

National Report for the Project Youth Policies and Participation for Italy

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1. The structure of the Italian Transition System

1.1. Labour Market

In the year 2000, Italy achieved a remarkably positive result as regards employment. Started in the late 90s, employment growth recorded a significant acceleration between January 2000 and January 2001, with an increase of 3.2%, equal to 656,000 new jobs. These figures were partly due to a GDP growth rate of about 3% (National Employment Plan 2001), but they also resulted from reforms of the labour market which have occurred in recent years and affected the youth employment situation: temporary or part-time jobs, new apprenticeship, tax incentives, reduction of indirect tax burden on labour cost. From a qualitative perspective, two facts are particularly worth of attention, namely the significant growth in employment in the south of Italy - coupled with a clear tendency for undeclared work to come to light - and a high growth in female employment. All these positive results reflect in a decrease in the unemployment rate, which fell under 10% (ibid.) for the first time last decade. Nonetheless, while in the centre-north of Italy average unemployment is estimated as being lower than in the rest of Europe, even with a certain labour shortage in the north-eastern regions, unemployment in the south is still more than double that of the EU, despite the significant improvements mentioned above.

The National Employment Plan for 2001, issued by the Labour Ministry, summarises these achievements and expresses hopes of an even brighter future. Yet, contrary to the policy adopted in previous years, the report does not deal with either specific data on youth work, or more general data on youth transitions, including the latter two issues within a wider strategy framework for employment and for discouraging early school-leaving. The latest available data on youth unemployment (April 2000) are provided by ISFOL - *Istituto per la formazione professionale dei lavoratori* (the Institute for the professional education of workers).

According to this source, youth unemployment rate (15 to 24 years of age) at a national level accounts for 31% in 2000, compared to 32.9% in 1999 and 33.8% in 1998 (ISFOL Report 2000).

The national youth unemployment rate represents an average value between a rate assessed at 15-17% in the north, at 27-30% in the centre and at 48-54% in the south (National Employment Plans 98/99/00/01). These data suggest how difficult it is for young people to obtain a job (as many as 32% of those entering the labour market do not). Nevertheless, increases in national employment levels in general have had positive repercussions on youth employment as well.

Indeed, comparisons with data from 1996 show:

- a) increased propensity to continue studies;
- b) that 18-to-20-year-old workers doubled in number (from 10.7% to 21.2 %);
- c) increased presence of both 21 to 24 year-olds (from 26.6% to 38.5%) and 25 to 29 year-olds (from 43.9% to 56.6%) in the labour market.¹

Still, unemployment does remain a long-term situation for the youth: either the labour market is entered soon, or the difficulties in finding a job increase drastically. The majority of young job-seekers (about 80% of the total) can therefore be classified as "long-term unemployed", that is to say unemployed for more than one year. Young

¹ Data taken from the Fifth IARD report on youth condition in Italy, Milan, 29 November 2000. This report has not been published in its entirety. We therefore refer to a summary distributed by the research body itself, together with previews appeared on the Internet and/or specialised journals.

people who have remained unemployed for less than 6 months (the threshold indicated by the EU for adopting preventive measures) are in fact estimated to amount to a mere 20% of the total unemployment rates according to the 1999 National action plan for employment).

1.2. Schemes for the young unemployed

"Active" labour policies, introduced in the early 1980's, attempted to remedy the generation imbalances within the Italian labour market by adopting measures which aimed to cover the interstitial market spaces by encouraging self-employment, stimulating enterprises to take on young people or other categories of disadvantaged citizens, and fostering the interface between labour supply and demand.

Initial measures of some relevance were *Contratti di formazione lavoro* (Vocational training contracts) which aimed at making appointments more flexible - replacing adult workers with younger people who in turn were replaced on expiry of their contract - chiefly by containing the enterprises' operating costs.

By the end of 1996 urgent measures were passed on placement and *promotion of self-employment in the South of Italy*: Act 608/96 entrusted the *Agenzia per l'imprenditoria giovanile* (Agency for youth entrepreneurship), a joint-stock company predominantly financed through the public purse (i.e. the Treasury). In the latest years of its activity, the Agency for youth entrepreneurship has fostered the birth of a few thousand enterprises, most of which are still successfully operating. The Agency has also been in charge of the management of promotion of self-employment (financed by the employment fund of the Labour Ministry), of interventions in support of *female entrepreneurship* (Ministry of Industry and Ministry of Equal Opportunities) and, in 1997, of *State grants*, a programme targeted at the South of Italy which finances smaller self-employment enterprises set up by people out of work, partly through unrecoverable grants and partly through low-interest loans.

The so called *State grants* are intended for residents in economically weak areas who have been looking for a job for at least 6 months, to set up low-cost micro-enterprises (total investment under EUR 25,000) which promise to provide an outlet, albeit provisional, to young people looking for a job. The profitability of the enterprises thus created, and their survival rate, however, seem to permit only a partial repayment of the sums invested.

Another measure adopted within Act 608/96 concerns *socially useful work*, which is primarily targeted at people with work experience. According to a widespread view, these jobs would in fact seem to have a function not dissimilar from that of other social shock absorbers (Fund for unemployment benefits, mobility allowances), attempting to put a time limit to unemployment and thus enhance future employability of the worker in the same enterprise.

Also in 1996, various departmental orders led to the creation of a *Fondo per l'occupazione* (Employment fund), for the promotion of the employment of people who do not receive any social benefits. This fund has substantially contributed, through its resources, to the development of socially useful work projects.

Act 59/1997 focused on the creation and *regional distribution of employment agencies*. These were meant to guarantee the provision of services for the placement, guidance, pre-selection, advice on individual training, advice on self-entrepreneurship, promotion of socially useful work, and apprenticeship. These structures would also handle the exchange of information between essential services and vocational training centres, so as to meet

the need for training and employment supply, also thanks to the creation of a unitary and integrated *Work information system* at the national level. These two objectives are of fundamental importance insofar as the delay in conforming with the means of active intervention in the labour market appears to be due to the lack of an information system and to a fragmentation of responsibilities among institutional bodies (the municipalities are in charge of information, the Provinces of vocational guidance, the Regions of vocational training, and the Ministry of Labour - through its peripheral structures - of employment agencies). At the moment, the reform of public employment services proceeds through pre-selection, the favoured option, with guidance playing a somewhat less prominent role.

1.3. The educational and training system

The proposal to extend compulsory education from 14 to 15 years of age has only recently been put forward. According to a 1998 bill, the whole education system should have been reformed; however, one of the first acts of the new government led by Mr Berlusconi has been the suspension of this reform. In the old system - still operating as a result of this decision - young people move through primary school (5 years, from age 6 to 10) and lower secondary school (3 years from 11 to 14) in order to enter the labour market or embark on one of four main possible post-compulsory pathways at age 15. Simplifying somewhat, on the more vocationally oriented side it is possible to choose either technical schools (Istituti Tecnici) or vocational schools (Istituti Professionali), on the more academic side the options are grammar schools (Licei), and the arts-oriented secondary schools (Istituti Artistici).

The main purposes of the suspended reform of the school system was to increase the duration of compulsory education, to reduce the number of dropouts and to re-integrate routes of vocational training in the post-compulsory courses. Pupils would attend a seven year 'first cycle', and a two year 'second cycle', thus completing compulsory school education at an age (15) when they are more conscious of their attitudes and better able to make informed choices. Pupils would leave this second school cycle with a certificate attesting their competences, on the basis of which they would then apply for an apprentice contract, pursue professional training or attend a further school cycle. This third, non-compulsory cycle would last 3 years (from 16 to 18) and consist of either a more educationally-oriented school programme or a more vocationally-oriented training programme. In this last cycle, work placements and work experience were supposed to be integrated.

At the organisational level, the greater didactic and organisational autonomy granted to the schools through Act 59/97 was the first step in a series of structural interventions bound to radically (though gradually) change the organisation of the Italian school system.

On the topic of the expansion of university autonomy, Act 127 was equally important, conferring on each university the power to plan and control the organisation of courses, university diplomas, graduation and specialisation. The University reform should start in September 2001 in a significant number of universities, although the newly established government has extended the deadline to year 2003.

Summarising our discussion so far, the recent reforms aimed at achieving a closer integration between school and vocational training curricula, the diffusion of work placements and apprenticeships, and the creation of

a channel, non-existent in Italy so far, of a higher - post-secondary - education and technical training system (*IFTS*).

Vocational training is also facing a turning point, thanks to the attention devoted to the relationship between labour training and policies within Act 196/97 (the so-called *Treu reform package*, named after the former minister Tiziano Treu).

The purpose is to adjust the training system in terms of both process and products/services in order to meet the specific requirements and needs of the labour market, paying special attention to the new demands connected with self-employment, atypical work, and the weaker population groups. The increased training opportunities and the close connection with the operation of the employment services, as well as the greater access to various forms of traineeship both inside and outside training courses proper, should allow a progressive and wide-ranging implementation of actions preventing and reducing unemployment.

In particular, with reference to the dropout problem, the strategy is to co-ordinate a number of actions through guidance, curriculum integration, extensive recourse to traineeship schemes, extension of the schooling requirement (compulsory training), introduction of training credits, school/training integration courses, heightening of the apprenticeship schemes.

The 1999 Finance Act established a *compulsory training requirement* up to the eighteenth year of age, to be met within the school education system, the vocational training system or an apprenticeship scheme, starting from the school year 1999-2000. The main points of interest concern:

- discharge of the compulsory training requirement through vocational training
- discharge of the compulsory training requirement through apprenticeship (240 hours of training equivalent to 120 hours of apprenticeship after having met the schooling requirement)
- involvement of the employment services
- interaction between education and vocational training, with integrated paths
- final certification
- monitoring activities.

The compulsory training requirement scheme is expected to become fully operational in 2002. The *new apprenticeship* plan is soon to provide the main on-the-job qualification channel for the youth: while continuing the experimentation begun in 1998 (19,000 apprentices), an effort has been made to specify the contents of off-the-job training programmes focusing on transferable and vocation-oriented skills) and to heighten the training action relative to young people of *up to* 18 years of age (compulsory training requirement). In 2000, the Ministry of Labour allocated additional resources to training under apprenticeship schemes also targeting young people *over* eighteen years of age.

Representatives of the Ministry of Labour and of the Regions worked out, with the technical assistance of the ISFOL, an operational crediting proposal to be experimented by 2001 and generalised by 2003. As for the *certification of skills*, a Commission comprising representatives of the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry for University and Scientific Research (MURST, now MIUR) and the Regions will be set up with a view to establishing a "*national system of competences*". It will be up to the Regions to certify the skills acquired through the participation in vocational training and continuing education activities, working

activities, traineeships and self-training. The *citizen's training booklet* will be created by regional authorities with the aim of documenting the training curriculum.

The 1999 Finance Act provided for the setting up of a *IFTS - Sistema di Istruzione e Formazione Tecnica Superiore* (higher - post-secondary - education and technical training system). The courses planned by the Regions on the basis of local requirements and in line with national standards, last from 2 to 4 semesters and aim at the attainment of medium-high professional skills through extended periods of in-house training. Upon completion of these courses, students are issued a certificate, recognised throughout the national territory, anticipating the system of training credits: this should enable them to redirect the course of their education even in respect of university studies.

1.3.1. Adult education

The 2000 Finance act defines the regulations for the *integrated adult education system*, which is going to be implemented through the joint efforts of the *Centri territoriali permanenti* (Permanent territorial centres),² training agencies, employment services, Universities, private social and volunteer workers' associations, civic networks and public cultural infrastructures, entrepreneurs and their associations. Further significant aspects of this new shift are the establishment of a co-ordinator responsible for each Centre, the combined procedures of education and training, the possibility of extending activities to prisons, the provision for training credits, and the establishment of a Provincial Committee for education and training headed by a Director of Education.

1.4 Other elements of youth transitions

1.4.1 Leaving the education system

The number of young people who continue their education beyond the compulsory age (now fixed at 14) has risen, as has the length of the time spent in study. The youth in Italy have never been as educated as they seem to be today: 60.9% of 15-29 year-olds hold a secondary school diploma, compared to 49.5% in 1996 and 42.2% in 1992 (Gasperoni 2000).

Up to 20 years of age, young drop-outs are a minority bound to decrease. This would seem to signal a greater tendency to obtain a school-leaving certificate and a decreasing wastage rate. Nonetheless, although education is spreading, there remains a considerable cleavage between those who obtain a high school certificate and those who drop out after lower secondary school (i.e. at the age of 14), without taking vocational training. Indeed, the latter, who constitute a minority, are becoming increasingly marginalised.

At the same time, a secondary-school certificate is rapidly becoming inadequate for the needs of the labour market, whilst the intrinsic quality of one's course of study, together with the degree of parental support (socio-economic status and cultural level) are becoming more and more crucial.

² These centres are meant to take on the role of places for a) planning, co-ordinating activating and managing educational and training initiatives for adults and young adults, b) detecting their needs and c) collecting and disseminating documentation.

1.4.2 Leaving the parental home

As pointed out in several studies (see e.g. Buzzi et al. (eds.) 1997; Cavalli 1995), the propensity of young people to remain in the parental home for longer is growing: only about 30% of 25-29 year-olds have established an independent household, whereas 16% of 30-34 year-olds continue to live with their parents.

Some researchers explain this phenomenon by way of reference to cultural factors and to a sort of "convenient arrangement" intended to keep away from the many responsibilities of adult life (Buzzi 2001: 6). Such an interpretation might actually underestimate the structural difficulties that hamper young people in deciding to move out, most notably total lack of grants and services for the youth and of housing policies (i.e. absence of council housing for the youth and inadequate rent control, to the effect that rents in big cities account for half or even two thirds of the average earnings).

1.4.3. A new family and the birth of a child

Experiences of married life and cohabitation are concentrated between 30 and 34 years of age (60%), and the decision to have a child is often postponed even further. Only 12% of 25 to 29 year-olds and 44% of 30 to 34 year-olds have already had a baby.

1.5. Influences of social class, cultural capital, region, gender and ethnicity

1.5.1. Family's cultural capital and social class

Over the past thirty years, intergenerational mobility in Italy has been considerable. Nonetheless, young people's access to education is still to a great extent affected by their social background (as portrayed by their parents' schooling and employment status). Consequently, those belonging to families of a higher cultural level are likely to be characterised by a definitely higher educational level compared to their same-age group. Indeed, 63% of them hold a secondary-school diploma, whereas only 44% of the children of less educated families do. Social status has an influence not only on the education level, but also on the type of course of study young people tend to choose: whilst more than half of the youth from high cultural-level families have studied in a *Liceo* (the more academically-oriented option), the majority of pupils from less cultured milieus opt for a more technical course of studies, and about one third of them for vocational training. It is interesting to note that 80% of young apprentices come from families whose education level never goes above that of a lower secondary school certificate (see on this topic Buzzi et al. (eds.) 1995: 33-38).

1.5.2. Region of origin

Statistically speaking, a young person from the north of Italy has 80 chances in 100 of rapidly finding a job; this figure falls to 40% in the case of a young person from the south. This datum is emblematic but not exhaustive. One should not forget that, especially in the wealthy north-eastern regions, early employment often causes pupils to leave school early, thus ultimately resulting in lack of education and of specific training, often leading to an unstable and precarious employment situation.

1.5.3. Gender

There are clear signals that differences between genders with regards to the education level are becoming less and less significant. Nevertheless, despite this move towards uniformity between men and women on several cultural aspects, there are still some difficulties for women. For instance, the growth in female labour supply (especially in the services' sector) is fuelling specific unemployment rates (34.3% for young men as opposed to 45.5% for young women). In the southern regions of Italy, young women enter the labour market with greater difficulty than in the rest of the country: while in the north-east 37% have a permanent job, this figure drops to 9.7% in the south and to 4.1% in the main islands (Sicily and Sardinia).

On a more positive note, young women perform better than young man at University: whilst only 26.7% of male students successfully complete their exams in the expected time, this percentage equals 40.5% in the case of female students).³

1.5.4. Ethnic identity

To this day, there is no research on the conditions of young people of different ethnic origins. This is likely to be due to the absence of a shared model of reception of and support to immigrants in Italy, based on scientific data and research on qualitative and quantitative indicators. At present (data from 1997), registered resident aliens are nearly 855,000, whereas the temporary residence permits issued are approximately 986,000.

The biggest groups come from Morocco, former Yugoslavia, Albania and the Philippines. The majority are between 18 and 34 years of age (La Rosa and Kieselbach (eds.) 1999: 140). These young people often live in conditions of social exclusion, due to difficulties in joining the regular labour market, which, in turn, are caused by difficulties in obtaining or renewing work permits. It is precisely the irregularity of their position that increases risks of destitution and marginalisation.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that young Italians show a worrying *ethnic prejudice*. Although Italy has an overall lower immigration level than the European average, 75.4 % of young Italians share the idea that "there are too many immigrants in Italy", and 60% think that "most of the immigrants are involved in criminal or illegal activities" (Peri 2000: 78).

For these reasons, there is likely to exist a specific problem with ethnic origin on the basis of the ensuing observations:

- 1) The cultural status of young immigrants - the children of first-generation immigrants, with poor language skills and low educational level - is among the lowest in Italy.
- 2) Their economic status is similarly low, due to well-known problems of subsistence and search for accommodation.
- 3) The social environment seems to discourage young immigrants from developing a sense of belonging.

³ Ibid. The Italian university system allows students to postpone exams or re-take failed ones virtually indefinitely, so that it is far from unusual for a student not to have taken/passed all her/his exams for a given academic year when the exam session for the following year begins.

1.6. Critical debate on youth transition

1.6.1. The new context

The complex reform introduced by previous centre-left governments (school autonomy, school cycles, integration of systems) began to show its effects in the year 2000 (new three-year undergraduate degree courses, new school curricula integrating training and education, new higher education and technical training system - IFTS). Amongst the most significant consequences was a drop in the unemployment rate (which fell to 10%), backed by a favourable, though not excellent, economic situation (in 2000, GDP was close to 3%).

The victory of the centre-right coalition last May has already started to bring about changes, the effects of which are still hard to foresee. Mr Berlusconi's cabinet has already blocked the school cycles reform which was due to come into effect this autumn (September 2001). The Italian school system will therefore remain unchanged whereas a reform of University degree courses introducing a first-level and a second-level degree is coming into effect this September. While the latest centre-left governments had tried to base their action strategy upon integration and co-operation among the social partners, the new government intends to mark a turning point in Italy's economic system, orientating it towards economic models based on the notion of self-regulating market. This economic and social perspective is accompanied by a strong focus on the enterprise and on private entrepreneurship: as an example, the government aims to rapidly accord official recognition to private schools (mostly catholic) and to encourage continuing education. As regards youth transitions, labour market flexibility is expected to be fostered in both directions (recruiting and dismissal), in order to create a more dynamic model along the lines of Great Britain and the U.S.A.

On the same wavelength as industrial associations, the new political leadership considers an excessive rigidity and bureaucracy in the employer-employee relationship to be one of the reasons why companies are discouraged from recruiting personnel thus indirectly fostering youth unemployment.

1.6.2 A brief outline of the current debate

Youth transitions can hardly be claimed to make the subject of critical debates in Italy these days. It is worrying to note that neither the National action plan, nor the recent electoral campaign have given any significant space to youth transitions. Equally worrying is the fact that a national basic law on youth participation has not been approved yet (see 2.5 below).

So far, public and private organisations involved in education and guidance have regarded young people more as "business" opportunities (in the most positive meaning of the term) than as protagonists of their change and of those active policies that (may) pertain to them.

Young people will shortly be deeply involved in important reforms they have not worked at or they hardly know of. The context they live in is much more competitive than it was the case in the last decade, and the liberalistic turn fostered by the present government might if anything accentuate the gap between "first-class" and "second-class" youth, unless effective social absorbers and participatory preventive policies are implemented.

Praiseworthy as it may be in theory, the complex reform proposed by the centre-left governments might also end up accentuating the gap between those who choose education and those who opt for training.⁴ The bet on the permeability between the systems has not been won yet, whereas there remain strong privileges and prerogatives of both academically-oriented, elite schools (Licei) and Universities.

Perhaps the real core of the current debate may be viewed as spreading from the larger current debate over globalisation: in the same way as a tendency towards globalisation may have a worsening effect over the economy of poor countries, the social processes typical of information and knowledge society might accentuate the gap between "strong" and "weak" young adults, strength and weakness depending largely upon original social status. Since in a technologically-advanced society distances often grow exponentially rather than geometrically, recovery might become not simply difficult, but utterly impossible.

Furthermore, the debate over flexibility in the job sector would seem to remain too closely linked to economic criteria. Our society does not appear to be ready to face youth transition processes by means of complex and diversified interventions, which foster a more responsible attitude in young people and provide them with real opportunities to gain their independence. In this situation, flexibility is perceived more and more as an instrument in the hands of the private sector, whilst institutions remain utterly un-flexible - it is significant to note, in this respect, that mortgages still tend to be granted almost exclusively to steady, "un-flexible" employees - and flexibility is often understood to be a synonym for precariousness and insecurity.

Lastly, one cannot ignore the attempts, sponsored by neo-liberalist politicians and theoreticians, to manipulate the youth question in order to legitimise real onslaughts on Italy's fragile welfare system. A first such attempt dates back to the recent political manipulation of the "parents-against-children" conflict, which was meant to back the cutting of social security expenses ("young people are working to pay old people's pensions, so our pension system needs reforming"). Another recent attempt makes use of the youth unemployment issue to justify measures whose ultimate function is to increase the employers' freedom to dismiss their employees (Majorino 2000: 12-14).⁵

2. Youth policies in Italy: between fragmentation and integration

2.1. Introduction

One major difficulty in providing a clear framework for youth policies in Italy springs from the problem of defining what the term "youth" should be understood to refer to. According to some, the word would include individuals between 14 (or even 11, if one considers so-called "preadolescents") and 30 years of age, although most youth policies are specifically intended for adolescents, that is those between 14 (or 11) and 19 years of age (Baraldi and Ramella 1999: 5-6). Moreover, a certain ambiguity adds to this vagueness, in that individuals from different age groups are sometimes grouped together solely on the basis of a common condition of "minority" of

⁴ See, on this subject, the position statements by the National university council (*C.U.N.*) and by the Students representative committee in "Riforma dell'istruzione superiore", annexed to Decree Law and related provisions, and MURST documentation.

⁵ Majorino recalls, some years ago, EC commissioner Mario Monti's invitation to a "generational strike", and the slogan - "less to the parents, more to the children" - launched by many an authoritative economist in favour of a more modern and far less costly social system.

their citizenship status.⁶ In Italy today, the concept of *youth policies* can actually be interpreted in different ways. The expression first appeared at the beginning of the 1980s. Before that time, the government intervention aimed at the youth primarily used to consist of welfare measures and campaigns against social and moral deprivation. The "youth question" therefore remained limited to problems such as drug addiction, unemployment, and the prevention of diseases.

The 1980s marked a turning point in the approach to the youth question in Italy. Thanks to the devolution of power to the regions, the provinces and the municipalities, and as a consequence of the protests and social revolts of the youth in the 1970s, local authorities undertook actions that, for the first time, were meant neither to cure nor to stigmatise, but rather to integrate different levels of intervention. That was the beginning of the so-called *Progetti giovani* (Projects for the youth), which brought a wave of fresh air and launched the first truly modern and European youth policies in our country. Many municipal administrations began to carry out interventions that directly involved young people and their associations. Throughout the Eighties and in the early Nineties, their commitment was reflected in the promotion of youth information centres known as *Informagiovani* (see 2.3.2 below), *Youth centres* (places of aggregation) and youth *Councils* that would help political decision-makers develop guidelines for their actions. An important role has also been played by participation in *EU programmes* focusing on the promotion of employment, education and mobility (e.g. cultural exchanges).

2.2. The institutional actors of youth policies at the central level

Until 1995 there was no systematic policy for the youth, but only laws on particular aspects that aimed to protect young people in various fields, with responsibilities shared among different ministerial cabinets. Moreover, there used to be no ministry or other equivalent institutional body to coordinate youth policies. Historical reasons for such a lack go back to the early postwar period, when the political forces of the newly established Republic wished to refrain from following the same policies for youth and families adopted under the fascist regime. Rather, they committed both education and transition to adult and professional life to the traditional education structures (family, school, and church) and to the political organisations close to the party system (Montanari 1996: 182-183). Nonetheless, it should be said that over the last few years, the State has attempted to re-organise and coordinate strategies in favour of the youth in various ways. In what follows we shall offer an overview on the various central bodies involved in youth policies.

2.2.1. Department of Social Affairs

The *Department of Social Affairs* of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers was created in 1990 in order to deal with emerging areas of social concern (within the family, as well as relating to information and education) and to take on measures in the field of minority and youth problems - particularly with regards to minors at risk of getting involved in criminal activities - organisations and volunteering (Maggian 1993: 77-78).

⁶ Until recently, the concept of "minor citizen" was interpreted primarily in terms of non-autonomy and dependence from adults: behind this attitude, firstly a more widespread tendency for people younger than 18 years of age to be almost invisible (institutionally) in Italy, and, secondly, a view of young people as the passive targets of measures and interventions. Only recently has the vague term *youth* started to disappear from specific political interventions, in an attempt to take into account the more faceted reality of "children", "adolescents" and "youth". The currency of the notion of "young adult" is even more recent.

Under Law 451 of 1997, The Department of Social Affairs established:

- 1) The *Osservatorio nazionale per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza* (National observatory for childhood and adolescence), whose aim is to accord priority to measures in the field of child protection and to co-ordinate actions taken by the different public authorities involved;
- 2) the *Centro nazionale di documentazione ed analisi per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza* (National documentation and study centre for childhood and adolescence), a centre for research, documentation and analysis of statistical, bibliographic, and legislative data on problems pertaining to minors;
- 3) the *Commissione parlamentare per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza* (Parliamentary committee for childhood and adolescence), whose aim is to monitor children's and adolescents' conditions and to promote the adjustment of norms required for the implementation of relevant European and International law. The *Department of Social Affairs* promoted Law 285/1997 (Provisions for the promotion of rights and opportunities of children and adolescents) and set off an intense national debate on a basic law on youth policies, which is now stuck in Parliament (see 2.5 below).

2.2.2 Ministry of the Interior

Over the last few years, the *Direzione generale servizi civili* of the Ministry of the Interior has stood out for promoting initiatives - both nationally and locally - in matters pertaining to the youth. From 1985 to 1990 it promoted researches and studies that filled the information gap on youth policies in our country. It is worth mentioning, among other initiatives, researches connected with *Progetti giovani* and *Progetti adolescenti*, carried out by local authorities, as well as the support given to the National coordination of the information system for the youth (see below) and to the National coordination of youth associations and movements for the prevention of deprivation.⁷

2.2.3. Ministry of Justice

The *Ministry of Justice* is the only ministry in which measures pertaining to minors have been attributed since the very beginning to a single central body, the *Ufficio centrale per la giustizia minorile* (Central office for juvenile justice). Its aim is to coordinate juvenile justice services in order to limit measures that would restrict personal freedom, by proposing alternative interventions in collaboration with both local authorities' assistance services and voluntary organisations.

2.2.4. Ministry of Education

Besides coordinating the national educational system, Italy's *Ministry of Education* has recently undertaken to fight school dropout by creating a national observatory and several provincial observatories. Moreover, over the past few years it has intensified interventions for the integration of less able people, education on health-related issues, drug prevention, and integration with the vocational training system. It has also boosted the *Consulte provinciali degli studenti* (Provincial councils of students), institutional students representative organisations at the provincial level, and promoted the creation of a "Statute of secondary school students" (see 3.3. below).

⁷ See, on this subject, a number of publications of the Ministry of the Interior (in bibliography).

2.2.5. Ministry of Labour

Over the past few years it has co-ordinated several interventions pertaining to youth employment (see also 1.2. above) and fought against social exclusion in collaboration with the Department of Social Affairs and with financial contributions from the relevant European Social Fund. Amongst other projects, it is particularly worth mentioning "Percorsi per l'inclusione sociale", aimed at creating facilities providing assistance, training, advice and tutoring for marginalised young people having only temporary and intermittent work, and for breadwinning women living in conditions of poverty. The project also aims to create basic facilities for minors, families and the elderly.

2.3. The role of local authorities

2.3.1. Regional policies

Regions in Italy are autonomous bodies whose powers and functions are granted to them by the Constitution. Among their competencies are public welfare, health- and hospital-care, manpower and vocational training, school welfare, local authorities' museums and libraries. In all these sectors, most measures are undertaken in favour of young people. According to a recent survey of regional laws in Italy,

- 1) Since the mid-Seventies, several regions have passed provisions to *support youth employment*, mostly under State Law 285/1977, which provided for financial contributions to encourage youth employment (both open-ended and fixed-term training contracts) as well as for the implementation of regional programmes of vocational training and recruitment in socially useful work. Especially in the Eighties and early Nineties, regions played a significant role in implementing active policies for youth employment, passing regional laws that fostered a) the development of youth companies and co-operatives, b) recruitment in private companies and public bodies through short-term contracts, and c) the allocation of funds for youth employment (particularly in the crafts and agricultural sectors) and entrepreneurship.
- 2) A second thread of regional laws deals with measures in the welfare, social, and cultural sectors, as well as supporting youth aggregation and participation. Since the mid-Seventies several measures have been adopted that aim especially to protect children, adolescents and young people at risk. Since the beginning of the Eighties, some regions have promoted basic laws for youth policies promotion and coordination, with the aim of: i) stimulating youth aggregation and participation, ii) creating integrated systems of youth information offices (Informagiovani), iii) promoting intercultural exchanges, spare time and cultural activities, iv) integrating foreign students as well as young people from outside the EU, v) designing measures to prevent deprivation and deviance, vi) fostering educational initiatives (dealing with environment, sense of civic duty, etc), vii) promoting equal opportunities and so forth (Baraldi and Ramella 1999: 10). From an institutional point of view, all these laws are supposed to provide regional and local decision-makers with tools for monitoring youth realities and for adopting integrated measures in favour of the right of citizenship of adolescents and young people.

The impression one gets is that, at the normative level, Italian regions seem not to consider the youth population as a proper target of policies and services (VV.AA. 1995: 23). In regional measures, the youth condition seems to acquire its specificity only when connected with marginalising processes (drugs, deviance,

violence, school dropouts, etc.). Most regional youth policies spring from the system of social rights (as opposed to civil and political rights) which constitute the weaker section of modern citizenship (ibid.: 27).

One should not forget, however, the qualitative and quantitative differences between geographical areas, which make it impossible for us to describe regional policies as a coherent whole. Whilst certain regions have undertaken unitary integrated projects, others still show a worrying lack of co-ordination between agencies (associations, local authority, family and schools).

2.3.2 *Municipal policies*

As we have seen, it is in the early Eighties that the youth began to be recognised as a social subject, the target of services and interventions from local administrations. First actions were undertaken in large cities of the north of Italy ruled by left-wing councils: Turin, Bologna, Milan, Modena, Reggio Emilia. The starting point was *Progetti giovani*, projects that aimed to integrate different interventions in favour of the youth, by promoting the presence of representatives within local administrations. But what are the reasons behind those initiatives at the end of the Seventies? There was above all the need to re-establish a dialogue between the youth and the state after the youth protests of the second half of the Seventies. Furthermore, political associations and parties were going through a crisis that pushed the local political class to move away from a view of youth policies intended merely as social support to one that saw them as offers of services and opportunities to regain the support of the younger section of the population.

As regards the single fields of intervention, the sectors of *sports* and *spare time* played a primary role, in particular with the creation of *youth centres*. Such facilities were managed either directly by the municipality, or with the collaboration of private or voluntary associations, or self-managed by youth groups (Montanari 1996: 187-188).

As regards the *school education sector*, the most relevant measures were taken primarily to increase the right to education: school refectory management, benefits for poor families or for less able young people, psychological support to young people in serious state of maladjustment, *extracurricular activities* which were created for the purpose of looking after children of full-time workers. Over the past few years, these activities have attracted more and more users thanks to new initiatives in the areas of sports and social animation.

Measures against youth marginalisation are usually promoted by the council departments in charge of the social services. In some cases, these measures have been promoted by *Aziende sanitarie locali* (Local health units). Unfortunately, co-ordination with measures in the cultural or spare time sectors have often been missing in these cases, resulting in a gap between the rehabilitating and welfare interventions conceived for marginalised young people, and the many cultural initiatives conceived for "normal" youth. There are two main types of municipal interventions against youth marginalisation, namely *rehabilitative* and *preventive* interventions. *Rehabilitation* is generally targeted at specific groups, such as drug users, less able people, young people with particular family situations (e.g custody and adoption). More recently, rehabilitation has also included services pertaining to employment support, such as protected recruitment in a company and vocational training programmes. *Prevention* consists of information initiatives (mostly on drug or health), social recovery or the

setting up of aggregation and socialisation facilities. Nevertheless, there is an observable preponderance of rehabilitation over prevention measures.

In the sector of youth *employment and vocational training*, most of municipal interventions consist of medium/short-term vocational training courses, training workshops, and "progetti di formazione lavoro" (vocational training programmes). Some municipalities - together with schools - organise vocational guidance services with work placements in either companies or local agencies. These are the most innovative experiences: unlike rigid traditional training projects, they offer young people all the instruments necessary to elaborate their own educational pathway autonomously and in accordance with their abilities and expectations.

Youth access to *information* has been significantly improved and eased over the last few years, due to a growing need for support when making school and professional choices and, more generally, to the growing social importance of information processes in technologically-advanced societies. The best example of such interventions is provided by *Centro Informagiovani* (Youth Infocentre), which constitutes a sort of municipal help desk in the areas of socio-educational and prevention policies, a bridge between the youth and (local) institutions and associations. These centres give access to a variety of information channels, offer computing facilities, and, in general, provide information in all sectors of some relevance for young users (tourism, vocational guidance, spare time, culture, etc.). There is little doubt about the fact that Informagiovani centres have played a major role in the launch of local youth policies in Italy, often stimulating institutions to carry out initiatives with the active participation of the youth. The number of Informagiovani centres has been rising exponentially over the last few years: from 203 centres in 1994 (Ministry of the Interior survey), to more than 500 (according to a 1997 study, De Biase et al. 1997: 385), scattered all over the country.

The creation of *Progetti giovani* has certainly raised the public awareness of youth policies in Italy, especially with regards to a) the need to co-ordinate competencies among various council departments in order to develop and integrate coherent and complementary interventions, and b) the need for flexible social policies, capable of redefining their own strategies and goals by means of modern planning and evaluation as the need arises, in order to overcome the outdated welfare logics mentioned throughout this report. Moreover, attempts have been made at encouraging a deeper involvement of territorial resources, thus favouring the autonomy and participation of local youth associations. The first forms of direct participation of associations in projects of *Forums* and *Councils* (Consulte) saw the light in this context, with varying success.

As already pointed out, local government's action in the field of youth policies has clear limits: first of all, the lack of a basic law to refer to at the national level forces local authorities to adopt urgent, improvised measures whenever they are in need of financial resources.

Secondly, it is no longer enough for projects to confront the causes of social maladjustment, fostering adequate educational courses. These action have to be accompanied by the distribution all over the country of spots where youth requests can be heard (VV.AA.: 1995:111). This role could very well be played by the traditional educational agencies (school, church, associations, public services, etc). It is clear that a lot depends on an efficient networking of interventions, where local authorities coordinate these spots, stimulating their co-operation.

2.4. The role of associations and voluntary organisations

Over the last decade, different aspects of the youth situation have been documented and analysed in several theoretical and empirical studies. Albeit rigorous and detailed, such surveys tend to present the new generations as a fragile reality, incapable of bringing about changes in *adult society* (in short, an impolitic social reality). In fact, a different scenario emerges from more recent research: in Italy, young people (between 18 and 29 years of age) are readier to play an active role in social work activities and voluntary organisations than adults and the elderly (CNEL 2000). Rather than members of a superficial, uncommitted generation, the young people of today would seem to be the key actors in new forms of active participation within the third sector and informal networks.

Youth associations would appear to be concentrated especially in the north-west of Italy (Albano 1995: 127-128). While in the late Eighties 30% to 40% of the young Italian population (15 to 29 year-olds) were involved in more or less structured aggregation forms, data provided by the latest estimates published by the IARD Research Institute show a more and more widespread, diversified and intense overall participation of youth in some kind of associations. The number of subjects involved is quite high (62.9%, *ibid.*: 121), and those who belong to more than just one association are also growing in number. Such upward trend is confirmed by another survey: the number of young people who do not participate in any association has dropped by more than 5% over the last decade and is now at 45.6%. Young people tend to join voluntary associations, and leave more traditional ones (e.g. political parties and trade unions). Spontaneous and informal forms of association also attract a growing number of participants who find themselves closer to decision-making processes. Among the favourite sectors are sports and religion, followed by social work (CCE-Eurobarometer, in Sorcioni 1997: 6-7).

A problem concerning the relationship between youth associations and local authorities in Italy is that of *representation*. In other words, associations may face a double difficulty: on the one hand, that of collecting and giving voice to the requests of their members and, on the other, that of influencing the choices made by local authorities in the field of youth policies. To this day, youth requests often seem to be difficult to identify. Understanding them is a major problem even for the associations, that are now trying to study ways of interpreting indirect requests and of finding adequate answers (VV.AA.: 1985: 19).

With regards to the ability of associations to influence local authorities' choices, it is worth pointing out that the most advanced participation experiences (such as Councils, Forum of associations, etc.) are certainly facing problems. The first problem concerns how much power to decide such agencies should be given, since in the past the nature of powers and competencies was not properly defined. The second problem pertains to the nature of the relationship between associations and local authorities, in that, traditionally, the former have the sole function of asking the latter for funds.⁸ However, it is undeniable that a system of representation of youth associations at various institutional levels involves a rise in youth participation and the development of policies for young people capable of accepting and effectively strengthen their stimulus to participate.

⁸Youth representative bodies have been set up by 23% of municipalities only. Moreover, according to Montanari (1996: 188), their ability to interact profitably with local institutions is still very much in doubt.

2.5. Latest legislative measures

The *Ministry of Social Solidarity* greatly contributed to reshaping Italian youth policies. The first intervention is Law 285 passed in 1997, *Disposizioni per la promozione di diritti e di opportunità per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza* (Provisions for the promotion of the rights and opportunities of children and adolescents), under which the *Fondo nazionale per l'infanzia e l'adolescenza* (National fund for childhood and adolescence) was founded. The mission of the Fund is that of developing interventions at national, regional and local level in order to encourage the promotion of rights, quality of life, development, individual fulfilment and socialisation of children and adolescents (Official journal of the Italian republic, p. 4).

This law has laid the bases for incisive acts to be carried out in the last four years on a forgotten sector, that of protection and promotion of youth rights. It also seems to have encouraged allocation of considerable resources (approx. EUR 450 million) to qualified projects, approved by Regions and Municipalities, and monitored by the Department of Social Affairs. The following sectors were most closely involved in these actions: promotion of *sustainable cities for children and adolescents* (against environmental and social decay); *prevention of violence and exploitation*; *enhancement of custody and adoption*; transformation of hospitals according to minors' needs; *launch and development of actions and services for adolescents and preadolescents* (physical and mental health, more autonomy, responsibility and participation in civil life).

The first financed projects at the national level have focused more on services for early childhood and adolescence, while little has been done for 16 to 26 year-olds. However, the law offers considerable opportunities for intervention in a variety of other fields, through, among others, policies for the youth and for youth and female employment, for the integration of immigrants, against drug use, for less able people and for the elderly; policies for the environment, infrastructures and sustainability of urban environment; policies concerning regulation of employer-employee relationships; policies for the promotion of sports, school and extra-curricular education and so forth ("Il calamaio e l'arcobaleno", <http://www.minori.it/>).

A second important step taken by the *Ministry for Social Solidarity* is unfortunately still stuck in Parliament: a bill was presented in late 1997, in accord with the Department of Social Affairs, *Disposizioni in favore delle giovani generazioni* (Provisions for young generations), that tried to collect the best proposals from experts, individuals and associations that were active at the time in the youth sector. This initiative is extremely interesting for several reasons. In particular, it stimulated an intense debate that brought together various active realities of the sector, from the representatives of institutional youth associations (e.g. the traditional ones, those affiliated to either political parties or the church) to those of the non-institutional youth world (e.g. self-managed social centres, see 3.3. below).

A first fundamental aspect of the bill is the explicitation of a framework of institutional responsibilities at the national level, that could guarantee coordination of competencies of the various local authorities and, at the same time, an effective representation on matters pertaining to youth policies at EU level.⁹ The bill promotes the launch of a *National plan for the youth* with interventions in the following sectors: associations and youth groups,

⁹ As claimed by Sorcioni (1997: 10), as recently as last year the Italian representative at the EU Committee of youth ministers (formed of the heads of governmental institutions in charge of youth policies in each member country), was a member of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, namely the co-ordinator of international youth exchanges: "lack of concern at the central institutional level was generalised".

young individuals' innovative achievements, computer networks for the youth, social security and support to youth financial autonomy, spare time recreational services, young people's enjoyment of environment and art heritage, cultural exchanges and services for national and international mobility, youth participation in national and international institutions and prevention of youth maladjustment (bill 6220). Other important aspects of the bill are: the creation of a *Centro nazionale per lo sviluppo delle politiche giovanili* (National centre for the development of youth policies) and of a political and social representative body called CNG - *Consiglio nazionale dei giovani* (National youth council), whose aim is to make proposals and give advice to national and international bodies. To this day, Italy is the only country which lacks a national representative body for youth associations. The bill also stimulates Regions and local authorities to create their own youth representative agencies.

At present, however, it is difficult to know whether the new centre-right Parliament will ever approve the bill.

3. Participation

A debate over participation in Italy does exist and can be found at various levels and in several disciplinary fields. Confronted with the crisis of most formal institutions, the social participation of citizens tends to be seen as a solution to many of our society's problems.

3.1. Participation as active citizenship

In the field of political studies, the debate over *active citizenship* represents an interesting approach to the question of participation at the public level. In Italy, active citizenship - in the sense of a network of organisations sharing an autonomous and participative approach to social issues - began in the Seventies. Two main factors contributed to bringing the old statist and state-centric culture into question: the beginning of the crisis of the traditional *welfare* system and the crisis of political representation (Moro 1998). The traditional concept of citizenship based upon a representative democracy that reduces political participation to assertion of the rights to vote and to delegate is consequently brought into question. What does *active citizenship* consist in? Moro defines it as an *attitude* shared by citizens of the present era. This means that "being active" is not something that can be inherited or passed on from the outside (Moro 1998: 48). Participation in this sense is connected with awareness of being *protagonist in one's own territory*. If one considers the traditional public policy-making procedure and its five steps (problem identification, formulation, decision, implementation, evaluation), active citizenship means that citizens can and must play an autonomous role and have a specific weight in each of these steps. Not only do they express the needs that political and technical actors subsequently try to find answers to (as often happens with youth policies), they also operate as real interlocutors throughout the whole procedure. They can even activate and carry out an entire public policy-making procedure.

Being active citizens involves three types of actions: organising groups (associations, representation movements, social enterprises, etc.), mobilising resources (human, technical and financial resources), protecting rights and interests. Those actions are carried out by *exercising powers and duties*. "Being an active citizen implies influencing the course of things and other subjects' behaviours, in other words affecting reality". There

are numerous internal and external obstacles to the realisation of such an idea in Italy's social life. Nevertheless, active citizenship has proven successful and contributed substantially to significant changes in Italian society, culture and institutions (ibid.: 49).

3.2 Participation and community

Another field in which an intense debate over participation in Italy has been promoted is that of *community psychology* and its recent developments. In the Seventies, community psychology remained limited to the psychiatric services' sector and was eventually extended to other sectors of social and community life. In the context of "community", participation is seen as the result of a network of single and group forces, thanks to individuals and groups' direct involvement in the exchange relationship with the community they belong to (Lavanco (ed.) 2001: 21).

The goal of participation is attained by promoting personal and social resources and through civil initiative for a better environmental balance. After abandoning ideological rigidities which involved laying the blame for maladjustment on either individual shortcomings or social causes for deprivation, a more complex interactive model tends to be adopted nowadays. By sharing this complex model of social problems, psychologists of the Nineties opted for a variety of strategies that would strengthen positive interactions between individuals and environment by promoting individuals' and community's *empowerment* (Francescato et al. 1997: 18). The group plays a fundamental role in the construction of participatory attitudes, in that it constitutes the collective dimension to confront with and in which it is possible to express oneself, find recognitions, experiment with forms of participation.

Two key-concepts are particularly worth mentioning in relation to participation processes: *social action* and *empowerment*. The former can be defined as a socially organised action performed in social work. The latter refers to an increase in the possibilities for individuals and groups to have active control of their life. As such, it is a key pillar of community psychology and can be reached stimulating participation of citizens in significant experiences (ibid.: 231).

The notion of *empowerment* adopted for the development of competent communities bears a significant emancipatory component. In Italy, experiences have been realised by means of *empowerment* strategies, for example in the world of labour, schools, local communities, areas of civic and environmental decay. This is made possible by the transformation of "beneficiaries" into co-protagonists in initiatives, while all other members of the network benefit from the competences acquired through participation in the projects. By designing and realising interventions in their own communities, people acquire those technical and emancipatory skills necessary for them to gain more power and consequently become capable of learning how to find resources and develop them, in short affect the reality in which they live. Through this process, the competences of both individuals and organisations increase (ibid.: 251). This approach has spread over the past few years and has been put into practice through experiences of *joint social planning* in projects for environmental and social recovery of decayed peripheral areas, thanks – above all – to the efforts of young people in promoting these areas (e.g. the experience "Progetto speciale periferie" in Turin, on-line <http://www.comune.torino.it/periferie/>).

3.3 Young people and participation

What is the role of participation in the world of the youth then, and what repercussions does it have on youth policies?

There is no doubt that political, social and cultural changes have had an effect on new forms of youth participation. All these changes have influenced the way young people relate themselves to their social environment: marked by a conflictual relationship with the external world, the society of *repression* of the Sixties was to be replaced by the society of *depression* of the Eighties, when the interior world became more important than the outside world, the latter being deaf to individual needs. Today's society of *expression* is based on the idea that satisfying one's needs is possible by strongly expressing them and by making them known to others. People, especially young people, look for new spaces in the limelight, where they can be seen and heard, and offered not only practical solutions to urgent problems, but also judgement criteria to guide their future choices (Lavanco 2001: 21-22).

Baraldi too (Baraldi: on-line) points out that our society shows a particular interest in the promotion of children's and young people's participation. He suggests that such promotion involves varying one's perspective and learn to consider young people "complete" and autonomous beings. This does not mean ignoring their evolution, but changing the way we socially depict youth conditions. Participation of children and adolescents can be promoted within various systems: family, education system, economic system (through mixed forms of education and work), etc. In particular, over the past few years, the idea of *citizenship of children and adolescents* has developed, with the contribution of new areas of social participation:

- 1) participation through games and expression (expression of emotions and creativity)
- 2) participation through decisions (by making important decisions for the social context)
- 3) participation through projects (by formulating relevant projects for the social context) (Baraldi: on-line).

What is the role of youth policy strategies in Italy in such social context?

Participation has become a catchword over the last few years, though substantial concrete results are still missing. Italy's centre-left government passed several laws that reformed most of the social and socio-educational sector. In the *National plan for the youth*, elaborated during the preparatory phase of the basic law on youth participation in 1998 (see 2.5), *empowerment* and participation are underlined as the main strategies to be implemented in youth policies. They emerge in all fields of intervention whose aim is meeting young people's needs. Amongst the main tasks set out by the plan, it is worth mentioning the following:

- spreading the culture of self-management in employment and educational pathways;
- formal and informal facilitating measures targeted to young people and groups, also in associations. These measures are especially aimed at developing culture and social relations;
- functional recovery of urban spaces for the realisation of social centres and initiatives managed by young people; re-adaptation of historical centres with the contribution of young people;
- coordinating and increasing the presence of the youth within European and international agencies;
- training for active citizenship.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Piano nazionale giovani*, set up in 1998 by a commission of the Department of Social Affairs for the formulation of a basic law on youth policies. On-line: <http://www.exodus.it/politichegiovani/pianonazio.htm>.

As was already pointed out above (see 2.5.), the bill on youth participation appoints the creation of a *Consiglio nazionale dei giovani* (National youth council), a form of participation and representation, with tasks of advice and proposal related to the youth policies introduced through the National plan. The representative role in particular has been largely discussed during the preparation of the bill.

Significant attention is also paid to participation within the *National plan of action and intervention for the protection and development of adolescents 2000-2001*. The government acknowledges the need for adolescents to be involved in societal transformations, and the lack of recognition that the world of the youth still suffers from. Moreover, in order to fight urban and social decay, spaces and occasions are to be created to experiment with young citizens' responsibilities, participation and forms of self-management.¹¹

In the schooling system, *Consulte* (Councils), a kind of representative student bodies at a provincial level, were introduced. Each secondary school institute has two representatives who are elected directly by their fellow pupils. Councils are an important step in the process transforming schools into realities promoting youth participation. Thanks to these Councils, schools can provide students with real opportunities of experimenting with forms of government and decision, enhancing their chances to be protagonists in their school life. Unfortunately, they have not succeeded in involving the majority of students so far.

Although the YOYO project acknowledgedly targets young adults mainly, it is important to mention recent initiatives in Italy aiming to involve children in the processes of social participation. *Law 285/1997* (see 2.5.) on childhood and adolescence (from 0 to 18 years of age) has launched and defined the concept of *participation project* which concerns both children and bodies and other local actors. Amongst the projects financed through the Funds allocated by the law, we can mention those for the *promotion of children's rights*, whose aim is to promote *children's and adolescents' participation in local community's life*. Under this law, a number of actions have been taken with the aim to set up *Consigli dei ragazzi* (Local youth councils) for community support.

Before closing the present chapter it is important to mention a traditional field of youth participation and self-management in Italy, namely *self-managed social centres*, rich with experiences and deserving further investigation. Created in the late Seventies by young groups "illegally" occupying unused buildings, these squats have soon turned into aggregation, cultural, discussion centres, and have sometimes been recognised by local authorities, thus becoming real alternative socio-economic and cultural networks. They are scattered throughout Italy and undoubtedly represent an important resource (though conflictual and anti-institutional at times) in the process of youth participation and *empowerment* in large cities (Moroni et al. 1995; AASTER et al (eds.) 1996). Lastly, the qualitative and quantitative impact of the mobilisation, this year, of hundreds of youth groups (catholic, secular, pacifist) against globalisation perverse effects. Such mobilisation is currently stimulating an intense debate over the most adequate instruments for an active participation of those associations constituting the diverse world of the *Italian Social Forum*. Italy's centre-right government's response to this new aggregation reality has unfortunately only been that of overt police repression and criminalisation of the movement, as episodes in Genoa last July clearly show.

¹¹ Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Department of Social Affairs, *Piano nazionale di azione e di interventi per la tutela dei diritti e lo sviluppo dei soggetti in età evolutiva 2000-2001* (law 451/1997).

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