DESAFÍO Y PERSPECTIVAS ACTUALES DE LA PSICOLOGÍA EN EL MUNDO DE LA ADOLESCENCIA

DEVELOPMENT OF THE TERRITORY BETWEEN IDENTITY DYNAMICS, INTERPRETATION OF ROLE E ACTIVE PARTICIPATION: AN EXTENSIVE RESEARCH WITH SICILIAN ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

In the modern day world with its processes of rapid and continuous change, it has become particularly important to understand how citizens, particularly the young generations, live with regard to their own life context and feel involved in the future of their society.

In this framework, it seems plausible to hypothesize that the school, whose main task is to educate the young, carries out a dynamic role in the life planning and civic sense of adolescents by promoting active participation.

The data of our research, carried with 2.461 students of Sicilian schools, indicated the desire of the majority of those interviewed to fulfil themselves elsewhere, far from Sicily, and the ambivalent nature of the bond that emerges concerning one's own territory. Also, those who see themselves in the future closer to their own territory valued more than the others the notion that in the future they will contribute actively to its development. This data confirmed the hypothesis by which participation, as the acceptance of an active-propositive role, is linked to involvement with one's own territorial life context, accepted as part of one's own Self.

Keywords: Territory, students, life planning, partecipation.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the modern day world with its processes of rapid and continuous change and a "multitude of voices" that allow for no fixity of meaning (Hermans, & Dimaggio, 2007), and the progressive erosion of certainties on which, in the past, the construction of Identity was based, it has become particularly important to understand how citizens, particularly the young generations, live with regard to their own life context and feel involved in the future of their society (Obradovi•, & Masten, 2007).

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According to field theory, life context is defined on the basis of "concrete entirety" (Lewin, 1931 [1965: 37]), or rather, the specific situation characterised by the dynamic interdependence between the objective elements of the environment and the subjective elements of the people who fear, hope, nurture aspirations, desire and suffer, who constantly measure themselves with the present and are able to project themselves into the future, thinking of change and making it happen. Also the "genetic model" proposed by Moscovici (1979) focalises attention on the close interdependence between the psychic and the social, considering the individual as a co-constructor of his own life context and not as a mere spectator.

According to several studies, on the border between psycho-social tradition and the psycho-environmental area, the environment, in particular the "place", is significant in the extent to which it is viewed by subjects as an opportunity to carry out certain activities and to feel or try something that one desires (Gustafson, 2001; Russel et al., 1981, 1980); moreover, it may contribute to the formation, maintenance and defence of identity, encouraging self-esteem, value and pride on an individual, group and cultural level (Altman, & Low, 1992) and evoke a "social imageability" collectively assumed by the occupants (Stokols, & Shumaker, 1981). As Canter states, the construction of "place" concerns those units of experience within which activities and physical forms are founded (Canter, 1977), a convergence of cognitions, emotions and behaviours that people experiment there (Canter, 1991). Proshansky speaks of "identity of place", connecting it to those dimensions of Self that refer to a complex pattern of ideas, sensations, values, objectives, abilities and behavioural tendencies concerning the existence of the individual in the physical world. (Proshansky et al., 1983; Proshansky, 1978).

Considering these processes, the construction of the Self as a dialectic system of self-definition and self-projection, can be found in the concept of "Possible Selves", significant aspects of the "Working Self" (Markus, & Nurius, 1986), pertaining to the future planning, that reflect the ideas of the individuals regarding what they expect, hope and fear to become; they activate strategies not only for personal action but also for commitment in the wider social context in which they think they will fulfil their ambitions" (Oyserman, & Fryberg, 2006; Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004).

In this way, participation, as a "culturally anchored" concept (Amerio et al., 2003), could be the function of the representational framework (Moscovici, 1979) of one's own territory, in reference to the functional and symbolic-affective bond (Fagg et al., 2008; Hernandez et al., 2007; Lewicka, 2005; Brown et al., 2004; Pretty et al., 2003; Stedman, 2002; Hidalgo, & Hernandez, 2001; Altman, & Law, 1992), besides identifying its potential (Licciardello, & Castiglione, 2008).

Therefore, civic commitment and the development of competences of active citizenship appear to be closely linked to personal interpretation of role in one's own life context and the capacity for existential planning, because of the choices that the individual, in particular the adolescent, must make, through a constant process of construction and deconstruction of experience. In fact, by developing motivation and the right competences to restructure one's environment/life context in a positive way, making plans through careful focalising on the present and a continual projection towards the future, adolescents become protagonists of their own development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Lerner et al., 2005, 2006). According to Verba et al.: «Citizen participation is at the heart of democracy. Indeed, democracy is unthinkable without the ability of citizens to participate freely in the governing process» (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995: 1).

In this framework, it seems plausible to hypothesize that the school, whose main task is to educate the young to be "potential assets of the community" (Zeldin, 2004), carries out a dynamic role in the life planning and civic sense of adolescents by promoting active participation and acquisition of the competences needed for it. Several studies have shown that taking part in civic activities is

associated with development of society on one hand, and development of the young person on the other, in terms of school success, social competences, exploration and widening of personal and social identity (Bobek et al., 2009; Harré, 2007; Stetsenko, 2007; Titma et al., 2007; Levine, & Youniss, 2006; Balsano, 2005; Zeldin, 2004; Lerner, 2004; Youniss et al., 2002; Arnett 2000).

Moreover, the teaching of civic education, and the smooth transition between school and the world of work lead to a sound preparation for citizenship as the formation of a flexible and articulated identity and competences linked to the reading of the context and the meta-context (Youniss, 2002).

OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESIS

Beginning with the idea that participation concerns also personal interpretation of role in active-propositive terms, in the field of dynamics concerning the territorial context of belonging, the research we propose here has two objectives: on the one hand, we aim to explore the representation of the territory of belonging, life planning and the personal interpretation of role in the development of territory; on the other hand, we aim to test the hypothesis according to which a more positive view of one's own territory and a self-definition and self-projection closer to it are positively associated with the idea of assuming an active role with the aim of developing it. Secondly, we aim to verify if this framework is positively influenced by a higher level of secondary education and by an education path mainly characterised by a grammar school education with conceptual articulation rather than a vocational school that focuses on professional training.

METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out in the territory of centre-eastern Sicily, involving the provinces of: Catania, Messina, Siracusa, Ragusa, Enna, Caltanissetta, and Agrigento. By agreement with the school Heads, the questionnaires were administered during school hours and in small group settings and with only with the presence of a researcher in order to guarantee the reliability of the results. 2.461 students took part in the research; they were from different kinds of secondary school, chosen randomly and equally distributed in the various provinces, by the level of education (50.5% II year; 49.5% V year), by the type of school they attended (34.1% Grammar schools, 33.5% Technical Institutes, 32.4% Vocational Institutes) and by gender (51.7% males; 48.3% females).

The following methods were used to display the data: a series of Likert scales (gamma 1÷7), relative to personal interpretation of role in the field of development of one's own territory; two closed questions for the exploration of "expectations" and "desires" concerning the geographical context of self-fulfilment; three Semantic Differentials (D.S.) (Di Nuovo, & Licciardello, 1997), concerning the representation of the dimensions of the Self (Present=PS e Future=FS) and the "Provincial Territory" (gamma -3 ÷ +3; indifference point = 0).

When dealing with the data, for the D.S. first we made the calculations of the reliability (Cronbach's alpha =.81÷=.90), of Euclidean distances# and factorial analyses (PCA extraction method, Promax rotation). By considering the first and last decile of the distribution of Euclidean distances (respectively the smallest and greatest distance between those explored), we identified two binary research variables:

1) smallest/greatest distance between Present Self/Territory;
2) smallest/greatest distance between Future Self/Territory.

Subsequently, we carried out descriptive analyses of the variance, for the verification of the multivariate and univariate effects (t test e Anova), and the correlational effects (r di Pearson).

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RESULTS

Representation of the Territory

The possible lines of development of one's own territory are mainly seen in the field of tourism (M=6.16 SD 1.32) and, albeit with a significantly lower score, in the advanced service sector (M=5.62 S.D.1.36) (t=-16.827 p<.001) and in traditional areas (commerce, banks) (M=5.57 SD 1.27) (t=-17.881 p<.001). However, primary economic activities (such as agriculture and fishing) were given little consideration (M=4.51 SD 1.72) as was the work of artisans and craftsmen (M=4.61 SD 1.51).

This framework in part affected the level and type of education: A) raising the level of education diminishes the importance given to the traditional tertiary sector (p<.001) and the advanced one (p=.008). B) a grammar school type of education, oriented towards further education leads to a lesser appreciation of the primary economic activities (p=.014) and the work of artisans and craftsmen (p<.001) compared to a vocational school education.

The "territory" is valued negatively (M=-0.10), especially by students with a higher level of education (p<.001) and those who go to grammar school (p<.001).

The factorial analysis indicates that the representation of one's own territory is divided into 4 principal components: "functionality", "affectivity", "activity" and "quality of life", with eigenvalues greater than 1 (6.18, 1.69, 1.38 and 1.23). The factors explain the 52.44% of the variance. The rotated loadings are presented in Table 1.

Table1 Promax-rotated principal components of territory dimensions				
	Functionality	**Activity**	**Affectivity**	**Quality of life**
Insecure-secure	**,784**	-,013	,054	-,109
unstable-stable	**,744**	-,070	,159	-,097
indecisive-decisive	**,734**	-,028	,039	-,028
Fragile-resilient	**,674**	,119	,071	-,209
Untidy-tidy	**,654**	-,030	-,172	,202
efficient-inefficient	**,512**	,254	,061	,069
Satisfied-dissatisfied	**,441**	,197	,175	,117
aggressive-peaceful	-,243	**,809**	-,156	-,431
independente-dependente	,083	**,716**	-,228	,064
Strong-weak	,321	**,570**	-,001	,008
Deep-superficial	,107	**,494**	,139	,180
Quick-slow	,211	**,441**	,148	,075
Cold-warm	,036	-,281	**,845**	-,173
undesiderable-desiderable	,283	-,127	**,630**	-,032
lovely-disgusting	,077	,047	**,562**	,195
Lively-apathetic	,042	,288	**,526**	-,002
Calm-agitated	,125	-,287	-,181	**,762**
simple-complicated	-,219	,036	,157	**,634**
Tender-hard	-,364	,109	,366	**,588**
Reflective-impulsive	,172	,178	-,313	**,586**

The bond to the "territory" is mainly connoted negatively with reference to factors of "functionality" (M=-0.31 SD 1.25) and "activity" (M=-0.38 SD 1.17) but positively on the level of "affectivity" (M=+0.18 SD 1.24) and "quality of life" (M=+0.11 SD 1.04) (one test compared to the point of indifference p<.001, in all cases).

The type of schooling influences many factors: grammar school students value "functionality" (p<.001) and "activity" (p<.001) less than the other two groups, and they value "affectivity" less than students of the Vocational institutes (p=.011).

Self-fulfilment and territorial context

Expeted and desidered planning of life is mainly planned outside the Sicilian territory: 61.2% of participants expected to build their future outside Sicily and 55,3% indicated that their desire to do so. In both cases, the type of school had a strong influence: more than the other two groups, the grammar school students expected (X2=43.94 df 2 p<.001) and desired (X2=13,03 df 2 p=.001) to fulfil themselves outside Sicily.

Significant relationships between the dimensions of Self and "Territory" were revealed:

1)analysis of Euclidean Distances indicates that the distance between Territory/Future Self (M=2.60 SD .94) is significantly higher than the distance between Territory/Present Self (M=2.43 DS .77) (t=16.42 p<001). Also in this case, more differences relating to the level and type of schooling emerged than in the other: students with a higher level of education and grammar school students show greater distances between Self and "Territory" (Table 2).

Table 2				
	School		Class	
Euclidean Distance	*F*	*p*	*t*	*p*
Present Self-Territory	15,140	<.001	5.14	<.001
Future Self-Territory	27,295	<.001	5.84	<.001

2)Those who imagine and desire to fulfil themselves in a territorial context that is different from the Sicilian one show greater distances between Territory/Present Self and Territory/Future Self (p<.010 in all cases).

3)The distances between the dimensions of Self (present and future) and the representation of "Territory" correlate negatively with the Functionality, Affectivity, Activity and Quality of Life factors (relative to the territory) (Table 3).

Table 3. Pearson's correlation coefficients between Euclidean Distance/Territory Factors				
	Functionality	Affectivity	Activity	Quality of Life
Present Self/Territory	-,565**	-,468**	-,487**	-,245**
Future Self/Territoriy	-,683**	-,520**	-,591**	-,295**
** *p*<.001				

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Active participation : interpretation of role in development of the Territory

With regard to the possible link between interpretation of role and development of territory, a medium-high level of agreement was seen (M=5.89 SD 1.12) regarding opportunity for personal commitment "in work" and medium-low with regard to one's own participation of a "political-social" nature in the territorial dynamics (M=5.22 SD 1.51), the latter being expressed mainly by grammar school students (p<.001).

Thinking in a concrete way about the future, however, the possibility of personal active commitment in the development of one's own territory was not very appreciated (M=4.49 SD 1.81); this data regarded especially students with a higher level of education (p<.001), grammar school students (p<.001), and those who plan on fulfilling their ambitions outside Sicily (p<.001).

This orientation, however, is affected by the distances between the dimensions of Self and Territory: those who are in the first decile of the distribution of Euclidean distances between Present Self/Territory and Future of Self/Territory (that is, the least "distant") value less than others personal commitment in work and more than the others the possibility of contributing actively in the future to the development of the territory (p<.006, in all cases).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The possible lines of development of one's own territory are identified especially in activities of an 'immaterial" type (tourism and services) and less in the primary sector and in the work of artisans and handicrafts, though historically these have characterised the economic development of Sicily.

Regarding the representation of the Sicilian territory and the personal interpretation of role in its development, the results indicate a gap between the ideal plan and the real one: in fact, those interviewed on the one hand declare moderate agreement regarding the need for "greater work and social-political commitment", but on the other hand, thinking about their personal future, do not see themselves very involved on a personal level in the dynamics of the development of their own territory.

This would appear to be coherent with the expectations and the desire to fulfil themselves elsewhere, far from Sicily, of the majority of those interviewed. It is also coherent with the ambivalent nature of the bond that emerges concerning one's own territory: negative referring to those aspects regarding management of everyday life (factors: "functionality" and "activity"), positive on the level of emotional attachment (factors: "affectivity" and "quality of life").

Those who see themselves in the present (Present Self) and in the future (Future Self) closer to their own territory (or rather, they place themselves in the first decile relating to the lesser distance between both dimensions of the Self and the Territory), value more than the others the notion that in the future they will contribute actively to its development. This data confirms the hypothesis by which participation, as the acceptance of an active-propositive role, is linked to involvement with one's own territorial life context, accepted as part of one's own Self.

However, the hypothesis according to which a higher level of education and an educational path that is articulated on a more conceptual level contributes to greater involvement in one's own territory does not appear to be confirmed.

The data regarding the link between dimensions of Self and territorial life context and the negative influence and the type of education on the representation of it and on the interpretation of one's own role in terms of active intervention for its development, poses the problem of role and the function of school; school should be the place of training, and at the same time, of actions of "civic competences", like organizational and communications abilities (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995: 4), aiming at future active participation in the widest social context.

In more specific terms, the results of our research appear to be indicative of the need for educational methods that are different from those traditionally experimented referred to; indeed, for

some time, this has been explicitly highlighted by relevant institutional bodies in Italy (Circolare MURST-MPI, 1997) and also by the European Commission (2001): methods aimed at promoting the development of meta-competences for the interpretation of role as "competently active actor" for personal involvement and participation in the dynamics of the development of one's own territory and, fundamentally, in the interpretation of it in "genetic", dynamic terms rather than "functionalist" and reified ones (Moscovici, 1979).

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