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The Future We Want: The Transition to Adulthood of Unaccompanied Minors

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ABSTRACT

The “threefold” transition from adolescence to adulthood of unaccompanied boys and girls hides an infinite number of personal stories, expectations, sufferings and hopes. These are fundamental elements that must be acknowledged, listened to and valued, along a process of integration that, in its deep meaning, also includes that of the “integrity” of the self. The excursus on legal protection and institutional interventions to protect “young” migrants is accompanied by a broader reflection on interculturality for a pedagogy of encounter.

Keywords: education; interculturality; pedagogy of encounter; transition; unaccompanied minors.

1. BACKGROUND

The passage, transitio, from adolescence to adulthood, translates in the case of unaccompanied boys and girls into a “triple transition”: from adolescence to adulthood like any human being; as a result of migration with the consequent detachment from the context of origin and the need to build a new life in a different cultural and social environment; as a consequence of overcoming the traumas experienced before, during or after the journey (UNICEF & MDM, 2018), with the possible activation of resilience factors that generate individual well-being.

More generally, the theme of adolescent children follows that of the guarantees and rights they enjoy until they come of age and the set of

opportunities that the system is able to guarantee in this transitional phase. Concomitantly, the theme of the transition to adulthood focuses on the complex process of transformation/change that concerns the body and the development of sexuality, psychological maturation, with the evolution of the areas responsible for regulating emotions and impulses, as well as the consolidation of the neural structure of the brain related to the growth of adult reasoning capacity (UNICEF, 2017).

In relation to the social integration of unaccompanied minors, the protection profiles have been outlined in the course of a legislative evolution centred on the vulnerability of minors and on the necessary specific forms of protection characterised by protective and promotional measures aimed at guaranteeing their full dignity in coherence with the inspiring principles of our constitutional system and with the supranational rules placed to safeguard the rights of the person (Parrinello, 2020).

The affirmation of the general principle of safeguarding the unaccompanied minor as an evolving person, with the consequent recognition of the rights due to the subject in formation¹, is derived from the very definition offered by Law no. 47/2017:

the minor who is not a citizen of Italy or the European Union and who is for any reason in the territory of the State or who is otherwise subject to Italian jurisdiction, without the assistance and representation of his and her parents or other adults legally responsible for him and her under the laws in force in the Italian legal system.²

¹ The ratification of the 1996 Strasbourg European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights (Law no. 77/2003), which renders effective the recognition of the rights of the child already operated by the 1989 UN Convention of New York, implies the full consideration of the growing autonomy of the child linked to the development of his or her personality in judicial and administrative practice. With regard to the fundamental principles of the rights of children and adolescents recognised by the New York Convention, they can be summarised as follows: non-discrimination (art. 2); best interests (art. 3); right to life; survival and development of the child and adolescent (art. 6); listening to the views of the child (art. 12).

² Even before the law under comment, known as the Zampa Law, the notion of "unaccompanied minor" was first defined in a resolution of the Council of the European Union of 26 June 1997 (97/C221/03), on unaccompanied minors who are nationals of third countries ("third-country nationals below the age of 18 years who arrive on the territory of the Member States unaccompanied by an adult responsible for them by law or custom and until such time as an adult responsible for them actually takes custody of them") and, subsequently, outlined in Prime Ministerial Decree no. 535 of 9 December 1999, art. 1, para. 535, c. 2 (Regulations concerning the duties of the Committee for Foreign Minors, pursuant to art. 33, paras. 2 and 2-bis, of Legislative Decree no. 286 of 25 July 1998), by which it was established that "unaccompanied foreign minor present in the territory of the State", hereinafter referred to as "unaccompanied minor present in the

The current system for the reception of unaccompanied minors, enriched by novella 47/2017 and by the National Integration Plan for Holders of International Protection (of October 2017), provides for the collaboration of various territorial actors: the local social and health services, the Juvenile Court, the tutelary judge at the ordinary Court, the Police Headquarters, public educational agencies, schools of all levels, including the provincial centres for adult education.

Family foster care is favoured, through the actions of the local authorities, as a substitute for placement in a care structure, with specific awareness-raising actions addressed to citizens on the issue of foster care. With reference to the reception of minors, the novella also amended art. 19 of Legislative Decree no. 142/2005, establishing a multi-level system that establishes governmental first reception facilities³, SIPROIMI⁴ second reception facilities and reception facilities in agreement with the municipality where the minor is located.

Of course, behind this regulatory system lie an infinite number of personal stories, expectations, sufferings and hopes. These are fundamental

territory of the State”, means “a minor who does not have Italian citizenship or citizenship of other States of the European Union who, not having applied for asylum, is for any reason in the territory of the State without the assistance and representation of his parents or other adults legally responsible for him according to the laws in force in the Italian legal system”. Next, art. 1, c. 1 (par. 1) of Directive no. 2011/95/EU of 13 December 2011 on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection, for a uniform status for refugees or for persons eligible for subsidiary protection, and for the content of the protection granted, which defined an “unaccompanied minor” as a minor who arrives on the territory of the Member State unaccompanied by an adult responsible for him/her under the law or practice of the Member State concerned, and until he/she is effectively taken into the care of such an adult. Art. 2, c. 1 (par. e) of Legislative Decree no. 142 of 18 August 2015 (transposing European Directives no. 2013/33/EU on the reception of applicants for international protection, and no. 2013/32/EU on related procedures) defined as “a foreigner under the age of eighteen years, who is, for whatever reason, in the national territory, without legal assistance and representation”.

³ They are facilities specifically intended for minors and established by decree of the Minister of the Interior, after consulting the Unified Conference. They are managed by the same Ministry, also in agreement with local authorities. In the first reception facilities, minors are received for the time strictly necessary to identify them, to ascertain their age and to provide them with information on their rights, including the right to apply for international protection. MSM may remain in first reception facilities for a maximum period of 30 days and are guaranteed an interview with a developmental psychologist, accompanied if necessary by an intercultural mediator.

⁴ These are facilities for the reception of MSNAs and holders of international protection. Upon reaching the age of 18, minors who have applied for international protection remain in the facility until the application is finalised.

elements that must be recognised, listened to and valued, along a process of integration that, in its deepest meaning, also includes that of the “integrity” of the self. The latter presupposes the possibility of a recomposition of each individual boy’s or girl’s history, language, and sense of belonging, in a dynamic path of change and confrontation, which starts from each of them, recognising their origins and guaranteeing their full personal identity, without having to deny parts of it in order to be accepted and welcomed (Catarci & Macinai, 2015).

If, however, the process of integration⁵, in its legal qualification⁶, has been variously understood as an instrument of adaptation and adjustment with substantial acceptance of the host national culture, in the course of time and of migration policy choices there has been a shift to a perspective of social inclusion⁷, which is even more necessary with regard to unaccompanied minors.

Indeed, the general supranational principle of the best interests of the child, proclaimed in art. 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (approved by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989

⁵ For a sociological reading of the different socio-cultural integration models, please refer to the vast specialist literature. In particular, in relation to the assimilation, cultural exchange and pluralist model, see, among others, Cesareo, 1998, p. 16. In favour of a functionalist model, albeit starting from assimilation and cultural exchange, Rossi, 2011, 15 ff.

⁶ Consider, for example, art. 4-bis, para. 1, of the Programme Report that accompanied Legislative Decree no. 286/1998 (the so-called Consolidated Act on Immigration), which states that integration is to be understood as that process aimed at promoting the coexistence of Italian and foreign citizens, in respect of the values enshrined in the Fundamental Charter, with the mutual commitment to participate in the economic, social and cultural life of society. The EU Council Document 14615/04 and the European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals – COM (2011) 455 – also point in the same direction. The European Commission itself – Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on immigration, integration and employment of 3 June 2003, COM (2003) – defines integration as a two-way process based on the presence of mutual rights and, consequently, obligations for legally resident third-country nationals and the host society that offers full participation to the migrant. Similarly, the European Parliament Resolution on strategies and means for the integration of immigrants in the European Union 2006/2056 (INI) qualifies integration as a two-way process that presupposes the willingness and responsibility of immigrants to integrate into the host society and, on the other hand, of EU citizens to accept and integrate migrants.

⁷ In its broadest sense, it represents a process of improving the conditions for participation in society, particularly for vulnerable persons such as immigrant children, through the enhancement of opportunities, access to resources and respect for rights. In implementation of art. 3 of the Treaty on the European Union, and art. 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, childcare and child support is promoted.

in New York and ratified by Italy with Law no. 176 of 27 May 1991)⁸, now recognised as an axiom of relevance to the child's rights, is now recognised as an essential element in the integration of unaccompanied minors. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, now recognised as an axiom of internal constitutional relevance⁹, guarantees the fullest possible protection for the concrete affective and educational needs of all the minors involved in the judicial cases submitted to the judge of merit¹⁰.

In the framework of the protection of migrant minors, the child's right to an education emphasises a biunivocal inter-national passage: on the one hand, the individual child is understood as a unique and unrepeatable person in terms of his or her existential, family, cultural and social life; on the other hand, this uniqueness must be promoted through education, which is an essential instrument of freedom and a source of equal opportunities for the fulfilment of the affective and pedagogical needs that are prodromal to the harmonious psychological, physical and relational development of the child¹¹.

⁸ Thus, *verbatim*: "in all decisions relating to children, whether taken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration". This provision has also been reaffirmed by other legislation and jurisprudence at the international level, to the point of becoming a general principle now consolidated within the legal system of numerous States (see, most recently, the Council of Europe Guidelines on child-friendly justice adopted on 17.11.2010, para. 3, lit. B).

⁹ The principle in question is framed as a true general clause that, in the light of arts. 2 and 31 of the Constitution, constitutes a parameter for assessing the constitutionality of laws (cf. nos. 425/2005 and 341/1990). The legislator also reiterates its value at the regulatory level: art. 317-bis of the Civil Code, in fact, establishes that the judge, in settling questions concerning the exercise of parental authority over children, must have as his sole reference the exclusive interest of the child; similarly, art. 155 of the Civil Code, as amended by Law no. 54/2006, provides that the judge who pronounces the personal separation of spouses shall adopt measures relating to the offspring with exclusive reference to the moral and material interests of the child.

¹⁰ Cass. Civ., sec. I, 16.02.2002, no. 2303. More recently, an important pronouncement emphasised how the recent regulatory interventions on filiation (art. 315-bis of the Civil Code; Law no. 219/2012, art. 2, para. 1) place the listening of the child, as also highlighted by the new *sedes materiae*, among the fundamental and general rules through which, as the recognition of the listening itself as an absolute right of the child is realised, its superior interest is pursued, corresponding to its harmonious psychic, physical and relational development, to be pursued also through the immediate perception of its opinions on the choices that concern it, thus allowing the participation of the child itself in the judgment, as a "party in a substantial sense" (Cass. Civ., Sec. I, 05.03.2014, no. 5237 in the same sense Cass., sec. U, no. 22238 of 2009).

¹¹ To the broad and now unambiguous normative definition of unaccompanied minors contained in Law no. 47/2017, new and more vigorous safeguard instruments have

For our purposes and beyond the multiple protection profiles, art. 13 of the aforementioned law allows each child, regardless of legal status, to be able to benefit from being entrusted to the social services even beyond the age of 18 and up to the age of 21, if the Juvenile Court deems that the person needs prolonged support for an adequate path of social integration¹². This applies, a fortiori, to victims of trafficking for whom a specific assistance programme is reserved to ensure adequate reception conditions and psychological, social, health and legal assistance, providing solutions even beyond the age of majority¹³. In concrete terms, we grasp the socio-political and pedagogical aspects.

2. THE CROSSROADS: TRANSITION AND MIGRATION PROJECT

Some data will give us a real picture of the juvenile migration phenomenon and the relevance of the adolescent group present. According to the report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 11,227 boys and 315 girls were present in Italy as of January 2022, for a total of 11,542, equal to 97.3% boys and 2.7% girls. The total number of unaccompanied minors is broken down by age group as follows: 7,461 (64.6%) aged 17 years; 2,583 (22.4%) aged 16 years; 909 (7.9%) aged 15 years; 559 (4.8%) aged 7-14 years; 30 (0.3%) up to 6 years.

The region receiving the largest number of children is Sicily, with 3,200 (27.7%), followed by Calabria, with 1,278 (11.1%) and Lombardy

been added. Thus, the absolute prohibition of refoulement; the uniformity of identification and age verification procedures; the provision of first assistance and reception facilities dedicated to minors; the establishment of a national information system; greater protections for the right to education and health; the right to legal assistance and to be heard in administrative and judicial proceedings; continuous and prolonged support for minors in particularly vulnerable conditions (such as victims of trafficking and exploitation); the establishment of the list of voluntary guardians. In particular, procedures must be followed to guarantee the right of MSM to participate and be heard in proceedings concerning them with the support of an intercultural mediator. Of significant importance is art. 9 of Law no. 47/2017, which provided for the compilation of the social file, drawn up by the reception facility staff also on the basis of the first interview, subsequently transmitted to the social services of the destination municipality and to the Public Prosecutor's Office at the Juvenile Court.

¹² In a Circular of the Ministry of the Interior - Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, dated 03.01.2019, the Ministry of the Interior clarified that MSNAs who are granted the possibility of continuing the reception and integration process beyond the age of majority remain within the SIPROIMI system.

¹³ See art. 17 of Law no. 47/2017.

with 1,221 (10.6%). In January 2022, 1,212 minors left the specific protection circuit on reaching the age of majority.

The issue of the transition to adulthood and its undeniable complexity is significant when it comes to the reception of unaccompanied adolescents. If, therefore, it encompasses the passage from the level of cognitive development and emotional experiences – typical of childhood – to a level marked by fully developed cognitive abilities, more balanced emotions and adulthood, according to a progression of endogenous factors common to all adolescents (body, brain)¹⁴, on the other hand the contexts experienced by the young migrant and structural factors of a socio-political and economic nature are equally important and interacting on the transitio.

In fact, conditions such as poverty, war and persecution, condition individual development, shape life choices and the related path, becoming crucial, for example, to find a job at a very young age or to move away from the land of origin in search of safe places. If one adds to this the dramatic nature of the journey, being alone in caring for oneself or dealing with the many traumas that the journey brings, one understands how the migration of unaccompanied minors, like severe adversities (extreme poverty, domestic violence, loss of parents, catastrophic events) will also produce early transition and adultised behaviour (PAHO, 2005). In the specific case, unaccompanied minors will experience the journey as a sort of rite of passage (UNICEF & MDM, 2018), their migratory project, sometimes forced by the family, will constitute an integral part of identity construction (Terres des Hommes, 2017) with the risk of the double loss of belonging (of the context of origin and that of destination).

The picture thus represented depicts the substantial “artificiality of a distinction between ‘minors’ and ‘adults’” (UNICEF *et al.*, 2019, p. 39) since it does not take into account the processual nature of becoming an adult, the cultural and social differences that affect this process, the vulnerabilities specific to adolescent migrants or experiences that “impose” adult responsibilities, behaviours and roles. Added to this are the considerable difficulties in being considered (and being able to consider themselves) fully adult due to insufficient knowledge of the new arrival context and an anomalous condition of “quasi-adult”, after the age of eighteen, which makes these young people abstractly independent and responsible for their actions, but concretely fragile. Acknowledging their being ‘young’, regardless of whether they are minors or adults, means understanding the three-

¹⁴ The model referred to is the one developed by the Pan-American Health Organisation: PAHO, 2005.

fold transition they go through¹⁵ by fully understanding their evolutionary needs with a view to their empowerment – as reiterated by the UN in its Youth Strategy 2030¹⁶.

Well, starting from the expectations of these boys and girls, from their desires with respect to the imagined future, contributes to the construction of their existential and identity trajectory. Improving one's life, studying or working, fleeing violence or early marriages, reuniting with family members in Europe, building one's own family (UNICEF *et al.*, 2019), constitute the prevailing desires, but the effectiveness of the transition paths to adulthood of unaccompanied minors depends on personal "characterising" factors (origin, age, gender) and external factors (legal status, school or vocational training insertion, relations with the family of origin or with the peer group, significant relations with reference adults¹⁷). For many of these "young people", traumas and psychological discomforts may compromise a full transition to autonomy¹⁸, but sometimes good practices of prolonged reception and social integration allow existential discomforts to be overcome and identity affirmation to be achieved in the territories of residence.

The importance of listening to and participating with adolescents, especially if unaccompanied, is at the heart of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations addressed to Italy in 2019. In them, a universalist perspective is adopted in which differences and diversity are recognised and enhanced by the opportunity to be taken on in

¹⁵ Some of the key areas in which this transition takes place are: the legal status granted to the child; the possibility of accessing educational and training opportunities; the possibility of accessing the labour market; the possibility of achieving housing autonomy and the possibility of establishing or maintaining formal and informal relationships.

¹⁶ https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080_UN-Youth-Strategy_Web.pdf.

¹⁷ The first relationships of trust are established with the educators of the reception facilities, who contribute to defining a positive model of support and accompaniment to adulthood. Educators often represent effective reference points in the lives of minors, even after they come of age, and are considered pseudo-parental figures. Building positive bonds with reference adults helps to alleviate the confusion linked to the condition of unaccompanied minors and to rebuild the propensity for sociality, redefining a positive connotation to adult figures. For further discussion, UNICEF *et al.*, 2019.

¹⁸ The report by UNICEF *et al.* (2019) recalls how the vulnerability of these boys and girls is certainly linked to their individual stories and derives, for example, from the experiences of torture, sexual violence and exploitation experienced in Libya and during the perilous journey along the Mediterranean route, or from the anger and disappointment at having been induced by their parents to leave for Italy, or pushed by deception, as often happens to trafficked girls. The violence suffered before leaving, during the journey and even in Italy in some cases, leaves serious consequences on the psycho-physical health of the boys and girls. Some of the interviews reveal a total lack of trust in themselves and others.

a shared context capable of countering any risk of exclusion. It also reiterates the opportunity to introduce an all-encompassing legislative measure that establishes the right of minors to be heard, even beyond the judicial context, and to institutionalise the Juvenile Councils¹⁹ in the form of a permanent appointment, in order to facilitate their effective involvement also in national legislative processes with respect to the issues that concern them. Of course, the right to be heard and to participate²⁰ must necessarily be integrated with other fundamental principles, including the best interests of the child and non-discrimination (O.N.I.A., 2021).

In the same sense, and specifically in the European sphere, the commitment to make children's rights a concrete reality has been emphasised in the current Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)²¹, which has identified the areas in which action should be taken to improve the condition of children to ensure: equal opportunities; participation for all children; combating violence perpetrated against children; ensuring child-friendly justice for all children; guaranteeing children's rights in the digital environment.

Another point of reference is the European Guarantee System for Vulnerable Children, European Child Guarantee – COM (2021) 1377, which supports the Italian government in ensuring that children and adoles-

¹⁹ Among the good practices of inclusive participation, in particular, mention should be made of the Consulta desired by the Guarantor Authority for Childhood and Adolescence – in its function of promoting integrated actions aimed at ensuring that children and adolescents are listened to and included in decision-making processes, in all the spheres in which they find themselves (in the family, at school, in the courts, as well as in the communities that receive minors) – with which it has also been able to give a voice to unaccompanied foreign minors (MSNA).

²⁰ In 2018, UNICEF and AGIA signed a two-year memorandum of understanding to promote the listening and participation of children and adolescents; to foster their authentic participation in the activities promoted by UNICEF and AGIA; and to promote and implement information activities on the rights enshrined in the UN Convention with regard to MSNAs. The online platform U-Report on the Move made it possible to investigate young migrants and refugees' knowledge of their rights as minors and to foster the exchange of information on the protection of human rights. The protocol was renewed in May 2021, envisaging joint initiatives to ensure the full effectiveness of the rights of children and adolescents living in Italy, with particular reference to the most vulnerable, such as migrants and refugees, as well as to guarantee their participation in the processes that concern them, also thanks to the online platform U-Report Italia, aimed at involving adolescents and young people in Italy (14-30 years old).

²¹ Council of Europe (2016); Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021). Also available at: <https://edoc.coe.int/en/children-s-rights/7207-council-of-europe-strategy-for-the-rights-of-the-child-2016-2021.html>. Adopted in 2016 and implemented in subsequent years. The two implementation reports of the Strategy were published in October 2017 and May 2020, respectively.

cents in Italy have access to care, protection, shelter and decent housing, through a detailed analysis of policies and measures related to child poverty and social inequalities, the production of a specific action plan, as well as the testing and evaluation of operational models for some of the most vulnerable groups. In fact, in the European panorama, Italian children and adolescents are among those most at risk of poverty and social exclusion: 30.6% against an EU average of 23.4%. Children coming from a migratory background are particularly exposed to the risk of poverty or social exclusion and lack of access to basic services in all five areas covered by the Child Guarantee (health, education, childcare, housing and nutrition)²².

The principles highlighted so far are transfused in the Fifth National Plan for Childhood and Adolescence, which promotes the rights of children and adolescents through a participative²³, cooperative and solidarity-based approach. It was developed around three key words: formal and non-formal education, as an essential tool to guarantee well-being, psychological and physical, and development, right from birth, in synergy between public and private; equity as a principle to fight absolute poverty, foster social inclusion and guarantee equal access to technology, as well as a strategy to involve, develop and protect conscious and active young citizens; empowerment for the management of social and health systems with respect to conditions of vulnerability and for the planning and evaluation of public policies in the sector.

Actions concerning policies for equity include ensuring full implementation of the legislation on the reception of MSNA (Law no. 47/2017) by monitoring its implementation, strengthening the system of voluntary protection and promoting family-based reception, accompanying them even after they come of age and adopting legislative measures to improve the determination of statelessness. In the field of education policies, among others, the school context is emphasised as a place of health promotion, based on a broader value of the school institution, including policies for a healthy school, in relation to the physical and social environment of schools and links with the entire educational community. The available data show

²² In Italy, the experimentation phase of the Child Guarantee is being implemented under the coordination of a national steering committee composed of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (DG Lotta alla povertà e programmazione sociale and DG Immigrazione e politiche di integrazione), the Department for Family Policies under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, UNICEF and the Italian Committee for UNICEF. The pilot started in July 2020 and will end in March 2023.

²³ Dipofam and Istituto degli Innocenti (2021), *Rights, priorities for action and the pandemic: The views of girls and boys*. Available at: <https://famiglia.governo.it/media/2349/rapporto-artecipazione-onia.pdf>.

that it is essential to increase the focus on prevention and intervention policies in the area of mental health. The pandemic has also accelerated the process of awareness and change: in a well-known research study²⁴, it emerged that during the Covid-19 emergency, adolescents demonstrated an enormous capacity for resilience and adaptation to the changes and new demands dictated by the measures to contain the epidemic, and that is why adolescents are calling for a return to a 'new' normality that takes into account their needs, their thinking, and their vision of the future.

To the leaders we want to say: we are confident that you are working to build a better, fairer and more sustainable future! But we ask you, please, not to exclude us from decision-making processes and not to leave us behind! We are the future of every society, the actors of the present and we want our voices to be heard. Right now. (UNICEF, 2020, p. 85)

In terms of empowerment policies, it is emphasised that children, boys and girls are equal partners with adults. Their involvement enables them to gain a different, often divergent point of view on facts, which contributes to the evolution of society's thinking. Participation is thus not only a right that the world of adults must recognise for children and young people, but must increasingly become a daily practice, a consolidated action, a constraint in the planning of governance.

As far as good practices are concerned, beyond a few experiences in identified geographical areas (UNICEF *et al.*, 2019), the one implemented by the Juvenile Court of Reggio Calabria with the Freed by Football Project can be considered good practice, in implementation of art. 13, c. 2, of Law no. 47/2017 on the administrative continuation of the social integration pathway until the age of 21. Together with a number of institutions and UNICEF, minors coming from contexts of socio-familial deprivation (unaccompanied foreign minors, marginalised minors or, in general, victims of educational poverty) were offered to play football for free in a much broader circuit of socio-pedagogical inclusion. In this experimental path, beyond the 'legal origin' of each boy, the young people participated,

²⁴ Beginning in May 2020, UNICEF, in collaboration with other national and local partners, conducted a focus group with adolescents aged 15 to 19 years resident throughout the country, both Italian and non-Italian, representing different realities with the aim of outlining, through a participatory process, the impact of the pandemic on young people and proposals for a post-Covid-19 future. The result was the first survey on the pandemic with questions drawn up directly by the adolescents and administered in June to their peers through the dissemination on social networks of the programme partners: Agevolando, Arciragazzi, Care Leavers Network, Caritas Italiana, CNCA, Scuola Zoo, United World College (UWC), U-Report, JA Italia, YoUnicef.

in parallel with the game, in an educational path centred on the culture of fair play, of respect for the rules for proper inclusion in civil society, starting precisely from football practice. Concrete life opportunities also passed through the possibility of undertaking or continuing studies (or entering the world of work) thanks to the granting of scholarships and work bursaries provided for the most deserving (Surace, 2021). As already found in the regions under research, also for the young people of interest of the specialised court in Reggio Calabria the scholarship or, mainly, the work scholarship, were instruments of economic support and work placement in “protected” conditions, offering at the same time a qualified experience and greater awareness of the Italian regulatory context in view of more stable work relations, also through apprenticeship contracts. To date, these young people, who are now of age, have gained housing and working autonomy by maintaining a relationship of trust with educators, guardians and operators who have remained reference persons in their growth path.

3. INTERCULTURE, DIALOGUE AND RECIPROCITY

I travelled to cultivate myself and grew up too fast, finding myself a teenager on the road to maturity. Today, I always travel the same roads, those of the awareness of the joy of belonging to a people. Proud to be African. (Diabate & Visitilli, 2019, pp. 27-28)

This is the story of Kader, once an unaccompanied minor. This is the “age of rights”, to use Bobbio’s words (2005), the historical era of the recognition of human rights that, today more than ever, can defend us from dehumanising fundamentalist drifts. To ensure, however, the concretisation of concepts such as citizenship and democratic coexistence, within the broader framework of inclusive migration policies, it is necessary to move from multiculturalism to interculturality, that is, to proceed “from multicultural coexistence to cultural coexistence” (Elia, 2017, p. 11), promoting the transformation of the foreigner, even more so if he or she is a minor or an adult “young person”, into a citizen of the host country through the sharing of rights, cultures and values.

In the time of globalisation, not only economic, but also cultural, linguistic and social, diversity becomes a resource, an opportunity for equal confrontation, respect for the identity to which each person belongs. The pedagogical specificity of interculturality, which “expressly rejects the static nature and hierarchisation of cultures” (Portera, 2014, p. 124), unfolds in the dialogue between people who refer to different cultural and value systems, favouring learning processes capable of enabling knowledge of

other cultures through openness, availability and understanding of differences, read according to a dynamic concept of culture that emphasises its value, relational, socio-environmental and communication characteristics.

Intercultural education, as an expression of the exercise of solidarity, becomes, especially in the school context, the promotion of listening to differences and proactive participation in the educating community. The intentional objective of dialogue and cultural confrontation requires, as a precondition, a relational symmetry and thus the possibility of expressing individual subjectivity (starting from the needs, needs, interests and rights) in a condition of equality (between migrants and non-migrants) according to a cultural pluralism in which diversity and reciprocity are common values that respond to the aims of social justice and equal opportunities, regardless of the history and origins of each (Fiorucci, 2019). In other words, the subject experiences difference as a resource, overcoming stereotypes and prejudices about otherness, in favour of the constitutive I-other relationship, far from the binary or dichotomous logic of identity/difference, in order to become “multiple” through the transformative power of the relationship (Gallelli, 2016, p. 153).

Intercultural strategies avoid separating individuals into autonomous and impermeable cultural worlds, promoting instead confrontation, dialogue and even mutual transformation, in order to make coexistence possible and address, with the tools of pedagogy, the conflicts that may arise. (Fiorucci *et al.*, 2017, p. 618)

In the same way, borrowing Freire’s anthropological-ethical vision of educational action (Freire, 1971) and his teleological horizon towards a path of humanising restitution that offers children a “being more”, we can affirm that the role of dialogue-listening to diversity, as a confrontation and horizon of self-consciousness and awareness of others, always implies an educational commitment capable of “‘dilating’ the boundaries of the world, grasping its ethnic plurality, of ‘enlarging’ the social reality of the human being and orienting it towards the acquisition of cultural ‘greatness’, which is indispensable for accepting the formative value of cooperation for the creation of a planetary citizenship, halfway between individual freedom and solidaristic sociality” (Annacontini & De Serio, 2019, p. III).

An intercultural pedagogy, therefore, which is a pedagogy of encounter, which “confronts a co-presence of culturalities always in the process of becoming” in which, that is, the aspect “of the plural, of the many others and of the between worlds” is present as an element that characterises each individual and the communities to which he or she belongs (Cima, 2017, p. 129). Proposing to growing children, especially if they are

unaccompanied adolescents or young adults, positive welcoming experiences, in the fullness of the word that is “medicine” (Dolci, 1974, p. 182), means “training the heart and recognising in life what counts to build personal and common existence” (Mortati, 2019, p. 171).

Although this vision may appear utopian or illusory in the era of hate education (Tramma & Brambilla, 2019, p. 95) of the “liquid post-modernity” (Bauman, 2003), it is certain that the construction of an intercultural educational pathway, in a projectual perspective of growth and social integration, is a precise task of a historicized and critical pedagogy that knows how to analyse the migration phenomenon, even more so towards unaccompanied adolescents or “young people”, with “a proactive utopia”, that is, able to look beyond, to the future, and to look before, anticipating situations and planning appropriate actions (Schiedi, 2017, p. 25).

What is envisaged is therefore a “dialectic of identity” (Cambi, 2002, p. 11), between the social and the individual, the singular and the plural, which is an “inhabiting” of the encounter space, known and shared, as the means and end of interculturalism in which “the encounter and welcome of all, solidarity and fraternity are elements that make our civilisation truly human”²⁵.

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²⁵ Homily by Pope Francis on the occasion of the XXVIII Youth Day on 27 July 2013, celebrated in Rio de Janeiro.

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RIASSUNTO

Il "triplice" passaggio dall'adolescenza all'età adulta dei ragazzi e delle ragazze non accompagnati nasconde un'infinità di storie personali, aspettative, sofferenze e speranze. Sono elementi fondamentali che vanno riconosciuti, ascoltati e valorizzati, lungo un processo di integrazione che, nel suo significato profondo, comprende anche quello di "integrità" del sé. L'exkursus sulla tutela giuridica e sugli interventi istituzionali a protezione dei "giovani" migranti è accompagnato da una riflessione più ampia sull'interculturalità per una pedagogia dell'incontro.

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