

*Being an adolescent in Northeast Italy **

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Summary. *This study investigates the social relationships and study habits of adolescents attending the third and fourth grade of high school in the District of Latisana (province of Udine, Italy) through the direct administration of a structured questionnaire. The total number of respondents was 264, consisting of 133 males and 131 females. It emerges that these adolescents are largely oriented toward peer relations but do not disregard the family, especially in the event of problems. They need to interact with adults, to be listened to without judgment, to talk about their future, relationships with peers or family and to discuss issues of common interest. They are aware of living in a society with certain risks, in particular drug abuse.*

Keywords: Adolescents, participation, *meeting places*, relationships with adults, risk behaviors

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1. Introduction

In December 2010, the local authorities of Latisana, in the province of Udine (Italy), began an investigation into the social relationships and study habits of resident school children aged between 11 and 19, with specific attention to the needs of aggregation and to the demand for leisure facilities. This investigation aimed to enter the world of adolescents in an attempt to understand their habits related to school and leisure time, their social needs and opinions on the problems of their generation. The administrators of the local authorities of Latisana have posed the problem of activating intervention policies for young people and decided to implement the guidelines of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. These promote listening to young people not only in relation to issues concerning family or school, but «also, and indeed primarily, to assess how society as a whole regards the child and his/her real needs of human growth; to identify the presence, or not, of a real and not merely formal attention to frequently non-verbalized questions; and investigate whether the adult world is capable of passing from a simple reception of his/her questions to an actively engaged dialogue» (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2001.317). The cognitive objective of the survey aims to provide the instruments to accompany teenagers in the process of building and consolidating their personal and social identity. Given that this is a responsibility of all the agencies of socialization with which the young person comes into contact, the best way to fulfill this function is by asking ourselves what kind of future are these young people moving toward, what are their planning qualities and how are they preparing to be future citizens starting with their present choices and behavior.

Recognizing that only knowledge of the local area and its specific needs can assist in preparing targeted interventions in favor of young people, the Local Authorities of Latisana opted for prioritizing a contextual analysis. For this reason, it was decided to carry out a survey directed at children attending the middle and high schools in the territory, with the aim of "entering" their world and exploring it to reveal the most effective means of responding to their needs.

This paper summarizes the main results of this survey related to the children in the height of adolescence, or in other words, those attending the third and fourth classes of high school (Vegetti Finzi, Battistin, 2000). Obviously, to better understand the findings of this research it is necessary to contextualize them within the environment which they reflect.

The area under analysis consists of 14 municipalities, with the most populated one, Latisana, having about 13,600 inhabitants, and the least

populated, Precenicco, around 1,500 inhabitants (1 January 2012). The overall District resident population is approximately 57,000 (7.9% are foreigners), of which 14.9% are children, 22.2% are aged 65 or over and the remaining 62.9% are aged between 18 and 64.

The area is characterized by great economic diversity. Until 50 years ago the local economy was primarily based on agriculture. There was also an industrial presence, but confined to Torviscosa, the easternmost town, where an important plant for the production of cellulose was established and then converted to the production of artificial fibers. Since then, the economic profile of the territory, while grafted onto the pre-existing agricultural model, has developed in several directions. For example, the most important industrial pole of the region, Aussa Horn, where several activities in the steel, mechanical and food sector are based, appeared and grew. The area proves to be attractive for the system of economic activity due to the infrastructure that includes a direct connection to the road and rail network and Porto Nogaro, the third most important port in the region after Trieste and Monfalcone (Chamber of Commerce, 1996). In addition, the seaside resort of Lignano began to grow in importance at the end of the '60s, underwent major development in the following decades. Today, as well as being a reference point for tourists commuters mainly in the provinces of Udine, Venice and Treviso, it also continues to attract tens of thousands of summer tourists predominantly from northern Italy, Austria and Germany every year.

These changes in the economic structure, to which a more general process of expansion of the tertiary sector must be added, has resulted in a modification in the social fabric and also a marked municipal differentiation, with distinct cultural, religious and political orientations. In the eastern part, where the presence of industrial workers or laborers has or had deeper roots, we find a more secular society with a stronger political orientation to the left. In the western part, where agriculture based on small farm ownership was and still is dominant, more traditional models still prevail (Zilli, 2000).

This context, different in terms of social and economic structure, but homogeneous in relation to certain environmental and cultural aspects, first and foremost the use, at least in immediate relationships, of the Friulian language (Picco, 2001), is therefore the setting for the microcosms of these young respondents, their backgrounds, experiences and, at least in part, their future prospects.

2. Theoretical references

Adolescence, an age of uncertainty (Vegetti Finzi, Battistin, 2000), constitutes a delicate phase of development when the individual starts to acquire the skills and traits needed to assume the roles and responsibilities of adulthood (Palmonari, 1997; Beetles and Pietropolli Charmet, 2004) on a physical, psychological, intellectual and social level. To be adolescent is «to be an intermediate area of life, which requests enlargement and expansion of all fields of experience, starting from one's own subjective experience» (Lazzarini, 2000, 26). However, this connotation does not have universal value and is strongly contextualized in time and space, where it assumes culturally determined meanings (Mead, 1928).

Since the sixties, the so-called "youth question" has stimulated the interest of academics from various disciplines (psychologists, psychoanalysts, sociologists) who began to ponder the aspects related to the personal and social life of young people, with particular attention to deviant behaviors, such as drug use, violence in stadiums, bullying, baby-gangs, teenage suicide and so on (Pasqualini, 2005, 51). This heightened attention to pathological cases (while serious and alarm worthy) seems to have caused an overlooking of the positive and constructive features of this intermediate developmental stage, when the adolescent is prompted to expand all possible fields of experience and put him/herself to the test, but lacks the possibility to fully realize his/her potential (Lazzarini, 2000).

The development of sociality induces the adolescent to overcome the infantile egocentrism that led him/her to seek others purely for amusement, and it becomes increasingly important to find company with whom to discuss and share thoughts, projects, ideals; someone to form friendship with. However, it is also the age of doubts, the search for identity, which passes through a strong need for independence and, at the same time, stable figures of referral. Here the ties between peers are reinforced and narrow forms of attachment develop usually in overt opposition to the adult world, largely considered as hostile. In this way, communities are formed (groups, gangs, bands) that share not only ideas or ideals but systems of values and rules that do not always coincide with those of adult society. Within the group they seek new experiences, putting themselves to the test, experimenting new roles.

The search for a social identity passes through the adoption of behaviors that the adolescents perceive as imbued with novelty and discontinuity with the previous generation, but which actually reproduce the behavioral patterns of adults whom they know, which represent models of reference. In this way the young become the mirror of the adult generations, but a

mirror which reveals the future (Zanutto, 2007). From the way young people act and think we can understand how adults form new generations and thus «permissive or regulatory attitudes between young people and the specific relevance that these assume are a meaningful indicator, above all, of how the world of adults is transforming» (Zanutto, 2007, 209). Understanding the youth of today allows us a glimpse of the future social scenario. The "health" of this generation preludes a healthy society in the near future, and their concerns, hopes and desires allow us to imagine the society of tomorrow. However, at present, «rather than anticipate what will be, the young seem to reflect the current state of a society bent in on itself, that avoids looking to and planning for the future» (Cavalli, 2007, 28).

The adolescent period can therefore assume different meanings, such as a stage of the evolutionary path leading from childhood to adulthood and as a mirror reflecting present society, which is shaping and educating young people on what their future will be. But what exactly are the phases of adolescence?

In 1972, Kinsington was among the first scholars to distinguish between the two sequential stages of adolescence and young adulthood. The former, when the first emotional ties with peers begin to replace those that characterize the more infantile relationship with parents, is a time of great instability, when the adolescent seeks personal identity and space, but is also unreliable and with a scarce sense of responsibility. The full phase of adolescence can be conventionally placed in the period from 15 to 18 years, that Vegetti Finzi and Battistin define a «second birth» (Vegetti Finzi, Battistin, 2000, 43). During this period, the peer group «assumes significant importance and adolescents make their first timid and sometimes difficult and troubled attempts to exit from the family and acquire independence» (Pasqualini, 2005, 38). While the beginning and the end of adolescence are not marked by unequivocally recognized and established moments, and are characterized by a process of gradual development, in our culture they are associated with particular events. It is commonly held that adolescence begins with puberty (with the onset of a physical transformation associated with changes on a psychological and relational level), and concludes when the individual acquires his/her own corporeal identity and relational and cognitive maturity which allows him/her to «make responsible and consistent choices about his/her engagement in the social world» (Palmonari, 2001, 9), conventionally attributed in our society to the coming of age.

3. Method

The aims of the research can be grouped into five topic areas: school and participation; leisure time; aggregation habits; relationship needs; and opinions on youth issues. Given the nature and objectives of the survey and respecting the needs of the District, it was decided to use a structured questionnaire with closed or structured questions to be administered directly to the respondents.

The questionnaires were distributed directly to students and completed during the school day. Administration of the questionnaires began in December 2010 and ended in March 2011. In total 264 adolescents were interviewed, from which 133 males and 131 females, attending the third and fourth classes of secondary schools in the district. A proportion of adolescents who reside within the area attend schools elsewhere in the province of Udine and Venice, in particular the capital of Friuli (Udine), where the educational offer is much broader; the total number of resident teenagers aged 14 to 18 is 2,311, of which only 830 are enrolled in secondary school in the District. Three of these schools are vocational institutes, two have a technical orientation and one is a high school for science-based subjects.

The distinction between males and females was maintained in the processing of data, in order to verify the presence of gender-related differences in behavior, opinions and habits. When these differences are indicated as "significant" or "not significant" they refer to differences statistically tested through the application of the chi-square test, with $\alpha \leq 0.05$.

4. School and participation

The school plays a fundamental role in the lives of adolescents. This study examines this topic from a temporal viewpoint, passing from the past, to the present and the future. Firstly, there are a series of questions relating to the choice of school (past), followed by questions on the time devoted to study and participation in school life (present), concluding with requests for information on plans after leaving school (the future).

The reasons relating to the choice of school are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 - Main reason they chose to enroll at present school

	M	F	M+F
It seemed consistent with my future goals	53,4	57,4	55,3
For convenience; it is close to home and/or easily accessible	28,6	15,5	22,1

I liked the curriculum subjects	10,5	14,7	12,6
Board of middle school / teacher / counselor / relative / family	5,3	7,8	6,5
My parents chose it for me	0,8	3,1	1,9
My friends had chosen this school	1,5	1,6	1,5
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0

It emerges that over half of the respondents had chosen to attend their current school on the basis of their life plan, because of the statement that their choice was consistent with their future goals. The location of the school also proves to play an important role, probably connected to the fact that this area is relatively distant from large urban centers. Gender analysis reveals a significant difference between males and females. A significantly higher proportion of males opted for an easily accessible school, while females gave more weight to curriculum subjects. The reasons for choosing the school cannot be correlated with plans for the immediate future after leaving school since indecision about the future is on average around 28%, although again in this case, girls are more clearly oriented. In summary, the widespread ability of adolescents to autonomously choose school can be recognized, often in relation to projections into their future, yet the choice of many is also dictated by convenience or imitation.

The everyday relationship with study was measured by the daily number of hours spent studying, which revealed that females are significantly more studious than males, dedicating on average 2 hours and 19 minutes a day to homework compared to 1 hour and 17 minutes, respectively. Similarly, with the results of a series of questions on the frequenting of libraries (school and otherwise), it is striking that 56.4% of students never go there, in particular 63.2% of males and 49.6% females.

Participation in school life was assessed by asking students about their direct involvement in their capacity as class or school representatives. Overall, 30.2% have had such an experience (including the 15.2% who would not do it again) with no significant differences between genders. It emerges that 54.2% of students have never been interested in participation in school bodies and have no plans to be so. Interest in active participation in school life, as a class or school representative, can be interpreted as an indicator of the propensity for involvement - or at least for interest - in the future management of public and political affairs. The 54.2% of adolescents who stated their disinterest reveals a potentially substantial group of citizens who, out of school, will remain spectators to matters regarding the local management and administration.

As elsewhere, here, the youth are largely disinterested in politics, and fail to feel or get uninvolved in it (Bova, Montanari, 2005), while the propensity and willingness to participate in voluntary and charity-oriented activities is much higher (Fantozzi, Licursi, 2005). The participation in local associations, mostly very active and widespread, is also low mainly due to a generational problem. On the one hand, it is recognized that young people often fail to grasp the opportunities offered to them while on the other hand associations could do more to increase the involvement of young people. The older generations ought to leave more space for young people and demonstrate confidence in their abilities, while the young need to show their desire to participate and take responsibility.

There is a clear gender distinction regarding the future after high school, with the choices at the end of the school curriculum; the boys are mostly geared towards the world of work (48.8% of males versus 23.1% of females) and the girls towards pursuing a university education (43.1% versus 18.0%), while the proportion of undecided respondents (about 28%) is equally distributed. Clearly, asking students in their third or fourth year of high school what they want to do in life is premature since «the perception that adolescents have of their future is often confused, fragmented, deliberately unspecified, centered on the present» (Pasqualini, 2005 55), but it is evident that the orientation follows a particularly marked gender perspective.

5. Leisure time

A qualitative survey on the leisure time of Piedmont adolescents by Marco Masuelli (2008) demonstrates that the «time is “free” not only and primarily because it can be spent on fun activities, but it is often also a time of tedium, to be filled with that which is not perceived as forced, chosen with the purpose of letting off steam» (Masuelli, 2008: 19-20). According to Parker (1971) free time is a "mental attitude", for Niero «time is free because it is real life. ... To spend time with friends contains a component of life truly lived, and not protected by institutions which can make it somehow 'artificial'» (Niero, 1989: 140). It can also be a time to devote to oneself, «a strategic investment in the definition and construction of one's own personality» (Caporusso, 2007, 340).

Most young people associate the concept of free time with the choice of things to do and who to do them with, without external constraint, «with the use of places and environments to a certain extent the subject of a personal desire, which is already positive in itself, given that it is the result of a deliberate choice and a strong need for identity recognized in the

preferential choices made» (Masuelli, 2008, 21). However, other meanings are also reserved to the concept, which becomes a residual time (which remains after fulfilling school assignments and family duties), or a time to satisfy the need for socialization and friendship or the need for play, for pure entertainment (Masuelli, 2008).

Almost all the adolescent respondents take part in organized activities outside of school, such as sports, music, catechism, and so on. The adolescents of the District largely organize their free time alternating between moments of socialization and individual pursuits or, to a limited extent, voluntary work of social or public benefit. Two key elements for interpreting the data should be taken into consideration: on the one hand, the choice of youth leisure activities within the territory is somewhat limited; and on the other hand, since we are dealing with minors, these subjects are not autonomous in travelling long distances, which leads to a restriction of independent access to venues and entertainment facilities in remote areas.

The use of the free time has been explored using a series of questions which distinguish between formal commitments, such as a sport in a club, or not formalized. The results are summarized in Table 2.

As can be seen from the table, most respondents usually prefer to spend their free time with friends. These data are in line with those of the CENSIS survey in 2002 which showed (among comparable items) that 91.7% of teenagers prefer going out with friends, 68.9% watching TV, and 46.9% reading (CENSIS, 2002 61-62). In recent years there has also been a sharp increase in the new options of home entertainment and sports activities. These results are also in line with a survey conducted on students of the fifth

Table 2. How the adolescents spend their leisure time (percentage of multiple responses)

	M	F	M+F
With friends	72,2	76,3	74,2
Watching TV	63,2	58,8	61,0
Playing on the computer or play station	56,4	38,9	47,7
Doing sports in a sports club	51,9	38,9	45,5
With my boyfriend / girlfriend	35,3	35,1	35,2
Reading	21,1	46,6	33,7
With family	24,1	34,4	29,2
Attending the School of Music or band	12,8	6,1	9,5
Attending an association	7,5	2,3	4,9

grade of high school in the province of Udine, which again shows spending time with friends in first place, followed by watching television and the company of the girlfriend or boyfriend (Tillati, Batic, 2006). Clearly, at this age the bonds of friendship play a crucial role in the maturation of the adolescent. «Teenagers have a thirst for relationships and the group [of friends] is the preferred context in which they exchange values, norms, communication, symbols, feelings and emotions» (Pasqualini, 2005, 48). This sum of factors prompts teenagers to spend their free time with friends, determining the strength of the bond between them, and given the choice «between parents and friends, the peer group is more important for them» (Lazzarini, 2000, 17).

Many adolescents dedicate their free time to solitary activities such as watching television, using the computer, playing video games or even doing sports activities. Females love to spend their free time reading more than males (46.6% versus 21.1%). Less than a third of the respondents pass their free time with their family and fewer than 10% attend a school of music or are in a band.

In terms of commitments outside of school, 36.5% of respondents cultivate cultural or artistic interests. Around a third says that while they have the desire they lack the time, although this response does reveal a gender distinction (35.4% for females and 23.3% for males). Some reported that they would like to engage in such activities but do not know the structures to turn to. It is worth noting that 36.1% of males versus 13.8% females expressed a total lack of interest towards these activities. A comparison with the data from the IARD (although referring to 15 to 34 year olds) shows a substantial convergence between behavior at the local and national levels (La Valle, 2007, 270).

Overall, 23.5% of adolescents engaged - occasionally or regularly - in cultural, recreational and environmental voluntary activities. Again, the gender differences are strong; the majority of girls claim to lack the time, while indifference prevails among boys. Likewise, examining the relationship that adolescents have with social welfare, we discover that 11, 5% are involved - regularly or occasionally - in voluntary services for the community, with statistically significant gender differentials. The reasons for this low engagement differ (primarily they lack free time, are not drawn to this field, not interested, or do not know where to turn), but the total lack of interest is predominantly shown by males (almost 30% versus less than 10% of females).

6. The forms of aggregation and the formation of associations

We have already seen that three-quarters of young people like to spend their free time in the company of friends, so we need to identify their favorite places to meet. The results of the questionnaire relating to these aspects are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Hangouts with friends, by gender (percentage of multiple responses)

	M	F	M+F
Bar, pizzeria	72.2	71.8	72.0
At someone's house	60.9	72.5	66.7
Square / park	44.4	53.4	48.9
My house	38.3	52.7	45.5
Disco	31.6	34.4	33.0
Shop, malls	9.8	40.5	25.0
Sports centers	33.1	16.0	24.6
Cinema	15.8	32.1	23.9
Community centers, associations	21.1	9.9	15.5
Parish / religious groups	7.5	13.7	10.6

In the Latisana District, the meeting places most frequented by teenagers are public places. The percentage of respondents who attend bars/pizzerias is considerably higher than their peers at the national level (72.0% vs. 55.5%). These aggregation habits have a strong territorial connotation, correlated to the availability of resources at the local level. In the event of no aggregation points other than public places, the favorite haunt became friends' houses, used by 66.7% of boys (compared to 44.9% nationally).

The level of hanging out in public squares or parks is in line with national data (48.9% and 50.2%, respectively), to which we can associate spending time in shops and malls (by far preferred by females: 48.1% versus 9.8% of males). The level of attending parish or religious groups is

slightly lower than the national figure (10.6% vs. 12.3%, respectively) (CENSIS 2002, 63). Lastly, a significant gender difference also emerges in relation to sports activities, preferred by males.

In the lower part of the distribution we find the public facilities, which receive minimum levels of consensus. These data are important in giving a measure of the lack of contact between the structures designed for young people and their intended recipients. While supply and demand are far from coinciding, the adolescents themselves give clear signals that could guide public initiatives to support community youth centers. If they were to find the right responses to their aggregation needs at youth centers and entertainment venues, they would probably frequent them more.

7. Demands of relationships: being and doing

The centrality of social relations in the process of adolescent growth, and as a component of individual well-being is confirmed in the context of the District of Latisana. «Happiness and a sense of personal satisfaction depend on [...] the affections surrounding us, the esteem and respect that we enjoy, the emotional support that we can find in others when we need it» (La Valle, 2007, 263).

In the survey, sociability was captured by asking the respondents whom they turn to when they have a problem. A summary of the results is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. To whom adolescents turn when they have a problem (percentage of multiple responses)

	M	F	M+F
Friend	77,4	87,8	82,6
Parents	57,9	64,1	61,0
Brothers, sisters, cousins	33,8	32,1	33,0
Other adults	6,8	8,4	7,6
Newspapers, magazines or internet	6,8	6,1	6,4
Priest	7,5	3,8	5,7
Chat or a social network	3,8	6,1	4,9

Sports coach	3	5,3	4,2
Teacher	0,8	3,1	1,9
See if they discuss it on the TV	2,3	1,5	1,9

The centrality of the actors of socialization, namely the family and peer group, in the lives of adolescents is further confirmed by the indications of whom they turn to when they have a problem. In first place are friends (82.6%), followed by parents (61.0%) and other family members (brothers/cousins, 33.0%). This shows that in the event of problems, young people are open to discussion and encouragement from the people who represent a point of reference for them. While the sphere of friendship is privileged due to the greater affinity between equals, an important role is also reserved to the family and to the adult world in general. It is important that the adolescents know they have people they can count on and ideally not be judged by. If there are structures of aggregation for the young in the local area, the teenagers express their desire for the presence of adults who know how to listen and advise, but without judgment; figures to turn to in case of need, but who are willing to accept them.

These choices are significant since they testify to the existence of a dialogue between generations, which is rated positively by adolescents (Scabini, Martha, 1995) confirming that family and friends have a high profile in young peoples' value systems (Pasqualini, 2005). These findings confirm the data of CENSIS (2002), showing that the family of origin is both a «cushion you can count on (44.7%) and a value (38.3%), and the results of «the majority of recent research conducted on family relationships [in which] the family is perceived by both adolescents and young people as a protected niche, an oasis of tranquility and point of reference» (Pasqualini, 2005, 55). For the youth of the new millennium, «we are witnessing a strong reduction of conflict within the family and the establishment of a good dialogue between parents and children; indeed, the family is ranked in first place in the value systems of young people» (Pasqualini, 2005, 92-93).

In this context, other adult figures find little space, particularly those in some way "institutional", such as priests or teachers, the first surpassed by DIY searches in newspapers, magazines or the internet, and the second surpassed by social networks and sports coaches and on par with television.

The "decadence" of these figures, first and foremost the priest, is encountered to some extent everywhere, and especially in the Veneto

region, where the parish played a particularly important role in the network of social relationships, not just among adolescents. For adolescents, in the process of structuring of their adult identity, «distancing themselves from religion increasingly appears to be a process of a physiological nature, determined by the need to grow, that is, to remove themselves from those collective processes, formerly serenely accepted and then examined critically, that marked his childhood including religious socialization» (Castegnaro, 2006, 562). In this context of changing values and withdrawal to the private sphere, already evident in the 80s, the relationship with the key figures in the religious sphere have also changed in nature (Soravito, 1990).

8. Opinions about youth problems

This paper also explores youth problems from an "adult" perspective, by focusing on risk behavior. Young people are aware of belonging to a generation that is exposed to many physical and mental risk factors. This type of behavior can be easily adopted due to peer pressure or to the need to appear as having acquired adult status. Respondents provided on average nine answers each to the question "In terms of risk behaviors for the person, in your opinion what are the most dangerous for young people today?" The summary is given in Table 5.

Tab 5. Risk behaviors for youth (percentage of multiple responses)

	M	F	M+F
Make use of hard drugs	90,2		87,9
Drive after drinking alcohol	78,9	77,9	78,4
Smoke more than 10 cigarettes a day	64,7	71,0	67,8
Make use of soft drugs	64,7	65,6	65,2
Get drunk	56,4	53,4	54,9
Have unprotected sex	43,6	61,8	52,7
Drive over the speed limit	42,1	56,5	49,2
Accept lifts from strangers	37,6	56,5	47,0

Gambling (betting, slot machines, online poker, etc.)	49,6	36,6	43.2
Accept meetings with people met online	33,1	52,7	42.8
Spend over 2 hours a day using the computer or videogames	33,8	32,1	33.0
No other interests outside of school	36,1	29,8	33.0
Do wheelies on the motorbike	32,3	32,8	32.6
Eat too much or too little	27,8	32,8	30.3
Chat with strangers	23,3	35,9	29.5
Eat often fast food	27,8	27,5	27.7
Smoke up to 10 cigarettes a day	27,8	26,0	26.9
Drink spirits	26,3	24,4	25.4
Eat in an irregular manner	27,8	20,6	24.2
Frequent virtual realities	18,0	25,2	21.6
Get too little sleep	14,3	13,0	13.6
Drink alcohol between meals	11,3	9,2	10.2
Spend up to 2 hours a day using the computer or video games	11,3	8,4	9.8
Travel alone abroad	6,8	7,6	7.2
Watch violent movies	3,0	5,3	4.2
Go to bed very late	3,8	3,8	3.8

The data (while not directly comparable since different items were used) are in line with a trend already witnessed a decade ago with reference to adolescents of Friuli Venezia Giulia (Cattarinussi, 2004). The use of hard drugs is perceived as the riskiest behavior, while (now, as before) smoking and the use of soft drugs are attributed with almost the same level of danger, as if smoking a cigarette or soft drugs are analogous forms of consumption (Scolobig, 2004).

The perception of risk associated with the consumption of alcohol is very different; 9.1% of adolescents of Latisana considered drinking alcohol between meals harmful, while getting drunk is risky for 54.9% of

respondents (in line with the 52.2% at regional level). Over half the adolescents identify risks attached to getting drunk and having unprotected sex, but on this point we see the first significant manifestation of gender difference on level of concern (61.8% of girls vs. boys 43.6% of boys). Notable gender differences also emerge in relation to driving over the speed limit (56.5% of girls vs. 42.1% boys), accepting lifts from strangers (56.5% of females vs. 37.6% males), and meetings with people met online (52.7% of girls vs. 33.1% of boys).

A final element of reflection comes, in this case, not from the answers provided but from those not expressed. Since the question placed no limits on the number of responses it would be reasonable to expect that unanimity, at least on certain behaviors, emerges, but this is not the case. There is no clear evidence to suggest that these behaviors are commonly pursued, but not having chosen them can be considered as an indicator of their normality or tolerance of them. In this sense, what is noteworthy is the number of respondents who do not report the behaviors in the questionnaire as risk behaviors, i.e. the use of hard drugs (12.1%), driving under the influence of alcohol (21.6%) and smoking more than 10 cigarettes a day (32.2%).

Conclusions

The main objective of this research was to gather the information necessary to understand the needs of adolescents in the territory, with particular reference to the "construction and consolidation of their personal and social identity". From this, a "world" emerges that is akin to that of their peers on the national level. We can observe that they prefer to spend their free time in the company of friends, frequent the most popular venues in the area (bars, pizzerias), or friends' houses, and lack some clarity when thinking about their future. They love to have fun, watch television or do sports rather than engage in community activities (such as class representatives or social, cultural or environmental voluntary work, etc...). They are drawn to the computer and social networks without abusing them and do not snub the company of family and the support of parents or siblings when they have problems. These findings are of great importance in order to understand these adolescents' hearts and minds. They are young people who need their space to grow and share experiences. They need to acquire their own independence and put themselves to the test, but the

family remains a point of reference to turn to in case of need, a place to go when faced with personal problems or doubts that they are unable to tackle alone. In these cases, they seek out adults with whom they can voice their concerns, and parents are the nearest figures that can listen. It is clear that when they are in trouble they wish above all for someone who is willing to listen rather than necessarily help, because whether big or small their concerns are important and merit the attention of adults.

Active and contextualized listening (Sclavi, 2000) therefore emerges as an element of great importance to make contact with the world of the young. It is important to understand them and reduce as much as possible the mistakes that adults make in relation to them, to help them grow by responding to their real needs. As the results of this and other studies conducted in the local area make clear, it is the adolescents themselves who make this request. The adolescents who participated in the survey are in the phase of building their own identity as adults and therefore need to discuss, reason, be helped to understand themselves and project themselves into their future. As can be expected they prioritize relations with peers to meet the needs of play and discussion, while at the same time seeking advice from parents and dialogue with non-judgmental adults.

For important decisions, such as for choice of school, a large majority assert independence, projecting themselves into the future, although many make a choice dictated by convenience or imitation. Nevertheless, we are dealing with adolescents who need to be supported in their life choices, starting with the all-important decision on whether to go to university or straight to work after high school.

The presence of stable figures of reference is crucial for the development of the adolescent because they represent the models which, perhaps unconsciously, will be emulated (Zanutto, 2007). Adults can therefore be said to have a responsibility to be aware that their actions are an example, and that certain behavior, such as poor involvement in services for others (lack of voluntary social activities or high indifference to participation in school bodies) is largely attributable to the messages young people receive from the family and the community in which they live.

«To mature well adolescents need a genuine relationship with adults, based on dialogue, and the certainty of being heard [...]. To build a mature identity, without blocks or role confusions, the teen must have real interlocutors, capable of listening but also able to express values, through their actual behavior» (Palmonari 2001, 123). «This is the real challenge of our time; listening to teenagers does not imply - as is sometimes ambiguously said - becoming adolescent again, but knowing how to be

fully adult, sensitive, available, understanding and loving but also authoritative» (Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2001, 320).

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