

‘Neet’ What?, ‘Neet’ Where?

Empirical evidences
and reflections
from Novara (Italy)

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The paper In brief

- **The paper reflects on the category "Neet" and analyses it as a fundamental keyword (Williams, 1983) in contemporary public rhetoric (Carrithers, 2009).**
- **The paper reflects on the Italian context, focusing on a the data collected in the Province of Novara in the project "CivicNeet.**
- **The paper points out "Neet" turned into a black box in the wider debate about unemployment and youth.**
- **It concludes the phenomenon of young people neither employed nor in education or training does not represent a social novelty, rather should be read as a the result of dynamics of power and discrimination profoundly rooted into the model of modern, industrial societies.**

The raise of a category

- European industrial societies in the 20th century were based on a linear passage from education to work;
- The 1990s marked a radical social change.
- In the late 1990s new categories was introduced into the public debate in order to describe emergent phenomena, among which the number of young people *Neither Employed nor in Education or Training*.
- After fifteen years, the acronym NEET spread internationally and became commonly used to single out unemployed young people, between 15 and 30 years old, who left the education system.
- In Italy, ISTAT pointed out the percentage of young people neither employed nor in education raised from 19.2% to 26.2% between 2008 and 2014; overall in 2014 they were 2.413.000 people, 48% men, 52% women (Rosina, 2015)
- Eurostat (2016) pointed out Italy was the second European state, after Greece, for percentage of NEET.

A black box

- **The category “Neet” has turned into a heuristic black box (Latour, 1999)**
- **It conceives a simplistic portray of a social phenomenon.**
- **A deeper analysis of this social group is needed in order to provide an answer to the title of this paper (NEET where? NEET what?)**

Novara and the neets

- The fieldwork was conducted in Novara during the “Civic Neet” project.
- Novara is the second most populated city in Piedmont, the fourth Italian region for GDP (ISTAT, 2014).
- Also in the province of Novara the rate of youth unemployment increased in the past decade.
- The 7th January 2016, 3621 young people from Novara province had registered on the "Youth Guarantee" portal.
- There were 1685 women and 1936 men
- There is a disproportion in gender: while over 60% of the people with middle and high school diploma were men, the 70% of people with a university degree were women.
- Only 8% of the registered people were immigrants.

CivicNeet

Sviluppo di Comunità

- It is an ongoing project funded by Cariplo Foundation run by local NGOs together with a pool of independent researchers (sociologists, economist, jurists, etc.)
- The project offers a selected group of young people involved in the “Youth Guarantee” scheme the opportunity of conducting a *progetto di comunità*, a “community project” that is an experience of civic engagement, alongside the formal internship.
- All the “community projects” aim at involving the participants into new social networks in order to allow the young people gaining new social and professional skills.
- CivicNeet offers 15 “community projects” and about a third of them started in the first semester 2016.
- The participants were selected aiming at one sample homogenous in education and type of internship.
- In particular, the CivicNeet selected people with a high school or a vocation training diploma and conducting internship programs in manufacturing firms.
- Until now, only men accepted to participate to the project

The box opened

- **In the “Neet” debate scholarship has generally prescribed universalistic prescriptions.**
- **CivicNeet poses some questions to the researcher:**
 - is it just a case young people with higher education and whose families have a better education and greater wealth are those who are able to establish stronger and wider social networks?
 - Is it just a case, in the case of same education, young men find more easily jobs?
 - Is it just a case it is easier to engage a community project for those who have already carried out activities in collaborative contexts?

The box opened

- CivicNeet brought to the foreground trends, such as gender and class inequality, that had characterized modern industrial societies for decades.
- Young people share common experiences, such as an interrupted education, scarce and not qualifying work experiences, limited participation to social activities, a certain tendency to cultivate only limited social relations within the family and a close circle of friends.
- However, the research suggests the *multi-faceted barriers* young people face result from disparities in their cultural, economic, and social capital, and differences in place of birth, religion, gender, and race.
- The raise of young people not in education nor in work should not be considered as a recent social innovation.
- It is a result of a reduction of entry positions in a context of job market that did not change its social structure.
- It is a consequence of the change in the entry level of the job market.
- It is linked with the individual's attempt of looking jobs as a form of social status broking.

Conclusions

- The “Neet” category can be misleading because absolutizing a reality too diverse within into a apparently coherent statistical social model.
- The raise of the young people neither in education or employment is not just an issue of culture and motivation (contrary to what the media in Italy often seem to suggest).
- The stimulus of “Youth Guarantee” aimed at launching six-months training programs, during which the young people often carry out often generic and subordinate tasks, hardly can be the solution to start a career path otherwise precluded or delayed.
- The incentives of “Youth Guarantee” scheme may have offered a first opportunity to answer to this problem. However, this opportunity is not a sufficient medium and long-term response, unless accompanied by “place-based” projects aimed at fostering the inclusion of young people into local communities and provide them with the social ability to activate networks and skills that go beyond what a six-months training can offer.
- CivicNeet suggests the importance of strengthening social relations and individual’s social capital.
- The case of Novara suggests not overlooking the context in which young people live their post-adolescence.
- In particular, it appears contemporary young people are facing difficulties that are not new.

The raise of the Neet
is not
the dawn
of a new, brave world but
the twilight
of an old one.

Thank you

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