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Youth Perspectives on Public Youth Policies:

A Case Study of Moncalieri.

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Student's signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francesco", written over a horizontal dotted line.

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## **Abstract**

In Italy, youth policy is a recently developed area of policy marked by significant fragmentation and heterogeneity. Currently, there is no legal framework on the subject, and legislative competence is shared between the Central government and the Regions. Therefore, a wide range of youth representations and intervention methods are observed across the country. In decision-making processes, the role of young people is relegated to a purely consultative function, with little genuine effort from governmental institutions to actively engage them. Moreover, especially among the very young, a high rate of disinterest in political issues is registered as well as a sense of disillusionment with the initiatives promoted at the government level. By virtue of this widespread feeling, the current research was carried out to investigate this phenomenon in greater depth by focusing on the local context of Moncalieri, a town in Turin's first urban belt. The objective was to gauge the perceptions of young individuals regarding public policies designed for them, encompassing their knowledge and perspectives on spaces and services dedicated to them in Moncalieri's urban area. Moncalieri was chosen as a case study because of its dynamism and proactive effort in promoting measures and initiatives aimed at young people. Moreover, it has been characterised by a certain level of political continuity and stability over the years, enabling a clear identification of the municipal council's direction regarding youth policies. To provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, a triangulation of research methods was adopted, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches.

## **Extended summary**

In Italia, le politiche giovanili sono un settore di policy di recente sviluppo, caratterizzato da una notevole frammentazione ed eterogeneità. Attualmente non esiste un quadro normativo nazionale in materia e la competenza legislativa è concorrente tra il Governo centrale e le Regioni. Pertanto, nel Paese si osserva un'ampia gamma di rappresentazioni giovanili e di modalità di intervento altamente diversificate tra loro. Nei processi decisionali, il ruolo dei giovani è relegato a una funzione puramente consultiva, con pochi sforzi reali da parte delle istituzioni governative per coinvolgerli attivamente. Inoltre, soprattutto tra i giovanissimi, si osserva un alto tasso di disinteresse per le questioni politiche e un senso di disillusione nei confronti delle iniziative promosse a livello governativo. In virtù di questo sentimento diffuso, la presente ricerca è stata realizzata per indagare questo fenomeno più a fondo, prendendo in esame il contesto locale di Moncalieri, una città situata nella prima cintura urbana di Torino. L'obiettivo è stato quello di comprendere le percezioni dei giovani sulle politiche pubbliche a loro dedicate, andando a considerare anche la loro conoscenza e le loro prospettive sugli spazi e i servizi a loro dedicati nell'area urbana di Moncalieri. Moncalieri è stata scelta come caso studio per la sua vitalità e intraprendenza nella realizzazione e promozione di misure e iniziative rivolte ai giovani. Inoltre, nel corso degli anni è stata caratterizzata da un certo livello di continuità e stabilità politica facilitando l'identificazione dell'orientamento dell'amministrazione comunale in materia di politiche giovanili. Per una comprensione approfondita del fenomeno, il presente studio ha adottato una triangolazione dei metodi di ricerca, combinando l'approccio qualitativo a quello quantitativo. Come punto di partenza di analisi, sono stati presi in considerazione alcuni dei dati emersi dalla somministrazione del questionario realizzato in collaborazione con l'Ufficio delle Politiche per i Giovani riguardante il benessere psicofisico delle ragazze e dei ragazzi di Moncalieri. Successivamente, sono stati condotti un focus group con giovani di Moncalieri con un'età compresa tra i 18 e i 29 anni e quattro interviste individuali con tre youth workers e l'Assessore delle Politiche per i Giovani della città. La maggior parte dei risultati ottenuti si sono dimostrati essere in linea con la tendenza nazionale e la letteratura presa in esame per l'elaborazione del presente studio.

## Preface

The current study was conducted during the curricular internship carried out at the Moncalieri Youth Policies Office, MoncalieriGiovane. During the four-month internship, I had the opportunity to closely observe and experience the complexity, flexibility, and interdisciplinarity nature of this policy sector. The task assigned to me was to conduct a survey on the psychophysical well-being of young people in Moncalieri to provide sector operators and the Councillor for Youth Policies with a general overview of the mental and physical health status of the target demographic. Some of the data collected during this survey were partly used for the ongoing research. The survey was conducted as part of the *Chiedimi se sono felice* project. This initiative was carried out to promote coordinated interventions aimed at supporting the psycho-physical well-being of young individuals aged between 13 and 29 in Moncalieri. The project ended in October 2023, but a second edition spanning a total of two years is slated to commence in January 2024.

The task assigned to me allowed me to engage with professionals in the field as well as to interact with the young people they target. I actively participated in MoncalieriGiovane's daily activities, gaining first-hand experience. During site visits and the administration of the questionnaires, I had the opportunity to speak with some young people about the issue of mental health, and the discussion usually turned towards their perspectives on the existing activities addressing mental health in Moncalieri and the measures that the municipality should prioritise. Insights gathered following these interactions were the starting point of a broader personal reflection. They prompted me to contemplate the perspectives of local youth regarding policies governing initiatives targeting young people, extending beyond mental health, and the mechanisms governing their operation. Consequently, I formulated a research question centred on the nexus between young individuals and politics, particularly within the policy domain concerning newer generations. The question was deliberately framed to encompass the viewpoints not only of Moncalieri's youth but also of the local youth workers engaging with them daily. By including diverse viewpoints, it was possible to facilitate a nuanced comparative analysis and to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

Defining the demographic category of 'young people' presents a multifaceted and intricate challenge, lacking a univocal definition across international, national, and local regulatory frameworks. In Italy, this category typically encompasses individuals aged between 14 and 35 (Department for Youth Policy and Universal Civil Service). Over the years, this demographic segment has shrunk considerably, emerging as a minority within the Italian social fabric (Eurostat, 2014; 2018; 2022). This phenomenon has consequently led to a reduction in youth political influence, perpetuating the marginalisation of youth-related issues in the national political debates (Ambrosi and Rosina, 2009; Bazzanella, Campagnoli, 2014). Moreover, this trend has been compounded by the prevailing disengagement of young individuals from politics. Statistical records from ISTAT over the past decades highlight a significant disconnection and disinterest of the younger cohort toward political affairs. Therefore, the collective voice and perspectives of young people are often weak in public debates, making it difficult to track their viewpoints regarding measures and policies tailored specifically to them. However, acknowledging and valuing their perspectives is pivotal in crafting comprehensive and effective measures aimed at addressing the diverse needs and challenges that define youth. Indeed, the multifaceted and interconnected nature of the hurdles that define the passage of young individuals toward autonomous adulthood and active citizenship requires a complex and heterogeneous formulation of policies (Mesa, 2010). Partly due to their interdisciplinary nature, youth policies in Italy lack a national framework law (Bazzanella, Campagnoli, 2014). Despite the establishment of a dedicated ministry more than fifteen years ago, which partly provides the programmatic guidelines for interventions concerning young people, the actions regarding the new generations are regulated mostly at the regional and local levels. Since 1970, local institutions and the Third Sector have been the primary drivers of innovative and proactive measures and initiatives dedicated specifically to young people (Grassi, 2009). The diverse approaches across individual territories led necessarily to fragmentation and consequent heterogeneity within this policy sector. Therefore, nowadays each region and municipality exhibit unique experiences denoting specific peculiarities and distinctiveness in this sector. Therefore, to delve deeper into the topic of youth policy it is essential to consider single territories. The present study focused on analysing the local context of Moncalieri, a medium-sized urban reality near the larger urban centre of Turin. Since 2015, Moncalieri has been

characterised by a certain level of political continuity and stability, enabling a clearer identification of the municipal council's direction regarding youth policies. However, the objective of the current research was not to carry out an analysis of the policies implemented by the municipality of Moncalieri regarding youth, but to explore how youth policies are perceived and comprehended by their intended beneficiaries, the youth population. Therefore, the primary aim was to prioritise their perspectives, placing their voices at the forefront and emphasising their viewpoints on political matters that directly affect them. The study was implemented between June 2023 and November 2023 in the municipal area of Moncalieri and it involved a total of 168 people. More precisely, 164 belong to the city's youth population aged between 14 and 29, while the remaining four participants consisted of three youth workers and one institutional figure. The theme on which the research focused was inherent to how local young individuals perceive youth policies in Moncalieri. By investigating their perspective starting from their local experience, also in terms of access to spaces and services dedicated to them in the area, the study aimed to delineate the relationship between young people and local politics. To provide an in-depth understanding of the topic, a triangulation of research methods was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches. Quantitative data were derived from an analysis of the questionnaire designed with the Office for Youth Policies, focusing on the mental and physical well-being of individuals aged 14 to 29. Conversely, qualitative data were gathered through a focus group involving young individuals aged 18 to 28, along with individual interviews conducted with MoncalieriGiovane's youth workers and the Councillor, responsible for Youth Policies in the city. The quantitative approach aimed to widen the spectrum of perspectives by broadening the sample size of young interviewees, providing a more expansive overview of the subject matter. In contrast, the qualitative approach aimed to convey the multidimensional nature of the current youth condition and articulate the intricate and multifaceted relationship between young individuals and politics. This dual-method analysis did not restrict the units of analysis solely to the youth demographic. It also encompassed individuals from the adult segment engaged in daily interactions with young people and serving as institutional anchors for local youth policies. Inserting their point of view on how young people perceive politics, particularly that aimed at the new generations, made it possible to identify further nuances of the phenomenon and to understand how local public authorities and sector operators relate to young people and their needs. Moreover, the trajectories and points of view of young people, juxtaposed to those of adult generations, highlighted aspects and dynamics essential for guaranteeing coexistence, innovation, and social cohesion both at the national and local scale.

The objective of this research activity was to provide a small contribution to the existing literature regarding youth policies and the relationship between politics and young people. Centring on the voices of newer generations, the study also sought to equip the public authorities of Moncalieri with valuable insights, facilitating meaningful dialogues and actions conducive to improved engagement with the youth.

## CHAPTER 2

### Theoretical and political framework

In the past few decades, the concept of 'young' has changed considerably and currently recalls the complexity and fragmentation of today's social, economic, and cultural system. The transition witnessed from a rigid and pre-established social system to a fluid and constantly changing one has particularly affected the new generations, by modifying their identities and making it challenging to confine them within set boundaries (Bazzanella, 2010). In the literature, youth is considered a transitional phase from the condition of dependency typical of childhood to the condition of complete autonomy of adulthood (UNESCO, 2011). Traditionally, this phase has been defined by the passing through five fundamental stages, which were namely I) the end of education and training, II) the entry into the labour market, III) housing independence from the family of origin, IV) the establishment of a stable couple relationship and, in terms of social reproduction, V) the experience of parenthood (Cavalli, 1994; see national and local publications by the IARD Institute). The first studies examining the situation of young people, carried out in the 1980s, categorised "youth" as individuals aged between 15 and 24. This age range was specifically recognised as the phase during which the majority of these stages took place. Nevertheless, this model reflected the linearity and rigidity of a fixed and deterministic social system that is hardly to be found in contemporary society. Over the last two decades, the two economic shocks and the social transformations at the international level led to a progressive and continuous procrastination on the part of young people in facing the stages of transition and a tendency to go through them in random order and, often, in a non-definitive manner (Bazzanella, 2010). Although the United Nations still considers 'youth' to be those belonging to the 15-24 population bracket<sup>1</sup>, most European legislatures and research institutes have declined the term 'youth' to a much broader life span ranging from 14 to 29-34 years. This classification includes very different life experiences, which, from the perspective of public administration, require a diverse range of actions. These actions encompass promoting education, facilitating socialisation, ensuring mental and physical well-being, supporting integration into the labour market, and assisting individuals in achieving financial and living independence. Youth policies, the branch of public policy designed to

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<sup>1</sup> Secretary-General's Report to the General Assembly, A/36/215, 1981.

address issues faced by young people (Mesa, 2010), are responsible for tackling these challenges. Unlike other public policy fields characterised by cohesive frameworks, youth policies, both in Italy and in other countries, exhibit significant fragmentation and a variety of interventions at the local, regional, and national scales (Bazzanella, 2010). As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons for this peculiarity can be found in the varied composition of the target group. Therefore, the role played by youth policies inevitably shifts according to the context and the age group of reference, sometimes diminishing into a connecting link between different policy domains (Bazzanella, Campagnoli, 2014). Due to their cross-sectoral nature, actions targeting young people are often integrated into the responsibilities of other ministries. For instance, issues related to employment and prevention can fall under the purview of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies.

Another element that makes the direction and implementation of youth policies highly heterogeneous is the different intervention philosophies adopted across various levels of governance. Indeed, the ways in which young people are represented as well as the aims to be achieved through the measures promoted are highly diversified (Mesa, 2010). Young people are generally conceived in a dichotomous way: either as a problem or as a resource (Wallace and Bendit, 2009). In the first case, preventive measures are taken to address social issues, primarily focusing on disadvantaged young individuals (*ibid.*). In the second case, the orientation is more universalistic addressing the entire youth population to promote their development, autonomy, and independence. In some countries, both perspectives coexist ambivalently (*ibid.*). Such intervention philosophies originate from diverse welfare contexts with distinct institutional histories concerning young people (Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998). To classify the youth policy regimes in Europe, it is possible to refer to the work of Claire Denise Wallace and René Bendit (2009), who applied, with some modifications, the clusters used by Esping-Andersen in 1990 to define welfare regimes. Four regimes have been identified, each presenting distinct approaches. The first is the universalist model, typical of Northern European countries, which implements measures targeting the entire youth population within a specific age range from adolescence to 25 years. These measures aim to foster autonomy, independence, development, and political participation through effective subsidies. Notably, despite the high level of youth participation, political engagement remains a significant concern. The second model is the community-based approach, which primarily focuses on the most disadvantaged young people to prevent social problems and curb exclusion. The implementation of measures is mainly delegated to civil society, local authorities, and communities rather than taken over by the state. The third, typical of continental countries, is called the protective regime and corresponds to the corporatist welfare state model. This regime

encompasses a vast youth population, including children and young families, and it tends to adopt a 'paternalistic' approach. It seeks to enhance social integration, prevent problematic social situations, and it addresses political participation and the reduction of social exclusion as primary concerns. Finally, the fourth model refers to a centralised approach found in Mediterranean countries like Italy. Here, youth policies have been introduced more recently, often in response to European demands. Instead of providing comprehensive coverage, these policies tend to develop targeted measures for specific groups of young people. Their key objectives are autonomy, independence, social integration, and political participation. Notably, the main issues they are interested in tackling concern the delay young people experience in transitioning to adulthood and the risk of social exclusion.

## 2.1 Youth public policies in Italy

In Italy, young people are defined at the legislative level as those belonging to the age group ranging from 14 to 29-35 years, depending on the specific measures taken. Applying this categorisation, in numerical terms, young people resident in Italy in 2022 aged between 14 and 29 accounted for 15.9%<sup>2</sup> of the population, almost a third of the citizens aged 54 and over, who constitute 40.9%<sup>3</sup> of the entire population. These data confirm what Ambrosi and Rosina highlighted in 2009, indicating that young people hold little significance within the nation. Consequently, they have limited influence not only in public discourse and the economic system but also, and above all, in social life in general. Although the progressive reduction of the youth population is a widespread trend across many European countries, Italy stands out as one of the nations with the lowest share of young people, as can be seen in Figure 1.

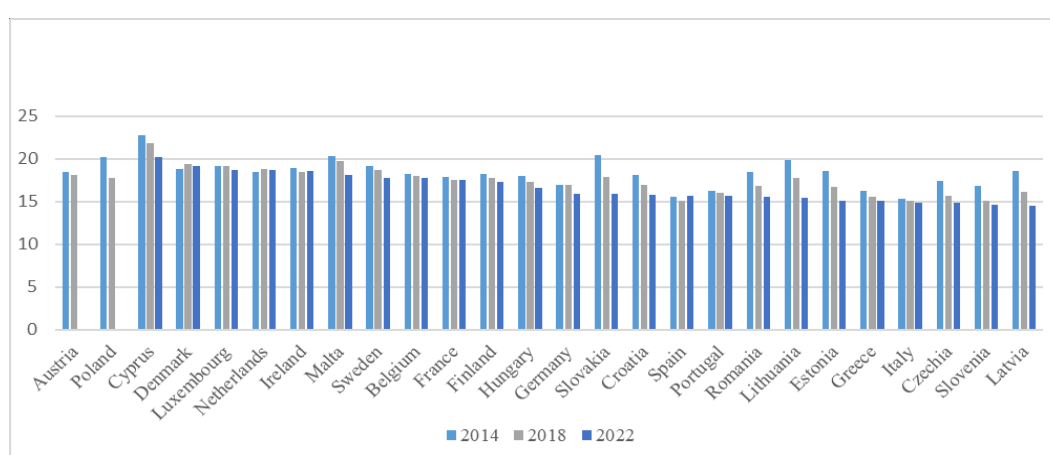


Figure 1: Young people aged 15-29 as a percentage of the total population. Years 2014, 2018, 2022.

Source: Eurostat database elaboration.

<sup>2</sup> Percentage processing of ISTAT data of *Resident population by gender, age and marital status as of 1 January 2023*. See page: <https://demo.istat.it/app/?i=POS&I=it>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* footnote 2.

This index carries numerous implications. Firstly, it implies a marginal influence of young people on the electoral market, encouraging the political class to focus more on the adult-senior population segment (Bazzanella, Campagnoli, 2014). Secondly, it leads to a reduction in allocated resources (OECD, 2020). Indeed, fewer productive resources make it necessary to invest heavily in assistance services for citizens requiring social protection, consequently reducing the allocation of resources to young people (Bazzanella, 2010; OECD, 2020). Since the establishment of a dedicated ministry for youth policy in 2006, funding for youth has been reduced by about 30%, with drastic cuts during the 2013 financial crisis. The decline in resources has also been accompanied by waning interest in youth-related issues: as depicted in Figure 2, the search trend for the term 'youth policy' on Google (in Italian “Politiche giovanili”) surged in 2007 and then steadily declined in the following years.



Figure 2: Interest in youth policy on Google over time

Source: Google Trends.

However, the issue of youth in Italy has always been addressed in a marginal, discontinuous, and fragmented manner, regardless of the numerical composition of the age group in question.

### 2.1.1 The evolution of the youth policies in Italy

The history of youth policies in Italy has seen relatively recent developments compared to other policy areas and has been built up, especially thanks to the action of Local Authorities and the Third Sector. Although the protection of young people is a topic that appears explicitly in Article 31 of the Constitution<sup>4</sup>, no specific intervention strategy for youth was ever drawn up by the State until the 2000s. Traditional socialisation agencies, such as the family and school, as well as historical associations, such as the Catholic Church, political parties, various associations, and trade unions (Mesa, 2010) were the main actors involved in youth care. From

<sup>4</sup> "The Republic shall facilitate by means of economic measures and other provisions the formation of the family and the fulfilment of related tasks, with particular regard to large families. It shall protect maternity, infancy and youth, encouraging the institutions necessary for this purpose".

the 1980s onwards, following a series of decrees that attributed to the regions and municipalities a series of institutional competencies in the fields of social services, sport, leisure, education, and culture (Ibid.), the regions began to legislate on youth issues. Meanwhile, local administrations and some Third Sector actors initiated innovative interventions, such as “Progetto giovani”, focusing on information, socialisation, culture, training, employment, marginalisation, and hardship (Dondona et al., 2004). The main measures implemented included the establishment of spaces for young people to gather, i.e. “Centri di aggregazione giovanile”, the introduction of formal and informal consultation methods, such as juvenile forums, and, notably, the creation of the Informagiovani, a service aimed at providing information to young people in the fields of training, work, leisure, and social life (Mesa 2010). These initiatives put into action innovative experiments and best practices, involving both the public and the social private sector (Grassi, 2009). These partnerships introduced the principles of the constitutional concept of horizontal subsidiarity<sup>5</sup> into local projects (Dalla Mura, 2005). Nevertheless, a significant challenge faced by these interventions was the lack of funding. In the early 1990s, Italy saw the first legislative measures targeting young people at the national level. They included:

- Presidential Decree 309/90 (and later Law 45/99) containing the Consolidated Law on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation of Drug Addiction and establishing the National Fund for the Fight against Drugs with an allocation of approximately EUR 900 million.
- Law 216/91 concerning the First Interventions in favour of minors at risk of involvement in criminal activities, with around EUR 125 million in funding, particularly in Southern Italy.

Nevertheless, due to the scarcity of resources allocated to younger generations, these funds were utilised by local authorities to finance various projects, not necessarily focused on social assistance actions, but more inclined towards fostering the proactive growth of young people. By the late 1990s, a more comprehensive political framework addressing childhood and adolescence was established with Law 285/97, promoting rights and opportunities for children and adolescents, backed by funding of approximately 750 million euros. This law introduced a new perspective of intervention, emphasising a promotional approach and a systematic planning of social actions at the local level. The involvement of local authorities and Third Sector actors became integral. From this moment on, the network of referents was further structured, involving both institutional bodies, such as Regions, Provinces, and many

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<sup>5</sup> Principle for the distribution of responsibilities between local authorities and private entities, individual or collective, within an integrated system of intervention.

Municipalities through specific delegations or special departments, and non-institutional entities, such as associations, social cooperatives, and youth associations. Initiatives and projects targeting minors and young people increased throughout the country, albeit in a heterogeneous manner with diverse offers and opportunities.

In the early 2000s, new perspectives emerged also at the European level. The European Union committed to providing clear guidance for youth policies across the EU by disseminating the White Paper *A New Impetus for European Youth* (2001). This initiative focused on promoting non-formal education, cultural exchanges, and the European Voluntary Service. At the same time, comparative studies were carried out, revealing that Italy, among the historical member countries of the Union, lacked a well-defined strategic design for youth policies. Additionally, there was a deficiency in initiatives aimed at fostering youth participation in decision-making processes, highlighting the absence of a competent national ministry dedicated to the subject. Only in 2006, Italy established, for the first time, the Ministry for Youth Policies and Sporting Activities, with the functions of state competence in the field of sport and guidance and coordination in youth policies (Mesa, 2010). The following year, in 2007, the National Youth Agency was created as an autonomous organisation for the management of European youth programmes under the auspices of the Italian government and the European Commission. During the same year, the first national youth policy strategy was drawn up, defining the first National Youth Plan. This plan has been subsequently agreed upon annually at the Unified Conference, which includes representatives from the national government, regions, autonomous provinces, the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI), and the Union of Italian Provinces (UPI). That year, a series of measures were planned to remove the structural barriers hindering young people's transition to adulthood. Emphasis was placed on facilitating access to housing, credit, employment, family support, entrepreneurship, education, and political engagement. These actions required the establishment of a dedicated fund, called the Youth Policy Fund, which received financing totalling 130 million euros over the three-year period 2007-2009. Moreover, youth policies were recognised as a matter of concurrent legislation between the central government and the regions, giving the opportunity to experiment with a regionalist approach in this realm. Consequently, the central government started laying down fundamental principles and guidelines for youth policies, while regions had authority to legislate and implement territorial measures. Regions then became real policymakers with a significant role in agreeing on the arrangements for the allocation of the National Fund resources, of which they were the primary beneficiaries. Municipalities and the Third Sector also continued to play an important role, participating in the Unified Conference through ANCI and UPI and responding to Ministry calls for proposals, aimed at encouraging

innovative projects for young people (Bazzanella, Campagnoli, 2014). However, due to the economic crisis and the installation of the new centre-right government, funding in the subsequent three-year period was reduced to 80 million euros. New focus areas were introduced, including spreading information, bringing young people closer to traditional local arts and crafts, enhancing creativity and talent in fields related to the visual arts, music, and multimedia, strengthening reception facilities like Youth Hostels, and promoting a culture of legality. In the following years, from 2013 to 2018, resources allocated to youth policies were drastically cut, ranging from 4 and 13 million euros annually<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, fewer purposes were pursued, and they were primarily concentrated on establishing youth centres to enhance social opportunities for young people.

### *2.1.2 Youth policies in Italy at present*

Italy still lacks a comprehensive national law governing youth policies. However, it maintains a national action strategy, outlined annually through the agreements in the Unified Conference on the allocation of the National Fund for Youth Policies (OECD, 2020). The Youth Policy Fund remains the main funding channel and is defined annually through the State Budget Law. Part of the Fund is earmarked for governmental activities while the other part is directed to support projects run by regions, ANCI, UPI, and other institutional bodies. As can be found on the government webpage in the section of the Department for Youth Policy and Universal Civil Service<sup>7</sup>, the legislation concerning youth issues continues to fall under the jurisdiction of both the national government and territorial authorities, namely the Regions and Autonomous Provinces. Regional Departments overseeing youth policy therefore collaborate with Provinces and Municipalities to define the instances, ideas, and rights to introduce in the planning of actions for young people. Currently, three-quarters of Italian regions have legislation on the subject, with the exceptions of Abruzzo, Calabria, Lombardy, and Molise regions. The dedicated ministerial department, now called the Department of Youth Policies and Universal Civil Service (DYPUCS), continues to rely on horizontal cross-sectoral cooperation, receiving support from other departments and ministries. As regards the management of European Youth

<sup>6</sup> Funding allocated to the Youth Policy Fund from 2013 to 2018 (Camera dei Deputati, 2018).

<i>Year</i>	<i>Financial Law</i>	<i>National Fund for Youth Policy</i>
2013	Law 228/12 (Stability Law 2013)	€ 5.278.000
2014	Law 147/13 (Stability Law 2014)	€ 13.665.714
2015	Law 190/14 (2015 Stability Law)	€ 5.761.589
2016	Law 208/15 (Stability Law 2016)	€ 5.000.000
2017	Law 232/16 (Budget Law 2017)	€ 4.221.150
2018	Law 205/17 (Budget Law 2018)	€ 8.891.535

<sup>7</sup> Most of the information in this section can be found at the following link: <https://www.politichegiovanili.gov.it/>

Programmes, the Italian Youth Agency, established in February 2023, assumed all functions previously handled by the National Agency for Youth. In addition, the DYPUCS relies on the cooperation of local authorities and various stakeholders, including the National Youth Council (NYC). Established in 2019 by Budget Law 145/2018, the NYC serves as an advisory body representing young people in dialogue with the institutions on youth policies. Moreover, policy actions are outlined considering empirical evidence that comes from studies conducted by public and private institutes. Indeed, the government utilises surveys conducted by the National Observatory for Children and Adolescents, the National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies, and the Institute for Research on Population and Social Policies as well as the data and indicators collected by ISTAT. It sometimes cooperates with the National Youth Council to collect relevant elements and information to guide public policies. Also, some regions and municipalities have set up observatory institutes to develop and monitor their policies. The main ones are those of the Campania Region and the Emilia-Romagna Region.

Since 2019, a new impetus has been recognised at the government level in the promotion of youth policies. From that year on, the resources invested in the Youth Policy Fund have gradually increased. The 2019 Budget Law allocated an endowment of 30 million to the Youth Policy Fund for the present year with the aim of supporting young people's access to cultural and professional training, and social inclusion and facilitating credit access for the purchase and use of goods and services. In 2022, Budget Law No. 234/2021 allocated 90.864 million euros to the Fund, then reduced by 5 million euros for the following year.

In the last five years, the strategy has focused on actions to develop young talent and address youth distress. The priorities have therefore been:

- Enhancing social integration and participation of young people, also by the acknowledgment of the role of youth work;
- Supporting youth autonomy through the development of services aimed at reducing NEETs (individuals Not engaged in Education, Employment, or Training), fostering employment, and entrepreneurship, and strengthening digital and ecological skills;
- Encouraging non-formal education, prevention, and measures against new addictions;
- Mitigating post-pandemic effects, including the promotion of sports activities;
- Introducing the National Youth Card (linked to the European EYCA Card) and the Regional Youth Cards, offering discounts on educational, sports, cultural, and information products and services.

Furthermore, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the issue of intergenerational solidarity and justice has become more relevant in public debate, especially in countries with predominantly elderly populations like Italy. Generational equity plays a crucial role in a

country's proper functioning as it ensures a fair redistribution of resources between pensions and education. The OECD report of 2020 highlighted that in countries where age-related inequalities are greater, citizens tend to express lower levels of satisfaction. Institutions, therefore, are the first to have to intervene to stem this imbalance. In Italy, where prospects for youth and generational equity have been deteriorating over the years (Monti, 2017), two measures have been implemented. In March 2021, the parliamentary intergroup 'Next Generational Italy' was created to discuss and present proposals for youth and intergenerational equity in the context of the recovery from COVID-19. Subsequently, in June of the same year, the DYPUCS set up the Committee for the Evaluation of the Intergenerational Impact of Public Policies (OECD, 2021).

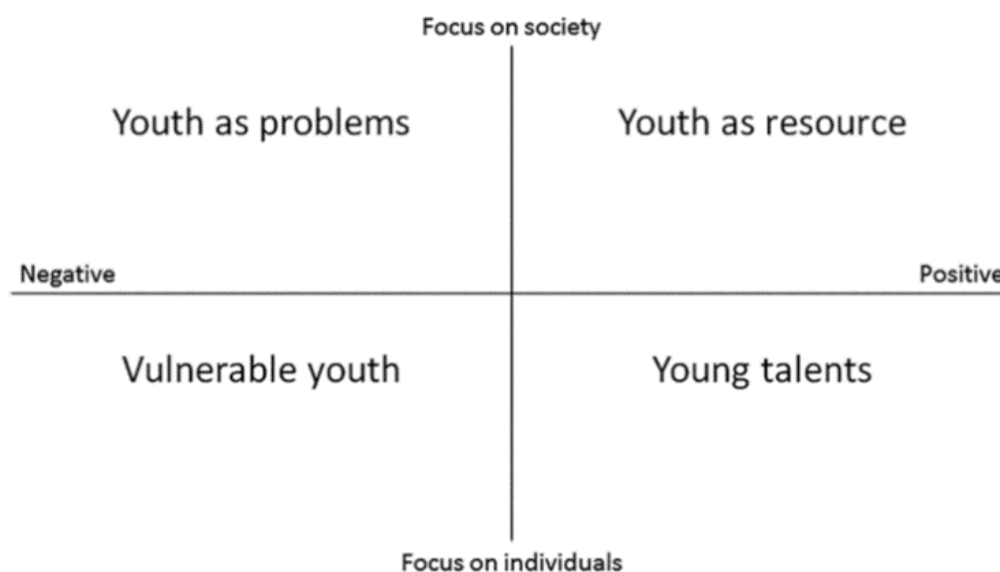
Currently, a process is underway to draft a national youth policy bill with the active involvement of the National Youth Council. The main focus is on the active participation of the NYC in shaping the national strategy with a three-year horizon, instead of planning it annually on the occasion of the Unified Conference between the Government and the territorial authorities. This strategy should also make systemic the impact assessment of the actions promoted. Over the years, the accounting magistrates have noted a growing number of strategic objectives in youth programmes which, however, have not been adequately matched with clear management goals and effective outcome indicators (Corte dei Conti, 2021). As a result, there has very often been a gap between the principles stated during institutional settings and the practices subsequently implemented. This gap occurred mainly due to a lack of monitoring of the efficiency and effectiveness of the measures introduced. Although the DYPUCS is mandated to issue periodic reports on the progress of the initiatives promoted and to carry out an evaluation of the measures implemented, the survey conducted by the OECD in 2020 revealed that Italy falls in the 39% of OECD countries that do not systematically evaluate the impact of proposed laws and regulations on young people.

Therefore, nowadays the government's objective is to address the structural deficiencies that have characterised this policy area so far. The lack of an Italian national law on youth policies has compromised the degree of concertation and co-decision-making in this domain, leading to a highly heterogeneous framework and a discontinuity in the allocation of resources (Guidi 2014; Andersson et al. 2016). In addition, the limited participation of youth organisations in central decision-making reduces clarity in government accountability and diminishes their influence on decisions, hindering the development of civic skills among young people.

### *2.1.3 Intervention philosophies in Italy*

The history of youth policies in Italy is closely related to the evolutions that have occurred both in the model of the welfare state and in the institutional representations of young people. By applying the categorisations of youth policy regimes proposed by Claire Denise Wallace and René Bendit, it is possible to identify a shift from a community-based model to a centralised one. Although the Italian welfare state began to take shape from the late 19th century, experiencing significant expansion in the three decades following the Second World War, a well-defined strategy for social policies targeting young people did not emerge until the 2000s. Historically, the education system and matters related to youth were not considered fundamental pillars of the welfare system (Belotti, Selmi, 2020). Consequently, youth issues were largely relegated to family and community dimensions and addressed only in emergency situations. It was then local institutions and third-sector organisations that began to put into practice protective and promotional actions for young people, similar to those promoted in countries where national youth policies were already developed. Finally, in the 2000s, partly due to the influence of the European Union, Italy defined a more structured welfare system for youth policies. The approach focuses on specific measures, granting regions and municipalities decision-making autonomy and without providing universal coverage. This model assures flexibility and more efficacy in response to local needs but, at the same time, it poses the risk of significant regional disparities and fragmentation.

Such fragmentation is also evident from the youth representation, affecting in turn intervention modes. Indeed, there exists a relationship between the image that is put forward of young people and the goals and solutions proposed by policies (Wallace et al. 2009; see also IARD 2001; Andersson et al. 2016). As mentioned before, in Italy as well as abroad, the underlying polarisation of policy processes, depicting young people either as problematic individuals who require intervention or as promising ones, is quite glaring (Nairin et al., 2006). However, such a classification does not allow for further nuances in the assessment carried out by institutions regarding young people and rather risks reflecting a generalised societal assessment (Mesa, 2010; Mazzoni et al., 2019). In this context, the study by Mazzoni and colleagues (2019) becomes pertinent. Through a comparative analysis of public documents concerning youth policies in Italy between 2012 and 2016, they identified four main representations: young people as a problem, as vulnerable individuals, as talents, as a resource.



*Figure 3: The four main representations of young people in Italian policy documents (2012-16).*

*Source:* Graphic elaboration by D. Mazzone et al. in *Italian Young People through the Lens of Youth Policies* (2019).

The first case refers to specific aspects of the youth condition that may pose a possible threat to the community. This interpretation justifies targeted measures addressing specific issues as necessary not just for the protection of young people but also for society. The second representation, mainly found in regional documents, focuses on the behavioural risks that this section of the population may face, given their fragility and susceptibility in this phase of life. The measures taken aim to develop educational and healthcare services, emphasising health promotion and risk prevention. The third depiction delves into a more individual perspective, emphasising the personal qualities of young people that need nurturing and enhancement. This viewpoint can be seen as complementary to the fourth portrayal, which sees the new generations as a resource for communities and an asset to be involved in decision-making processes. Both these representations value them as active players and essential resources for the innovative and sustainable development of their territories. Therefore, they promote measures to increase youth participation in the political sphere.

Due to the fragmentation mentioned before and the multi-level governance which characterises youth policies, a univocal representation of youth can't be traced in Italy. Indeed, an extremely heterogeneous framework exists allowing the coexistence of several representations.

In the historical reconstruction that was carried out in the previous paragraph, national politics employed an approach imbued with a perception of youth as a problematic entity, generating concerns, or at most, to be put under protection (Grassi, 2009). It dealt with young people when

there was an 'emergency' in order to curb a situation that was considered borderline and at the same time to gain public consensus (Bazzanella, 2010). Until the end of the 1990s, the government paid attention to young people only in relation to specific issues, notably drug addiction and juvenile delinquency. Conversely, at the local level, actions with a more promotional focus, rather than charitable or reparative, began to emerge as early as the 1980s, largely due to the initiatives of local institutions and Third Sector organisations. Indeed, local institutions developed a perspective on young people that was no longer confrontational but rather conciliatory, depicting them as individuals eager to communicate and be acknowledged by adults and the local community. Hence, the political objective became resolving conflicts and addressing the interests of young people, promoting dialogue between generations, and nurturing the creative potential of youth, particularly in the arts (Grassi, 2009).

By the 2000s, the perception of young people as a problem became relegated to an economic concern inherent to unemployment and economic autonomy, and the representation of young people as vulnerable subjects was favoured. During the 2007-2013 five-year period, the actions were aimed at ensuring autonomy and support from both an economic and employment perspective. Simultaneously, there was a surge in national programmes aimed at enhancing innovation and talents in relation to professions in creative arts. So, there emerges a representation of young people as valuable assets to be supported and promoted. In the following season, from 2014 to 2018, youth issues were marginal at the state level, while they maintained a certain relevance at the regional level with the circulation of best practices. Nowadays, from 2019 onwards, it is still evident a rather polarised representation of young people. Indeed, the measures promoted are targeted, on the one hand, at youth facing precarious situations, especially in economic terms, and, on the other hand, at the more talented individuals. The widespread negative perception of young people as a problem has diminished and given way to the dimension of vulnerability. However, the idea of young people as a generalised resource for the country is struggling to take hold. It is easy to find programmes aimed specifically at young talent, while there are still few measures aimed at providing all young people with the necessary tools for their personal and professional growth. As Grassi points out (2009), a significant portion of the funds allocated to young people primarily focus on spending interventions, essentially 'consuming' resources, aligning with interventions to address marginalisation. However, if a different perspective were adopted, recognizing the full potential of young individuals, these funds could be channelled into projects and initiatives that transform that potential into valuable resources (ibid.). Moreover, this limitation tends to exclude from the political discussion the intermediate group of young people who fall neither into the category of fragile or problematic subjects nor of young promises. Hence, this group,

previously defined by researcher Karen Nairn in 2006 as the 'excluded middle', remains marginal from political discourse.

In general, it is possible to recognise a more positive representation of young people, at a national level. However, there is a welfare-oriented tendency that focuses on remedying or preventing specific high-risk situations, rather than a forward-looking policy that invests comprehensively in all young people, providing them with the essential resources to prevent precarious conditions.

## 2.2 Young people and politics in Italy

Having discussed the governance of youth policies in Italy and the intervention philosophies adopted, it is essential to explore how young people position themselves within the political domain and what are their perceptions. In general, since the 2008 financial crisis, there has been a trend of scepticism and disengagement from politics on the part of the younger generations. Young people's trust in national governments, compared to that of the total population, has decreased in most OECD countries. Italy stands out significantly in this regard, with a 22-percentage-point difference from the OECD countries' average. Specifically, in 2020, only 24% of the population aged 15-29 expressed trust in the national government, compared to the average of 46% in other countries. This pattern correlates with a waning interest in political matters: according to 2022 ISTAT data on how frequently citizens talk about politics, approximately 50% of individuals under-20s never engage in political discussions, with only 6.3% doing so daily - figures that deviate considerably from the national average.

Age class	Talk about politics					
	Every day	A few times a week	Once a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	S/he never talks about politics
14-17	4,8	11.2	4.8	11	10.2	55.5
18-19	7.9	18.5	4.9	14.4	11.9	41.2
20-24	14.1	22.7	6.4	13.1	9.7	32.8
25-34	15.5	24.5	5.7	12.5	9.6	30.7
National average	26.5	21.7	4.5	9.6	7.8	28.4

TAB. 1: People in the 14-34 age group by frequency with which they talk about politics, year 2022.  
*Source:* Re-elaboration of Istat data collected for the annual survey 'Aspects of Daily Life'.

The youngest individuals, in particular, express the highest indifference concerning staying informed on political issues. They also state that the topics addressed are too complex and they do not possess the cognitive tools to understand them. However, this trend shifts slightly as individuals grow older, with a slight uptick in engagement with political subjects. Nevertheless, a lack of interest remains the primary reason for not informing themselves regularly. At the same time, people over 20, more than the national average, cite lack of time as a barrier to staying informed. Distrust in politics also contributes to this phenomenon.

Age class	Motifs				
	Not interested	No time	Complicated topic	Distrust in politics	More
14-17	76.5	4.8	11.7	6.6	3.3
18-19	74.4	6.8	5.6	17.2	1.7
20-24	71.1	8.5	7.4	21.6	3.1
25-34	68.3	9.1	6.6	23.3	2.5
National average	64.4	6.9	8.6	23.1	3.6

TAB. 2: People in the 14-34 age group by reason of why they never find out about Italian political events, year 2022.

*Source:* Reprocessed Istat data collected for the annual survey 'Aspects of Daily Life'.

The findings mentioned are similar to those that emerged from the study conducted by Malafia and other researchers in 2021 in Porto, Portugal. Their survey, which included questionnaires and focus groups, revealed that lack of time and interest were the main reasons hindering youth participation. However, during the focus groups with students from vocational schools, they found that many participants agreed that lack of time is often an excuse used by their peers to conceal demotivation, carelessness, or lack of responsibility. Regarding this observation, several studies have indicated that young people's demotivation and disinterest in politics stems from the perception that politics does not affect them and has no consequences for their lives (Eliasoph, 1998; Henn et al., 2002). On the contrary, Malafia's research highlighted that this perception is rooted in inadequate, confusing, and unclear communication from political institutions. Political actors use a language that is often inaccessible to young people, contributing to internalising a typical adult perspective according to which young people do not possess sufficient experience or knowledge to engage in public debate.

This communication barrier can be considered one of the causes leading 69% of young people in Italy to claim that politics does not represent them, reaching 74.7% among those living in the North-East and 77.3% among the unemployed (Censis, 2022). These percentages provide

further evidence of how the political landscape has diminished its significance and relevance among the younger generations. Instead of perceiving it as a tool of democracy and inclusivity, they see it as an extraneous element, detached from their needs and interests, incapable of representing them (National Youth Council, 2022). Additionally, 73.5% of the population aged between 18 and 36 share the idea that there are too many older individuals in positions of power and that generational change is hardly taking place (Censis, 2022). This finding is confirmed by the data on the age of those who administer politics, at the local and national levels. At the local level, 287 mayors are younger than 35, constituting 3.7% of the 7,718 Italian mayors, and there are 2,738 municipal councillors under 35, accounting for 13.5% (Ibid.).

As far as young people's satisfaction with government performance in public services is concerned, Italian respondents exhibit a certain dissatisfaction compared to their counterparts in other OECD countries. This finding is partly correlated with the low level of involvement of youth organisations in decision-making processes. As can be seen in the graph of Figure 4, when youth organisations are more involved in all phases of the entire decision-making process, it is possible to identify a higher degree of satisfaction for governmental performance.

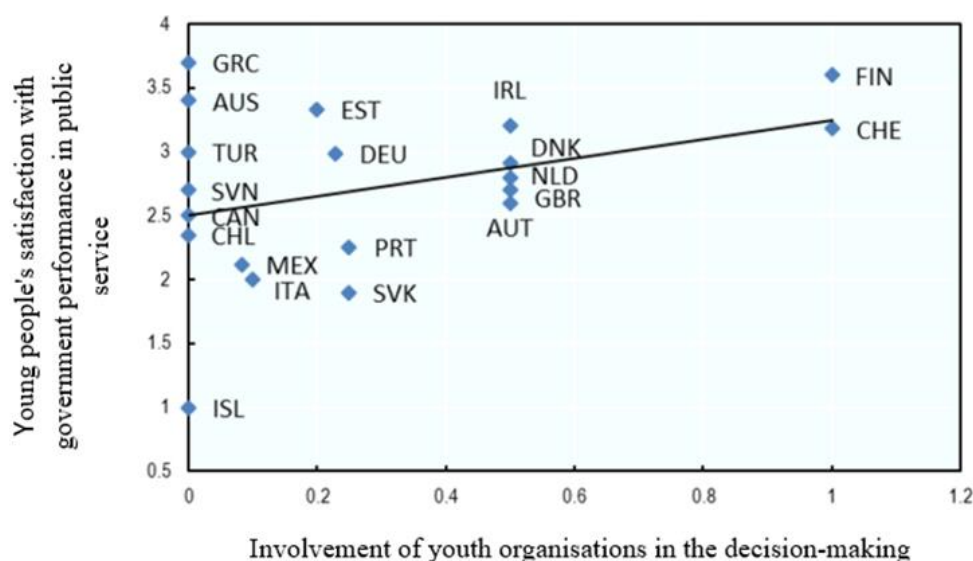


Figure 4: The relationship between the involvement of youth organisations in decision-making and youth satisfaction with governmental performance in public services, 2020.

Source: Graph elaborated by OECD through data from Youth Governance Survey.

In Italy, where young people's involvement in decision-making processes is limited, particularly at the national level, and only 26% of youth organisations express satisfaction with

the government's performance with regard to youth participation in public life (Youth Governance Surveys data), there is a lower level of contentment with public services.

As far as youth participation in institutional terms, the National Youth Council is the consultative body entrusted with representing the demands of the young generation to governmental institutions on policies that impact youth. To date, more than 80 national youth associations from different fields belong to the NYC: third sector, trade unions, professional categories, party, religious, sports, university and student youth. These associations actively engage in the decision-making processes through their designated representatives in both the General Assembly, the highest decision-making body, and thematic commissions, which delve into specific areas of public policy. As defined by the Founding Law 145/2018, the NYC carries out the primary activity of consultation with the Prime Minister or the delegated political authority on matters and policies that have an impact on the younger generations. It provides opinions and formulates proposals on government-initiated legislative actions related to youth and collaborates with public administrations by conducting studies and preparing reports on the state of young people, which prove valuable in shaping public policies. Additionally, the NYC plays a pivotal role in fostering dialogue among institutions, youth organisations, and young individuals. This involves facilitating young people's participation in representative democracy, supporting the activities of youth associations, and establishing and maintaining networks among them. The NYC also utilises its communication channels to disseminate information about events, assemblies, meetings, and projects in collaboration with the Department for Youth Policies. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the ongoing dialogue between institutions and the members of the NYC remains contingent upon the responsiveness of individual political authorities, as emphasised by the NYC President, Maria Pisani (Il Mattino, October 2022). Consequently, she advocates for a more prominent role for youth policies in the public debate, calling for the establishment of a framework law. This law would delineate the roles of entities working for young people and mandate compulsory consultation mechanisms for them, aligning with recommendations issued by the European Commission (Ibid.). Notably, the younger generation is advocating for active involvement in all decision-making processes, aiming to shift from being mere subjects to becoming active participants in shaping decisions (Istituzioni24.it, November 2020). The ultimate goal is to provide room for a new perspective within the realm of youth affairs, urging national institutions to formulate multi-year policy plans with specific objectives in order to support younger generations and contribute to the nation's growth (Ibid.). In a contemporary scenario where 68.6% of young people between the ages of 16 and 29 agree that the era when younger generations had better prospects than their parents is over (Censis, 2022), NYC highlights the vital importance of politics prioritising the

concerns of young people to restore their confidence in the possibility of a better future and to reduce economic and social inequalities fostering overall development (National Youth Council, 2023).

Among the political priorities highlighted by the National Youth Council in the National Youth Plan 2024 (October 2023), the employment issue comes first. A significant 52.5% of young aged between 16 and 30 in Italy emphasise the urgency of combating unemployment and job scarcity. This figure stands higher than the European average of 37.3%. The issue of NEETs and youth employment is also declared a priority by the president of the NYC (Il Mattino, October 2022). In second place comes the fight against poverty and inequality, considered a priority by 44.2% of Italians and 42.8% of Europeans. The third key concern, fundamental for 44% of Italians and 39.4% of Europeans, revolves around sustainable development, emphasising environmental protection and efforts against climate change. In contrast, improving access to education and training is deemed less critical by young Italians, with only 18.5% prioritising it, compared to a notably higher 27.6% among young Europeans. Long-standing objectives such as employment, education, social inequalities, and health are intertwined with the flagship issue of this era, for which young people themselves have emerged as advocates: climate change and its far-reaching consequences.

In the realm of social and environmental concerns, the youth sector demonstrates a robust commitment to making a meaningful contribution. Looking at the voluntary sector, the number of young people engaged in such activities is higher than the average for the total population in Italy and also compared to other OECD countries (OECD, 2020). Recent data indicate that the 18-19 age group is particularly active in participating in voluntary activities within associations. As reported by NYG (2023), in this context, youth organisations in Italy play a significant role in the associative, social, economic, educational, and voluntary landscapes. Even amid the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, young people swiftly organised crucial initiatives to aid those most affected by the health emergency. These efforts primarily rely on the spontaneity and dedication of young individuals, who often juggle their involvement with their studies and employment. However, the sustainability of these organisations and their initiatives faces considerable constraints due to the lack of dedicated, stable funding sources. In Italy, third sector organisations, including youth organisations, rely on potential public and private funding acquired through voluntary participation in competitive bids and tenders, alongside donations, membership fees, or service provision, as their primary means of financial support.

The data reveals a substantial disengagement of young people from politics on one hand. On the other hand, it highlights a noteworthy dynamism and initiative among the youth, although this enthusiasm often lacks recognition and representation at the national level. However, these

dynamics and perceptions can vary significantly in the local context, as they are significantly shaped by regional laws and the virtuosity of individual municipalities.

### **2.3 The local context: the Municipality of Moncalieri**

As highlighted in previous sections, the lack of a comprehensive strategic plan for youth policies in Italy for many years and the regulatory vacuum concerning initiatives targeting the youth population led local institutional and non-institutional territorial realities to take charge of the issue (Grassi, 2009). These actions occurred spontaneously and followed up on projects implemented in scattered order, strictly conditioned by the virtuosity and dynamism of individual territories. Although the presence at the national level of a more cohesive and organic political framework on youth issues is currently acknowledged, local authorities continue to play a crucial role. Even today, they are the closest institution to young people and their needs enabling the implementation of targeted measures. As the composition of young people and their needs change according to the territorial context and the local political leadership is replaced cyclically, diverse youth policy experiences can be observed across municipalities.

The present research chose to investigate the experience of the municipality of Moncalieri, a medium-sized urban reality located in the first urban belt of Turin. The youth population is proportioned to the national average. In 2022, the total resident population consisted of 56.193 inhabitants, with 7.309 individuals falling within the 15-29 age group constituting 13% of the total population (ISTAT, 2023). The town is equipped with four Comprehensive Institutes, two High Schools and one Vocational Training Institution. In particular, the Industrial Technical Institute, one of the two High Schools, attracts many students not only from Moncalieri but also from neighbouring municipalities. However, there are no university poles, so those who want to continue their studies after high school must necessarily move to Turin or other cities, a trend that in some cases already occurs at secondary schools.

From a political and governance point of view, Moncalieri is a municipality that in recent years has maintained a certain continuity and stability in its orientation, predominantly leaning towards the centre-left. Currently, the mayor is serving his second consecutive term, along with the Councillor for Youth Policies, who during his first term (2015-2020) was also in charge of other areas, such as labour and employment, legality, information systems and technological innovation, demographic and toponymy. In the second term (2020-2025), he was designated in charge of youth and education, legality, information systems and technological innovation.

Regarding youth policies, they are developed in compliance with Regional Law No. 6 on youth policies of the Piedmont Region. In the legislative text, young people are considered a

fundamental territorial resource for the community<sup>8</sup>. Since they are considered a wealth for the territory, the law provides for coordinated efforts by the local authorities through collaborative planning.

The actions which the Region supports are mainly aimed at:

- ❖ Enhancing the skills and initiatives of the younger generation, also through knowledge and analysis of issues relating to the condition of young people;
- ❖ Promoting citizenship and active participation of young people, also through a consultative and proactive role in youth policy planning with the establishment of the Regional Youth Forum<sup>9</sup>;
- ❖ Promoting a coordinated information system by setting up and qualifying the *Informagiovani* as multi-sectoral information desks and youth policy service centres;
- ❖ Supporting education on legality and non-violence, gender and anti-discrimination issues, well-being and health education on healthy lifestyles;
- ❖ Promoting equal access to education and work by removing economic and social obstacles to prevent and combat marginalisation and deviance;
- ❖ Fostering dialogue between different generations, cultures and religions while promoting a sense of belonging to the national and European community, including through cultural exchanges.

Within this legal framework, the municipalities have the capacity to implement actions and projects in favour of the youth population in line with the regional planning just described and with the principles of subsidiarity and adequacy. Their action is particularly directed towards the creation of meeting spots and multifunctional aggregation hubs to encourage youth sociability and creativity in its various expressions and to foster the transition into adulthood and the world of work. Additionally, they are involved in the coordination and monitoring phases of the actions promoted as well as in the sharing of projects and experiments with other actors to encourage the dissemination of best practices. Indeed, at least once every three years, the Regional Council, with the cooperation of the municipalities and provinces, must submit a report on the overall progress of youth policies implemented in the territory. Since this clause was only included in 2019 and implementation was scheduled to take place after two years, the document has not yet been drafted.

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<sup>8</sup> Art. 1.1 'The Region, within the scope of its competences and in compliance with national and European provisions on youth policies, recognises the young generations as an asset of the territory and as a fundamental resource of the community'.

<sup>9</sup> The Regional Youth Forum, however, has not yet been made operational. Despite the fact that the implementing regulation was due to be passed one year after the publication of Law No. 6, the Regional Council has not yet launched the Forum as well as the activation of specific calls for tenders for the allocation of resources to youth organisations.

The municipality of Moncalieri is therefore subject to this regional legislation. The main goals that the Youth Policy Department of the town has set during the 2015-2020 mandate (Città di Moncalieri, April 2020) and subsequently for the five-year period 2020-2025 (Città di Moncalieri, December 2020), have been to consolidate young people's sense of belonging and enhance their closeness to institutions. Moreover, it aims at developing their critical awareness through the utilisation of existing local resources and cultural hubs. To fulfil these objectives, a wide range of actions is promoted and enforced in the territory.

The implementation of the relevant policy guidelines is carried out by the MoncalieriGiovane office, which also performs the function of Informagiovane. Management is entrusted to the Cooperativa Sociale Educazione Progetto, a social cooperative that operates in the first belt of the city of Turin and manages services in the fields of labour, educational and youth policies. It was established in 1978 as a Social and Psycho-pedagogical Research Centre with the aim of experimenting with innovative projects concerning education and childhood. Subsequently, it broadened its fields of competence and took on the management of public services, promoting participatory and shared planning aimed at enhancing territorial resources and community ties. Regarding its position on the representation of young people, the Cooperative is in line with that promoted at the municipal and regional levels. This alignment is detectable on its official website<sup>10</sup>:

*"For many people, dealing with young people and adolescents means dealing with a problem, because young people are annoying, they are transgressive, they make noise, they go to bed late, then they smoke and do terrible things: so, we have to deal with young people because they bother us. We have taken a few steps: we have begun to replace the word 'problem' with the word 'issue', and we have tried to shift the attitude of part of the adult world towards young people from 'annoyance' to 'curiosity' to 'desire to listen and meet'. Youth policies are not the policies of social control and the problem of youth, the important thing is not to start by talking about young people and their discomfort, but from what they have to 'say' and 'give' in their normality."*

This stance is accompanied by the implementation of a plurality of actions and experiments designed to integrate educational projects with preventive measures and fuse the informative aspect with the community-building dimension. Following this approach, which is in line with the policy direction and programmes drawn up by the Moncalieri's Youth Policies Department, the MoncalieriGiovane office is engaged in a wide range of activities and services.

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<sup>10</sup> Cooperativa sociale Educazione Progetto website link: <https://educazioneprogetto.it/giovani>

Primarily, the office performs an information function in observation of purposes e) and f) of Art. 1 of Regional Law no. 6<sup>11</sup>. Specifically, it provides information on school and employment opportunities in the territory, also offering school and work guidance services through individual counselling or training meetings. It actively promotes awareness among young people about volunteering opportunities, encouraging participation in the Universal Civil Service, and involving them in the organisation and execution of city-wide youth events.

The office is then committed to raising young people's awareness on a wide range of issues through numerous events and campaigns, aligning with the goals stated in sections g) and l) of the regional legislation<sup>12</sup>. Annually, it organises meetings related to 20th-century conflicts, arranging ceremonies, performances and visits to significant sites related to the Shoah, the Resistance and the Yugoslavian conflict. These initiatives aim to preserve the historical memory of the past and foster a sense of historical awareness among the youth. For many years, it has managed and supported *Moncalieri attiva per la Legalità (Moncalieri Active for Legality)*, a project implemented with *Libera Piemonte* aimed at education on legality and the fight against the mafia. This project involves the organisation of in-depth analysis sessions, film and documentary screenings, school workshops, and visits to mafia-confiscated properties. The main aim is to disseminate and promote active and democratic citizenship, through paths of awareness and responsibility. Regarding environmental issues, the office is committed to organising events and awareness-raising campaigns on climate change and environmental protection actions. It periodically organises ecological days and, during the summer, it kicks off *Piazza Ragazzabile*, an urban ecology education project for young people aged 14 to 18 living in Moncalieri. This project lasts for three weeks and includes morning activities to upgrade public spaces, such as cleaning up access roads to gardens, and afternoon educational workshops, such as horticulture and cycling sessions. Furthermore, as of this year, MoncalieriGiovane has taken part with other partner organisations in the *Mind Changers: Regions and Youth for Planet and People* project, an interdisciplinary training course for young people aged 15 to 29 years focused on the global consequences of human actions. The project also includes international collaboration with young people in Ratoma, Guinea, through online workshops aimed at exchanging best practices and defining communication strategies in both regions. Finally, concerning the personal well-being theme, in recent years, the Moncalieri

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<sup>11</sup> Art.1, Law No. 6 concerning the youth policies of the Piedmont Region:

e) Facilitating the networking of knowledge and initiatives of interest to young people as well as access to networks, electronic communication services and innovative technology projects.

f) Promoting a coordinated information system.

<sup>12</sup> Art.1, Law No. 6 concerning the youth policies of the Piedmont Region:

g) Promoting education on legality and non-violence, gender and anti-discrimination issues.

l) Promoting wellbeing and education in health and healthy lifestyle;

Youth Policy Office has increased its support for projects addressing the mental and physical health of young people. It provides essential contacts and information about local services, such as the ASL listening space for young people aged 14 to 25, and specialised support services for eating disorders, gender violence and issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Since March 2023, MoncalieriGiovane has taken the lead in the *Chiedimi se sono felice* project, funded by the Piedmont Region. This is an initiative aimed at young people from 13 to 29 years of age and territorial actors dealing with young people to support the psychophysical well-being of the new generations. On the one hand, a psychological help desk was set up for young people aged between 13 and 25 with the intention of creating a neutral space where they can talk about their discomforts and difficulties through three free initial meetings. Additionally, a new figure was introduced, the community tutor, a youth worker who acts as a reference point for young people aged 15 to 29 who need listening and support in a difficult phase of their lives. The tutor is responsible for listening and providing information on the services available in the area and, if necessary, accompanying the person to the appropriate place to face and solve their problems. On the other hand, the project envisages the formation of two working tables: the first one is open to young people who are particularly active in the area and has been set up so that they can share their experiences and viewpoints concerning the condition of young people. The second is open to youth workers and local authorities working with young people in order to establish a strategic network aimed at creating coordinated actions to accompany and support young people. The project ended in October 2023 and will be followed by a second edition in the next two years. At this moment, it is not yet possible to assess the outcomes. However, the implementation of the roundtables has facilitated the collaboration of all stakeholders involved and encouraged the active engagement of young people.

As far as aggregative hubs are concerned, the Sonika Youth Centre and the Punto di Svolta Youth Centre, also known as the Don P.G Ferrero Multifunctional Centre, play a pivotal role in organising the diverse activities that the Youth Office offers. In the two youth centres, after-school care and homework help are organised, services offered free of charge by the municipality. The after-school centre, known as EduSpazio, from the crasis of 'Edu' from education and 'spazio' which means space, intends to be a space where young people can meet and feel listened to and accepted, fostering learning through sociality and collaboration. Additionally, *Facciamo salotto* is organised twice a week for 14 to 17-year-olds, providing opportunities for engaging in various playful educational activities. The Sonika Youth Centre also hosts *Massive Wave Web Radio*, a radio project run entirely by young people and supported by MoncalieriGiovane and the Councillor for Youth Policies. The Don P.G. Ferrero Multifunctional Centre, in particular, serves as a gathering, recreational and reference point for

the city's young people- and not only, especially those who live in the Santa Maria suburb, a peripheral district with a working-class background. The coexistence in the same place of recreational and cultural activities alongside personal services, including the *Punto Donna* anti-violence centre, the associations and voluntary work desk, the *Arcobaleno* listening desk, the psychological and the social services help desks, enables the fulfilment of the second function outlined in the regional guidelines for youth policies. Indeed, this function emphasises the creation of meeting spaces and multifunctional hubs that promote creativity in various forms and facilitate the transition to adulthood and the professional world (Article 5, Law No. 6, Piedmont Region).

From a research and observational perspective, the Moncalieri Municipality, in agreement with the social cooperative Educazione Progetto, set up the Parents and Children Observatory in 1999, a tool shared by the Department for Social Policies and Solidarity and the Department for Childhood and Youth. It remained operational until 2015 and was intended to build a complete and constantly updated overview of the services and initiatives planned and to acquire adequate knowledge of the needs and real conditions of families with minors in Moncalieri. Since it is no longer operational, occasional informal surveys are currently conducted by MoncalieriGiovane from time to time. In 2016, it carried out a mapping action aimed at obtaining a general picture of youth aggregation in Borgo San Pietro, one of the most populated neighbourhoods of the city. This action involved the administration of a questionnaire to 148 young people from the area, alongside direct on-site observations, and a series of interviews with local organisations. On one hand, the analysis of the questionnaires revealed that the young people had limited knowledge of the geographical area and the opportunities tailored to their age group. The majority declared they were unfamiliar with organisations and associations in the area and identified shopping centres as the only places of entertainment. Interviews with organisations, on the other hand, revealed a lack of willingness on their part to provide proposals and collaborate with public administration, coupled with a growing perception that young people were distancing themselves from the activities they proposed. Faced with these results, the Youth Office and the Youth Policies Department worked to enhance the visibility of services in the area targeting young people, in particular those activities carried out at the Don G.P. Ferrero Multifunctional Centre and introduced new initiatives. The most recent survey, conducted in the summer of 2023, focused on the mental and physical health conditions of young people aged between 13 and 29 in Moncalieri. The research was carried out to collect useful data for the second edition of *Chiedimi se sono felice* project and part of the results will be used to support the present study.

This brief overview of the activities undertaken by the Youth Office in Moncalieri reveals a certain dynamism in implementing a diverse array of initiatives and programmes for young people. Its medium-sized dimension makes this municipality a valuable context for studying and analysing the implementation and effectiveness of youth policies at the local level. Furthermore, its proximity to Turin, a hub of innovative youth policies where the first Italian Youth Information Centre was established, adds an interesting layer of analysis. It has surely influenced Moncalieri's youth-oriented practices but, at the same time, it might have served as a catalyst to differentiate Moncalieri's offerings from those of the metropolis. Although the number of services provided is naturally lower due to the city's smaller scale, the compact urban environment might have fostered closer proximity to young people and their needs. The medium-sized dimensions might also favour the involvement of young people in active citizenship initiatives as they are more easily approachable. Additionally, Moncalieri municipality as well as the Piedmont Region adopt an approach towards young individuals centred on youth promotion and valorisation, considering them a valuable asset for the community. This perspective on youth, which is relatively new in the Italian context, might significantly influence the relationship that young people have with local institutions and their perception of politics and initiatives targeting them, diverging from the national trend. This combination of factors makes Moncalieri an ideal case study, allowing for a nuanced understanding of youth policies and their impact on young citizens in a specific urban context.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology and research methods

In line with the literature outlined in the previous chapter, the present research aimed to investigate the relationship between the new generations and local youth public policies, paying particular attention to young people's opinions and experiences. The research question is:

*How do young people, aged between 14 and 29, perceive youth policies in Moncalieri municipality?*

The audience examined by the study was the population group towards which youth policy actions are directed according to national and regional legislation. The selected age range was from 14 years old to 29. The 29th year was chosen as the maximum age to be considered by taking as reference the age group involved in the MoncalieriGiovani project, *Chiedimi se sono felice*.

The objectives of the research were therefore as follows:

- *To investigate the opinion of the young people interviewed about politics and the policy measures addressed to them, at the national and local levels.*
- *To investigate the experience of young people of services and activities dedicated to them in the municipality of Moncalieri.*
- *To investigate how local public authorities and practitioners relate to young people and their needs.*

The study aimed to be relevant in terms of providing concrete data on the relationship between the interviewed population and local youth policies by taking into consideration a specific context, namely that of the municipality of Moncalieri. It therefore intended to provide useful insights to understand the degree of inclusiveness, equity, and sustainability of the policy measures promoted.

The following paragraphs will highlight the methodology used to address the research question and the objectives of the study. The research design, the research methods, the participant

selection process, and the data collection and analysis technique will then be explained and justified, along with the study limitations.

### **3.1 Research design and research methods**

As illustrated above, the purpose of the research was to describe *how* young people define their relationship to youth public policy from their personal impressions and considerations. Therefore, the research method deemed most appropriate to adopt was the case study. Indeed, the case study is a research method that aims at understanding a phenomenon occurring in the contemporary world by taking into consideration a specific real context, characterised by its complexities and peculiarities (Yin, 2018). In this case, the issue to be investigated was related to a topical matter and circumscribed to a specific territorial context. The nature of the research was exploratory as the object of study in question had not yet been investigated previously and there was little data on it. Therefore, an attempt was made to collect and analyse a sufficient number of data to provide an initial overview of the phenomenon and give inputs for future research and/or territorial actions. Precisely because this was a preliminary exploratory study, it was decided to focus on a single case in order to analyse the phenomenon in depth and to focus on the understanding of the complex structure of relations that identify and define the case itself, considering its uniqueness and specificity. Only secondarily, the eventual appearance of empirical evidence was used to shed light on the topic more generally.

In order to provide a fairly comprehensive framework, the research opted for developing an embedded single case study, which did not study the case in its entirety, as would have been done had one opted for a holistic approach, but took into account the evidence from the individual parties involved in the dynamic in order to subsequently organise it in a structured manner and provide an organic analysis of the case. Therefore, several sub-units of analysis were considered: a sample of 157 young people aged between 14 and 29 living in Moncalieri, a selected group of 7 young people active in the municipal area, the practitioners working with the Moncalieri Youth Policy Office, i.e. MoncalieriGiovane, and finally the Moncalieri Councillor for Youth Policy.

Hence, the data collected came from various sources that required the use of different research methods, both qualitative and quantitative. Although the case study calls for the almost exclusive use of qualitative methods, it was decided to opt for triangulation of research methods in order to I) obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and II) increase the validity of the research.

Since the study referred to a very large population group, it was deemed necessary to carry out a quantitative analysis in order to collect a larger amount of data. Moreover, it allowed me to process and compare data more quickly and to identify possible determinant and characterising variables. The quantitative data used in this study were collected through the survey conducted by MoncalieriGiovane in the summer of 2023 concerning the psychophysical well-being of young people in Moncalieri aged between 13 and 29<sup>13</sup>. As illustrated in Chapter 2, this survey was carried out with the primary purpose of understanding the mental and physical health condition of young people and subsequently detecting their perception and use of the services and spaces offered by the municipality of Moncalieri. The questionnaire through which the survey was carried out was structured in three sections: in the first one, the general information of the person was requested; in the second one, the psychophysical well-being of respondents was investigated; finally, in the last part, their degree of knowledge and opinion of the services and spaces present on the territory were examined. Therefore, for the purposes of its research, the current study examined the data collected through the first and third sections. Although it did not explicitly mention youth public policies and did not ask for explicit opinions on them, the latter was considered equally relevant for the investigation: aggregative spaces and services can be considered the territorial expression of public policies and thus the concrete, and tangible results of their actions. Moreover, youth policies defined in these terms are more accessible, also on a cognitive level, by young people. Indeed, the latter interact directly with the services and spaces dedicated to them on the territory and their personal experiences greatly influence their perception of the effectiveness and relevance of the political actions taken towards them as well as their participation in public life. Furthermore, the implementation of services and the facilitation of the creation of spaces for young people often reflect the stated objectives of the local authorities in concrete terms. By comparing young people's perceptions with such policy objectives, it was possible to understand whether the authorities' modes of action are aligned with young people's expectations or not.

The questionnaire had limitations, primarily stemming from the fact that it was not specifically designed to explore the phenomenon under investigation in this research. As a result, it only addressed certain aspects of the issue, offering a partial perspective. Nevertheless, the integration of the two sections of the survey conducted by MoncalieriGiovane into the present

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<sup>13</sup> The survey conducted by MoncalieriGiovane was carried out as part of the *Chiedimi se sono felice* project whose target audience was in the 13-29 age group, so the questionnaire was also distributed to young people aged 13. As will be illustrated in the data analysis section, this study performed a data cleaning by excluding questionnaires filled in by young people under the age of 14.

study made it possible to extend the research sample and to explore the respondents' opinion on the tangible measures of youth policies, primarily services and activities.

Therefore, the results obtained from the survey have been used as a baseline from which to develop and conduct qualitative research. The latter was structured using the following methods:

- Focus group with a selected group of 7 young people.
- Semi-structured individual interviews with practitioners in the field and the Moncalieri Councillor for Youth Policies.

The focus group was conducted for the primary purpose of surveying the young people's opinions and perceptions on the topic of youth policies through a collective comparison. Secondly, it was implemented to obtain a possible explanation, from their points of view, of the data that emerged from the large-scale survey administered to their peers. The young people taking part in the activity were selected according to a precise rationale, aiming at bringing together the most representative young voices in the municipality. Hence, figures who are particularly active in the area, from both a political and social point of view, and able to act as spokespersons for the visions and needs of their generation, were brought together. Through this meeting, it was possible to obtain a deeper insight into the phenomenon and thus detect nuances of meanings and additional impressions that would not have emerged through the questionnaire.

The semi-structured single interviews, on the other hand, were used to survey the views of those working for and/or with local youth. The primary aim was to investigate the opinion of those working in the sector, including the Councillor, regarding the young people's perception of the territory's public youth policies and to understand whether or not their considerations coincided with those that emerged from the questionnaires and the focus group. Through the interviews, it was therefore possible to understand the degree to which local authorities and those working in the field are aware of the phenomenon. Secondly, it investigated their opinion and their personal explanation regarding some of the results that emerged from the questionnaires and the focus group and thus to partly understand, based on their answers, how they relate to the new generations and their needs.

### **3.2 Data collection**

The data collected by the research came from primary sources, i.e. through observations and surveys carried out in person, including the one conducted by MoncalieriGiovane. The data collection process took place from the second half of June 2023 until October 2023. To organise

it in a structured manner, a clear definition of the objectives and a detailed schedule of the distribution plan for the questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews were drawn up.

### 3.2.1 Questionnaire

The survey covered the Moncalieri urban area and was conducted from 22 June 2023 until 22 September 2023. As explained in the previous paragraph, the questionnaire used for this study was part of a wider questionnaire. The part of the questionnaire considered was structured into 36 closed-ended questions, organised mainly in battery form. Six questions were dichotomous, with 'yes' or 'no' as the answer, while the remaining ones were multiple-choice questions structured in graduated scales, with response modes ordered according to the level of satisfaction or agreement and to the quantitative perception of the services and spaces present in the area. For each item (or sub-question) a scale of satisfaction/ dissatisfaction, agreement/disagreement and numerical perception consisting of five modes have been prepared. The questions were structured to gauge respondents' opinion on general issues concerning young people, their degree of satisfaction with the services and spaces present on the territory, and finally, their knowledge and opinion about these services. Participants were asked to provide a quantitative assessment using the following options: "no, there are none", "yes, there are but not enough", "yes, there are enough", "yes, too many" and finally "I don't know". The services and spaces investigated were those that aim to achieve the general objectives of youth policies both on the national and local scale. These objectives included supporting young people's development, education, employment, and well-being. Thus, specific categories of services were considered, and they were those aimed at I) supporting education, employment, and guidance, II) enhancing mental and physical health, III) providing cultural and recreational activities and IV) promoting civic participation and social engagement. The variables investigated by the questionnaire were all qualitative. The chosen sampling method was the non-probabilistic convenience and voluntary sampling. In terms of time and resources, it was the most immediate and easiest method to employ as it ensured easy accessibility and cooperation on the part of the respondents. The population sample referred to, and to whom the questionnaire was administered, was the young people of Moncalieri, aged between 14 and 29, who have attended in the last six years one or more activities organised by the MoncalieriGiovane office and by Moncalieri Basketball, a partner organisation of the *Chiedimi se sono felice* project. To enlarge the sample as much as possible and reduce selection bias, the questionnaires were also distributed to young people encountered during site visits organised in specific areas of the city where spontaneous youth gatherings usually occur. These

spaces were previously identified and mapped together with the MoncalieriGiovane youth workers and concerned:

- Moncalieri Castle and historic centre.
- *Borgo San Pietro*.
- Shopping centers: *Le porte di Moncalieri, Quarantacinquesimo Parallelo, Decathlon Moncalieri, Esselunga Moncalieri*.
- *Vallere Park* and *Lungo Po Abellonio*.
- Public garden *Via Ada Negri* and *Piazza Argiroupoli*.

Questionnaires were distributed in a mixed mode, both in person and online. The first mode was used during the inspections around the city and during the activities and events organised by MoncalieriGiovane in the period June-September 2023, which were: *Piazza Ragazzabile, Ritmika* staff training, *Climathon, A night at the Castle of Moncalieri* and *Ritmika*. The second method was used to send the questionnaire to young people attending Moncalieri Basketball activities and to those who had taken part in one or more MoncalieriGiovane initiatives in the past. It was then sent online, via e-mail or WhatsApp, to all the contacts provided by the two organisations.

To facilitate the dissemination and later the processing and analysis of the questionnaire's data, it was decided to carry it out in digital format via the Google Forms platform, which could be accessed via a link or by scanning the QR code. The data was collected anonymously and in observation of privacy according to Articles 13 and 14 of EU Reg. No. 679/2016 and national legislation on the protection of personal data.

Out of a total of 171 questionnaires distributed, the valid answers obtained were 157, also considering the exclusion of all respondents under the age of 14.

Before large-scale distribution, the questionnaire was pre-tested on a group of 11 children aged 14 years who were part of EduSpazio, one of the afternoon activities offered by MoncalieriGiovane previously cited. The preliminary test was useful to understand the effectiveness of the questionnaire and to identify any critical issues in the formulation of questions and answers. In addition, the choice to test it on young people belonging to the minimum age group of the research was motivated by the desire to understand whether the terminology and sentence formulation were accessible and comprehensible even for the youngest.

### 3.2.2 Focus group

The focus group was conducted in presence on 26 October 2023 at the Don PF Ferrero multifunctional centre in Moncalieri after convening the participants by e-mail.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling, whereby the choice of cases was dictated by the characteristics presented and the objectives of the survey. Thus, an attempt was made to form a rather heterogeneous group of young people from different ages and backgrounds, so that different experiences and opinions on the subject of youth public policies could be detected. Care was taken to convene young people who were particularly active from both a political and a social point of view and with a certain degree of knowledge of the perceptions and visions of their peers in relation to the topic. Specifically, the group was composed as follows: a high school senior from Majorana, a 21-year-old university student, a 23-year-old basketball instructor at Moncalieri Basket, two civil servants aged 23 and 28 respectively, a 25-year-old worker who was formerly a civil servant in Moncalieri, and finally, a 25-year-old activist for the Democratic Party (PD) in Moncalieri.

The focus group lasted a total of 90 minutes and was conducted in a semi-structured manner with limited and objective intervention by the moderator.

The main themes that were addressed mainly concerned their perception of how politicians and media depict young people, the relationship between Moncalieri's youth and local institutions, the requests expressed to politics by the new generations, and the engagement and active involvement of young people in local political matters.

The results of the focus group were recorded through detailed notes taken during the meeting and audio recording.

### *3.2.3 Semi-structured interviews*

The interviews were carried out in person in Moncalieri, at the MoncalieriGiovane office, in October 2023. They were conducted individually and involved three practitioners working with MoncalieriGiovane and the Moncalieri Councillor for Youth Policies.

The selected practitioners were chosen for their consolidated experience in the field and their in-depth knowledge of young people living in Moncalieri and their social condition:

- Interviewee No. 1 has been working at the MoncalieriGiovane office for almost ten years and has witnessed the many transformations that have taken place over the years in terms of youth policy, both at the national and local level, and in terms of the practices and fashions of local young people;
- Interviewee No. 2 works at Cooperativa Educazione Progetto. She carries out projects and activities not only in collaboration with the municipality of Moncalieri but also with those of Rivoli and Collegno. She was a relevant voice in understanding the distinctive elements of Moncalieri about youth policies compared to other municipalities and the relationship between young people and institutions;

- Interviewee No. 3 has been working for more than ten years in Moncalieri as an educator and territorial animator and has gained a lot of experience in recognising the social dynamics among young people and their relationship with local institutions.

Their testimonies and reflections helped to provide external readings of the phenomenon based on observations made and matured over time, thus providing an understanding of how the relationship between young people and youth policy has changed over time and space.

As far as the decision to interview a political figure, more precisely the one in charge of drawing up and putting into practice local youth policies, it was motivated by the desire to investigate his opinion on the issue and his degree of awareness of the views of young people and their needs. In this way, it was possible to point out his perception of the relationship between the new generations and public policies and his approach to it.

The content of the questions posed to the interviewees was almost in line with those asked to focus group participants. However, an attempt was made to adapt them to each person's role and professional experience. For this reason, a semi-structured interview format was chosen so that individual insights could freely emerge to enrich the response.

The interviews lasted an average of 30 minutes and were audio-recorded.

### **3.3 Data analysis**

The data analysis process started on 25 September 2023, which coincided with the end of the administration of the questionnaires, and lasted until the beginning of November 2023.

Different analysis techniques were used during this phase, depending on the research method used.

#### *3.3.1 Questionnaire*

Concerning the data collected through questionnaires, once their administration was completed, the Excel file organised by Google Forms, where all the answers of the respondents were reported, was downloaded. Then, it was possible to proceed with a cleaning of the data by removing from the dataset the answers given by people outside the 14-29 age group and performing a check of missing data and anomalous answers. Subsequently, a new dataset was created containing only the data of the first section, linked to the socio-demographic variables, and those of the third, concerning the perception and opinion of the services and aggregative spaces dedicated to young people. Through Excel, it was possible to carry out a comprehensive description of the survey data, which was largely done by calculating the response frequencies given to the different modes of each question. The frequency was calculated both in absolute

terms, thus highlighting the number of subjects who chose that answer, and in relative terms. A bivariate analysis was performed, examining the responses concerning opinions on general issues related to young people in relation to the age groups. The decision to carry out a bivariate analysis on this topic was motivated by the desire to detect the presence of significant differences in the perceptions and opinions of services between Under 20s and Over 20s respondents.

### *3.3.2 Focus groups and individual interviews*

The focus group and interviews were analysed using a precise methodology. At the end of each meeting, a careful tidying up of the notes and the full transcription of the answers were carried out. The latter was useful for comparing in detail the report of the different categories of participants interviewed with respect to the topic under investigation. Thus, an in-depth analysis of the interventions was carried out, highlighting the frequency and extent of comments relating to a topic. By analysing the extent and specificity of the interventions, it was possible to detect the importance of the topic for the interviewees and to compare different types of expressions relating to the same subject. Thanks to the analysis, an open coding, in which the key concepts and emerging themes were categorised, was carried out. Through this technique, it was possible to reconstruct the flow of discourse by highlighting the significant conceptual elements and their cognitive links and to highlight recurring patterns and tendencies.

In addition, other factors were taken into account in the analysis process. More precisely, they were:

- Comments or reflections emerged spontaneously or in reaction to an explicit question from the moderator or, in the case of the focus group, in relation to the statements of the other participants;
- Time devoted to a certain theme.

In the case of the focus group, the account was taken of the group's level of agreement on a certain topic, highlighting any changes of opinion and possible causes, such as new evidence, a different rationale or the charismatic power of a participant.

### **3.4 Study limitations**

The research was developed to describe how the relationship between the new generations and public policies manifests itself in a specific context, in this case, that of Moncalieri. Although the results obtained could be in line with or differ from those found in the literature, the

sampling method chosen for the questionnaire does not allow a generalisation of the evidence found. Indeed, the sample identified cannot be considered representative of the entire youth population of Moncalieri. Although an attempt was made to reduce the bias due to non-probabilistic sampling at convenience through presences in strategic locations for the city, the number of young people reached with this technique was significantly lower than that reached with the other distribution channels. The contexts in which the young people were engaged were predominantly leisure, so there was little inclination to devote time to filling out the questions.

In addition, the distribution of questionnaires via the MoncalierGiovane and Moncalieri Basket contacts did not cover the 20–29-year-old youth population. This group was partially reached through the inspections and the two major events organised by MoncalieriGiovane, namely *Una notte al Castello di Moncalieri e Ritmika*. Nevertheless, a disproportion in the target sample in terms of age has been maintained. Hence, respondents aged between 14 and 19 were far more numerous than those aged between 20 and 29. Attempts were made to ask for explanations about this difficulty in finding young people from the older age group during the interviews with the practitioners and the Councillor. They provided their interpretations which were relevant but could not be ascertained through direct testimonies of those concerned.

As far as the focus group is concerned, the opposite occurred. Due to consent requirements, only young people over 18 were involved.

Lastly, the scope of the research was limited because many respondents, both from the questionnaire and the focus group, were already familiar with the activities and services offered by MoncalierGiovane. Therefore, their perspectives were influenced by their prior knowledge of the Office.

In the end, the findings of the research as well as its limits enhance significant evidence that could be the basis for further studies and reflections that may confirm or refute the results obtained.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results Analysis

#### 4.1 Questionnaires

As reported in Chapter 3, the questionnaire drawn up for *Chiedimi se sono felice* survey was useful in understanding the knowledge and perspectives of the young individuals regarding the services and activities promoted by the municipality of Moncalieri for their age group. It also helped in exploring their opinions on general issues related to youth and institutions. Before delving into the analysis of the responses, a brief overview of the characteristics of the sample will be provided.

Out of 157 respondents, over 70% belonged to the under-20 age group, while the other respondents were in their twenties or older, with a notably smaller percentage of individuals over the age of 25.

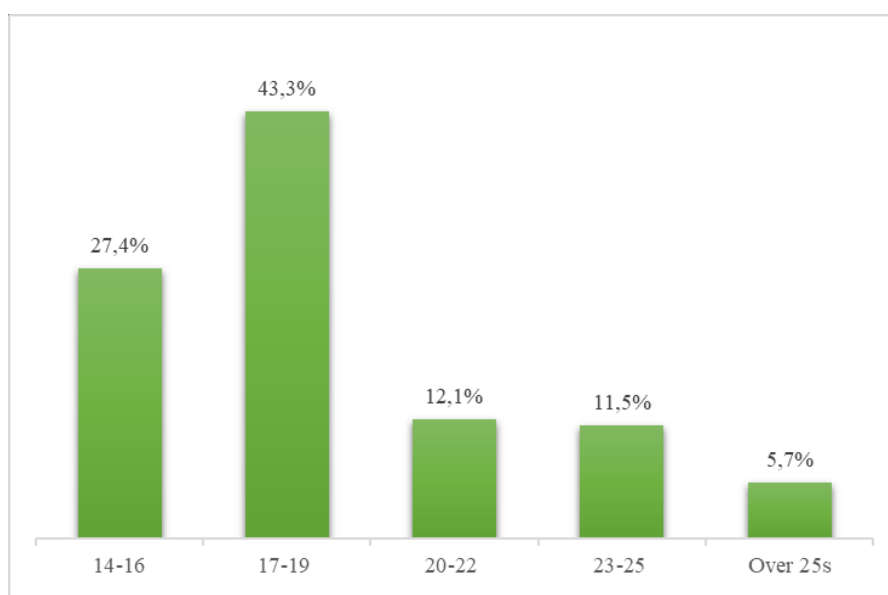


Figure 5: Age of respondents.

In terms of gender distribution, the percentage of males and females was roughly similar, differing only by 0.7 percentage points in favour of the female component. The remaining 1.9% identified themselves as non-binary or preferred not to specify their gender.

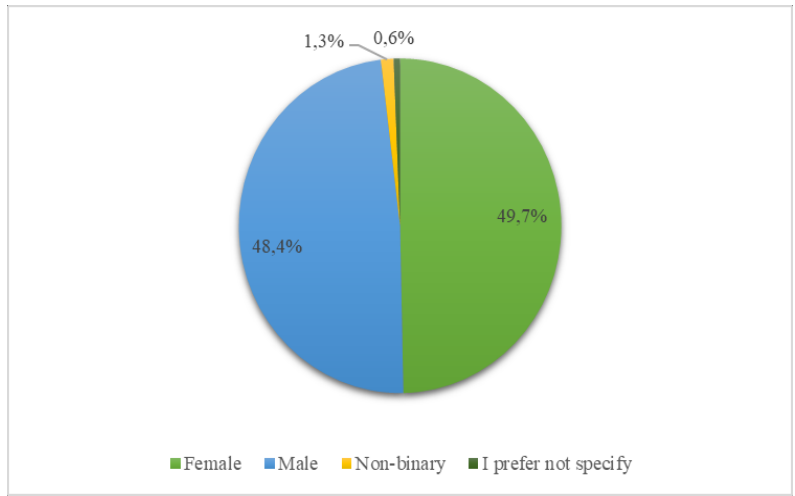


Figure 6: Gender of respondents.

Regarding nationality, the majority of the interviewed population was Italian, while only 3.2 % were of foreign nationality.

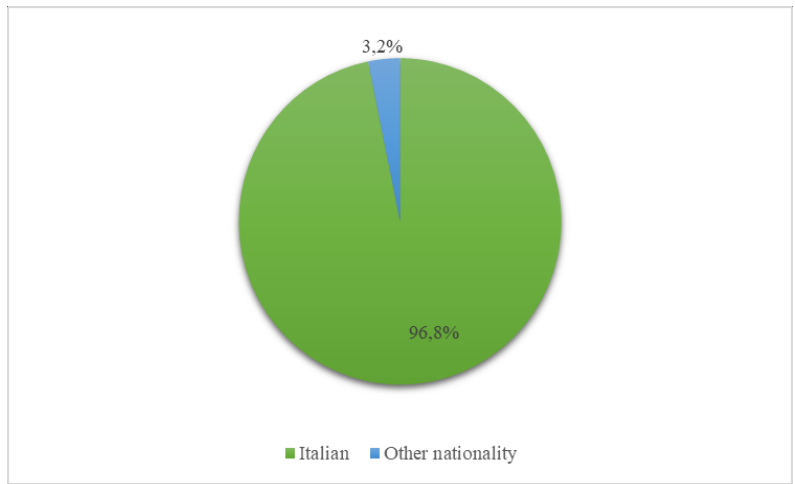


Figure 7: Nationality of respondents.

More than three-quarters of them were students, most attending high school. About 24.2% were employed, including those who work and study in the meantime, while just under 2% did not study and did not work.

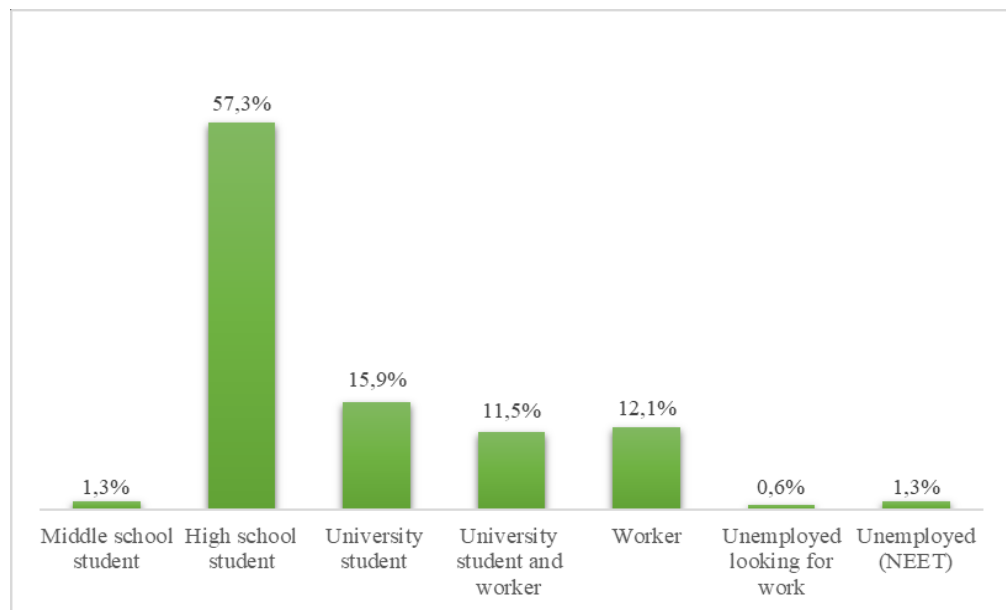


Figure 8: Employment status of respondents.

Turning to the analysis of the data on general issues, valuable insights were gathered concerning the respondents' opinions on the condition of young people, their future prospects, and the external support they receive. The analysis was conducted by categorising respondents into two groups: those under 20 and those over 20. Even though the numerical distribution is imbalanced, as individuals under 20 constitute 70% of the sample, it was still interesting to observe variations in responses, considering also the diverse employment statuses of the two groups. Notably, most participants under 20 mentioned their current enrolment in middle or high school, whereas all participants over 20 indicated they were either students, employed, or unemployed. Generally, no significant disparities were observed, except for a higher percentage of respondents under 20 indicating “I don’t know” as an answer. Regarding their views on institutional support, over two-thirds of both groups deemed it insufficient. Notably, 80% of respondents agreed that young people should receive more psychological support.

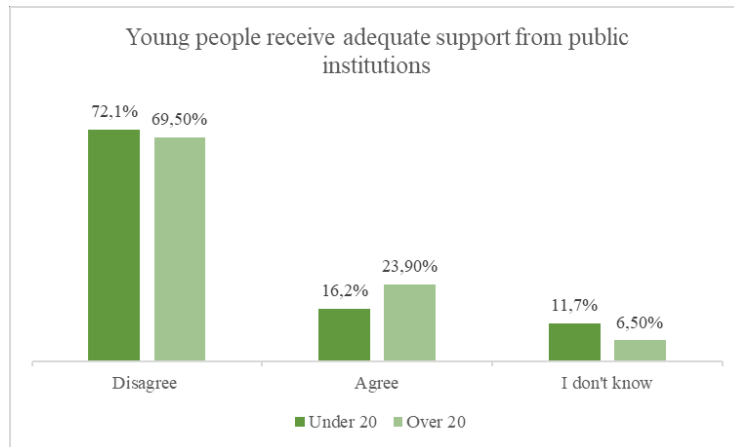


Figure 9: Appropriateness of public institutions' support.

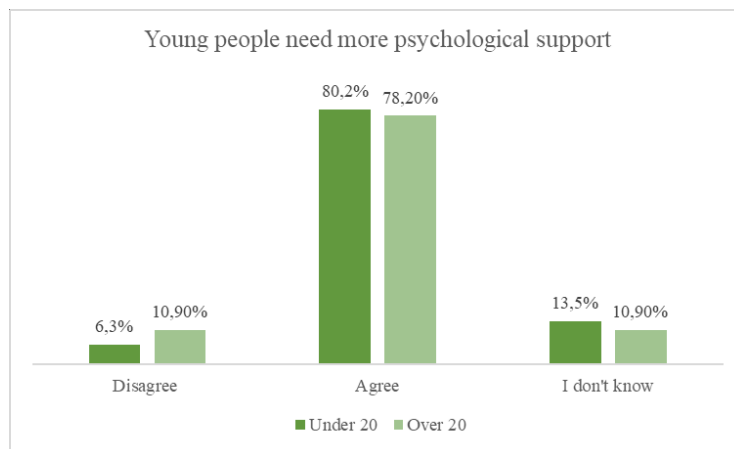


Figure 10: Appropriateness of psychological support.

Concerning future prospects, the over-20 group was less optimistic than their younger counterparts about having a better future than previous generations.

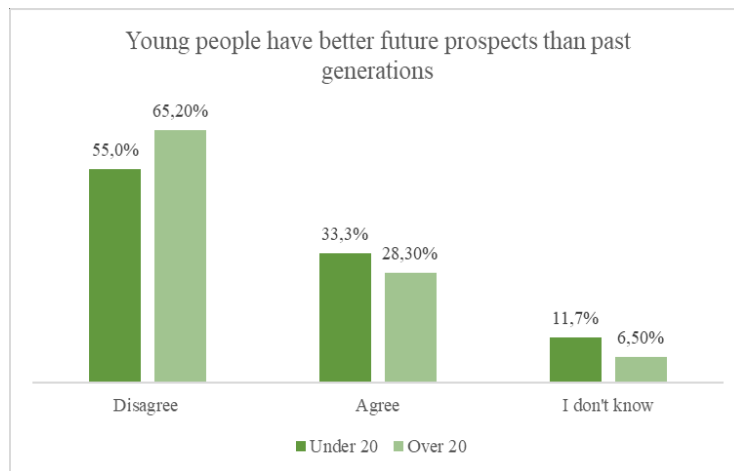


Figure 11: Future prospects compared to those of past generations.

On the topic of young people's responsibility in building their future, a moderate difference emerged: 23.9% of those over 20 disagreed with the statement, whereas only 8.1% of those under 20 were of the same opinion. However, the over-20 group showed a greater inclination towards the belief that young people should be more actively involved in the political and social activities of their city, with 76.1% in agreement, compared to 67.5% of those under 20.

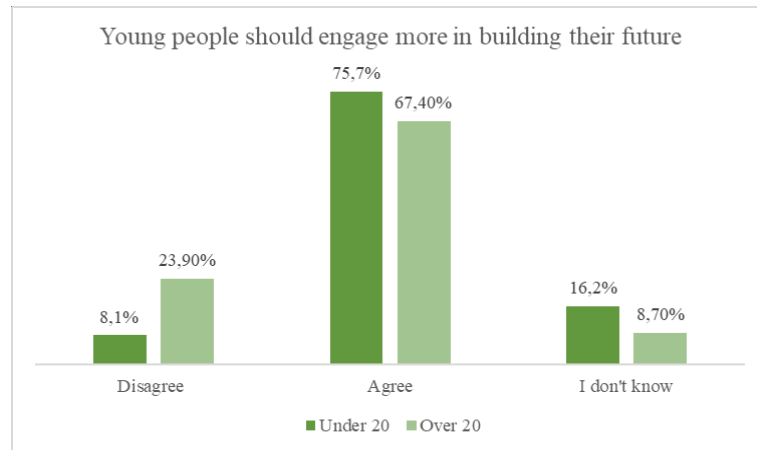


Figure 12: Engagement of young people to build their future.

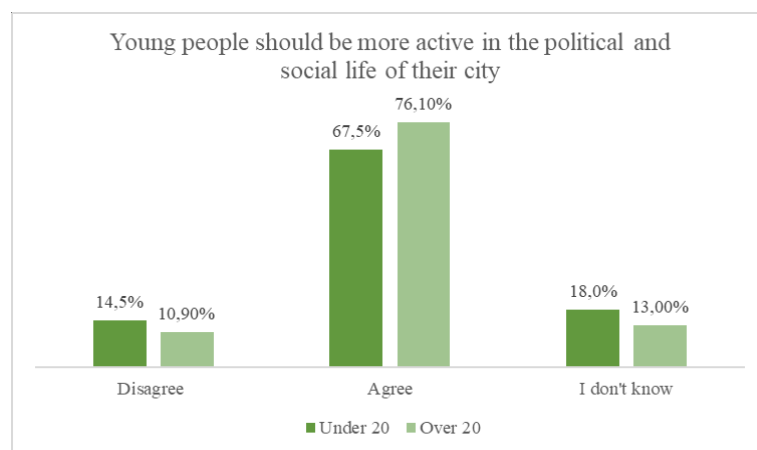


Figure 13: Young people activism in political and social affairs.

Shifting the focus to the local context that the young respondents are used to experiencing every day, Moncalieri, their level of satisfaction with the services dedicated to them in the area was assessed as well as their perception of such services in quantitative terms. The analysis clearly revealed indifference towards art workshops and socio-cultural/recreational activities. In contrast, more than half expressed contentment with the musical events hosted by the city, volunteer opportunities, and green spaces. Conversely, a rather high dissatisfaction rate was found for the offer of evening activities. As far as study and work guidance services and psychological support services are concerned, the responses reported were similar but rather heterogeneous. Both services showed an indifference rate of approximately 36%. A similar

percentage was attested to positive satisfaction, while slightly over a quarter of the young people expressed dissatisfaction with these services.

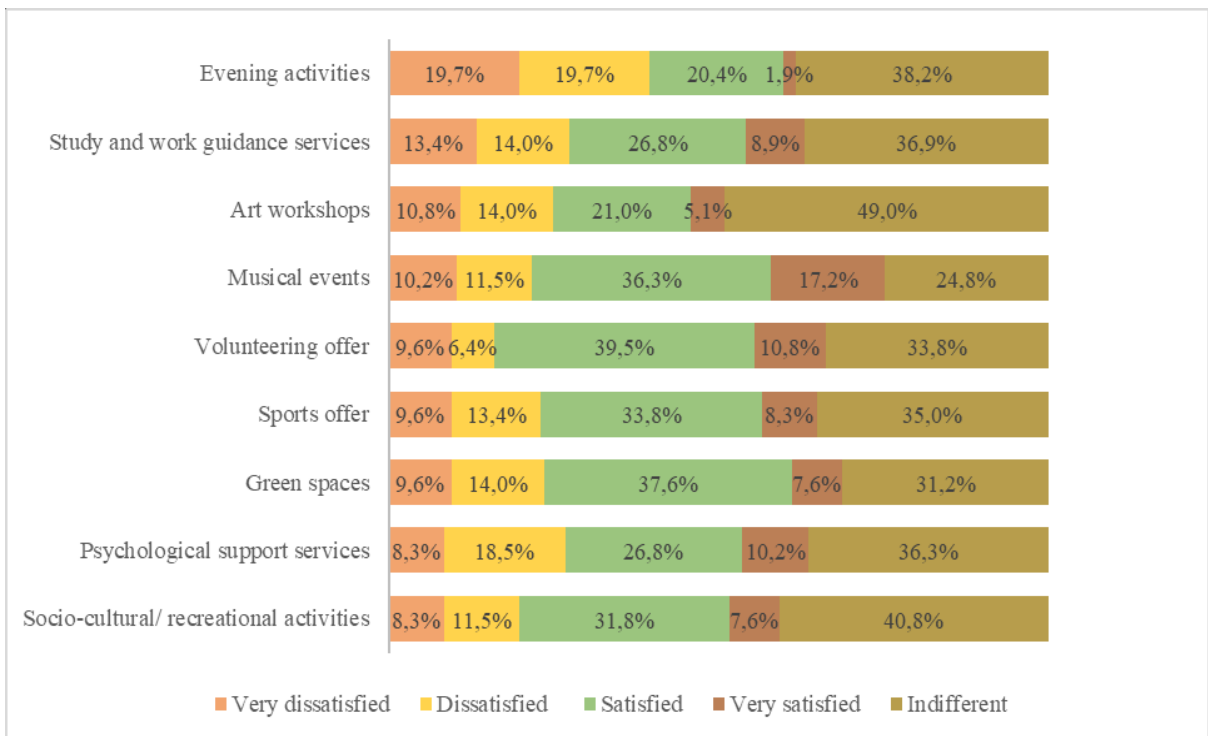


Figure 14: Degree of satisfaction with the services offered to young people in Moncalieri.

Regarding the evaluation in quantitative terms of the services dedicated to them, which were partly illustrated in the presentation of the case study in Chapter 2, the respondents answered whether the listed services were available in Moncalieri and whether they were adequate in quantity. In line with the positive level of satisfaction with music events, almost 40% stated that there are sufficient concerts and events in town. However, study rooms, evening entertainment venues, and school guidance services were considered to be insufficient in number. Additionally, approximately half or slightly less than half of the respondents were unaware of the existence of LGBTQI+ community counters, associations, clinics for eating disorders, and anti-violence counters for gender abuse. In general, a lack of knowledge about the spaces and services present in the area has been revealed: more than a third of the interviewees, in some cases almost half, stated their ignorance about the presence or absence of most of the services dedicated to the person, while at least 10% denied their existence.

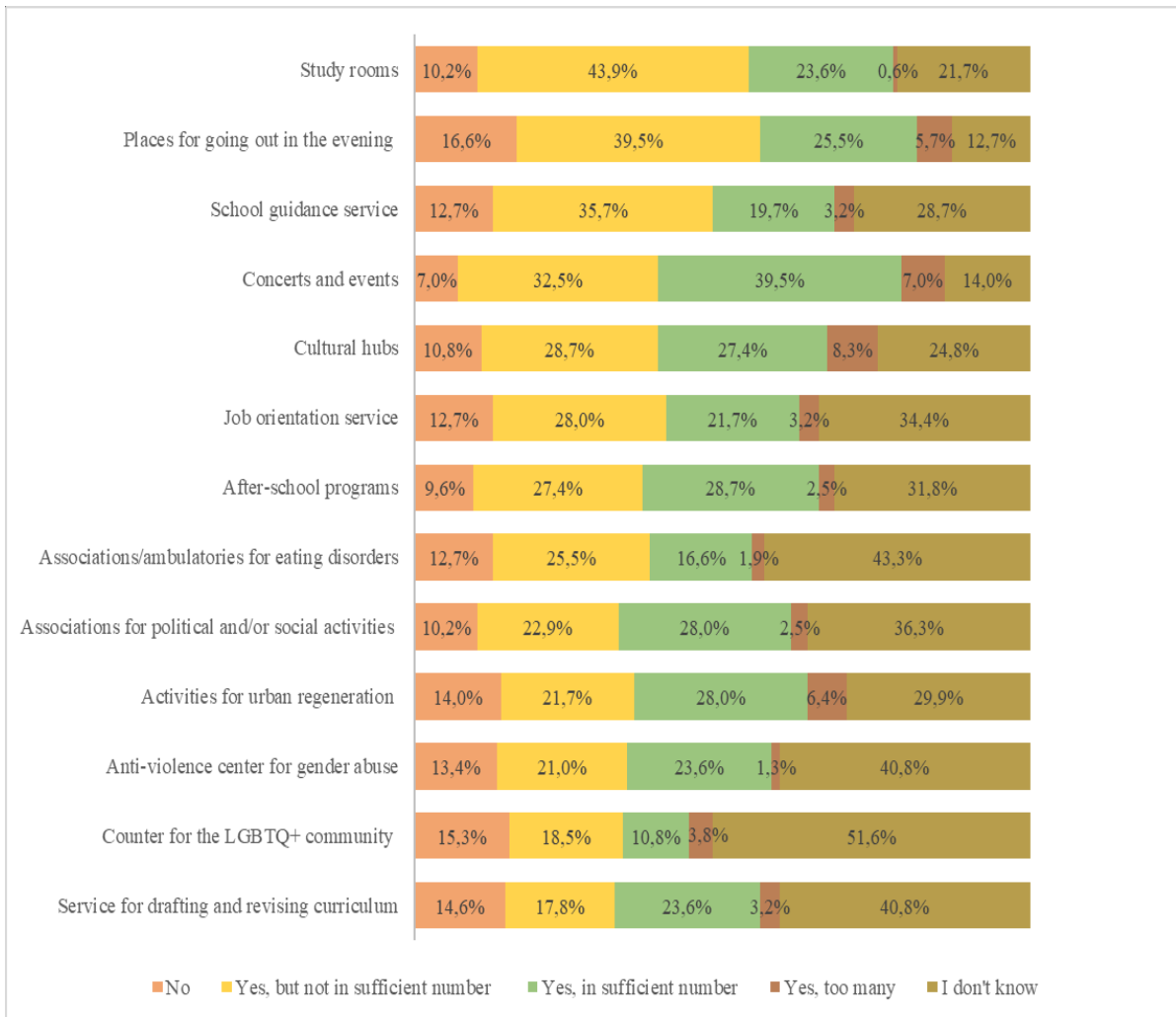


Figure 15: Numerical evaluation of services in Moncalieri.

In conclusion, the degree of satisfaction with life in Moncalieri was assessed, and a medium-high level was found.

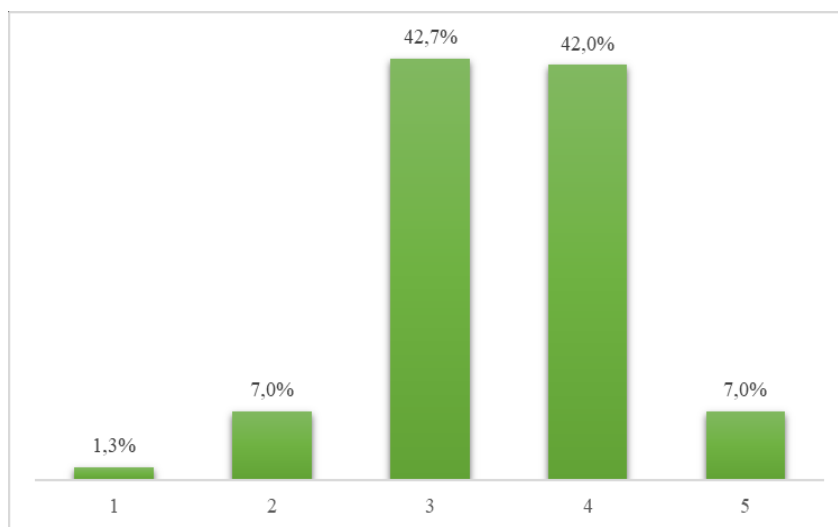


Figure 16: Degree of satisfaction with life in Moncalieri, where 1 = Very dissatisfied and 5 = Very satisfied.

## 4.2 Focus group

The focus group addressed the issue of youth policy, covering a wide range of topics, including how young people are portrayed in the Italian political framework, their engagement with politics, the main demands of the younger generation, and their degree of involvement in decision-making processes, referring both to the national and local context. The participants displayed a strong interest and engagement with the subject, requiring minimal prompting for responses. However, it was observed that the focus group participants predominantly viewed politics through a national lens despite efforts to anchor the discussion in the local context of Moncalieri.

Starting from their perception of the image that politics projected on them, what emerged in the first instance was the portrayal of young people as individuals without any motivation or purpose:

*"In my opinion, they give the idea that we don't want to do anything. There's always this idea that we don't want to do anything, we don't engage... So in my opinion this is the biggest image they have of young people, when on the contrary we live in a society that is difficult to live in".*

This perception was accompanied by the view of young individuals as troubled, vulnerable, and helpless. The majority of focus group participants endorsed this outlook. When discussing it, many of them expressed feelings of nervousness and disappointment regarding this representation.

*"Even the depiction, when we talk about young people, is always associated with the idea of the problem, that is 'Young people are sick' ... There is this idea that they suffer from something, they must all necessarily suffer from something that then becomes almost ... A mantra... If we talk about young people, we talk about the problems they have, the things they can't do ... It may be true in part, but it's not totally true because if there are people here who do things, who work, who study, etc., they are not all debilitated in their homes who can't go out as they are portrayed... I'm often more annoyed by this portrayal because it gives an image of us as if we were all ... I don't know... Whatever..."*

Another one added:

*"There is the image of the poor, poor people as if we were kind of helpless, yes".*

Two interviewees affirmed that, in their opinion, this perception of young people has evolved over time due to heightened political and media focus on the psychological and mental health dimension of people.

*"I agree, I think young people are now seen as too sensitive from the psychological sphere and I think it is wrong. There is simply a lot more emphasis being placed on mental health, which before was a topic that was also almost absent, not thought about... I have also been told several times: 'But yes, I've had these things too.... Did they happen to you? Don't worry, it goes away' as if everything was normal...But trying to be well is not negative... So, there is this opinion that now the more you go on, the more young people are too sensitive, they complain about everything. You simply try to be well and even now I think everyone wants to try to be able to work in a fair environment, without there being inequalities or problems."*

*"Times have simply changed, and perhaps, whereas in the past people tended not to see certain problems or to pretend that nothing was happening, today people are paying attention, perhaps even too much attention in some cases... However, it does not mean that a child has changed compared to before, a child didn't use to have fewer problems than now... These problems simply are now recognised while in the past they were not. "*

Only one participant recognised that there are current weaknesses among young people which, however, are completely overlooked in the context of political campaigns.

*"On a national level, I think there are two aspects: those of façade and those more related to reality. The facade ones, during elections, when you have to make propaganda anyway, the young people are instrumentalised concerning the future because they state that we have to dream, we have to have a broader perspective, lots of nice dreams by showing, already sampling those who perhaps have arrived, those who perhaps have had more possibilities and not seeing those who have more difficulties. And for them, this is the most comfortable reality to show. In their heads, I perceive the difficulty in understanding the generational change that has taken place and that is becoming more and more extensive with each year that goes by."*

Another participant shared the same idea of instrumentalization, pointing out the disparity between pre- and post-election propaganda while opposing the portrayal of young people as fragile individuals.

During the interview, another representation of young people emphasised by politicians emerged several times, namely that of young talent. All participants agreed that at the media

level and sometimes even in political discourse "there is a tendency to praise or focus on exceptional cases, such as those who manage to graduate in two years instead of five".

At the local level, there were no explicit references to images that local politicians use to represent young people but rather mentions of concrete actions carried out by the municipality of Moncalieri. The actions they reported suggested an intervention aimed at addressing social unease manifested in some areas of the city. The Polifunzionale Don P.G. Ferrero was taken as an example and it was mentioned as a very important reference pole for young people located on the outskirts of Moncalieri, in the Santa Maria district.

*"It is an area where generally, let's say, young people are left a bit to their own devices, so it was thought to do it to curb this uneasiness which is much higher there compared to the city centre".*

This action has been viewed positively by all participants as it enabled the Santa Maria neighbourhood to emancipate itself from marginalisation and shed the label of a ghetto area. They credited the current mayor for this transformation.

Shifting the focus to the relationship between young people and politics, the participants unanimously agreed that there is a lack of youth involvement in politics as well as a lack of interest. The causes they attributed to this phenomenon, however, were articulated in a scattered and confused manner. One respondent identified the decline in young people's political engagement to politics itself, stating:

*"Young people over time have lost the desire to participate in political activities because of politics itself because it is no longer credible".*

Another interviewee highlighted the issue of credibility, pinpointing the loss of faith not just in politicians' behaviour but also in the inconsistency or ineffectiveness between the promises made and the actual measures implemented.

*"You lose credibility when you say 'From September we cut all petrol taxes' but then it goes back to two euros again... is there credibility?"*

Regarding this issue, a participant expressed a similar sentiment, stating:

*"It is always all just words printed there, I mean I can think of the house bonus under forty and the mortgage, but then, in the end, there is nothing concrete..."*

Others in the discussion believed that there are other factors affecting young people's disinterest in politics, including social and cultural changes:

*"Nowadays there are other things that are more captivating [than politics] ... Since it is much more a society of spectacle, in my opinion, this spectacle is not hijacked on the political side but more on something else... Before, it seems to me, this showy dynamic, taken to extremes, was not as strong as it is now".*

Some argued that the neglect with which politics has dealt with youth issues over the years has significantly contributed to young people's disillusionment with politics:

*"It stems from not being considered for so long that young people say 'Eh then let them manage without us'... Today some people engage deeply in the political discourse proclaiming 'I want to do something', but others say 'I'll leave it alone because they don't do anything for me anyway'".*

Following this statement, another participant highlighted politicians' neglect of young people who lack exceptional talents. Drawing from personal experience, they cited the abolition of the Bonus 18app in 2024 and its replacement by two different cultural cards: the Youth Culture Card, accessible to student with an income below a certain threshold, and the Merit Card, granted only to students who pass their high school graduation examination with a grade of 100/cent.

*"Concerning the 100/cent grade requirement, I found it quite fair, because sometimes it's impossible for us to achieve that grade, partly because some professors don't give us the chance to get to a certain grade at the end of the year anyway... And it makes you feel a bit undervalued in certain aspects... I mean, on the one hand, maybe there's the one who says: 'Now I'm going to set myself the goal of getting there'.... Others, on the other hand, feel even more discouraged and say: 'Eh, I'm not up to it anyway, I don't deserve it, so I'll leave it alone...'".*

This topic sparked a brief discussion among participants on the value, and at the same time the limits, of meritocracy. Although it deviated the focus away from the main topic, this excursus brought out a certain sensitivity on the part of the participants to generational justice and the awareness of structural factors that can significantly undermine the meritocratic system, benefiting some individuals while disadvantaging others.

Focusing on youth policies in the local context of Moncalieri, one respondent shared their personal experience with local politics, stating:

*"Moncalieri is like everything apart and everything is done better... Compared to Turin... I also know how youth politics works in Turin and personally I don't like it... In Moncalieri I'm getting on well because there is for real a project that the councillor and the mayor are carrying out especially with young people, to make them grow and make them active citizens, but above all at the level of politics, because there are few young people, so if there is a lack of personnel it's a bit of a problem."*

Another interviewee highlighted the numerous initiatives aimed at young people, claiming that:

*"There are many spaces here supported by people, educators, and so on. For example, there are places where young people can come and be helped ... just find their place of aggregation for free and with professionals".*

Furthermore, one participant stressed the virtuosity in the social sphere in Moncalieri by drawing a comparison with Turin:

*"It's nice that they focus so much on social issues because I think it's so important nowadays, especially since we only communicate by digital means. In Turin, I notice this difference... here in Moncalieri they put a lot of effort into creating aggregation, getting together, creating a community... There, in Turin, for example, this aspect has been lost... There's not all this attention..."*

This perspective was echoed by another interviewee who did not question the greater number of opportunities Turin offers but pointed out that the size of the city hinders the management of services and makes activities and actions more dispersed. Nevertheless, this viewpoint was challenged by a participant who argued that Turin's issue lies not in mismanagement but in the lack of information and the reluctance of young people to seek out relevant information about the available services. This problem was also identified in Moncalieri. All respondents admitted that many of their peers are not aware of the several activities carried out by MoncalieriGiovani. Two interviewees referred to their personal experience, revealing that they learned about its initiatives by word of mouth and by subsequently taking part in one of their events. They noted:

*"There is a bit of misinformation, in the sense that if I don't go precisely to look for things I don't know..."*

However, in this regard, all present refrained from attributing this problem to inefficient or inadequate communication on the part of the office. Instead, they collectively agreed that the

participation of young people in local activities depends firstly on them and their own will, reporting the frequent occurrence of dynamics of victimisation and snobbishness.

*"Often there is the victimhood of 'there is never anything here'... But often there is something, but people don't even look for it... there is not even the slightest bit of curiosity."*

Another participant argued that each individual is in charge of taking initiative, even when supply is limited:

*"First, you have to be the first to be active and get active... Then if something is there, fine... If there is not, do something to change..."*

According to them, this discourse is not only limited to the simple enjoyment of local services and activities but concerns also political engagement:

*"In my opinion, this is also related to political activity, I mean, the desire of young people to get involved in politics... not only to get involved in politics but to do a lot of things... Maybe there is less courage to undertake something..."*

Therefore, the reluctance to engage themselves has been linked to young people's own perception as vulnerable, influenced by their personal beliefs, societal representations, and exposure to challenges and vulnerabilities. These challenges were identified mainly in insufficient financial support, including inadequate subsidies and high taxation, and in recommendations.

*"We were talking about meritocracy and we know that here in Italy there is none. Precisely knowing this, I am not incentivised to do something... If there is no meritocracy I can work as long as I want, but if there is the one who has had more economic possibilities or there is the 'I am the relative of' I a priori say to myself "What am I going to do? I am precluded from the beginning anyway"."*

Another statement indicated that:

*"If you talk about enterprise there is also the factor of taxation, of course... so there is something more than young people, there are various factors that come in and trigger new dynamics... Taxation in Italy is too high... If you do this business idea... it's not that the young person doesn't want to do it... The young person wants to do it and says 'yes, but I don't do it in Italy'".*

This claim concerning the lack of incentives for young people to stay in Italy was echoed by the personal experience of another participant who stated that:

*"In the future perspective, more than half of my class, consisting of 30 students, wants to leave Italy... and me too, eh, I want to leave... "*

The decision to leave primarily stems from the prospect of better university and job opportunities abroad compared to Italy, coupled with a feeling of not being adequately represented at the national level at the moment.

However, despite employment and economic issues seeming to emerge as factors of primary importance, the answers they reported about the demands of young people to politics, even at the local level, were of a different nature. In this case, the responses were very heterogeneous. They ranged from specific issues like mental health support and the need for spaces and activities for socialising, to more abstract desires such as a sense of certainty, especially concerning employment, and hope, recognised as a crucial motivating force in achieving personal goals.

The topic of mental health sparked considerable debate, pointing out some interesting findings. All participants acknowledged it as a topic of general interest for the younger generation, but they also felt it has received excessive attention and is handled in a heavy-handed manner.

*"I know that there is more demand [for psychological support], I feel that this desire is there... However, in my opinion, there is also so much the idea that we are all delicate and so this stuff of protect, protect one, protect the other no? What's that? It becomes something that is also detrimental to life, because you are not always protected; therefore, you also have to come up against what frightens you..."*

Despite the acknowledged importance of mental health, the participants displayed a lack of active engagement on the topic. An example they mentioned was *La Giornata del Benessere* organised by MoncalieriGiovane on 24th October 2023, dedicated to mental and physical health through workshops and conferences organised with the involvement of some young people. Those who attended the event noted a low level of participation compared to the expectations. Nevertheless, they attributed the cause not to the lack of interest in the topic, but rather to a lack of commitment on the part of young people to take concrete action for the cause. Furthermore, social dynamics and popularity, especially among younger individuals, were pointed out as factors that significantly influence their participation and engagement.

*"I notice that it's a subject that obviously affects everyone... We've also talked about it several times in class... But there's very much a popularity dynamic, in the sense, at least in my case, if there's no one who says 'Nice this initiative, should we go?' Nobody will go. If, on the other hand, there's only one person in your group who says: 'Oh, there's this thing...', people are more likely to go..."*

Similar dynamics have been recognised when considering the issue of climate change.

*"Everyone knows that it's a problem, that there are so many issues related to climate change but as far as my class is concerned, in the end I base my experience on that, like at the Fradays for future demonstrations no one goes unless justified by the school... no one wants to take the absence to go to the demonstrations..."*

Additionally, a further element increases the complexity of this matter, and it is linked to the perception that climate change is a phenomenon beyond individual control.

*"In my opinion, rather than mental health, this is the case where it is more of a fad... In the sense, there is more of a feeling of something that is so much bigger than us that therefore in our own small way we can do very little..."*

Finally, the conversation shifted towards the involvement of young people in political decision-making processes and the influence they can exert by expressing their opinions, both locally and nationally. One respondent pointed out that the current system does not effectively enable young people to be involved in politics, as it operates through the election of representatives. Participation is replaced by a relationship of trust between voters and representatives. This perspective was countered by a more critical viewpoint which argued that involving young people in decision-making processes is practically impossible. According to this view:

*"More than involvement, it is an attempt to make them believe that they are involved in other ways".*

In this regard, there were mentions of local initiatives attempting to engage young people in political discussions and familiarise them with the subject through projects and simulations. However, these activities often remained isolated events without tangible outcomes and, most importantly, without influencing actual decision-making processes.

The reasons provided for the limited involvement of young people in decision-making processes were attributed to adults' lack of trust in the youth due to their limited experience in

the field. Participants partly agreed with this adult perspective but also expressed a sense of disappointment. One participant stated:

*"But if you don't give yourself space how do you gain experience, I mean, it's a dog biting its own tail..."*

Furthermore, there was recognition of adults' presumption in thinking they know what young people want.

*"Young people don't get involved for the simple reason that those who are older have the arrogance to know what young people need even though they haven't lived through a period, the historical period of young people... Because they believe they have more experience, they know what others need... Which is right up to a certain point, because if you are a politician you should know what, who needs what, but they should listen more..."*

In this observation, the complexity of living in today's society and the older generations' limited understanding of the challenges faced by the youth becomes evident once again.

#### **4.3 Semi-structured interviews**

The individual interviews conducted with MoncalieriGiovane staff and the Councillor for Youth Policies revealed a consistent response to their proposed initiatives and a shared perspective on youth and politics. None of the interviewees declined to comment on specific issues. They were all cooperative and expressed their views as clearly as possible.

In general, what has emerged has been a prevalent critical stance toward the adult world and the segment of politics that portrays young people negatively, seldom acting as attentive listeners to their concerns. Additionally, all respondents reported the perception that young people today face more intricate challenges and obstacles than in the past and that the adult world is often blind to this precarious condition. They observe a society marked by individualism, hindering collective thinking and action. According to them, this form of individualism affects young people and the values they identify with, diverting their focus from their own needs and those of their peers.

During the interviews, the numerical minority of young people in Italy, including the local context of Moncalieri, was emphasised several times. It was identified as an additional barrier, making it challenging for young people to organise themselves effectively as a group and diminishing their political and social influence at the national and local levels.

Since the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, the order in which the macro-topics were addressed varied from interview to interview. In order to present the data clearly

and coherently, the information was then categorised into four macro-categories, corresponding to the themes outlined in Chapter 2.

#### *4.3.1 Institutions' portray of young people*

Starting from the representation that politics and the adult world make of young people, all the respondents have brought out the coexistence of several narratives. Among them, a dominant one was unanimously acknowledged, depicting young people as problematic and fragile, especially at the national and media level.

*"The media narrative portrays them as good-for-nothing, idlers, with few goals, with few methods, with few tools, with many misfortunes, with contexts that are not able to welcome them, with a deep frontal judgement against them."*

An exception to this narrative was noted in the case of young talents.

*"On the other hand, you find the young entrepreneur who succeeded against all odds."*

*"When do we talk about young people? When they constitute a problem. They don't get in the papers for anything else. Yes... maybe someone because they are the champion of a sport or because they have had some results somewhere but they are rare occasions."*

This reading of young people has been recognized as predominant among older adults and a segment of politics that does not engage with new generations but precisely with adult people contributing to confirming and feeding their prejudice.

Additionally, two other national narratives have been recognised. The first stigmatises them as active, funny, and carefree and it was strongly contested by the interviewee who reported it, claiming that:

*"It's an unrealistic narrative in my opinion and above all so discriminatory as its exact opposite... When you compare yourself with an equal person you do not put yourself in either of these two ways, it underlies the same idea of discrimination".*

The other narrative that was pointed out presents a paradoxical and contradictory representation, exemplified by the title *Youth: help us save the world*, used by the newspaper

*Avvenire* to summarise the interview with the Minister of the Environment Mr. Pichetto (*Avvenire*, October 2023):

*“Young people, help us’, that is, ‘young people, you’re not the ones who can do things on your own, you don’t count for anything, you can’t accomplish anything by yourself, so help us’. So, in this ‘help us’ the young person is relegated to an instrumental function compared to the adult... not as if they were considered the equal of an adult... no... ‘we are the ones who do the important things, you help us’... Then ‘to save the world’... Therefore they are also invested with a responsibility, and, I must say, very distressing, very anxiety-provoking for their function.... Moreover, several times we have employed young people who are a minority, who have fewer tools than adults... So ‘save the world’ seems a bit paradoxical to me.”*

The emphasis placed on the numerical minority implicitly reinforces the depiction of young people as precarious individuals to be protected. Although all the youth workers in the sector and the Councillor have shown a very proactive attitude towards young people, one of the respondents admitted that in the Third Sector, including MoncalieriGiovane, there is still a tendency to approach young people with a protective mindset, viewing them as a category in need of safeguarding. However, there is an awareness that this type of approach can have a negative impact on young people, including their drive for political participation.

*“What do you do when faced with the minority? Inclusion is promoted, hiring is promoted, integration is promoted, support is given, care is taken, and projects of various kinds are implemented... However, welfarism historically does not emancipate... And this means that belonging to a minority gives you difficulty because you are a subject who is not worth much, from the point of view of the weight you have, and above all relegates you to a condition of inferiority.”*

This statement, along with others that have been made, leaves room for a prevailing sentiment of concern, not necessarily for young people themselves, but for the complex and precarious reality that the new generations are compelled to face. Indeed, the personal experiences shared by youth workers concerning young people were overwhelmingly positive and stood in stark contrast to the prevalent narrative portraying them as problematic and inactive individuals. At the same time, they acknowledged that they find themselves facing significantly tougher challenges and "experiencing a period of instability as ordinary", as the following reflection expresses:

*“Young people find themselves in a situation in which they have fewer resources, especially economic ones because we are in a period of economic recession.... And therefore it is clear that this minority is also becoming a social minority, not just a numerical one... So it needs even more someone to protect it, or to carry forward its visions and its rights because otherwise our world is destined to end”.*

#### *4.3.2 Young people and politics*

Another issue discussed with all respondents was their perception of the relationship young people have with politics. One youth worker observed a profound disconnect between the two worlds, mainly due to disillusionment and distrust.

*“The relationship is terrible: partly due to the bad examples, from Tangentopoli<sup>14</sup> onwards... In general, citizens are deeply discouraged... When you understand that a person in whom you have to put your trust steals secretly... it's a speech so broad that you can't save anyone.”*

The other respondents offered different views. One argued:

*“If young people are put in a position to express their needs and if they find people available to listen to them, if they find containers, activities, realities in which they can spend their time, they do not have any problem doing so”.*

Another respondent acknowledged a genuine political commitment among young people, albeit in different forms and variations than in the past:

*“There is a different translation of political engagement... how to say... what I seem to see is that politics is more expressed as activism from the point of view of human rights, environment... [...] I see many young people who are committed to changing the things they don't want... In different ways, in ways that are certainly much more specialised than before, perhaps because... more people study, it's a more specific training... therefore more specific skills are available”.*

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<sup>14</sup> Tangentopoli denotes a series of investigations initiated in Italy from 1992 onward. These investigations exposed a pervasive system of corruption and bribery that implicated nearly all major political parties of the era and part of the national business community (Il Post, February 2022).

In support of this statement, the wide participation of young people at the Young People's Table of the *Chiedimi se sono felice* project has been taken as an example.

*"We called a young table on psychophysical well-being and 35 young people responded, with 20 attending... I mean, it's a measure of how much they are involved. Then it is difficult to maintain maybe a continuity... it is difficult to maintain a commitment for the long term... It is also true, but I don't think that guys are less committed than before, it's just that the conception of politics has changed a little".*

The voice of the Councillor acted as a glue to these three testimonies. He highlighted that young people may not openly express interest in politics due to a prevalent prejudice against them since politics has historically dealt with them as if they were problematic entities or ignored them completely. Therefore, he argued that:

*"Young people do politics, but they don't know they are doing politics. In fact, I perceive, and the data also says so, that there is a great tension among them towards others... and it can become a form of voluntary activity, of associations, of commitment to some houses... Think of the environmental ones, think of commitment within the institute representation. In my opinion, the commitment is growing on that... It is not considered political even though it often is... There is a tendency to be afraid at times to define oneself, to take sides, to take a position... This is something I perceive."*

#### *4.3.3 Youth participation in politics and their demands*

Closely related to the issue of the relationship between youth and politics was the question of young people's participation in political issues and decision-making. On this topic, the responses were widely heterogeneous, providing a diverse perspective on the factors influencing this process.

One significant obstacle identified was young people's lack of awareness of their collective identity and their potential as a unified group advocating for their rights.

*"Young people today do not recognize themselves as a group that represents demands for rights, for instance. [...] Young people make much more effort than the elderly to recognize themselves so and therefore they also have more difficulty in recognizing that this is a necessity... [...] If they get together and try to assert their belonging to a group that maybe is*

*formed there, and that maybe becomes a subject, this is a guarantee of seeing perhaps more recognized at the political level, decision, this type of request".*

This problem can be accompanied by the tendency by young people to organise themselves in a "less structured to intervene in a closed process", as pointed out by another youth worker, and the numerical factor that disadvantages their effectiveness in the political arena.

One more obstacle was recognised in the political dynamics of power and the lack of reference points to which young people can turn to give voice to their demands. A respondent stated that:

*"If they do not do so it is because perhaps our society does not confront them with the awareness that a politician can take on a battle, a right to obtain, a motion to be carried forward."*

Additionally, problems within the political machinery that should facilitate youth participation have been identified. The Councillor acknowledged two major limitations: the lack of political will to genuinely include young people in decision-making processes and outdated methods of involvement. According to him, efforts should be made to involve young people in their less formalised, more natural states, preserving their perspectives and objectives. This process must take place in a sincere and effective manner and not be exploited. These considerations aligned with the two modalities identified by a youth worker for engaging young people:

*"Let's say that there are two ways to involve them: starting from what they say and trying to give legs to their projects, their ideas, the things they want to concentrate on, on which they want to work... Or searching in a little sneaky way to let young people know what their goals are and tell them 'but let's work on it together'... And this is a method that can work in some respects, but which does not give young people a voice, as these types of initiatives are often sold ".*

Nevertheless, even though all respondents demonstrated awareness of the importance of involving young people in decision-making in the most genuine way, practical implementation was deemed challenging. Indeed, one youth worker admitted:

*"As Third Sector, as an institution, as well as the municipality, we tell ourselves many times to involve young people in the moment of planning, of ideation... Then in the end perhaps we don't let go so much... it's still difficult to do so... We are still in the moment where we tell ourselves what our good intentions are but then we still struggle to put them into practice. [...] Both*

*because young people are perceived as too vulnerable and because the adult doesn't want to give up control for fear that the young person might make a mistake so 'who knows where you'll take me if you guide me'. However, this denotes a lack of trust."*

The lack of trust was repeatedly cited in the context of the adult world's failure to listen to the voices of young people.

*"We talk and we want them to listen, but we don't build the moments when we adults listen to them. Even institutions, even when they are very present, hardly have contexts in which young people are heard, so it is clear that if we do not listen, we cannot understand their point of view, but if we do not understand the point of view we cannot also see their strengths and therefore do not give confidence".*

Not by chance, listening was unanimously identified as the main request from young people. One youth worker associated listening with their desire to “*have a space to exist on a political level*”, where to express themselves without being exploited. This vision was accompanied by that of the Councillor who instead emphasised the request for non-judgmental listening and support in recognising their paths.

Listening was recognized as fundamentally important by all respondents because they perceive a lack of clarity among young people about their aspirations, objectives, and desires, which contributes to hinder their effective participation in political decisions.

*"Every time I asked young people what they needed the answers were identical, in different years and different places: the swimming pool, the disco, a place to be [...]. Is this what citizens really need? Is this what young people really need? I don't want to fall into the mistake of saying that the young person is not capable of interpreting his own needs. Nor the adult. This is why we need people who do this job".*

Another youth worker stated that:

*"I feel that there is a real difficulty in achieving what they want, but in my opinion, it is due to the fact that young people in their twenties are constitutionally messed up and don't really know how to ground them. However, when there is a figure who helps you in that thing... That is: 'If you have ideas, I help you bring them out, I help you ground them, make them concrete'".*

These reflections emphasised the fundamental importance of external support able to guide them in this process of growth and creation.

As far as thematic demands are concerned, none has been identified, except for the issue of mental health, considered a significant concern among the new generations.

#### *4.3.4 Moncalieri's local approach*

Faced with the issues discussed and the problems identified, the Councillor for Youth Policies and the Moncalieri Youth Office have implemented a clear and defined strategy to address the needs of the new generations.

Primarily, the central action around which all others revolve is ensuring an active and continuous presence in the territory.

*"Living in the same spaces, living the same moments... So, be in touch if nothing else, and that's something already... I think we do it here in Moncalieri quite a lot... Getting in touch with young people, partly also for some projects, some moments, even creating opportunities to seek their opinions. There is still some work to be done because this is an ongoing process... It is not a one-time effort, but you have to repeat it, repeat it, repeat it".*

The presence in the community is not solely the responsibility of sector youth workers but also extends to the active involvement of the Councillor himself, which actually occurs. One of the youth workers reported that:

*"We have a Councillor who tries to be a point of reference, tries to be present as much as possible".*

He also noted that young people often react with astonishment and disbelief when they meet him, primarily due to the Councillor's relatively young age and the rarity of encountering an institutional figure genuinely interested in their concerns.

*"When these occasions arise where maybe it's the first time the kids meet the Councillor, they are a little surprised by the fact that there is a politician who in our case is young compared to the rest, compared to the standard, because he is 34 years old, 35 years old... But this has also been happening for years since he was 28, 29 years old... That there is a young politician who is available to listen to them and give importance to what they say. We often realise that this thing is perceived by them as something absolutely extraordinary, that is, that it has never*

*happened in their lives before that moment and perhaps that it contradicts the narrative of politics that they have always heard.*

Another youth worker, who works with other municipalities, argued that:

*"Here in Moncalieri the Youth Office is very strong, very present... And we are quite recognizable, although we could do much better, but we are quite recognizable... We are a bit of a junction between that level of high and formal politics and that more informal and less structured level of young people... In many places this does not happen, especially in smaller municipalities. Moncalieri is a municipality of the province but very large... In small municipalities there is not a mediator who approaches this high and this low we were talking about. [...] I read MoncalieriGiovane as a hub of this type, in the sense that it approaches different levels, helps young people in the realisation of things, so it accompanies them and also helps them a little to become a bit what they would like to be, in the sense that one of the missions of MoncalieriGiovane is for example to help young people who want to do things to become maybe associations, or groups of other".*

The presence on the territory is then declined in the proposal and implementation of many activities differentiated by age groups. The youth group to which they refer starts from those who still attend middle school, then from the age of 12-13 years. The reason, they explained, lies in the "precocity compared to some dynamics of adolescence" and to establish connections and familiarity early on, facilitating a smooth transition for the young participants. As reported by the Councillor, the differentiation in activities is carefully planned, following a clear and strategic logic, all geared toward a comprehensive, long-term educational approach.

*"We do this by imagining interventions that have a different level of involvement defined as low-threshold activities which can be simply extemporaneous aggregation activities which however serve the kids to learn that there are different possibilities ... They perhaps last for a limited period, they are more occasional, but they allow them to enter a circuit, to learn about a series of realities linked to our MoncalieriGiovane office and opportunities, and often we carry them forward over time... Some activities instead require greater involvement, therefore not only of a passive subject who for example joins a laboratory, an activity, but who in its development becomes a tutor of an action and therefore also takes on a more operational responsibility or sharing the objectives that are established with the activity... And others where in reality you also try to co-plan actions... So, we have imagined at least four types of levels*

*because they therefore adapt to the type of age group. Then obviously they are different from each other in the sense of the type of actions we imagine for high schools, university students who are already entering the world of work..."*

The targeted age range for most activities is from 14 to 20 years, although efforts extend up to 28-30 years. The primary focus on the younger demographic (14-20 years) is attributed to their greater flexibility and susceptibility, coupled with a common sense of confusion and disorientation. The need for a stable reference point during these formative years is crucial. Engaging individuals between 25-30 years, especially in a smaller town like Moncalieri, proves challenging due to the allure of nearby Turin.

*"It is not easy to hook up guys more towards 28, let's say so 25-30, because being a small town that still suffers the charm of Turin... Young people, many, at that age they are no longer in Moncalieri".*

Returning to how the actions are elaborated and carried out, the Councillor reported the experience of the *Chiedimi se sono felice* project.

*"I think of the very recent path we have taken on the theme of mental health, a theme that was born in reality from the listening of young people, which has produced policies... I think of the psychological counter and what was 'La Giornata del benessere', at the discussion table... then it comes from listening, it becomes a need that is understood to be, say, common, therefore not only single, and produces the fact that we tried to engage the guys in organising an appointment and organise an initiative and imagine together even those that may be therefore the policies on the territory... this in my opinion is a type of model that has in fact found a great, a good answer, and that we continue to attend".*

The intent highlighted by the Councillor and a youth worker is to somehow stimulate awareness among young people of shared generational needs and to build together with them policies that respond to these needs.

However, it was unanimously agreed that these actions can practically be implemented only at the local level. The main reasons have been attributed I) to the physical proximity that facilitates direct interactions with citizens and II) to the direct and immediate impact of the promoted measures on the local population. These two factors were recognised as fundamental

instruments to establish a dialogue with young people and to dispel their prejudices about a political system that seems indifferent to their concerns.

Nevertheless, it was recognized that the difference lies in the individual politician and the type of role they choose to embody.

*"In the end, the difference is made by people themselves; merely being a local politician is not enough. One must have a vision that aligns with what the citizens have, be available for comparison, be open to dialogue, and be willing to work in the direction of making the public interest and not their own, even when perhaps the public interest does not coincide perfectly with what one's personal vision is".*

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

The findings from both the focus group and individual interviews with youth workers and the Councillor revealed a considerable affinity of opinions and impressions regarding the topic addressed. This alignment indicates a certain level of awareness among local institutions in Moncalieri, particularly those dealing with young people, regarding the current political, economic, and social landscape that the new generations are navigating.

During all the interviews, a notable influence of the national framework was identified in the perceptions inherent to the local context, thus denoting the impactful role of national-level political and media discourse on the local experience.

To structure the discussion of the results, this chapter mirrors the organisation of the themes addressed in the introductory chapter. The first section analyses the results by relating them to the literature presented in Chapter 2, focusing on the relationship between young people and politics predominantly at a national level. The second section delves into results specifically relevant to the case of Moncalieri, offering insights for local authorities. The final part addresses the limitations of the current study, and it suggests areas for future research.

#### 5.1 Comparing results with existing literature

One of the first topics that were addressed in the introductory chapter referred to the types of narratives that politics has often foisted on young people and how these portrayals influence the approach used by institutions to deal with youth. In exploring this aspect, the study delved into the perceptions of the interviewees—both the young individuals in the focus group and the youth workers—regarding the prevalent representation of young people in Italy at both the national and local levels. The unanimous consensus within both groups identified the dominant portrayal as that of vulnerable and defenceless individuals in need of protection. The exceptions to this narrative were recognised in the rare instances of celebrating highly talented young individuals, such as those who excel academically or in sports. The perception of the coexistence of these two perspectives confirms the polarisation of representations previously identified by Narina and colleagues in 2006 and then reaffirmed by Wallace and Bendit in 2009. Moreover, it validates the analysis of the institutional youth programmes carried out in the literature review. Both narratives align with two of the four representations of young people

detected by Mazzoni and colleagues (2019) in the comparative analysis of Italian institutional texts published between 2012 and 2016, those of young people as vulnerable and as talented. The focus group participants expressed opposition to both representations. According to them, the tendency to celebrate talent, often through incentives like the Merit Card, carries the risk of creating economic and social disparities among peers and fostering a sense of frustration among those unable to achieve similar results. Concurrently, they expressed strong hostility to the portrayal of young individuals as fragile. Despite the unanimous acknowledgment that young people are currently facing increased vulnerability and challenges, all of them refused the reading of young people as debilitated and helpless. Many attributed this narrative to an excessive focus on the mental health of young people and to the adult world's belief that the new generations are more psychologically vulnerable than in the past. The focus group participants found this narrative problematic, suggesting that it could be counterproductive and have adverse effects on young people's self-esteem. From the testimonies collected during the focus group and also from individual ones, a greater sensitivity on the part of young people on the issue of mental well-being emerged but not so much related to greater discomfort on their part, but rather linked to a higher awareness of the importance of cultivating the own individual well-being. This awareness and sensitivity were also revealed by the results of the questionnaire, with 80% of respondents agreeing that measures should be implemented to encourage greater psychological support for young people. However, the heightened awareness of this topic is not meant to be misconstrued as an expression of increased vulnerability but rather as greater attention to personal psychophysical well-being. The frustration that emerged from the young interviewees in reporting these two types of representations and in not feeling adequately represented by neither of them highlights an institutional limitation resulting in the exclusion or marginalisation of that “intermediate” category of young people who are neither problematic nor fragile nor promising as Karen Nairin reported in 2006.

Even the youth workers and the Councillor declared to diverge from the conception of young people as fragile and vulnerable. However, as one of the interviewees stated, they are not always successful in practising what they say, and they often carry out actions that follow the Italian welfare-oriented tendency to remedy or prevent specific high-risk situations. The focus group participants implicitly supported this evidence by discussing activities at the Don PG Ferrero centre and noting that many of Moncalieri Giovane's initiatives are concentrated there, an area where young people often find themselves in challenging situations.

Nevertheless, the interviewees collectively emphasised the need for a different, more proactive perspective. Indeed, the narrative that is missing is precisely that of young people as a resource, as was highlighted in the work of Mazzoni and colleagues in 2018. Despite regional legislative

text on youth policies expressing clearly that the Piedmont Region "recognises the young generations as the wealth of the territory and as a fundamental resource of the community", this narrative struggle to materialise in concrete terms and consequently to be perceived by those directly concerned.

However, as already mentioned, both in the focus group and individual interviews, there was a recurring acknowledgment of the perception that young people are navigating a more intricate and precarious historical period compared to the past, requiring additional support. The questionnaire results strongly affirmed this view, with a majority of respondents expressing strong disagreement with the notion that young people have better prospects than previous generations. This figure aligns with Censis data from 2022, where 68.6% of individuals aged 16 to 29 believed that the era where children had better prospects than their parents had is over. Concerning the relationship between young people and politics, a sense of detachment and disenchantment with formal and party-oriented politics was apparent. However, it was also detected the emergence of alternative ways of engaging in politics that deviate from traditional models. While the focus group participants indicated a perceived disinterest in politics among them and their peers, their active participation in the interview, along with their expressed personal interests and those of their friends as well as their need and desire to express themselves revealed a heightened sensitivity to current issues and to the way they are addressed and communicated. Even during the individual interviews with the youth workers and the Councillor, the perception of a certain activism on the part of young people for some contemporary issues emerged. This activism, however, takes shape differently than in the past. It is manifested in unconventional, mainly informal, and unstructured ways, resisting classification within specific political movements (Harris, Wyn, Younes, 2010). Nevertheless, these new forms of actions and organisations struggle to find space and recognition within traditional institutional politics. This factor contributes to the majority of interviewees from both groups expressing a significant lack of interest on the part of young people towards politics, aligning with ISTAT data for 2022. During the interviews, other reasons for this phenomenon were identified, confirming and enriching those discussed in Chapter 2. At the end of the '90s and beginning of the 2000s, studies highlighted that young people were disinterested in politics because they had the perception that politics did not have consequences for them and was not relevant to their lives (Eliasoph, 1998; Henn et al., 2002). Two decades later, this observation remains valid in many of the accounts collected in this research. One of the main causes of young people's disengagement from politics has been traced back to the impression that politics does not address or communicate with them. Consequently, young people direct their energies and interests towards other fields and alternative avenues. The

perception that politics should pay more attention to young people also emerged from the results of the questionnaire in which more than two thirds of the respondents agreed that young people would need more support from institutions. The lack of support, both in terms of opportunities and economic assistance, has been identified as a significant barrier to the initiative of young people. Simultaneously, it was recognised as an incentive for them to seek their own professional and social dimensions outside Italy. This remark aligns with one of the priority actions reported in the 2024 National Plan of the National Youth Council. According to the programme, politics should prioritise youth issues to restore their confidence in a better future and to diminish economic and social inequalities, thereby fostering comprehensive development (National Youth Council, 2023).

Another decisive factor that contributes to the disaffection of young people from politics, in addition to those identified in the analysed literature, has been recognised in the lack of credibility of politics today. Specifically, one of the youth workers attributed the genesis of this phenomenon to the events of Tangentopoli. This issue is compounded by the perception of young people being instrumentalized during electoral campaigns. According to the interviewees, young people are often cited as fundamental resources for the country during electoral rallies, with claims that it is essential to invest in them. However, once the voting concludes, this investment is ultimately not made and young people are forgotten throughout the mandate. Nevertheless, a contradiction implicitly emerges in these statements, and it was not possible to clarify it during the interviews. Therefore, it necessitates the formulation of a series of hypotheses and interpretations. Starting from the assumption that all interviewees, both young people and social workers and Councillors, repeatedly emphasised that young people, as a numerical minority, have negligible political weight compared to the rest of the population, aligning with the position of Ambrosi and Rosina (2009), two interpretative scenarios might be possible. The first scenario would challenge the notion that the numerical minority of young people implies less political relevance by asserting that the promises made to young people during electoral rallies aim to attract the votes of the specific segment of the population to which they refer. The second scenario, which seems more plausible, would partially contradict the adult depiction of young people as problematic and fragile perceived by the interviewees. The instrumental function of young people during the electoral period could be geared towards capturing the attention not so much of young people themselves but of a portion of the population that likely rejects the narrative portraying young people as vulnerable and needy, instead considering them a resource for the country. If this interpretation were true, it implies that in the adult world, there exists a representation different from the one recognised by the interviewees, falling into the last of the four categories developed by Mazzoni and

colleagues, that of resource. However, this narrative would remain manifest only in the context of the electoral campaign and would not then find concreteness in the measures and initiatives then implemented.

Nevertheless, this slight inconsistency in positions does not diminish the unanimous sentiment expressed by the focus group interviews of not feeling represented at a political level aligning with the 2022 Censis data, according to which 69% of young Italians declared that politics currently does not represent them.

The theme of representation also emerged in relation to the issue of youth participation in political decision-making processes. The representative model, based on a relationship of trust, has been acknowledged as a necessary element for the functioning of the political machinery, but, in certain cases, it limits the active involvement of the new generations in political debate. Indeed, on this subject, the focus group participants displayed criticism to some extent, even toward the municipality of Moncalieri. Their accounts highlighted the insufficient efforts to actively engage young people in political decisions, confirming one of the most significant shortcomings in Italian youth policies. Aligned with the testimony of a youth worker, one of the most impactful reasons for the limited engagement of young people in politics was attributed to the adult world's perception of the lack of experience of the new generations. The young people interviewed seemed to partially concur with this notion supporting the claim that the experience of young people is often immature, representing a significant limitation to the relevance and impact of their political actions. This shared account might partly support the findings reported by the study conducted by Malafaia and colleagues (2021), which demonstrated the tendency of young people to internalise the typical adult perspective that they lack sufficient experience or knowledge to be involved in political discourse. Nevertheless, a further explanation has been provided and it stems from the belief held by politicians and adults in general that they know or can interpret the needs of young people adequately and therefore that they can represent them without the need for their direct involvement. This insight was reported both by participants in the focus group and by some involved youth workers and the Councillor. However, the latter have also highlighted that the young people with whom they interact often do not have sufficient or adequate tools to structure a request or proposal accurately. This difficulty was partly encountered during the focus group, where participants struggled to identify their own and their peers' needs. The answers that were provided mostly reflected individual needs. The main causes that have been recognised as responsible for this difficulty have been given by the youth workers interviewed and they are mainly two, one intrinsic to young people and the other extrinsic. The first cause has been traced back to the internalisation of the distinctive individualism of contemporary society and the inability of

young people to perceive themselves as a group with common demands. The second cause has been recognised in the complexity of contemporary issues and the lack of reference points and reassurance. Consequently, the often-unspoken request from young people for listening, support, and a space in which to exist politically emerged as a unanimous need. This space would allow them to express and clarify their needs and collaboratively construct valid solutions for new generations with institutional reference figures.

However, in none of the individual interviews, and especially in the group interview, did any other significant priorities emerge for young people, comparable to those outlined in the 2024 National Plan by the National Youth Council.

## **5.2 Implications of the findings for Moncalieri's local authorities**

Shifting the focus to the local context, the efforts of the municipality of Moncalieri in terms of youth policies received generally positive feedback both in interviews and questionnaires. The youth workers and the Councillor for Youth Policies have declared that their action is aimed at guaranteeing a physical presence in the area and providing support and listening to all the young people who turn to them. This intent is in line with what has characterised the proximity and promotional actions of local authorities and the third sector in the field of youth policies since the 1980s. The effort to put this purpose into practice was recognised as Moncalieri's strength by the focus group interviewed. The availability of free access to professional educators and the provision of spaces for fostering socialisation, community, and a sense of belonging were acknowledged as valuable services, not always easily found in other cities, such as Turin. Before delving into the discussion, it is important to highlight that Turin was surprisingly mentioned a few times during the interviews, almost as if it were a well-separate urban centre from Moncalieri, despite the nearly imperceptible border between the two cities. Moreover, the interviewees of the two groups presented two contrasting perspectives on the city. On one hand, the youth workers acknowledged Turin as a significant attraction for young people, especially those over 20, given its larger size and the array of opportunities, particularly in terms of university offerings, compared to what Moncalieri can provide. On the other hand, participants in the focus group regarded Turin as too dispersed, making it challenging to sense the level of community and social cohesion that they identify in Moncalieri.

Nevertheless, turning back to Moncalieri, the perception of numerous spaces, activities, and services expressed by the focus group did not entirely align with the questionnaire results. Despite respondents indicating a medium-high level of quality of life in Moncalieri, the utilisation of services and activities revealed some critical issues. Some of these issues had

already surfaced in the 2016 research conducted by MoncalieriGiovane, revealing a lack of awareness among young people about the services aimed at them on the territory. However, the study did not comprehensively explore satisfaction or their quantitative perception of these services. Therefore, the questionnaire results analysed for the current research can offer additional insights. Apart from the notable indifference toward artistic and socio-cultural activities, it was detected a significant dissatisfaction with the offerings for evening outings. Interestingly, the youth workers were already aware of this complaint before the survey. During one of the individual interviews, it was highlighted that young people in Moncalieri had been consistently requesting a greater variety of options for evening entertainment over time. Over the years, Moncalieri has attempted to address the demand for varied evening entertainment by organising events and concerts specifically addressed to the youth target, such as the Ritmika music festival or the Club Silencio event. Despite these efforts, the recurring of this request suggests to youth workers that it is somewhat for its own sake. Instead, what local institutions should pay closer attention to is the availability of study rooms and school orientation services. Indeed, a significant part of interviewees, almost half, considered these services to be absent or insufficient in number. This insight gains further significance when considering that over 80% of questionnaire respondents are students, with almost three-quarters still attending high school. Study rooms and orientation services are essential for young people and are services that the majority of them either use or would use. In contrast, this line of thinking can't be entirely applied to more specialised services addressing specific issues, such as those related to eating disorders, anti-violence centres, or the LGBTQ+ community. Given their specific nature, fewer young people may need to use these services, explaining the higher likelihood of "don't know" responses in this category. One factor contributing to the ignorance of citizens, in this particular case of young people, about local offerings has been traced to misinformation. During the focus group, it was revealed that many of the activities organised by MoncalieriGiovane are often unknown to their peers. Some participants mentioned that they would not have been aware of these initiatives if not for word of mouth, highlighting a visibility problem. However, interviewees attributed the cause of misinformation not to the Moncalieri youth office's inability to promote its services but rather to the lack of curiosity and dynamism among young people to discover territorial offers and participate in the city's activities. This observation was partially supported by questionnaire results, particularly in responses regarding the commitment of young people to personal fulfilment and contributing to the well-being of their city. A critical response, especially among those over 20, was given suggesting a consensus that young people should intensify their efforts in building their own future and actively engaging in the political and social life of their city. The lack of dynamism among young people was mainly attributed

to two factors. Firstly, the internalisation of the social representation of young people as fragile and vulnerable, perceiving themselves as individuals incapable of becoming proactive citizens. Secondly, the absence of effective support from institutions, as discussed earlier. These two factors partly align with the findings of Malafaia and colleagues (2021) from the focus groups in their studies. They reported that interviewed young people associated the lack of youth activism with underlying demotivation, negligence, and a lack of responsibility. This correspondence in results would suggest that the issue is not confined to the Italian context, but it also affects other countries, as the referenced research was conducted in Porto, Portugal. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that these two causes identified by the focus groups of this research pertained also to the national dimension, not only to the local context of Moncalieri. Returning to the local scale and examining the actions implemented by the Moncalieri Giovane Office, it must be highlighted that the activities primarily target individuals under 20. Although there is an attempt to reach the entire demographic for which youth policies are intended, the initiatives aimed at those over 20, primarily related to employment support and co-planning actions, are executed on a much smaller scale than those involving individuals under 20. In an individual interview, the challenge of including age groups over 25 was acknowledged, as their autonomy at that age makes it challenging to engage them. This observation relates to a key challenge in youth policies, namely the breadth and considerable heterogeneity of the targeted demographic. Additionally, it draws an interesting parallel, as the maximum age of young people deemed capable of involvement aligns with the defined age limit for youth by the United Nations. Although the scope and focus of this research did not allow for the development of hypotheses regarding the most appropriate age group for inclusion in youth policies, the difficulty of implementing effective measures and actions for such a broad demographic emerged clearly.

Shifting the focus to the relationship between young people and local institutions, the narratives convey a generally positive sentiment. Considering the 2022 Censis data - with more than two-thirds of the population between 18 and 36 years old expressing the urgent need for a generational change in seats of power - the Municipality of Moncalieri's commitment to involve young people in its political objectives is certainly advantageous. Additionally, the Councillor for Youth Policies' young age adds value, representing an exception in Italy. Indeed, his age places him among the 2783 municipal councillors in Italy under 35, constituting 13.5% of the total (Censis, 2022). Moreover, the efforts to be actively present and engaged in initiatives concerning the young people of the town further contribute to this positive image. However, it was acknowledged by the interviewed youth workers that the effectiveness, successful implementation of actions, and the performance of youth policies significantly depend on the

person holding that role. This observation aligns with the statement made by the President of the NYC, Maria Pisani, who noted that fruitful dialogue with institutions is closely tied to the sensitivity and responsiveness of individual authorities (Il Mattino, October 2022). Due to the absence of a consultation mechanism and mandatory participation, the degree to which young people are heard and involved in political processes depends on the individual politician's sensitivity (*Ibid.*). In the case of Moncalieri, the reactivity and response are notably positive compared to other municipalities, but lack of systematisation and structure risks decline once the current municipal council's mandate expires.

However, as mentioned in the previous section, a significant challenge has been recognised in the influence of young people and their demands on local decision-making processes. During the focus group, there was a perception of an absence of this process. While the institutions, especially the Councillor, were acknowledged for their efforts in actively listening to the ideas and requests of young people, doubts were raised about the actual realisation of these demands in terms of initiatives, activities, and projects.

Additionally, a divergence in perspectives was noted between the youth workers and the Councillor on one side and the young people interviewed on the other, specifically regarding *La Giornata del Benessere*. The testimonies from these two groups revealed conflicting views on the effectiveness of the activity. According to the young people, *La Giornata del Benessere* did not achieve the desired success. Although mental health was recognised as a common interest among young people, the interviewees emphasised the importance of distinguishing between interest and concrete activism, implicitly suggesting to local institutions the need for different methods of engagement. Conversely, the Councillor and youth workers viewed the initiative as a successful action with the active involvement of young people and an effective impact on present and future political programmatic lines. These different interpretations can give rise to various explanations, which however cannot be supported by the data collected for this study.

Regardless, these divergences in perspectives and the limited level of youth involvement can be more easily overcome at the local scale. As highlighted in some individual interviews and partially in the literature, local institutions possess numerous tools to initiate a meaningful dialogue with the local youth and facilitate the exploration of diverse perspectives, as in this instance, attempting to find common ground between them. In the case of Moncalieri, the intention to listen to young people and work for their interests is evident, akin to the ethos that has driven the third sector and local authorities since the 1980s in the youth sector (Grassi, 2009). Therefore, there is the potential to establish an effective mechanism for involving young

people in the local political debate, ensuring the tangible realisation of their ideas and requests when it is feasible.

### **5.3 Study limitations and future directions**

Based on the results obtained from the research and the preceding discussion, several critical issues and potential directions for future research have been identified.

Firstly, the interviews, both individual and group sessions, revealed a certain difficulty in delving deeper into local context topics. This challenge may have arisen due to the fact the questions addressed broad issues which led the interviewees to speak in general terms and with little context to the local dimension of Moncalieri.

Concerning the questionnaire, in addition to the limitations already discussed in the Methodology and Research Methods section of Chapter 3, a further critical issue was identified in the formulation of questions, hindering exhaustive data collection. Specifically, a lack of perfect symmetry in the questions about young people's satisfaction with city activities and services and those related to the quantification of these services limited the investigation. Therefore, a correlated analysis of the two sets of responses was significantly limited.

Lastly, the study acknowledges gaps in literary references in certain instances, preventing a more in-depth discussion of the obtained results. During the research period, difficulties were encountered in tracking down information. Perhaps due to the legislative fragmentation that characterises this policy sector, the literature on youth policies was found fragmented and it was not always possible to construct an organised and cohesive framework.

In terms of future research prospects, it would be valuable to delve deeper into the subject by refining the research tools and addressing the limitations present in this study. Additionally, extending the analysis through a multiple case study with a comparison of other municipalities could provide richer insights. This comparative approach might involve municipalities of similar size situated in the Turin urban belt or other Italian cities.

Exploring the influence of proximity to a large urban centre on the structure of youth policies could be another avenue of investigation. In this case, the research direction could be oriented towards making a comparison between Moncalieri and another municipality characterised by the same numerical composition of young people and inhabitants but classified as the only and/or main urban centre in the area.

Finally, for a more comprehensive international perspective, a comparative study with a municipality in a foreign country, characterised by a different welfare system and youth policy framework from the Italian model, could be considered. The consideration raised by one of the

youth workers about the emancipatory limits of the welfare and protective model, typical of continental European countries, could serve as a starting point for exploring new research questions.

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusions

The current research aimed to explore how young people aged between 14 and 29 in Moncalieri perceive the youth policies of their city. The objective was not to confirm or dispel hypotheses but to provide a partial description of the relationship between the new generations and politics starting from the local context in which they live. The research methods used for the collection and analysis of data provided an initial overview of the phenomenon, aligning closely with those reported by the existing literature. Although the data referred to the local context of Moncalieri, certain findings resonated with nationwide surveys conducted by ISTAT and Censis statistical centres. Specifically, these findings refer to the sense of inadequate political representation, a call for greater support from institutions, and a prevailing perception of a more uncertain future compared to the past. Indeed, the two themes that recurred periodically during the interviews were the precariousness and complexity of the contemporary world that young people have been used to living in since they were children and the numerical minority that characterises their demographic group. These two factors emerge as both a barrier for young people to act and have a relevant voice in the political debate, and a challenge for youth policies to prevent the precarious context from hindering the new generations' opportunities and ensure they receive adequate public and political attention. Regarding the kind of attention directed towards young individuals, linked to the narrative constructed around them, the study revealed another significant aspect that aligns with the findings reported by Mazzoni and colleagues (2022). The perception conveyed by the interviewees regarding the portrayal of young people at the national and mediatic levels was that of vulnerable and fragile individuals, except in cases of very talented ones. However, these narratives were not considered representative of the entire youth demographic, but only of a small portion. What has emerged is a lack of representation of the new generations as valuable resources to invest in without hidden motives or propagandistic purposes. The limited identification of the young interviewed with the dominant narrative about the new generations might be one of the factors contributing to keeping young people distant from politics. Part of the study's results, particularly those gathered from discussions with young individuals, report young people's disinterest and detachment from political matters, aligning with the data from ISTAT. The reasons attributed to youth disengagement were notably the perception of the lack of the institutions' genuine concern for the new generations, a deficit in political credibility and a sentiment that they're often exploited

for electoral gains. Nevertheless, the youth workers and the Councillor considered this disengagement as a form of distancing from traditional political structures rather than a widespread lack of interest in current affairs. In fact, regarding young people and politics, they perceive a shift toward new forms of activism and a reluctance to align with traditional party politics.

The findings reported so far pertain mostly to the national level. An observation that surfaced during the study, which, to some extent, constrained a detailed examination of the Moncalieri case, is the significant impact of national-level political context on the experience of local politics. Despite efforts to focus the discussion on the local scale, many testimonies frequently referenced the national framework.

The results specific to the local context of Moncalieri differ to some extent from those observed at the national level. Firstly, the relatively young composition of the municipal council and the young age of the Youth Policies Councillor are viewed positively for the city's political direction concerning young people, by symbolising a closer tie to younger generations. Secondly, the findings that emerged from the focus group perceptions highlight a significant effort of the municipality to create spaces for interactions for young people, specific activities tailored to this demographic group and foster a sense of community belonging.

However, two critical elements have emerged. Regarding young people's awareness and satisfaction with the local services tailored to them, a relatively high rate of misinformation was observed among the young respondents, particularly regarding services dedicated to personal needs. Nevertheless, this misinformation was attributed to a lack of interest among young people in delving deeper into the opportunities offered by the area in which they live. The second concern revolves around the effective engagement of young individuals in decision-making processes. Indeed, it was considered as somewhat limited. The causes that have been given to this deficiency were the mistrust in young people due to their perceived inexperience and the presumption among adults that they inherently understand the needs of young people and how to interpret them. In part, the role of being interpreters of these needs and requests was, to some extent, assigned to the youth workers and the Councillor themselves. They recognised a challenge among the younger generation in articulating their needs effectively and formulating structured requests. Their approach, therefore, consists of relating to young people through listening and living in the same spaces. Thanks to the closeness and intermediation of professional figures, they try to understand the needs of the new generations and identify the actions that best respond to those requirements. However, they acknowledge that their approach still quite aligns with a supportive, welfare-oriented perspective, fitting the prevalent narrative that portrays young people as vulnerable. In terms of the intervention method, the Moncalieri

Youth Policies Office acts through the differentiation of activities based on age groups. Nevertheless, engaging individuals over the age of 25 proves challenging. This difficulty was highlighted also during questionnaire administration, with only 5.7% of respondents identifying as older than 25. This issue relates to the complexities of formulating policies for a demographic with extremely diverse needs and requests.

In general, the youth workers and Councillor exhibited a high level of awareness regarding these complexities and the challenges inherent in youth policies, including how young people engage with public discourse and the current state of youth in Italy. Their insights on young people's perceptions of politics often align with the testimonies of the young people interviewed.

However, what emerged from this study was the need to identify new and suitable methods and tools to actively involve young people more in civic decision-making processes providing tangible space for their ideas and requests. As highlighted in the United Nations Global Youth Action Programme (1996), the foresight and sustainability of institutions, along with their political direction, rely on their capacity to integrate the contribution and responsibility of youth in shaping and strategizing for the future. Beyond their intellectual contributions and mobilisation abilities, young people offer unique perspectives that must be valued and incorporated. Therefore, recognising young individuals as valuable resources and actively engaging them signifies, if it moves beyond mere rhetoric, a real opportunity to give young generations the possibility of acting as engaged citizens and shaping their own futures.

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## 8. APPENDICES

### 8.1 Questionnaire

#### *General information*

Age (in years): (short answer)

Gender you recognise yourself in:

1. Female
2. Male
3. Non-binary
4. I prefer not to specify

Nationality:

1. Italian
2. Other nationality

Occupation:

1. I study in middle school
2. I study in high school
3. I study at university
4. I study at university and work
5. I work
6. I don't study and I don't work
7. I don't study but I'm looking for work

#### *Opinion on general youth-related issues*

1. How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	I don't know
Young people receive adequate support from public institutions					

Young people need more psychological support					
Young people have better future prospects than past generations					
Young people should engage more in building their future					
Young people should be more active in the political and social life of their city					

*Level of knowledge and opinion of the services present in the Moncalieri area*

2. How satisfied are you with Moncalieri?

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Indifferent
Green spaces					
Sports offer					
Art workshops					
Socio-cultural/ recreational activities					
Musical events					
Evening activities					
Volunteering offers					
Psychological support services					
Study and work guidance services					

3. In your opinion, in Moncalieri there is/are:\*

No / Yes, but not enough / Yes, enough / Yes, too many / I don't know

- a. Study rooms
- b. Afterschool programs
- c. Counter for the LGBTQI+ community
- d. Anti-violence center for gender abuse
- e. Associations/ ambulatories for eating disorders
- f. School guidance service
- g. Service for drafting and revising curriculum
- h. Associations for political and social activities
- i. Activities for urban regeneration
- j. Concerts and events
- k. Places for going out in the evening
- l. Cultural hubs

\*The list was drawn up based on the services active in Moncalieri to understand the level of knowledge of the young people interviewed of the offers available for them in the area and an opinion on the matter.

4. If you had to rate the quality of life in Moncalieri, what score would you give from 1 to 5?

1: Very low / 5: Very High

## **8.2 Question guide for the focus group**

1. How do you feel represented by public institutions? At the national and local levels.
2. What is your relationship with politics, particularly that of your city, and how familiar are you with this topic?
3. In your opinion, what are youth policies? And how do they work?
4. Do you believe that Moncalieri's youth policies respond to the needs of young people? What improvements would you suggest and what initiatives, services, and activities do you think should be implemented?

5. In your opinion, are young people involved in the decision-making process of youth policies in Moncalieri?

### **8.3 Question guide for the individual interviews**

1. In your opinion, how do public policies portray young people? At the national level and the local level.
2. In your opinion, what is the relationship between the young people of Moncalieri and local politics, in particular those related to youth issues?
3. In your opinion, what are the needs of young people in Moncalieri and what are their main requests?
4. How are young people involved in the decision-making process of Moncalieri's youth policies?
5. What are the factors that favour and hinder the active participation of young people in the political issues that concern them?



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