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Adolescenti Italiani e Cultura della Legalità

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Reviews

Colombo, M. (2016). *Adolescenti italiani e cultura della legalità*. Milano: Franco Angeli.

The central topic of the analysis of Maddalena Colombo, which constitutes the object of her book, is the study of the culture of legality among adolescents. Her work summarises several years of field research on the topic, adopting an approach typical of sociology of education, i.e. starting from the perspective of the transmission of values and norms from a generation to another one, i.e. socialisation.

But Colombo, being aware of the complexity of the study of “the adolescents’ perception of the rules that society expects them to respect”, broadens the analytical perspective, both conceptually and methodologically, up to define an action-research approach. As the Author states in the concluding remarks of the book, the “Adolescents’ legality is not a typically disciplinary topic; it is property of no discipline; on the contrary, it asks (*a priori*) for an interdisciplinary ability of analysis, as well as it requires (*a posteriori*) a global intervention”.

The starting point of Colombo’s analysis is the purpose of checking the extent to which adolescents are incapable of legality, i.e. are bearers of a culture of violation of the rules, and then reversing this thesis. According to this, in the first chapter of her book, the Author starts with an in-depth examination of the causes and the consequences of the so called denormalisation of the society, a process that can have direct and indirect effects on the adolescents: as weakness of the socialisation agencies, on the one hand, and as inability of the adolescents themselves to follow the rules defined by the fathers, on the other hand. Following this perspective, in the second chapter of her book, Colombo analyses the transformation of the relationship of the adolescents with the rules, in the light of the evolution of the adolescence life phase itself, increasingly characterised by early discovers and pressing demands.

From the third to the sixth chapter, the Author presents the hypothesis, the methodology, and the results of a survey carried out between 2011 and 2013 in five Italian big cities, located in the North, Centre, and South of Italy, at five different degrees of the upper secondary education, and carried out using a validated questionnaire.

In particular, in the third chapter Colombo presents the main hypothesis which geared the research, related with topics like: the relationship of Italian adolescents with rules; the relationship with formal legal system; the role of parents, grandparents, teachers, and peers.

The fourth chapter presents the results of the survey, starting with a description of the relationship between adolescents and legality, in terms of risk exposure and norm's transgression, carried out by means of the measurement of predictive factors.

In the fifth chapter the analysis are devoted to the reconstruction of the culture of legality founded on norms, values, rules and ideal models, but also founded on the exemplar behaviour brought by individual witnesses. Within this context, different norm sources are made object of a comparison, in terms of distance or proximity with adolescents' moral world. This leads the Author to the classification of types of adolescents, according to the kind of their daily relationship with legality, which is presented in the sixth chapter.

In the light of all the results that she presented, in the last chapter Colombo is able to reach some interesting conclusions. About the first research question, which states that the adolescents today are confused and are fumbling in a normative emptiness (incoherence hypothesis), according to the results the answer is: no, they aren't. On the contrary, about the second research question, which argues that the Italian adolescents are experiencing a distance from the legal system (also fuelled by the weak adults' civickness), the answer is: yes, under many extents they are.

Furthermore, concerning the third research question, related to the role of parents and grandparents, i.e. of the domestic sources of norms, it appears that it is still prominent, and reinforced by the consideration that the adolescents have concerning the family as a value itself.

Finally, concerning the hypothesis which states that the adolescents have trust, as normative source, more in the coetaneous than in the teachers, i.e. the horizontal socialisation overcomes the vertical one, the research conclusions lead to confute it. The teachers are the third stronger normative source of norms for the adolescents, after parents and themselves. The group

of the peers is very important during adolescence, but it doesn't represent the source of norms more credible.

Maddalena Colombo's research, focused ultimately on a topic which constitutes – since its birth as discipline – the foundation of the sociological analysis of the society – i.e. norms formation and their transmission –, and moreover applied on a delicate group of the population, as the adolescents are, brings a fundamental outlook on how the society works, by pointing out the regulatory gaps (in the sociological sense), but also revealing the values and the achievements of the educational system (in a broad sense), as source of norms itself. And this fundamental outlook is worth, as conceptual and methodological frame – not only to understand Italian society – i.e. the context of the field research presented in the book –, but all societies.

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