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The Relation Between Participatory Social Practices and Social Representations of Citizenship in Young Adulthood

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Abstract The concept of citizenship is used both as a synonym of social action when referencing to an active form of citizenship as well as to indicate a form of civic obligation (formal citizenship). According to these premises, citizenship can be formalized in a large number of activities that contribute to building it in different ways. The aim of the present work is to explore how the concepts of citizenship and being a citizen are co-built by Italian young adults. Two groups of young adults are considered (engaged vs. not engaged). Eighty-nine young adults participants aged 18–36 completed a self-administered mixed-method questionnaire. A content and thematic analysis was conducted and a composite representation of citizenship emerged. Results of the present work can clarify the concept of citizenship by exploring how it is cognitively and socially represented in young adults and how this representation changes in engaged and not engaged young adults.

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Resume   Le concept de citoyenneté est utilisé comme synonyme de l'action sociale lorsqu'il est question d'une forme active de citoyenneté ainsi que pour indiquer une forme d'obligation civique (citoyenneté formelle). D'après ces principes, la citoyenneté peut être formalisée dans un grand nombre d'activités qui contribuent à la construire de différentes façons. L'objectif du présent travail est d'étudier comment les concepts de citoyenneté et d'être citoyen sont conjointement construits par de jeunes adultes italiens. Deux groupes de jeunes adultes sont étudiés (engagés et non engagés). Quatre-vingt-neuf jeunes adultes âgés de 18 à 36 ans, les participants, ont rempli un questionnaire auto-administré de méthodes mixtes. Une analyse de contenu et thématique a été réalisée et une représentation composite de la citoyenneté s'est dégagée. Les résultats de ce travail peuvent préciser la notion de citoyenneté en étudiant comment elle est représentée d'un point de vue cognitif et social chez les jeunes adultes et l'évolution de cette représentation chez les jeunes adultes engagés et non engagés.

Zusammenfassung   Das Bürgerschaftskonzept wird als ein Synonym für soziale Maßnahmen in Bezug auf eine aktive Form der Bürgerschaft verwandt sowie als ein Zeichen einer Form der bürgerlichen Pflicht (formale Bürgerschaft). Entsprechend diesen Voraussetzungen kann die Bürgerschaft bei einer Vielzahl von Aktivitäten, die auf verschiedene Weise zu ihrem Aufbau beitragen, formalisiert werden. In der vorliegenden Arbeit soll untersucht werden, wie die Bürgerschaftskonzepte und das Bürgersein von jungen Erwachsenen in Italien gleichzeitig aufgebaut werden. Dazu betrachtet man zwei Gruppen junger Erwachsener (engagierte gegenüber nicht engagierten Personen). 89 junge Erwachsene im Alter von 18 bis 36 Jahren nahmen teil und füllten eigenverantwortlich einen Fragebogen nach dem Mixed-Methods-Konzept aus. Eine inhaltliche und thematische Analyse stellte eine gemischte Darstellung der Bürgerschaft heraus. Die Ergebnisse der vorliegenden Arbeit können das Bürgerschaftskonzept verdeutlichen, indem untersucht wird, wie es sich kognitiv und sozial in jungen Erwachsenen zeigt und wie es sich bei engagierten und nicht engagierten jungen Erwachsenen jeweils unterscheidet.

Resumen   El concepto de ciudadanía se utiliza tanto como un sinónimo de acción social cuando se hace referencia a una forma activa de ciudadanía como para indicar una forma de obligación cívica (ciudadanía formal). Según estas premisas, la ciudadanía puede ser formalizada en un gran número de actividades que contribuyen a construirla de formas diferentes. El objetivo del presente trabajo es explorar cómo los conceptos de ciudadanía y ser un ciudadano son co-construidos por los adultos jóvenes italianos. Se consideran dos grupos de adultos jóvenes (comprometidos frente a no comprometidos). Ochenta y nueve participantes adultos jóvenes de edades comprendidas entre los 18 y los 36 años completaron un cuestionario autoadministrado de métodos mixtos. Se realizó un análisis temático y de contenido y emergió una representación compuesta de ciudadanía. Los resultados del presente trabajo pueden clarificar el concepto de ciudadanía explorando cómo se representa cognitiva y socialmente en los adultos jóvenes y cómo esta representación cambia en los adultos jóvenes comprometidos y no comprometidos.

Introduction

Citizenship is a complex concept because its definition sits at the crossroads of various disciplines, such as sociology, political science, jurisprudence, and philosophy. It is constantly being redefined because of continuous changes in society's socio-political arrangement. The 'post-modernization' and 'globalization' of contemporary society requires an 'increasingly complex and contextual understanding of citizenship' (Roche 2002, p. 71) which will be useful for the interpretation and study of these same changes. There are categorizations of citizenship based on the socio-political arrangement of states (Isin and Turner 2002), those founded on the identification of new patterns of citizenship linked to the demand for specific human rights (Turner 2001), and those that describe multiple citizenships as a function of status, experience, and the understanding of the citizens themselves (Hall and Coffey 2007). Isin and Wood define it (1999, p. 4, italics in original) as '*both* a set of practices (cultural, symbolic, and economic) and a bundle of rights and obligations (civil, political, and social) that define an individual's membership in a polity.' This membership would thus be defined by the interaction between formal legal status and informal social processes.

Psychology is interested in the understanding and experience that people have of citizenship as a palpable part of their social life (Renedo and Marston 2011): whether it is considered to be connected to one's belonging to a nation (Gattino and Miglietta 2010; Sindic 2011); in terms of action, as the totality of practices carried out in everyday life (Barnes et al. 2004); or as the fruit of one's commitment to one's community, for example, in terms of voluntary action or political engagement (Flanagan 2004). Sindic (2011) uses the term psychological citizenship to indicate the subjective sense of being a citizen. This definition may take us beyond an external, objective ascription and lead to subjectively caring about the status of the citizen and what that entails, in terms of rights, benefits, and responsibilities. Moreover, psychological citizenship presupposes that one perceives oneself and others as part of a community, involving perception of others as fellow citizens who are eligible to the same citizenship status, associated rights, and duties.

Citizenship as 'Moving Boundary' and the Citizen as 'Subject to be Built'

If the normative aspect is considered, with the criteria of legal inclusion and exclusion, citizenship can be seen as a dividing line to delineate who is inside and who is outside the category of citizens. Although it is fixed in legal terms, this boundary cannot be considered stable in social terms: its definition has to do with a process in which groups, citizens' rights, and the equilibriums of society are

continuously renegotiated, thus giving it the character of a 'moving boundary' (Gattino and Miglietta 2010, p. 27). In this sense, citizenship can be considered as a two-sided concept: on the one side involving aspects that favor equality and social inclusion, while on the other side acting as a criterion for exclusion and closure. From the psychosocial point of view, this determined inclusion/exclusion dynamic is not only of a formal type but involves a symbolic dimension that is closely connected to individuals' social identity and to the modalities which regulate relationships among members of the same group, and between them and members of other groups. Gattino and Miglietta underscore the close correlation between social identity theory (Tajfel 1981) and citizenship: 'If social identity is an answer to the question "Who am I?" then citizenship answers this question when it is posed in the social sphere' (Gattino and Miglietta 2010, p. 27). National identity therefore becomes a crucial question to investigate if the psychosocial dimension of citizenship is considered. 'Whilst it is important not to reify the relationship between psychological citizenship and national identity as a natural necessity, the latter seems to be currently the only form of identification that is both psychologically consonant with the notion of citizenship and a pervasive social psychological reality' (Sindic 2011, p. 210).

In order to understand the concept of citizenship from a psychosocial point of view, it is necessary to move away from a definitional logic that begins with the question 'What is citizenship?' towards embracing a constructivist perspective that brings into focus the way in which citizenship and, most importantly, the perception of being a citizen is built in context since 'the construction of the citizen does not happen only in individuals' heads' (Haste 2004, p. 420). In other words, it is necessary to consider the constructivist dynamics and social networks by means of which citizenship is built and exercised, altering the questions that guide research to: 'How is the citizen built? How is citizenship exercised?' Posing these types of questions completely shifts the definition of citizenship from a perspective that emphasizes top-down aspects (nature, functions, and effects of citizenship) to a bottom-up perspective by which citizenship is built through practice and discourse through processes of comparison, negotiation, and dialog (Barnes et al. 2004). In this sense, the authors concur that 'citizenship in practice surrounds us in a broad range of everyday activities that build it in a variety of ways that often go unobserved' (Barnes et al. 2004, p. 190). From this point of view, the individual ceases being an object to be observed and becomes a subject that with his/her action builds citizenship and consequently builds him/herself as a citizen. Citizenship, then, is neither 'cognitively in individuals' heads' nor 'sociologically outside of them' in the social organization, but is built in the practice and interaction that structure both the one and the other pole.

Young People and the Sense of Citizenship

In the preceding paragraphs, citizenship was shown to be an essentially debated social object (Sanchez-Mazas and Klein 2003) about which specific social groups can build for themselves a social representation. This observation is backed up even

more by the evidence we see looking at the group of young adults who are considered citizens '*in the making*' (Marshall 1950, p. 25) by definition.

In the sphere of the social sciences, young adults are considered to be increasingly less involved in the life of their communities and less interested in politics; in general, the adult generation does not have much faith in them as regards their role in the future of society (Howe and Strauss 2000). The transition to adult life has become a drawn out and uncertain period, increasingly without rites of passage, such as, leaving the parental home, marriage, or the acquisition of a stable job. We find citizenship, as mentioned in the preceding paragraph, a discontinuity demonstrated by the acquisition of rights and civil and political obligations granted when one reaches the age of majority, among which foremost is the right to vote. However, the age of majority does not signal a resulting, immediate development of full social and political consciousness; rather, the social and political values that are expressed in this life phase are the product of social relations and activities experienced during the age of development.

Flanagan (2008) connects the change in levels of civic engagement to the changes in the transition to adulthood mentioned earlier. The lengthening of the transition period to adulthood leads to a parallel lengthening of the formative period that results in a stable civic identity (Atkins and Hart 2003). Disinvestment in the social and political sphere is thus not seen as lasting; rather, the development of a full sense of citizenship is only thought to be delayed.

Different terminologies are used in the literature to indicate this single but highly variegated phenomenon, they are: social action or civic engagement. The construct of civic engagement, which was first developed to describe the situation of adolescents who still have not acquired the right to vote (Sherrod and Lauckhardt 2009), was also adapted to young adults through adjustments that imply integration into the formal political arena. Within the construct of civic engagement, therefore, the 'civic' and 'political' aspects are used interchangeably. Civic engagement can refer to both actions of volunteerism as well as actions of political engagement (Marzana et al. 2012). In the development of citizenship, understood in the classic sense, we detect a sort of discontinuity for which an external convention—in this case, reaching the age of majority—has the power to transform a person into a citizen for all intents and purposes by giving him/her the right to vote and run for public office, and by legally recognizing his/her possibility of having a personal relationship with the state. The legal acquisition of this status certainly does not coincide with a sudden change in the perception of one's role within the community or state but is inserted into a more or less formed civic identity, contributing towards the completion of it.

Aims

Citizenship is thus clearly a multiform object that has to do with numerous aspects of the human condition, from individual identity to social organization, so much so that one comes to recognize the impossibility, perhaps even futility, of offering a univocal definition. Of particular interest for the psychosocial perspective—the

point of view adopted to address this theme in the present work—is the definition of 'lived citizenship' that Lister (2005, 2007) proposes as a privileged standpoint for the study of citizenship. Such a dimension, according to Lister, references the way in which individuals understand and negotiate what she identifies, and which also emerge from this overview, as the three key elements of citizenship: legal rights-duties, belonging, and participation. From this perspective, it is necessary to take an attentive look at the day-to-day, subjective, lived experiences that place the attention on the representations and definitions of citizenship elaborated by social actors.

Functioning within this perspective, the general objective of the present work is to study young adults' social representations (SRs) with respect to citizenship (Moscovici 2000; Abric 2003). The specific objective is to identify possible differences existing between the internal structures of the social representations of citizenship built and shared, on the one hand, by young citizens who are engaged in actions of volunteerism and, on the other hand, by young citizens who do not actively participate in the life of their community of belonging.

Method

Participants

The study involved 89 Italian young adults between the ages of 18 and 36 years ($M = 26.5$, $SD = 5$), who were contacted by means of a snowball sample procedure. The participants are 42.7 % male and 57.3 % are female. Of all the participants, 60.7 % were labeled as *engaged* to identify those who claim that they had carried out political or voluntary activity at least one time in their lives. The remaining 39.9 % of participants who stated that they had never carried out any type of political or voluntary activity in their lives were labeled consequently as *not engaged*.

Belonging to the group of engaged young adults, 54 subjects ($M = 44.4$ %; $F = 55.6$ %) reported the following educational levels: 27.8 % have a high school degree; 31.5 % have a bachelor's degree; 33.3 % have a master's degree; and the remaining 7.4 % have a Ph.D. As to occupational status, the majority of the engaged subjects claim being students (42.6 %), employed (40.7 %), working students (11.1 %), and the remaining 5.6 % are unemployed.

In the group of not engaged young adults, there were 35 subjects ($M = 40$ %; $F = 60$ %); from the point of view of educational level, they are distributed as follows: 17.1 % have a high school degree; 37.1 % have a bachelor's degree; 25.7 % have a master's degree; and the remaining 20 % have a Ph.D. More than half (54.3 %) state that they are employed while 28.6 % only study, 14.3 % study and work at the same time, and 2.9 % are unemployed.

No significant differences were found between engaged and not engaged participants regarding gender ($X^2 = .171$, $p = .679$), education ($X^2 = 4.351$, $p = .226$), or occupation ($X^2 = 2.489$, $p = .477$).

Research Design

With the general objective of the present work, that is to study young adults' social representations (SRs), Abric's (2003) Theory of the Central Nucleus (TCN) was used.

TCN assumes that SRs are composed of a content and a structure. The content represents the information that individuals have of a social object. The structure represents the way in which this information is organized. Within the structure, information is organized in a central core and in peripheral elements. The SRs' central core, called the nucleus, is composed of a few cognitive elements responsible for the rigidity and stability of the representation. According to the TCN, the nucleus generates the global SRs' significance and determines the organization of the peripheral elements.

The peripheral elements consist of those evaluative SR elements that allow mobility, flexibility, and inter-individual differences. The peripheral elements allow for understanding of how that SR favors the adaptation to social concrete practices (behavioral elements). Another function of the peripheral elements is to protect the nucleus from transformations due to social circumstances.

Therefore, for a complete understanding of a SR, it is necessary to take into account both the content and the structure of the representation.

As Abric (2003) maintains: 'Being organized wholes, all the representations have two components: a content and a structure. Studying a social representation from this standpoint thus means first retracing the constitutive elements of this structure.' 'Knowledge of the content is not sufficient; it is the organization of this content that 'gives sense' to the entire representation' (Abric 2003, p. 59). Two identical contents can correspond to two totally different symbolic universes and, as a result, underlie two distinct social representations (Galli and Fasanelli 2001).

Measures

Data were collected through the online administration of a self-report, a semi-structured questionnaire, composed of two sections:

1. open-ended questions created to investigate the content of the representation ('In your opinion, what is citizenship?')
2. an exercise of free associations by using the Hierarchized Evocations Technique (Vergès 1992) to disclose the structure of the representation. Participants were asked to associate five nouns and five adjectives with the word inductor ('Citizenship' for engaged and for not engaged) and to rank them by importance. To disambiguate nouns and adjectives, subjects were asked to briefly explain their choice (Fasanelli et al. 2005).

With this technique the researcher obtains:

1. from the open-ended answers (content of the representation), a data corpus that can be treated qualitatively through a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006);

2. from the free association task a data set (structure of the representation) that was analyzed through Evoc2000 software. We used a lexicographic analysis based on the analysis of average rank and frequency distribution. In particular, the software calculates the frequency distribution and the average rank both in general and for each word. Then, by using the RANGFREQ function, it crosses the two indicators on the basis of 3 parameters: the average rank, the minimal frequency (to establish what can be considered a frequent word), and the intermediate frequency (to establish what can be considered a very frequent word).

Four independent judges completed the analysis of citizenship on both engaged and not engaged participants. Each judge worked individually at first, then they shared their analysis. Therefore, the final analysis is the result of the shared and negotiated integration of the four analyses.

The *content* of the SR of citizenship for both engaged and not engaged participants has been studied through the *thematic analysis* method (Braun and Clarke 2006). This method has been applied to the open question data set.

On each single *data set* (one for engaged and one for not engaged), the aim was to provide some *labels* which refer to the collected open answers (Level 1-coding), identify groups of labels which have similar meaning and clustering them into *themes* (Level 2-coding), and to identify the relationships among the themes into a small, coherently organized narrative (Level 3-coding) which 'connects' the different themes that emerged and explains their relationship. All three levels of coding were realized referencing something important in the data and regarding the research question.

The second component, the *structure* of the representation, has been reconstructed inserting the words—results of the free associations—in Evoc2000 and running the software.

Before this operation, the terms have been summarized in semantic categories or lemmas. These categories are the result of the match between all the synonyms, according to the explanation given by the participants ('Why have you chosen X?').

In order to identify the central core of the SR of citizenship and its peripheral elements, the freely associated terms were analyzed in the manner of Vergès (1992), crossing two possible criteria for prototypicality: the frequency of appearance and the rank of importance (Abric 2003) by using Evoc2000 software. Evoc2000 software works according to the structural approach theorization (Abric 2003; Vergès 1992) crossing the frequency of appearance and the rank of its importance, that is the average position in which a word is classified. The intersection of these two (qualitative and quantitative) criteria allows for the identification of the statute of constitutive elements of the social representation (Fasanelli et al. 2005). The software distributed the frequent/most frequent word in the 4 quadrants. In particular considering the average rank as separating the left and right zone and the high/low frequency, as separating the top/down zone, it places: most important and frequent words (most shared) in the top left quadrant; less important but most frequent words in the top right quadrant; most important but less frequent words in the lower left quadrant; less frequent and less important words in the lower right

quadrant. Frequencies at the limit of two zones are the value thresholds the researcher can use as minimal/intermediate frequency in the rank*frequency analysis.

Results

The results will be presented as follows: first, the results pertaining to the analysis of the engaged people's representations of citizenship will be discussed, and then for the not engaged.

Engaged People

Content of the Representations

Regarding the content of the representation circulating among the *engaged* young adults, it is worth emphasizing that the concept of citizenship for this group of participants identifies the feeling of *belonging to a community* (level 2-coding), a feeling of belonging that is understood relative to a place inhabited by a community of people and in which *participation* (Level 2-coding) can be practiced: 'Citizenship is participating in its culture [of the community], in its rights and duties, following its rules and participating in its political life' (subject no. 31). It should be noted, moreover, that the majority of engaged participants underscore the participatory element as essential for the concept itself of citizenship: 'It is the active participation in civil life and in the decision-making processes of representational institutions' (subject no. 67). 'Citizenship for me must also have an active role, that is, participating in the public life of one's community' (subject no. 65). Furthermore, the concept of *social contract* (Level 2-coding) is mentioned (subject no. 7) as a reciprocal recognition that calls for an *active role* (Level 2-coding): 'It is feeling like an actor (not passive) and author of this *living together* (Level 1-coding) [...], desiring and motivated to make one's own contribution to the community' (subject no. 12), and for *co-responsibility* (Level 1-coding): 'Recognizing that one belongs to a group of people and feeling co-responsible for the group's good function' (subject no. 8) and 'feeling that one belongs to one's community and acting accordingly, feeling responsible for the people and spaces that we share' (subject no. 76). Citizenship is described as an *identitary element* (Level 2-coding) that is an important expression of 'feeling part of one's community' (subject no. 75). It is an 'expression of a historical-cultural and linguistic identity' (subject no. 70); it 'characterizes our person and for this reason it forms us, thanks to habits, language, customs...' (subject no. 69). Another element characterizing the definition of citizenship is reference to *rights* and *duties* (Level 2-coding). Subject no. 38 states that, 'It is being part of a country with rights and duties'; 'It is a social status that guarantees rights and imposes duties' (subject no. 13).

Structure of the Representation

In order to describe the structural elements of the central nucleus and the periphery of the social representations of citizenship circulating in the two subgroups involved in the study (engaged and not engaged), we decided to present the results in the following order: nucleus, first periphery, elements of contrast, and second periphery conjointly for nouns and adjectives. The synthesis of the following results is related in Tables 1 and 2.

As Table 1 shows, in the nucleus of the group of engaged young adults, top left quadrant characterized by a high frequency of appearance and by a high average rank of appearance, the noun *right* and the adjectives *active* and *positive* are located. Specifically, citizenship evokes the noun *right* understood as a legal status to which one is entitled by birth or by law. The nouns *right* and *rights* are considered separately and not as the singular and plural of the same concept in that they connote different aspects of the object of representation. Moreover, citizenship is connoted by the adjective *active* in the sense of participation and protagonism. One does not passively submit to it. Being involved is implied, as well as living in order to build a belonging. Citizenship is, moreover, *positive* in the sense of a belonging that helps to define one's identity and guarantees rights. In the first periphery, top right quadrant characterized by a high frequency of appearance and by a low average rank of appearance, the nouns *belonging, rights,* and *duties* and the adjective *important, are* respectively, located. Citizenship evokes the concept of *belonging* understood as the idea of living together and being a fundamental part of a community with which one establishes a bond, creating a sense of reciprocal belonging. In addition, citizenship evokes the concept of *rights* understood as the idea of safeguarding and guaranteeing political and civil rights. The concept of *duties,* understood as the set of regulations that attest to the citizen's obligations towards his/her country, is the last noun evoked by the concept of citizenship in this quadrant. It indicates respect for laws. Moreover, citizenship evokes the adjective *important* that it is closely connected to the recognition of rights. The elements of contrast located in the third quadrant, on the lower left, characterized by a low frequency of appearance and by a high average rank of appearance, are respectively, the nouns *community, identity,* and *engagement* and the adjective *necessary.* Citizenship, for a subgroup of these interviewed, evokes the concept of *community* understood as an expression of experiencing and sharing spaces, places, and resources with other members of the collective body. It also evokes the concept of *identity* understood as derived from belonging. It contributes to building identity and establishes the way in which one perceives oneself and is perceived. In addition, citizenship evokes the concept of *engagement* understood as respect for rights, duties, and laws and also as an informal collaboration and activism for one's country. The adjective *necessary* is evoked as part of identity. In the second periphery, lower right quadrant, characterized by a low frequency of appearance and low average rank of appearance, the nouns *citizen, participation, State*, and *vote* and the adjectives *legitimate, free*, and *responsible*, respectively, are located. Citizenship evokes the concept of *citizen* understood as a subject who constitutes and incarnates the concept of citizenship. It also evokes the concept of *participation,*

Table 1 Summarizing nouns and adjectives for engaged young adult

	Nucleus	Freq.	Rank	First periphery	Freq.	Rank
Noun	Right	7	2	Belonging	14	2.5
				Rights	10	3.1
				Duties	13	3.7
Adj.	Active	10	1.8	Difficult	5	2.8
	Positive	4	2.2	Dual	6	2.5
				Important	6	2.5

	Elements of contrast	Freq.	Rank	Second periphery	Freq.	Rank
Noun	Community	5	2.4	Citizen	3	4
	Identity	5	2.4	Participation	5	3.4
	Engagement	3	2	State	5	2.8
				Vote	3	3.3
Adj.	Necessary	3	2.3	Legitimate	3	3
				Free	3	4
				Responsible	3	3

understood as the possibility of propositional help, knowledge about one's country, and the possibility of engaging in an active role. Citizenship evokes the concept of *State,* understood as a group of reference. It serves as a container and as that which gives meaning. In addition, it evokes the concept of *vote* understood as an expression of a right. The adjective *legitimate* is evoked in that it is acquired at birth as a right and confers belonging. It poses the question of its legitimacy itself. Moreover, the concept of citizenship evokes the adjective *free* in that it should be without legislative constraints in the act of obtaining and exercising it. Moreover, it evokes *responsible* in that it involves taking responsibility for oneself and for the actions that one carries out for the community in which one lives. One should be critical and functional towards it.

In synthesis, the structure of the engaged young adults' social representation of citizenship revolves around the legal dimension sanctioned by law but connoted by the participatory dimension, that is, the impossibility of speaking about citizenship in the absence of an active contribution. This nucleus is further defined by the first periphery in which the participants' social practices are specified. Here, on the one hand the sense of community is alluded to, that is, citizenship as the sense of emotional connection to a group of belonging, and on the other hand the concept of rights and duties is evoked, understood as the possibilities or modalities for the active exercise of citizenship itself. The second periphery is very complex and sets together numerous nouns and adjectives. Once again, reference is made to the ideas of participation and responsible citizenship. In this regard, it is interesting to notice

Table 2 Summarizing nouns and adjectives for not engaged young adults

	Nucleus			First periphery		
		Freq.	Rank		Freq.	Rank
Noun	Belonging	17	2.2	Duties	13	2.5
	Right	10	1.4			
	Rights	12	2.3			
Adj.	Active	13	2	Important	4	3
	Positive	5	2.4			
	Elements of contrast			Second periphery		
		Freq.	Rank		Freq.	Rank
Noun	Citizen	4	2	Diversity	3	3.3
	Equality	6	2	Nation	7	2.6
				Participation	5	3
				Politics	4	4.7
				People	4	4
				Rules	3	2.7
				Respect	6	2.8
				Solidarity	4	3
				State	6	3.7
Adj.	Abstract	3	2	Honorary	3	3.7
	Fundamental	3	1.3	Political	4	4
	Necessary	3	2.3	Felt	3	2.7
				Solidary	3	3.3
				Foreign	4	2.7

the noun *vote* underscoring the importance of this specific form of civic participation.

Not Engaged

Content of the Representations

As to the representations' content, emerging from the questionnaires of the not engaged young adults, the concept of citizenship is mostly described as '*a belonging to a State or nation*' (Level 2-coding). Belonging thus makes reference to a physical place, to a well-defined territory, a nation, a State, a context: 'Rights and duties with respect to one nation, in particular' (subject no. 21); 'The right of a person who lives in a certain city' (subject no. 22), and 'It is being born in a particular territory' (subject no. 28). Belonging to a State is sanctioned by right. 'Belonging is adhesion from a legal-administrative point of view to a particular State' (subject no. 10); 'It is the totality of laws that ensure that a citizen is recognized as belonging to a State'

(subject no. 37), and 'Citizenship is belonging to a State with which a specific legal relationship is established' (subject no. 33). Citizenship is also a *relation or bond between the person and a nation* (Level 2-coding): 'Citizenship defines the relation of belonging between a person and a State' (subject no. 49), and 'In my opinion, citizenship is a bond that ties a person to a nation' (subject no. 61). Another element that characterizes the definition of citizenship is undoubtedly the reference to *rights and duties* (Level 2-coding): 'Citizenship is a person's legal status within an institutional system that includes a set of duties and rights' (subject no. 11) and 'Belonging by law to a State with the associated rights and duties' (subject no. 50).

Structure of the Representation

As Table 2 shows, the nouns *belonging, rights,* and *right*, and the adjectives *active* and *positive*, respectively, are located in the nucleus of the subsample of not engaged young adults. Citizenship evokes the concept of *belonging* understood as (12 out of 16) the legal condition of a bond with a State or Nation. It also evokes the concept of *rights* understood as something that comes by virtue of being a citizen, which is granted by the State. It also evokes, in fact, the concept of *right* understood as a status held due to birth or the law, which allows one to acquire rights. Citizenship is *active* in that it is the exercise of rights and a movement towards the community enacted in the first person. It is *positive* in that it brings advantages to those who possess it. The noun *duties* and the adjectives *dual* and *important*, respectively, are located in the first periphery. Citizenship evokes the concept of *duties* understood as an obligation sanctioned by a State. It evokes the adjective *dual* in that one can have two of them and *important* in that it allows citizens to enjoy their rights and defines the sense of belonging. The elements of contrast, located in the third quadrant, are, respectively, the nouns *citizen* and *equality*, and the adjectives *abstract, fundamental*, and *necessary*. Citizenship evokes the concept of *citizen* understood as the possession and use of the rights of citizenship. It evokes, moreover, the concept of *equality* understood as the parity of citizens in the eyes of the State. Citizenship is *abstract* in that it is not correlated with concrete actions, *fundamental* in that it is required for social life, and *necessary* in that it is required for the existence of society. The nouns *diversity, nation, participation, politics, the people, rules, respect, solidarity*, and *State*, and the adjectives *honorary, political, felt, cohesive*, and *foreign*, respectively, are located in the second periphery. Citizenship evokes the concept of *diversity* understood as ethnic and religious differences but also differences connected to place of origin, growth, and culture. It also evokes the concept of *nation* understood as a synonym of State. Citizenship, moreover, evokes the concept of *participation* understood as an active position in the life of one's nation, of *politics* understood as the institution guaranteeing rights as well as the possibility of gaining access to the *res publica,* and the concept of *the people* understood as the group of citizens in a specific territory. Citizenship evokes the concept of *rules* understood as duties imposed by society. In addition, citizenship evokes the concept of *respect* understood as a requirement for an ideal relationship with people, places, and institutions; of *solidarity* understood as reciprocal support that involves citizens and the state; and of *State* understood as a

synonym of citizenship. Moreover, it is defined as *honorary* in that one can obtain it for demonstrated merit, *political* in that it is politics that should be the guarantor of equity and parity of participation, and *felt* in that it has to do with one's identity and the feeling part of one's community. Citizenship also evokes the adjective *solidary* in that it allows one to participate in actions to help others, and *foreign* in that it is also the citizenship of others.

In synthesis, the structure of the not engaged young adults' social representation of citizenship revolves around the idea of citizenship as a legal status that provides advantages derived from rights. The nucleus is completed by the appearance of the concept of duty in the first periphery, which seems to represent the participants' only form of social practice. The reference to the legal aspect is clear. In fact, citizenship is a fundamental and necessary status that makes all citizens equal in the eyes of the law. Moreover, it is important to highlight the adjective *abstract* that underscores once again the bureaucratic-administrative dimension of citizenship that is detached from concrete social practices. The second periphery is very complex and groups together numerous nouns and adjectives. It seems to us to be important to highlight the words *diversity* and *foreign*, which makes one think of citizenship as a principle able to differentiate/mark those who are citizens and those who are not.

Discussion of Results

As regards the group of engaged and not engaged young adults, it is important to notice the absolute correspondence between these two aspects of the representation: content and structure. In fact, they mutually reinforce each other. Confirming this is correlation of the usage of the same key words both in the definition of the representation's content and in the description of its structure.

If we consider the distinction between the engaged and not engaged young adults, we find that their representations differ the most as concerns the reference to the geographical context and to the frequency with which the participatory and legal-normative aspects of citizenship are considered. The reference to the geographical context, both on a national as well as local level, predominates in the group of not engaged young adults, as is the reference to the legal-normative aspect; references to the participatory aspect, instead, turn out to be more frequent in the engaged young adults. What distinguishes the groups, however, is not so much the frequency of references to a specific aspect as the connotation that is attributed to it and the importance it assumes in building the discourse around the theme of citizenship. In the group of engaged young adults, citizenship's participatory aspect emerges as a response to the open question (the representation's content) and becomes a salient element in the formulation of the definitions of words and adjectives that constitute the representation's structure while for the not engaged it emerges incidentally, both in the content as well as in the structure. For the not engaged, in contrast, the geographical and legal aspects are central to the representation.

The other interesting difference was amply discussed above and has to do with the identitary dimension mentioned by both groups but with a meaning that was

very different in some respects. While for the engaged young adults, the identity that we defined as 'civic' has to do with belonging to a community and with one's personal contribution to its growth and well-being, for the not engaged young adults, 'place' identity has to do with belonging to a Nation or local community that guarantees, by virtue of this belonging, rights and duties.

Therefore, two figures of the citizen can be delineated for the two groups: the citizen as 'she/he who enjoys rights' of the not engaged young adults and the citizen as 'she/he who produces and safeguards rights' of the engaged young adults, which is above all a participating citizen.

The Engaged young adults perceive themselves as citizens especially by virtue of their own social commitment. In particular, it was found that social commitment impacts the representation of citizenship, connoting it as more active and less bound to traditional and static aspects. If we analyze the content of the engaged young adults' representation, it turns out to be a more diversified representation which maintains its geographical and legal frame, but which also integrates within itself the participatory aspect that connotes the engaged young adults' daily experience. This result accords well with the vision of citizenship 'as practice' (Barnes et al. 2004), assuming meaning in everyday life and showing how the social representation of an object incorporates the experience that one has of it in the social context.

The fact that the not engaged young adults more frequently mention citizenship actions referencing the legal-normative aspect, in particular, attributing to the citizen the exercise of rights and the fulfillment of obligations, suggests once again that for this category citizenship is, in the words of a participant, 'something that derives from belonging to a state', having less to do with one's own personal action or with the relation between citizens who are members of the same community.

Conclusions and Operative Implications

The present work's objective was that of observing the concept of citizenship through the paradigm of SCN. In particular, attention was focused on youth citizenship by probing the perception of the young people themselves since citizenship is configured as a complex social object. Youth citizenship, specifically, was the object of the exploratory study carried out, which aimed to investigate young adults' representations relative to the concept itself and to their own status as citizens.

The scarcity of literature on the study of citizenship in these terms and within this theoretical frame led to the realization of an exploratory study that would make it possible to understand young people's point of view on the question, moving beyond public opinion's general, and often generic, accusation of disinterest and lack of engagement in young people. A composite representation emerged that sheds light on numerous aspects of citizenship, going from a formal belonging to the State to contributing to one's community through political engagement and direct volunteerism.

It is possible to connect these results with the need for a profound change of perspective on citizenship, which is delineated in the present work, and which, as has been said, represents one of the most important challenges for contemporary society. Young adults' social representation of citizenship, given that their precarious and ill-defined position within the social structure fully mirrors the social changes currently underway, seems to have within itself exactly the potentialities and limitations that accompany this desired change in perspective. As regards the passage from an 'ethnic-national' citizenship to a 'universal' one (Vegliò 2009; Papisca 2007; Vitale 2005), we find both a critical attitude expressed with respect to the social exclusion of immigrants and the differences existing between 'first class' citizens and minorities as well as a lack of references to discriminatory or excessively nationalistic dynamics. This is true both for the engaged and the not engaged young adults; even if the latter makes reference more often to normative aspects, it is also true that they do not refer exclusively to 'natives by birth and family' but make reference to a right that is in everyone's reach.

The second change highlighted is the need for movement away from traditional citizenship, focused on citizens' rights and duties deriving from their belonging to a State, towards an 'active' citizenship that gives priority to the activation of citizens' resources to allow them to contribute to the well-being of the community to which they belong. In this case, the difference between the engaged and not engaged young adults becomes more evident because only the former clearly expresses this innovative position.

It is as if the young people who have not had the opportunity to experience the efficacy of their own actions in a social context and have never experienced social generativity—a hallmark of relations in volunteerism contexts—have never had the conditions necessary to imagining themselves as promoting change and activating their own resources; as a result, they do not feel sufficiently competent to make a contribution to their community. This leads to young adults' failure to take on responsibility, but, at the same time, they also fail to take advantage of the empowerment that could be derived from their being 'active' citizens.

Finally, revisiting some of the conclusions reached by Flanagan (2008) and Scabini et al. (2006), it is possible to connect this decline in responsibility to today's cultural-historical context and to thus speak—more than of a 'lack'—of a 'delay' and difficulty on behalf of the young generations. As much as this delay can be a source of worry about the stability and progress of civil society, it can also be seen as a unique opportunity for young adults to explore civil society and the political arena with better tools than they had in adolescence, to eventually find a position that is theirs. This is what happens to young people when they decide to invest time in volunteerism and politics, simultaneously enriching their vision of citizenship and enhancing their sense of empowerment relative to their civic expertise. The adult generation's task is to provide young people with tools that allow them to face this exploration in the best way possible and to prevent the abandonment of contexts that can sustain the development of civic engagement, such as associations, religious institutions, and educational agencies.

What must be done, therefore, is to provide young people with the basic tools that enable them to perceive themselves as more capable of coping with the challenges that confront them in the social sphere so that they do not retreat into disinterest but activate themselves in order to face them.

We cannot expect that young people become civically engaged in communities and societies that fail to support them. This can certainly be done through social policies that favor young people on the practical side of their transition to adulthood, but this effort cannot falter once again by simply delegating the task to the State; it is necessary that all educational agencies, starting with the family obviously, take on this primary task of upbringing.

In this link, the experience of civil service represents a possibility: a formative pathway open to the territory, involving institutions, and, thanks to the organization itself of the association promoting it, introduces people to the complexity of the democratic context, fostering a sense of the community to which one belongs. A recent study on young people who participated in civil service (Marzana 2012; Marzana and Pozzi 2012) provided interesting results in this direction: the majority of participants in the study stated that they discovered the world of solidarity and the opportunities present in their cities thanks to their experience of civil service. What was previously distant and unknown became clear and visible. Being aware of the social sphere surrounding them has enabled many young people to take the first steps on what we can define as the road towards active citizenship. It is plausible to believe that the experience of civil service enables young people, in the same way as political action and volunteerism, to develop a sense of solidarity and civic duty. When they feel actively involved in social dynamics through activities aimed at promoting collective goods (i.e., the environment; the artistic heritage; social solidarity, etc.) this helps them feel that they are an integral part of the community.

It is thus necessary 'to care for' youth citizenship by means of educational pathways and action proposals that truly meet young citizens' needs and their demands for change; however, this cannot be done in an efficacious way if we do not first deepen our understanding of the representation that young people really have of their own citizenship.

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