

Becoming an adult in the new millennium

How the transition to adulthood has changed

Monica Santoro

12.1 Introduction

The process of transition to adulthood is comprised of different phases, such as entry into the labour market, leaving the parental home, forming a first union and entrance into parenthood (Modell *et al.*, 1976; Shanahan, 2000). It is acknowledged that, since the end of the seventies, the transition to adulthood has become more complex and less linear (Billari and Liefbroer, 2010; Kohli, 2007; Settersten Jr. and Ray, 2010). More specifically, the prolongation of educational paths, the difficult conditions of the labour market and the emergence of new family forms have changed profoundly, inducing a shift in the traditional transition model. These changes have occurred in different ways and on differing timescales in various European countries. For example, from the eighties onwards, the tendency to prolong permanence in the family of origin has become more pronounced in the whole Western world, especially among young people aged 25 to 34 (Furstenberg Jr., 2010; Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005), although this phenomenon has had a higher intensity in Southern Europe (especially Italy, Greece and Spain) (Cherlin *et al.*, 1997).

This chapter reports on the findings of two studies carried out in 2003 and 2013 respectively, which both focus on the transition of young Italians into adulthood. The comparison of the two projects provide an insight into several changes in the transitional pathways, especially on how the transition from school to employment and moving out from the parental home are dealt with. Before presenting the results, I will provide some data that will be useful in characterizing the conditions of young people in Italy in contrast to their counterparts in Europe. The data is indicative of transformations that have occurred in the family, education and employment status in the course of the decade from 2003 to 2013.

12.2 Transition to adulthood in Europe

There are two distinctive traits in the transitional model of young people in Italy: the fact that financial independence does not lead to leaving the parental home and the widespread absence of living arrangements that differ from cohabitation

with parents prior to marriage. Since the start of the new millennium, cohabitation before marriage or experiencing periods of independent living after achieving financial independence have become increasingly common choices in cities within Central and Northern Italy (Santoro, 2012). However, Italy remains one of the European countries with the highest percentage of young people (aged 18–34) who live with their parents (in 2014 68.8% of male and 57.6% of female adults) (ISTAT, 2015).

Cavalli and Galland (1995) consider the Italian model of transition as an example of the so-called Mediterranean model, counterposed by the Nordic model. Prolonged permanence in the family and the synchronicity of the phases of leaving the parental home and marriage define the transitional model in Southern European countries (Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal). In contrast, the Nordic model is characterized by a pronounced experimental phase in which young people adopt various living and family arrangements (including cohabitation with friends during the university period, cohabitation with a partner before marriage or solo living).

Because of the recession and the increased rates of youth unemployment in all Western countries, a prolonged permanence in the family of origin has been observed. It is interesting to note that Furstenberg (2008) coined the phrase ‘Italianization of transition to adulthood’ to indicate how pervasive this trend is in Italy, as observed in previous chapters of this book. As a result of this deferral of home-leaving that frequently occurs in Italy, young people typically enter into a union and parenthood at a later age than in the past. Numerous comparative studies between different European countries have highlighted the widespread nature of this destandardization of the phases of the transition into adulthood (Billari and Wilson, 2001; Elzinga and Liefbroer, 2007).

Recently, social scientists have increasingly focused on the emerging models of transitions to adulthood than the differences between countries. Although they do not deny the differences persisting between Southern, Northern and Central European countries, they have also identified some common trends in the transitional pathways. Billari and Liefbroer (2010) estimate that the new transition model is late, protracted and complex. Late, because many events occur with a delay, and they are protracted because the timespan between leaving the parental home and the birth of the first child has been prolonged, and finally complex, because during the transition many events happen, and some of them repeatedly.

In contexts that are particularly difficult from a labour-market perspective, the experimental dimension characterizes many transitional phases. In such cases, the traditional transition model based on the consequential achievement of different phases and on the separation between youth and adulthood is of little help to understand the orientation strategies of young people. Boundaries between the different transition phases are porous and not all of them appear to lead to taking on adult roles. Young Italians go through experimental phases where they are confronted with adult roles and new experiences. New ways

of building their work and family paths emerge, where precariousness and uncertainty are not necessarily a suspension of adulthood (Cuzzocrea and Magaraggia, 2013). This trend has been observed in previous chapters of this book.

12.3 Data on young Europeans

In 2013, the youth unemployment rate in the European Union (EU) peaked at 23% for people in the 15–24 age range. In the years that followed, the steady decrease of this percentage appeared to have marked the end of the recession for most European countries. However, for some countries and most of those in Southern Europe, recovery from the recession has yet to occur. In 2015, the youth unemployment rate in Italy amounted to 40% (30% in the 15–29 age range). This is one of the highest rates in the EU and is only better than that of Greece and Spain. In addition, Italy ranked highest in Europe for the number of those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). In 2015, the percentage of young NEET aged between 15 and 24 was 21.4% (this figure rose to 31% in the 20–24 age range) (Eurostat, 2016b), whereas in Greece and Spain these figures were 17.2% and 15.6%, respectively (Eurofound, 2016).

With regard to education, Italy is far from reaching the targets set in the Europe 2020 Strategy – the EU Strategy for Jobs and Growth – which focuses on increasing tertiary educational attainment to at least 40% and reducing the share of early school leavers to less than 10% by 2020. In Italy, although the share of early school leavers who obtained only a lower secondary level of education has steadily declined over the years, this figure is currently over-target at 15% (23.1% in 2004) (European Commission, 2012; Eurostat, 2016a). Additionally, although the percentage of university graduates continues to increase, it is still far from the European targets: in 2015, only 25.3% of young Italians aged between 30 and 34 had obtained a university degree, compared to a European average of 38.7% (Eurostat, 2016a).

As an effect of the recession, the phenomenon of prolonged permanence in the family of origin has grown substantially, especially among young adults: in 2015, 38.3% of young males and 23% of young females aged between 30 and 34 still lived in the parental home (ISTAT, 2015). Arguably, the decision to remain under the parental roof no longer appears to represent free choice but rather a solution to circumstantial issues. An ISTAT survey examining the reasons for deferred home-leaving reveal a decrease in the percentage of young people stating their satisfaction with living at home, whereas there was an increase in the number of those who declared they remained due to contingencies (especially unemployment, and not being able to afford housing costs) (ISTAT, 2009).

Prolonged permanence in the family of origin has the effect of postponing family choices (ISTAT, 2014a). For example, Italy has the lowest percentage of young people aged between 18 and 34 years who live as a married or cohabiting

couple (Mauceri and Valentini, 2010; Eurostat, 2010). The postponement in entering the first union is therefore considered as one of the reasons underlying the very low Italian fertility rate (1.35 children per woman in 2015), together with the low incidence of prenuptial cohabitation (ISTAT, 2016c; Santoro, 2012).

12.4 The case studies

The two pieces of research on which I will draw my analysis herein are both based on qualitative data. The first research, ‘Families and transitions in Europe (FATE)’, was carried out in 2003 with the funds of the European Commission within the Fifth Framework Programme (European Commission, 2007). It involved in-depth interviews with 40 young people who had finished their educational path in the previous year – or were finishing – and were therefore on the verge of entering the labour market or had just entered employment. At an early stage of the research, a questionnaire had been given to approximately 100 young people attending the final year of secondary school or university. One year later, 24 of these participants (12 females and 12 males) were contacted again for an in-depth interview. The remainder of the sample was comprised of participants who had graduated from university the previous year. The recruitment of the young graduates was obtained using the snowball sampling method. All the participants lived in Milan, the second largest Italian city by territory and population. The age range of the interviewees was between 19 and 34 years (Leccardi *et al.*, 2004). The main aim of the research was to look into the processes through which young people make their most important life decisions in view of their assumption of adult roles. In this respect, there was a specific focus on the school to work transition.

The second piece of research was carried out between 2013 and 2014 and was funded by the Ministry for Universities, in the context of Research Projects of National Interest (PRIN), involving a study of 65 young people aged between 18 and 32. Unlike the sample of participants of the previous study, these participants were contacted 3 years after the completion of their education. The university graduates were recruited using lists supplied by University of Milan and the snowball sampling method; whereas the qualified secondary school leavers and young school dropouts who were attending training courses were obtained through the Afol centres in Milan (Metropolitan Agency for training) and Vocational Training Centres.

In certain respects, the two pieces of research are not immediately comparable. First, a difference is apparent in the differing number of participants, comprising 64 in the second study, compared to 40 in the first. Additionally, a lack of uniformity of educational pathways derived from the differing sampling and recruitment methods. Moreover, in the earlier study, the participants were contacted a year after completing secondary school, meaning that they had all obtained a secondary-school diploma. Whereas in the later study, some participants had no secondary-school qualifications. Having dropped out of school, they were

attending training courses with the aim of achieving vocational qualifications. However, this lack of uniformity can also be partially linked to the reform of the educational system that occurred during the intervening decade, which will be described in the following section. In spite of these differences, the analysis of the results has allowed light to be shed on some changes in the transition processes, both at a structural level (transformation of the labour market and the educational system) and at an individual level (biographical choices), which will be developed in the conclusion section.

12.5 The educational system

Within the 10-year time frame from 2003 to 2013, the conditions of young Italians have undergone significant transformations. In the year 2000, the Italian educational system launched the reorganization of university courses. They are no longer based on a single cycle, which variably lasted from 4 to 6 years, but rather consisting of two distinct cycles. The first of which represents an undergraduate qualification and lasts for 3 years, with the option of following on with a post-graduate degree, lasting 2 years. This allowed university students who obtained a (3-year) bachelor's degree to enter the labour market within a shorter timescale than with the previous single-cycle university system. This is the specific reason that in the 2013 research the degree-holding participants were younger than those in the previous study.

In 2003, further reforms to the educational system were implemented. A greater autonomy in terms of the organization of qualifications was conferred to the Regions.¹ In the Lombardy Region, where the participants were based, a professional qualification is awarded after attending a vocational institute for a 5-year course. This type of qualification can only be obtained by the age of 18 or higher and allows access to both the labour market and to university – this latter feature making the system more open in theory than other countries in Europe. Other than this professional qualification, young Italians can opt for other educational institutes, called lyceums and technical institutes. The lyceum is a preparatory school for university, whereas the technical institutes focus more on providing a high standard of vocational training, although they also grant formal access to university. Students who fail to obtain any of these 5-year qualifications and drop out of school earlier are instead steered towards alternative training programmes, combining theoretical lessons with training internships in companies. In this case, upon completion of a 3- or 4-year training course, a vocational qualification is obtained.

12.6 Education and work paths of young interviewees

The first distinctive feature differentiating the two samples concerns the employment status of the participants. In 2003, the most commonly reported status of interviewees was 'student' (12 participants). The decision to enrol in university,

especially for those participants who had obtained a professional diploma, took the form of a short-term experimental response while waiting to find employment. This trial-and-error attitude was partially an effect of the then recent university reform, where an increasing number of curricula had been introduced, that were able to better satisfy the demand for specific interests. For the participants, obtaining a degree also represented a key factor for upward social mobility. For the participants' parents' generation, obtaining a university degree was less common, and this explains why families perceived the attainment of a degree by their children as an improvement in their social status. In 2004, only 23% of students had obtained a first university degree, compared with an OECD average of 32% (OECD, 2004). In 2017, the share of young adults aged 25–34 with a tertiary degree was 27%, lower than other OECD countries (OECD, 2018). In this sense, less importance was assigned to the type of subject chosen; what counted most in their accounts was that they managed to obtain a university degree, which was perceived as representing a guarantee to be able to find a job and improve their social status. Moreover, compared to those who attained a secondary-school diploma, a university education also offered greater opportunities for finding a job.

Until the very last minute, I still didn't know whether to start working and therefore start earning. Then, the fact of standing out from the crowd and gaining more knowledge than others, encouraged me to continue education, also because if you don't have a degree, I don't think you're able to find a job very easily... I like being, well, I think everybody would like to belong to the higher strata of society. (Giovanna, 20 years old, studying Foreign Languages, interviewed in 2003)

Several young people admitted that it was their parents who actively encouraged them to attend university, convinced that a degree, other than offering greater job opportunities, was also a key element of social prestige. In a country where attending university is still a choice for the privileged few and where previous generations had difficulties in accessing university education, a son or a daughter holding a degree represents a conquest. It is an instrument to improve social status.

Actually, there was some encouragement to start university from my parents; especially dad, he really wanted me to continue my education. (Cinzia, 20 years old, doing Arts and Cultural Management Studies, interviewed in 2003)

A decade later, a university degree is no longer perceived as an instrument providing upward social mobility, nor as a guarantee of accessing the labour market. For young people from a privileged social-economical background, obtaining a degree is a set course that has been planned since the choice of secondary

education. At the other end of the spectrum, for young people from less-privileged social strata, the best decision is deemed to be the acquisition of work experience rather than education. More specifically, witnessing friends or family members working in low-paid jobs or in jobs which were at odds with the educational level acquired, had further strengthened the belief in the futility of a university education.

Nowadays in Italy a degree is useless, no one could care less. My cousin has a degree and what does he do? Nothing, absolutely nothing. Others work as waiters, so what? (Federico, aged 18, apprentice mechanic, interviewed in 2013)

They always told me that without a secondary school diploma, you're going nowhere. I see people, my friends with a diploma, my cousin with a degree, not going anywhere. They work like I did, as a waiter. And so, I see them and say, what am I supposed to do, do I have to study until I'm 30... you know, there are people who study engineering and then end up working as waiters. (Rocco, aged 21, apprentice plumber, interviewed in 2013)

From this viewpoint, Italy differs from other countries because throughout the decade 2007–2017 the employment prospects for young graduates have worsened. Indeed, the employment rate of young graduates in Italy is much lower than that of the graduates aged about 60 (OECD, 2018). National data confirms the increasing (and worrying) disenchantment of young Italians towards university education, particularly in the central-northern regions, those very areas of the country where employment rates are highest. It has been calculated that between 2003–2004 and 2014–2015 new enrolments in university have decreased by 60,000 students, reaching a record low of less than 260,000 students in total (–20.4%) (Fondazione Res, 2016; ISTAT, 2016a).

Even those who had obtained a university degree expressed deep concerns about a hostile labour market that is also poorly receptive to specific areas of specialization. In Italy, those holding a degree in the arts or humanities are usually the ones who are more highly penalized by the labour market (ISTAT, 2016b). However, the narratives emerging from the interviews were crystal clear about the obstacles that also faced by those holding a degree in several scientific fields. For example, Fausta had a degree in Veterinary Medicine, but had been unable to find employment as a veterinarian. Therefore, she planned to transform her hobby for photography into a business:

In my sector there's too much competition, too many graduates in Veterinary Science. I'm giving myself one more year to succeed; after that I'm going to try to do something else. Anything else at that point, anything else. I also have a hobby for photography; I must admit that I occasionally work as a wedding photographer. (Fausta, aged 30, interviewed in 2013)

This is similar to the experience of another female respondent, who had a degree in Biological Sciences:

I was working in the university lab without any type of contract or salary. At the same time, I had begun working in this shop just after my degree, it's a brand in the luxury fashion sector, and they offered me a job with a permanent contract and I accepted without giving a second thought. (Bianca, aged 26, interviewed in 2013)

In Italy, the phenomenon of accepting jobs where the skills required to perform the job are lower than the academic qualifications attained (Murgia and Poggio, 2014), is fairly widespread among younger generations (in 2013, 34.2% of young people in the 15–34 age bracket) (ISTAT, 2014b). In Lombardy in particular, this is especially relevant among people aged 25 to 34 (21.6%) (Cerea *et al.*, 2015). Overqualification is also the subject of [Chapter 5](#) of this collection, by Lara Maestripieri, so I will concentrate here more specifically on the effect of this trend on the more general transition to adulthood.

In 2003, the participants perceived university education as representing the route to achieve an occupation, providing good financial and social rewards. In the same manner, even for those who had attained secondary-school qualifications and wanted to enter the labour market, attaining a vocational diploma was seen as a valid instrument to be able to perform qualified manual work. They managed to move on from their initial low-paid temporary jobs by acquiring work experience and thus improved their employment prospects. Indeed, apprenticeship represented a valid route to obtain regular employment.

I'm now working as an apprentice accountant in an accountancy firm, which is what I studied to be... The only thing is that they employed me as an apprentice, so they pay me less money... I think that above all, I'll get a regular job, because they assured me they would give me a permanent contract. (Valeria, aged 19, interviewed in 2003)

One decade later, young people with vocational qualifications are the most disadvantaged in the labour market and appear to have lost the opportunity to improve their job prospects, even after acquiring work experience. Their narratives described a range of strategies, such as switching jobs continuously, undertaking employment through short-term contracts lasting just a few months, accepting unpaid working hours and getting involved in difficult relationships with employers and colleagues.

Some exceptions are those young people who were able to create alternative career pathways by fiercely exploiting their skills and setting up their own businesses. For example, Virginia, aged 20, after attaining a lower-secondary-school qualification, attended a regional fashion and tailoring course and then started to design her own patterns. At the time of the interview, she had just opened her

own business, together with a partner, in a property she inherited from her grandmother. Or as in the case of Fabio, aged 18, who after attending a car mechanics training course organized by the Region, had undertaken an apprenticeship in a luxury car workshop. He was attending online courses of a renowned car manufacturer, with the hope of being accepted for an internship in the United Kingdom. Two other young degree holders had created their own business ventures. Enrico was 28 years old and a graduate in Economics; he began promoting events on behalf of several companies and decided to become self-employed by setting up a company to promote cultural events dedicated to young people. Cosimo, aged 27, with a degree in Communication Sciences, opened a recording studio for young artists by using his skills as a sound technician acquired by attending several courses whilst he was still a university student. What characterizes the initiatives of these young people was being original and distinguishing themselves in the activity that they carried out. In this way, they could be successful by combining professionalism and entrepreneurial ability.

12.7 Family

In the timespan of just over a decade, the employment perspectives of young people have worsened, whereas the family situation shows some openness towards greater independence of young people from their family of origin. The housing and family circumstances, observed in the young participants interviewed 10 years later, is the element of greater difference between the two samples. Among the participants in 2003, only one young 31-year-old woman lived alone, and another two participants had tried moving out of the family of origin to then return to live with their parents. None of the participants were married nor had children. Conversely, among the participants interviewed in 2013, 27 had moved out of the parental home. More specifically, 11 lived alone, 3 shared a house, 10 lived with their partner and 3 were married. None of them had children.

Among those still living with their parents, the desire to leave home was widespread, and they expressed the intention to do so as soon, as their employment situation would allow them to do so. Conversely, the young people interviewed in 2003 had imagined that they would leave home once they had achieved a certain level of stability in their personal and financial situation. Therefore, cohabitation with a partner (if not marriage) or a job opportunity in another city would have been the main reasons to achieve independent living.

There are many difficulties to face... without a job and without money, I would bite off more than I could chew... the problem would be finding a regular job that would enable me to be financially independent and start living together... (Claudio, aged 20, accountant with a fixed-term contract, interviewed in 2003)

I don't know if I'll leave my parents' house, I just don't like the thought of living alone... Unless something special occurs, like finding a job somewhere

far away, I'm not going to live on my own. Perhaps I would go and live with a partner, so that I wouldn't be alone. (Roberto, aged 29, university degree, working under a fixed-term contract, interviewed in 2003)

The projections of a future family refer to a linear transition pattern where housing choices are subordinated to affective choices. Ten years later, the young participants appeared to be eager to leave the family of origin, and this was regardless of their employment or family situation:

Even if I'm at ease at home, with Mum who does everything... I repeat, being independent is something I really like. Living alone is great. Perhaps I'll be little homesick... but I think I can cope. (Francesco, aged 20, apprentice hairdresser, interviewed in 2013)

I've been living alone for four months, with a female roommate... After having lived in London, there you are independent, can do whatever you want... it triggered that desire to move out and live alone, and so as soon as the chance came up... thanks to the two jobs and anyhow finding a house I liked close to work. (Giovanna, aged 27, university degree, office worker, interviewed in 2013)

About 6 months ago, due to me wanting to move into my own place, I moved to the suburbs, slightly outside Milan where the rent costs less. With my job I can get by, it's fixed-term, but up until now I've always had an income. (Ginevra, aged 30, university degree, interviewed in 2013)

As can be surmised from these accounts, being employed under a fixed-term contract did not necessarily enable participants to achieve independent living. For example, some participants were doing odd-jobs in the evenings or at the weekends, in addition to their day job, just so that they could manage to pay the rent.

The greater propensity towards achieving independent living could indicate a shift in the process of becoming adults. In general, leaving home could be perceived as an important step in becoming and feeling independent. However, Cicchelli and Merico (2007) have stressed that in the Italian case prolonging the stay with the family does not compromise the achievement of independence for young people, which also explains the high percentage of young people living with their parents. Although marriage and life as a couple retain their importance as a phase in the transition to adulthood, these stages are no longer portrayed as marking the transition to independent living. An emerging trend of new housing strategies has been observed, such as living with a roommate, living alone or with a partner, all of which were, until quite recently, a rarity among young Italians (Santoro, 2012). On the other hand, this multiplication of living arrangements can also be seen as a response to the difficulties faced by the younger generations in the labour market.

Up until a short time ago, postponing moving out of the parental home was tolerated because occupational instability was limited to the initial phases of entry

into the labour market; the recent recession has rendered the route to full financial independence rather obstacle prone. Therefore, young people circumvent the obstacles represented by employment instability by opting for temporary and experimental living arrangements. Frequently, young Italians are also spurred towards these types of living arrangements due to the declining financial conditions of their parents, who can no longer manage to provide financial support to their children in purchasing a property, as was often the case in Italy (Santoro, 2015). To further illustrate this, it should be noted that among the interviewees who were employed, some declared that they gave a part of their salary (and in one case, in full) to their parents. In 2013, this custom was particularly widespread among young people from the lower social classes, although this was unheard of among the young participants from 2003, regardless of their social class of origin.

12.8 Conclusions

Over the course of the last 15 years in Italy, significant reforms in education and training have been implemented in Italy. They were intended to improve the educational levels of young generations and thus facilitate their entry into the labour market, implying that it was the lack of proper educational level if they were unemployed or underemployed. Indeed, the educational level of young Italians has improved during this period, just as the percentage of university graduates has increased. However, the labour market did not seem able to value and exploit this qualified human capital.

Young people with qualifications or a vocational degree who enter employment are often employed in lower-ranking roles, with scarce opportunities to improve their career prospects. Reflecting on the two pieces of research examined in this chapter, one can see how, despite the increase in training opportunities, the current young generations have lost faith in the usefulness of education, particularly in university education. Inversely, even if the increasingly widespread fixed-term employment contracts and lack of employment stability were perceived to be problematic, participants in the 2003 study still believed that university qualifications were important to be able to successfully deal with these uncertainties. This is an important orientation, which suggests a certain relation to wider society. A decade later, uncertainty is widely acknowledged to be the common situation in which all young people find themselves, regardless of the educational level attained, a situation that they can adapt to and within which they pursue their projects.

The young participants in 2003 appeared to be anchored to the concept of a linear and traditional transition, to be completed through marriage and parenthood. Even the participants in 2013 appeared inclined to this same route, or at least were not rejecting it. However, even though forming a family or entering a stable romantic relationship preserves its importance as a key milestone in life plans, young Italians interviewed in 2013 showed a marked propensity to undergo these

events through a cohabitation period, seen as a temporary experiment. This also explains why, as mentioned before, the increase of this family form among young Italians has occurred in recent years (ISTAT, 2015; Santoro, 2015).

In this scenario, what kinds of pathways to transition then emerge after these socio-economic changes? The social class of origin and educational levels continue to be significant in determining the transition processes, above all in the period in which young people's conditions have worsened. Not only do the young participants coming from families in a high social class manage to achieve higher educational qualifications, but compared to the past, they also manage to complete the final stages of the transition in a shorter time frame. The prolongation of the educational phase is partially compensated by achieving independent living at an earlier stage, not necessarily accompanied by entry into their first union. Prior to the recession, young people with lower educational levels were able to complete a linear and swift transition due to their early entry into employment and, once they had achieved financial independence, to leave the parental home. Conversely, among the most-recent participants, those young people from working-class backgrounds and the lowest educational qualifications had the most tortuous trajectories and had to necessarily prolong their permanence in the family home. The occupational condition of the dropouts – early school-leavers who took training courses and were inserted in low-paid apprenticeships – were particularly vulnerable, and they did not always have the certainty of obtaining a stable job once their training ended.

The ways that the transition to adulthood is achieved depends to a great degree on the ability to adapt to environmental uncertainty. The adaptation process comprises putting into effect various strategies, one of which infers curbing expectations. This is an adaptive process that can also lead to putting ones' expectations aside to embrace or exploit opportunities unrelated to the educational level attained. For example, some graduates had accepted or were prepared to accept low skilled, low-paid jobs, which were unrelated to the university qualifications achieved in order to proceed with their transition. Others took on more than one job, as this seemed the only viable way to achieve financial independence. This curbing of expectations may have also contributed to many looking for opportunities abroad, following the example of friends and acquaintances who had emigrated. Emigration is seen as a viable solution for young people, as shown in a recent research on how 18-year-old young people imagined their future (Cuzzocrea, 2018). In the space of 5 years, the number of Italians who emigrated steadily grew, reaching the figure of 100,000 in 2015 (compared to 80,000 in 2013) (ISTAT, 2014c, 2016d), mainly concentrated in the 20–45 age span (Santoro, 2020). To conclude, some young people managed to modify their trajectories by means of innovative solutions. More specifically, they sidestepped the employment crisis by investing their skills in original and successful initiatives. The opportunity to fulfil these types of initiatives was often subordinated to the availability of family resources, channelled into the start-up of these business ventures. One participant, Virginia,

was a prime example of such behaviour; thanks to being able to make use of family property, she was able to open her own dressmaking business.

The recession has accentuated the individualized approach to the transition to adulthood. If before the crisis young people still showed an adherence to a traditional transition model and the various phases were assumed to follow each other sequentially (finishing education, entering into the labour market, forming a first union, leaving the parental home), after the crisis not only has it become increasingly difficult to follow such a trajectory, but young people themselves have abandoned a *life plan* based on this model, signalling a shift in their aspirations. In this sense, it appears that young Italians are aware of the high improbability that they will benefit from the same (favourable) circumstances of previous generations, which led this model to prosper. For this very reason, they are forced to plan their lives within a context of greater constraints and fewer opportunities.

Note

- 1 The Italian educational and training system is organized in accordance to the principles of subsidiarity and autonomy of educational institutions. The State has exclusive legislative power for the 'general rules for education', while the Regions have exclusive legislative powers over vocational education and training. Law n. 53/2003 lays down the obligation for education and training for at least 12 years or until the achievement of at least a 3-year vocational qualification by the age of 18. This obligation can be fulfilled in three ways: in the 5-year secondary-school system (lyceums, vocational institutes and technical institutes) aimed at obtaining a diploma that allows access to university; in the 3- or 4-year regional educational and vocational training system aimed at obtaining a vocational qualification (level EQF3) or a vocational diploma (EQF4). Finally, usually the educational path also foresees the possibility to obtain an apprenticeship contract for youths aged between 15 and 19.

References

- Billari, F.C. and Liefbroer, A.C. (2010). Towards a new pattern of transition to adulthood? *Advances in Life Course Research*, 15(2–3), 59–75.
- Billari, F.C. and Wilson, C. (2001). Convergence towards diversity? Cohort dynamics in the transition to adulthood in contemporary, Western Europe. MPIDR Working Paper WP 2001-039, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Rostock. Available at: <http://www.demogr.mpg.de/papers/working/wp-2001-039.pdf>.
- Cavalli, A. and Galland, O. (eds) (1995). *Youth in Europe*. London: Pinter.
- Cerea, S., Maestripietri, L. and Ranci, C. (2015). *Le azioni di social investment a Milano: Un'analisi del mismatch fra offerta qualificata e domanda del mercato e un bilancio delle misure per contrastarlo*. Milano: Camera di Commercio, Paper, available at: <http://www.milomb.camcom.it/documents/10157/26557655/rapporto-Ranci-2015.pdf>.
- Cherlin, A.J., Scabini, E., and Rossi, G. (1997). Still in the nest: Delayed home leaving in Europe and the United States. *Journal of Family Issues*, 18(6), 572–575.
- Cicchelli, V. and Merico, M. (2007). Le passage tardif à l'âge adulte des Italiens entre maintien du modèle traditionnel et individualisation des trajectoires biographiques. *Horizons stratégiques*, 4(2), 70–87.

- Cuzzocrea, V. (2018). 'Rooted mobilities' in young people's narratives of the future: A peripheral case. *Current Sociology*, 66(7), 1106–1123.
- Cuzzocrea, V. and Magaraggia, S. (2013). Challenging the inevitability of the threshold approach: Experiences of work and parenthood among young adults in Italy. In: Nicolas, A., Flaherty, I. and Crouch, M. (eds) *Trajectories in Time: Chronology, Age, and Visions of the Life-Course*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.
- Elzinga, C.H. and Liefbroer, A.C. (2007). De-standardization of family-life trajectories of young adults: A cross-national comparison using sequence analysis. *European Journal of Population*, 23(3–4), 225–250.
- Eurofound. (2016). *Exploring the diversity of NEETs*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- European Commission. (2007). *Families and Transitions in Europe: FATE Final Report*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- European Commission. (2012). *EU Youth Report: 2012*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Eurostat. (2010). 51 Million Young EU Adults Lived with their Parent(s) in 2008. *Statistics in Focus*, n. 50, Luxembourg: European Commission.
- Eurostat. (2016a). *Eurostat Regional Yearbook 2016 Edition*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Eurostat. (2016b). Education, employment, both or neither? What are young people doing in the EU? Patterns substantially change by age and over time. *Newsrelease*, n. 155, 11 August.
- Fondazione Res. (2016). *Università in declino: Un'indagine sugli atenei da Nord a Sud*. Rome: Donzelli.
- Furstenberg, F.F. (2008). Generational inheritance of children and youth in a changing world, ESF-LiU Conference: *The Transfer of Resources across Generations: Family, Income, Human Capital and Children's Wellbeing*, Vadstena, Sweden, 9–13 June.
- Furstenberg, F.F. Jr. (2010). On a new schedule: Transitions to adulthood and family change. *The Future of Children*, 20(1), 67–87.
- Holdsworth, C. and Morgan, D. (2005). *Transitions in Context: Leaving Home, Independence and Adulthood*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- ISTAT. (2009). *Famiglia e soggetti sociali*. Rome: ISTAT.
- ISTAT. (2014a). *Generazioni a confronto: come cambiano i percorsi verso la vita adulta*. Rome: ISTAT.
- ISTAT. (2014b). *Rapporto annuale 2014: la situazione del Paese*. Rome: ISTAT.
- ISTAT. (2014c). *Migrazioni internazionali e interne della popolazione residente. Anno 2013*. Statistiche report, Rome: ISTAT.
- ISTAT. (2015). *Aspetti della vita quotidiana*. Rome: ISTAT.
- ISTAT. (2016a). *Studenti e bacini universitari*. Rome: ISTAT.
- ISTAT. (2016b). *I percorsi di studio e di lavoro dei diplomati e dei laureati*. Statistiche Report, 29 September, Rome: ISTAT.
- ISTAT. (2016c). *Natalità e fecondità della popolazione residente: anno 2015*. Statistiche Report, 28 November, Rome: ISTAT.
- ISTAT. (2016d). *Migrazioni internazionali e interne della popolazione residente. Anno 2015*. Statistiche report, Rome: ISTAT.
- Kohli, M. (2007). The institutionalization of the life course: Looking back to look ahead. *Research in Human Development*, 4(3–4), 253–271.

- Leccardi, C., Santoro, M. and Rusmini, G. (2004). *Families and Transitions in Europe – Italy National Report*. Working paper, Coleraine: University of Ulster.
- Mauceri, S. and Valentini, A. (2010). The European delay in transition to parenthood: The Italian case. *International Review of Sociology*, 20(1), 111–142.
- Modell, J., Furstenberg, F.F. Jr. and Hershberg, T. (1976). Social change and transitions to adulthood in historical perspective. *Journal of Family History*, 1(1), 7–32.
- Murgia, A. and Poggio, B. (2014). At risk of deskilling and trapped by passion: A picture of precarious highly educated young workers in Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. In: Antonucci, L., Hamilton, M. and Roberts, S. (eds) *Young People and Social Policy in Europe: Work and Welfare in Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- OECD. (2004). *Education at a Glance*. Paris: OECD.
- OECD. (2018). *Education at a Glance*, Paris: OECD.
- Santoro, M. (2012). *Le libere unioni in Italia*. Rome: Carocci.
- Santoro, M. (2015). The meanings of cohabitation in ‘low cohabitation land’: The case of Italy. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 4(1), 117–130.
- Santoro, M. (2020). Italian youth and the experience of highly qualified migration to the United Kingdom. In: Cairns, D. (ed.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Youth Mobility*, London: Palgrave Macmillan (forthcoming).
- Settersten, R.A. Jr. and Ray, B. (2010). What’s going on with young people today? The long and twisting path to adulthood. *The Future of Children*, 20(1), 19–41.
- Shanahan, M.J. (2000). Pathways to adulthood in changing societies: Variability and mechanisms in life course perspective. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26(1), 667–692.