

## The impact of the economic crisis on Italian young people's everyday life

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### Abstract

In Italy, the economic crisis of the last years has been characterized by recession, deflation, and unemployment. In addition to its broader effect on society, the crisis has deeply affected Italians' everyday practices, their views, and their future goals. This is particularly true for young people, who can no longer rely on rising expectations. The paper presents the preliminary results of a qualitative study aimed at understanding how young people perceive and handle their everyday life in a social and working context so heavily influenced by income uncertainty, job insecurity, and a general lack of confidence in the future. Face-to-face in-depth interviews have been conducted in the metropolitan area of Milan (Italy).

Keywords: economic crisis; young people; everyday practices.

### Resumo

*O impacto da crise económica na vida quotidiana de jovens italianos*

Na Itália, a crise económica dos últimos anos tem sido caracterizada pela recessão, deflação e desemprego. Além do seu efeito mais amplo sobre a sociedade, a crise tem afetado profundamente as práticas quotidianas dos italianos, as suas perceções e os seus objetivos futuros. Isto é particularmente verdadeiro para os jovens que já não podem contar com expectativas crescentes. O artigo apresenta os resultados preliminares de um estudo qualitativo que teve como objetivo compreender como os jovens percebem e lidam com a sua vida quotidiana num contexto social e de trabalho tão fortemente influenciado pela incerteza do salário, insegurança no trabalho e uma falta geral de confiança no futuro. Foram realizadas entrevistas em profundidade na região metropolitana de Milão (Itália).

Palavras-chave: crise económica; jovens; práticas quotidianas.

### Résumé

#### *L'impact de la crise économique sur la vie quotidienne de jeunes Italiens*

En Italie, la crise économique des dernières années a été caractérisé par la récession, la déflation et le chômage. En plus de son effet plus large sur la société, la crise a aussi profondément affecté la vie quotidienne des Italiens et leurs objectifs futurs. Cela est particulièrement vrai pour les jeunes, qui ne peuvent plus compter sur les attentes de l'avenir. Le document présente les résultats préliminaires d'une étude qualitative visant à comprendre comment les jeunes perçoivent et gèrent leur vie quotidienne dans un contexte social et de travail de manière fortement influencé par l'incertitude sur le revenu, l'insécurité de l'emploi, et un manque général de confiance dans l'avenir. Des entretiens face-à-face en profondeur ont été menées dans la région métropolitaine de Milan (Italie).

Mots-clés: crise économique; jeunes; vie quotidienne.

### Resumen

#### *El impacto de la crisis económica en la vida cotidiana de los jóvenes italianos*

En Italia, la crisis económica de los últimos años se ha caracterizado por la recesión, deflación y por el desempleo. Además de su efecto más amplio en la sociedad, la crisis ha afectado profundamente las prácticas cotidianas de los italianos, sus puntos de vista y sus metas futuras. Esto es particularmente cierto para los jóvenes, que ya no pueden confiar en el aumento de las expectativas. El artículo presenta los resultados preliminares de un estudio cualitativo dirigido a la comprensión de cómo los jóvenes perciben y manejan su vida cotidiana en un contexto social y de trabajo tan fuertemente influido por la incertidumbre de los salarios, la inseguridad laboral, y una falta general de confianza en el futuro. Entrevistas en profundidad se han realizado en el área metropolitana de Milán (Italia).

Palabras clave: crisis económica; jóvenes; prácticas cotidianas.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In Italy, the economic crisis has been the focus of intense discussion since its outburst in 2008, both at a personal and public level.

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<sup>1</sup> In this article we present part of the survey “Sustainable practices of everyday life in the context of the crisis: toward the integration of work, consumption and participation”, funded by MIUR-PRIN 2010-2011 and coordinated by Laura Bovone (Università Cattolica di Milano), in collaboration with the Universities of Milano (coordinator Luisa Leonini), Bologna (coordinator Roberta Paltrinieri), Trieste (coordinator Giorgio Osti), Molise (coordinator Guido Gili), Roma “La Sapienza” (coordinator Antimo Farro), Napoli Federico II (coordinator Antonella Spanò).

According to the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) data (Daveri, 2014), such a prolonged period of recession has deeply affected the Italian economy and society. Compared to its level in 2007, the Italian GDP decreased by 9 percent in 2013. During the same span of time, the number of unemployed people reached 3.2 million; the number of people in absolute poverty reached 4.8 million in 2012 and it has increased ever since.

As regards consumptions, Confcommercio (Berici, 2014) estimated that the disposable income shrank to level comparable to that of thirty years ago. In 2013, household spending fell 7.6% with respect to the pre-crisis period. All components of household expenditure – such as food, travel and holidays, self-care and health, and especially clothing and footwear (-6.3%) – fell consistently.

Moreover, the economic crisis has negatively affected Italians' hopes for a better future. The Osservatorio Demos-Coop data (2012) estimated a significant drop in the percentage of Italians that consider themselves part of the so-called “middle class”, namely from 60% in 2006 to 44% in 2012. During the same period, only 20% of Italian citizens (compared to 31% in 2004) aimed to be self-employed (either them or their offspring). Coherently, only 16% of them wish to become freelancers (compared to 23% in 2011). The percentage of Italians that consider their own family status as “low” or “medium-low” has climbed from 42% in 2011 to 51% in 2012. Overall, Italian people feel they are slipping down the social ladder. The individuals who already perceived themselves as marginal before the crisis were the ones to feel such decline with greatest intensity. In fact, the aforementioned institution (Osservatorio Demos-Coop, 2012) estimated that, while a staggering 80.9% of lower class individuals perceived a worsening of their economic situation, only 35.1% of upper or medium-upper class individuals felt the same. The bottom line is that the current economic crisis increased the social inequality – typical of contemporary Western societies – between a fringe of population, which benefits from ongoing transformations, and another fringe, which strives to resist to the constant risk of marginalization and social exclusion (Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 1998; Beck, 1999; Sassen, 1998).

Younger generations are particularly affected since they cannot exploit rising expectations for their future. Indeed, the crisis has deeply affected the unemployment rate. As of August 2014, the unemployment rate reached 44.2% in the 15-24 age rank (Istat, 2014b). Obviously, such a dramatic drop does not encompass off the book labor

and the unreported activities (Bussi, 2014), which are both fueled by unemployment levels and by an extremely constrained labor market.

To overcome the difficulties of critical times, as the one young people are experiencing in Italy, researchers have proposed as resources able to train social change “capabilities” (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2001; Deneulin and Shahani, 2009), cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Brown, 1995; Jeffrey and McDowell, 2004), and educational credentials (Coleman, 1988).

The paper presents the first results of an empirical qualitative research conducted on young people living in the metropolitan area of Milan (Italy). The focus on young people is the key to evaluate future trends about the future outcome of the crisis as regards work choices and family planning.

The research aims to understand if informants' cultural capital and the educational credentials shape differently crisis perception thus modifying biographical paths, daily practices, and plans for the future. The paper is structured as follows. The next section contains the theoretical framework about how “capabilities”, cultural capital, and educational credentials influence people's capacity turn difficulties into opportunities. The following section focuses on the objectives of the study and the applied methodology. Then, the main results of the empirical research are discussed. Eventually, last section discusses the upsides and the downsides of the study.

## **1. Theoretical framework**

Since Bourdieu's (1990, 2001) seminal work, the concept of cultural capital has allowed researchers to view culture as a resource transmitted from one generation to the next thereby providing access to scarce rewards. According to previous researches, investing in cultural capital allows to improve academic performances (DiMaggio, 1982; Zweigenhaft, 1992, 1993; Catterall, Chapleau and Iwanaga, 1999), family-school relationships (Lareau, 1987), marital prospects (DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985), physical fitness (Shilling, 1992), and children's psychosocial development (Offord, Lipman and Duku, 1998).

Lareau and Weininger (2003) maintain that the concept of cultural capital is associated with “highbrow” aesthetic culture. Furthermore, cultural capital does not predict skills, ability or achievements that one can acquire through a proper education.

Yet, Bourdieu's writing does not distinguish between cultural capital and ability/technical skills.

Cultural capital is thus often a property of upper class students that can benefit from it. In their families, cultural capital is transferred from parents to children by investing in culturally rich items such as books, tickets to theaters/museums, and other highbrow artifacts (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). In our study we use the concept of cultural capital mostly to identify young people (and their families) with high level of education (university degree). We have not investigated specifically the relationship between academic background and cultural consumption.

Beside cultural capital, social capital "is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119). Thus, the individual social capital depends on the size of the network of connections and on the quantity of capital possessed by every member. The social capital has a key role in school settings as well (Coleman, 1990). Increasing social capital is associated with better communication and greater academic achievement. According to Schaefer-McDaniel (2004), young people benefit from social capital not only through academic success, but also through an improvement in their own social networks and resources. Other beneficial outcomes might be a better quality of life and a lower level of stress. Moreover, according to Jeannotte (2003), not only the individual, but also the collectivity can benefit from investments in social capital. Such benefits contribute significantly to social cohesion.

Therefore, both cultural and social capitals are keys to bias young generations' personal achievements.

Since Sen's work (1985, 1993 and 1999), the concept of capability has been used to define the set of alternative combinations of functionings that a person can achieve to acquire a certain quality of life. A person's capability is a function of the effective capacity of an individual to choose between different functional combinations – each leading to a different life style. Nussbaum (1997: 276) writes, "the capabilities approach was a valuable theoretical framework for public policy, especially in the international development context". Thus, public policy ought to aim at expanding such capabilities to let people have the opportunity to live accordingly. The capabilities approach has been

widely used in relationship with education (Walker, Unterhalter 2007; Otto, Ziegler, 2010). According to Saito (2003), education can enhance capacities and opportunities and can foster the development of judgment in relation to the appropriate exercise of capacities.

There are many studies on the influences of different capitals on children and young people. Mohr and DiMaggio (1995) focused their study on the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital. Furstenberg and Hughes (1995) examined the impact of family on social capital among at-risk children. Morrow (1999) explored the link between social capital and health on one side, and wellbeing in children and young people on the other side. Dorsey and Forehand (2003) investigated the relationship between social capital and children's psychosocial adjustment. Holland, Tracey and Susie (2007) used the concept of social capital in relationship with transitions, networks, and communities in the lives of children and young people. Moreover, many authors studied the influence of parents' cultural capital on young people in gaining educational credentials (DiMaggio, 1982; Sullivan, 2001, De Graaf, De Graaf and Kraaykamp, 2000). In general, there is a widespread consensus about the importance of families' cultural capital for the scholastic success of their children.

Based on such considerations, the paper aims to analyse the economic crisis from a sociological perspective rather than either the most common economic and political point of view (Kotz, 2009; Posner, 2009, Della Posta, 2011) or the psychological one (see Leesing *et al.*, 2010; Chang, Stuckler and Yip, 2013). This approach allows us to gain a better understanding of Italian young people's everyday life, thereby filling a gap in the existing literature.

## **2. Research methodology**

In order to understand how deeply the economic crisis has affected young people in Italy, the in-depth interview has been selected as the most appropriate technique to obtain detailed information about one's thoughts and behaviors (Spradley, 1979; Corbetta, 1999). Obviously, such a method has some limitations (Boyce and Neale, 2006). For one, interviews might be biased by the researcher's involvement. Further, it is a very time consuming methodology (the interviews have to be conducted, transcribed and then analyzed). Interviewers must be properly instructed. Finally, the results cannot

be generalized because of the limited size of the sample. However, despite such shortcomings, in-depth interviews can provide much more detailed information than other data collection methods.

In this study, to test the hypothesis concerning the influence of capabilities, cultural capital, and educational credential on the economic crisis effects on biographic paths, everyday practices and future projects of young people, the research team selected two very polarized samples of respondents. The first sub-sample is composed of young individuals (male/female) with a university degree, whose parents have a high level of education (mostly university degree or high school). The second sub-sample is composed of young individuals (male/female), which have either a vocational school degree or have dropped out of school before acquiring it, whose parents have a low level of education (mostly elementary school or junior high). Although cultural capital is often associated with class distinction (Bennett *et al.*, 2009), researcher chose the level of education as the main indicator of informants' cultural capital, as well as their families. Indeed, according to previous research (Bourdieu, 1977; Sullivan, 2001) parental education is correlated with cultural capital and the ability to cope with difficulties. Moreover, higher education and the possibility to rely on a family with a higher cultural capital reduce the economic crisis negative effects (Istat, 2011). For instance, in many cases, a critical working situation becomes the trigger for professional growth, even if with an elevated degree of uncertainty.

Since one of the most enduring effects of the economic crisis regards the entry into the job market, researchers focus on the years immediately following the end of a school cycle as the most significant ones. In this study, both groups are composed by individuals who have finished their studies (university or vocational school) no more than five years ago. As a result, the average age of the sub-sample of young people with a university degree is greater than the average age of the other sub-sample. Specifically, at the time of the interview, the older informants were in the range of 26 and 30 years and the younger were between 18 and 23 (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**The sample**

	High cultural capital (HCC)	Low cultural capital (LCC)
Year of birth	From 1983 to 1987	From 1990 to 1995
Female	12	11
Male	5	11

The in-depth interviews were conducted in different locations as cafes, fast food joints, and urban parks, between May 2013 and March 2014 – each interview lasted up until two hours. The interviews were conducted following a narrative approach “that allowing respondents to provide narrative accounts of their lives and experiences can help to redress some of the power differentials inherent in the research enterprise and can also provide good evidence about the everyday lives of research subjects and the meanings they attach to their experiences” (McCormack, 2004: 219). Researches obtained informants’ written consent to audiotape and transcribe the interviews in compliance with ethical standards.

At the time of the interview, 15 out of 22 LCC informants were somewhat employed, most of them as apprentices. One has decided to enroll again in school, while the remainder were unemployed. Most of the apprentices declared to be quite satisfied with their job – they come from vocational schools and their activities match their scholastic background. The unemployed informants considered to be in a transition phase between jobs.

In the HCC group, 15 out of 17 people were currently working. Most of them are dissatisfied with their work since it is perceived as precarious and not up to their education level expectation.

The transcribed interviews and the correlated demographic data have been analyzed and interpreted thematically based on grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991). Researchers started to analyze the interviews as soon as they were transcribed. The goal of such early analysis was to understand whether there were significant issues that might be worth of further enquiry in the following interviews. In this regard, despite the often very low disposable income,



the necessity of saving emerged as something unexpected. The ensuing content analysis singled out concepts that have then been grouped to form relevant categories (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Perception of the crisis

Overall, the informants perceive the economic crisis as a real phenomenon with which they have to cope on an everyday basis. Regardless of their cultural capital, young people face an unavoidable condition. Furthermore, interviewees blame the abuse of the term crisis both as used by people in everyday discussion and as exploited by the media system. Specifically, HCC young people distance themselves from the media system and its representation of the economic crisis – as a competent audience they mistrust the narrative offered by newspapers and television media.

“The crisis is definitely not what they are talking about in newspapers, I would say that now there is some sort of common definition there... I think more of a value crisis than of an economic crisis.” (4D, M)<sup>2</sup>

The media representation of the economic crisis has had an impact on informants' last years and their entrance in the job market. Nevertheless, their narratives often mention a crisis of social values and a loss of respect for people and their work. The uncertainty of the job market fosters the proliferation of unregulated labor positions, such as underpaid internships and off the book jobs.

Among those with a higher cultural capital, anger surfaces as the predominant feeling. They compare their current income level and job status with earlier periods in which previous generations – often their own older siblings – might benefit from a better jobs matching more closely with one's educational background. The continuous quest for an adequate job is their main concern.

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<sup>2</sup> Verbatim have been translated from Italian. The number indicates the interview's progressive number. D or P indicates people with a degree versus people coming from professional/vocational school. F or M indicates the gender.

“This situation, but I think, God, I'll study, I promise, I will have a good job... and nothing, I am still looking for a job, I have done a thousand interviews, but that never leads to anything, except that they bullshit me.” (19D, F)

As regards informants with a lower cultural capital, they seem to be resigned. Coming from families already struggling with economic difficulties, they accept the situation and show more flexibility and more hope in the future.

“Despite the crisis, if there is a firm will, it is possible to find something to do, maybe not the work of your life...” (23P, F)

Informants perceive the crisis as a part of their present life – something they have to cope with on a regular basis.

### **3.2. Motivation behind the crisis**

Politicians' responsibility emerges as a key category. In both groups, narratives reveal a strong disappointment and loss of faith in the political leaders who are generally held responsible for the current unsatisfactory situation.

HCC young people provide more articulate explanations as to how politicians misgoverned the country. Some informant goes as far as to suggest to rebel against the government. Consistently with previous studies (Gozzo, 2010; Pitti, 2013), only a few informants are involved actively in politics – most of them declare to vote out of habit without any strong conviction that their vote can make any real difference.

“There is a general crisis of politics, with these... Politicians are disappointing, wasteful, and the various unstable governments... there is little clarity and then I also have a lack of clarity about what to believe.” (1D, F)

LCC informants are even less politically involved. They show a complete lack of participation. If hard-pressed on political issues, they express what they take to be a widespread platitude.

“Politics... you know it's a topic I don't like at all, so I would not know what to say. Certainly I think the euro had fucked us up, so I think the euro is to blame...” (20 P, F)

The loss of faith in the institutions (typical of Italian young generation) appears somewhat reinforced by the distrust about the current political situation, which is perceived as one of the main cause for the enduring crisis.

### **3.3. Consumption practices and saving strategies**

Although, the crisis does not always affect one's personal consumption standards, most of the informants refer to its impact on their family of origin. They perceive some changes in respect to the past and they have accordingly adapted to the new standards of life.

According to Istat data (2014a), consumption in food and beverage has dropped 2.5% in the last year and most HCC young people refer to some downshifting in the family's consumption practices.

“Apart from the most well-of families, shopping for groceries is changed... Not that my mother doesn't buy the basic products... but, she doesn't buy the superfluous. For instance, she now buys just a kind of cookies, in the past there were three different kinds... and maybe they went stale, but it's not the packet of cookies, is indeed... like for vacations we don't go on vacation during winter and summer, we go away just during summer and just a week instead of two.” (1D, F)

The crisis's influence on young people's consumption patterns is limited due to the already precarious economic conditions.

“On my personal life, maybe because I was – as I use to say – already penniless, the crisis had scarce influence.” (15D, F)

It is a common practice, for LCC young people, to contribute to the family budget:

“(My salary) I give them at home, I help at home, and I take what I need.” (2P, M)

Regardless of the amount of the monthly income, most of the informants are able to save something for future important purchases – a trip, a car, or even an apartment. A widespread and popular analogy is offered by Aesop's fable of the ant and the grasshoppers – they perceive themselves as the ants. Among HCC young people, such a penchant for saving is greater since they do not have to contribute to the expenses of their family of origin.

“Living with my parents, I do not have specific fixed expenditure. Most of my income goes to an account, my savings... this is precisely because I do not have specific fixed expenditure, it is not that I have to think how to spend money, how to use it...” (12D, M)

Despite the discomfoting official data (Istat, 2014a), informants do not appear to apply a real downshifting in their everyday consumption habits. They seem to be more worried about eventual future difficulties than to be struggling with present issues.

### **3.4. The quest for a job**

In Italy, the increase of job's flexibility has fostered the spread of unregulated works based on geographical location, gender, and personal resources (Buzzi, Cavalli and De Lillo, 2007). Thus, looking for a job – or the perfect job – is the most crucial issue.

“The value of the job is the life... through the job you can create everything... once, when my father earned 2 million Liras, we went to the sea every year... once the job was life. You could eat, you were happy, you went to the sea.” (19P, F)

Informants' narratives confirm the difficult situations emerging from Istat (2014b) data: unemployment, precarious job, perpetual internships represent the current scenario.

Sheer luck and personal recommendations emerge as critical keywords for both groups. Usually the term recommendation is mentioned with a positive connotation, something that is part of the Italian culture (Di Lucchio, 2012), becoming even more needful in a period of job scarcity. It is worth to mention that the notion of recommendation in Italy rarely takes place as a semipublic and explicit request for letters of recommendation. More often, recommendations are seen as an equivocal exchange of favors on the brink of illegal corruption and illicit favoritism.

“I did always found something... thanks to my uncles, I have uncles everywhere, they have helped me.” (23P, F)

“[you find a job] just if you have some recommendations ... if someone is sending you... this one is sent by me, he is good, I know that he is good... that is already a good recommendation.” (13P, F)

Sheer luck is perceived as indispensable to seize the opportunities as they arose. Yet, flexibility and a good disposition are also taken to be important.

“I was lucky enough to find this job that I like and it's paid... I love what I do and it is also paid, I can't leave it to go back studying and thus burden on the family finances for two more years and then... Who knows.” (1D, F)

Overall, the informants are well aware that “Italy is a Democratic Republic, founded on work”<sup>3</sup>. Hence, both unemployment rate and low-than-expected job positions are often perceived as socially iniquitous,

### **3.5. Education and job**

According to many authors (Schultz, 1962; Bowman, 1966; Becker, 1970; Mincer, 1989), education provides marketable skills and abilities pertinent to job performance. Therefore, applicants with a higher education are perceived as employees that are more valuable. This difference improves their chances to get better jobs. On the other hand, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), people with a better educational background possess an array of highly valued social and interpersonal dispositions. Employers use educational credentials to secure employees with the requisite skills. In the present study, informants of both groups often complain about a lack of correlation between education level and job level. The reasons for such a lack of causal connections are many. HCC young people who work are disappointed because their job is often unrelated with their background. Coherently, university courses are frequently blamed for being unable to prepare people to get a job matching their skills and education. In particular, informants with an humanistic background consider their studies as unfit to meet the actual job market needs<sup>4</sup>.

HCC young people generally do not perceive themselves as more equipped to get a suitable job. They often criticize the years spent studying. By the same token, LCC young people are generally proud of their early school dropout, regardless the fact that it is very difficult to be hired for a permanent position without a university degree.

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<sup>3</sup> It is the first article of the Constitution of the Italian Republic (English translation at [http://www.educational.rai.it/materiali/pdf\\_articoli/22122.pdf](http://www.educational.rai.it/materiali/pdf_articoli/22122.pdf)).

<sup>4</sup> “What's more useless than culture?” (7D, F).

“They said... without a high school certificate you will not achieve anything. I see people, friends on mine, they have an high school certificate, my cousin have an university degree, they are unemployed.” (2P, M)

“Having a degree, in this period it's completely useless. I luckily have made some experience, so I'm a little bit saved by the experiences.” (7P, M)

The picture emerging from the interviews represents a scenery in which young people seem to have lost faith in acquiring an education in order to be able to access the job market in a qualified position. This shared perception is not confirmed by statistical data. Indeed, according to Istat (2011), young people with a degree almost double (41%) the chance to find a job compared to young people with a junior high degree. Probably, the insistence of the media about the unemployment rate, the constant referring to the “brain drain”<sup>5</sup>, and the general dissatisfaction with the instability of most of the available jobs encourage young people loss of faith in traditional education.

### **3.6. The uncertainty of the future**

Informants from both groups share the same perception of the future – deep uncertainty. Both groups are unable to visualize their future situation because of the uncertainty of their current job conditions.

“The future? I don't really know, because every time that you are expecting something... then, so sincerely, I don't know.” (7D, F)

“In ten years... I really don't know! Beside the fact that I'm really looking forward to find a different job... I'm always looking for a job... maybe the waitress...” (20P, F)

Some of them envision a future in a foreign country, at least for a period. They see a period abroad as something able to “broaden my mind... it's important” (5P, M). In the future, especially the younger informants, both male and female, foresee themselves with a family, a partner and some children, even if they are currently singles. They manifest the need to have a traditional family, probably since most of them come from difficult family situations, but they cannot really envisage a feasible plan to achieve it.

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<sup>5</sup> Italian newspapers refer to the phenomenon as “Fuga dei cervelli” meaning that often brilliant young people leave Italy to work abroad.

Overall, a sentiment of deep uncertainty due both to the uncertainty of one's job situation and to the general dissatisfaction disseminated through the media system is the dominant feeling.

## **Conclusion**

Notwithstanding the differences between the two considered samples of informants, the collected narratives flashes out a rather homogeneous picture. The different educational credentials of both informants and their families do not seem to affect the perception of the crisis. It is likely due to the fact that the economic crisis – so heavily stressed by media – represents a dominant background against which a deep crisis of all sort of values takes shape. The uncertainty about the future depends heavily on the lack of a social position. Indeed, young people strive to acquire a defined position, both in the job market and in the society. Having a job emerges as a nonnegotiable condition for choosing one's current behavior and for envisaging one's plans and future goals. Thus the personal network of acquaintances (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004) seems to be a much more relevant factor for one's social growth than one's education or family's cultural capital. As a result, academic qualifications and family high cultural capital are perceived of little importance to reduce the negative effects of the economic crisis.

Sometimes, HCC informants regret having spent several years to obtain an higher education. As a consequence they are less prone to adapt; they have been more negatively affected by the recent changes in the economic situations of their family of origin and thus they are proportionally angrier.

Coherently with recent data (Diamanti, 2013), disillusion and lack of political engagement are shared by both groups of informants. Respondents often refuse to declare explicitly their outrage against the current situation. They are keen to generically blame in equal measure both politicians and the Euro as the main culprits of the Italian crisis and perceive themselves as the victims of an already degraded social and political system.

As regards consumption practices, informants, likely because of their relatively young age, have already adapted their behaviors to match the current scenario, mostly downsizing expectations both for the present and for the future. The future is perceived as highly uncertain. The same feeling of uncertainty prevents them from making plans

for a future family, even if most of the younger informants envisage themselves committed to a family life. As regards research's limitations, the presented analysis is a part of a wider research project encompassing a larger number of geographical areas and a larger number of people of different ethnicities.

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