

Abstract

In the last three decades, European initiatives relating to the world of *youth policy* underline the crucial role of the *Learning Continuum* as an articulated process in which the three dimensions of education (*formal, informal and non-formal*) are increasingly understood as cogs that require a synergistic and combined action.

Starting from this reference framework, the work aims to take the *non-formal* as a reference area, showing through the articulation in theories, *policies, practices and experiences*, the different declinations that this dimension has taken in Italy as well as the European and international contexts.

The work opens with a theoretical reconstruction of the debate on non-formal education in the broader framework of the sociology of education. The attempt is to show its progressive structuring, while highlighting the contours of a debate characterized by discontinuity, intermittence, if not - at times - by “improvisation”, albeit within territorial scenarios and contexts - first of all Italy - in whose “experiences” of non-formal education have characterized significant historical episodes and moments.

After outlining the reference scenario and reconstructing the different perspectives of analysis of non-formal education, the dissertation focuses on the contribution of European youth policies to the “(re) discovery” of non-formal education. It should be noted that what appeared to the theoretical debate as a “nebula with still faded borders”, has taken on an increasingly important role in the European context in the *Youth Policy* interventions of the European institutions, which have attracted its attention and the relevance in the broader framework of contemporary educational processes.

Along this line, part of the work was dedicated to a survey of the legislation and documentation of European importance in the field of non-formal education and youth policies, carried out at the Youth Department of the Council of Europe (headquarters of the Youth Partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union) in Strasbourg, at the European Youth Center in Strasbourg and at the library of the Directorate General “Education, Youth, Sport and Culture” of the European Commission in Brussels. A twofold work was carried out in the aforementioned institutions: on the one hand, an in-depth study of the documentary research which substantiates the second chapter of the work; while on the other, a first empirical study through the administration of semi-structured interviews to the heads

of the aforementioned institutions involved in the management processes of *youth policies*.

The Second Part of the research aims to analyze the *experiences* of non-formal education in Italy starting from the framework of European youth policies.

Through the “Erasmus + Project Results” platform of the European Commission, a mapping of the non-formal education projects carried out in Italy by organizations that have submitted requests for funding in the framework of the Erasmus+/Youth in Action actions was carried out.

Subsequently, the objectives, methodology and results of two *case-studies* on two non-formal education projects funded under the Erasmus+/Youth in Action Program and implemented in Italy were described. The *case-studies* were carried out through the qualitative analysis of non-formal education *experiences*, with the aid of semi-structured interview techniques and participant observation. The case-studies have made it possible to highlight not only the potential but also the challenges that are accompanying the adoption of the European perspective in the Italian context, both in reference to the educational processes as well as in relation to the restructuring of the educational trajectories of young Italians.

After having reconstructed the different theories and perspectives of analysis of non-formal education, outlined the institutional policies and guidelines that guide the processes covered by this research, and analyzed in detail some practices and experiences carried out in Italy starting from the framework European, it is possible to make the following conclusion: the cardinal principles of non-formal education including the centrality of needs, openness, spontaneity, the ability to graft onto previous training experience and the flexibility of methods are all elements capable of offering young people opportunities for enrichment as well as personal and professional growth. In this sense, non-formal education must be recognized as having a decisive role in contemporary educational paths. However, if its effectiveness is not measured and its structural characteristics are not (re) known and (re) constructed, it will continue to remain a field that is still relatively unexplored, especially in Italy, despite the rich matrix of experiences that the country has. It is also worth highlighting how, in the national scenario, non-formal education continues to be little valued, both in terms of *policies* and *practices*, not least in terms of *research*.

In this direction, on the basis of the European teaching aimed at integrating *research, policies and practices*, it would be necessary to valorise and promote the commitment

aimed at highlighting, from all three points of view, the results and the transformative impact of the experiences of young people in non-formal educational contexts. However, it is also a question of recognizing the ambivalences, if not the contradictions, that run through the practices of non-formal education as well as the Programs and policies that support them.