

S70 SPECIAL SESSION PROPOSAL THE ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN BUILDING UP SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES FOR INNER AND RURAL AREAS

Title:

“Rockability: a social and inner being renewal regeneration project involving young people leaving care”.

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Since 2019, in the Italian village of Roccaporena, in the territory of Cascia in Umbria Region (Central Italy), a regeneration and participation project has been active, named *Rockability*. It involves mainly young people coming out of protection paths as minors. The project aims at reinterpreting the identity elements of the place, its historical-cultural and naturalistic features including one of the deepest vocations of this village, represented by the caring of young people in difficulty.

This contribution aims at illustrating how the project Rockability starts and what actions and results it is achieving today, in terms both of the development of a widespread community in the village as well as the creation of a model for the social integration and training of the young people as coactivator of community.

The place Roccaporena social and spiritual renewal. Not only is Roccaporena the birthplace of Saint Rita of Cascia, the saint known for the ‘impossible undertakings’, that attracts to the tiny village every summer thousands of pilgrims from all over the world, it was also the site of one of the most important orphanages in central Italy since the Second World War until recently. The experience of taking in and caring for young people in difficulty is therefore a heartfelt one for its inhabitants, who today remain few in number with difficulty attracting young families, new residents and year-round services.

Roccaporena has been strategically nominated as a candidate for the selection of the Umbrian village benefiting from a pilot project for cultural, social and economic regeneration under the Next Generation Plan. Since 2022 it has been functioning as a centre dedicated to the policies designed for vulnerable young people.

The contribution will be structured in two parts:

The first part will give an insight into the condition of the young people leaving care in a transnational approach, giving examples of how legislation in Europe is tackling these group of young people who are alone without a family behind. It will also illustrate how the accompaniment of these young people coming out of protection paths as minors has become even more strategic today, in the light of the low demographic trends, and at an age phase (18-25 years) in which training and social integration is vital for all young people.

Who are the careleavers and the bottom-up process in Italy that has led them to have a voice

In Italy, every year about 5,000 young people come out of protection paths as minors - i.e. they have lived outside their family of origin through judicial proceedings, in foster care or in family homes or

communities - and at the age of 18 they find themselves without any protection because for the State they are adult.

The experience in Italy includes a unique bottom-up model that was born in 2010 thanks to the work of a senior careleaver, Federico Zullo, who founded the first association of the careleavers, called *Agevolando*, with branches in every region. Today *Agevolando* is the main partner of the project in Roccaporena.

Thanks to the *Agevolando* association, the young people leaving care started having a voice by the institutions, helped by social services, Villaggio SOS Italia, and supported by European Union projects, and it was the young people's voices that raised awareness among politicians, local administrations, and the media. This bottom-up process, now consolidated, has enabled policymakers understand more about the needs of minors under care and the needs of young adults when they leave care.

As a result of an intense advocacy activity the Italian Parliament in 2018 decided to establish the first Careleaver Fund for accompanying these vulnerable young people alongside the so-called transition age toward adulthood (18-25 years old). The Fund includes training tutors in order to personalize a life-project for each young people who decides to participate on voluntary basis.

However, despite the Fund and the tutor-related project only a few today receive the continuity of a support and many are still left to face the transition to adult life alone. The Roccaporena project was therefore created in order to extend these policies and involve careleavers into project of social innovation.

The interconnection of the inner and the outer work as the basic principle

The objective of Rockability project is to embrace a whole process of regenerating the state of being regenerated through social participation and a collectively act of caring for young people. By implementing policies designed to train and socially integrate vulnerable young people the project aims at creating a 'widespread community' able to involve and be involved by young people in new spontaneous, informal and authentic models of social inclusion. Communities living in small and marginal areas can offer young people proximity of relations and slow time, that is what they need to re-generate the outer as well their inner world. The remoteness of Roccaporena as well as its spiritual vocation has made it as a suitable place to become a national centre dedicated to experiment new integrated policies for young people leaving care.

This first part of the speech will be based on official data, a comparative legislative approach on careleavers, their related policies and experiences in some Italian regions, social research on the matter and the voices of the young people through the *Agevolando* association.

The material and immaterial resources at Roccaporena. First results of the project

The second part of the speech, will present the different assets and subjects involved in the Rockability project, in relation to the material and immaterial resources of Roccaporena and leading to the social and cultural regeneration of the village.

The experience of a 'spread community' which has been active since 2021 will be analysed starting with the temporary co-housing as a methodological device for hosting careleavers in the 'homes for

autonomy' in Roccaporena, as well as co-housing for external subjects, for tourists-pilgrims, inhabitants of the village, artisans, sports spaces and athletes, involving different stakeholders including the Slow Tourism District and the Church Cultural Park.

Temporary co-housing as a methodological device

The pedagogical method of the tutors for the careleavers, at the basis of the Careleavers Fund in Italy, makes it possible to continue working on the transformative processes of the place, focusing on the involvement of the youngsters (enhancing mountain walks, biking, eco-sustainable practices, welcoming pilgrim-tourists, local services) generating useful skills so that the youngsters become co-activators of and for the community.

Trust, authenticity, responsibility as key factors of the project

The final objective of the intervention is to illustrate, through the case study of Roccaporena, what factors are at stake for the involvement of vulnerable young people in the community, what needs they express, what micro-models of local experiences we can count on in Italy to compare with other European countries and beyond.

Ultimately, what young people are asking for is interdependence that can lead them to be autonomous and to feel well in society, to seek personalised transition processes in which all the actors (social workers, school, job formation, institutions, house service) are recognised. Young people leaving care need to be able to complete their study and be trained for work (official data still show low levels of schooling). They also need to overcome their negative emotional experiences in order to become responsible parents. The Roccaporena integrated model, which is a unique pilot project, places young people as community co-activators, accompanied by tutors who give them confidence by putting them in relationship with many other actors. Roccaporena's identity, as a place that has been for more than a hundred years a large orphanage - much loved by the inhabitants and tourist pilgrims who still send money from abroad to support children in difficulty - is in such a way reinterpreted and brought up to date in the light of social innovation policies in the field of caring and solidarity.

Emanuela Rossini is a linguistic and cultural policy maker. She has developed policies for young people leaving care during her mandate as a MP in the Italian parliament. She is an honorary member of the careleavers Association 'Agevolando' supporting advocacy projects for vulnerable young people.