some improvements to this thing,-"
"For me democracy means the common good and looking after those who are unable to look after themselves, a support for people who are having problems."

7.4.5 Young person that represents some peculiarities of our country

"I feel European because I feel at home when I travel through Europe, I feel I am a member of a wider community, but on the other hand I feel I will always remain a Lombard, in the way I express myself, in the way I behave with other people, in the way I am always cheerful but not easy-going, a bit distrustful. But anyway I feel I am a member of the European Union; for me the climax as a European was when I

went to Edinburgh in '98 at a meeting with supporters of Scottish independence; I said - well we have a common ideal, but we are all in any case European, although we want a different kind of Europe – I have no problems with other cultures, but I want that my traditions and culture are respected and not tread on."

7.5 Are young people ready to participate in other activities if encouraged to do so?

Out of the 5 people questioned, only two would be prepared to get more involved in politics. The reasons lie in their desire to change their political activism into something much more formal, like an appointment to some public office. We show here an example:

7.5.1 Young person that represents some peculiarities of our country

"The ultimate goal would be to become a member of the European parliament because I like Europe very much and would like to take care of the interests of my ethno-community or ethnic community in Europe; in the future, I think that most of the politics will be derived from Europe."

On the contrary, the other three interviewees are not interested in being appointed to public offices. The most frequent reasons for this regard a certain degree of distrust towards formal politics: to become part of a greater institution would distance their activity from the "community sense", there would be less contact with the people and the activity "from the base" would cease. Moreover, there would be the added limitation of having to follow the guidelines of the party formation one would have to join.

7.5.2 Young person in community group

"Certainly, my involvement arises from a civic sense, on the other hand there is also a personal motivation, thus, the people for whom I work are people, whom I respect and that have worked and are working hard for the common good and therefore, one thinks, well, I think that I actually have some qualities, some skills to give. However, I am not greatly interested in having an official position, meaning that, my goal was not that of becoming a town counsellor rather than a public administrator even though I was offered this opportunity. That doesn't interest me, it is not part of my goals or my wishes to acquire an official role in public administration. I am more interested in helping them to prepare their program, rather than highlighting things which, in any case, for the type of work I do, I am more aware of and could be useful to them and why perhaps don't they get involved in education, in youth, in social politics. Therefore, there is a desire of giving one's own skills, some new ideas, rather than accepting a position within public administration."

7.5.3 Young person active on school's council

"I don't know, it is something I have been asked about several times, but I have never accepted because I had some doubts. They asked me to get involved with the collective, but to me it seemed…anyway it is very biased, and then I don't know, it is as if one took a definitive political stand…I don't know, in my opinion they don't stop and really think or consider things properly: becoming a member of that party, of that formation…yes they are quite inflexible…And then I am not sure if it is right for a school representative to be politically biased, at the end of the day I represent eight hundred students."

8 Section 8: other relevant themes

8.1 Relationship between media and politics

Most interviewees gave a highly negative assessment of media. About 75%, - 25% males and 50% females - rated them poorly, while only about 25% - 17% males and 8% females expressed more favourable judgements. However, it is to stress that almost all of these positive judgements are referred to the Internet, while television, as was predictable, is the most criticized media.

Going more into details, the first remarkable aspect that emerged is the role of media in moving people away from politics, generating lack of interest and of participation. The reason is twofold: on one hand information is perceived as non objective, oriented and partisan; on the other hand media are felt to encourage individualistic attitudes, which do not prompt to act for the sake of common good.

Fna *"I assume that all TV programs, for instance, take sides; they all give you their version of facts, and they fail to arouse my interest".*

Fna "*The moment I switch TV on, and I find a program on politics, 99% of the times I change channel! (laughs). It doesn't catch my attention".*

Ma *"In a sense media are responsible for certain social phenomena such as political apathy, because when they pass the message that you solely are important, you solely have value, they create a culture, they pass a kind of thought – you, it's only you …- I mean, I agree with giving importance to the individual, but it eventually becomes extreme, to the point that you become just an alienated consumer, in the sense that your worth is what you can buy".*

Even those who don't explicitly speak about media discouraging political participation, insist that media are politically non-neutral.

Mna *"You need being aware, also simply as to the channel you want to watch, because Mediaset[7] channels are quite partisan and you must watch the news with a very critical eye for you to understand how they twist things and to whose advantage. So you really need to watch news with a critical eye".*

Fna *"If you watch the news on Rai[8] channels and then you watch the news on Mediaset channels, they are different, I mean, news are put in a different way".*

[7] Mediaset channels (three in total) are private and they are partly owned by the current President of the Council.

[8] Rai channels (three in total) are public.

Many interviewees go even further: they don't just deem media non-neutral, but are convinced that they deliberately construct information, for example shaping news in a certain way, giving relevance to some details instead of others with the purpose of constructing a certain reality. Giving reality a desired shape, media actively build up audience attitudes.

Fna *"I think they are political instruments. I see the media as an instrument to build up political attitudes in the people".*

Fna *"What they do is to show you a part of reality, not all the aspects, and this is the way they take you in, I mean you take as true and real what we are told, but there are lots of things, the unsaid could have been more worthy. But generally speaking, this is a broader discourse, namely the construction of information and attitudes".*

Fna *"TV and media can – also without people being aware – influence and construct the information we think to possess, this is my opinion. You are part of what they build around you. If everywhere they feed us a certain view of things, sooner or later you'll get to think the same way".*

Fna *"There's a will to present information in a certain way rather than another".*

As confirmed by the percentages reported above, few people attach positive characteristics to the media. Internet is the media judged more positively, the more neutral and democratic one.

Mna *"Yes, sometimes they shell you excessively, in the sense that one has no time to go more in depth, and also a simple piece of news becomes something contributing to create a feeling that politics is just interests, but it's not true, not everything is negative, there's also something positive, you just need to watch intelligent programs on TV".*

Mna *"In my opinion there's just one media that could be indifferent to sides, and it is the Internet, because voices get there from everywhere, often also from single individuals. It's much more powerful than TV, but it's not yet being used by everybody, because it's up to you whether you go and look for information, in the sense that you can get detailed information about what you're interested in. It's not a passive thing, it's more of an active thing".*

Fa *"The Internet is the main way to coordinate all the initiatives".*

8.2 Generation gap

Family is considered one of the main contexts which are capable of influencing interest or lack of interest in politics, as well as specific ideals underlying a certain political orientation.

Mna *"It's logical that there is influence… that's what forms people, I mean whether you keep yourself informed etc. it depends also on the environment, and family is where you stay more".*

Mna *"Values have a weight because they were passed to you by your parents, and you see things as your parents do, or with some discrepancies because we are different generations, but if they gave me values, that I share, it's obvious that generally speaking I will agree with them also about some political choices".*

Fa *"Yes, I feel very close to my parents, in the sense that my initiation took place in the family".*

Generation gap is felt; particularly young people underline a generational difference in the approach to politics, recognizing that their parents' generation was much more politically involved and used to live events with greater participation.

Mna *"I can see a difference, in my case, a different attitude, maybe of confidence, I'm a bit more confident towards politics, but this has probably to do with…I have a life in front of me, I hope, (laughs) while some others experienced time of tougher political clash and so they have a different vision of politics. Well, I think there is difference…how can I say, my father was not given the same opportunities and support as we are, and I think this did influence his vision of politics: then, ok, you always have difference between generations".*

Mna *"They belong to a generation with completely different experiences…the time of great cultural evolution in the juvenile world, thy lived it… The context they lived in was so different that they grew up with, let's say, a larger degree of participation. Politics was a bigger part on their life than it is today… I mean, now discourses are more about conflicts between father and son because maybe the son is acting the extremist while the father, who's old, wants to act the one who's a bit more moderate".*

What emerged is a certain clash with parents, which is mainly characterised as a heated exchange of opinions.

Fna "*We do argue, but not on the party, rather on the single event, the single value".*

Fna "*Also on much smaller things, on topics…we discuss about single events in the news, for example".*

Fna "*On new issues maybe, we clash more; on the old ones we agree more".*

CONCLUSIONS

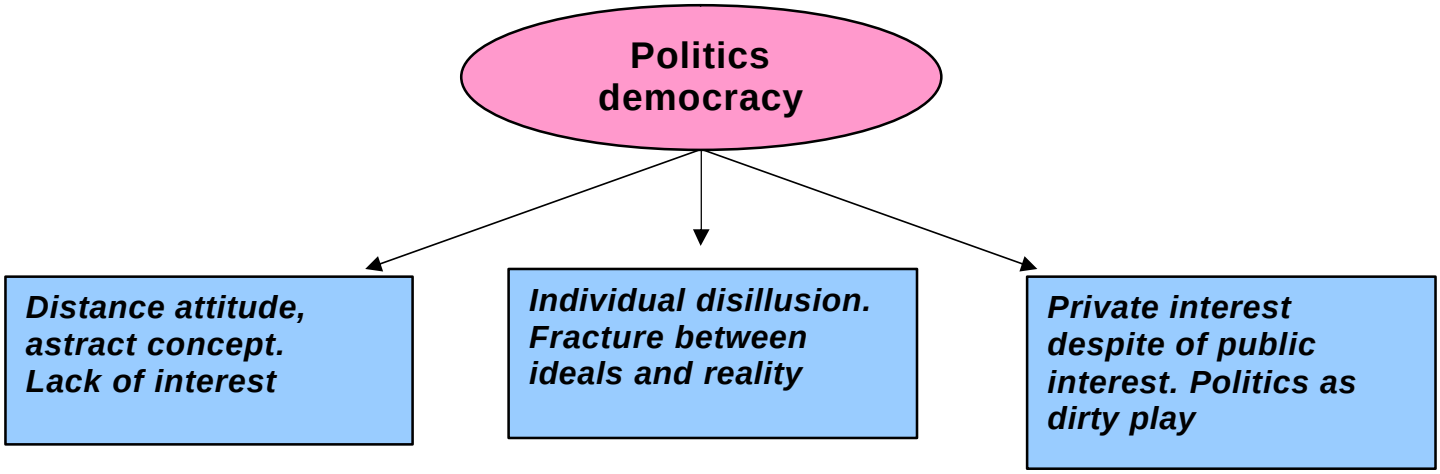
9 Section 9: Comparison of Focus Groups versus Individual Interviews

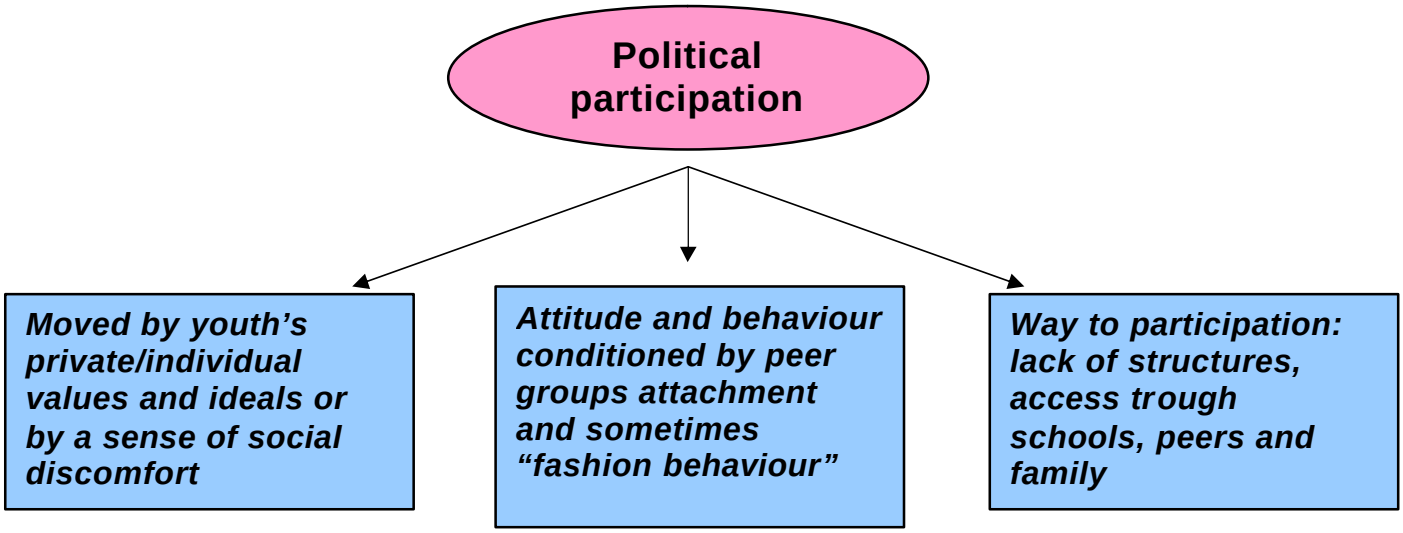
In line with the aims of this research, individual interviews and focus group dealt with two different aspects, though overlapping in more than one point. Individual interviews allowed to investigate our subjects' personal history, as to how and though which channels they approached politics. Focus groups, on the other hand" allowed us to analyse young people construction of political reality in Italy.

This is why in our opinion further comparisons between individual interviews and focus groups would not be so meaningful. The only variable – apart from sex – that allows to divide subjects into two categories is their being politically active or non active. Indeed activists values, experiences, attitudes as well as their constructions of social reality emerged in the focus groups are very similar to those emerged during activists' individual interviews. Obviously political faith has a role, but in our opinion the fundamental difference is the way of conceiving political reality and the concept of politics itself. Activists present a more positive attitude towards politics, which is considered the genuine expression of democracy. Politics is the expression of civil society and consequently every citizen takes part in it; civil society and politics are closely interrelated. As a consequence even if they blame corruption and excess of quarrelling among politicians, they firmly believe in politics, considering it a fundamental activity of the human being. So there is an investment – more or less concrete – on their part in politics. Non activists, on the contrary, tend to present a deep lack of interest and of participation in any kind of political activity; they don't think it is an expression of civil society, quite the opposite, it is a dirty business which has nothing to do with common people and in which civil society does not take part. So, apart from lack of interest and a vision of politics as confusing, shady, hypocrite, dirty and leading nowhere, it is also perceived as an isolated "business", severed from civil society

10 Section 10: Definition of key concepts and terms

The following figure shows a synthesis of the two main concept definitions resulting from the qualitative research. In section 11 and conclusion paragraph can be found related comments.





Need to find the own political identity through concrete and anchored in every day life political actions: every single individual can give a personal contribute to the community through a form of policy starting from below close to the people needs.

11 Section 11: Stimuli for Quantitative Work

From the qualitative research results emerged that youth **motivation** for taking part in political participation activities can be far from a genuine interest in politics.

The risk is that the social/political participation (such as the widespread student street demonstration or other political strike) become a spontaneous action often accompanied by a lack of awareness about the possible political or societal meanings.

From some of the interviews the real interests seems to be others.

In particular we have identified different kind of interests/motivations that can stimulate and activate young people to participate:

For the less politically interested people:

- Need of affiliation to the group of peers
- Pleasure in playing moderately transgressive roles (typical of adolescence)
- Need to search identity and to experiment with it possible motivations.

For the more politically interested people:

- Need to express the own individual value, ideals or needs
- Need to be close to the real people needs

Such data are confirmed also by other studies (Fondazione IARD, 2001).

The interest in ideology has been replaced by **pragmatic goals**, concrete objectives close to the real people needs or simply close to the own values or needs.

Considering the youths' decreasing interest in strictly political matters, alternative forms of social participation more tangible from youth are worth investigating.

The broad definition extends the concept of political participation to wider social and civil involvement. From this perspective, participation enhances social integration, in terms of democratic citizenship.

Besides, we have identified not only disinterest but also such of **incapacity for conceptualizing** the idea of politics or the idea of democracy. Most of the interviewees had difficulties to report theoretically the concept and to deepen the proposed issues. Even if the spontaneus attitude towards these issues was characterized by negative connotation and common sense, we can suppose these attitude are due to the lack of awareness and conditioned by the mass opinion.

The attempt to get closer the youth language and way of thinking allowed to reach their real need and opinions. Often, despite their negative attitudes we found out a rich potential and willness to participate....but unfortunately they could'nt express it. Behind their lack of interest maybe it was hidden only need of

guidance or need of concrete opportunities. Also these aspects could be take as referement for the quantitative work.

Some suggestion- variables could be propose for the developing in the questionnaire:

- Political interest: which motivation or pragmatic goals?
- Political knowledge: which capacity of conceptualizing? Which awareness?

CONCLUSIONS

Here following is reported a brief overview of the main results of the qualitative work.

Investigating the feelings of belonging we found out as most of the interviewees perceive themselves as Italians, taking on a definite identity and responsibility. Such perception emerges from their experience of belonging to their country, so what they express is the attachment to national identity. Their reasons are essentially cultural: being Italian means to share the same uses, costumes, traditions, language and history. It is worth notice that males reported a higher sense of Italian belonging than females.

On the contrary lack of identification with Europe is quite common, as it is felt to be a too far and extraneous reality. Sex seems to be influent with this respect: mainly females express feeling of extraneousness towards the European Community.

Analysing how young Italian people conceptualize politics and how they construct and experience it on a social level we found out, as first, that many of the data confirm previous national research results. We have already mentioned the studies carried out by Fondazione IARD[9], which highlighted a strong and progressive lack of interest in politics among young people, some of whom are even so disgusted by politics, that it can be even spoken about “eclipse of politics”. At the same time Caniglia[10] reported about lack of interest and activism: as to lack of interest, he defines the current generation as "invisible", according to the political behaviour and participation that involved young people since the '60. Lack of relationship between young people and institutions should be seen as the consequences of growing distance between traditional politics and social needs. Young people perceive political participation as a personal choice instead of a result of the social environment in which they live. The fracture between ideals and reality still represent the disillusion towards the traditional politic and the distance from the social needs.

In the present research the most recurrent images basically concern confusion about the concept of politics and a heightened negative connotation of politics itself. Reasons underlying such representations are manifold: politics is conceived as purely abstract, without any effective impact in real life, it is just an instrument of social control which in fact is used to take citizens in, since its aims are shady, dirty and undeclared. It is worth notice that again they were mainly females who expressed the most negative judgements.

[9] Fondazione IARD, *Giovani nel nuovo secolo: Quinto rapporto IARD sulla condizione giovanile in Italia*, 2002, Il Mulino.

[10] Caniglia Enrico, Identità*, partecipazione e antagonismo nella politica giovanile*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli (2002).

To get closer to politics young people need to perceive concrete goals and to feel proved results of the political actions. Also values and people needs represent the key element where focus the possible input to political participation.
Thus, our subjects, whether activists or not, stressed the importance of political actions being concrete and anchored in everyday life; every single individual can thus give a personal contribute to the community, through a form of politics “from below”, which is close to the people.

Somewhat paradoxically, it emerged that as forms of political participation, demonstrations and marches are very popular expressions of political activity, but sometimes they don’t seem to rest on political motivation. Other variables are often at stake, such for example a strong need for affiliation to the group of peers. Only few activists can find stimuli for activation inside a real social analysis capability, but anyway they still look at they own interest or problems such as school issues.

ANNEX

Table: A1: tables of personal information of all focus groups and interviewees

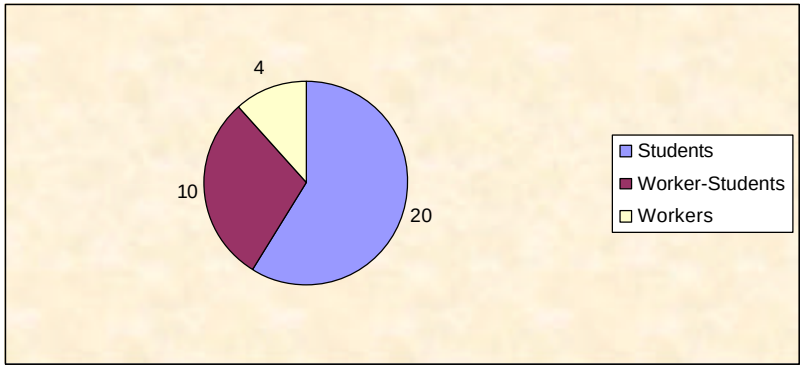
NUMBER OF INTERVIEWEES	PLACE AND LOCATION OF THE INTERVIEW	AGE	SEX	NOT ACTIVIST-ACTIVIST	OCCUPATIONAL STATUS	FAMILY RELATIONS	POTENTIAL POLITICAL INTERESTS AND/OR ACTIVITIES	HOBBIES
1	Fondazione IARD	25	F	Not activist	Worker	Living with parents	No	Movies, reading, sport
2	Fondazione IARD	24	F	Not activist	Worker-Student	Living with parents	No	Sport, reading
3	Fondazione IARD	25	F	Not activist	Worker-Student	Living with parents	No	Sport, reading
4	Fondazione IARD	23	F	Not activist	Student	Living with parents	No	Music
5	Fondazione IARD	25	F	Not activist	Worker-Student	Living with parents	No	Dance, music
6	Fondazione IARD	24	F	Not activist	Worker	Living with parents	No	Reading, sport
7	Fondazione IARD	25	F	Not activist	Worker	Living with partner	No	Theatre, music
8	Fondazione IARD	23	F	Not activist	Student	Living with parents	No	Reading, music, sport
9	Fondazione IARD	23	F	Not activist	Worker-Student	Living with parents	No	Music, to travel, reading
10	Fondazione IARD	18	F	Not activist	Student	Living with parents	No	Sport

11	Youth Aggregation Centre	18	M	Not activist	Student	Living with parents	No	Music
12	Youth Aggregation Centre	22	M	Not activist	Worker	Living with parents	Interests	Sport, music
13	Youth Aggregation Centre	22	M	Not activist	Student	Living with parents	No	Sport
14	Youth Aggregation Centre	19	M	Not activist	Student	Living with parents	No	Reading
15	Youth Aggregation Centre	19	M	Not activist	Student	Living with parents	Interests	Reading, sport
16	Youth Aggregation Centre	23	M	Not activist	Student	Living with parents	Interests	Sport
17	Youth Aggregation Centre	18	M	Not activist	Student	Living with parents	Interests	Music, sport
18	Fondazione IARD	22	M	Not activist	Student	Living alone	No	Reading, movies, Mus., sport
19	Fondazione IARD	21	M	Not activist	Student	Living with parents	No	Music
20	Fondazione IARD	18	M	Not activist	Student	Living with parents	No	Reading
21	Fondazione IARD	21	M	Not activist	Student	Living with parents	No	Music

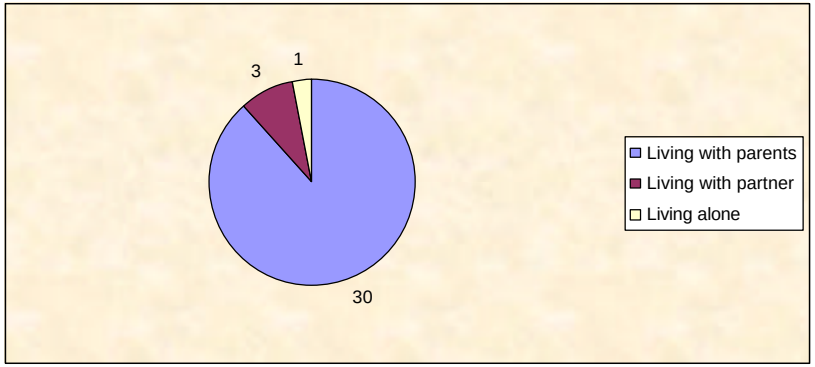
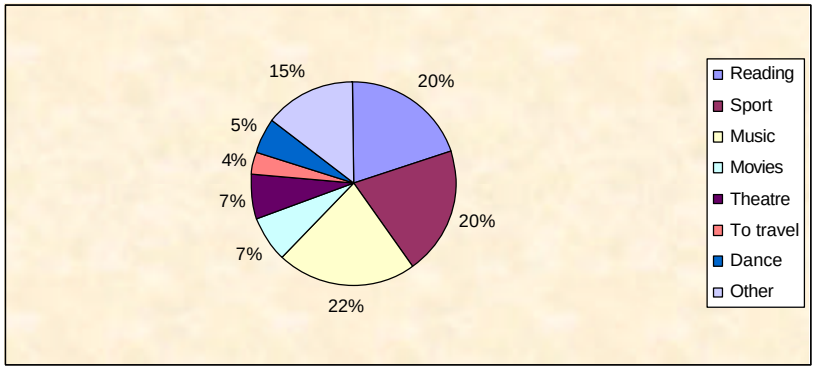
22	Fondazione IARD	20	M	Not activist	Worker-Student	Living with parents	No	Music
23	Fondazione IARD	19	M	Activist	Student	Living with parents	Activities	Music
24	Fondazione IARD	18	F	Activist	Student	Living with parents	Activities	Theatre
25	Fondazione IARD	19	M	Activist	Student	Living with parents	Activities	Theatre
26	Fondazione IARD	25	F	Activist	Worker-Student	Living with parents	Activities	Movies, reading
27	Fondazione IARD	25	F	Activist	Worker-Student	Living with parents	Activities	Theatre, movies
28	Fondazione IARD	24	F	Activist	Worker-Student	Living with parents	Activities	travel, reading, dance
29	Fondazione IARD	23	F	Activist	Student	Living with parents	Activities	Dance
30	Fondazione IARD	25	M	Activist	Student	Living with parents	Activities	Reading, sport
31	Fondazione IARD	25	F	Activist	Worker-Student	Living with partner	Activities	Theatre
32	Fondazione IARD	18	M	Activist	Student	Living with parents	Activities	Music
33	Fondazione IARD	24	M	Activist	Worker-Student	Living with parents	Activities	Music, theatre
34	Fondazione IARD	21	M	Activist	Student	Living with partner	Activities	

Table A1 shows the complete list of the socio-demographic aspect of the entire sample involved in the qualitative research. According to the guidelines, each participant have filled “The personal details questionnaire” before the interviews.
The following graphs give an overview of such characteristic; the graph A1, the occupational status; the graph A2 The family relationship; the graph A3, hobbies and interests.
In spite of the age of our participants (nobody is under 18 years old), the majority of young people are just students. Almost the whole youth’s sample is living with their parents and the youth’s interests express quite heterogeneous.

Graph 1 : Personal details questionnaire: Occupational status.



Graph A2: Personal details questionnaire: Family relationships



Graph A3 :Hobbies/Interests