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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE RI-ELABORATION OF THE COLLECTIVE SPHERE

New Paths of Sociality and Groups-formation Among the New Generations

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ABSTRACT: Goal of the article is to contribute to the understanding of the reinvention of politics in young generations moving from an in depth sociological examination of the change occurring in the structure of society and in its self-definition. The objective is to grasp the ambiguity and the ambivalence characterizing the ongoing scenery of change. To carry out this analysis, we will refer to Simmel's seminar theory of society as a network of relations and, along this line, to the contributions of authors such as Beck, Giddens, Touraine, Melucci, Castells, on the development of the late modernity and the network society. The hypothesis we follow is that the younger generations present multiple and original synthesis between subjectivity and the collective dimension. The emergence of reticular and fluid relations among individuals fosters the process of individualization and the same reinvention of the nature of social ties. We frame the qualitative transformation of the concept of "group" and "collective" as the culmination of a process of individuation, which does not entail a disappearance of intermediate groups, but that multiplies and radically alters their structure. Groups are more and more fluid and their borders porous. Individuals are no longer defined by their belonging to groups, as the same belonging to groups becomes a contingent and a negotiated act.

KEYWORDS: Youth; Individualization; Groups; Collective Sphere; Sociality

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1. Introduction

New generations, for a few decades now, have been considered individualized and politically apathetic. The second phenomenon is mostly considered to be a direct and unavoidable consequence of the first. The individualization process, according to this reading, is reflected in a weakening of social bonds and atrophy of social relations. On closer inspection, this unidirectional interpretational key – reductive under many aspects and mostly lacking "sociological imagination", has long been subject to criticism. Bettin Lattes, in 1999, invited to go past an "abused descriptive style, typical of too much research on Youth", to highlight how, particularly among young people, there are "Pioneers of a more reflective community that knows how to step back and evaluate with critical detachment the dominant social models transmitted by previous generations" (Bettin Lattes 1999: XIX). No longer, or not only, reduced to an image of "silent apathy", sometimes shaken by an "erratic violence", Youth, according to the author, forms a "moving kaleidoscope", stating a new "propensity towards being there, to publicly participating [...] in contrast to the full-blown silence of today's Youth" (Bettin Lattes 2001: 5-7). This article, adopting the perspective outlined by Bettin Lattes, locates within newer generations the protagonists of the re-elaboration of the collective sphere and the "reinvention" of politics. In agreement with Loader's theory of "cultural disconnection" (1997), we believe that if young people are disillusioned and emotionally detached from institutional politics, this should not be hastily interpreted as a "lack of interest on the part of youth with the political issues that influence their everyday life experience and their normative concerns for the planet and its inhabitants" (Loader et al 2014). The challenge is to contextualize, understand and explain the dynamics of political re-elaboration which takes shape in the diversification of repertoires of action, in the diffusion of unconventional practices of participation and non-formal involvement. We are witnessing a radical change of the repertoires of action and – more generally – a deep redefinition of the nature, objectives and the means with which collective action is designed and built. "New Social Movements", from the end of the Sixties, have been identified - as opposed to political parties - as the venues where new practices of participation were generated and new ways of thinking and of mobilizing the collective identity were ex-

¹ The contribution originates from a shared reflection. Andrea Pirni wrote the paragraphs 3 and 4; Luca Raffini wrote the paragraphs 1 and 2. Both wrote introduction and conclusion.

perimented. Nowadays, neither the fluid, unstructured and informal nature of "New Social Movements" seems to place itself in harmony with the nature and the meanings of contemporary forms of action, in the face of a full individualization of the practices of participation, of the growing marginalization of collective organizations and the increasing role assumed by networks.

Today, it has been suggested, the collective action takes shape as "organizing without organization" (Shirky 2008), in which the fluid connection between individuals, rather than a given collective belonging, or a firm attachment to a collective identity, acts as a glue (Rainie and Wellman 2013; Bennett and Segerberg 2013). An example of this type of mobilization, animated by publicly networked individuals rather than by members of organizations, are the *Indignados* and the *Occupy* movements. They can be conceived as an unstable creative space of collective identifications and subjectivity, rather than an expression of pre-existing and fixed identity and subjectivity.

Starting from this premise, the objective of the article is to contribute to the debate on the transformation of the relationship between young people and the collective dimension, starting from an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of social change.

We focus on the new morphology of the "social" and in how the representation of society and the way individuals experience the collective sphere change in the context of reflexive individualization and network society. The ambition is to critically investigate the ambiguities and ambivalences that characterize the current changing scenario, highlighting risks and opportunities.

In developing this type of analysis, we assume as theoretical central reference Simmel's theory of society as a network of relationships. Thus, we critically revise the main interpretations of the changing relationship between individuals and the collective dimension elaborated by authors such as Beck, Giddens, Castells, Melucci, Touraine. What brings these authors together is their analysis of the process of individualization as the result of a radicalization of modernity, which leads to the redefinition of the relationship between individual and society, between actors and social structure. The goal is to identify some major directions of change in the relationship between young people and the collective dimension. We suggest overcoming both the rhetoric of the apathetic youth, as much as the opposite rhetoric that looks at network society as a society where individuals - and especially young people - being hyper-connected - would be automatically and directly integrated and active, as imbued with a kind of "participatory culture", instead of the formerly predominant consumer culture (Jenkins 2011).

Behind the change in the forms and in the meanings of participation there is a broader and more general transformation of the forms of sociability, that is, in the ways social relations are built and in the nature of the self-placement of the individual within the

collective sphere. For this reason, we explore the "re-elaboration of the social" to search for the explanatory keys of the "reinvention of politics".

The first hypothesis identifies "horizontality" and permeability as the qualifying traits of the relationship between groups and between individuals and groups. The insertion of the former into the latter is less and less based on individual, stable and consolidated cohesion around the referenced values promoted by the actor and increasingly more the result of discontinuous and temporary actions from which the individual obtains resources of identity and sense. This feeds a de-structuring effect on the collective sphere, through the multiplication of the collective contexts in which the individual actor is inserted, and is reflected in a radical transformation of the forms of belonging. The second hypothesis suggests that this de-structured and "widespread" collective sphere promotes a weakening of the structures of sense that these transmit. The collective representations that are widespread in society result in being less highly-ordered and less compelling for the individual, to the point of impacting in the ways in which individuals represent society and the subjective way they relate with it, contributing to the "subjectivation" of the collective sphere. As a result, we observe a growing connection/overlapping between politics and other spheres of action, starting with the one most closely linked to every-day action. The third hypothesis, in contrast to the thesis of de-politicization, defines a scenery of growing salience of sociability practices, rather than their deterioration, just as a result of the disintegration of the collective sphere, of the emancipation from the higher-ordered structures of meaning, of the horizontalization of the relationship between private and public, and the de-differentiation of social subsystems.

2. The "reinvention" of social: individuals, networks, groups

Individualization is a key process that has always been at the center of the analysis of social change. In agreement with Pendenza et al. (2014) even today, to understand the transformations of the social bond in an individualized and globalized society, the considerations of the "classics" regarding the transformation of social morphology and the relationship between individuals and society, offer us valuable analytical tools, allowing to shed some light on its ambiguities and its ambivalence. The readings of the social and political change that reduce its complexity to "apocalyptic" or "enthusiastic" visions, by their nature are falling in some form of technological determinism and end up endorsing a hyper-individualized vision of the individual. Thinking of the theory of participatory culture (Jenkins 2011) or of Shirky's reflections on the creativity features and the sharing practices enabled by digital media and somehow intrinsic to network society (2010). The

main limitation of these theories is their sociological inconsistency. They are not rooted in a structured theory of social and political action and, more generally, in a theory of social change. It is a limit that, in part, can be extended to Bennett and Segerberg's theory of connective action (Bennett and Segerberg 2013, for a critical reading see Bakardjieva 2015). The risk we run in placing too much emphasis on the individual and in sanctioning the outright disappearance of the collective dimension of social life, in favor of a horizontal connection between individuals, is that of fostering an epistemological fallacy, assuming that the process of individualization involves the lesser influence of structures, or their very existence, while enshrining the overcoming of collective identities (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). Indeed:

While structures appear to have fragmented, changed their form and become increasingly obscure, we suggest that life chances and experiences can still largely be predicted using knowledge of individuals' locations within social structures: despite arguments to the contrary, class and gender divisions remain central to an understanding of life experiences (...). Although social structures, such as class, continue to shape life chances, these structures tend to become increasingly obscure as collectivist traditions weaken and individualist values intensify (ivi: 2).

Among the classics of sociology, Simmel can be considered the founder of a theoretical orientation that escapes the simple individual-collective dichotomy, investigating the qualitative transformation of the relationship between the individual and the collective sphere as part of a more complex process of redefining social morphology. The perspective adopted by Simmel, in hindsight, is the basis of Castell's theory of network society. According to Castells (1996), in the network society the central role of flows replaces the centrality of institutions. The network logic radically transformed the social experience of individuals, shaped production processes, dynamics of power, cultural practices. Also the conceptualization of the relationship between actor and structure on the behalf of the theorists of late modernity (Beck 1992; Giddens 1991) is in continuity with Simmel's lesson. Social change is interpreted as a radicalization of the effects of modernity rather than as an overcoming of it. The focus is on the qualitative transformation of the relationship between the individual and society, in open contrast with the theories of post-modernism, which celebrate the irreparable divorce between actor and structure. Anthony Giddens' theory of "structuration" identifies a co-determination relationship between actor and structure, recognizing both the power of the structures in shaping trajectories, actions, individual identity, as the ability of the individuals themselves, to pro-

duce (and not merely reproduce) society, retroacting on structures. The relationship between the individual and society thus assumes a dynamic key. The individual is reflexive and capable of exercising options of choice, not a mere reproducer of roles.

Alain Touraine addresses “de-socialization” and “de-institutionalization” as the key processes that define global society. The “dissolution of the mechanisms of belonging to groups and institutions capable of stabilizing their internal cohesion and managing their own transformations” (2004: 29) and the weakening of the transmission process for new generations of roles, norms and values that make up social life (1997) determine “the disappearance of society as an integral system and the bearer of a general sense”, that “seems to have given way to a diversity of micro groups and lifeworlds in a way that has profoundly destabilized sociologists” (McDonald 1998: 1). Again, the fragmentation of traditional identification, which is matched by the abstract universality of economic globalization, does not translate purely and simply in a disruptive individualization, but is the backdrop to an acquired autonomy of the individual, that fights to assert himself as a Subject and become the true center of social reality rather than the groups and institutions to which he belongs. The idea of a society composed by connected subjects contrasts the image of a social experience fragmented in a variety of microcultures, and threatened by the development of “neotribalism” (Maffesoli 1996) and a reassuring search for the “missing community” (Bauman 2007). The weakening of exogenous processes grants more freedom but also more responsibility to individuals. They constitute themselves as subjects through a dual act of self-affirmation, by their resistance and subtraction to all forms of determinism, by their refusal to be identified both as consumers and as community members. According to Touraine, the understanding of the transition from the “world of society” to the “world of actors” requires a paradigm shift in how we represent the individual and collective life, and we understand the relationship between the two dimensions. If the nation-state modernity was based on a social language, global society can be understood in terms of a cultural paradigm, in which even the major conflicts that have as protagonists the subjects assume this declination, both in the form of neocomunitarism, and through the development of new cultural type of claim. As the claims and conflicts have as their object the will of self-determination of the subject, and then take the form of acts of subjectivation, new social movements generate processes of collective subjectivation. They do not mobilize people around pre-determined collective identities. They express cultural claims. They allow for forms of collective action which create and mobilize collective identity and at the same time support the formation of individuals as subjects: “they refer to the same subjects, to their dignity and self-esteem, as a force of conjugation between instrumental roles and individuality” (Touraine 1994), opposing the community dictators and the dominance of the

global economy. Pleyers, following the tourainian teaching, analyzed the World Social Forum as "spaces of experience", in which participants shared the desire to constitute themselves as actors, with respect to the domain of anonymous reports and impersonal forces of neoliberal globalization. Activists are not pursuing a "merger" with a homogeneous collective identity, but conceive the diversity of individuality as a value, in a perspective of unity in difference (Pleyers 2010). They act as "free electrons", pursuing forms of "disembedded" participation. "Individuals keeping their distance from all association but reserving the right to interact as they see fit with groups and organizations which appear, temporarily, to correspond better to their ideas and the types of action they wish to take" (ivi: 48).

Melucci also identifies in "new social movements" the main cultural laboratories where new kinds of individual and collective subjectivation practices are experimented. Among the most important contributions that Melucci leaves us is the dual overcoming of the tendency to investigate collective action based on an analysis of its structural pre-conditions and the opposite approach, that studies it starting from the individual motivations of the participants, thus reproducing the traditional structure-actor dichotomy. Rather, the focus is on the collective construction and on the intersubjective meaningful mechanisms, namely, the "processes through which a collective becomes a collective" and through which people "give sense to their 'being together' and to the goals they pursue" (Melucci 1995: 43). If collective identity is a collective process, and not a pre-condition of collective action, it is within the networks and groups that we should study the mechanisms of production of subjectivity and identification. According to a social constructivist perspective, collective identity is conceived as a product of social interaction, which therefore loses its rigid and consistent connotation, to take the form of a continuous, fluid, unstable and contingent process, which Melucci defines as "identization", attributing it both an emotional dimension and a cognitive one (Kevada 2009). In summary, in the collective action we no longer look for the existence of a stable ideological consensus and the principle of unity between individuals who are part of it, but the ability of self-reflection on the behalf of a collective subject" (Bakardijeva 2015). Collective identity is radically transformed. It loses its fixity and stability traits but it does not disappear. Losing any essentialist definition, it becomes the contingent and fluid result of a continuous social construction process, which sees thoughtful individuals as protagonists engaged in a reorientation of their actions and in the construction of collective subjectivity. This characterization allows attributing a pre-figurative connotation to the movements formed on this basis, but it guided the same Melucci, twenty years ago, in his later contributions, to consider the concept of "new social movement" no longer able

to understand all new forms of participation, anticipating today's literature on "organizing without organization" (Shirky 2010), on "individualized political action" (Micheletti and McFarland 2010), on "networked individualism" (Rainie and Welmann 2013) and on "connective action" (Bennett and Segerberg 2013).

3. From identification as a given element to activation as a choice

If individual biography is the constantly reversible result of a choice, more so the individual's involvement in groups and networks, is the result of an act of choice, which is accomplished through processes of interaction and sharing. The identification and involvement in collective projects can be conceived as a reversible act of activation of relationships among the multiple and differentiated ones in which the individuals are inserted (Urry and Elliott 2010).

The distinctive feature of late modernity is that individuals have the freedom - and the responsibility - to choose between different options, to take part in projects and mobilizations that do not fully absorb their identity and prospects of life, which can be characterized by high intensity, but ever in the awareness of their potentially transient nature. Habits and rituals play a secondary role in the new social morphology. One identifies himself because he chooses to do so. One adheres to the extent that such an adhesion allows him to connect his individual project with a collective project. The group carries out, in this respect, the function of an ongoing process, rather than a solid anchor and takes on an individual process rather than a community one. It is configured almost the same way as a collective means of a subjective goal. The groups are increasingly less stable and consistent, customs and norms that order and regulate them are weakened, the identity that qualifies them is blurred. This will not only alter the relationship between individuals and groups, but the very notion of group and collective. The Simmelian theory on the relationship between pluralization and individualization of social networks seems to find fulfillment in the network society as the qualitative transformation of the concept of group and collective and, in our opinion, is at the culmination of a process of individualization that does not involve their disappearance of groups and networks but multiplies them and alters their structure.

The groups are increasingly fluid and their boundaries appear porous. Individuals are not defined by their membership because the same group membership becomes a contingent and negotiated act. The insertion into networks and groups is "instrumental" to the construction of a more general - and individual - process of social integration, or in other words to the individual's integration to the social fabric. Individuals adhere to

groups to the extent in which this allows them to exercise a transformative impact on reality. New forms of involvement are characterized by a "heterogeneity of condition and a non homogeneity of action (that) shatter the unity nature of young peoples' mobilizations but give greater specificity to their individual identities" (Melucci 1996: 43).

The collective identity construction process becomes an integral part of individual identity construction - providing the tools for the individual processes of subjectivation - and at the same time by placing individuals into meaningful relationships (Touraine 2004; Leccardi et al. 2011). Groups are "wardrobe communities" (Bentivegna 2011). They provide a constitutively contingent space of sharing. The weakening of traditional forms of identification, based on community membership, does not merely reflect the weakening of the social capital, but its qualitative transformation. We experience a transition from a society based on solid and relatively stable groups over time to a society founded prevalently on "weak" and flexible ties" (Granovetter 1973). Nevertheless, these weak ties "allow the affirmation of identity choices and the expression of forms of struggle and protest otherwise difficult to obtain in the absence of organizational structures" (Bentivegna 2011). The result is the emergence of a kind of "cultural and political nomadism", powered by physical and virtual mobility as part of a new social geography, at the center of which, more than territories, stands the individual with its connections (Elliott and Urry 2010). Network sociality progressively sides with, and replaces, "community-based" sociality (Wittel 2001).

In network sociality, social relations are not narrational but informational: they are not based on mutual experience or common history, but primarily on an exchange of data and on "catching up". Narratives are characterized by duration. Whereas information is defined by ephemerality. Network sociality consists of fleeting and transient, yet iterative social relations; of ephemeral but intense encounters. Narrative sociality often took place in bureaucratic organizations. In network sociality the social bond at work is not bureaucratic but informational: it is created on a project-by-project basis, by the movement of ideas, the establishment of only ever temporary standards and protocols (ivi).

The solidity and the temporal continuity of the groups fail. Personal experience appears to be less and less shaped by social institutions, and becomes rather the result of a continuous choice of the individuals, called to give biographical order to an otherwise incoherent and fragmented set of experiences and microcultures (Dubet 1994). The collective sphere is a continuous product at the center of which there are individuals who choose to participate through a contingent, provisional and negotiable act. The groups are defined as distinct actors from the outside because they are characterized by a specific agency and based on a network of active relationships (Melucci 1996), and they

provide the dynamic bindings that allow the individual to "choose" and therefore to constitute itself as subject. Within this new social morphology network communities assume relevance as "networks of interpersonal ties that ensure social conditions, support, access to information in addition to the sense of belonging and social identity" (Wellman 2002).

People have changed the way they interact with each other. They have become increasingly networked as individuals, rather than embedded in groups. In the world of networked individuals, it is the persons who is the focus: not the family, not the work unit, not the neighborhood, and not the social group (...). Small, densely knit groups like family, villages, and small organization have receded in recent generations. A different social order has emerged around social networks that are more diverse and less overlapping than those previous groups (Rainie and Welmann 2013: 6).

In a context where integration is not "given" but the result of a never-ending reflexive effort, the search for subjectivity leads to a "diverse and deeper need of socialization" (D'Ambrosi 2012). The connection to collective identity and the commitment in collective projects is never "taken for granted", but the result of a conscious choice, to be taken in front of a multiplicity of alternatives. Relations are "easy to start" but "harder to sustain", as networking requires time, work, energy to be fulfilled (Rainie and Welmann 2013, cfr. Elliott and Urry 2010).

Re-elaborating Touraine's thoughts, we can define network individualism as a reflexive, critical and procedural relationship with society, based on the double refusal of both the reduction of citizens in consumer of goods and global culture, and a in passive member of a superimposed identity.

4. Hypothesis of transformation of the collective sphere

The picture presented shows the traces of an ongoing profound change of the collective sphere. It is possible to provide a summary of its developmental guidelines focusing on the three points that, at the same time, represent the research hypotheses proposed with this contribution. One clarification is necessary: here we consider the collective sphere as a place of production of the sense of a society, the environment in which issues and interests - and with them the values - relevant for the social fabric, emerge. The collective sphere is, in this sense, necessarily political. We also believe that the collective dimension is not only able to specify the important issues of the interaction between collective actors but is it also performs a structuring - or de-structuring function on the

morphology of the social, as will be discussed in the following paragraphs. In other words, the collective sphere is able to shape the link between the individual and society.

The first hypothesis argues that the individualization of contemporary society intervenes on the collective dimension transforming its configuration. For now, the de-structuring effects of this dynamic are easily observable through the overall weakening of collective actors, particularly on the political level. This weakening is nourished by the different relationship between the individual and the group: this is always less and less based on the stable and consolidated individual participation surrounding the fundamental values promoted by the collective actor and increasingly depending on discontinuous and temporary actions from which the subject obtains identity and sense resources. This implies that the collective actors gradually lose authorities against the individual actor: who, in fact, finds himself not so much directing his action in a tight and ritualistic connection with structures of meaning on a higher-order than him in relation to other activating factors. There is, therefore, a disintegration of the collective sphere that is realized in a multiplication of collective contexts in which the individual actor overcomes the traditional sense of belonging. The subject acts in a more socially widespread and less standardized space where the options at his disposal as well as the possibilities of composing them attributing subjective coherence to the adopted action paths increase.

Traditional collective actors are structured vertically and linearly, basing themselves on specific affinities from which particular interests are moved; in relation to this the collective actors develop an internal organization on a basically hierarchical matrix where a decision-making summit maintains the link with the base, stimulating the confirmation of support.

This process produces well-defined and formalized collective actors who act in the public sphere with specific objectives pursued by safeguarding the maintenance of its own collective identifying. The weakening of these forms is connected with the aforementioned dynamics that rather tend to define collective actors horizontally. With this it is arguable that at the base of the stable over time identifying adhesion between subject and group there is no longer the – also stable over time – belonging – but a form of “identifying action” of the subject who disrupts the causality between identification and action.

In summary, the individual actor freeing himself from the higher-ordered meaning structures contributes to the making of a dense and articulate but de-standardized, widespread and fluid collective sphere that crystallizes in a specific morphology only when the subject decides to activate it through an identifying action. This type of action produces a horizontal and discontinuous morphology of the collective sphere where the

production of meaning does not structure itself within impermeable collective actors but transversely to them, on the basis of the identifying action of the individual actors.

Politics present many examples in this direction: think in the overcoming of mass parties and the spread of "catch-all" parties; in the dynamics of party re-composition in the traditional right-left poles, in one hand, and in the fragmentation in political actors which can be barely placed in traditional political space, in the other; in the nationalist or populist waves; in the spread of diversified social movements that tend to recombine within very generic coordinates; in the participation through the web; in individual mobilizations in specific and limited in time actions such as the flash mob, or collecting signatures for a petition. Political actors tend to react to this dynamic in a different way than in the past: having essentially lost the ability to structure and guide the production of meaning, and with it, the ability to stimulate the political support they act by "chasing" the elaboration that takes place on the social level. This undermines traditional political identities. These were capturing the input of a specific part of society and structuring it in goals, establishing then, on the basis of the authority of which they were defending, the way to reach them. The belonging-based political and election-related mobilization, was conventionally shared by the majority of other political formations. This favored the placement of individuals in the scenario of collective political actors on the basis of the goal they pursued. Today we have now established a number of ways of doing politics: the unconventional political action has spread far beyond the traditional one. The way in which politics are done is as important as the goal of the political action. Therefore, for this reason many individuals align themselves to a political orientation - in a mostly temporary fashion and without truly identifying themselves - based on the way politics are done.

The dynamism of the political sphere is, therefore, the effect of the dynamism of the collective sphere that deconstructs the geography of belonging and of the collective actors that compose it. This way the collective sphere appears fragmented and, within it, the boundaries between groups appear as flexible. Horizontality and permeability result, therefore, as qualifying traits of the relationship between groups and between individuals and groups.

The second hypothesis is linked, for the most part, to the previous one: the collective sphere, de-structured and widespread in terms of collective actors, bears a weakening of the structures of sense that these transmit so that total collective representations are widespread in society and appear less on a higher-order and less stringent for the individual. This stimulates the re-elaboration of asymmetries and overcomes boundaries in which it was traditionally divided in our society. It is believed, in fact, that the collective sphere represents the nexus with which the subject interacts with society through the

collective representations that it makes available. The lower regulatory capacity of collective representations implies a transformation, first of all on cognitive level, of the way in which individuals "feel" in society. A general and indirect acknowledgment of the implications of this dynamic comes from the increase in awareness campaigns promoted by the institutions on drug addiction, alcohol abuse, tobacco use, on proper nutrition, sexuality, lifestyle, on motor vehicle driving, on legality etc., mainly towards younger generations. The growth of corporate communications of this type denotes that some deviations are to rise in spite of the social orientation and conveyed collective representations in society have not changed position on it. Of course, this is connected to many other factors, but the purpose of our reflection notes that the socially transmitted model appears much less understood than in the past. Another trail in this direction comes from the relationship with religion: among those who consider themselves believers, a significant proportion has now stabilized as "non-practicing believers" or "committed exercisers" that outside of the religious sphere profoundly deviate from the values that their faith transmits. In essence, identifying action shifts increasingly toward the subjectivization, as a whole, of the collective sphere in the sense that the subject defines the configuration in a more flexible and liberal way than according to his belongings. Among the asymmetries that have helped define the structure of our society it is necessary to include that between public and private: the public dimension has long defined the source of a civil religion that was based on the centrality of the *res publica* and the higher-ordering over the individual. Paradigmatic, in this sense, is the - now substantially rhetoric - image of the civil servant. The superiority of the public compared to the subject was compensated by the first with the increasing protection of the latter's rights, or through increasing personal freedoms. It is not a coincidence that today some complicated political issues concern individual freedoms such as euthanasia, abortion, artificial insemination, adoption of children by homosexual couples, the use of light drugs, prostitution, gambling. Traditionally the subject approaches the public sphere by adopting a behavior that results from the expectations of his social representation. Surely common sense still plays a significant role in this regard, however, the way we relate the subject with the public sphere is more independent than in the past and, so to speak, secularized. In other words, the public dimension is drawn based on the subject. This produces a hybridization of the concepts of public and private which is realized by moving from an extension of the latter. In this sense, it produces a "projectivity" of the individual actor extending the representation of himself and his private life within the public sphere. The asymmetry between the two spheres is therefore reduced compared to the past as a result of the attribution by the individual to the public of a lesser regulatory capacity: given in this

direction is the exponential increase in the number of appeals against public administration and the multiplication of associations that deal with advocacy and protection of citizens' rights.

The "desacralization" of the public has important implications on the political sphere. This has been for a long time in social representations the specific and delimited means to intervene on the public. The political subsystem was characterized as the exclusive expression sphere of popular sovereignty carried out through the traditional process of agglutination of interests and articulation of the consensus through the parties. Today, through the modification of the collective sphere of which we have spoken, the prevalent perception of the political sphere appears to be more and more blurred, or not defined by distinct limits. The extension of non-conventional participation which we have referred to suggests a trace of this progressive dynamic. Another support for this interpretation comes from phenomena related to media hype and the spectacle of politics or the growing role of opinion leaders of non-partisan provenance: from this picture emerges a progressive hybridization of politics that connects more closely and in a less mitigated way with many other spheres of daily life. In this framework, political action dissolves, mixing itself with other forms of action by returning a landscape in which politics, the economy and society are recomposed and merged into the collective sphere. The holistic trend that pervades the relationship between individual and society faces the functional specialization in which this is structured. Some expressions of this tension towards a reformation in a hybrid form derive, per example, by the spreading of forms of participatory governance, social enterprise, the financing on the behalf of the state of voluntary associations for the provision of utility services. This way, a generalized hybridization of social subsystems in accordance with the disintegration of the collective sphere is confirmed.

This framework would seem to draw a hyper-individualized society in which the subject moves independently in an almost empty space that tends at not binding him; hence the adoption on the part of the individuals of self-referential behaviors that are nihilistic and narcissistic and, consequently, the decline of morality as well as values. Our third hypothesis is in complete contrast with this scenario. It is believed, in fact, that the disintegration of the collective sphere, the emancipation from the higher-ordered structures of meaning, the unfolding of the relationship between private and public, the decontainment of social subsystems implicates, rather, a growing appreciation of the relationships and of the forms of association.

Why would the unstructured collective sphere favor relationships? We believe that the reduction of the sense of identity belonging directs individual actors towards an exploratory conduct outside of their closer circle: it consists of the experiential contexts

that somehow bind to groups with which the subject interacts daily. Everyone has a close circle related to their work, to their family, to the place where they live: each of these areas involve the routine of actions and relationships. The act of identifying which has been discussed previously in contrast to the routinization of relations and moving towards new, original and unpublished experiential fields, for the subject. Hobbies are an effective precursor phenomenon of this dynamic that becomes even more concrete from involvement in voluntary associations to participation in diverse online communities. In essence, it is believed that the individual in relation to the perception of an external unconfined "space" tends to "jump the fence" of their close circle of projecting themselves in contexts that would be very unusual to a traditional reading. The dynamism of the subject outside of its proximity is not systematic or linear but may be activated in several directions according to a reticular pattern that assumes a variable and substantially unpredictable shape because elaborated subjectively autonomously. The individual actor does not move in this space as an acrobat in a circus jumping from one trapeze to another by clinging to a new support and completely abandoning the previous one, but he weaves a network of experiential contexts that remain connected with each other and with their close circle: the network is not always fully active but activates in function of the subject's action left in its center. Of course, each node in the network implies a series of relationships with individuals who act in that context. This means that the subject comes in contact with other potentially very different individuals but shares with these a common interest in a specific field. This sharing does not produce a sense of belonging even though the subjective involvement can potentially be very intense but usually short-lived. The formation of "groups" through Facebook exemplifies this dynamic effectively.

If the unstructured collective sphere promotes these forms of association, which type of solidarity is established between individuals connected in reticular relationships, flexible, transverse and temporary ones? This type of relationship assumes many traits in common with the social capital up to almost overlapping: in this case, however, the network of relationships is not activated as a function in order to reach the concrete goal of achieving a saving of means but to get identity resources through identifying the act. This results in a form of latent solidarity which can result in the consolidation and mobilization of the subject in specific and context free moments. Ultimately, we are seeing a proliferation of reports by the subject that are based on temporary, but not for this weak, forms of solidarity. The result is an intense but fluid relatedness that escapes to the consolidation within formalized groups supported by a strong sense of belonging and stable identification. If you consider the hypothesis presented here together, they sup-

port the claim of a profound social re-elaboration process that moves from the relationship between individual and society up to redefining the forms of association in an undefined form.

5. The new generations and the re-elaboration of the collective dimension

The aforementioned phenomena are traceable here and there in society and they can only be observed in fragmented and partial components. The segment of the population that more contributes to the spread of these dynamics is believed to be made up of the younger generations where we basically find all the considered elements more clearly. It is assumed, therefore, that the younger generations are developing a new model of identity and, accordingly, an unusual social morphology destined to cross the borders of youth's condition and to assert itself more and more in subsequent generations. Why would young people be the protagonists of this process? The reasons are essentially two. The first relates to the specific situation of young people; the second is linked to the objective conditions of the current context.

Although individualization is a widespread phenomenon in society, this affects especially the younger generation. After adolescence, young people enter, in fact, in a predominantly autonomous phase of socialization or, at least, in which each one finds a greater number of choices to make in front of himself in a substantially free and independent way. Individualization and youth are placed, therefore, as syntonetic phenomena since both have in common the questioning of established patterns in order to need to build their own identity. Individualization bonds to the youth in the importance assumed by the self in relation to reference contexts realizing the greatest emancipation of young people from higher-ordered structures of meaning compared to other generations. It is a drive that is not yet fully metabolized by the younger generation as it "is frozen", for now, in mostly apparent forms of impasse and referral. The mysterious involvement of the younger generation within the collective dimension - of which that political will is only the most visible example - constitutes its manifest indicator.

The new generations relate to a context in which traditional models are much less normative because multiplied. Family models, the articulation of training, spatial mobility, job placement, are now extremely diverse and varied. This implies that the definition and the re-composition of these moments take place continuously and not once for all and, in particular, with a greater investment on the part of the subject compared to previous generations. This investment is structured along three lines of tension that, in a

condition of youth, much more pronouncedly than in other stages of life, are placed together and with intensity. It is the empowerment from the original family that brings with it, for example, and above all, the choice to continue one's studies rather than interrupting them in search of work - it should be noted, however, that the second option tends to grow in these last years -. The empowerment is necessarily accompanied by the planning of the subject that requires more costly processing than in the past considering the economic reference context, that will be discussed later. Finally, the third line is related to sociability or to the system of relations that the subject wants to activate, and the way in which he intends to be placed within them. It is believed that the latter area represents the main challenge for new generations, for which there are also other ones: empowerment and planning converge on sociability as this is the more dynamic and renegotiable area; sociability becomes the location of the identifying action, free from traditional structures and with a very high and differentiated potential. Some researches offer the opportunity to encounter this dynamic considering Italian youth: the landscape of value structures presents itself as essentially stable over time (Cavalli and de Lillo 1988) and recently an increase of importance of the affective dimension of friendship, is detected (de Lillo 1993). The articulated ranking of values is instrumental in reducing to two the factors that emerge in an increasingly clear way from empirical findings: the private orientation, linked to the interests most closely connected to one's self and to its immediate surroundings, leisure and evasion; social orientation, referring to the various sectors of engagement with others and for others (de Lillo in 1993 and 1997; Garelli, Palmonari and Sciolla 2006). On the basis of this continuum we see a gradual shift towards the pole of individual life (family, work, friendship, love, career, self-realization, comfortable and wealthy living) rather than that of collective life (solidarity, social equality, freedom and democracy, home), therefore, on its way to affirmation appears to be a form of restricted sociability (de Lillo 2002), which however, does not qualify for attention to post-materialist values, rather than by reference to the definition of identity, as an intimate relational fabric, to claiming their rights (de Lillo 2007).

The new generations, in the encounter between the process of individualization and the condition of youth which characterizes them, interpret it the search for their own coordinated implementation through sociability and within this process the tensions related to autonomy and planning as a priority. This process escapes the traditionalist interpretation of the relationship between young people and society that brings to the understanding, in evolutionary and pragmatic terms, of the settling of the outcome of these challenges to the progressive outflow of young people from youth condition to permanently joining usual adult roles. Why is it then that sociability, which is the area of greatest investment on the part of the younger generation, does not present outcomes

in line with the current paradigm? The answer is related to the different forms of association of young people who do not constitute collective actors based on the sense of belonging and lasting identification between the individual and group. Forms of reticular association propose, in fact, a new synthesis between individual and group: belonging and identification are replaced by the identifying action. Thus, consolidating a hybrid synthesis between collective group phenomena and aggregate collective phenomena in which there are simultaneously both forms of internal solidarity as individual expressions of atomization. The collective dimension becomes experiential. The experience of participation in the collective sphere, therefore, is not fueled in a linear fashion, reaching a stable landing but develops discontinuously or continuing to produce its own subjective identity based on the re-elaboration of the experiences and identifying actions they bring.

Even the objective conditions of the context of reference help make the new generations protagonists of this process. The widening horizon of opportunity of achievement that qualified earlier generations has recently changed sign: the economic crisis, job insecurity, the temporary nature of conditions, the risk associated with each investment choice on themselves generate a climate of overall uncertainty. In this context, going back to the supporting lines qualifying the aforementioned youth conditions, empowerment and planning are today, much more than in the past, slippery terrain in which the hetero-management or adherence to the trend that has established itself in previous generations no longer guarantees a serene and comfortable landing. This is particularly evident in the substantive refusal of the traditional path of overcoming the condition of youth: the end of their studies, employment, leaving the original family, the creation of a new family. Each of these stages has been, in the past, the enabling condition for the next step: the financial crisis strongly impacts on the economic dimension at the base of some of these stages as well as the questioning of individual fulfillment models intervenes on their cultural dimension. The identifying action cuts across these stages and comes to terms with the objective conditions of accomplishment. The reticular sociability is the redefining laboratory of empowerment and planning and answers the urge for actualization that new generations derive from the context of reference.

On closer inspection, the widespread uncertainty that characterizes the beginning of this millennium suggests to critically reconsider the assumptions of the lengthening of youth: by this expression it is customary to argue that new generations keep attitudes, lifestyles, exploratory behavioral patterns longer than previous generations, and postpone the entry into adult roles. In a nutshell, it would be a continuation of typically youthful traits even beyond the traditional limits of the youth condition. This phenomenon - highlighted for some time by some of the scholars who deal with youth condition

- is more structural than cyclical today. It is believed, however, that this interpretation is raised in a sparsely predictive perspective as it projects the dynamics involved in the emancipation of previous generations on the current ones, reconfirming repeatedly the familiar delay syndrome that would qualify the youth of today. Leaving the original family, economic independence, completion of the course of studies, building a family and parenting, make up a traditional model that is already being challenged from adult generations even before the latest ones. It is true that the older generations have played this model for a long time but now its "rejection" is no longer a juvenile specificity. It does not involve the lengthening of youth. It is believed, therefore, that it should be read looking beyond the lengthening of youth and it should grasp the new social morphology on its way to affirmation.

Generational turnover, and with it social change, happens not just through forms of collective action that are dramatically consolidated as in 1968, openly contesting some concrete forms of social organization. The potential for change in new generations also lies - and perhaps to a greater degree - in the ability that they have to implement the innovative traits of society, to rework them and reassemble them into a model in which they are carriers through the adoption of unconventional behavior. In this sense, the new generations are prefigurative on society's change because they consolidate within them innovative traits that are not prevalent but widespread in the rest of society. In this case, it is a model that promotes a new social morphology based on reticular sociability. The new morphology of the Social has important implications on a political level because it extends and hybridizes it with other sectors of society by increasing the possibilities for action and influence of new generations.

6. Conclusions

Trying to draw conclusions of this reflection we can dwell on three points of synthesis. First point. The individualization largely emancipates the individuals from higher-order cognitive categories; this results in a weak identification of the subject with collective identity and shared references. Individual action is more dialogical in the sense that the subject is placed in a more equal condition with their partner, be it another person or a collective actor, institutional or not, or a structure of meaning. This context makes the individual action crucial since this becomes an instrument of self-representation: reflexively acting in society, the individuals give continuity to a flexible and changing process of self-identification instead of reaffirming a prefixed and stable identity asset. From a situation in which identification preceded the action we move on to a situation in which

the identification is simultaneous to the action. Second point. Simultaneity between identification and action tends to reduce the salience of the collective sphere making memberships weak, exceedingly numerous, diversified and temporary. This makes the collective sphere, and its variations, more widespread and less stringent. The collective sphere tends to become more of a contextual environment factor than an instrument able to timely and orderly structure society and the relationship between it, groups and individuals. The identifying action, in fact, does not come to stable identifications and maintains a trait of fragmentation that is responsive to the needs of the subject, but not very effective in structuring traditional, stable and delimited, collective actors. This does not weaken the potential solidarity of society, but it transforms its realization. The collective sphere is widespread and unstructured. The subject is moving in a less constrained way in its interior and it individually tracks its path. It is an implication of the greater dynamism of the individual but also of society itself.

Third point. The weak identification of subjects within the collective dimensions does not lead to the isolation of the individual in the collective emptiness. On the contrary. The increased dialogability of individual action tends to place considerable importance at the time of interaction. Concurrency is relevant. This framework leads to rethink the foundation of the collective dimension suggesting the emergence of a new morphology. The simultaneity of action and identification changes the structure of the collective sphere. Traditionally collective membership is a source of identity resources. Continuing to use them requires adhesion to cognitive schemes and models of action: these are expected to reproduce the group identity that characterizes it and, consequently, the identity of the subject that is part of it. Today this dynamic is transformed by individualization. Individuals participate to a collective sphere in the moment in which the subject knows that its action intervenes within and finds a confirmation on the group's level. In other words, I'll take part of a group if this contributes to changing the group itself in line with my self-representation.

The identifying action occurs within contexts that are characterized by being fluid, malleable and changeable and not in rigid and structured ones that require passive adhesion rather than individual contribution. In other words, the subject is brought to act in collective contexts in which its action has an effect on the group and, in this way, on himself. This phenomenon deeply changes the co-operative action. This traditionally finds a basis in a strong sharing of the means and the values on which it is based on the behalf of the subject: when the identification of one own subjective goal with that of the organization weakens he resorts to the advantages or subjective benefits in terms of incentives or motivational leverages. When even this channel is increasingly inadequate the subject independently elaborates the incentive and the opportunity to reflect a part

of himself within the organization through his actions. In essence, the subject is active within the collective dimensions in which its action can have a tangible return on the asset of the group, thus returning to the subject as identity resource.

We can summarize this phenomenon calling it "subjectivism in the collective sphere." It is necessary to point out that this does not require the egoistic closing of the subject in a cosmic narcissism. Although this line of interpretation can be sustained on the basis of various empirical evidence related to the growing self-referentiality of the individuals manifested especially in those generations who are socialized to the model of "identification then action" and who subsequently joined the model of "simultaneous identification to action" when the latter was still not a widespread phenomenon. The younger generations, however, assert themselves in a context where the subjectivization of the collective sphere is dominant and fully transposing this modality.

New generations, in conclusion, present multiple and original synthesis of subjectivity and collective dimension. Young people are the main witnesses and potential actors in a process of "reinvention of the social" that amends and innovates value orientations, identity references, integration dynamics, contributing to political change. Inserted in a more and more deconstructed social context in terms of roles, rules and no longer able to provide consistent processes of socialization, they are called to a difficult process of continuous self-socialization, whose keywords are reflexivity, choice, reversibility, contingency.

Collective sphere transformations, therefore, present self-regenerative abilities also in the current "de-institutionalization" and "de-socialization" context, of weakening of the process of transmission of roles, norms and values for new generations, that form the social life (Touraine 2004). The progressive loss of salience from the collective belonging in shaping narratives and identity of "publicly networked individuals" (Rainie and Welmann 2013; Bennett and Segerberg 2013) suggests, in socialization studies, to move from the institutional concept of Parsonsian matrix - centered on the role of the family and school - to a multiple socialization model in which the auto-insertion in temporary and reversible networks plays a crucial role. New generations, to that effect, experience more than others the challenges of empowerment and planning (Pirni 2008) and self-construction of society (Touraine 1977), starting from the acquired awareness that "the social order has no metasocial warrant for its existence, whether religious, political and economic, and is totally the product of social relations" (ivi: 2). In this context, the size of collective action, and in general the political dimension, do not disappear but are transformed, through a re-politicization process that takes shape in the intertwining between different spheres of action, and at the crossroads between private and public. Paraphrasing Leccardi et al. (2011: XV), "the private re-politicizes and, with a parallel

movement, politics loose sacredness", it de-institutionalizes, and therefore sees the importance of the collective structures, common identity, liturgies, diminished.

The reinvention of the Social is reflected in a reinvention of politics that is based, first of all, on the redefinition of social action, as well as overthrowing the boundaries between what is private and what is public, between what is private and what is collective (Alteri and Raffini 2014). Participating, in this context, means taking part in a collective subjectivity project, composed of individuals that generate a connection from the networking of their essential diversity, which is a common element in the pursuit of individual subjectivity.

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