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YOUTH CIVIC AND POLITICAL (DIS)ENGAGEMENT: REPRESENTATIONS, PATTERNS AND CONTEXTS

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Esame finale anno 2018

To my mother, Lina

Acknowledgments

Abstract

The desire and capacity of youth to engage with the civic and political sphere has been put in doubt by competing approaches in the study of youth citizen participation. In this research we aim to: 1) examine the social representations of youth civic and political participation in the current psychological literature; 2) explore the patterns of (dis)engagement in the civic and political sphere among Italian youth; 3) examine the patterns of (dis)engagement of late adolescents, in particular, and the influence of proximal ecological contexts on the assumption of different orientations; 4) explore how youngsters interpret active citizenship and their role as social agents, and how they perceive their schools' climate, opportunities and limitations for meaningful involvement. Based on a mixed methods approach, the project analyzed: psychological academic discourse through a bibliographic content analysis; patterns of (dis)engagement and contextual correlates through a person-centered approach, using a survey; and young people's perspective and experiences through focus group discussions. The results highlight the structural organization of social representations about youth participation in psychology, which result in competing normative assumptions about what kind of participation is studied (conventional vs. critical) and what role youngsters have in their civic development (recipients vs. agents). Moreover, the patterns of (dis)engagement identified also a large proportion of latently involved youth, while on every level of activity was distinguished by those who were satisfied with politics and those who were not. Also, the findings found important influences of proximal contexts for the orientations that adolescents assumed. Finally, youngsters displayed comprehensive and critical views of active citizenship and thought of their role as social agents with frustration. School characteristics, and especially, opportunities for reflective discussion and meaningful involvement were found to be crucial for the perception of having an empowering role. The results are discussed in view of their implications.

Keywords: *youth, civic and political participation, ecological contexts, agency*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years there have been drastic changes in the political landscape all over the world. Uprisings across the Middle East, which were initially linked to youth dissatisfaction with oppressive authorities and labeled the "Arab Spring", were met with strong counterrevolutionary responses and resulted in large-scale conflicts and still-ongoing civil wars. Western democracies were shaken by anti-austerity protests in response to the worldwide Great Recession, which evolved into the international Occupy movement against social and economic inequality. Growing discontent with globalization and supra-national influence on national governments spread in Europe and America, leading to the rise of populist and nationalist parties, right-wing governments in Austria, Hungary and Poland, the withdrawal through referendum of the United Kingdom from the European Union, and the election of Republican candidate and reality TV star Donald Trump as president of the United States of America. The recent elections in Italy saw the affirmation of the anti-establishment party Five Star Movement and the right-wing nationalist party Lega Nord as the key political forces of the country. These, and other, events that signal a turn to radical political agendas or withdrawal from the political sphere have been taken to evidence the palpable social anxiety and generalized dissatisfaction of the population with political and economic elites. In Europe, the low levels of engagement in political activities and the sense of lack of accountability by EU institutions have raised grave concerns over an increasing "democratic deficit" (Hobolt, 2012). Recent developments showcasing problems with European integration on matters such as immigration and the rise of Euro-skepticism have given an even stronger weight to these alarms (Treib, 2014).

Young people have occupied a crucial place in these discourses either as protagonists of the pressures towards social change, as in the Occupy protests, or as politically disillusioned and alienated from the current governing systems. Youth participation, in fact, has become a central topic of both academic and political interest. On the one hand, instances of collective mobilization are taken to indicate a possibility for political renewal driven by youth. On the other hand, the decline of participation and the distancing of young people from politics are often

interpreted as alarming signs of a democratic crisis. There is, indeed, mounting evidence of the increasing disenchantment with politics of youth across European countries (Maggini, 2016). Such trends are worried to lead, among other things, to even greater alienation of young people in a vicious cycle that sees political parties disregard the shrinking young electorate and give even less attention to youth-related issues. Such was the case of the Brexit referendum, in which British youth voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU, but lost out to the majority of older voters (Goulard, 2016)[1]. Moreover, the recent election campaign in Italy demonstrated the disappearance of youth as a topic from the political programs and promises (Magnani, 2018)[2]. At the same time, the social and economic conditions for youngsters in Italy in the aftermath of the financial crisis have been characterized by increasing lack of prospects, occupational uncertainty and unemployment rates of over 30% (Istat, 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2015). Such tensions have inevitable consequences on the feelings of young people about the possibility that institutions and social structures address adequately their difficulties.

Young Italians are thus developing their civic outlook in an increasingly complex institutional environment, where relations between nation members in the EU are under stress and citizens' distrust is growing. On both national and European levels, there has been ever growing emphasis on contrasting these issues and promoting active citizenship education in view of strengthening democratic societies, social cohesion and allowing people to participate fully in society (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009). The EU has adopted a number of strategies to promote youth inclusion and participation ever since the European Commission elaborated a vision of the problem in the *White Paper* on youth (European Commission, 2001). Research, for example, is supported within European Framework Programs and, in particular, "Horizon 2020" has highlighted civic engagement among the key topics. Moreover, one of the aims of the EU Youth Strategy (2010–2018) is to encourage young people to actively participate in society through initiatives targeted at promoting non-formal learning, participation, voluntary activities, youth work, mobility and information (European Commission, 2009). This attention is in line with the attempt to promote active citizenship and democratic participation within the EU (EESC, 2012; European Commission, 1998; 2009; 2013). Emphasis is given to education that promotes social

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[1] https://www.politico.eu/article/britains-youth-voted-remain-leave-eu-brexit-referendum-stats/
[2] http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2018-01-03/giovani-ne-promesse-ne-fatti-gli-under-30-scomparsi-campagna-elettorale-165831.shtml?refresh_ce=1

citizenship and active participation "as a method for social inclusion, in the course of which people together create the experience of becoming the architects and actors of their own lives" (European Commission, 1998, p. 11). The Lisbon Treaty (2009), in fact, defines the right for every citizen "to participate in the democratic life of the Union" (Article 10.3) and includes within the policies of education the aim of "encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe" (Article 165). EU policy until now has, thus, focused intensely on education when it comes to promoting youth participation. In fact, the topic is a priority, as evidenced by the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020) and the European Commission's Education and Training 2020 Working Group on "Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education". The recent Eurydice report (2017b) has shown that most European countries include citizenship education in their national curricula and intend its aim as a multidimensional development of a number of competences related to interacting effectively and constructively with others, acting in a socially responsible manner, acting democratically and thinking critically.

The current transformations in the international socio-political context and the outlined policy attention towards young people are inevitably related to academic interest in youth democratic participation. The topic has produced a large body of research in the last couple of decades, which has been dominated by somewhat different interpretations of the issue – either in terms of concern over the rise of disengagement among young people in conventional forms of political participation and associational life (Macedo, 2005; Pharr & Putnam, 2000; Putnam, 2000), or in terms of recognition of multiple and varied forms of youth engagement that have not been traditionally considered (Dalton, 2008; Norris, 2002; Schudson, 2006; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Carpini, 2006). Throughout this dissertation we will focus on confronting such assumptions on the nature of youth participation with the plurality of young people's citizenship orientations and their perspective about their active role in the civic and political sphere (Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Geissel, 2008). We also seek to address the agency-building capacity of proximal contexts in favoring youth engagement through an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Through a mixed methods approach the complex issue of youth participation is tackled from multiple perspectives in the different chapters of the dissertation.

This doctoral project has been developed in the context of a larger research program ("*CATCH-EyoU – Constructing AcTive CitizensHip with European Youth: Policies, Practices, Challenges and Solutions*" - EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020), funded by the European Union and coordinated by the University of Bologna. Data used in the quantitative and qualitative studies presented in this dissertation are part of the data collection done by the Italian team in CATCH-EyoU, of which the Author is member, and have been analyzed independently by the Author of this dissertation.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the theoretical framework used in the thesis, anticipating some of the issues addressed by the research project. We adopt a social and community psychology perspective, informed by contributions on the topic in developmental psychology, education studies, political sciences and sociology. Firstly, we outline different perspectives in literature on the topic, which underline the existence of competing assumptions about youth participation, its presumed decline and the role of political distrust in disengagement. We then explore some of the most prominent definitions of participation and their conceptual characteristics with respect to the study of youth engagement. Next, we focus on the agency-building potential of environmental characteristics in the civic and political development of young people. Finally, the research aims to be addressed in the following chapters are introduced.

Chapter 2 presents an explorative bibliographic study that intends to complement the examination of normative assumptions in the literature on youth participation and to understand the social representations constructed within academic studies in psychology regarding the role of young people as active citizens. We examine current literature in the discipline through a systematic lexicographic content analysis in order to comprehend the existing conceptualizations of youth participation and to evidence the tensions and contradictions that can be identified.

Chapter 3 proposes to examine the patterns of (dis)engagement orientations in young people and in adolescents and their contextual correlates. The intent is to undertake a descriptive approach and identify the positions that young people assume with respect to the civic and political sphere. We examine through a person-centered approach the patterns of engagement among Italian youth identified by civic and political activity, political and social interest, and political distrust. The results provide an original articulation of orientations taken by young

people in terms of disengagement, stand-by engagement and participation, as well as their differentiation on a normative/critical dimension. Moreover, we examine the specific profiles of engagement within a subsample of upper secondary school students and confront the results with respect to those for the general sample. Also, we analyze how proximal contexts – such as family, peers, neighborhood and school – influence the membership in different profiles. The results confirm the importance of family, neighborhood and school characteristics that foster quality opportunities for involvement.

Chapter 4 explores further through a qualitative approach the perspectives of upper secondary school students on what it means to be an active citizen, what role young people have as active citizens and how their schools foster or inhibit the development of social agency in the students. The results present the comprehensive view of students on active citizenship and the crucial role for agency-building that democratic and participative school climate, as well as opportunities for involvement and reflection.

The final chapter summarizes and discusses the main findings from the overall research project.

CHAPTER 1. STATE OF THE ART

Competing Perspectives on Youth Engagement Decline

In recent years, there has been an ever-increasing interest in youth citizen participation both in political discourse and in academic research. The prominence of the topic has been mainly motivated by major concerns over the rise of disengagement among young people in conventional forms of political participation and associational life. However, scholars have given different interpretations of the changes in the relationship of youth with public institutions – some approaching it as a threat to the social and democratic functioning of society, while others favoring a more optimistic and nuanced understanding. The differences in the competing perspectives on the issue outline the presence of conflicting assumptions in political and academic discourse regarding participation and young people's role as citizens. In this section we seek to sum up the major current debates in a multi-disciplinary literature on youth participation. In particular, two general approaches are identified in the interpretation and explanation of the decline of engagement in many forms of activities among young people.

Focus on youth apathy and democratic erosion. A great amount of research on youth participation has focused on the decline of electoral and formal political participation and its possible negative effects for democracy and communal life. Indeed, numerous studies have provided evidence of ever-growing decrease in voting among youth (e.g., Horvath & Paolini, 2013; IDEA, 1999; Maggini, 2016; Wattenberg, 2003) and some studies have shown that young people are less likely to engage in a number of political and social activities that have traditionally been conceived as characteristic to participatory citizenship (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Such trends have been interpreted in a number of very influential works as signs of political disaffection that is feared to erode trust in public institutions and democratic governance, as well as communal ties and social life (Macedo, 2005; Pharr & Putnam, 2000; Putnam, 2000). These worries are related to two key positions regarding civic and political participation, stating that:

1) participation is the backbone of democracy: "Citizen participation is at the heart of democracy. Indeed, democracy is unthinkable without the ability of citizens to participate freely in the government process." (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995, p. 1);

2) participation is the foundation for social connections and trust between people (Putnam, 2000).

In this sense, it has been argued that there is the need to focus on reinvigorating youth engagement, especially through civic education. Research on the topic has also centered on identifying trends of youth alienation with civic and political life, as well as personal determinants of civic and political knowledge and behavior. However, aspects of similar perspectives have been criticized for the adoption of normative assumptions that seem to regard young people as the problem for "good" democratic functioning. The ever-growing gap between youth and political institutions is related to their disinterest and lack of trust, while attempts to counter this trend focus on restoring "appropriate" values and behavior (Hart, 2009). The risk is that young people are ultimately treated as passive recipients of policies and citizenship education aimed at moulding them into dutiful citizens, according to an adult-centric perspective.

Focus on youth existing repertoires and the transformations of citizenship. In contrast to this "pessimistic" approach (Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Hooghe & Dejaeghere, 2007), several authors within the academic debate have pointed out that, rather than spurning from apathy, contemporary increase of political disconnection among youth may have more to do with transformations of citizens' relationship with the public sphere towards non-institutionalized and individualized engagement (Dalton, 2008; Norris, 2002; Schudson, 2006; Zukin et al., 2006). In this perspective, the decline of formal political participation is recognized, but this trend is considered to be offset by a shift in young people's preferences for alternative, less organized and informal ways of engaging with the public sphere (Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010; O'Toole, Lister, Marsh, Jones, & McDonagh, 2003; Stolle & Hooghe, 2005). These would include consumer activism, lifestyle choices, internet-based engagement, sporadic mobilization and others. This change is more or less what is to be expected in a post-modern society, where post-material citizens actively reject institutionalized and state-related politics (Inglehart, 1997). In this sense, it has been suggested that youth are increasingly taking a position towards being *critical citizens*, who continue to uphold democratic ideals, but are suspicious of authority and

political practices (Norris, 1999). Hence, the distrust towards political institutions has been attributed not solely to apathy, but has instead been considered also as a response to inadequate and contradictory political systems (Banaji, 2008; Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison, & Anstead, 2014). It has been argued that everyday decisions and interactions take a prominent role in this transition towards "subpolitics" (Beck, 1997) and, thus, youth assume a "radically unpolitical" self-actualization approach (Farthing, 2010).

On the one hand, such an approach re-orients attention from pre-conceived ideas about how youth engagement should manifest towards acknowledging and understanding how young people themselves create and express new forms of politics, including critical, monitorial and non-participating positions (Farthing, 2010; Schudson, 2006; Stolle & Hooghe, 2005; Zukin et al., 2006). On the other hand, by focusing on an "alternate sphere of power" (Farthing, 2010, p. 189) specifically taken up by youth, there is a risk of excluding them from the current "adult" spaces of political decision-making in the public sphere. A further problematic is presented by data showing that even though young people are more likely to engage in non-institutional rather than in institutional forms, the overall levels of non-conventional participation are nonetheless stable or in decline (Pilkington & Pollock, 2015). Moreover, adopting a vision of simply broadening the spectrum of social and political participation may lead to the confusion in the use of these concepts and their excessive stretching (Berger, 2009), whereby "everything is active citizenship and thus nothing is" (Moro, 2013, p. 27).

We seek to take into account aspects of either of the outlined normative approaches in order to address youth citizen participation. Specifically, we recognize the importance of civic and political engagement in democratic societies (Barrett & Zani, 2015) and the need to confront possible segregation of young people from the public sphere. Youth, especially adolescents, may be influenced by general attitudes that portray them in negative terms or as lacking the abilities to contribute significantly to society (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). It is, thus, important to consider how young people may internalize deficit-based views of their citizenship or be unwilling to participate in contexts that devalue their voice (Hart, 2009). Moreover, we consider the importance of beliefs about the effectiveness and fairness of democratic decision-making in the current socio-economic environment. The perception of unresponsive, opaque and elite-driven governance may be a factor in alienating youth from the political sphere or, conversely, a motivation for a critical engagement in the face of injustices in the system. In this sense, we seek

to understand, eschewing adult-centric notions, the perspective of youth themselves and the ways, in which they express their civic and political orientations in a changing European context. From this point of view, the research presented is in line with the proposal to adopt:

> A dual strategy that addresses both the marginalization of youth from formal politics and takes seriously their everyday acts to shape society. … In doing so, we can attend to the ordinary ways that young people are both disengaged and engaged with politics. (Harris et al., 2010, p. 28).

Therefore, the perspective adopted in our studies focuses on two aspects – the recognition of the variety of youths' engaged, critical, monitorial or passive positions in their relationship with the public sphere, as well as the everyday spaces that allow empowering and emancipative experience of having a voice as young citizens.

The Role of Political Distrust. What transpires from the examination of the different normative understandings on youth political participation in literature is that distrust in political institutions and functioning has been interpreted differently with respect to citizenship. Classical research on the topic has considered political support and trust as crucial for the legitimacy of democratic systems (Almond & Verba, 1963). In this view, the lack of trust in institutions and politics has been associated with increasing political disaffection and the erosion of democratic legitimacy. Hence, in a traditional interpretation, political trust has been regarded as a necessary quality of active citizens and it has been examined as an important precursor to political participation.

In contrast, other authors point out that trust can play a different role in the relationship of citizens with politics. Considering the transformations of the public sphere in contemporary societies, the rise of *critical citizens* has been interpreted as a resource for democracy and even an indicator of its health, as they are assumed to also be motivated to monitor and control the political process (Dalton, 2004; Norris, 1999). In this sense, distrust in politicians and institutions may be accompanied by a need of critical supervision of decision-making and, possibly, a subsequent urge to take action to improve it (Dalton & Welzel, 2014a; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Norris, 1999; Rosanvallon, 2008; Theiss-Morse & Hibbing, 2005).

Empirical results on the consequences of political trust for engagement have suggested a rather complex picture. For example, Hooghe and Marien (2013) have showed that institutional

trust impacts differently participation in interaction with the type of activity (conventional or unconventional) and with levels of political efficacy. In parallel, Geissel (2008) has found that participation was more likely with higher levels of attentiveness to political issues, but regardless of the level of political trust and satisfaction.

Hence, trust in the political process can play different roles in youths' expression of citizenship and may be linked differently to orientations of engagement or disengagement. With these considerations in mind, we suggest that it is necessary to examine the role that trust/distrust in the political process may play in youths' expression of citizenship. We propose that young people's engagement and disengagement can assume different orientations with regard to the political system, in which they live – either normative (characterized by trust and satisfaction) or critical (characterized by distrust and dissatisfaction).

Conceptual Definitions of Youth Participation

The debate on youth participation outlined in the previous sections has evidenced the conflicting assumptions about the studied phenomena and its contested nature. The existent disagreements over what constitutes citizen participation and, thus, whether it is declining or not, have revealed some conceptual confusion surrounding the definitions of the studied phenomenon (Amnå & Ekman, 2015). Terms such as activism, political participation, civic engagement, social participation/involvement, citizen participation, active citizenship, and many others, have been used at times synonymously and at times distinctly to denote various ways of getting involved in societal or collective issues. Many of these concepts have been defined and developed extensively in the fields of political sciences or education studies to then be borrowed and adopted in psychological disciplines along with the underlying assumptions about what constitutes participation and about youth, in particular. While the contribution of psychology is relevant for the understanding of underlying psychological mechanisms of participation (motivations, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, sense of belonging, perceptions of efficacy, perceptions of contextual influences, etc.), there is lack of a comprehensive systematic view on how the discipline addresses the topic with respect to youth. In *Chapter 2* of the research project we address this issue by attempting to identify the existing fields of research and their assumptions about young people's participation. We now examine some of the main characteristics in the study of the two most prominent (and less specific) notions in literature –

political participation and civic engagement – and the progressive refinement in the definition of distinct spheres and modalities of participation.

Political Participation. Traditionally, electoral participation has been a main focus for literature on the involvement of citizens with the public sphere. Evidence on voting turnout has indeed been the principal issue of research in relation to citizen participation and its decline has often been cited as the demonstration of growing political disaffection (Macedo, 2005; Wattenberg, 2003). In this sense, political participation has often been linked to the aim of influencing governmental decisions:

> By political participation we refer to those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take. (Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978, cited in Ekman & Amnå, 2012, p. 285)

Thus, institutional-oriented actions related to the electoral process and the support of representative democracy (voting, party membership, contacting politicians) have been widely considered. However, more recent definitions of the concept have also taken to include other activities directed at influencing political outcomes in general, such as protests and social movements. Teorell and colleagues (Teorell, Torcal, & Montero, 2007) have also included consumer behavior (including donating, political consumption, boycotting and signing petitions) in a more comprehensive typology of political participation. Wider conceptualizations of what can be considered relevant for "affecting the making or implementing of public policy" (Verba et al., 1995, p. 38) have turned to voluntary associations and even informal work in the local community. The theoretical developments on the concept have nonetheless concentrated on the distinction based on the issue of institutionalization of the considered activities by identifying two broad categories – institutionalized/electoral-oriented/conventional vs. non-institutionalized/non-electoral/unconventional political behavior (Marien, Hooghe, & Quintelier, 2010; Oser, 2016). The contrast between these forms of participation has been linked with the theorized transformations towards *critical* citizenship (Norris, 1999) and the adoption of norms emphasizing engaged self-expressive values (Dalton, 2008; Dalton & Welzel, 2014b). Broadening the spectrum of relevant involvement activities is crucial with respect to the possible expansion of younger generations' repertoires in what can be defined a blended civic taste pattern characteristic of the modern *civic omnivore* (Hustinx, Meijs, Handy, & Cnaan, 2012).

The attention has, either way, been mostly drawn to manifest, deliberate and observable actions by citizens with the aim to make a difference in the political realm (Ekman & Amnå, 2012).

Within the context of the outlined conceptualizations, these actions have been considered largely in relation to their importance for democratic legitimacy and/or social change. With regard to youth, in particular, the study of political participation has mainly considered the forms of involvement they undertake and the predictors of different types of political behavior towards adulthood. In relation to this attention, psychological research has sought to contribute to the field by investigating social and psychological underpinnings of political participation, such as aspect of cognition and learning (e.g., Bandura, 1977), general and domain-specific internal and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1986; 2006), collective and political identification (Klandermans, 2013; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008) and many others. A large amount of research in social psychology, in this sense, has been dedicated to the theoretical understanding of the driving forces of particular forms of participation, such as protesting behavior (Klandermans, 1997; Tausch et al., 2011; van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013; van Zomeren et al., 2008) or volunteering (Marta, Guglielmetti, & Pozzi, 2006; Omoto & Snyder, 2002). However, the consideration of younger people and their political development has brought scholars to employing broader conceptualizations of participation and to the use of the term "civic engagement", in particular.

Civic Engagement. The tendency towards broader conceptions of the ways in which citizens engage with society has lead to the consideration of the wider civic sphere. The concept of *civic engagement*, in particular, has taken a prominent role in research from political sciences and sociology to education studies and developmental psychology. The definitions of the term have proliferated and a variety of perspectives have been identified that point to existing conceptual ambiguity (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Berger, 2009; Shaw, Brady, McGrath, Brennan, & Dolan, 2014). Civic engagement has alternatively emphasized forms of volunteering in one's community, forms of political involvement or collective collaborative action, but more often it has been defined quite broadly as an umbrella term encompassing a wide variety of possible acts in interaction with society (Adler & Goggin, 2005). It has been argued that the attention to this notion has been popularized by Putnam's landmark observations on the importance of social capital (Putnam, 2000). In this conception, in fact, *civic engagement* refers to a range of formal and informal activities (from electoral activities and associational involvement to reading

newspapers and bowling) that build social capital in terms of reciprocal and trustworthy social networks.

The emphasis on citizens' engagement as encompassing involvement beyond the strictly political goals has been particularly fruitful in the context of research on youth civic development (Flanagan, 2003; Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002; Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). In particular, as the focus of analysis shifts to children and adolescents, participation is considered in terms of progressive formation mainly in relation to community-based activities, volunteering and grassroots activism, in the context of which political awareness is built (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Generally, the theoretical perspectives studying young people's *civic engagement* have been developed with the particular concern of the benefits that social involvement entails for the community and for the individual (Shaw et al., 2014). In this sense, a large part of the literature on the topic has concentrated on the issue of developing youths' capacity to engage throughout transitions towards adolescence and adulthood.

Attention has also been brought to the psychological aspects that underpin manifest involvement by considering *civic engagement* as "an integration of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive factors within the individual" (Zaff et al., 2011, p. 1208). Zaff and colleagues (2010b), for example, include in the concept of civic engagement: knowledge and exercise of rights and responsibilities, sense of concern for the state and shared fate with one's fellow citizens, as well as subjective identification with other citizens. Other authors have also defined the concept quite inclusively as "a set of values, actions and competences aimed to change or improve the local community or the wider society" (Lenzi et al., 2015, p. 445). In many cases it remains unclear whether politically oriented engagement is considered in these conceptualizations and how – as a distinct form, as a consequence or as a part of the wider definition.

The concept of *active citizenship* is also considered to be closely related to that of civic engagement (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Shaw et al., 2014; Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010a) and has been defined in similarly broad terms. Within the European context, the theoretical development of the notion has been characterized by attempts to define indicators and competences of active citizenship. In this line of research, Hoskins (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009) has defined the concept as "participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterized by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and

democracy" (p. 462). In this conception, too, the activities considered are of great variety – from electoral, activist to community-based and unconventional types. However, a specific emphasis is given on the values that are at the base of such involvement. These are indicative of the underlying intention behind the definition of the concept, which is related to the promotion of a specific kind of active citizenship within European policy on education (Biesta, 2009). In particular, the focus seems to be on identifying the appropriate competences and forms of involvement in a functionalist approach that emphasizes the needs of the existing social order: "its aim is mainly to 'domesticate' the citizen and channel his or her political agency into a very specific direction" (Biesta, 2009, p. 154). Moreover, Biesta (*idem*) has highlighted that the approach in consideration gives disproportionate attention to individual initiative rather than to availability of resources for participation and privileges consensus over contestation in the democratic process. From an educational and youth work perspective, Barber (2009), too, has recalled the priority given to youth participation and active citizenship in Europe, while arguing that there are multiple meanings that young people attach to the concept of citizenship (from universal status to dissident action) and a truly democratic understanding of youth participation should accommodate bottom-up as well as top-down pressures.

Attentiveness and Passivity. The broadness of the outlined definitions, especially with regard to *civic engagement*, has been criticized for excessive conceptual stretching: "like other buzzwords, civic engagement means so many things to so many people that it clarifies almost nothing" (Berger, 2009, p. 335). In an attempt to surpass the concept, Berger (2009) has focused on defining engagement as a combination of attention and energy. He distinguishes three spheres of engagement: *political* (attention to and activity in political issues and processes in interaction with the polity, the state, or any level of government), *social* (attention to and activity in associations in civil life without a political component, including informal socializing and friendships) and *moral* (attention to and activity in support of particular moral code, moral reasoning, or moral principles).

Other authors have also proposed to distinguish the political and the civic sphere in conceptualizing participation (Zukin et al., 2006). More recent contributions in the context of the project Processes Influencing Democratic Ownership and Participation (PIDOP), have drawn a distinction between participation as a behavioral construct and engagement as a psychological one (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Barrett & Zani, 2015). In this case, *political participation*

would refer to activities that have "the intent or effect of influencing either regional, national, or supranational governance" (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014, p. 6), both through conventional electoral forms or unconventional non-electoral forms. *Civic participation* would entail voluntary activities of help within a community, work for the public good, belonging to community organizations, volunteering, charity, etc. By contrast, political or civic *engagement* would involve "having an interest in, paying attention to, or having knowledge, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, or feelings about either political or civic matters" (*idem*, p.6).

The distinctions proposed by the authors highlight the consideration of less manifest and psychological involvement alongside observable behavior in the civic and political spheres. In line with this acknowledgement, Ekman and Amnå (Ekman & Amnå, 2012) have proposed a typology that differentiates manifest and latent (pre-political) participation from disengagement. The authors propose a refined classification that distinguishes: 1) *manifest* political participation in both *formal* and *extra-parliamentary* activities (including collective and individualized forms, such as protesting, boycotting, petitioning, consumer activism, etc.); 2) *latent* political participation that is expressed in *civic engagement* (considered as pre-political activities in the sphere of volunteering, helping others, discussing issues and acting with socially awareness) and *involvement* and *interest* (e.g., attentiveness to political and societal issues, sense of belonging); 3) *disengagement*, which is also distinguished between *active* anti-political stance and *passive* lack of interest. The concept of *latency* has drawn the attention to considering the lack of manifest behavior as an issue that is more complex than simply relating to political passivity. The authors have developed further the idea by identifying an orientation towards politics that is characterized by interest in political issues and potential readiness for participation: "standby citizens are those who stay alert, keep themselves informed about politics, and are willing and able to participate if needed" (Amnå & Ekman, 2013, p. 262). The conceptualization is in line with previous proposals acknowledging the growing *monitorial* attitudes among youth (Hooghe & Dejaeghere, 2007; Schudson, 1996; 1998) and points to the need of considering distinct orientations of young people towards the civic and political life that go beyond the simplistic presence or absence of activity. With this consideration in mind, we propose to examine young people's orientations towards citizenship in the European context by considering both the importance of attentiveness in qualifying passive orientations and the role of political (dis)trust in distinguishing normative and critical orientations. Very few studies have examined

empirically the existence of similar orientations and their relations with other political attitudes among youth (Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Geissel, 2008; Hooghe & Dejaeghere, 2007) and there is lack of literature on how these orientations might be influenced by contextual factors during adolescent development.

Civic and Political Development towards Youth Agency

As evidenced, civic engagement has become an important object of study especially with respect to the crucial developmental periods of adolescence and young adulthood (e.g., Sherrod et al., 2002; 2010; Zaff et al., 2010b). These have been considered particularly critical periods for the development of sociopolitical orientations (e.g., Erikson, 1968). At this age youth are engaged in the maturing of their identity and of their relationship with society (Atkins & Hart, 2003; Yates & Youniss, 1998; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). Scholars have thus often focused on the period from late adolescence to early adulthood – the "impressionable years" (Mannheim, 1952b) – in order to identify the formative experiences that continue to influence the civic and political attitudes and habits throughout adult life (Sears & Levy, 2003; Sherrod et al., 2002).

The research on youth civic engagement in developmental perspective has been motivated by two primary considerations. Firstly, civic involvement in young age has been considered as conducive to further participation in adulthood and, consequently, the literature has focused extensively on the life-course development of civic behaviors, skills and attitudes (Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012; Zaff et al., 2010b; 2011). Secondly, civic engagement has also been regarded as a means to strengthen young people's resources and capacities, especially in the context of positive youth development (PYD) and community development (Flanagan, 2003; Lerner, Lerner, & Benson, 2011; Sherrod et al., 2010). The latter consideration, in particular, has contributed to understanding youth as assets to their communities and as agents of social change, instead of focusing on deficit-based concerns (Flanagan & Christens, 2011; Sherrod et al., 2010).

Fostering Youth Agency. The importance of recognizing and fostering youth agency in the development of civic and political engagement has been emphasized in literature of different disciplines. Major concerns have been raised over the ways, in which young people tend to be represented with regard to their civic and political capacity in academic and political discourse.

Several authors have highlighted how youth citizenship is frequently intended in terms of "investment" and development for the future (Martelli, 2013; Smith, Lister, Middleton, & Cox, 2005) and young people are regarded as "citizens-in-waiting" (Lister, 2007; Osler & Starkey, 2003). As a consequence, existing practices in living contexts can be ignored and the resulting alienation from political life should not come as a surprise, since youths' identification as citizens is influenced by the discourses surrounding them (Percy-Smith, 2015). In this sense, an approach that treats young people as capable and resourceful citizens attests to "a shift in focus away from strategies to help *make* young people citizens, towards ways of *supporting* young people as citizens" (Smith et al., 2005, p. 439).

Young people construct their ideas of themselves as citizens and of civic and political processes within the everyday interactions with significant others and with the communities, organizations and institutions of which they are part. It is in these contexts that youth should be supported and recognized for their capacities by providing opportunities for their involvement. In order to understand the interplay between structure and agency in interactions aimed at fostering youth participation, it is important to consider the relational dynamics in decision-making processes. Defining the role of the participant (Watts & Flanagan, 2007) is relevant for defining the nature of participation (e.g., decision-making vs consultative role), wherein the power differentials between the parties involved (e.g., between youth and teachers) are acknowledged as a constraining factor influencing the quality of the experience and its impact. A classic work in the field has been Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation, which classifies eight levels of hierarchical power dynamics in participation, that progress from non-participation through tokenism and up to citizen power. Since then, many authors have proposed different participation models regarding youth-adult dynamic of control (Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001; Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010). Hart's (1992) and Shier's (2001) models build upon the idea of a stepwise progression of participation, where youth-initiated action is the ideal top level. These perspectives have been generally concerned with the negative impact of designing activities and programs at a non-participation or tokenism level, thus compromising the possibility of building agency among youth. More recently, Wong and colleagues (2010) have argued for valorizing shared control between youth and adults. The authors have argued that a more egalitarian approach that emphasizes participatory co-learning through youth-adult partnerships can help foster empowerment and build critical awareness. In this conception, ownership of the

participative process is fostered by a social arrangement, in which adults' purpose is to maximize conditions and opportunities for youth involvement in decision-making by providing support, resources and social capital, while encouraging youngsters' initiatives and voice.

A significant amount of literature in community and developmental psychology has indeed sustained that truly participatory citizenship development is fostered by involving young people in collaborative processes within organizations, schools and everyday interactions (e.g., Percy-Smith, 2015; Sherrod et al., 2010). Social settings, in which youth can participate in relevant discussions, exercise informed judgment, criticize the status quo and have a voice, are seen as crucial in an approach that focuses on facilitating political abilities: "interest in political issues tends to be generated by controversy, contestation, discussion, and the perception that it matters to take a stand" (Flanagan & Christens, 2011, p. 2). Watts and Flanagan (2007), for example, have argued that a perspective on sociopolitical development should examine also aspects of contestation in politics and the structural barriers to youth participation as *justice-oriented* citizens (having a critical stance on social and political issues, see Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). The authors have stressed, furthermore, that meaningful and empowering social involvement cannot leave out of consideration neither the presence of opportunity structures and their capacity to facilitate or hinder agency, nor the role that young people can take within these structures.

In this sense, the analysis of the development of capacities for civic and political participation in youth should also consider the quality of available experiences of engagement within young people's living contexts. To put it differently, not everything that is being proposed as "participative" necessarily leads to positive changes for political development: and "quality civic and political participation experiences must be favored if we value more complex, autonomous, critical, and reflective citizens" (Ferreira, Azevedo, & Menezes, 2012, p. 608). In particular, it has been argued that it is important to investigate the interaction of opportunities for action allowing for role-taking experiences and for reflection in supporting and yet challenging relational contexts (Fernandes-Jesus, Malafaia, Ferreira, Cicognani, & Menezes, 2012; Ferreira et al., 2012; Menezes, 2003). For youngsters such opportunities can be found in civic organizations and community activities, but also within-school experiences and extracurricular activities.

Therefore, it is important to examine the agency-building potential of environmental opportunities for sociopolitical development. With these considerations in mind, we adopt an approach that considers the influence of contexts in young people's life.

Ecological Perspective. The literature on the development of civic and political engagement has focused on the different living contexts that can provide opportunities for the growth of participatory capacity and behaviors. In particular, in line with contextual models of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007), scholars have underlined that adolescents' civic sense and political attitudes are influenced by multiple environments – such as family and peers, with whom most social interactions take place; or schools and neighborhoods, where youngsters spend most of their daily lives.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development stresses the progressive adaptation between the individual and her/his everyday social environment, as well as the interaction between multiple contexts in the shaping of behavior. The ecological environment, proposed by the author, refers to a series of structures, in which the person is situated: *microsystem*, *mesosystem*, *ecosystem* and *macrosystem*. The *microsystem* represents the contexts of which the individual has direct experience, such as family, classroom, peers. The *mesosystem* is comprised of the set of microsystems, in which the person participates, and their interactions (for example, the relationship between parents and friends). The ecosystem represents the influential environments, in which the individual does not participate directly; while the *macrosystem* is a level that influences all others and is related to the broader social and cultural system. Youth civic and political engagement, similarly to other behaviors, can be understood as a product of the interaction between the person (and their characteristics) and the environmental factors pertaining to contexts of differing proximity. The proximal contexts (micro- and mesosystems) constitute a particularly important focus of research for the psychological understanding of civic and political development during adolescence, since these represent the social settings where youngsters can experiment their agency. Neighborhoods, community organizations, youth groups and schools are all contexts, in which young people can collaborate with others, discuss relevant social and political issues, engage in participatory experiences and reflect critically on social issues. These are conceived as practice grounds for public life, that can provide adolescents with the possibility to exercise rights and responsibilities as members of a community and foster interest and critical awareness on a broader civic and

political level. The following sections review briefly research on the contexts taken in consideration in our studies. Greater attention is dedicated to the school environment, which is a focus of study in both *Chapters 3* and *4*.

     Family and Peers. Existing research has illustrated the fundamental role of families and peers on adolescents' civic development in providing opportunities for discussion and construction of knowledge, as well as models of citizenship (Andolina, Jenkins, Zukin, & Keeter, 2003; Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998; Lenzi, Vieno, Santinello, Nation, & Voight, 2014a; Rossi, Lenzi, Sharkey, Vieno, & Santinello, 2016; Sherrod et al., 2002; Silva, Sanson, Smart, & Toumbourou, 2004; Zaff, Malanchuk, & Eccles, 2008).

     The family can provide the learning opportunities and resources that foster civic development, but it also represents the primary caregiving environment where social norms and expectations are introduced (Kelly, 2006). The evidence converges on identifying parents and siblings as critical role models, whose own engagement tends to be transmitted across generations (Andolina et al., 2003; Flanagan et al., 1998). The social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) describes such process of transmission through observation and inference. Caregivers' political behaviors and parent-child communication have been found to be related to youth voting and volunteering (Kelly, 2006). Discussions within the family, for example, provide opportunities to share knowledge and beliefs, and convey the notion that engagement in civic and political matters is important (Allen & Bang, 2015; Flanagan et al., 1998). Adolescents' perception of parental attitudes has also been identified as crucial in this process (Knafo & Schwartz, 2010; Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997). In addition to providing a direct example with their values and behavior, however, families represent a complex environment, where styles of interaction and parental styles can also influence greatly adolescents' civic and political attitudes (Gniewosz, Noack, & Buhl, 2009; Lenzi, Vieno, Santinello, Nation, & Voight, 2014a). For example, authoritarian parenting, characterized by strict rules and control, has been shown to foster political alienation in teens (Gniewosz et al., 2009).

     During adolescence peer groups become very influential in political socialization, even more so than parents according to some scholars (Allen & Bang, 2015; Silbiger, 1977). In a process similar to the influence of the caregiving environment, peer civic behavior and communication also contribute to the construction of knowledge and beliefs that foster

adolescents' civic development (Rossi et al., 2016). Friends can also encourage participation (Silva et al., 2004) and they can maintain norms that support engagement (Quintelier, Stolle, & Harell, 2012).

Neighborhood Community. The neighborhood is another social setting that has been demonstrated to influence young people's civic development by providing opportunities for interaction and involvement (Atkins & Hart, 2003). Neighborhood social resources and the perception of social connectedness have been often linked to greater participation among adolescents (Albanesi, Cicognani, & Zani, 2007; Lenzi, Vieno, Pastore, & Santinello, 2013; Rossi et al., 2016). In particular, the availability of neighborhood-based organizations has been related to youth participation and pro-social outcomes (Quane & Rankin, 2006), while stronger intergenerational ties within the local community have been associated with greater civic responsibility and involvement (Lenzi et al., 2013; Rossi et al., 2016). A great deal of research has concentrated on the notion that social capital within communities is crucial in fostering civic engagement through shared norms of trust and social networking (Putnam, 1995; 2000). At the same time, within community psychology, the subjective experience of community – i.e., sense of community – has been identified as having a central role in facilitating participation for the common good (Cicognani & Zani, 2015). Sense of community has been theorized as a four-dimensional construct (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), consisting of: *membership* (sense of belonging to the community), *opportunities for influence* (perceived opportunities to contribute to the communal life through participation), *integration and fulfillment of needs* (benefits and satisfaction of needs deriving from community membership) and *shared emotional connection* (sharing of common history and emotional ties). For adolescents, in particular, the quality and multiplicity of experiences of involvement and opportunities for influence are crucial for positive developmental outcomes (Chiessi, Cicognani, & Sonn, 2010; Evans, 2007). Neighborhood, in this sense, is conceived as a learning context, a practice ground for public life, that can provide adolescents with the possibility to exercise rights and responsibilities as members of the local community and foster interest and engagement on a broader civic and political level.

School. Another crucial training ground for adolescents' civic and political development is the school. Both formal and informal aspects of school civic education – civic learning curricula and practices, open discussions about current issues in the classroom, opportunities for involvement and extracurricular activities – have all been found to foster civic participation and

interest among youth (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; Torney-Purta, 2002). Schools' role in shaping young people's civic and political sense is pivotal as an institution that is capable of reaching the majority of youth with a clear educational agenda. Educational institutions have certainly been regarded as privileged settings for acquiring skills and knowledge that foster civic and political engagement (Emler & Frazer, 1999; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001).

The existing research has shown that effective citizenship education, however, focuses on more than the mere teaching of civic knowledge and provides opportunities for the experience of participation that foster development of identity, skills and efficacy instrumental to active citizenship (Haste, 2004). In this sense, the experience itself of citizenship in the school context is central as "young people learn to be citizens as a consequence of their participation in the actual practices that make up their lives" (Lawy & Biesta, 2006, p. 45). The school, then, can be seen as a microcosm in which public life is exercised daily. Hence, the development of youth as active and reflective citizens is related to the whole-school experience as a source of opportunities for practical learning and agency-building (Dias & Menezes, 2013). Indeed, schools represent public institutions that can involve students in the school governance and recognize them as social agents with claims and interests (Cockburn, 2007; Lawy & Biesta, 2006). Informal aspects of the school context, in particular, are important in influencing civic and political development by providing experiences of democratic participation and practice of civic and political skills. Informal learning in school can be affected by contextual characteristics, such as institutional rules and norms, school culture (informal shared values and norms), school leadership (e.g., decision-making style), classroom climate (e.g., teacher-student relationship, democratic classroom climate) and structures for student involvement (e.g. student councils, extracurricular activities, school projects) (Scheerens, 2009). Participatory school culture that ensures collaborative processes between students and adults has been increasingly regarded as fundamental for the socio-political development of adolescents (Kerr, Sturman, Schulz, & Burge, 2010; Percy-Smith, 2015). Several authors have stressed the importance of providing opportunities for open and respectful discussions in the classroom, as well as centering the school climate as a whole around democratic values that promote students' decision-making power within the school governance (Hahn, 1998; Torney-Purta, 2002; Torney-Purta & Barber, 2005). School climate has been defined as "impressions, beliefs, and expectations held by

members of the school community about their school as a learning environment, their associated behavior, and the symbols and institutions that represent the patterned expressions of the behavior" (Homana, Barber, & Torney-Purta, 2006, p. 6). Research has shown that attitudes and behaviors related to political development are promoted by a democratic school climate, in which students feel they can discuss topics openly and take part in decision-making at school (Flanagan, Cumsille, Gill, & Gallay, 2007; Vieno, Perkins, Smith, & Santinello, 2005). For example, the IEA international studies of civic and citizenship education showed that classroom climate that is open for discussion of civic and political issues predicted civic knowledge and sense of engagement (Torney-Purta, 2002). Moreover, students who perceive school climate that is centered around democratic values tend to show higher trust in other people and in institutions (Hahn, 1998). Another aspect that has been linked to the development of civic responsibility and engagement in adolescents is the perception of fair treatment at school (Lenzi, Vieno, Sharkey, Mayworm, Scacchi, Pastore, et al., 2014b). The feeling of being treated fairly generally brings to considering authority as more trustworthy (Tyler & Smith, 1999). For adolescents, in particular, it may foster the development of beliefs that value equality and social relationships and, thus, facilitate intentions to engage in the improvement of the social and political community (Lenzi, Vieno, Sharkey, Mayworm, Scacchi, Pastore, et al., 2014b).

Importantly, experiences in school can provide opportunities for participation and reflection in a supportive and challenging environment, which has also been shown to lead to positive development of civic and political attitudes. For instance, research on service learning in school has evidenced that critical reflection during the experience is essential in order to reach positive impact and avoid detrimental effects (Chupp & Joseph, 2010; Roschelle, Turpin, & Elias, 2000). In this sense, the line of study focusing on the quality of participation experiences (Ferreira et al., 2012) stresses the importance of settings that allow the consideration and integration of plural diverse perspectives for the social development of adolescents. Hence, the school context has the multiple responsibilities not only to impart civic knowledge, but also to provide a general environment that is open for dialogue between different views and that invites critical reflection and participation by students. There is the need to explore further the influences of informal and everyday experiences in school on young people's orientations towards citizenship and on their perceptions of themselves as capable social agents.

Structural inequalities. Although schools are a crucial context of capacity-building and involvement for civic development, there is evidence that adequate civic education is hindered by inequalities in civic learning opportunities for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. Despite the capacity of schools to offset the impact of underprivileged family and neighborhood backgrounds (Kahne & Sporte, 2008), in practice existing social disparities seem to be re-enacted and exacerbated also in the educational context (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). In this sense, it is important to understand what structural barriers and uneven opportunities to participate in the civic and political process are found in educational institutions and how young people might experience them as exposing a discrepancy between ideal and real-world democracy (Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

School Tracks. When considering inequalities in education, special attention should be given to the different school tracks offered in national education systems. In Italy, at the age of 14 students choose their upper secondary school between many different programmes within three types of tracks: general/*liceo*, technical and vocational (see Eurydice, 2017a). The general track is conceived specifically as preparatory for university studies, while the technical and vocational tracks lead directly to a professional qualification. General upper secondary education lasts five years and it is delivered by six types of *liceo* specializing in the following areas: arts, classical studies, sciences, languages, music and dance, human sciences. Technical institutes offer vocational education in economics and technology sectors. Vocational institutes offer vocational education in areas of the service sector and the industry and crafts sector. All tracks give access to university after five years of schooling.

Numerous international and Italian studies identify the choice of track in secondary education as an important influence on subsequent educational and employment career (Ballarino & Panichella, 2014; Checchi, 2010; Contini & Scagni, 2011; Woessmann, 2009). More importantly, it has been argued that this choice is often rooted in social background and ultimately reproduces social inequality in education (Checchi & Flabbi, 2007; Contini & Scagni, 2011; Romito, 2014). In particular, lower socio-economic family background has been associated with the choice of vocational and technical schools, where chances for subsequent tertiary education have been traditionally low and drop-out rates have been high. Reforms in the last decade, however, have reduced vocational aspects in technical institutes and re-oriented the track towards increasingly academic curricula. Nonetheless, the different school tracks in Italy

seem to maintain relative inequality in educational opportunity through a vertical hierarchy of prestige and quality, which sees *liceo* on top, followed by technical institutes and vocational schools at the bottom (Triventi, 2014).

Previous research in the German context has demonstrated that there are differences in political attitudes and behavior between young people from different school tracks – high school students attending academic tracks reported higher political interest, more positive attitudes towards political engagement and higher willingness to participate than those from vocational tracks (Eckstein et al., 2012; Gaiser & Rijke, 2007). There is, however, limited empirical evidence of the impact school tracks in Italy may have on youth civic and political attitudes (e.g., Cicognani, Zani, Fournier, Gavray, & Born, 2012). The different types of school can represent diverse socialization contexts, in which resources and opportunities for students are of varying quality (Eckstein et al., 2012). Aspects of the school context that influence students' political development – sophistication of curricula, civic learning practices, extracurricular opportunities, classroom climate – may differ between tracks. However, as already evidenced, the choice of certain tracks may also be tied to students' family socio-economic background, thus reproducing the impact that social inequalities have been shown to exert on civic and political development.

Socio-economic background and gender differences. Literature on political participation across disciplines has evidenced the existing inequalities of voice across individuals and groups, as well as the decisive impact of socio-economic contexts on participatory behavior and attitudes (Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2012; Verba et al., 1995). Youth who are less advantaged and less educated are persistently less likely to take political or civic action, tend to have lower interest in political and civic matters and are more skeptical towards politics (Bynner, Romney, & Emler, 2010; Zukin et al., 2006). Adolescents from families with higher socio-economic status seem to experience environments that foster more positively political involvement (Ichilov, 1988; 1991). Moreover, youth disengagement and political apathy have been explored as possible reactions towards the marginalization and inequalities, that disadvantaged students perceive in their relationship with society (Ahmad, 2015; Rubin, 2007). Researching young people's citizenship orientations should, therefore, account for the socio-economic differences that impact the spectrum of opportunities for positive political engagement available to adolescents.

The existing literature has also evidenced inequalities in terms of civic and political participation for young women and girls (Albanesi, Zani, & Cicognani, 2012; Cicognani et al., 2012). Substantial amount of research has shown that there are gender differences in political engagement – generally, men are more likely to be interested in politics and active, especially in formal political forms of participation (Dalton, 2008; De Piccoli & Rollero, 2009; Paxton, Kunovich, & Hughes, 2007; Schlozman, Burns, & Verba, 1999). However, the picture seems more complex when adolescents are concerned and when informal and civic engagement is taken into consideration. Gender disparities start to emerge within the ecological contexts of adolescent development (family, school and local community) and can depend on the opportunities and resources present for boys and girls (e.g., Cicognani et al., 2012).

With these considerations in mind, in *Chapter 3* we analyze the possible differences between adolescents' citizenship orientations based on school tracks, socio-economic background and gender, as well as family, peer, neighborhood and school characteristics.

Overall Research Aims

Throughout this chapter, we discussed the existing normative approaches to youth engagement/disengagement, the contested definitions of the phenomenon, as well as the role of proximal contexts on the development of civic and political agency.

Based on the considerations outlined, we sought to address: the lack of systematic exploration of the assumptions and contradictions in psychological literature regarding youth civic and political participation and young people's role as social agents; the scarce study of young people's orientations towards citizenship in the European context in terms of engagement/disengagement and critical/normative stance; the lack of evidence on how environmental factors can influence these orientations in adolescent development; the need to address the role of everyday experiences in school in influencing youngsters' ideas of engagement/disengagement and of themselves as capable agents.

Consequently, the overall research aims of the dissertation are:

1) to examine the social representations of youth civic and political participation in the current psychological literature in order to outline the existing assumptions and contradictions (*Chapter 2*);

2) to explore the orientations towards participation in the civic and political sphere among Italian youth (*Chapter 3 – Study 2A*);

3) to examine the differences of orientations towards civic and political participation among late adolescents with respect to the general young population (*Chapter 3 – Study 2B*)

4) to analyze the influence of proximal ecological contexts on the assumption of different orientations towards civic and political participation among late adolescents (*Chapter 3 – Study 2B*)

5) to explore how late adolescent Italians interpret active citizenship and their role as social agents (*Chapter 4*)

6) to explore how upper secondary school students perceive the climate, the opportunities and the limitations of meaningful involvement in their school context (*Chapter 4*)

The studies presented seek to underline the complexity of young people's relationship to the public sphere and to favor a theoretical interpretation that subverts adult-defined and pre-conceived ideas of what it means to be a young active citizen. We assume an approach that proposes to confront normative assumptions in academic research on youth participation with the plurality of young people's citizenship orientations and their perspective about their active role. In order to do this, we use a mixed methods approach to analysis (Creswell, 2014; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007) in a sequential design where each method seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of different aspects in the complex study of youth participation.

Chapter 2 seeks to address *Research Aim 1*. The purpose of the study is to complement the examination of normative assumptions in the literature on youth participation outlined in *Chapter 1* and to understand the representations constructed within academic studies in psychology regarding the role of young people as active citizens. We examine current literature in the discipline through a systematic lexicographic content analysis in order to comprehend the existing conceptualizations of youth participation and to evidence the tensions and contradictions that can be identified.

Chapter 3 seeks to address *Research Aims 2-4*. The intent is to undertake a descriptive approach and identify the orientations that young people assume with respect to the civic and political sphere. We examine through a person-centered approach the patterns of engagement among Italian youth identified by civic and political activity, political and social interest, and political distrust. The goal of the analysis is to explore the positions taken by young people in terms of disengagement, stand-by engagement and participation, as well as their differentiation on a normative/critical dimension. Moreover, we examine the specific profiles of engagement within a subsample of upper secondary school students and confront the results with respect to those for the general sample. Subsequently, we also analyze how proximal contexts – such as family, peers, neighborhood and school – influence the membership in different profiles. The goal is to understand which environmental characteristics are associated with different orientations of engagement/disengagement in adolescence.

Chapter 4 seeks to address *Research Aims 5-6*. The aim is to explore through a qualitative approach the perspectives of upper secondary school students on what it means to be an active citizen, what role do young people have as active citizens and how do their schools

foster or inhibit the development of social agency in the students. Moreover, we consider different types of school (general/technical/vocational) as possibly diverse contexts of influence.

CHAPTER 2. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN CURRENT

PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

The first goal of the dissertation project was to map the existing research on youth civic and political participation in psychology, in order to identify the different ways that young people's role in the public sphere is understood currently in the discipline. This chapter presents a bibliographic study that used lexicographic content analysis to examine the dominating discourses in a corpus of psychological academic publications. Following a brief introduction, we present the method used and the results from the analysis.

Background

As evidenced in *Chapter 1*, the literature on youth participation has shown a series of disagreements and conceptual ambiguities. While some authors in recent contributions have sought to refine more precise distinctions between spheres of action and levels of engagement (Barrett & Brunton-Smith, 2014; Ekman & Amnå, 2012), the field of study has been characterized by lack of clarity on what constitutes participation and how it should be approached. Adding to the confusion in the study of youth participation is the difficulty to disentangle the competing assumptions about young people within academic research on the issue. There have been criticisms on how young people's role as actors in the public sphere can often be challenged by normative and adult-centric assumptions in policy and scientific discourses on citizenship (Hart, 2009; Osler & Starkey, 2003; Smith et al., 2005). Youth can often be framed as citizens-in-formation based on a deficit-based model that tends to overlook existing experiences and rights (Osler & Starkey, 2003). Consequently, a lot of research has assumed young people to be lacking interest and knowledge and has concentrated on how to promote their development as "good" responsible citizens. As argued by Staeheli and colleagues (2013), such an approach runs the risk of attempting to "mould" youth into normative and unchallenging active citizens, rather than seeking to foster their autonomy and critical skills in

relation to the political sphere. As a result, different understandings of youth agency evidence the contested nature of the concepts in academic literature related to young people's active citizenship.

These considerations are particularly relevant in the field of psychology. As discussed, the contribution of psychology has been important for the understanding of underlying psychological mechanisms of participation (motivations, beliefs, attitudes, emotions, sense of belonging, perceptions of efficacy, perceptions of contextual influences, etc.), as well as the beneficial outcomes of engagement for individuals and communities (especially in developmental and community psychology). However, we argue that the research in the discipline is also fraught by contested interpretations in the line of assumptions about "good" participation and about the role of young people as agents. Nevertheless, there is lack of a comprehensive systematic view on how the discipline addresses the topic with respect to youth. Thus, we explore how youth civic and political agency is imagined in recent psychological literature.

The aim of revealing underlying repertoires of meaning in a particular sphere of public debate is in line with an approach in social psychology that adopts a social constructionist approach. In particular, the analysis of scientific discourse on a specific topic would permit the investigation of semantic elements and their structure as indicators of repertoires of meanings, revealing content components of social representations (SR, Moscovici, 1976). According to the paradigm of the theory of SR, social knowledge is developed dynamically within everyday interactions and organizes the implicit systems of beliefs that characterize common sense. SR are complex dynamic collectively shared "theories" that include emotions, judgments and attitudes and are aimed at the interpretation and construction of reality (Moscovici, 1976; 1988). The contents and meanings of SR are structured and they are embedded in communicative practices, such as everyday conversations, media and scientific discourses (Markovà, 2003). The construction of meaning is intended as dynamic and can be of contested nature, characterized by oppositions in the structure of a representational field owing to different social positioning (Doise, 2003) or embedded contradicting dialogical antinomies (*themata*, Markovà, 2003). This means that academic products can concur in the construction and consolidation or contestation of shared ideas of youth active citizenship. The analysis of SR of youth participation in scientific psychological production can elucidate the semantic contents and contradictory assumptions in

the disciplinary discourse on the topic. While the theory of SR has been very interested since its inception (Moscovici, 1976) in the social representational processes of the *socialization* of scientific contents in common-sense knowledge, less research has been dedicated to the examination of scientific communication itself (Sensales, Areni, & Dal Secco, 2011). So far, the specific discourses on young people's civic and political role diffused in psychology have not been examined systematically through such an approach. We use lexicographic content analysis of academic publications in the discipline to address this question and obtain an overall image of the current prevalent ideas on the topic.

Aims

The aim of the present exploratory study is to map and explore representations of youth participation in the civic and political sphere within scholarly psychological literature from the last 25 years, in order to gain better understanding of how young citizens and their actions in the public sphere are viewed and theorized in psychology's academic discourse. We, thus, analyze the use of several most prominent key terms used to denote youth citizen participation ("activism", "civic or political participation", "civic or political engagement" and "active citizenship") and the emerging social representations on the topic in order to capture what academic literature in psychology acknowledges as youth ways of participating to the civic and political life. In particular, we seek to identify the core semantic elements (meanings) that can be distinguished in the social representations of youth participation and their organization in the representational field in terms of opposing understandings of forms of involvement and of young people's role.

Method

Procedure

Searching process. A systematic search was carried out in the electronic database PsycINFO, which is one of the most important bibliographic source for international literature in psychology. Containing more than 4 million records with extensive coverage from the 1800s to the present, the database is one of the most comprehensive in psychology and related social and behavioral sciences. With this consideration in mind, we assumed that the resulting references would be sufficient for a comprehensive view of current literature in psychology.

The research was carried out on 30 August 2016, using each of the following terms: "active citizenship", "civic engagement" or "political engagement", "civic participation" or "political participation", "activism".[3] These were required to appear together with words denoting young people: "youth*" or "young*", "teen*" or "adolescen*" and delimited to titles, abstracts, keywords or subjects.

Data extraction. The references were organized based on the search terms used. Duplicates were removed and the database was screened to remove erratums to articles and book reviews, deemed not to be original contributions to the scholarly discourse. Moreover, 103 references published before 1990 were excluded from the analysis, resulting in a final database of 1777 publications published between 1990 and mid-2016. The textual corpus was created using the abstracts of the contributions, considering that they represent the first communication to the academic public and could thus provide a concise description of the authors' main ideas. It is important to stress, however, that abstracts are quite limited in length and, so, they are more structured and less thorough than the publication itself. The entries in the final corpus were tagged so as to indicate the year of publication, the type of publication (journal article, book or chapter), the geographical area relative to the institutional affiliation of the first author, and the key terms used to retrieve the publication from the database.

Analysis

The abstracts of the references resulting from the bibliographic search were analyzed by means of a lexicographic content analysis using the software T-Lab (Lancia, 2004), which is an all-in-one set of linguistic and statistical tools. The software allows for a variety of text analysis based on word occurrences and co-occurrences within units of analysis (*elementary contexts*) defined by the researcher (the paragraph in this case). It is possible to identify thematic differences in the documents and relate them to external variables by which the text corpus is classified. The variables according to which the entries in the corpus were classified were: key terms used in the bibliographic search; time period of publication; type of publication. In more detail, the corpus of abstracts was analyzed to obtain the main thematic clusters characterizing the corpus and the latent dimensions through which it can be organized. The *thematic document*

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[3] Initial searches included the terms "community involvement", "community participation" and "citizen participation". The examination of the results led to excluding those terms, as contributions were too broad (not pertinent to the civic/political sphere) or repetitive.

classification tool was used, which combines cluster and correspondence analysis of each record in the text corpus. In a first phase of the analysis, automatic lemmatization was performed to reduce the corpus words to their respective headwords according to the linguistic vocabulary consulted. Afterwards, the *thematic document classification* module was used to perform unsupervised clustering with the method of bisecting K-means, which consists of the following steps: 1) a data table of corpus documents x lexical units with presence/absence values is constructed; 2) data is pre-processed through a TF-IDF (term frequency - inverse document frequency) normalization and scaling of row vectors to unit length (Euclidean norm); 3) documents are clustered using the measure of cosine coefficients and the method of bisecting K-means; 4) for each of the obtained partitions, a contingency table of lexical units by clusters is constructed; 5) a chi square test is applied to all the intersections of the contingency table; 6) finally, a correspondence analysis of the contingency table of lexical units by clusters is performed (Lancia, 2004).

The thematic clusters identified by this procedure represent *semantic universes* (Reinert, 1983), that identify the specific vocabulary of a group of publications with respect to the others. The correspondence analysis examines the relationships between the resulting vocabularies in latent dimensions that represent the organization of meanings within the overall discourse. The identification of the *semantic universes* of a discourse on a specific argument and their organization in a semantic field allow us to examine the core elements of social representations (Veltri, 2013).

Results

Characteristics of the Bibliographic Corpus

Figure 1 shows the temporal distribution of the retrieved publications on youth participation between 1990 and 2016. The increase of literature produced on the topic in the last ten years is evident. It is worth noticing that the contributions published from 2011 until the date of the bibliographic search account for 52,8% of the whole corpus.
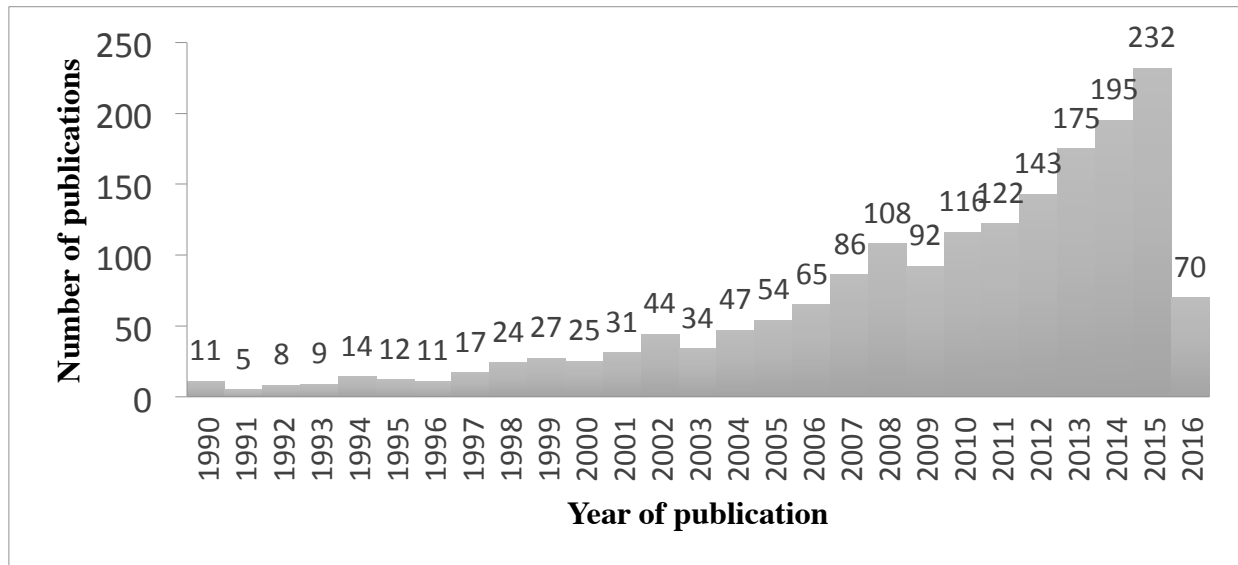
Figure 1. Distribution of publications by year

The publications were categorized in six different time periods in order to use the variable in the thematic analysis (see Table 1). We considered the large number of publications in the last seven years and, while previous years are categorized in periods of five years each, the period from 2010 to 2016 is divided in two periods of four and three years.

Table 1. Number and percentages of entries according to time period

	Frequency	Percent
1990 - 1994	47	2.6
1995 - 1999	91	5.1
2000 - 2004	181	10.2
2005 - 2009	405	22.8
2010 - 2013	556	31.3
2014 - 2016	497	28.0
Total	**1777**	**100.0**

Table 2 shows the amount of publications according to their type.

Table 2. Number and percentages of entries according to type of publication

TYPE	Frequency	Percentage
Book	51	2.9
Book Section	266	15.0
Journal Article	1460	82.2
Total	**1777**	**100**

Figure 2 shows the distribution of publications according to the geographical area of the first author's institutional affiliation. The majority of authors were affiliated with an institution in North America (60.4%).
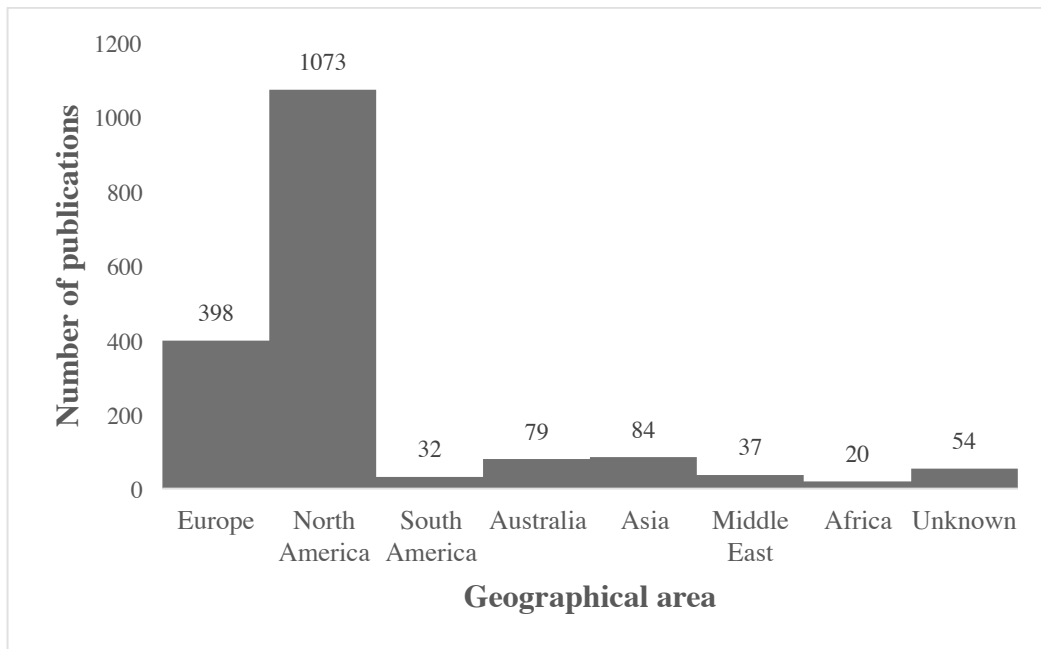
Figure 2. Distribution of publications by geographical area

The entries were also classified according to the search terms used to retrieve them. The aim was to explore the amount of scientific production related to different keywords denoting citizen participation and their interconnectedness, as seen in Table 3. Contributions could be classified to one term uniquely or, if resulting from multiple searches, to the combination of relevant terms.

Table 3. Number and percentages of entries according to search terms and their combinations

	Search terms (TOPIC)	Frequency	Percentage
Unique entries	Civic or political engagement (CPE)	376	21,2
	Civic or political participation (CPP)	419	23,6
	Activism (Act)	661	37,2
	Active Citizenship (AC)	39	2,2
Co-presences	Civic or political engagement + Civic or political participation (CPECPP)	137	7,7
	Civic or political engagement + Activism (CPEAct)	43	2,4
	Civic or political engagement + Civic or political participation + Activism (CPECPPAct)	29	1,6
	Civic or political participation + Activism (CPPAct)	62	3,5
	Active citizenship + Civic or political engagement (ACCPE)	4	0,2
	Active citizenship + Civic or political engagement + Civic or political participation (ACCPECPP)	1	0,1
	Active citizenship + Civic or political participation (ACCPP)	6	0,3
	Total	**1777**	**100**

As shown in Table 3, the term "activism" (37,2%) resulted in the largest amount of scholarly publications, followed by "civic or political participation" (23,6%) and "civic or political engagement" (21,2%). "Active citizenship", however, yielded limited results (2,2%), indicating that the term has not received wide attention in psychological literature, despite its possible relevance. Moreover, the terms do not seem to be highly related. "Civic or political participation" and "civic or political engagement" obtain the highest number of shared results (7,7%).

Thematic Classification

The analysis obtained three clusters corresponding to different themes in the analyzed corpus. Each cluster consists of a set of documents characterized by the same patterns of keywords and can be described through the most characteristic lexical units (lemmas) from which it is composed. Chi-square test tests the significance of a word recurrence within each

cluster. Table 4 shows both the percentage of the textual corpus of which each cluster is composed of and a brief list of the most characteristic words for each one.

Table 4. Most characteristic lemmas for each thematic cluster

CLUSTER 1: *Development of civic engagement (36.5%)*		CLUSTER 2: *Activism (13.2%)*		CLUSTER 3: *Civic education as prevention/intervention strategy (21.4%)*		CLUSTER 4: *Political participation (28.9%)*	
Lemma	CHI²	Lemma	CHI²	Lemma	CHI²	Lemma	CHI²
youth	918.15	feminist	747.91	health	389.95	political	775.93
civic engagement	233.05	peace	740.87	students	329.06	political participation	672.71
citizenship	193.70	gay	509.76	community	309.46	on-line	498.11
civic	156.36	feminism	361.76	school	299.09	social capital	303.40
development	112.20	protest	356.66	service-learning	273.97	internet	266.75
immigrant	107.92	movement	322.53	program	168.03	news	213.72
ethnic	93.68	war	286.46	tobacco	159.45	Facebook	203.69
young people	78.64	lesbian	270.58	prevention	150.83	offline	177.31
developmental	58.16	women	263.78	African American	134.88	use	171.96
disability	56.93	feminist activism	245.49	teachers	134.53	participation	169.96
identity	56.08	aggression	224.28	alcohol	104.16	voting	169.84
empowerment	53.02	sexual	222.91	service	95.73	social media	169.76
space	47.53	men	215.88	medical	91.45	election	159.74
adolescence	45.24	LGBT	175.68	intervention	89.57	political efficacy	154.37
opportunities	45.24	rights	156.19	educational	81.20	politics	152.53
Note. **The table reports only the first 15 lemmas according to Chi² value (see discussion of the clusters in the following paragraphs for more details).**							

The clusters thus represent domain-specific repertoires that identify different approaches and underlying assumptions to the study of youth civic and political participation. In the following paragraphs the characteristics of each thematic clusters are explored in detail, including – where significant – their relation to the illustrative variables considered in the analysis.

Development of civic engagement (Cluster 1). The first thematic cluster is the most present one (36.5%) and shows a direct focus on youth ("youth", "young people") and adolescents, in particular. It presents a clearly developmental perspective ("development", "developmental", "positive development", etc.). The theme seems to be one of studying civic engagement and active citizenship, as well as associated processes in young people ("civic engagement", "active citizenship", "responsibility", "civic development", "competence", "civic knowledge", "foster"). The thematic domain seems to pay interest in citizenship education ("citizenship education", "learning"), but mostly on creating opportunities for youth empowerment through participatory approaches ("opportunities", "participatory", "empowerment", "power", "youth-led" etc.). In this sense, a concern with marginalized groups that may not have equal availability of resources emerges, especially regarding immigrants ("immigrant", "ethnic", "disability", "marginalized"). Book and book section publications characterize the cluster, as well as the search terms "civic or political engagement" (also in combination with "civic or political participation" and "activism") and "active citizenship". Moreover, the cluster is characterized by publications in the period between 2010 and 2013.

Activism (Cluster 2). The emerging discourse in the second cluster (13.2%) represents youth participation in terms of challenging the status quo and of claiming rights related to identity. It is characterized by reference to activist practices of raising one's voice and defending social causes and rights collectively: "protest", "movement", "activism", "right", "collective action", "equality", "social movement", "oppression", "radical", etc. Participation is conceived as rights-claiming action that challenges inequalities and affirms collective identities, as evidenced by the many references to gender-related terms ("feminist", "gay", "gender", "feminism", "sexual", "LGBT", etc.) and other characteristic identity-related words ("identity", "assertive", "social identity", "identification", etc.). The focus is on the struggle against injustices and discrimination ("aggression", "prejudice", "oppression", "torture", "sexist", etc.) and on the request for rights related to diverse issues ("peace", "war", "animal", etc.). However, the cluster does not seem to be characterized by direct references to young people, rather focusing on marginalized groups and social issues. This theme is related to results from the search term "activism" and to less recent publications from the 90's (time periods: from 1990 to 1994 and from 1995 to 1999).

Civic education as prevention/intervention strategy (Cluster 3). The third cluster (21.4%) emerging from the analysis is characterized by a discourse on participation that relates it to the educational sphere ("students", "school", "service-learning", "educational", "teachers", "classroom", etc.). Youth participation, in this case, is conceived in relation to strategies to be enacted top-down ("program", "intervention", "project", "policy", etc.), in order to train and promote civic skills ("training", "skills", "promote", "civic responsibility", "communication skills"), but also to prevent or cope with different health issues or problematic behaviors ("health", "prevention", "tobacco", "alcohol", "sex education", etc.). These can also be addressed in the community and local contexts ("community", "neighborhood", "community-based"). The cluster is characterized by the search term "civic or political engagement" and publications from North America. While *Cluster 1* also focused on civic engagement and the fostering of certain competences for participation, this thematic grouping does not refer to any developmental issues and remains prevalently focused on strategies and interventions in educational contexts. The main difference between the two clusters seems to be the way that youngsters are intended – tellingly, here the focus is on "students" (seemingly passive recipients), whereas in Cluster 1 it is "youth" and "young people".

Political participation (Cluster 4). Youth participation in the last cluster (28.9%) is related mainly to the political sphere: "political", "political participation", "voting", "political engagement", "political behavior", "political activity" and the electoral process ("election", "campaign", "party", "presidential"). Related psychological processes ("political efficacy", "efficacy", "trust", "values", "attitudes", etc.) and personality traits ("trait", "personality") are brought forward. Interestingly, there is a characteristic attention for the role of media and its digital forms ("on-line", "off-line", "news", "Facebook", "social media", etc.). The focus is on explaining and predicting voting and political engagement in a quantitative research approach ("survey", "predict", "effects", "hypothesis", "correlation", "experiment"). This theme is also not characterized by references to youth as a group and focus of the research. Likely, the approach in the contributions from this cluster is mostly focused on understanding the underlining factors of participation and young people are the sampled population, but the emphasis is not on them specifically. The cluster is characterized by journal articles and by results from using the search term "civic or political participation" (including in combination with "civic or political engagement" and "activism").

Correspondence analysis identified three latent dimensions that organize the corpus, explaining the variance between documents. The thematic clusters are positioned in the factorial space, according to the relative contribution of each as seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Collocation of the clusters in the factors (absolute contributions)

	Factor 1: *Youth participation as Conventional political activity vs. Civic development*	Factor 2: *Youth participation as Rights-claiming vs. Normative civic and political engagement*	Factor 3: *Youth participation as Empowering developmental process vs. Learning and prevention*
Cluster 1: Development of civic engagement	**+ 0.26**	+ 0.12	**+ 0.39**
Cluster 2: Activism	- 0.04	**- 1.15**	- 0.06
Cluster 3: Civic education	**+ 0.43**	+ 0.19	**- 0.53**
Cluster 4: Political participation	**- 0.69**	+ 0.18	- 0.07

Figure 3 and 4 represent the thematic dimensional space and the interactions between the clusters.
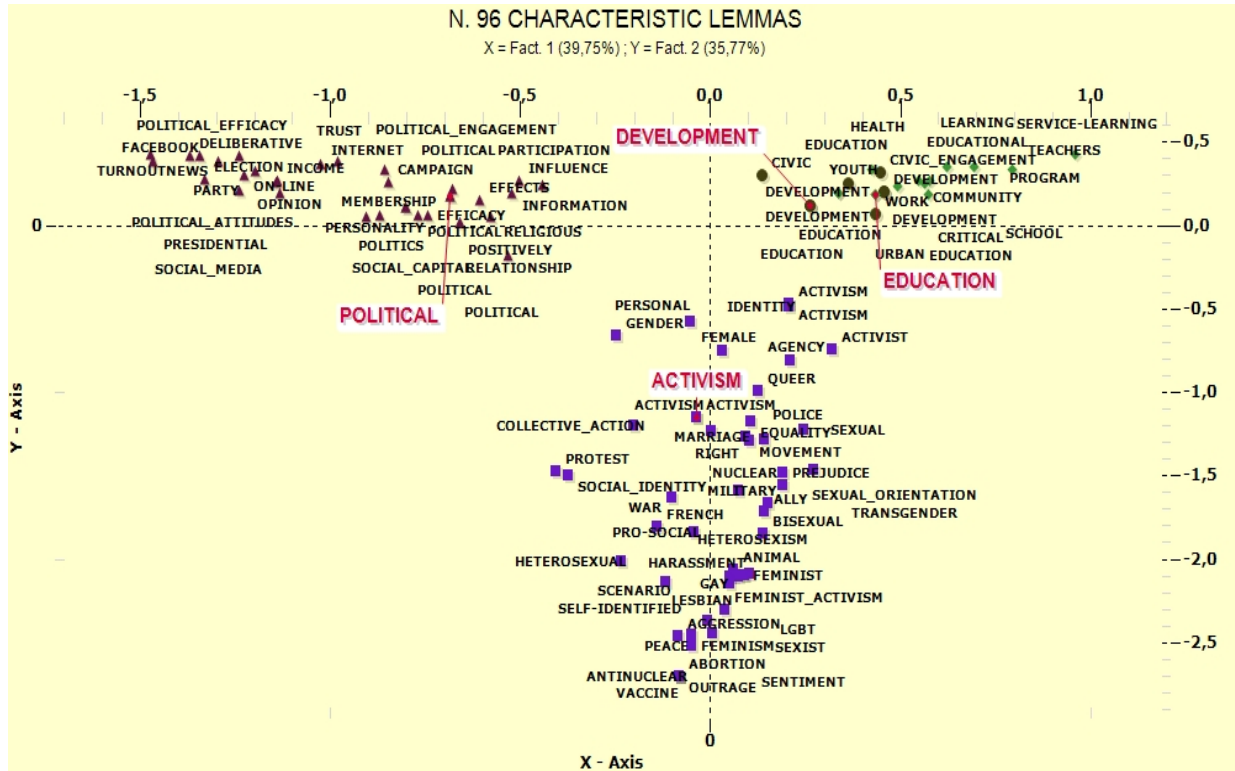
Figure 3. Representational field: Factor 1 (X-Axis) and Factor 2 (Y-Axis)
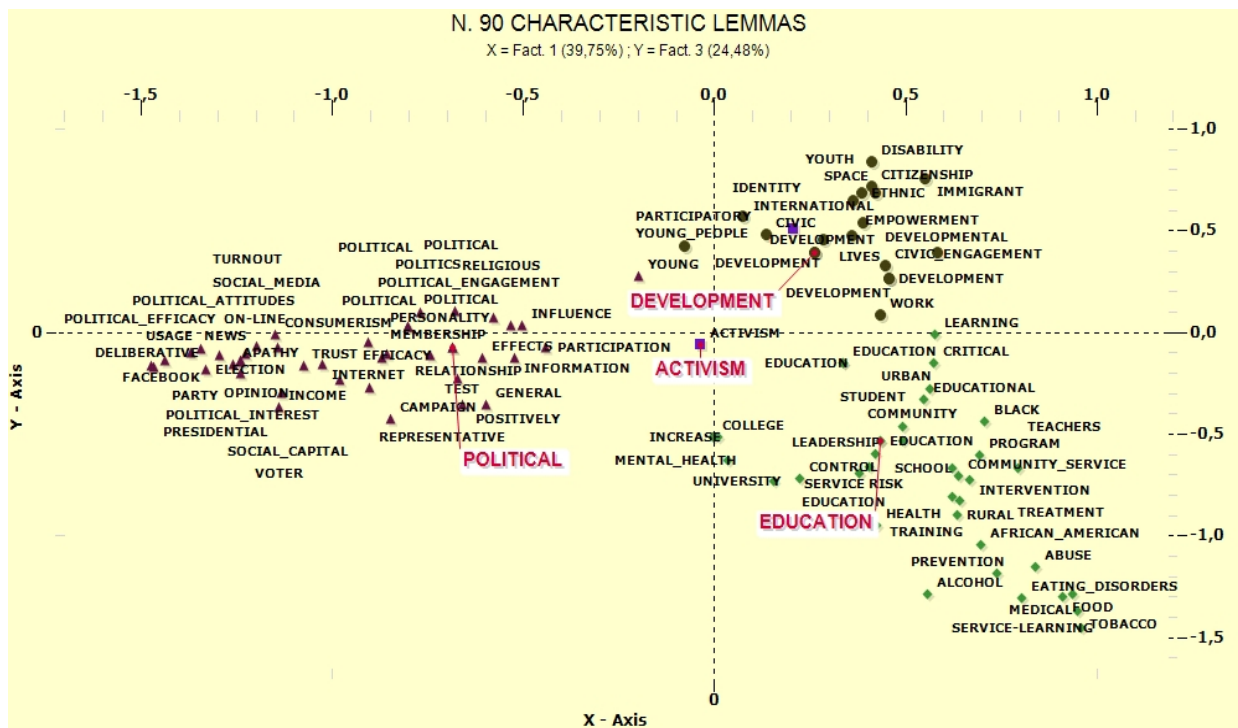
Figure 4. Representational field: Factor 1 (X-Axis) and Factor 3 (Y-Axis)

Youth participation as Conventional political activity vs. Civic development (Factor 1).
The first factor explains 39.75% of the total variance and differentiates the clusters *Development*

of civic engagement and *Civic education as prevention/intervention strategy* from *Political participation*. On the one polarity of the factor, we find references to educational and developmental content ("school", "civic engagement", "learning", "program", "development", etc.), while on the other – to conventional political participation ("political participation", "election", "on-line", "social capital", etc.). The distinction is one between studying the development of civic behavior through educational strategies and analyzing the factors that facilitate political participation.

Youth participation as Rights-claiming vs. Normative civic and political engagement (Factor 2). The factor explains 35.77% of the total variance and distinguishes the cluster *Activism* from all the others. Participation of young people intended as active rights-claiming ("feminist", "activist", "right", "identity", etc.) is opposed to the study of normatively promoted civic and political behaviors ("civic engagement", "political participation", "school", "on-line", "democratic", etc.). The distinction recalls differentiated attention to non-conformist and conformist action, where the latter is privileged in mainstream research.

Youth participation as Empowering developmental process vs. Learning and prevention (Factor 3). Explains 24.46% of the total variance and distinguishes the cluster *Development of civic engagement* from *Civic education as prevention/intervention strategy*. On the one hand, the development of youth civic engagement is studied as a positive and empowering process in the transition to adulthood ("youth", "citizenship", "civic engagement", "participatory", "empowerment", "adolescence", etc.). On the other hand, studies are interested in classroom education and prevention ("health", "school", "prevention", "program", etc.).

Discussion

The study analyzed scholarly publications in order to examine the existing conceptualizations of youth participation in the psychological discipline. We sought to identify the semantic elements that characterize the social representations of youth participation and to examine how they are organized in the representational field in terms of oppositional relations. The analysis considered the use of different terms denoting participation to civic and political life and the findings suggest that, within the widespread attention to participation processes in psychological literature, there are variations in the ways that youth's role in contributing to society as citizens is understood. Contradictions in the disciplinary social representations were

evidenced by the different emerging lexical repertoires and their opposing configurations in the representational field. In particular, the cluster analysis identified four *semantic universes* in the corpus, which suggest the presence of different groupings of publications according to general focus of research: 1) the study of youth as citizens in development, where opportunities and empowerment are to be promoted; 2) the study of youth as actors of social change and rights-claiming in opposition to injustices; 3) the study of educational strategies for promoting civic behavior and preventing risk behavior; 4) the study of predictors and effects of conventional and digital political participation. Correspondence analysis identified three latent dimensions, differentiating the study of youth civic development from participation in conventional politics, as well as differentiating the educational focus from the one on empowering developmental processes. Moreover, the research on youth activism in defense of social justice was distinct from the other thematic repertoires.

Although the analysis was based only on the abstracts, and not the full texts of publications, and considered limited number of characteristics, the study evidenced and distinguished the contexts of participation in which psychology has attempted to make a contribution – electoral sphere, schools and higher education, community contexts and adolescent development, as well as activist movements. The thematic analysis allowed to highlight the underlying tensions in the social representations of young people and their agency that characterized each area of study. We found that the meaning of youth active citizenship is indeed contested within the academic production on the topic. On the one hand, the findings highlight how current psychological research present a double-faceted conceptualization of youth engagement, respectively focusing on the formation of future citizens (Osler & Starkey, 2003) or on the explanation of their actual participation. On the other hand, the results also indicate that the dominant discourse adopts an understanding of youth participation that is in line with a normative model of the "good" responsible citizen (by studying what motivates conventional political activity or how to develop civic knowledge and responsibility in formative environments), which is distinguished from a less present thematic pattern that pays attention to critical activism. These differences relate to underlying visions of the goals of engagement, which can be represented on a continuum from "responsible" compliant active citizenship to "disruptive" activist citizenship (Staeheli et al., 2013). The findings highlight the disparate attention found in psychological research for these different civic orientations and the need to

address gaps in the development of shared definitions in the study of youth participation that would allow for the recognition of both compliant and critical young citizens' agency. In the next chapter we assume an approach that seeks to identify and describe existing citizenship orientations among youth that could help future research to overcome normative prescriptions limiting an inclusive but clear understanding of youth active citizenship.

CHAPTER 3. CITIZENSHIP ORIENTATIONS AMONG ITALIAN YOUTH

Based on the identification of gaps in the existing research and on the results of the systematic analysis of publications, the following empirical studies explore the ways in which young people engage or disengage with the civic and political sphere. The first study presented in this chapter examines profiles of involvement identified by civic and political participation, political interest and political (dis)trust in a sample of Italian adolescents and young adults. The second study focuses on the specific orientations adopted by the subgroup of adolescents and aims to identify correlates that are likely associated to profile membership.

First, the chapter starts with a brief overview of the previous research, which informs the hypothesized patterns of (dis)engagement in youth. Following a description of the aims of research, the two studies are presented in their method and results. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings, especially with respect to their theoretical and practical implications.

Background

Citizenship Orientations: Varieties of (Non-)Passivity and Criticism

As evidenced in *Chapter 1*, within literature on youth participation, the deep concerns with the possible decline of engagement have been contrasted with a more optimistic outlook by considering it characteristic for postmodernity, while highlighting the emergence of new forms of engagement (Berger, 2009; Dalton, 2004; 2013; Norris, 2011; 1999). Several authors have argued that low levels of civic and political activity are not necessarily indicative of complete disengagement, but could be accompanied by interest and latent involvement in societal affairs stemming from a *stand-by* or *monitorial* attitude (Amnå & Ekman, 2013; 2015; Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Schudson, 1996). In particular, the concept of *monitorial citizenship* proposed by Schudson (1996) aims to reflect the transformations of social involvement in an increasingly individualistic and pluralistic society. The *monitorial citizen* avoids any routine-based or

institutionalized forms of participation, while remaining interested in and informed about politics. In line with this conceptualization, Amnå and Ekman (Amnå & Ekman, 2013) have also underlined the existence of different forms of passivity and considered that it is important to investigate a "standby" latent involvement, characterized by interest in civic and political matters and readiness for participation. The authors examined empirically the different orientations passivity can take among youth and identified four groups: *active* (who score high on both political participation and political interest); *stand-by* (who score average on participation and high on political interest); *unengaged* (who score low on both participation and interest); and *disillusioned* (who score the lowest both on participation and interest). The significant presence of *stand-by* youth is of particular interest for the debate on contemporary political participation. It is important to underline that this type of latent engagement is assumed to be accompanied by a sense of lack of urgency to actions, which derives from the trust put in institutions to do their work. The *stand-by* or *monitorial* citizen assumes an observational passive stand as long as they do not perceive the need of political action to be imperative, but they exhibit interest, attentiveness and efficacy associated to politics. In this sense, they would be the "product of 'too well' functioning democracies" (Amnå & Ekman, 2015).

Other authors, however, point out that political trust can play a different role in the relationship of the attentive citizen with politics. Distrust in politicians and institutions may be accompanied by a need of critical supervision of the political process and, possibly, a subsequent urge to take action to improve it (Dalton & Welzel, 2014a; Geissel, 2008; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Norris, 1999; Rosanvallon, 2008; Theiss-Morse & Hibbing, 2005). This conception of citizenship assumes a different normative perspective on the role that political support and satisfaction have in a democratic system. Distrust and criticism are considered positively for the potential pressure for reforms. The *critical* citizens in this interpretation are seen as a resource for democracy and even an indicator of its health, as they are assumed to also be motivated to monitor and control the political process (Dalton, 2004; Norris, 1999). In an empirical study aimed at clarifying the existence of different types of political criticism, Geissel (2008) has explored the distinction of democratic citizens on dimensions of political attentiveness and satisfaction, identifying both *attentive-satisfied* and *attentive-dissatisfied* groups, as well as *inattentive-satisfied* and *inattentive-dissatisfied* groups. The author's findings indicate that

attentive citizens are equally likely to uphold democracy-promoting attitudes and to participate, regardless of whether they are satisfied with the political state of affairs or not.

Although the studies cited above have investigated typologies of orientations towards political involvement, no prior study to our knowledge has looked at the profiles of both manifest and latent engagement simultaneously defined by political trust. Based on the considerations presented above, the studies presented in this section argue that young citizens can be defined not only as active, passive or stand-by, but they can also be distinguished between normative and critical in their orientations towards civic and political engagement. As emphasized by Amnå and Ekman (2013), political interest is considered crucial in characterizing youth who are involved in a *stand-by* mode, while consistent behaviors of participation characterize active citizens. However, in order to capture critically-oriented involvement, we also seek to distinguish on every level of activity between those who are satisfied with politics and those who are not.

Person-centered Approach

The aim of analyzing the existence of distinguished citizenship orientations among young people entails a person-centered approach. For example, youth may report low levels of participation in civic and political activities, but nonetheless exhibit trust in institutions and a standby attitude by being interested in political and social issues. On the contrary, other young people might also avoid participation and still be interested in politics, but feel critical towards the capacity of institutions to defend their interests. These would represent descriptions of naturally occurring homogeneous subgroups of youth characterized by common patterns of response on indicators related to their relationship with the civic and political sphere.

The interest of identifying the existence of such types of young citizens is the sort of question cluster-based techniques of analysis are well suited for. The benefit of using such an approach is that it allows to explore both commonalities and differences between previously unobserved groups of respondents. In particular, finite mixture modeling such as Latent Class Analysis (LCA) has gained popularity in social and health sciences in examining membership in distinct homogeneous groups (Collins & Lanza, 2010). It is a probabilistic form of clustering, which also provides goodness-of-fit statistics, as well as information on the quality of classification. This makes the technique preferable to traditional cluster analysis in which the optimal number of clusters is often decided arbitrarily (Vermunt & Magidson, 2002).

The empirical research presented in this chapter makes use of Latent Profile Analysis (LPA), which is also a mixture modeling technique. While LCA identifies subgroups in the sample based on categorical indicators, LPA allows the identification of subgroups based on continuous indicators. While we are not aware of any empirical studies that have used this analytical technique to identify types of citizenship orientations, previous research has used LCA and LPA to investigate engagement-related typologies based on forms of participation (Oser, 2016; Oser, Hooghe, & Marien, 2013) or citizenship norms (Hooghe, Oser, & Marien, 2016), for example. We use this approach in order to further research on how young Italians engage or disengage with the civic and political sphere in view of the trust they place on institutions and elections in the context of EU.

The Context of the EU and Italy

The debates on the role of citizen participation, political disaffection and youth agency acquire a particular significance in the current European political context. Contemporary young people in Europe construct their citizenship in a relationship with a variety of communities that go from a local level to an international one. Citizenship rights are no longer limited to the national state, as the EU has defined the right of European citizenship since the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and further elaborated it in the Lisbon Treaty (2009). It is, thus, important to consider the more and more flexible and hybrid civic and political lives of European youth. Research shows that generally there is correlation between national and European aspects of identity, political interest and participation (Kerr et al., 2010). Eurobarometer surveys have also shown that youth express stronger European identity than older generations. Moreover, the data has demonstrated they are indeed favoring less institutionalized participation, but this behavior is contrasted by the belief that these activities are also less effective in influencing decision-making (Horvath & Paolini, 2013). Other authors have noted that, in line with interpretations emphasizing the rise of critical-oriented engagement, young Europeans have turned to protest politics, especially through new media, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis (Sloam, 2013; 2014), as evidenced by instances of collective mobilization in the *Occupy* and *Indignados* movements.

The Italian context has been largely favorable to such contentious politics with resonating themes of anti-austerity and anti-establishment agendas, characterized by sharp decline of trust in

political institutions (Della Porta, Mosca, & Parks, 2015). The specific political climate of Italy has been characterized by long-standing issues with clientelism, corruption, disintegrated party system and unsuccessful reforms. Problems, that seem to have exasperated a feeling of rejection towards traditional politics and its elites in a post-Berlusconi era, especially among youth (Mammone, Parini, & Veltri, 2015).

In this sense, it is necessary to consider the plurality of positions – critical or normative – that youth can adopt with regard to their citizenship in a European context and the contextual factors that have a role in shaping their political agency. Based on indications that civic and political attitudes and behaviors on national and European levels are related (Horvath & Paolini, 2013; Kerr et al., 2010), we consider youth citizenship to be constructed in connection to both contexts simultaneously. Hence, we adopt a perspective that examines Italian young people's orientations with respect to (dis)engagement as embedded in a political sphere characterized by multiple belongings.

Adolescence and Ecological Contexts

As anticipated, the research presented in this chapter gives special attention to the study of adolescent active citizenship. Late adolescence is a particularly critical period for the development of sociopolitical orientations (e.g., Erikson, 1968). At this age youth are engaged in the maturing of their identity and of their relationship with society (Atkins & Hart, 2003; Yates & Youniss, 1998). Scholars have thus often focused on the period from late adolescence to early adulthood – the "impressionable years" (Mannheim, 1952a) – in order to identify the formative experiences that continue to influence the civic and political attitudes and habits throughout adult life (Sears & Levy, 2003; Sherrod et al., 2002). This is why in the second study of this chapter we examine in more detail the specific engagement orientations that adolescents assume and the factors that can influence them.

We adopt an ecological approach that considers the influence of proximal contexts in young people's life, in line with contextual models of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). In order to account for the interaction between multiple proximal settings, relevant aspects of different contexts – family, peers, neighborhoods and schools – are taken into account and analyzed concurrently in relation to adolescents' citizenship orientations in the second study of this chapter. In particular, we consider the influence of family and peer

encouragement to participate in civic and political matters (e.g., Silva et al., 2004), as well as family styles of interaction in terms of democratic discussions and decision-making, and parental styles or warmth and support (Gniewosz et al., 2009; Lenzi, Vieno, Santinello, Nation, & Voight, 2014a). We also analyze the perceived quality and multiplicity of experiences of involvement and opportunities for influence in the youngsters' neighborhoods (Chiessi et al., 2010; Evans, 2007). Moreover, the school influence is addressed, too, by examining aspects of democratic school climate, such as opportunities for open discussions and influence in school decision-making (Flanagan et al., 2007; Vieno et al., 2005), as well as the perception of fair treatment at school (Lenzi, Vieno, Sharkey, Mayworm, Scacchi, Pastore, et al., 2014b). The quality of involvement in school is also examined with respect to adolescents' citizenship orientations, particularly with respect to the perceived opportunities for critical reflection that allow the consideration and integration of plural diverse perspectives (Ferreira et al., 2012).

Finally, in the analysis of the development of citizenship orientations it is important to consider the possible inequalities with respect to wider contextual barriers and opportunities in the educational context (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). More specifically, we consider the possible influence of school tracks, in which resources and opportunities for students are of varying quality (Eckstein et al., 2012). Finally, in this study we also consider socio-economic and gender differences, in order to account for possible differences between adolescents' citizenship orientations based on socio-economic background and gender, outside of the impact that schools, families and neighborhoods.

Aims

The goal of the first study in this chapter is to examine, by means of a person-centered analysis, different patterns of youth involvement identified by three indicators:

1) **Civic and political activity**, which is expected to distinguish between active, occasionally/rarely active and passive youth;

2) **Political and social interest**, which is expected to distinguish between stand-by and passive youth;

3) **Distrust in institutions**, which is expected to differentiate between normative and critical attitude towards the political process.

Overall, it is expected to identify six groups according to different levels of these variables (see Table 6).

Table 6. Expected profiles of participation

	High political interest		Low political interest
	High civic/political activity	Rare civic/political activity	Low civic/political activity
Low political distrust and alienation	*Active normative citizens*	*Stand-by normative citizens*	*Passive normative citizens*
High political distrust and alienation	*Active critical citizens*	*Stand-by critical citizens*	*Passive critical citizens*

The second study in this section addresses adolescents' profiles of involvement, specifically. The aim is to examine their citizenship orientations during an important developmental phase in the formation of civic and political sense. Moreover, the study explores the characteristics of proximal contexts that are associated with the different profiles. More specifically, we examine:

1) School characteristics: school tracks, school climate and opportunities for critical reflection;

2) Family and peer characteristics: family and peer norms of participation, family democracy and family warmth;

3) Neighborhood characteristics: neighborhood sense of community (namely, opportunities for involvement and for influence).

Socio-economic background and gender differences were also controlled for.

STUDY 2A. PROFILES OF YOUNG CITIZENS' (DIS)ENGAGEMENT

Method

Participants

Data collection began in the autumn of 2016 and ended in January 2017. The study was approved by the Bioethic Board of the University of Bologna. Participants of two age groups – adolescents and young adults – filled out a self-report questionnaire either online or on paper. Adolescents, from 15 to 19 years old, were approached in high schools in the region of Emilia Romagna (North Italy). Young adults, from 20 to 30 years old, were approached in university and through snowballing. The final sample consisted of 1715 participants (61.2% were female; 38.7% were male). The average age was 19.74 years old ($SD = 3.59$).

Measures

The following measures were used as indicators for the identification of the latent profiles. The instrument was developed by the consortium of the CATCH-EyoU project.

Civic and political participation. Eighteen items measured participation in different civic and political activities in the last 12 months on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *no* to 5 = *very often*). E.g. ...*Taken part in a demonstration or strike.* A mean score on all the items was computed and used as an indicator for the latent profile analysis. The reliability of the scale was very good ($\alpha = $ .89).

Political and social interest. The dimension of interest was operationalized through a mean score of four items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The scale measured interest in politics, in societal issues, in European-related topics and in national politics. E.g. *How interested are you in politics?* The reliability of the scale was very good ($\alpha = .88$).

Political alienation and distrust in institutions. The critical attitude towards institutions was operationalized through a composite mean score of two items, adapted from Fischer and Kohr (2002), measuring political alienation related to Italy and to the EU (e.g., *It does not matter*

who wins the European elections, the interests of ordinary people do not matter) and two items measuring trust in European institutions and national government (reversed scores, e.g., *I trust the national government*). All were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The reliability was good (α = .75). Given the slight difference between the theoretical constructs of alienation and distrust, principal axis factoring analysis was performed in order to confirm the construct validity of this measure. It extracted one factor that predicted 45.1% of the variance, with factor loadings ranging from .50 to .83. Thus, this measure appeared to have adequate validity.

Analysis

Latent Profile Analysis (LPA) was conducted using Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2015) in an explorative way to identify the profiles that described the association between the chosen indicators. On a technical level, the choice of the number of profiles in LPA is informed by goodness-of-fit statistics. The most widely used statistic for identifying optimal solutions is the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC, Schwarz, 1978). Lower values indicate better fit. Additionally, it is possible to use tests of likelihood difference to help confirm the final model - namely, the Adjusted Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio (LMR) and the Bootstrapped Parametric Likelihood Ratio Test (BLRT, Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthén, 2007). Moreover, LPA allows the evaluation of the precision of classification through the measure of entropy.

Results

In Table 7 the descriptive statistics for the indicator variables are presented, while correlations between them are showed in Table 8.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of latent profile indicators: overall sample

	Mean	**SD**	**Skewness** (Std. Error)	**Kurtosis**
Civic and political participation	1.70	.61	1.407 (.06)	2.158 (.118)
Social and political interest	3.13	.91	.131 (.06)	-.393 (.118)
Political distrust	3.13	.86	.035 (.06)	-.533 (.118)

As evidenced by the low mean for the scale and the indications of skewness, civic and political participation was rather low among young people from our sample.

Table 8. Correlations between latent profile indicators: overall sample

	1	2
1. Civic and political participation		
2. Social and political interest	.546***	
3. Political distrust	-.133***	-.325***

*** *p* < .001

Correlations between the latent profile indicators were all significant. From a variable-centered perspective, interest in social and political issues was positively associated with civic and political participation and both were negatively correlated to political distrust.

LPA was performed estimating solutions from two to eight latent profiles, which were compared for fit and interpretability (see Table 9). Lower Akaike (AIC) and Bayesian (BIC) criterion indices indicate better fit. Additionally, significant *p* values for the Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test (BLRT) and the Adjusted Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio (LMR) test indicate *k*-class models that fit the data better than the (*k*-1)-class model. Higher values of entropy, closer to 1, indicate better overall classification quality of a model. AIC and BIC indices decrease up to the 8-LP solution. BLRT was significant for all solutions, while the LMR test was significant for the 2- to 5-LP solutions. Entropy was not particularly high for any of the solutions, with the highest value being for the 5-LP and 7-LP solutions (0.72).

Table 9. Model and fit statistics for 1- to 8-class latent profile models: overall sample

K-class models	LL	AIC	BIC	Entropy	LMR Value	BLRT 2xLL Diff
1	-6185.58	12379.16	12400.95	NA	NA	NA
2	-5852.31	11720.61	11764.19	0.68	644.90***	666.55***
3	-5773.17	11570.34	11635.71	0.58	153.13**	158.27***
4	-5638.26	11308.51	11395.67	0.68	261.07***	269.83***
5	-5573.90	11187.80	11296.74	0.72	124.53**	128.71***
6	-5526.32	11100.64	11231.37	0.70	92.07	95.16***
7	-5469.90	10995.81	11148.33	0.72	109.17***	112.83***
8	-5447.41	10958.82	11133.12	0.70	43.53	44.99***

Note. **p* < .01; ****p* < .001

The hypothesized 6-profile model presented only a marginal improvement in terms of model fit in comparison to the 5-profile solution. A problematic issue could be the identification of classes with less than 5% of the sample, which can be an indicator of spurious clusters. However, we deemed it plausible that the more active groups of youth are limited in number in a sample of general population. We compared the substantive differences between the 5-profile and 6-profile models in terms of the identified subgroups and both presented profiles that could be spurious (less than 5% of the sample). These were the most active and critical young people, which could be expected in our sample. Therefore, given the statistical similarity of the two solution and our initial hypothesis of 6 groups, we opted to explore further the 6-profile solution.

Figure 5 presents graphically the resulting latent profiles according to the model-estimated means (*EM*) on the profile indicators. The identified groups correspond largely to the ones we hypothesized.
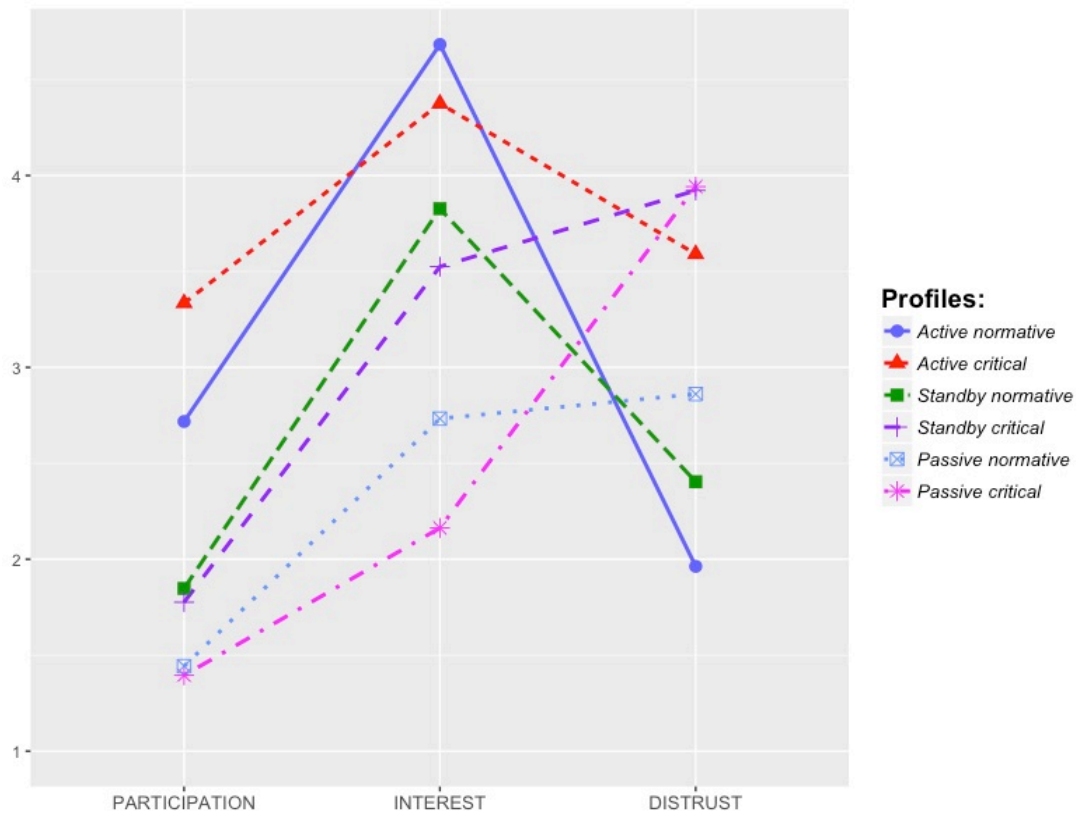
Figure 5. Latent profiles of youth citizen orientations

Table 10 shows the counts and percentages of classified individuals for each profile.

Table 10. Most likely profile membership: counts and percentages

Latent Profile	N	%
Active Normative	98	5.7%
Active Critical	48	2.8%
Stand-by Normative	329	19.2%
Stand-by Critical	284	16.6%
Passive Normative	618	36.0%
Passive Critical	338	19.7%

Overall, it was possible to obtain the expected distinct groups of youth in terms of levels of activity – passive, actively and latently involved. Moreover, the findings point to a clear distinction between normative and critical youth on each level of activity. Each profile is described briefly in the following paragraphs.

Active normative citizens. The first latent profile was limited in size (5.7% of the sample). The group had the second highest level of participation (*EM* = 2.72), the highest level of political interest (*EM* = 4.68) and the lowest level of political distrust (*EM* = 1.96). These were the subgroup of youth who were closer to the idea of the "good citizen" – trustful, interested and participating in civic and political activities.

Active critical citizens. The smallest latent profile in size (2.8% of the sample) had the highest levels of participation activity (*EM* = 3.34), and they showed high political interest (*EM* = 4.38), but also high distrust (*EM* = 3.59). Thus, young people in this subgroup were differentiated from the previous profile for the expression of skepticism towards institutions and the political process. Nonetheless, they reported being interested in social and political issues and, interestingly, they were also the ones who were most active with respect to all other profiles. It is possible that the participants classified in this group were motivated to act in defense of ideals that they deemed were not addressed adequately by the current political system, proving their democratic potential as theorized by Norris (1999).

Standby normative citizens. The third profile (19.2% of the sample) had relatively low levels of participation (*EM* = 1.84), high political interest (*EM* = 3.83), and the second lowest level of distrust (*EM* = 2.40). Youth classified in this group seemed to engage in social and political issues in a latent form, as they demonstrated interest, but were not really active civically

or politically. They also report being trustful in institutions and in being represented in politics. The members of this profile, therefore, assumed a monitorial attitude accompanied by political trust as theorized by Schudson and Amnå (Amnå & Ekman, 2013; Schudson, 1996)

Standby critical citizens. The fourth profile (16.6% of the sample) also presented low participation (*EM* = 1.78) and relatively high interest (*EM* = 3.52), but in contrast to the previous profile had high political distrust (*EM* = 3.92). Young people in this subgroup also assumed a monitorial attitude, characterized by political interest and low activity. However, in their case transpires an unfavorable stand towards institutions and the ability of the political system to represent their interests. Participants classified in this profile seem to feel the need to engage in a critical supervision of the political process due to lack of trust (Geissel, 2008).

Passive normative citizens. The fifth profile contained 36% of the sample – the most numerous. The group showed very low participation (*EM* = 1.44), the second lowest interest (*EM* = 2.73), but had average political distrust (*EM* = 2.86). Participants who were classified in this profile seem to assume a largely disinterested stance on civic and political issues.

Passive critical citizens. The last latent profile contained 19.7% of the total sample. Like *Passive normative* citizens, this group showed very low levels of participation activity (*EM* = 1.39). They also had the lowest level of political interest (*EM* = 2.16) and very high level of distrust (*EM* = 3.94). This subgroup of youth were largely unengaged with civic and political issues and seemed to feel more alienated from politics with respect to the previous profile.

Preliminary analysis on the differences between adolescents and young adults on the identified profiles of citizen involvement found that age group had significant impact on profile membership, indicating that the younger group of participants may differ in their configuration of subgroups (results of the preliminary analysis are not presented). We explore further the citizenship orientations of adolescents and the impact of contextual variables in the following section.

STUDY 2B. ADOLESCENTS' PROFILES OF (DIS)ENGAGEMENT

Method

Participants

The second study focused on the subsample of high school students only. The participants were 802 adolescents (50.3% were female, 49.7% were male, 2 respondents did not indicate their gender). The mean age was 16.42 years old ($SD = .78$). The participants were recruited in different types of school in order to account for differences due to diverse socio-economic contexts. In particular, the students were approached in two *liceo*, three technical schools and one vocational institute in the region of Emilia Romagna (North Italy). Table 11 reports the distribution of participants across the school tracks.

Table 11. Distribution of participants across school tracks: adolescent subsample

	N	%
Academic track	176	21.9
Technical track	516	64.3
Vocational track	110	13.7
Total	802	100

Measures

The same latent profile indicators were used as in the previous study: civic and political participation (18 items), social and political interest (4 items) and political distrust and alienation (4 items).

The following measures were used as correlates in the analysis. The instrument was developed by the consortium of the CATCH-EyoU project.

Democratic school climate. Students' perception of democratic school climate was assessed by looking at three dimensions: openness for discussion, fairness and external efficacy. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

Firstly, open school climate was measured with three items adapted from the IEA ICCS study (Schulz et al., 2010), which asked the degree to which students felt that they were encouraged to discuss issues openly and that their opinions were respected by teachers. E.g. *Teachers respect our opinions and encourage us to express our opinions during the classes.* The reliability of the scale was good ($\alpha = .76$).

Secondly, school external efficacy assessed students' perception that they could participate in school's decision-making with two items: *Students at our school can influence how our school is run; At our school, students' requests are taken seriously* ($r = .55$, $p < .001$). Finally, school fairness measured perceived fairness of teachers and of the school's rules with two items from the Teacher and Classmate Support Scale (Torsheim, Wold, & Samdal, 2000): *Our teachers treat us fairly; The rules in our school are fair* ($r = .53$, $p < .001$).

School opportunities for reflection. Participants were asked to characterize their feelings in school with respect to opportunities for critical reflection during the last year. The items correspond to the dimension of reflection within the Quality of Participation Experiences scale (Ferreira et al., 2012). Four items were used ($\alpha = .74$), measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). E.g. *During that time, I have… observed conflicting opinions that brought up new ways of perceiving the issues in question.*

Family and peer norms of engagement. The degree to which participants' families supported participation was measured with three items ($\alpha = .60$). E.g., *My family would approve it if I became politically active*. Friends' normative support of engagement was also measured with three items ($\alpha = .62$). E.g., *My friends would approve it if I became politically active.* All were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

Family warmth. Participants' perception of family warmth and support was assessed with three items, adapted from Persson, Stattin and Kerr (2004), measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Reliability of the scale was very good ($\alpha = .82$). E.g., *My family constantly shows me how proud they are of me.*

Family democracy. Two items, adapted from Stattin, Persson, Burk and Kerr (2011), measured participants' perception of democratic interaction style within their family on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*): *My family allows me to participate in*

family decision making; When we discuss something with the family, my family always listens to my opinion (*r* = .68, *p* < .001).

Neighborhood sense of community. Four items assessed participants' perceptions of opportunities present in their local territorial community. These corresponded to two of the dimensions of the scale Sense of Community for Adolescents (Chiessi et al., 2010) – namely, *satisfaction of needs and opportunities for involvement* and *opportunities for influence*. The items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Results suggest good reliability for the scale (α = .79). E.g., *In our neighborhood, there are enough activities for young people*; *I think that people who live in our neighborhood could change things in the community*.

Analysis

LPA was performed again using the same three indicators as in the previous study (participation, interest and distrust), but only on the adolescent subsample. In order to evaluate the impact of correlates on the probability of being in one or the other latent profile, we employed a three-step approach (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014; Vermunt, 2010). The three-step approach has several advantages over one-step analysis, including not having to re-calculate estimations for the latent variables when including co-variates or distal outcomes, while also taking account of a classification uncertainty rate (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014). In this case, all of the variables are treated as auxiliary, except for the latent profile indicators. All of the analyses were done with the help of the software Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2015). We used the R3STEP command, in particular, which provides multinomial logistic regression results for the test of external predictors' effect on profile membership.

Results

In Table 12 the descriptive statistics of the latent profile indicator variables and predictor variables are presented, while correlations between them are shown in Table 13.

Table 12. Descriptive statistics of scales used as profile indicators and correlates: adolescents

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness (Std. Error)	Kurtosis (Std. Error)
Latent profile indicators					
Civic and political participation	802	1.40	0.40	2.34 (.09)	8.86 (.17)
Social and political interest	802	2.74	0.79	0.21 (.09)	0.25 (.17)
Political distrust	802	3.27	0.81	0.04 (.09)	-0.48 (.17)
Correlates					
School climate: openness	800	3.09	0.91	-0.36 (.09)	-0.44 (.17)
School climate: external efficacy	799	2.96	0.96	-0.33 (.09)	-0.49 (.17)
School climate: fairness	799	3.24	0.87	-0.44 (.09)	-0.06 (.17)
School opportunities for reflection	800	3.41	0.67	-0.77 (.09)	1.50 (.17)
Neighborhood sense of community	802	2.59	0.88	0.02 (.09)	-0.45 (.17)
Peer norms of engagement	796	2.68	0.78	-0.11 (.09)	-0.13 (.17)
Family norms of engagement	796	2.96	0.80	-0.25 (.09)	0.12 (.17)
Family democracy	797	3.86	0.92	-0.96 (.09)	0.85 (.17)
Family warmth	801	4.05	0.81	-1.04 (.09)	1.10 (.17)
Valid N (listwise)	790				

The level of manifest civic and political participation was particularly low among adolescents in our sample.

Table 13. Correlations: adolescents' subsample

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Participation											
2. Interest	.345***										
3. Distrust	0.017	-0.177***									
4. School climate: openness	-.093**	.106**	-.224***								
5. School climate: efficacy	-0.031	.125***	-.251***	.451***							
6. School climate: fairness	-0.048	.140***	-.231***	.570***	.487***						
7. School opp. reflection	0.056	.246***	-.178***	.418***	.326***	.340***					
8. Neighborhood SoC	.138***	.155***	-.230***	.119**	.129***	.168***	.201***				
9. Peer norms	.247***	.194***	-.148***	.087*	.076*	0.067	.171***	.227***			
10. Family norms	.270***	.277***	-.177***	0.053	.088*	0.068	.168***	.198***	.495***		
11. Family democracy	0.029	.210***	-.076*	.154***	.151***	.189***	.256***	.102**	.087*	.259***	
12. Family warmth	-.117**	.070*	-.177***	.252***	.147***	.230***	.157***	.158***	-0.001	.129***	.428***

$^{*}p < .05;$ $^{**}p < .01;$ $^{***}p < .001$

Solutions from two to eight latent profiles were estimated and compared for fit and interpretability (see Table 14). Lower Akaike (AIC) and Bayesian (BIC) criterion indices indicate better fit. Additionally, significant *p* values for the Bootstrap Likelihood Ratio Test (BLRT) and the Adjusted Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio (LMR) test indicate *k*-class models that fit the data better than the (*k*-1)-class model. Higher values of entropy, closer to 1, indicate better overall classification quality of a model. AIC and BIC indices decrease up to the 8-LP solution. BLRT was significant for all solutions, while the LMR test was significant for the 2-, 5- and 6-LP solutions. Entropy was not particularly high for any of the solutions, with the highest value being for the 6-LP and 7-LP solutions (0.77).

Table 14. Model and fit statistics for 1- to 8-class latent profile models: adolescents

K-class models	LL	AIC	BIC	Entropy	LMR Value	BLRT 2xLL Diff
1	-2526.36	5060.72	5079.47			
2	-2443.77	4903.55	4941.05	0.47	159.22***	165.17***
3	-2367.09	4758.17	4814.42	0.66	147.85	153.38***
4	-2322.09	4676.18	4751.18	0.68	86.75	89.99***
5	-2273.16	4586.32	4680.06	0.73	94.34**	97.87***
6	-2244.32	4536.64	4649.13	0.77	55.60*	57.68***
7	-2219.30	4494.59	4625.83	0.77	48.24	50.05***
8	-2188.48	4440.96	4590.94	0.76	59.42	61.64***

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

Given the satisfactory goodness-of-fit statistics, the 6-profile model was chosen for examination. This also allowed us to compare the solution with the one obtained for the general sample.

Figure 6 shows the emerging six latent profiles for the adolescent sample according to the model-estimated means (EM) on the indicators, while Table 15 reports the counts and percentages of classified individuals for each profile.
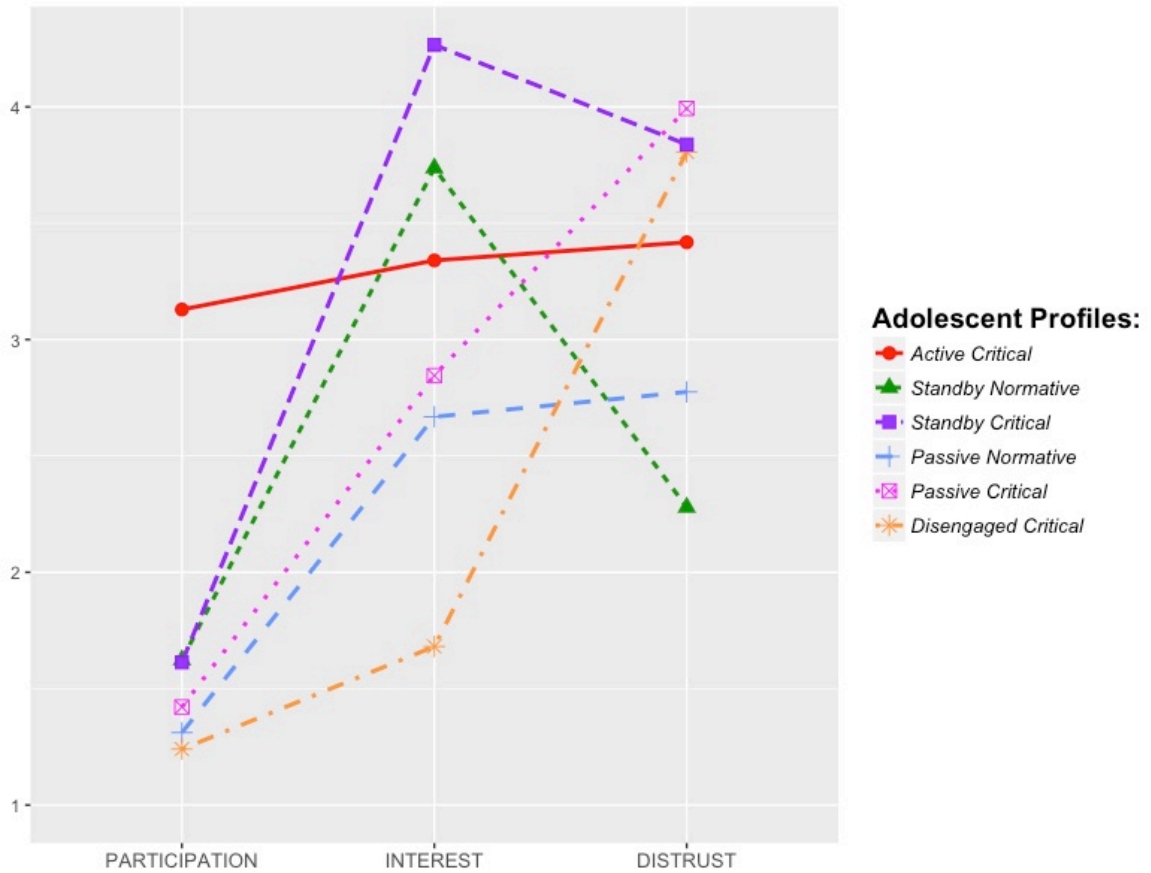
Figure 6. Latent profiles of adolescents' citizen orientations

Table 15. Most likely profile membership in adolescents: counts and percentages

Profile	N	%
Active Critical	11	1.4%
Stand-by Normative	68	8.5%
Stand-by Critical	42	5.2%
Passive Normative	351	43.8%
Passive Critical	203	25.3%
Disengaged Critical	127	15.8%

Active critical citizens. As in the general sample, the smallest latent profile in size (1.4% of the sample) was the *Active critical* group. They had the highest levels of participation activity ($EM = 3.13$), and they showed high political interest ($EM = 3.34$), but also high distrust ($EM = 3.42$).

Stand-by normative citizens. The profile (8.5% of the sample) had lower levels of participation (*EM* = 1.62) and high political interest (*EM* = 3.74), it differed from the previous profile for the political distrust, which was the lowest among the identified groups (*EM* = 2.28).

Stand-by critical citizens. This profile (5.2% of the sample) was limited in size and it also presented low participation (*EM* = 1.62), very high interest (*EM* = 4.27), but had high political distrust (*EM* = 3.84).

Passive normative citizens. The fourth profile contained 43.8% of the sample – the most numerous, similarly to the general sample. This subgroup of youth showed relatively low participation (*EM* = 1.31), average political interest (*EM* = 2.67) and had close to average political distrust (*EM* = 2.76).

Passive critical citizens. The profile contained 25.3% of the total sample. The group showed low levels of participation activity (*EM* = 1.42) and average political interest (*EM* = 2.85), along with the Passive normative profile. However, it also presented the highest levels of distrust towards institutions (*EM* = 3.99).

Disengaged critical citizens. The last profile (15.8%) had the lowest levels of participation activity (*EM* = 1.24), as well as the lowest level of political interest (*EM* = 1.68), while showing very high level of distrust (*EM* = 3.81).

In sum, the identified profiles for adolescents were characterized by low levels of participative activity. Only a very small subgroup (1.4%) showed higher levels of participation, along with political interest, and these were participants who were critical towards institutions. Moreover, *Standby* youth were also relatively less present among teens than in the general sample, but seemed to exhibit higher levels of interest. In comparison to the results obtained for the overall sample, the analysis on adolescents did not identify an active profile that showed political trust, but it differentiated more between profiles characterized by behavioral passivity. In particular, an additional subgroup that was particularly low in interest and high in distrust was identified – the *Disengaged critical* youth, who likely represent a group of adolescents who are completely alienated from the world of civic and political issues. At the same time, the two *Passive* profiles with average interest were distinguished from the two *Standby* groups.

        The results from the multinomial logistic regression analysis examining the role of

relevant proximal context variables in determining profile membership are reported in Table 16

in reference to the *Passive Normative* profile. The analysis also controlled for the influence of

gender and perceived family income. Results with reference to all other profiles are found in

Appendix A. Several significant results emerged and below results are discussed in view of the

complete analysis.

Table 16. Factors influencing adolescent profile membership: multinomial logistic regression results

	B^b	SE	OR^c (95% CI)	B	SE	OR (95% CI)
	Active Critical			*Standby Normative*		
Gender	0.58	0.85	1.78 (0.34-9.38)	1.06[*]	0.48	2.87 (1.11-7.42)
Family income	-1.41	1.01	0.24 (0.03-1.77)	0.02	0.50	1.02 (0.39-2.68)
School track[a]: Academic	-0.91	1.07	0.40 (0.05-3.27)	0.40	0.59	1.49 (0.47-4.70)
School track[a]: Vocational	-25.60[***]	1.53	0.00 (0.00-0.00)	-1.78	1.23	0.17 (0.02-1.87)
School climate: Openness	-1.02	0.73	0.36 (0.09-1.51)	0.41	0.30	1.51 (0.83-2.72)
School climate: Efficacy	0.07	0.45	1.07 (0.44-2.58)	-0.29	0.32	0.75 (0.40-1.40)
School climate: Fairness	0.83	0.99	2.29 (0.33-15.92)	-0.16	0.31	0.85 (0.46-1.57)
School opportunities for reflection	-0.86	0.84	0.42 (0.08-2.18)	0.98[*]	0.44	2.67 (1.13-6.32)
Neighborhood SoC	0.23	0.71	1.26 (0.32-5.05)	0.18	0.22	1.19 (0.78-1.83)
Peer norms	1.42	1.15	4.13 (0.44-39.18)	0.33	0.38	1.38 (0.66-2.90)
Family norms	1.07	0.83	2.92 (0.57-14.98)	1.04[*]	0.43	2.83 (1.22-6.53)
Family democracy	0.95	0.65	2.57 (0.73-9.13)	0.65	0.42	1.92 (0.84-4.41)
Family warmth	-1.85	1.13	0.16 (0.02-1.45)	-0.45	0.29	0.64 (0.63-1.13)
	Standby Critical			*Passive Critical*		
Gender	1.14	0.63	3.12 (0.91-10.72)	0.63[*]	0.27	1.87 (1.10-3.19)
Family income	-0.26	0.35	0.77 (0.39-1.52)	-0.54[*]	0.22	0.58 (0.38-0.89)
School track[a]: Academic	0.33	0.57	1.39 (0.45-4.26)	0.90[*]	0.35	2.46 (1.23-4.90)
School track[a]: Vocational	-2.31	1.53	0.10 (0.00-1.99)	-0.41	0.43	0.66 (0.29-1.53)
School climate: Openness	-0.68[*]	0.34	0.51 (0.26-0.98)	-0.27	0.20	0.76 (0.51-1.14)
School climate: Efficacy	-0.39	0.37	0.68 (0.33-1.41)	-0.33[*]	0.16	0.72 (0.53-0.98)
School climate: Fairness	0.07	0.32	1.07 (0.57-2.01)	-0.19	0.20	0.83 (0.56-1.22)
School	0.01	0.59	1.01 (0.32-3.21)	0.30	0.27	1.35 (0.79-2.30)

	B	SE	OR (95% CI)	B	SE	OR (95% CI)
opportunities for reflection						
Neighborhood SoC	-0.24	0.41	0.79 (0.36-1.75)	-0.36	0.19	0.70 (0.48-1.01)
Peer norms	-0.16	0.48	0.85 (0.33-2.19)	0.00	0.24	1.00 (0.63-1.59)
Family norms	0.87	0.51	2.39 (0.88-6.52)	-0.12	0.24	0.88 (0.55-1.43)
Family democracy	0.79	0.43	2.21 (0.96-5.11)	0.32	0.18	1.38 (0.97-1.98)
Family warmth	-0.47	0.41	0.62 (0.28-1.39)	-0.34	0.19	0.71 (0.49-1.04)
Disengaged Critical						
Gender	0.38	0.31	1.47 (0.81-2.67)			
Family income	-0.21	0.23	0.81 (0.52-1.27)			
School track[a]: Academic	-0.54	0.58	0.59 (0.19-1.83)			
School track[a]: Vocational	1.12**	0.37	3.08 (1.50-6.29)			
School climate: Openness	-0.13	0.22	0.88 (0.58-1.35)			
School climate: Efficacy	-0.18	0.18	0.84 (0.59-1.29)			
School climate: Fairness	-0.19	0.24	0.83 (0.52-1.32)			
School opportunities for reflection	-0.69*	0.27	0.50 (0.30-0.85)			
Neighborhood SoC	-0.55**	0.21	0.58 (0.38-0.87)			
Peer norms	0.06	0.26	1.06 (0.63-1.78)			
Family norms	-0.58*	0.26	0.56 (0.34-0.94)			
Family democracy	0.10	0.18	1.10 (0.78-1.55)			
Family warmth	-0.32	0.19	0.73 (0.50-1.05)			

Note. The latent profile *Passive Normative* was used as reference group.

[a] Technical institutes were used as reference group for the school track.

[b] B = logistic coefficients. The expected amount of change in the odds of membership in the outcome category versus the reference category for each one unit of change in the predictor. Values closer to zero indicate low effect of the predictor, greater negative values indicate lower odds of membership, greater positive values indicate higher odds of membership.

[c] OR = odds ratios. Values closer to 1 indicate no effect of the predictor, values greater than 1 indicate increase of the odds of membership in the outcome category, values lower than 1 indicate decrease of the odds of membership.

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Overall, gender and perceived family income showed limited influence on the membership in different profiles. In particular, male participants were more likely members of the *Stand-by Normative* and *Passive Critical* profiles rather than members of the *Passive Normative* one ($p < .05$), while participants whose family was better off were more likely to be in the *Passive Normative* profile than in the *Passive Critical* one ($p < .05$).

The type of school attended by the participants showed some substantial effects on the membership in the different profiles. More specifically, students from the vocational institute were less likely to be in the *Active Critical* profile than in any other profile, in comparison to students from other schools ($p < .001$). They were, instead, more likely to be classified in the *Disengaged Critical* group rather than in any other ($p < .001/.05$). General track students, on the other hand, were more likely to be *Passive Critical* rather than *Passive Normative* or *Disengaged Critical,* in comparison to students in other school tracks ($p < .05$).

School climate also had shown some influence on the membership in different profiles, in particular with respect to the dimensions of open school climate and external efficacy. In particular, students who reported more opportunities for open discussion at school were more likely to be members of the *Stand-by Normative* profile with respect to the *Stand-by* and *Passive Critical* ones ($p < .05$). They were also more likely to be classified in the *Passive Normative* rather than *Standby Critical* group ($p < .05$). Moreover, it was more probable for participants who reported higher school external efficacy to be members of the *Passive Normative* profile rather than in the *Passive Critical* one.

Furthermore, students who reported greater opportunities for critical reflection in their school were more likely to be members of the *Stand-by Normative* profile than of the *Passive Normative* and least likely to be in the *Disengaged Critical* profile.

The results were similar also in regards to the sense of neighborhood community – the more the adolescents felt that there were opportunities for youth participation in their neighborhood, the less likely it was for them to be in the *Disengaged Critical* profile with respect to the *Passive Normative* and *Stand-by Normative* ones.

With respect to variables related to the peer and family contexts, only family norms of engagement influenced membership in the profiles. Peer norms of engagement, family democracy and family warmth did not result as significant predictors. The more participants

reported that their family encouraged civic and political participation, the more likely it was that they were members of the *Stand-by Normative* profile rather than of the *Passive Normative* ($p <$ .05), *Passive Critical* ($p < $ .05) or *Disengaged Critical* ($p < $ .001) profiles. They were also less likely to be in the *Disengaged Critical* in comparison to both *Stand-by* profiles and the *Passive Normative* one ($p < $ .05).

Discussion

The two studies in this chapter sought to examine the citizenship orientations adopted by youth in their relationship with the civic and public sphere in a member-state of the EU. We have argued that, in order to contribute to the understanding of young people's variety of positions with respect to democratic citizenship, it is necessary to expand previous investigations of engagement typologies. The existing research on the topic has presented different interpretations of the role that a critical attitude towards politics can have in the civic and political involvement of citizens (Amnå & Ekman, 2013; Geissel, 2008). With the intention of exploring the question whether political dissatisfaction can assume different forms within Italian youth's experience of citizenship, we examined empirically profiles of different types of engagement. The analysis found the existence of six profiles of citizenship orientations identified by different levels of civic and political participation, interest and distrust. The empirical evidence presented confirmed that involvement and interest with civic and political issues can be present both for Italian youth who trust the political process and for those that do not. In line with previous research (Amnå & Ekman, 2013; 2015), we found that a considerable amount of young people in our sample displayed a *standby* form of engagement, characterized by low manifest activity and high interest in civic and political issues. These youth were differentiated from *active* citizens (higher levels of activity and high interest) and *passive* citizens (low levels of activity and average/low interest). However, the results also showed that each of these types of citizens could be further differentiated between critical and uncritical based on their attitude towards institutions and the electoral process. In particular, we identified six profiles: active normative, active critical, standby normative, standby critical, passive normative and passive critical. These findings point out that for some youth political distrust may be accompanied by the urge for critical supervision and even action in the face of perceived inefficacy of the system, as contemplated by scholars who have sought to define a positive interpretation of critical citizens in democracies (Dalton, 2004; Geissel, 2008; Norris, 1999). Hence, although we also found a

group of inactive alienated young people, political disenchantment does not seem to be necessarily grounds for disengagement.

In addition to examining participation profiles in a general sample of Italian youth, we also analyzed the specificities of adolescent citizenship orientations and their contextual predictors. Some differences in the resulting profiles were found with respect to the previous analysis, although they did not alter substantially the differentiation between more or less (latently) involved citizens who were either critical or uncritical. In line with previous research, participation and political interest among adolescents was low (Schulz et al., 2010). The analysis identified more inactive groups and did not find an *active normative* profile in the subsample. Moreover, most of the participants were classified in the *passive* or *disengaged* profiles, while *standby* and *active* adolescents were minorities. With regard to the further objective of examining proximal contexts' relationship with different citizenship orientations, we found that family norms of participation and sense of neighborhood community influenced profile membership. The feeling that one's family support civic and political engagement was associated with higher frequencies of *standby* involvement, characterized by trust in political institutions, rather than with more passive orientations. Our results confirmed the importance of the family context in transmitting and supporting interest in the public sphere. The findings also showed that participants who perceived that there were more opportunities for involvement in their neighborhood were less likely *disengaged*, suggesting that local social resources might have a protective role in inhibiting complete alienation from politics. Different variables related to the educational context also resulted significant predictors of profile membership – in particular, different school tracks, open school climate, schools' external efficacy and opportunities for reflection. The results showed that students from vocational institutes in Italy were associated with higher likelihood of being classified as *disengaged critical* citizens, suggesting that lower school tracks may indeed provide less opportunities for political socialization and perpetuate existing social inequalities in participation (Eckstein et al., 2012). Interestingly, academic tracks (*liceo*) were also differentiated from other types of school for students who were more likely *passive critical* (low participation, average interest and high distrust), rather than adopting orientations of disengagement or passive satisfaction with the public sphere. Perceived democratic school climate also proved to distinguish between profiles – in particular, greater openness for discussion and greater possibility to participate in decision-making at their school

predicted membership in profiles with higher political trust in comparison to critical ones. These results suggest that characteristics of the school as an institution, such as opportunities for open discussions and responsiveness, may induce greater satisfaction and trust towards the larger institutional context (Hahn, 1998), but not necessarily the adoption of more engaged citizenship orientations. Opportunities for critical reflection at school, however, seemed to be more associated with *standby normative* engagement rather than more passive stances. Our findings suggest that inviting the consideration and integration of multiple views at school, thus, support the development of interested youth who are largely satisfied with the institutional political process (Ferreira et al., 2012).

It should be noted that the presented studies were exploratory in nature and were based on a cross-sectional dataset in a single national setting. Further research, based on longitudinal data, is needed to understand the conditions in which both critical and uncritical youth transition from one citizenship orientation to another in time, becoming more interested or involved - or less so. Moreover, the studies have dealt exclusively with the Italian context. A more comparative approach would allow to investigate macro-level variations with respect to citizenship orientations as theorized in this research. Different national contexts may constitute varying socio-political environments in terms of formal institutions, economic development and political culture, which all have effects on the access to political influence and on the characteristics of mobilizing and educational settings (Vráblíková & Císar, 2015). In this sense, cross-national studies would help articulate our findings in contexts different from Italy. Nevertheless, the overall results represent a valuable insight for future research into existing citizenship orientations among youth and the contextual factors that may influence their development during late adolescence.

The next chapter will seek to delve into adolescents' understanding of their civic and political role. Based on the results from the quantitative analysis presented above, we will investigate further the role of the Italian school context in the development of civic sense, interest and participation as seen by students themselves.

CHAPTER 4. ADOLESCENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF ACTIVE

CITIZENSHIP

The following chapter presents a qualitative empirical study that had the goal of gaining a deeper understanding of young people's perspectives on active citizenship, their role as active citizens in the public sphere and the opportunities and limitations for meaningful involvement that they find in their schools. The findings from the quantitative study highlight the significance that school as a context has for the formation of civic and political orientations during adolescence. As evidenced, both formal aspects – such as school tracks – and informal aspects – such as opportunities for discussion, influence in decision-making and critical reflection at school – influenced the adoption of more or less engaged and/or trustful attitudes towards national and European politics. These results are in line with a perspective on socio-political development that emphasizes the importance of adolescents' interactions with their ecological environment. The qualitative research described in the present chapter also focuses on the central role that the school has in providing opportunities for civic and political development. Focus groups were used to explore further in depth how adolescents characterize their relationship with the public sphere in general, as well as to identify the characteristics in the school environment that build youth agency according to the experiences of the students. Following a brief introduction, we present the method and results of the analysis of focus group discussions with upper secondary school students from diverse institutes. Finally, the findings are discussed in relation to their implications for the empirical advancement on the understanding of civic and political engagement development.

Background

Although a universally accepted definition of (active) citizenship is non-existent, citizenship literature has nonetheless sought to define possible conceptions held by modern citizens. Several authors have contributed to the theoretical development of normative orientations with regards to what it means to be a citizen. Dalton (2008), for example, has distinguished between *duty-based* – focused on voting and law-abiding – and *engaged* norms – focused on non-institutionalized participation. The latter would be increasing and becoming more predominant in citizens' relationship with institutions. Other authors have distinguished further between four notions of good citizenship (Denters, Gabriel, & Torcal, 2007). A *traditional* one would see the good citizen as loyal, trustful and characterized by the core norm of law-abidingness. In a *liberal* conception those values go hand in hand with critical deliberation, where authority can also be questioned and engagement in public discourse is promoted. A *communitarian* notion emphasizes civic responsibility towards others and the common good, describing a good citizen who is solidary and tolerant. Lastly, *participatory* perspectives focus on the active participation in the political sphere. All of these views entail model behaviors and be adhered to distinctly, but they can also coexist and overlap considerably at the individual level. Empirical studies have also attempted to analyze the patterns of adhesion to such "good" citizenship norms among youth, finding evidence of duty-based and engaged orientations, but also of less clear sets of beliefs regarding what citizens should do (including traditional and all-around norms) (Hooghe et al., 2016). These results suggest that youth may assume positions regarding citizenship that are detached from the theoretically defined categories proposed by scholars.

When the research focus is on young people, however, such normative approach needs to be confronted with the developmental nature of the individual's relationship with society. As youth grow into adolescence and later into young adulthood, they elaborate a sense of what it means to engage with the public sphere and develop their civic and political identities (Flanagan & Sherrod, 1998; Mannheim, 1952a; Yates & Youniss, 1999). Developmental scientists have stressed how civic and political beliefs are constructed and developed in interaction with contextual structures and everyday practices (Flanagan, 2003). Young people construct their ideas of themselves as citizens and of civic and political processes within the everyday interactions with significant others and with the communities, organizations and institutions of

which they are part of. Assuming that youth have resources and are capable of being actors in this process requires that their views are taken seriously over what citizenship can mean and how these contexts can best facilitate its enactment (Shaw et al., 2014).

Thus, in contrast to research that has sought to identify the adoption of researchers' predefined conceptions of citizenship, a different perspective shifts the attention to the construction of meaning with respect to youth civic and political engagement by examining young people's perspectives. Assuming a discursive approach, for example, Olson and colleagues (2014) have analyzed secondary school students' descriptions of citizenship and identified three discourses focusing on: a knowledgeable citizen (entailing responsibility for knowledge-seeking, for gaining awareness, and taking a stand on world issues), a responsive and holistic citizen (acting for the benefit of the wider society), and a self-responsible and 'free' citizen (emphasizing freedom of action and self-determination). The authors then relate these conceptions with assumptions within the Swedish citizenship education system.

In the exploratory study presented in this chapter we seek to explore with a qualitative approach students' conceptions of what it means to be an active citizen through their own words and experiences, while we also investigate further their educational experiences and their ideas of a supportive and challenging school environment (Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2012; Ferreira et al., 2012). In particular, a school climate, in which teachers foster the open expression of students' voice and involve them in decisions regarding the school life, seems to be central for the recognition of pupils as critical and reflective citizens (Dias & Menezes, 2013). We consider the presence of opportunities for involvement in the school context and their capacity to facilitate or hinder agency, as well as the role that young people take within these experiences (Hart, 1992; Wong et al., 2010).

Consequently, the present research focused on the informal experiences in school that, from the perspective of students, facilitate their civic learning and their understanding of themselves as social and political agents.

Aims

The aim of the study was to explore how young people interpret active citizenship and their role as social agents, as well as their views on relevant experiences in their schools. We investigated the pupils' ideas of pertinent spheres of youth participation and how they viewed

their social agency as young people. Moreover, the intention was to identify facilitating and hindering elements for capacity-building of school climate and opportunities for involvement at school that students had experienced in relation to their civic and political learning. In addition, we considered how different school tracks may present varying barriers or opportunities in young people's civic development.

Method

In order to explore young people's visions in a qualitative approach we used focus group discussions – a method that uses group interaction to generate data and insights (Flick, 2014). Among the method's most relevant strengths in research is the capacity to "reveal both meanings that people read into the discussion topic and how they negotiate those meanings" (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). In this sense, we used focus groups to study the meanings students gave to active citizenship and how they shared and negotiated them.

Participants

Data was collected between February and April 2017 in five schools in Emilia Romagna (North Italy) and Lazio (Central Italy) regions with two focus group discussions per school. The schools were chosen to represent different tracks, in order to consider diverse educational contexts with possibly different resources and quality level. In each school the recruitment of students was mediated by a referent teacher according to specific guidelines for the choice of research participants. We sought to recruit about 15-20 students per school from upper secondary classes, who were as much as possible involved in projects or activities organized by the school that promote active citizenship or may be considered forms of youth participation (including school activities, such as working in the school newspaper, being a member of a school sports team, etc.).

A total of 101 students participated. The following Table 17 reports participants' number and characteristics for each focus group.

Table 17. Focus group discussions: participants

FG	Type of school	N	Female	Male	Age range	School year
1	General [gen]	12	6	6	16 – 18	IV
2		9	5	4	17 – 18	V
3	Technical [tech]	9	2	7	16 – 18	III - IV
4		9	0	9	16 – 19	III - V
5	Technical [tech]	11	10	1	17 – 19	IV - V
6		10	9	1	16 – 18	III - IV
7	Vocational [voc]	11	5	6	17 – 20	IV - V
8		10	6	4	17 – 18	IV
9	General / Technical [gen/tech]	10	7	3	16 – 18	III - IV
10		10	9	1	16 – 18	III - IV
		101	**59**	**42**		

The sample was balanced by gender in the general and in the vocational school. The participants in one of the technical school were predominantly male, while those from the other technical institute and the mixed general/technical school were mostly female.

Procedure

The study was approved by the Bioethic Board of the University of Bologna. Participants were first requested to read and sign an informed consent form (for minors the consent was preliminarily asked also to parents). The consent forms were distributed by the referent teachers before the date of the discussion, in order to allow time for gathering consent from parents. The focus groups were all conducted in the schools were facilitated by a moderator and a co-moderator, both researchers (the author and another member of the Italian research team in CATCH-EyoU). Students were asked to talk about their participation experiences and the role played by the school in promoting these experiences. The focus group discussion started with an ice breaking activity, by showing images of youth participation, whose aim was to facilitate students' understanding of some of the topics that would be discussed with them and to facilitate the discussion. In particular, participants were presented with printed images in multiple copies and were asked to select one of them. Subsequently, the students were asked to choose two cards from the provided ones that could describe the selected picture. Finally, everyone was asked to describe the portrayed situations and explain their choices. Students were then asked to talk in an

open discussion about their ideas of youth participation and its consequences, their experiences of participation, their experiences of addressing civic and political issue at school in promoting these experiences. All discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used with the help of Nvivo 10 software: "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). All data was organized in the framework of Nvivo and conversation turns were systematically coded with a combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies. Some categories were pre-defined based on theoretical expectations, while the analysis remained open to emergent themes and interpretations. The approach taken was recursive with progressive refinement of the thematic categories and continuous re-examination of the data in a procedure inspired by grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The results are presented according to the macro- and sub- themes identified through this interpretative process.

Results

Students' understanding of active citizenship

Practices of participation. Prompted by the images presented in the beginning of the focus group sessions, participants discussed different forms of civic and political involvement, reflecting also on their meaning and efficacy. The most discussed practice was justice-based protesting – the act of demonstrating was seen as one of the most important ways of expressing ones' opinions, of being an assertive active citizen and bringing about social change:

> *I chose this image, which concerns a protest, because it is very important to have this opportunity to make your voice heard, express your opinion, and it is one of the main ways to be an active citizen. Because it is right to follow the rules, to live according to the rules that are given to us, but we must also have our say when something is wrong. (gen, F, 18)*

Participants also considered involvement in political activities, such as membership in political movements and parties, as well as contacting politicians and using petitions to voice concerns. Voting, in particular, was discussed as an important civic responsibility and related to an idea of an informed and pro-active "dutiful" citizen, including at the EU level. Moments of electoral activity proved to be "a call" for becoming interested in political issues, which seemed to be something that was not considered beforehand:

> *We, newly eighteen-year-olds, were called to vote for the constitutional referendum and therefore we made our own idea, we had to read up and everyone had, in my opinion, had to look for their political idea for a change, in order to try to change things, or in any case to keep them as they are, but for the well-being of the collectivity. So yes, that is, when I was called to vote, I got interested in politics. (tech, M, 19)*

Electoral participation and demonstrations, however, were both seen as forms of political expression and did not seem to be understood as opposed to one another in any way. Civic-oriented activities were also discussed as an example of active citizenship with aims distinct from those of political activities. Volunteering and membership in associations were seen as positive ways of contributing to society. Donating was also mentioned, although less frequently.

In terms of their own experiences, participants from all schools brought examples of manifestations either in their schools or with regard to national demonstrations on education reform. Only a couple of students from the academic track, however, reported more straightforward political activity in movements and parties. Civic participation in voluntary activities and community, religious-based or non-governmental organizations was a little more common among the participants. Students from higher school tracks and technical schools, however, seemed to have more diversified experiences in volunteering and organizations, both community-based and international (including rights-based non-governmental organizations for a couple of general track students). Vocational students, instead, reported experiences mainly in religious-based community organizations and scouting.

Latent engagement. In our participants' vision, however, what was at the base of these practices of involvement was ultimately interest and awareness. The students emphasized latent forms of engagement as central for active citizenship and underlined, in particular, the importance of getting informed and being aware of civic and political issues. Informing oneself and being interested were seen as necessary pre-conditions in order to be able to defend one's rights and to take action. The understanding that emerges is that of a process of civic activation, which begins with knowledge and awareness, necessitates an active interest and can finally lead to participative engagement:

> *... even getting informed about politics, about what's happening in your country, according to me, is already a step forward to not getting subdued. Being informed and not being ignorant. So already that should be a commitment that everyone should take... (tech, M, 19)*

In one discussion in the vocational institute, participants took the idea further by describing a general civic attitude of responsibility in everyday life that should be characteristic of the active citizen:

> *According to me, you have to be active always – it's not just "I'm going to vote, I'll protest...", and then when you see someone having a fight with someone else, you say nothing... (voc, F, 18)*

Efficacy. In the discussion of different forms of involvement, the participants considered particularly the capacity of the actions to reach the intended goals. A common theme in the

discussions was the responsiveness of institutions and of people in power to demands and proposals by citizens. Although most of the students characterized participative acts as highly important, they also overwhelmingly highlighted how there could be difficulties in getting heard by those who really count. Thus being listened to was deemed a crucial aspect for participation:

> *But then, after bringing these ideas, have some confirmation from someone that the ideas have been listened to, and put them into practice too. Maybe not by doing something at the top right away, but not even something miserable. Being listened to is so much. (voc, F, 17)*

A common idea was that the bigger the unity, the more effective an action is and the more likely it is that demand would be heard.

> *In my opinion, it is more effective, because in fact, I think that any person, I think any message, any proposal that is given by any individual, even if more people propose the same thing in two different moments, they are less effective than a single message sent by a larger group of people.... (tech, F, 16)*

A lot of participants, however, pointed out that demonstrations and petitions even in their capacity to raise a collective voice are often unsuccessful and ultimately symbolic actions:

> *Usually, protests always have a moral return, but they do not always reach their goal and often protests are an end to themselves, but ... at least I'm not silent, I tried, then if I'm not listened to, at least I have not remained sitting down, accepting things as they are. (tech, M, 16)*

In the case of protests, it was also suggested that actions should be distinguished from each other, as some can be constructive and effective, while others, especially if misinformed or violent, can be pointless. Participants were very critical of violent protests and expressed a normative vision of demonstrating – pacific and legal methods were deemed as the right way to proceed:

> *Because it is true that protest is important to bring out your ideas, but when it comes specially to violence or disorganization, they lose their sense and their purpose, probably, and above all, from my point of view, do not give rise to a desire to progress,*

but to regress. Whenever you want to affirm your own ideas with violence there is obviously a wrong idea behind it. (gen, F, 17)

Purpose of participation. When reflecting upon the meaning and the possible personal consequences of participation, participants across all discussions identified the expression of one's ideas as the main reason for and benefit of taking action. It was frequently described as a civic duty, mainly regarding political actions. According to some students, even if just as a symbolic return, voicing one's opinions was still seen as sufficient motivation for participation – a way of learning to affirm oneself and take one's own decisions:

You learn to express your opinion and be assertive, not dance to somebody else's tune or let other people's ideas in your head. So being active and engaging with others, and joining groups allows you to learn how to be in a community and to express your opinion and don't let others decide for you. (gen, F, 18)

The sense of personal satisfaction of having helped or contributed, as well as benefits in terms of relational gains (e.g., collaborating with others, being and sharing in a group, understanding diverse points of view) and personal development of skills (e.g., skills and competences in organization, decision-making, development of awareness and responsibility) were also highlighted.

Yes, in the end it is important because we are exchanging views. And maybe a person who thinks in one way, hearing another person's opinion – someone who is part of the same group – can understand another point of view, perhaps creating a third one, which is a union of the good parts of their own thought and the opinion of others. (voc, M, 20)

Consistent with a solidarity-based view of active citizenship, participants also underlined the importance of supporting those who are worse off. However, the prevalent idea of participants was that participation is directed towards bringing about positive social change by recognizing problems and injustices, voicing concerns and acting for a solution. In particular, according to students, active involvement by citizens (often thought in terms of protesting, in these cases) would lead to calling for constructive change, addressing social inequality, and ultimately defending and demanding rights. Demonstrations, mainly, served to express discontent to those in power in order to stimulate change. In this sense, the participants favored a vision of participation as motivated by a critical stance to the status quo.

Now, those that protest are seen as subversive and not as wanting a change [...] if someone wants a change, they do in vision of a better future and not only for themselves, but for the whole community. [...] for protesting today there are topics, the arguments for doing them. Let's say that I think there's need for more protest, but a constructive protest. (gen/tech, F, 17)

Obstacles to involvement. When participants discussed participation and engagement with civic and political interests, they often referred to the existing obstacles and costs that they perceived. A common theme was the time-consuming nature of participative acts and the lack of time in youngsters' lives, especially related to the amount of school obligations, that prevented them from dedication attention to more political issues:

Also because the school doesn't give you time ... I mean, if there was something that interested me, in the afternoon I have so much stuff to study that at seven o'clock I sit on the couch and that's it. I don't go and get curious about the European Union, I mean, no.

The lack of responsiveness by politicians and institutions was also considered as a hindrance to getting involved and believing that action could be effective, especially in the vocational school and in one of the technical schools. In this sense, students expressed a level of disaffection with politics and lack of trust. They highlighted problems of corruption and distrust in the Italian context, in particular:

There is a lot of distrust in politics in Italy ... because democracy does not work in Italy. That is because the power goes to people, who look only for their own, let's say, just for their own interests. (tech, M, 17)

Some participants in the vocational institute expressed the idea of existing imbalance in power and possible oppression of actions (both in terms of protesting and getting informed, even in the school context). In this sense, while in other discussions collective participation was mostly seen as a counter-action to inequalities and injustice and as a way to have a voice, students from the vocational school expressed also an awareness of impotence in the face of class and power differences. This particular sensibility to the issue could be related to a greater familiarity with the impact of socio-economic disparities that these youngsters may have experienced in their living and educational context.

Being active, yes, this is all wonderful, but if you are also helpless in a group, if you are not listened to, you can be in 100,000 people. At this point there are two groups: group of the people, who may have ideas, they have managed to get an agreement, they have managed to create a group, lots of stuff, they are all active and the other group is the one holding the people. If those who hold it should serve the interests of the people, all that concerns them, but if two totally different groups of ideas that one should protect develop, in conflict, and the one that should facilitate the other, suppresses it – you can be a group, but you can't do anything. (voc, M, 18)

Moreover, in two different discussions (general and vocational schools) some students considered limitation of information as an instrument of power, underlying again the centrality of knowledge and awareness for political agency, but also hinting at the undemocratic distribution of information in society.

They want us ignorant. (gen, F, 17) - Eh, cause it's easier to govern a people of ignorant persons. (gen, M, 18)

So, in my opinion, disinformation is the main problem. And it is a disinformation that is wanted, it is wanted the ignorance of the people, because a population that knows is a population that protests, complains, creates problems. Instead an uninformed population, that knows just what you want to tell them, is a population that you can control as you please. (voc, M, 18)

In other instances, hindrances to action were discussed particularly with regard to protests. Participants were concerned with the dangers of confrontation and referenced the preoccupation of being silenced in case of police interventions:

I've never taken part mostly because, I mean, like I said it is dangerous, it can be misunderstood and maybe you can end up in the middle of a complicated situation, when in fact you have absolutely no guilt ... this is a reason why people do not do it ... I mean, we spoke before about police, right? ... this intervention can often be exaggerated and you can stumble on penalties when in fact you're not doing anything wrong. (gen, F, 17)

Ideas of the active citizen. The most common theme among the focus groups was the idea of the **deliberative** active citizen: someone who is informed, interested and aware of current

events, has an independent opinion on social and political issues and is capable of expressing it. The centrality of knowledge and awareness for participation emerged clearly as the most important theme across all discussions with the students. This vision delineates active citizenship as involving mainly critical reflection on societal issues and a continuous awareness of what is going on in society.

> *An active citizen aware of what is happening, has to know how to react to certain*
> *situations, to have their own personal opinion, and not get swayed. (tech, M, 17)*

Overall, students seemed to think of the possibilities for active citizenship in terms of two fields of action: civic and political. The latter was by far more discussed and seemed to characterize active citizenship more, even if implicitly. In continuation with this idea based on deliberation, some participants characterized the active citizen as **pro-active** – one that makes a next step and takes action to make a change and voice their opinions. This representation was often reflected upon in relation to activist and protesting behavior, but also regarding duty-based activities (voting and political activity). In any case, these actions were seen as affirmative and directed towards a better society.

> *Instead I must be an active person, I must I know, I must get involved in expressing my*
> *opinion, in the right ways, in order to improve what isn't acceptable around me. ... it is*
> *important to be active for those reasons – to have a better future and to have your say,*
> *build it yourself the better future, because it doesn't just come about to us. (voc, M, 18)*

Finally, in the social sphere, some of the students expressed a **solidarity-based** view of the active citizen – one who supports others in need and is involved in volunteering in their community. Those activities were sometimes dismissed as "small" and less significant than political action, and were mainly considered in terms of local actions, but nonetheless were cited as satisfactory ways of contributing to society. As one participant put it, they could even be beneficial for making Europe more united:

> *Surely you are more active in citizenship, that is, for example even the ambulance*
> *service, which sounds pretty trivial ... but in the meantime you give something from*
> *yourself that makes you feel active in citizenship and ... these little things make Europe*
> *grow. If all of us start doing such services or enter into voluntary associations, in my*

opinion, something could change. We feel more active and Europe, too, feels more

united. (tech, M, 17)

Students' vision of youth agency

Regarding their ideas of youth agency, participants showed somehow contradicting ideas about the role of young people as active citizens, fluctuating between positive and negative representations. The majority of students, however, expressed a rather gloomy vision of young people's capability to get involved and produce change in their societies.

An overwhelmingly recurring theme was the existing disinterest in issues of civic or political significance among youth. Some of the students (particularly in the general and the mixed technical/general schools) characterized their generation as "lazy" and mostly interested in themselves or in "materialistic" distractions. Some participants also reflected in self-critical manner their own indifference. In any case, a lot of youngsters saw the necessity of getting their interests stimulated by their surrounding contexts, especially by the school, in an attempt to compensate this situation.

In my opinion, it is necessary to know how to distinguish, because we are a generation

that is a little slack, we're a bit lazy and so, in my opinion, if you don't stimulate properly

young people, you can't have results in what you're doing. (gen, F, 18)

Adding to the sense of lack of agency, a vision of youth emerged that stressed their disadvantaged situation in terms of possibilities to get involved and to gain political knowledge. In particular, students lamented their lack of access to political information, the unclear ways that it was presented in the media (and in general) and their lack of capability to understand political issues. Being uninformed was seen as the main problem for youth active citizenship, underlining again the absolute importance given to knowledge and awareness for gaining political power.

I mean, I have no idea what I can do, I am not aware of the problems that there are …

But to be active citizen you should know about an issue, a topic of interest and you should

know how to manage situations so that there is something for the community. Not

knowing about the problem, not knowing the means, not knowing the bureaucratic

structures, not knowing who to turn to, what can I do? (gen/tech, F, 18)

Moreover, an issue, that underlined participants' idea of inequality in active citizenship based on age, was the feeling that youth voice is not appreciated and listened to. In this case, external efficacy was considered in particular for youth. Participants stated often that young people's opinions would not matter nor would they be taken seriously. There was, thus, a resulting negative view of young people's power to exert change and of their future in general, which went hand in hand with the idea of general disaffection with political decision-making.

I think young people have more difficulties, because in the end if adults can't make themselves be heard, imagine young people. In the end, anything young people say, things are taken very, very lightly and maybe they say things that adults would never say. (voc, F, 17)

... according to me, with the latest events there is distrust in going ahead and, for example, us, young people, in my opinion, we are powerless, because we can't do that much. That is, in our own small way we can do something to change our future, but little stuff, in the sense that we are not the ones to decide. Our change would be a small change. (tech, M, 17)

Some of the students noted that awareness, interest and action may develop in time, however. Adults were imagined as better equipped in this sense as opposed to the idea of "immature" youth, justifying the postponement of involvement to future times. In this context, reaching voting age was also seen as an important milestone that allowed more ways of becoming engaged.

In my opinion, a factor that influences a lot being an active citizen or not is also age, because becoming of age you can vote, you can also be more involved, help your city. Until you're underage you might have more problems. (tech, M, 17)

Other participants, however, talked more positively about the importance of young people's involvement, due to the new ideas they may have, their contemporary views and their sense of ownership of the future. There were some voices, although in very few cases, noting that at least some youth are in fact interested and involved.

But I think young people are also different. However, I see even within the group in which I am – we have the creativity, the interest, the desire to do something new, special, I don't know, it's a drive that I think we young people have. (gen, F, 18)

Students' views on the role of school

The previous paragraphs highlighted the prevailing vision of information and knowledge as the basis of political agency, which emerged in participants' accounts so far, but also their sense of disinformation and the reported inequality in the possibility to be active citizens for contemporary young people. The students, however, also saw the school as a setting that could potentially counter these limitations to youth involvement. Overall, they thought that educational institutions should have the primary role in fostering their citizenship skills, in informing them about relevant issues and in giving them opportunities for participation.

So I actually think that we are not active yet, say that we protest, we do this or that, because we don't have the tools – they don't teach us how to do it, they don't tell us "learn the rights they had 60 years ago", "what the people before you protested for", "what you can do now," no one says that. (gen, M, 18) - Moderator: And who should do this? - All: The school.

There's a bit of need increase in education. We should know what are we fighting, in a sense, it's not that I can … I start fighting with him and then I don't even have any bit of muscle. (voc, F, n.a.)

Teaching practices. The students underlined that a part from the importance of the content of the taught subjects, their interest in civic or political issues was particularly stimulated when the teaching was integrated with active and non-traditional methods, such as essays on social issues, online research, videos and films, organizing outside visits. However, participants lamented a somehow passive approach to education in general, as they were rarely involved in such practical activities (e.g. field research), allowing them to exercise their skills and knowledge. They also stressed the importance that the school should have in fostering research and critical thinking, but thought that was rarely the case, rather focusing on abstract learning. Students in the mixed technical/general institute were especially critical in denouncing an education that was more focused on knowledge transmission rather than on the personal development of the students.

[on field research] Never occurred to anyone here. (gen, F, 17)

For them work in the school is not about forming an individual, but more than anything else is to do mathematics, Italian, history, philosophy ... for them it ends there. (gen/tech, F, 16)

In this sense, students evidenced that it was up to individual teachers to stimulate their interest and treat relevant social and political actualities in class. Across all schools and discussions, participants described interested teachers as their main source of information in school on these issues. Teachers who treated current affairs, stimulated students' interest and discussion were all seen as formative in awakening civic awareness. It was underlined, however, that sometimes the discussions on actualities were digressions that were not part of the syllabus and could sometimes be a problem for the future studies of the students:

In ninth grade we had a particular teacher and she cared a lot about these things but was the only one, she followed this and not the program of course ... of Italian (tech, M, 17) - Useful, but for many things now, like Italian, the teacher tells us now "You did this stuff from the program before?" and everybody, nobody knows what we are talking about, so we have voids in the program. (tech, F, 16) - Under a certain viewpoint it was constructive, but on the other hand we are penalized now. (tech, M, 16)

School climate. The informal aspects of education at school were, thus, identified as crucial in the citizenship learning experience of students. Their relationship with teachers and school administration as well as their agency within classroom and school decision-making were particularly decisive. The most important aspect for the participants was that teachers stimulate debate among the students, treat them as equals and foster free expression of opinions, without imposing their own view. This was not always the case in the experience of the students, as sometimes teachers approached issues unilaterally and avoided stirring discussions with and among students, in order to shun potential conflict or exposing their own opinions. Hence, teachers were considered as particularly influential in facilitating or inhibiting growth of political interest in school, as well as in providing space for crucial critical reflection and debate.

Maybe some newspaper article, with the teacher of religion we always talk about current affairs with her, we can express ourselves freely. Perhaps with other teachers who may have an idea that is felt, let's say that it ... Moderator: prevails? - Yes, that's right. With

the religion teacher, like, she brings us every time a newspaper or we see with the
interactive whiteboard (…) then maybe we discuss it all together, but then for just one
hour. (gen, F, 16)

At times students also reported they did not have a stimulating relationship with their
teachers. Participants from the mixed general/technical institute, in particular, lamented being
obstructed in their involvement in extracurricular activities, which were otherwise considered
very formative:

Instead, we've found ourselves often with professors who maybe couldn't give value to
the initiatives proposed by the school itself. For example, also with the debate group
there are professors who don't realize the importance it may have. They come to preach
to you on a school subject, but fail to realize the opportunities that the school gives.
When maybe it will serve more to certain persons to have an experience like this that
we're doing now, rather than a subject explained and, like you said, imposed. (gen/tech,
F, 16)

In this sense, students sometimes complained that teachers may not be welcoming to
actually democratic functioning at school. There was an awareness among participants of the
disadvantaged position of students in having a say on school and class matters, especially in
relation to experiences in school councils, representing the class or institute.

[…] There's also the fact that our word does not carry the same weight against that of
the teachers. The teachers will always be right. (tech, M, 16)

Opportunities for involvement. A lot of the students that participated in the discussion
were involved in activities of representation in school councils and assemblies (28 students).
This type of involvement was considered by the participants as a potentially formative
experience of taking up responsibilities in organizing activities and representing other students'
needs.

I am a class assembly delegate […] there is a link between the Institute and the class,
attending meetings, you can discover many things, like, organizing activities that are
done in the school and out of the school, preparing the meetings, organizations, including

activities such as school dances, or even the more important things like organizing
assemblies for student self-management. (gen, F, 17)

However, several students reported that their experiences were accompanied by some frustration in cases where students' voice was limited or ignored by teachers and the school administration. Student representatives evoked examples of having little space for actual decision-making, revealing the existence of a tokenistic dimension of their participation at school.

It's kind of like what A. [class representative] did when she went to look for (…) things,
she told them, but there is always the predominance of ... (voc, M, 17) - The strong. The
strong that threaten. Maybe people who consider themselves to be strong, but in fact they
are not. (voc, F, 17) - Yes, but certainly a professor has more power than a pupil. (voc,
M, 17).

Such considerations were brought up in different institutes, but were rather accentuated in the mixed technical/general school. General track students, however, did not voice any similar preoccupation. It is also worth noting that in technical and mixed technical/general institutes students reported experiences of participating in student strikes at school mainly in relation to structural demands (e.g. due to lack of heating, issues with breaks between lessons, lack of a school gym, etc.) after being met with long absences of response by the school administration:

We did one here at Cento – more than one in fact with the previous school
representatives – we did one here in front of the school, because it was more than a
month that we had no heating in class. (…) After one month, after having written, sent
letters – nothing. Then we got out in front, we blocked everything. (tech, M, 19)

In this sense, the imbalance of power between students and teachers was highlighted at times and suggested difficulties in giving youngsters voice even when requested. Students from several schools denounced not being given enough responsibility to make decisions within their schools and freedom of voice in their educational life. In this sense, some students reported feeling rather powerless:

Eh in theory we have power, but in theory. Then we have the professor in the council, the
dean and others, and then it backfires "And what are you asking? What are you doing?".

So we always shut up, remain dumb and always good, because there is the blackmail of the vote. (...) The school is just as 50 years ago where people came to school, heard the lesson and left. I mean, I spend 5 hours per day at this school, it has to mean something, this is my school, I represent something and I don't even know what I represent, I have no power to do anything (...) Let's say that all these organs that have been established are only skin deep, because they are good for nothing – we have no power at all and there's nothing we can do. (gen/tech, F, 17)

Another important way for fostering civic and political participation in school was organizing encounters with organizations. Giving space for associations to present themselves and their activities was an opportunity to stimulate interest and eventually become involved. This was especially true in the general school, where a number of students had come to know a civil reality in school and later became involved. Moreover, some organizations, such as a NGO focused on fighting organized crime ("Libera") and a blood donations association ("AVIS") emerged as very active in schools as activities with them were reported by the students from different institutes.

Also I am a donor AVIS, I already donated once and also donor ADMO for bone marrow. I learned about it thanks to the school, even though I already knew these associations, but I didn't have the courage to do it and in the end I took courage. (gen, F, 18)

Many of the participants also stated that organized meetings with experts on different social or political issues were very useful for getting a deeper look at a particular topic, outside of the usual classroom activities. These occasions were seen as fostering knowledge, interest and awareness. Students in different schools reported, for example, seminars related to the national referendum held recently that helped clarify each side of the vote.

We are fortunate here at school to treat legal subjects, so we were fortunate with professors to talk about it. Plus we had a meeting with a university professor who, I mean, we weren't told what to vote because, I mean, they told us what it was and then the choice was free. (tech, M, 19)

Other extracurricular school projects that were referenced in relation to students' civic development dealt with prevention, e.g. peer education and meetings with guests from outside the school. All considered them very useful ways of getting to understand a problem and wished

to have more opportunities (as in the case of the vocational school, where the peer education project was interrupted).

Internships, as part of the students' studies, were also reported as useful opportunities to put into practice what they had learned and to have concrete experiences. The possibility that an internship could be related also to involvement that fostered active citizenship was most discussed in the two higher track institutes (since their studies were also more likely linked to internship opportunities relevant for the civic and political sphere). In fact, for some this occasion was translated in involvement in civic organizations. However, in other cases students evidenced the program was not always organized at best and sometimes they felt they would be doing useless work with little connection to their interests.

> *Our course really helps a lot, like, to me a world has opened up when last year we did the internship, we did an internship in a cooperative. (…) it changed my life because it made me realize what is the third sector, (…) that I can participate in this. I found another way of seeing things that were actually active. (…) I could (…) get an experience out of this, something that the textbook can't do. (gen, F, 18)*

> *It's a useless thing. (gen/tech, F, 17) - Just unskilled labour … (gen/tech, F, 16) - Because if I have to make an internship that I don't like (…) Then it serves no purpose at the end. I mean, to throw away time like this, to just take the exam and that's it, you make me also do a job that I don't like. (gen/tech, F, 18)*

Mobility projects – such as Erasmus, internships abroad, eTwinning – were very appreciated by the students and linked them to greater open-mindedness and to becoming aware of belonging to the EU. Being able to combine international experience with practical work-related involvement was especially valued.

> *[…] for us the experience we had in Madrid, to me it served both to form the character and also to put into practice, to use the language, to put into practice my knowledge. So it's nice to have a match then in reality. (tech, F, 17)*

However, some students also evidenced how similar projects (especially internship program abroad) could be limited to a small number of participants and there were not always enough allocated funds. Moreover, although mobility proved crucial in approaching the EU and

building belonging, the students did not relate it in any way to their civic and political agency.

Students in one of the technical institutes had participated in Model European Parliament simulations and described it as an important formative experience in which they could tackle current social issues, exchange opinions and propose concrete solutions at the EU level. This was one of the rare participative experiences referred in the discussions, that were specifically related to the European dimension and provided practical involvement to students.

> *I liked it a lot, because anyway they gave you a current issue - my group had that of recycling. We had to analyze, from a source text, a range of problems and find solutions in compliance with the Constitution. And then there was a simulation of a debate, and anyway it was a good experience for me. (tech, F, 16)*

A particularly appreciated opportunity referred by the students was that of a debate group in the mixed general/technical school. Participants underlined how participation in debates helped them get informed on diverse current issues, including the EU, and they felt more personally involved and interested in the themes they approached. According to the way it was described, the activity seemed to adhere to the vision of students that emphasized deliberation in active citizenship – it required getting informed, expressing opinions and discussion with others.

> *For example a positive thing I've seen is that a subject, I think, should be approached as one approaches the debate, because it involves you more and I've noticed this personally. They give you a topic on which you must get informed and in that way it sticks with you more because it's involving. For example, Brexit, growth and degrowth, remained much more impressing to us than they would have, if it had been a teacher to explain the topic, because we went to inform ourselves, we saw the conflicting theses. (gen/tech, F, 17)*

In other schools, where such extracurricular activity was not present, students still referred often to debates and discussions as an effective way of fostering critical understanding of civic and political issues and independent thinking. It was seldom suggested that groups or extracurricular classes were created in their school as an improvement of citizenship education.

Some students in one of the technical institutes had also participated in different opportunities of volunteering offered by their school, such as Open Days for future students of the school, donations collection or cultural guide for the Italian National Trust (FAI). They

described them as valuable experiences, which did make them feel active citizens, but also highlighted again issues of tokenism on behalf of the school and of teachers, which in their perception did not give the right importance to their agency development:

> *Well, it has a very large value. However, in my opinion, the school does not give such importance, they make us do it just because (tech, M, 19) - Also the teacher of religion pretends. (tech, F, 18) - Eh, I'm not saying that they impose it to her, however there are maybe some professors who want to do this, because according to them it is important and they are right. And the school says "Yes, okay," but then doesn't really care much about it. And so for us, it is very important, but should also be important to the people make us do it. And often, more often than not, it isn't. (tech, M, 19)*

Comparatively, the overall discussion on opportunities of involvement did not seem to differ substantially between school tracks. However, with the exception of school councils, the profiles of opportunities discussed by the students seemed to be distinguished in each school. Within some of the schools – the general, one technical and the vocational – students referred to a wider variety of activities (contacts with organizations, meetings, prevention education, mobility). In other schools – general/technical and one technical – the discussions were focused mostly on specific projects, such as the debate group or the European simulation. We note, however, that these differences might reflect the selection of participants made by the referent teachers. Furthermore, the pupils we approached did not necessarily have knowledge of all the existing opportunities in their school and reported only the ones that were personally relevant to them. An interesting dynamic of distinction emerged between the two higher track schools general and mixed general/technical.

Discussion

The study analyzed upper secondary students' views on active citizenship, youth agency, and citizenship education with the help of focus group discussions. We presented in detail students' perspectives on youth participation in the public life, the processes they envision as relevant for engagement, their viewpoints on the political system, as well as on the school's role in fostering and/or hindering youths' agency-building and meaningful involvement.

Active citizenship - meanings and processes. Overall, the findings showed that adolescents had a complex vision of active citizenship and its impact on individual and social level. Figure *7* presents a synthesis of the themes that emerged from the analysis and their inter-relations. Students seemed to think of two fields of action – political and civic – as distinguished in their aims and significance. On a general level, political action was mainly linked to the pursuit of social change, while civic-oriented activities were conceived as aimed at helping those who are worse off. The students seemed to give prevailing importance to collective action aimed at constructive change of injustices in their conceptions. In this sense, the youngsters' understanding of the participative citizen was in line with ideas emphasizing critical stances towards the status quo and justice-oriented actions (Norris, 1999; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). According to participants' point of view, however, what was the basis of active citizenship and its most fundamental characteristic was deliberation. In this sense, the students' conceptions seemed to mix several normative orientations, some of which were akin to norms identified in political research – e.g., liberal (deliberative), communitarian and participative notions (Denters et al., 2007). However, the analysis of how these norms were defined and interrelated in the participants' discourses showed how youngsters do not adhere to a sole representation. Instead, the results outlined a comprehensive view of the active citizen, in which deliberation is at the base and participation is distinguished by its aims on a social level (e.g., civic duty/law-abiding, social change and solidarity).
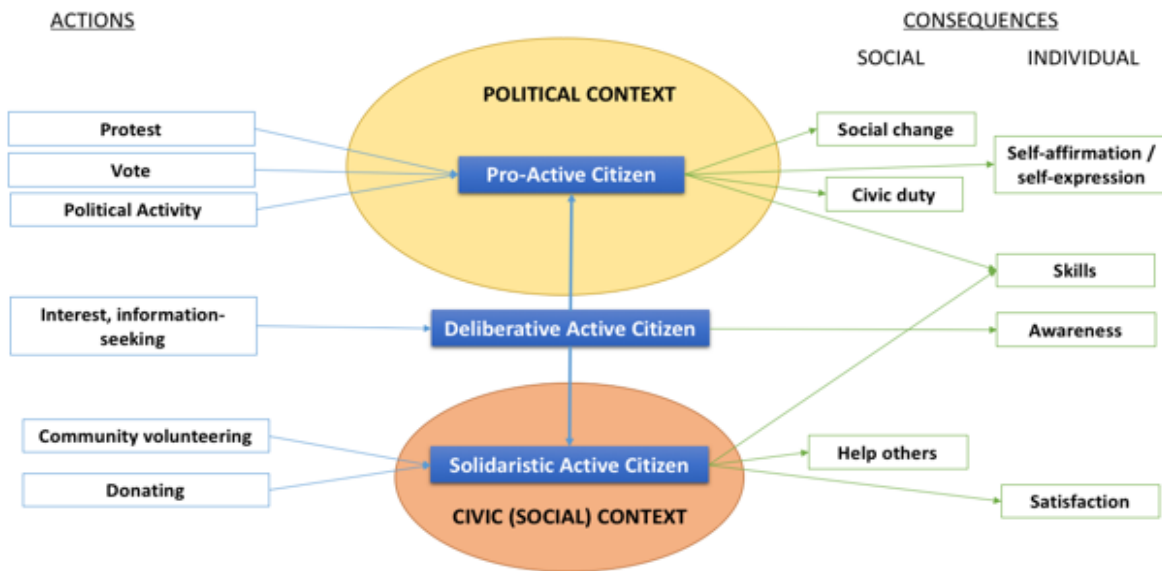
Figure 7. Ideas of active citizenship

Rather than crystallizing different typologies of citizens, students' descriptions revealed how they viewed participation as dependent on a process of activation that entailed: becoming interested and aware of relevant issues, getting informed, forming an opinion independently from others and eventually expressing it. Such a conceptualization of citizens' involvement bears resemblance to Emler's model of process-based political engagement, which has also proposed a sequential approach towards politics (Emler, 2011). At the base of this process model is the motivation to pay attention, either due to interest or sense of civic duty. This would lead to attentiveness and search for information, which in turn leads to knowledge and the formation of opinion. When the opinions become organized in structures, they can lead to one's realization as a political actor through participation. Emler (*idem*) has also suggested that, in addition to several personal characteristics, a variety of environmental factors influence every step of this process. These include family environment, education, opportunity structures, etc. Within the conducted focus groups, we also asked students to explore the role of youth as civic and political actors, as well as the opportunities and constraints they perceived in their environment, specifically their schools. These findings can be read as contribution to the elucidation of the influences upon the process of engagement, as conceived by the youngsters themselves.

Youth as active citizens. In general, the participants seemed to have internalized the

societal narrative that depicts youth as passive, disinterested and in need of stimulation. While asserting clearly youth distance from institutional politics, students showed desire to understand better issues of political significance and the ways in which change could be effected. Young people could be considered agents of change, but this depended on several conditions, according to the youngsters. Evoking the process model of engagement, students felt the need to become aware of relevant issues and have more information available in order to be better equipped for participating in a deliberative manner. Still, sustaining involvement required also seeing evidence of their opinions being listened to and taken seriously, rather than dismissed. They evidenced difficulties in finding external responsiveness, especially by institutions and politicians, as well as possible negative views of youth among adults in general. In this sense, students asked for greater recognition of their sociopolitical agency by adults, allowing them a more active role in decision-making processes.

   School influence. The school context was seen as fundamental in this process. Informal characteristics of the school was confirmed as crucial for stimulating students in paying attention to citizenship issues. Elements of school climate, in particular, were reported during the focus groups. In the students' experience, one of the most crucial factors was having positive relationships with interested teachers, who spurred their interest in particular issues, provided an example and treated them as equals. They also saw open discussions on current civic and political issues as especially relevant for their development as active citizens, since these activities allowed them to express their opinions freely and to feel listened to with regard to relevant political topics. In this sense, teachers' pedagogic style was seen as extremely influential in both the initial motivation for civic and political interest and the subsequent process of *opinionation* (Emler, 2011). Educators can provide a much needed supportive space of listening without patronization, where the formation of opinions and their expression can be practiced. Ultimately, students' accounts stressed the importance of an environment that fosters their critical thinking abilities and gives them opportunities for experimenting and affirming their political opinions truthfully, even if those may be non-normative. Nevertheless, participants recognized that their schools usually offered limited opportunities of discussion and felt that teachers would often avoid such activities for fear of confrontation and personal exposure. The findings confirm the importance of providing opportunities for open and respectful discussions in the classroom, as well as sustaining democratic values in school that promote students' decision-

making power within the school governance (Hahn, 1998; Torney-Purta, 2002; Torney-Purta & Barber, 2005).

With respect to pertinent opportunities for involvement in school, participants described several extracurricular projects, volunteering experiences, internships and mobility projects, as well as seminars and meetings with external figures. Overall, students identified key characteristics that make a project effective for meaningful involvement on civic and political issues, in particular providing opportunities for practical involvement that facilitate the connection of these topics with everyday life. Activities of student representation at school assemblies were also considered a relevant participative experience, that could allow both experiential learning and sense of agency within the educational context. The descriptions of the students' participation in the schools' decision-making, however, were also linked with accounts of frustration with the unrealized democratic potential within the institution and with the feeling of not really having their voice recognized. The findings point to a consideration of the characteristics that participative opportunities need to have, in order to lead to positive and empowering results. Providing space for extracurricular projects and student assemblies is not enough, if the quality and the outcome of the experience are questionable – participation experiences need to be supported in order to provide meaningful involvement, interaction with others, and opportunities for personal integration (Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2012; Ferreira et al., 2012; Menezes, 2003). In particular, the students could identify the aspects of participative opportunities that revealed the actions as proposals by the school in terms of tokenism or symbolic involvement (Arnstein, 1969; Hart, 1992). The participants, instead, seemed to demand a more egalitarian approach, in which they could undertake initiatives and be involved practically with support and guidance by teachers and the adults around them – what could be defined as young-adult partnership with shared control (Wong et al., 2010).

Overall, the youngsters' experiences with regards to approaching civic and political matters in school appeared to support the centrality of a participatory school culture that creates a supportive environment of open discussion, contestation, involvement and reflection. As resulting from the analysis in the institutes we approached, getting school administration and teachers on board with such an approach to capacity-building still remains a challenge and collaborative relations, in which students are valued as autonomous agents and can be an integral part of the school life, need to be promoted.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this dissertation we conducted four studies with the general aim to confront normative assumptions in academic research on youth participation with the plurality of young people's citizenship orientations and their perspective about their active role in the civic and political sphere. We analyzed: the social representations of youth civic and political participation in the current psychological literature (*Chapter 2*); the patterns of (dis)engagement orientations in young people and in adolescents and their contextual correlates (*Chapter 3*); the perspectives of upper secondary school students on active citizenship, youth agency and schools' influence (*Chapter 4*).

Although each study presented specific methodological limits, the mixed methods approach we adopted allowed us to address the complex issue of youth participation from multiple perspectives and brought to fruitful interplay of evidence. We tackled the issue of plural ways of seeing young people's engagement and disengagement through both quantitative and qualitative explorative methods that focused on academic discourse (bibliographic content analysis, *Chapter 2*), existing behavioral and attitudinal orientations (survey, *Chapter 3*), and young people's point of view (focus groups, *Chapter 4*).

In the next paragraphs the main results are discussed in order to gain an overall understanding of the main implications for further research and practice.

Youth orientations towards civic and political (dis)engagement

In this research we outlined the existence of different normative approaches to youth civic and political participation. We sought to identify the contradictory interpretations on the topic in psychology, in particular, through a systematic bibliographic research. The findings highlighted how the dominant social representations revealed an understanding of youth participation that is in line with a normative model of the "good" responsible citizen and this was distinguished from the study of critical justice-oriented activism. In this sense, psychology has

largely been occupied with the examination of precursors of mostly conventional political behavior (e.g. voting) and – when youth are addressed specifically as targets – with promoting civic development through education or empowerment. The resulting representation is in line with worries about rising political disaffection and the quest to counter it in research and policy (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009; Putnam, 2000). The semantic repertoire that emphasized the focus on critical activism, however, was completely distinct from the rest of the psychological corpus we analyzed.

Informed by these results, we underlined the need to overcome the disparate attention to normative and critical stances towards engagement and we sought out to contribute to an understanding of the variety of young people's positioning with respect to the civic and political sphere. In particular, we proposed that youth citizenship orientations in a European context can be defined by levels of participation, sociopolitical interest and political distrust. Indeed, we demonstrated that young Italians assumed distinct orientations characterized by interactions between these indicators. We found that few of the young people in our sample were active in civic and political activities, but an important part of them were engaged at least latently in a *standby* attitude characterized by high sociopolitical interest. The findings confirm previous research and the theoretical observations on the prevalence of a *monitorial* approach among young citizens, characterized by attentiveness and readiness for participation (Amnå & Ekman, 2013; 2015; Schudson, 1996). We were also able to show, however, that youngsters can be distinguished between critical and normative on each level of engagement, based on their attitude towards institutions and the electoral process. Apart from a satisfied active or standby approach, young people were also engaged in critical supervision or critical action. In this sense, political disaffection does not seem to be necessarily grounds for disengagement, but can represent also an approach to getting involved in order to control processes deemed unsatisfactory (Geissel, 2008; Norris, 1999; Rosanvallon, 2008). Further research is needed, however, in order to understand better the actual motivations behind critical latent involvement and the possible variations of the assumed orientations in different political contexts from the Italian one. Moreover, our study did not provide any indication on the possible differences between active critical and normative youth in preferred forms of engagement, since we treated both conventional and unconventional activities as an overall index of participation.

We sought to get a better understanding of young people's visions of citizen engagement in the qualitative study presented in *Chapter 4*. The importance of considering latent involvement in the analysis of youth active citizenship was also supported by the upper secondary school students we approached in focus group discussions. Youngsters' discourses regarded attentiveness and information-gathering, along with deliberative aspects of self-expression, as fundamental in their idea of the active citizen and as the necessary requisite for political activation. The findings are in line with previous ideas of interest and attentiveness in terms of readiness for action if the occasion arises (Amnå & Ekman, 2013) and in terms of the starting point for a process of activation (Emler, 2011). The students seemed to give prevailing importance to collective action aimed at constructive change of injustices in their understanding of the participative citizen – a vision in line with ideas of critical or justice-oriented citizens (Norris, 1999; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Youngsters' comprehensive vision of political participation as a potential for critical change was somehow in contrast to the fragmentation of focus between conventional activity and activism identified in the social representations of youth participation in psychological literature.

Sociopolitical agency in adolescence

We have argued in this thesis that the academic debates on what constitutes participation and how to approach it among youth has important repercussions on the ways, in which young people are represented and treated. In the analysis of social representations of youth participation within current psychological research, we found differing normative assumptions with regard to young people. On the one hand, lexical repertoires that focused on political participation and activism did not present specific attention to youngsters. We assume this might be because the resulting group of publications is more intent on explaining determinate behavior and youth are the population of research, but not a theoretical focus. On the other hand, representations focused on young people, in particular, viewed the general aim of promoting civic development in opposing ways – as educative and prevention-based interventions or as empowering developmental processes. The findings relate to general assumptions about the capacity of youth to engage in the civic and political sphere and underline a core *themata* (oppositional antinomy) (Markovà, 2003) in the organization of the social representation of youth participation in psychology – youth as empty vessels vs. youth as active agents. An important tenet of the theory of social representations is that they are preparatory to action since they give meaning to the

action and integrate it in a series of relations (Moscovici, 1976). How youth are thought of in psychological research, thus, acquires significance for the applied implications to education and policy recommendations that academic production is seldom called to contribute to. Within the continuous communicative practices between different spheres – scientific research, policy, media and everyday interactions – social representations are transformed in practices on all levels and penetrate the common sense knowledge. Academic discourse, then, has the responsibility to evaluate the meanings and possible worlds it conveys within the public sphere and how these can be taken upon in the "real" world. Representing young people as "citizens-in-waiting" and passive recipients of knowledge and intervention, in fact, can transform in the practical strategy to "mould" responsible conventional citizens (Hart, 2009). Research on active citizenship (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009), for example, has had important implications for European policy on citizenship education, but it has already been criticized for an approach of "domestication" and lack of support for critical agency (Biesta, 2009). In this sense, future research on the topic should take into account critically the impact of underlying normative assumptions for the possible alienation of young people.

With respect to this issue, youngsters' discourses also conveyed rather negative representations of their role and capacity as active citizens. The participants, indeed, seemed to have internalized the societal narrative that depicts youth as passive, disinterested and in need of stimulation. In this sense, adolescents may be influenced by general attitudes that portray them in negative terms or as lacking the abilities to contribute significantly to society (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). Italian youngsters confirmed that institutional politics was an abstract and distant entity in their everyday experiences, but these generalized feelings were not devoid of desire to understand better issues of political significance and the ways in which change could be effected. However, their dominant representation of active citizenship, as a deliberative and challenging process, did not seem to be a viable and supported in their own experiences – youngsters felt impeded by presumed generational characteristics of "superficiality", age-related lack of capacity and information, and the perception that their voice would not matter anyway. In this sense, students asked for greater recognition of their sociopolitical agency by adults and the political system, allowing them a more active role in decision-making processes.

Fostering youth agency

As evidenced by the analysis of recent psychological publications, an asset-based approach to youth agency needs to consider developmental processes of empowerment in interaction with the living environments of youngsters (Flanagan & Christens, 2011; Sherrod et al., 2010; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Recognition of the capacity of young people to effect change starts with allowing for everyday expression of voice within the ecological contexts of development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Both findings from the survey and the focus group discussion in this project tackled the issue of what contextual characteristics fostered youth engagement.

From a point of view of the patterns of (dis)engagement identified in our quantitative sample, family support and sense of having opportunities for influence in ones' neighborhood were less likely disengaged. In line with previous research, we thus found that parental norms of engagement (Andolina et al., 2003; Flanagan et al., 1998; Lenzi, Vieno, Santinello, Nation, & Voight, 2014a; Silva et al., 2004) and the quality and multiplicity of experiences of involvement and opportunities for influence (Chiessi et al., 2010; Evans, 2007) can have a positive influence in adolescent civic development. Open school climate, schools' external efficacy and opportunities for reflection were also influential. Our findings confirmed that opportunities for open discussions and responsiveness, may induce greater satisfaction and trust towards the larger institutional context (Hahn, 1998), while the consideration and integration of multiple views at school support the development of interested youth who are largely satisfied with the institutional political process (Ferreira et al., 2012).

Youth discourses also confirmed the importance of processes of engagement within school. The findings showed that motivated teachers and opportunities for open discussions can provide a much needed supportive space of listening without patronization, where the formation of opinions and their expression can be practiced. Moreover, opportunities for practical involvement in school projects and extracurricular activities that facilitate the connection of citizenship topics with everyday life were found to be particularly crucial for meaningful involvement on civic and political issues. However, youngsters' accounts also highlighted the need to eschew tokenistic and symbolic action, as students were quite aware and frustrated with the unrealized democratic potential of their schools. Providing space for extracurricular projects

and student assemblies is not enough, if the quality and the outcome of the experience are questionable – participation experiences need to be supported in order to provide meaningful involvement, interaction with others, and opportunities for personal integration (Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2012; Ferreira et al., 2012; Menezes, 2003).

Evoking the process model of engagement (Emler, 2011), students felt the need to become aware of relevant issues and have more information available in order to be better equipped for participating in a deliberative manner. Still, sustaining involvement required also seeing evidence of their opinions being listened to and taken seriously, rather than dismissed. Their experience in school succeeded occasionally in activating a process of engagement, but seemed to be hindered by a prevalent teaching approach that was driven by a "vessel" model of education, where teachers were more focused on transmitting knowledge to students than on stimulating their agency.

The findings have implications for recommendations towards the educational system. Clearly, the methods used to foster citizenship awareness and engagement in school need to be improved. As evidenced by the students' accounts, the quest to transcend transmission-driven schooling experiences to personally relevant ones, that foster contestation and reflection, is still a very challenging feat. The observations on including practical "learn-by-doing" experiences in a regular manner and emphasizing the creation of spaces for deliberation are important indications for the development of educational policy that is truly attentive to building students' capacity as active citizens.

Adopting a mixed methods approach, this dissertation provided important indications for the study of the variety of youth ways of (dis)engaging with the political sphere and for the role played by contextual factors in fostering greater sociopolitical agency.

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APPENDIX A

Multinomial regression results: adolescent sample

REFERENCE: Standby Normative	B	SE	OR	95%CI		p
Disengaged Critical						
Gender	-0.671	0.532	0.51	0.18	1.45	0.207
Family income	-0.222	0.513	0.80	0.29	2.19	0.665
School track: Academic	-0.935	0.745	0.39	0.09	1.69	0.209
School track: Vocational	2.899	1.224	18.16	1.65	199.94	0.018
School climate: Openness	-0.534	0.35	0.59	0.30	1.16	0.127
School climate: Efficacy	0.119	0.34	1.13	0.58	2.19	0.727
School climate: Fairness	-0.025	0.358	0.98	0.48	1.97	0.944
School opportunities for reflection	-1.672	0.515	0.19	0.07	0.52	0.001
Neighborhood SoC	-0.723	0.284	0.49	0.28	0.85	0.011
Peer norms	-0.264	0.444	0.77	0.32	1.83	0.552
Family norms	-1.615	0.487	0.20	0.08	0.52	0.001
Family democracy	-0.556	0.439	0.57	0.24	1.36	0.206
Family warmth	0.125	0.318	1.13	0.61	2.11	0.693
Passive Critical						
Gender	-0.428	0.477	0.65	0.26	1.66	0.37
Family income	-0.559	0.479	0.57	0.22	1.46	0.243
School track: Academic	0.499	0.534	1.65	0.58	4.69	0.35
School track: Vocational	1.364	1.209	3.91	0.37	41.83	0.259
School climate: Openness	-0.678	0.316	0.51	0.27	0.94	0.032
School climate: Efficacy	-0.04	0.307	0.96	0.53	1.75	0.896
School climate: Fairness	-0.029	0.311	0.97	0.53	1.79	0.926
School opportunities for reflection	-0.682	0.456	0.51	0.21	1.24	0.134
Neighborhood SoC	-0.539	0.255	0.58	0.35	0.96	0.034
Peer norms	-0.328	0.409	0.72	0.32	1.61	0.422
Family norms	-1.162	0.46	0.31	0.13	0.77	0.011
Family democracy	-0.331	0.422	0.72	0.31	1.64	0.433
Family warmth	0.109	0.306	1.12	0.61	2.03	0.721

Standby Critical

	B	SE	OR	95%CI		p
Gender	0.082	0.779	1.09	0.24	5.00	0.916
Family income	-0.271	0.557	0.76	0.26	2.27	0.626
School track: Academic	-0.07	0.751	0.93	0.21	4.06	0.926
School track: Vocational	-0.536	1.943	0.59	0.01	26.37	0.783
School climate: Openness	-1.084	0.436	0.34	0.14	0.79	0.013
School climate: Efficacy	-0.097	0.52	0.91	0.33	2.51	0.852
School climate: Fairness	0.232	0.426	1.26	0.55	2.91	0.586
School opportunities for reflection	-0.973	0.768	0.38	0.08	1.70	0.205
Neighborhood SoC	-0.415	0.476	0.66	0.26	1.68	0.383
Peer norms	-0.486	0.617	0.62	0.18	2.06	0.431
Family norms	-0.166	0.666	0.85	0.23	3.12	0.804
Family democracy	0.14	0.599	1.15	0.36	3.72	0.815
Family warmth	-0.025	0.48	0.98	0.38	2.50	0.959

Active Critical

	B	SE	OR	95%CI		p
Gender	-0.479	0.931	0.62	0.10	3.84	0.607
Family income	-1.428	1.108	0.24	0.03	2.10	0.198
School track: Academic	-1.315	1.157	0.27	0.03	2.59	0.256
School track: Vocational	-23.82	1.943	0.00	0.00	0.00	0
School climate: Openness	-1.425	0.788	0.24	0.05	1.13	0.071
School climate: Efficacy	0.362	0.531	1.44	0.51	4.07	0.495
School climate: Fairness	0.986	1.043	2.68	0.35	20.70	0.344
School opportunities for reflection	-1.846	0.982	0.16	0.02	1.08	0.06
Neighborhood SoC	0.057	0.727	1.06	0.25	4.40	0.937
Peer norms	1.093	1.145	2.98	0.32	28.14	0.34
Family norms	0.033	0.921	1.03	0.17	6.28	0.971
Family democracy	0.291	0.747	1.34	0.31	5.78	0.697
Family warmth	-1.402	1.157	0.25	0.03	2.38	0.226

REFERENCE: **Standby Critical**	**B**	**SE**	**OR**	**95%CI**		*p*

Disengaged Critical

	B	SE	OR	95%CI		p
Gender	-0.75	0.67	0.47	0.13	1.74	0.26
Family income	0.05	0.38	1.05	0.50	2.21	0.90
School track: Academic	-0.87	0.76	0.42	0.10	1.85	0.25
School track: Vocational	3.44	1.52	31.03	1.58	608.06	0.02

School climate: Openness	0.55	0.37	1.73	0.84	3.57	0.14
School climate: Efficacy	0.22	0.38	1.24	0.59	2.63	0.57
School climate: Fairness	-0.26	0.36	0.77	0.38	1.56	0.47
School opportunities for reflection	-0.70	0.61	0.50	0.15	1.65	0.25
Neighborhood SoC	-0.31	0.43	0.73	0.32	1.70	0.47
Peer norms	0.22	0.51	1.25	0.46	3.41	0.67
Family norms	-1.45	0.54	0.23	0.08	0.67	0.01
Family democracy	-0.70	0.45	0.50	0.21	1.20	0.12
Family warmth	0.15	0.43	1.16	0.50	2.71	0.73
Passive Critical						
Gender	-0.51	0.66	0.60	0.16	2.19	0.44
Family income	-0.29	0.34	0.75	0.38	1.46	0.40
School track: Academic	0.57	0.58	1.76	0.57	5.51	0.33
School track: Vocational	1.90	1.56	6.69	0.32	141.70	0.22
School climate: Openness	0.41	0.34	1.50	0.76	2.95	0.24
School climate: Efficacy	0.06	0.40	1.06	0.49	2.30	0.89
School climate: Fairness	-0.26	0.34	0.77	0.39	1.51	0.45
School opportunities for reflection	0.29	0.66	1.34	0.37	4.83	0.66
Neighborhood SoC	-0.12	0.44	0.88	0.37	2.10	0.78
Peer norms	0.16	0.56	1.17	0.39	3.48	0.78
Family norms	-1.00	0.60	0.37	0.11	1.19	0.09
Family democracy	-0.47	0.46	0.62	0.25	1.55	0.31
Family warmth	0.13	0.45	1.14	0.48	2.74	0.76
Active Critical						
Gender	-0.56	1.03	0.57	0.08	4.30	0.59
Family income	-1.16	1.03	0.31	0.04	2.38	0.26
School track: Academic	-1.25	1.18	0.29	0.03	2.91	0.29
School track: Vocational	-23.28	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
School climate: Openness	-0.34	0.80	0.71	0.15	3.39	0.67
School climate: Efficacy	0.46	0.58	1.58	0.51	4.94	0.43
School climate: Fairness	0.75	1.03	2.13	0.28	16.07	0.47
School opportunities for reflection	-0.87	1.00	0.42	0.06	2.95	0.38
Neighborhood SoC	0.47	0.80	1.60	0.33	7.69	0.56
Peer norms	1.58	1.27	4.85	0.41	57.94	0.21
Family norms	0.20	0.97	1.22	0.18	8.15	0.84
Family democracy	0.15	0.76	1.16	0.26	5.18	0.84
Family warmth	-1.38	1.19	0.25	0.02	2.57	0.25

REFERENCE: **Passive Critical**	**B**	**SE**	**OR**	**95%CI**		*p*
Disengaged Critical						
Gender	-0.24	0.35	0.78	0.39	1.57	0.49
Family income	0.34	0.27	1.40	0.83	2.36	0.21
School track: Academic	-1.43	0.61	0.24	0.07	0.78	0.02
School track: Vocational	1.54	0.46	4.64	1.87	11.52	0.00
School climate: Openness	0.15	0.26	1.16	0.69	1.93	0.58
School climate: Efficacy	0.16	0.20	1.17	0.80	1.73	0.42
School climate: Fairness	0.00	0.26	1.00	0.60	1.67	0.99
School opportunities for reflection	-0.99	0.37	0.37	0.18	0.77	0.01
Neighborhood SoC	-0.18	0.25	0.83	0.51	1.36	0.47
Peer norms	0.06	0.34	1.07	0.55	2.08	0.85
Family norms	-0.45	0.32	0.64	0.34	1.19	0.16
Family democracy	-0.23	0.22	0.80	0.52	1.23	0.31
Family warmth	0.02	0.21	1.02	0.67	1.54	0.94
Active Critical						
Gender	-0.05	0.85	0.95	0.18	4.99	0.95
Family income	-0.87	1.02	0.42	0.06	3.08	0.39
School track: Academic	-1.81	1.09	0.16	0.02	1.37	0.10
School track: Vocational	-25.18	1.56	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
School climate: Openness	-0.75	0.74	0.47	0.11	2.01	0.31
School climate: Efficacy	0.40	0.46	1.49	0.60	3.70	0.38
School climate: Fairness	1.02	1.00	2.76	0.39	19.40	0.31
School opportunities for reflection	-1.16	0.85	0.31	0.06	1.66	0.17
Neighborhood SoC	0.60	0.72	1.81	0.45	7.40	0.41
Peer norms	1.42	1.16	4.14	0.43	40.23	0.22
Family norms	1.20	0.83	3.30	0.64	16.94	0.15
Family democracy	0.62	0.64	1.86	0.53	6.57	0.33
Family warmth	-1.51	1.14	0.22	0.02	2.07	0.19

REFERENCE: **Disengaged Critical**	**B**	**SE**	**OR**	**95%CI**		*p*
Active Critical						
Gender	0.19	0.87	1.21	0.22	6.64	0.83
Family income	-1.21	1.02	0.30	0.04	2.21	0.24
School track: Academic	-0.38	1.18	0.68	0.07	6.85	0.75

School track: Vocational	-26.72	1.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
School climate: Openness	-0.89	0.74	0.41	0.10	1.74	0.23
School climate: Efficacy	0.24	0.47	1.28	0.51	3.17	0.60
School climate: Fairness	1.01	0.99	2.75	0.39	19.25	0.31
School opportunities for reflection	-0.17	0.83	0.84	0.16	4.29	0.83
Neighborhood SoC	0.78	0.72	2.18	0.53	8.91	0.28
Peer norms	1.36	1.18	3.88	0.39	38.94	0.25
Family norms	1.65	0.85	5.20	0.99	27.36	0.05
Family democracy	0.85	0.65	2.33	0.66	8.29	0.19
Family warmth	-1.53	1.13	0.22	0.02	1.99	0.18