

Childhoods on the move

Twelve researches on unaccompanied minors in Italy

Andrea Traverso
(Ed.)



Educare

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INDEX

Introduction <i>Andrea Traverso</i>	9
Chapter 1 The multiple transitions of unaccompanied foreign minors. An investigation in the Province of Padua <i>Diego Di Masi, Barbara Segatto, Alessio Surian</i>	15
Chapter 2 Models and innovative practices for welcoming and safeguarding unaccompanied migrant minor <i>Silvana Mordegli, Roberta Teresa Di Rosa, Maria Concetta Storaci</i>	27
Chapter 3 Unaccompanied adolescents in Tuscany's welcoming system. Flows, characteristics and life stories <i>Raffaella Biagioli</i>	35
Chapter 4 Supporting unaccompanied young people for their migration and life project <i>Luisa Pandolfi</i>	45
Chapter 5 Migrating Childhood and educational interventions in emergency contexts for Unaccompanied Migrant Children. A participative action research <i>Paola Alessia Lampugnani</i>	56
Chapter 6 A young refugee in the family. Intercultural relations during a hosting experience in Milan <i>Anna Granata</i>	71
Chapter 7 The school experience of unaccompanied children: a systematic literature review <i>Alessandra Augelli</i>	83

Chapter 8	
Sicily as a Laboratory Social-labour integration pathways for UAFM in Palermo	
<i>Giuseppe Burgio, Marinella Muscarà</i>	93
Chapter 9	
Educational provisions in Second Reception Communities for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors: what is the value of intercultural perspective in theoretical references and educative practices? Results from a qualitative research in Emilia-Romagna	
<i>Stefania Lorenzini</i>	104
Chapter 10	
The everyday racism of unaccompanied foreign children	
<i>Margherita Cardellini</i>	121
Chapter 11	
Unaccompanied girls and their silences: a qualitative research	
<i>Carmen Petruzzi</i>	135
Chapter 12	
Art as an intervention strategy with unaccompanied minors	150
<i>Francesca Audino</i>	
Appendix	
The photo contest “<i>Infanzie movimentate</i>”	159

Introduction

Andrea Traverso, University of Genoa

This book is a collective work that collects some of the research papers (in translated and expanded form) that have already been presented in the Italian version (Traverso, 2018). In Italy, UMs (Unaccompanied Minors), despite a drop in landings and arrivals, remain an urgent social and educational thought because that thought is about a fragile part of the population that lives in towns and cities alongside us.

The subject discussed in these pages is not, however, the “UM”, understood as a social or juridical category, but the stories of many childhoods, experiences very far from us and from our daily reference points. The research and educational design ask questions of themselves and work within this distance, to listen, to explain, and to tell.

These *childhoods* are *in motion*, because we imagine tears and jolts (the painful and violent migration they had to undergo); leaps and shoves (which have shoved these children away from their homes), chases and escapes (from something or someone); because to be accepted they need *educational movement* based on *creativity*, on *expressiveness*, and on *emotion*.

These babies, now children although unaccompanied have survived. They have crossed the thresholds of different countries, only because of an infinite dedication to life, towards which we too have a duty: to build new theories and practices, which can be transferable to different levels and different contexts, to make politics, research, people, and places enter into dialogue with each other.

The adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants” (A/RES/71/1)¹ obliges Member States to monitor possible rights violations and to pursue policies to combat racism, xenophobia and trafficking in human beings. In addition, it undertakes to activate specific actions in favour of refugee and migrant men and women: guaranteed outpatient and hospital care, medical assistance, prophylaxis, diagnosis and treatment of infectious diseases, the right to education, and compulsory education for minors.

The Declaration focuses its attention, and those of the Agendas of all Governments especially on living conditions and the protection of children in accordance with the *Convention on the Right of the Child* (1989).

¹ For more information see: www.unhcr.org/newyorkdeclaration [last access may 2020].

In particular

“We recognize, and will address in accordance with our obligations under international law, the special needs of all people in vulnerable situations who are travelling within large movements of refugees and migrants, including women at risk; children (especially those who are unaccompanied or separated from their families); members of ethnic and religious minorities; victims of violence; older persons; persons with disabilities; persons who are discriminated against on any basis; indigenous peoples; victims of human trafficking; and victims of exploitation and abuse in the context of migrant smuggling” (2.2).

“We will protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all refugee and migrant children, regardless of their status, and giving primary consideration at all times to the best interests of the child. This will apply particularly to unaccompanied children and those separated from their families [...]. We will work to provide for basic health, education, and psychosocial development and for the registration of all births on our territories. We are determined to ensure that all children are in education within a few months of arrival, and we will prioritize budgetary provision to facilitate this, including support for host countries as required” (2.11; then reiterated at point 3.19).

The MNA are in all respects considered “children” (Traverso, 2018; Granata & Granata, 2019), to be protected with social interventions and educational action. For this reason, all governments have declared:

In Italy, the debate on the protection of minors is kept alive by the civil and social commitment of UNICEF which repeatedly invites the international community, and with it in particular our country, to strengthen the commitment to six specific actions to support children (especially considering refugee, displaced and migrant children):

- protect refugee and migrant children from violence and exploitation, particularly unaccompanied;
- put an end to the detention of migrant minors or asylum seekers by proposing alternative solutions;
- work in favour of families, support them, unite them, protect children in order to guarantee them legal recognition;
- ensure educational opportunities for all children, access to health and other social services;
- promote actions that intervene in the causes of mass movements of refugees and migrants;
- promoting training and information initiatives to combat xenophobia, discrimination and marginalisation (UNICEF, 2020)².

² For more information see: <https://www.unicef.it/doc/7009/unicef-su-dichiarazione-di-new-york-sui-rifugiati-e-i-migranti.htm#> [last access may 2020].

In Italy it is the Law 47/2017 (Zampa) to draw a very precise line of attention to the subject. Article 2 gives a clear definition of UM: “*means a minor who does not have Italian or European Union citizenship who is for any reason in the territory of the State or who is otherwise subject to Italian jurisdiction, without assistance and representation by parents or other adults legally responsible for him according to the laws in force in the Italian legal system*”. However, the Italian regulatory system (by the approval of D.L. 113/2018), shows fundamental inconsistencies that have significant impacts on services: stays are often prolonged due to an insufficient number of places in second reception facilities and the lack of useful resources for management and accompaniment; many situations of admixture between minors and adults which risk perpetuating situations of abuse and strong conditioning; the weakness of courses on literacy and the approach to the world of work; the lack of specific structures and interventions for victims of trafficking, be they male or female.

Foreign minors are subject to a paradox: they are protected, as minors, by numerous international treaties; by law they must be guaranteed, among other things, the right to non-discrimination (art. 2) and the right to the best interests of the minor (art. 3).

In the same way, they are subject to regulations designed to control and for public security, as foreigners. This ambiguity translates into tension, contemporary and contradictory, between protection and control, which simultaneously pushes towards inclusion and exclusion: their legal status has been defined as “an interesting territory in which, as at the mouth of a river, both fresh water and salt water flows, they meet and merge and collide, two crucial issues today in Italy: that of minors and that of foreigners” (Miazzi, 1999).

If this ambiguity applies to all foreign minors, those who are the bearers of a greater vulnerability such as UMs suffer the consequences directly in the process of social inclusion.

In addition to the problems of inclusion related to the context of immigration, there are issues related to cultural differences. Those who move from one place to another, crossing different languages and cultures, face the suffering that Moro defines as “exile syndrome” (Goussot, 2011), which occurs frequently among immigrant foreigners: the symptoms are disorientation and a sense of abandonment and helplessness; the person moving does not have the network of the system of affection and shared symbolic representation. What was clear and understandable and shared in the country of origin is questioned and stops working. Those who emigrate must learn to manage multiple affiliations in a dynamic, constantly evolving mestizo structure.

The unaccompanied minors we welcome have bodies like maps, on which physical traumas have left a mark, a trace. While the scars are visible and can facilitate the recognition of refugee status, the wounds of the mind are less evident and often make social inclusion even more strenuous. UMs carry with them everywhere, in refuges, in school, in society, the heavy baggage of traumatic experiences lived before and during their trip. That same baggage can be weighed down by the conditions that they live in after their arrival, in a foreign country without points of reference and with the constant thoughts, on the one hand, about one's roots, on the other hand about the expectations fuelled during the trip.

From a more general point of view, however, we agree with Agostinetti when he says that the UMs, “have no substantial voice, resulting in them being - in all respects, even on a legal level - entirely 'dependent' on our ability or willingness to accept the requests of which they are bearers” (Agostinetti, 2018, p. 47). In recent years, despite attention and the development of intercultural skills (Portera, 2013; Reggio, Santerini, 20149), a decentralised view and “partial

points of view” (Granata, 2014, p. 79) which are capable of reading the phenomenon in a non biased way, seem to be missing, at least as regards to public opinion and politics.

After a period of exponential growth (Fondazioni ISMU, 2019), the number of UMs in Italy has drastically decreased (leaving however some more relevant problems uncovered, the most evident of all: what happens to the many minors who seem to have disappeared into thin air?) In the face of the overall drop, the relationships between males and females (+2.1% male) and the breakdown by age groups remain substantially unchanged. 87.8% of the MNA are young people between 16 and 17 years old, now close to the path to autonomy and to start in the world of work, with the consequent repercussions of an early transition to adulthood (Agostinetto, 2017, p. 443) and on their school careers (Giusti, 2017; Scardigno, Manuti, Pastore, 2019).

As for origins, however, there is a further increase in children of Albanian (dal 22 % al 29,8 %), and Egyptian origin (dall'8,7 % all'11,1 %) and a decrease in minors from the Ivory Coast (da 6,5% a 4,1 %) and Gambia (da 5,2 % al 2,5 %).

Tab. 1. UMs received in Italy (data updated as at 30 April 2020)

	30 june 2019		30 april 2020	
total	7.272		5.111	
males	6.778	93,2 %	4.870	95,3 %
females	494	6,8 %	241	4,7 %

Tab. 2. Age of MNAs received in Italy (data updated to 30 April 2020)

	30 april 2020	%
< 7 years	17	0,3%
7 - 14 years	238	4,7%
15 years	369	7,2%
16 years	1.297	25,4%
17 years	3.190	62,4%

Minors who arrive in Italy migrating from their country of origin to escape wars of persecution, conditions of extreme poverty, by personal choice, forcibly, or for a wider family project to which they remain attached during long periods of stay in the host countries (Di Rosa et al., 2019) live experiences ethically and morally unsustainable for their age. Many of them (88%) report having suffered physical violence during the trip: beatings, injury by firearm or being cut, burns, deprivation of water and food (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali,

2019); many victims or witnesses of sexual violence (84% females, 44% males); as it is also felt at European level:

“The particular needs of vulnerable groups, such as children, and other individuals at particular risk, shall be duly taken into account at all stages. In particular, special safeguards for asylum seekers who are unaccompanied minors should be ensured. These include the need to appoint a guardian and/ or representative. Unaccompanied minors shall be provided with extra protection and care and shall be protected from all forms of violence, abuse and exploitation. They should, as a rule, be accommodated in a specialised establishment for children. They shall not be held in centres that are ‘ill-adapted to the presence of children’. Deprivation of liberty of children shall be a measure of last resort, limited to the exceptional situations where the deprivation of liberty of the minor would be in the best interest of the minor – to preserve the family unity for example. Children deprived of their liberty should enjoy the same right to education as children at liberty”³.

What is necessary for social workers and educators is, therefore, to relaunch solidarity pacts (Deluigi, 2017) that can no longer be ascribed only to formal and non-formal places of education but which require adhesion and collaboration also in informal contexts, first of all all the family Cadei, Ognissanti, 2012; Granata, 2018), the spontaneous nucleus of welcome and cooperation and solidarity work of the individual, of each belonging to a global idea that we translate into relationships every day.

The cover of this volume is embellished with photography by Nuccio Zicari which in 2018 won the photo contest, linked to the seminar of the same name (Genoa, 5 April 2018). I thank Nuccio for the trust he has placed in us and for his always attentive gaze on the world.

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Chapter 1

The multiple transitions of unaccompanied foreign minors. An investigation in the Province of Padua

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Barbara Segatto, University of Padova

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1.1 Introduction and research purpose

The Italian Legislative Decree 142/2015, and the more recent Law 47/2017 provide the legislative framework concerning the “National Plan for confronting the extraordinary flow of non European Union citizens, foreign adults, families and unaccompanied minors”, including the principles to guide the support to unaccompanied foreign minors. Such support includes two types of actions.

The first type concerns the “activation of highly specialized governmental structures with the functions of their identification, determination of the age and status and also for the purpose of speeding up the reunification with relatives already present in other EU countries, identified and authorized by the Regions under the coordination of the Interior Ministry”⁴; the second type of action occurs within the SPRAR system and it involves authorized second level welcoming structures at a regional or local level (Pavesi, 2018).

Furthermore, some of the new developments introduced in the second type of action, as per art. 7 of Law 47/2017, specify how important it is to consider family fostering as the practice to be applied as a priority every time this can be applied (Valtolina and Pavesi 2017). This practice of reception was applied as pilot action, even before the decree was issued although there is a limited number of foster families available. The majority of the unaccompanied foreign minors are therefore hosted in family communities⁵ or in other types of structures that meet the essential levels of performance established by the State⁶ and the requirements of the respective regional regulations.

Therefore, we chose to analyze the various types of reception and to discuss their implications on the basis of an analysis of a specific Italian territory.

⁴ Rapporto sulla protezione internazionale in Italia (Report on international protection in Italy), 2017.

⁵ See the Interior Ministry circular of 9 April 2001.

⁶ Principle enshrined in art. 117, clause 2, paragraph m) of Italy’s Constitution.

1.2 Reference framework and context of the research

The 2016 VI Anni Cittalia report on “*I Comuni e le politiche di accoglienza dei minori stranieri non accompagnati*” (Italian Municipalities and the reception policies of unaccompanied foreign minors) documents “the growth in the percentage of the territories that in recent years have activated a service, a resource, an orientation activity, an intervention for protection or a reception programme for unaccompanied foreign minors”. Concerning the “authorities that declare that they have contacted or taken responsibility of minors, more than half (52.4%) are in the North West, 25.3% in the North East. As a whole, the northern regions represent 77,7%” of concerned local authorities (Giovannetti, 2016). However, apart of the Autonomous Provinces of Trento and Bolzano, the Veneto is the Region in the North East that receives the lowest number of unaccompanied foreign minors living in Italy. As of 20 April 2017, there were only 323 unaccompanied foreign minors in the Veneto Region, i.e. 2% of the total number of unaccompanied foreign minors received in Italy (MLPS, 2017). In the Padua municipality, the territory where we conducted an exploratory study on the second system of reception of the unaccompanied foreign minors, of the 124 minors that fall under the responsibility of the Local Municipality⁷, only 20 were hosted by families while 104 unaccompanied foreign minors were hosted by educational communities, especially in small-size centres that are considered one of the most suitable settings for the integration of the minor (Kalverboer *et al.*, 2016; Horgan and Raghallaigh, 2017).

1.3 Objectives and research question

Through the analysis of the Padua territory the study analysed the creation of the regulatory indications for the reception of unaccompanied foreign minors and highlights the fragile elements and the strategies activated from below to allow the achievement of the minimum standard needed to scaffold the integration process.

1.4 Research methodology

We carried out a qualitative exploratory study gathering data in the Padua⁸ Province between February 2017 and February 2018. The study involved different actors of the reception

⁷ As of 30 November, 2017, the unaccompanied foreign minors taken in charge by the Local Council of Padua were 124, of which 44.3% came from Albania, 22.6% from Kosovo, 24.2% asylum seekers who mostly originated from countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea and the remaining 9% belonging to other groups. They were mainly adolescent males aged between 15 and 17 (Data made public by the Local Council of Padua through a press release dated 18/01/18 that can be consulted online through the institutional website padovanet.it).

⁸ The research work was made possible thanks to funding from Padua University under the grant programme “*Progetti Innovativi per gli Studenti*” (Innovative Programmes for Students) which financially supports a number of activities designed by the students of different degree courses under the supervision of university staff. The group of students who collaborated with the research included Irene Bonotto, Sara Carucci, Lucrezia Comini, Elisa Defrancisci, Alessandro Fabri, Alessio Menini; Antonio Pietropolli, Mariasole Pepa, Anna Scapocchin, Alice Tria, Serena Varetto of the Degree courses Culture, Education and Global Society, Linguistic Mediation, and Local Development.

system (institutional representatives, professionals, families and minors) in order to understand the way they function, the strong points and the problems related to the hosting of the unaccompanied foreign minors.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with: the representatives of local cooperatives that were hosting unaccompanied foreign minors; the institutional representatives of the local Municipality; unaccompanied foreign minors; and host families, both foreign and Italian.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews concerning the reception operational practices, the purposes of the activities offered to the unaccompanied foreign minors, the resources and the efforts of those who operate in this specific territory, the point of view of those interviewed on the needs of unaccompanied foreign minors and on the room for improvement of the reception system.

1.5 Data gathering and analysis

All the interviews were audio-recorded and the contents were transcribed, noting the pauses in the dialogues. Through narrative inquiry (Daiute, 2013) of the contents of the interviews we were able to compare the priorities of the various actors involved in the reception system and to outline key issues concerning resources, risks and innovation. In virtue of the exploratory nature of the research and in order to safeguard the privacy of those who were interviewed, when writing the chapter we chose not to select the extracts of the interviews but simply to supply a reformulation of the content expressed by those interviewed.

1.5.1 The hosting of the unaccompanied foreign minors

Listening to the voices of the professionals makes it possible to better understand the hosting practices that were implemented until February 2018. The Padua Municipality has been promoting fostering practices since 2000. In the beginning, such invitation was oriented towards the migrant population that was already established in the local territory. Later, the call was also making use of the usual foster family networks, therefore expanding the potential number of families. Contacts with potential foster family were carried out through awareness raising activities concerning the reception of unaccompanied foreign minors by cultural mediators in the different migrant communities that could relate to the unaccompanied foreign minors who were already present in the territory. In the following years the increasing diversity concerning the age and the country of origin of the unaccompanied foreign minors encouraged the local administration to slowly move towards what the administration calls a “generative welfare” perspective (Vecchiato, 2011), i.e. encourage the reception by resident migrant families, even if they did not come from the same territories of the unaccompanied foreign minors. Therefore, in the beginning the fostering that was encouraged in the territory of Padua mainly concerned the matching of the unaccompanied foreign minor with a migrant family with a similar cultural background. Later, the social services worked to include as foster families migrant families that were already in contact with the local social services even if they did not have the same background as the unaccompanied foreign minor. The core idea was that such

families could provide the unaccompanied foreign minor a viable integration process in terms of housing, relationships, work and family. In addition, for about two years in the light of the arrival of younger and younger unaccompanied foreign minors, with growing needs for care and the provision of longer family fostering, it was considered useful to activate a collaboration with the *Centro per l’Affido e la Solidarietà Familiare del Comune* (CASF, Council Centre for Family Custody and Solidarity), especially for the unaccompanied foreign minors aged less than 16 for the purpose of encouraging Italian families to make themselves available as receptive families for the unaccompanied foreign minors as well.

The interviews with the foster families give us indications concerning the different motivations behind the choice to host unaccompanied foreign minors by the Italian and migrant families (it must not be forgotten that the families with a migrant background that were interviewed during this study were part of the group of families that were financially supported by the local municipality). The reasons that motivated the Italian families to choose to be a foster family focuses on a solidarity attitude. Such families show a solidarity sensibility towards welcoming migrants in general coupled with a specific focus on hosting young people with a different cultural background, as in the case of the unaccompanied foreign minors. Families with a migrant background choose the foster family project as a way to improve their own migration experience and condition.

It is worth noting that at the time of the research all the Italian families had attended a training course for foster families. Such training was not necessarily designed around the needs of unaccompanied foreign minors and it included only few or no references neither to the international and migratory contexts nor cultural diversity issues. Families with a migration background had received no training about foster care. The local municipality seemed to assess that their own experience of migration and integration as well as the ongoing parenthood experience should be considered sufficient for the foster project. Furthermore, the Italian families that were interviewed had previous foster family experiences that had ended positively (with the return of the youth to the family of origin, or with an adoption and/or with the minor reaching a condition of autonomy), while for some of the families with a migration background those with unaccompanied foreign minors were the first experiences as a foster family.

In relation to the experience, all Italian families described the fostering relationship in terms of substantially positive outcomes with Italian children, with migrant children, as well as with unaccompanied foreign minors. The narratives of the families with a migration background described a greater number of situations that, due to complex problems (for example, having to face deviant or extremely oppositional behaviour; declared age not consistent with the real age of the young person) made it necessary to interrupt the family foster experience ahead of time. Despite the different outcomes of the experience, all interviewed families reported that they would make themselves available for new family fostering. When foster care is not available or feasible then the reception is organised within the Italian SPRAR system and in second level hosting structures that are accredited and authorized at regional or local municipality level.

1.5.2 The lack of support to unaccompanied foreign minors hosts

The data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies show an exponential increase in the arrivals of unaccompanied foreign minors: there were 5,821 arrivals in 2012, while in 2017 they had increased to 15,939⁹. Today 65.8% of the unaccompanied foreign minors are hosted by so called “second level” welcome structures that should facilitate their social integration and autonomy in order to guarantee equal opportunities for all children and adolescents.

Giovannetti and Accorinti (2018) highlight how the failure to create the reception conditions, the absence of accurate indicators at the national level, and the culture of emergency that continues to characterize the approach to the migratory phenomena as contingent and as extraordinary burden the work of the professionals in this field and make it harder to achieve the processes of inclusion and autonomy of the unaccompanied foreign minors.

In particular, according to the professionals involved in the interviews, the fragility of the policies of reception is to be traced back to the instability of work, in the lack of specific training (CONNECT, 2014) and the difficulties that prevent proper networking within the reception system.

The turnover of the professionals hinders the creation of stable bonds of trust, as well as the consolidation of good practice and makes it harder to construct an educational and relational setting in which to redefine the life trajectories of the unaccompanied foreign minors. The sense of frustration concerning their work emerges in the professionals’ narrative, especially as they are clearly aware that the outcome of the potential integration process is depending on the possibility of structuring a climate of cooperation and sharing that can provide a solid support network to the unaccompanied foreign minors (Simoneschi, 2017).

Furthermore, the absence of stable reference professionals within the communities is accompanied by the absence of specific training that has direct repercussions on the practice of reception within the community. The centrality of the educational dimension in relation to the reception context is perceived as a priority by the professionals who often find themselves as having to manage the complexity of their work without having the necessary skills. The outcome of the intervention remains strongly tied to the social and professional skills of individual professionals as well as to the organizational dynamics of the community (Saglietti, 2011; Wade, 2011; Sirrieh, 2013; Giovannetti, 2016; Kauko, Fonsberg, 2017).

Finally, the scarce collaboration between the institutional actors involved does not allow the construction of working networks (Giovannetti, 2008; 2016). The lack of collaboration between the various subjects that make up the formal secondary network (Municipality Social Services, Police headquarters, Local Health Companies and the Third Sector/Cooperatives and Communities) hinders the creation of the individualised educational programmes for the unaccompanied foreign minors. In addition, the fragility of the networking efforts undermines the efforts that in the initial reception phase are directed at the analysis and assessment of the situation and resources available to the unaccompanied foreign minor and related development of supporting measures.

The principle of collaboration, teamwork and coordination of actions would require organizations on the one hand to rethink their approach on the basis of the unaccompanied

⁹ Monitoring Report, 30 April 2017, MLPS.

foreign minor needs and, on the other hand, to enhance the presence of professionals who are competent in communications, in the management of decision making processes and the construction of collaborative spaces - which seem to be lacking.

The difficult collaboration among the different reception bodies and the lack of shared practices forces the professionals to “replace” the public service by building more or less formal relations with the other institutional actors. Furthermore, the absence of protocols and guidelines, as well as leaving a wide margin of discretion to the professionals for their actions, risks promoting dynamics that favour the spread of stereotypes and professional prejudices (Di Masi, 2017).

The networking fragility also emerges by analysing the narratives by the professionals when they describe the drafting of the *Progetto Educativo Individualizzato* (PEI, Personalized Educational Programme). PEI is the main tool used by the communities in structuring the “integration” opportunities for the unaccompanied foreign minors.

At the time of their arrival the age of the majority of the minors is close to 18, i.e. their legal adult age (60.6% are aged 17, 23.4% are aged 16)¹⁰. Therefore the PEI objectives tend to be aimed at covering, in the shortest time possible, the requirements needed for the conversion of the residency permit at the age of 18¹¹.

Therefore, this scenario makes it necessary to redefine the priorities and, in line with what happens in the majority of Italian local councils (Giovannetti, 2016), also, in the communities interviewed literacy prove to be the first step taken in the minor’s path of reception.

However, inclusion of the unaccompanied foreign minors only in the literacy courses risks not guaranteeing the success of the path of reception. International literature highlights the importance of school as a place of aggregation and integration for the unaccompanied foreign minors and considers it the fertile and comparative ground that can generate occasions for dialogue in an intercultural context (Pastoor, 2013; Bitzi, Landolt, 2017).

Although the number of unaccompanied foreign minors enrolled in school is growing (mainly in professional institutes and some very rare exceptions in high school) the work network with the school is made difficult by at least two critical issues. The first depends on current legislation in matters of compulsory education, such as how to harmonise the legal obligation to education with the actual training opportunities. A second concern addresses the expectations of the unaccompanied foreign minors who often have undertaken their migratory project mainly for economic reasons. The professionals in Padua interviewed work with young people who ask first of all “When can I go to work?”

On top of the difficulties that are encountered in defining the educational and training programme, other difficulties concern the labour dimension. In the past the professionals of Padua could count on the support of the Province that financed apprenticeships for the young people who should attend compulsory schooling and had left their school. As the Province does not provide such support, professionals describe a condition of loneliness when it comes to look for companies where they can activate unaccompanied foreign minors internships and apprenticeships. These elements create a situation in which it becomes increasingly harder for

¹⁰ Data MLPS, Monitoring Report of 30 April 2017 on the unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy.

¹¹ For the requisites refer to DLgs 86/98, art.32, clause. 1-ter.

professionals to involve unaccompanied foreign minors in the definition and identification of their education and professional career.

1.5.3 Approaching eighteen years and beyond: suspended identities and multiple transitions

The life projects of these minors intersect with migratory projects and these often appear “suspended”. First of all they are “suspended” with respect to communications with the family and the different expectations of the members of the family that contributed to encouraging (or not) their journey and that read the possible consequences in different ways. Being able to achieve “results” in different geographical locations, in social and economic terms allows (or not) to also recover or acquire a different capacity to communicate with the family group and its individual members and to respond to responsibilities that the migrant minors feel are attributed to them. In addition, the minor experiences a condition of suspension of the interaction with the context of reception, encountering difficulties in defining priorities and taking into account the limitations and the administrative and legal obstacles that also concern the continuation of their migratory experience and project.

As shown by Segatto, Di Masi and Surian (2018), the adolescents interviewed show different attitudes towards to the migratory experience. A first group of minors left their family (and in some cases they can count on relatives spread around the world) on the basis of a project that aims at a good job and the possibility of earning a decent salary in order to be able to improve their financial situation and to help the family. This is often a migratory project that counts on a basic motivation and was built up over time. It is an individual project that tends to develop social skills and a capacity to observe and to listen for the opportunities that are available in relation to training and jobs in the country of reception. A second group of minors has not matured their own migratory project. The arrival in Europe is tied to a youth peer cultural context that sees the migration experience as an advantageous rite of passage for those who know how to take advantage of this opportunity that is often tied to belonging to a “group” of friends. This is a more impromptu step that generally counts on a lower level of individual motivation and autonomy.

In Italy, the recent Law 47/2017 (art. 13, clause 2) gives to the social services the responsibility to plan a period of up to three years from the moment the unaccompanied foreign minor is 18. Such measure gives priority to triggering and scaffolding a process that should lead to autonomy and that involves different welfare services of the local territory. Which places and services are taken into consideration? Social inclusion and autonomy are the two priorities highlighted by the law. Autonomy firstly concerns work and the obstacles that characterize the search for paid jobs. This labour dimension also influences the living and social dimension and the starting position with respect to social “inclusion”. Difficulties and discrimination in renting houses or an apartment persist in Italy when the nationality is identified as other than Italian. Alongside the challenges that this situation poses in terms of contrast and cultural growth in respect to the phenomenon of discrimination, it is evident that these difficulties call for measures of accompaniment towards autonomy and for reflections and initiatives that take into account the social capital and educational dimension that intersect those of training and job orientation.

As an example, here are summarized the choices made by the professionals of a cooperative in agreement with a minor. Knowing that she would have been “ready” for an autonomous life after her 18th birthday, the cooperative managing the community that hosted her created the conditions that allowed her to be fostered by an Italian family. This new family condition allowed her to attend and complete high school. In turn this allowed her to enroll in the university. This was not simply an educational issue. On the legal level, in regards to her resident permit, this choice allows to ask for a study visa, avoiding her to be obliged to look for work in order to obtain a work visa (her only other alternative to stay in Italy). This example shows how important it is to have, as far as possible, an in depth awareness (on the part of minors and professionals) of the ways in which the four dimensions of the home, work, training and legal status interact. Often this greater awareness seems limited to the months that come immediately after the eighteenth birthday. It is especially during the “final ten months” before the eighteenth birthday that the attention of the professionals concentrates on the two aspects linked to the world of work. On the one hand training is addressed, generally identifying a training course that lasts from four to six months. The professionals actively search for apprenticeships opportunities for the migrant minor. On the other hand, the minor is accompanied by a volunteer or by an operator in the drafting of their curriculum vitae and to search for a future job. The responsibility for this search is entrusted to the minor and is monitored by the professionals, for example, by using forms in which to write the workplace contacted and the answers given.

In principle therefore, the minor is encouraged to autonomously look for a job by visiting potential employers, supported only initially by a professional. It is not surprising that they struggle to find a job on their own, just as subsequently it will be very hard to deal with the difficulty of finding a place to live, also in the face of pervasive racism towards “migrants” looking for a home. Therefore, the initiative of the professionals and their skills concerning whom and how to contact for directing the minor towards a possible job plays a key role. These issues and the choice of the training course that should support them should be reflected in the PEI, the individualised educational programme, a sort of training “contract” between the minor and the cooperative that hosts him or her. For the most part, the PEI does not come to terms with the generally low level of initial schooling. Or better, the low schooling becomes the reason for concentrating the efforts on the search for job that is compatible with low schooling.

The main tool for the transition to legal age then becomes the training apprenticeship paid for by extraordinary solidarity funding - work grants in coordination with the local Job Centre. The grants are sums between 2,000 and 2,800 Euros that should cover 500 working hours. In fact, if managed with an eye to savings, this money allows for having a small reserve for dealing with life after having left the community. From the point of view of the resident permit, up to the eighteenth birthday minors have a permit for child integration, a kind of child’s permit/visa. It appears obvious that the accumulation of challenges concerning the resident permit, work and housing make the transition to autonomy quite difficult. Therefore these difficulties turn into a “grey” phase that sees various outcomes depending on the profile and the professional and social skills of those who have just become legal adults. In some cases it is possible to rely on family support, if present in Italy. In optimal cases the work grant allows the identification of an employer who can also take care of housing. But in many cases, the idea that the evening before the eighteenth birthday the minor has to have the suitcase ready and the day after he or

she will have to leave the community and will start to face the clashes with the lack of working and housing opportunities suggests, when possible, that the community extends the reception (often informally) or try to establish a new “working” relationship with the “new adult”, for example, by giving him or her the task of “tour operator” for the new youth that is being hosted by the community. In this case, he or she takes care of the young people who have just arrived by establishing a relationship, accompanying them, acting as a mediator in the cases in which the professionals take the newly arrived to public services, for example, for medical examinations. These are functions that do not commit them for all the day and allow them to continue their training (when available), for example as an assistant cook in view of a better arrangement.

1.6 Discussion and conclusions

With regard to the family fostering of the unaccompanied foreign minor, the experience in Padua shows a diminishing relevance of the attention for the cultural (diversity) dimension and a growing attention given to the dimension of reception. When it comes to unaccompanied foreign minors, the Padua Municipality is moving away from the initial reception based on families with a migrant background similar to the background of the unaccompanied foreign minor. Local reception policies now involve both families with a migrant background as well as local families (Segatto, Bonotto e Tria, 2018).

Overall, the professionals and the families who were interviewed provide a positive evaluation of family fostering of the unaccompanied foreign minors. The families involved describe the experience as enriching, regardless of the “success” in terms of length of the stay and the social integration and autonomy of the minor. For families with a migrant background the theme of *empowerment* becomes a relevant one while for the local families the core theme is mainly that of personal growth.

The narratives by those who were interviewed highlight a number of risk factors concerning the migrant families involved in the “generative welfare” programme. For these families it appears relevant to improve the foster process in order to avoid the risk of promoting the fostering activity mainly as an activity generating an economic income. This type of relationship between the municipality and the family puts at risk the unaccompanied foreign minors that are being hosted, as it tends to neglect the very important role of accompanying their psychophysical development and overall well-being (Fornari and Scivoletto, 2007; Long and Ricucci, 2016). Local foster families, on the other hand, understand the reception of the unaccompanied foreign minor as a commitment aimed at the minor and not necessarily taking into account the broader context of relationships with his or her family of origin. Nonetheless, the latter is a crucial dimension which is usually being taken into account in the fostering of Italian minors and that encourages the possibility for the minor to maintain a space of relationship with his or her family of origin, a dimension that should not be underestimated in the case of unaccompanied foreign minor as well.

Promoting proper practices of family fostering of the unaccompanied foreign minors across the local territory seems an important policy as it increases the number of families and single people available for fostering and the potential for the unaccompanied foreign minors to find

their way in terms of education, job opportunities and social ties. It becomes increasingly necessary to plan specific training and preparation opportunities for the fostering of unaccompanied foreign minors as they present specific features connected in particular to cultural differences, to migratory life experiences and related adolescent dynamics. Once more it appears important to provide services that are able to support the specific needs of these welcoming families by collaborating with cultural mediation and education professionals who should be available to support the minors in terms of education and communication opportunities and skills, especially in the initial phases of their insertion in the family and local contexts.

In relation to communities and cooperatives hosting opportunities, the narratives by the professionals focuses on creating “networks” aimed mainly at accessing relational resources that provide the cooperative and associative world with a dialogue with other relevant territorial actors.

In the narratives of the professionals very limited attention is provided to the tools for the shared construction of the PEI. In a similar way, limited attention is provided to collaborative practices that could enhance the ways the unaccompanied foreign minors can play a critical role within the educational and career programme that they are presented. The involvement of the unaccompanied foreign minors in the definition of the individualised educational programme (PEI) remains therefore in the intentions of the professionals who declare that in practice they cannot really work at enhancing the way they can provide the minors with taylor made options. Their prevailing understanding is that “the aims of the unaccompanied foreign minors are more or less the same, i.e. learning the language, looking for a job, eventually concluding the school cycle, and therefore the PEI is more or less a standard thing”.

Within this scenario each hosting community interviewed answered in a different way, on the basis of their own organizational and professional resources. Even though the organizational structure is similar across all the communities, the analysis of the interviews reveals a plurality of educational models and their implicit relations with the ways the relationship is being shaped with relevant resources and issues such as food, money, rules, times and conflicts (Di Masi and Defrancisci, 2018).

In relation to the transition to legal adulthood (18 years), a possible step forward could be represented by making available apartments to be managed by a resident couple, where the “new adults” can stay as temporary residents and experiment and support each other in the transition to autonomy, supported by key responsible persons supervising the educational and social areas.

Overall, the study conducted in Padua, consistently with previous literature, highlights differences between the priorities of the different actors involved in hosting unaccompanied foreign minors when it comes to their reception (Wernesjö, 2012), educational choices and careers (Attanasio, 2016), employment and social policies (AA.VV., 2015) and highlights the multiple transitions (Roberts et al., 2017) to which the minors are subject. Specific attention should be given, in the transition to legal adulthood (Wade et al., 2012), to the social capital of the unaccompanied foreign minors (Sime and Fox 2015) and to the way in which the local bodies should consider the minors as migrants with their own characteristics and problems (Giovanetti, 2016; Pavesi and Caneppele, 2011).

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