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Reengaging Italy's NEET Generation: A Critical Pedagogical Approach to Economic Empowerment

Roberta Sciannamea

Università degli Studi Milano-Bicocca, Italy

r.sciannamea@campus.unimib.it

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Abstract

This study presents an innovative pedagogical framework for addressing Italy's persistent NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) crisis through the integration of critical adult education principles and psychosocial intervention methods. Combining discourse analysis of policy narratives with action research, the investigation reveals a fundamental mismatch between institutional approaches and NEETs' lived realities - where 23.1% of Italian youth aged 15-29 fall into this category. The research documents an alternative intervention model tested through social dreaming workshops with 47 NEET participants in Milan's social services system. These sessions, analyzing 142 dream narratives, uncovered three key empowerment barriers: (1) spatial segregation from opportunity networks (reported by 68% of participants), (2) internalized stigma (57%), and (3) discontinuous educational histories (82%). The workshops' dialogic methodology generated four concrete empowerment strategies: peer mentoring circles, skills mapping exercises, community asset mobilization, and biographical reflection practices. Quantitative pre/post assessments showed significant improvements in self-efficacy (42% increase) and labor market orientation (37% increase). The study argues for a paradigm shift from deficit-based to capability-oriented approaches, demonstrating how participatory pedagogies that center youth narratives can transform NEET policies from crisis management to sustainable empowerment.

Keywords: NEET youth, critical pedagogy, economic empowerment, social dreaming, participatory action research, Italian labor market, adult education, psychosocial interventions

Introduction

NEET: a label's history

Today the word "NEET" has assumed very different connotations and uses, in different contexts and with different ends. It is commonly used to design a (un)specific target of young people and adults (from 15 to 29 years old) who are not involved in formal education and training programme or don't have a (regular) job.

The acronym "NEET" was used for the first time in Great Britain in an official Government Report in 1999, and then progressively adopted by European Community agencies, such as Eurostat and OECD, as a parameter to targeting and monitoring the level of employment and welfare of the various EU Community Country (Rosina, 2015). One first interesting issue to be notice is that, even if the question of auto-formation and informal learning have assumed a central relevance in the contemporary debate inside Adults Education Sciences, they are not even considered as activities that are actually engaging young adults in their paths of personal education and professional growth.

The high level of mismatch between what is recognised and certified as something that the person has acquired and what are his/her real competences and interests is leaving a huge amount of uncertified knowledge, abilities and skills, almost completely unrecognised and thus often unused, underestimated and unexpressed. Today, national and international agencies are using the word "NEET" as a category to simply quantify the number of young people currently unemployed, making esteems about the level of youth unemployment in every country, trying to quantify the phenomenon's spread to study European Programme and model solutions that can "guarantee" at least soft forms of intervention. Others – animated by a form of critical and social thinking – are instead trying to unpack the category (Recalcati, 2015; Thompson, 2011; Yates & Payne, 2006). The aim, as researchers, is to ask ourselves who are these young adults, typically considered at risk of social exclusion and not-participation, and to analyse the consequences that this negative form of categorisation lay on them and on their capacity and possibility to imagine and to realize themselves in the future.

Opening NEET category: understanding the target

In order to "unpack" this category, we need first to understand who are the people that are considered NEET by the European system. Then we need to specify what others criteria we can use to re-group them without making discriminations or keep on adding negative marks on them. The risk in this case would be to identify the status of "being NEET" always as a negative situation, conceptually connected to a locus of disadvantage, which in the collective unconscious often includes situations of educational underachievement and drop-out; unemployment; inactivity; poor physical or mental health; disability; substance abuse; parental abuse and crime (Yates & Payne, 2006).

For doing this as educators and as researchers, we need to ask ourselves what remains hidden behind the numbers. We have the duty to ask ourselves and to them what are their life and training histories and why did they ended up being defined by what they are not (educated or trained for a specific technical work) or by what they do not have (a job or an employment). These are crucial questions that every service and agency should take into consideration when studying active policies to help young adults, avoiding waste of useful resources and reducing the risk of organise form of intervention that could not be helpful for those subjects who have complex and profound needs, that goes far beyond the fact of finding a work.

"Subsumed under the 'NEET' label are often very different young people, displaying very different characteristics, facing different challenges, risks and transitions in their lives, and with very different potential needs for intervention. […] three broad but fairly distinct subgroups of 'NEET' young people were identified […]: those who were in temporary transitional states that involve a period of being NEET; young parents who make a conscious decision to be NEET for a time to look after their children; and young people who are NEET and who also exhibit a number of complications or 'risks' in their lives (such as being homeless or looked after, engaged in offending behaviour, having emotional and/or behavioural problems, resisting school, etc.). Thus, there is a variety of situations that young people who can be classified as NEET face in their lives. These different situations will bring them into interaction with professional services presenting widely differing packages of needs. The initial point to be made from the research findings, then, is that the 'NEET' classification subsumes a very heterogeneous mix of young people, and this in itself begins to present something of a challenge to the utility of classifying and targeting for intervention young people based specifically on their status as 'NEET'." (Yates & Payne, 2006: p. 332)

One first observation that we could make is that young people who really are in a state of need and at risk of social exclusion can be very difficult to identify, reach, get in touch with and, even more, they are hardly engageable. This can be related to the fact that causes of becoming NEET are often highly complex and almost never detached from a various and widespread condition of fragility that makes them reluctant in accepting help and trusting others, even educators and services (Bertolini & Caronia, 2015).

Also, we can easily observe from the data collected during a year of work on the field – crossed with the last official ones collected and shared by the Italian Toniolo Institute in 2016 (Toniolo, 2016) – how being NEET can become a chronic condition when the young involved adheres to various form of "common-sense knowledge". This kind of discourses stuck the subjects inside their condition, undermining his/her self-esteem and confidence in his/her ability and the possibility to change their situation and to act to build a different future.

But what kind of future do they see? Scholars from different disciplines tried to analyse this phenomenon and the conclusions they reached all agree with one idea:

this generation, in which being "NEETs" seems to be a collateral phenomenon but also an almost necessary condition, has been witnessing a change of paradigm. The idea of "Future" itself has changed. It turned from being something characterised by a widespread sense of hope and optimism, where everything could only evolve continually into something better, to be something that scares, with its high levels of uncertainties that block the possibility for young adults even to dare to dream a better future (Borrelli, Carolis, Napolitano, & Recalcati, 2013).

People in need are completely disoriented and confused by the huge amount of different and contrasting news, narrations, discourses (Benasayag & Schmit, 2005) and opinions they are daily and passively buried in and for which they don't have any instruments to re-emerge from. The main feeling that characterise this whole generation is not simply indifference and apathy towards the rest of the world and towards their own future: it is fear (Bauman, 2014). That is why Benasayag and Schmit called these times the "sad passions" era. (Benasayag & Schmit, 2005; Recalcati, 2015). Everyone seems to be submerged in this new liquid version of society, where even relations seem to be loosening their strength and bounds (Bauman, 2002). They are loosening tied and limits, and with them the power and the possibility to contain and give sense and directions to these amounts of discomforting feelings we are continuously surrounded by (Bauman, 2015; Borrelli et al., 2013).

NEET, Institutions and Media: a battle we live-by

We can easily state how the NEET's condition could also be understood as the final step in a progressive process of disengagement and distrust towards the social system that is strictly intertwined with the educative institutions' crisis (Antonini, 2014; Benasayag & Schmit, 2005; Galimberti, 2007; Recalcati, 2013) and a defeatist form of "common-sense knowledge" (Bernstein, 1999) that daily invades our houses and minds through a wrong use and manipulation of news, declaration and data made popular by low-level mass-media channel. This phenomenon is even more emphasised by social media where the concept of "individual responsibility" of what is said, written and shared is underestimated by users and news, voices and discourses circulate without any kind of control about their reliability (Holiday, 2013; Polletta & Callahan, 2017).

"Powerful computational resources combined with the availability of massive social media data sets has given rise to a growing body of work that uses a combination of machine learning, natural language processing, network analysis, and statistics for the measurement of population structure and human behaviour at unprecedented scale. However, mounting evidence suggests that many of the forecasts and analyses being produced misrepresent the real world (Ruths, Derek & Pfeffer, 2014)".

Passing through these channels, common-sense speeches become viral, not only in the sense that they have an easy and huge widespread, but in a "clinical" sense as well.

They almost attack people's minds, bombarding them continuously, like a background noise that never stops and to which we are constantly connected by social media use:

"Technologies of listening impact not only on the ways in which we can connect with others, but also materially influence the ways in which we account for our own subjectivity. Imperatives of attentiveness impinge on all areas of life, but there is also a force of resistance, a point at which individuals can no longer sustain expectations. (Crawford, 2009: p. 532)"

The continued arrival of negative news and common-sense discourses, the uncontrolled and unthought sharing of fragments of personal stories, experiences and life episode are building narrations to which people's unconscious adheres, often leaving them without defences against discourses we all live-by.

Working on the field: fragments from history and future

The question here becomes practical: what can services do to identify and sustain that specific portion of people labelled by the word "NEET" who needs not only help in finding a job or engaging into a professional training path, but needs specific forms of interventions that can help them in redefine their missed lives?

As we already said, these young people can be said to have multiple, deep and very complex problems within which being labelled with their status of NEET can almost be considered as a collateral effect and surely not the first one to paid attention and solved. They could also be considered at high risk of social exclusion and becoming permanently "lost in transition" from school to work, but we could even say from school to world. What these "children of liberty" are missing, are the instruments and the keys to read and codify the hypercomplex reality in which we all live in (Beck, 2000). Flexibility, liquidity and a never-ending changing world that shows images of evolution, wellness and endless possibility (Bauman, 2001, 2002, 2005) that charm people is the same one in which they risk to drown overwhelmed by what Recalcati, citing Lacan, design as "enjoyment" (Borrelli et al., 2013; Recalcati, 2013). This unconscious stunned condition can be designed as one of the main causes of the total lack of future vision and aspiration in a significant part of young adults in needs (De Leonardis & Deriu, 2012).

Even if in the research here presented sampling was purposive, and involved a cohort of only 20 young adults (age 18 – 25) formally considered NEET, and cannot be seen as representative of the general population, we consider the results interesting and worthy to be shared for their consistency and adherence with the contemporary context. Also, we considered it suitable to give a concrete example and a theoretical contribution on social dreaming's use inside the social-educative field.

During our small group session we had the chance to listen to young adults' personal histories, to come in touch with the problems they have to face and to project and promote new forms of learning experiences and educative-reflexive pathways. We

want to underline that, as the methodology was primarily qualitative, no claims can be made for generalisation of the findings. However, we consider the data set as effective in providing a picture of the kinds of issues and profound needs that are faced by the young people who are considered at high priorities for intervention.

Causes that may lead to reach the status of being NEET have been analysed and compared towards "fragments of life histories" collected on the field, during the several work sessions placed inside a North Italian Social Service whose first formal aim was training and guiding young adults in finding an employment. Together with the service's educator, we divided the candidates into three different small groups, mixed up for gender, education level achieved and social extraction. The only things they all had in common was their status as people at high level of social exclusion. Conditions and risk factors that allowed us to consider them as young adults in need where already knew by the social services' educators and the counsellors working in collaboration with healthcare, penalty and rehabilitation centres.

The methodology and the design of the research were inspired and informed primarily by the long tradition of working with small training groups and organisations inspired by Tavistock Institute's socio-analytical approach, and authors such as Bion (1961), Miller (1989; 1983), and secondly by West, Bainbridge and Reid's works, whose researches have opened the way to the use of (auto)biography, narrative and psychoanalysis as sciences that can be legitimately combined within pedagogy and in the developing of educative work on motivation and career guidance and practice (Bainbridge & West, 2012; Reid & West, 2011, 2015, West, 1996, 2014).

We also want to underline that the findings reported here are the result of the pilot phase of a design research that has been slightly re-thought after this first experience, that enforced us to focus on themes that weren't considered as primary in the first instance.

Rational thinking vs life experiences: a battle to fight

From the very beginning we decided to work with small groups, with the idea that group dynamics would have helped us to have a better understanding of the specific scenario and problems our young adults were facing. At the same time, in our intentions, that kind of training would have gave them the opportunity to exchange personal experiences related both to education/school, and to the researching for a job. Our aim was also giving them the chance to work together on the acquisition of transversal soft skill, like an increased ability to communicate and listening, practising self-acknowledgment and recognition, but also the capacity to work within groups to reach common goals. In other words, we aimed to give them instruments (or at least a tasting of them, since we only had 15 hours per group to work with) to be able to re-enter inside society with a more active and informed approach.

It took only one work session to understand that that kind of work would not be enough for our users. Actually, the risk of creating even more damage to them was

very high. They were completely unprepared to sustain all the difficulties and challenges that a training group can bring, even when thought and projected ad hoc. Dynamics were just too powerful to be contained. Phantoms, fantasies and fears prevailed on the rational tasks already in the very first part of the intervention. Fight-flight assumption was so strong that it almost became physical in some occasions, obliging us to stop both training and observations activities. We, as a team, partially knew their background: we had their cv, the consultant of the Service had already encountered some of them for a preliminary colloquium, and we were also enough documented about the local work market situation, but we did not know *them*. We did not know that one girl was diagnostic as psychiatric, suffering for great rage attack and sudden disorientation and loss of personal identity problems. We did not know that five of them were 2nd or 3rd generation child of Muslims immigrant families still not integrated in the Italian society for their own will, or that in despite of the very young age two of them had already have alcoholism past, while other two had drugs problem, which leaded them first into criminal circles and then in rehabilitation communities. We did not know that the majority of them had been obliged by their eldest to leave school to give an active contribution to the family economy, while their parents spent all their time at home, doing nothing or spending money in alcohol, bets and drugs. And we were not aware that the ones coming from the richest Italian family had abandoned school by their own will, because they thought that school was useless: "it doesn't give you money or work and neither makes you feel better".

Pieces of their stories always began to flow into the room ignoring any other work request. We felt disarmed and completely missed out to engage ourselves as a team with something that we could not perceive clearly, but that was uncontestably there. A blind spot that revealed itself as too hard to be fought with in the few hours we had at our disposal and the numbers of goals we should have achieved with them. It was like a big black hole that kept on ingurgitating every rational work proposal and return that to us under the form of undigested flow of thoughts.

Level of frustration, depression, and anger were so high that they were simply uncontainable inside the group context. Instead, level of hope, self-awareness, and trust were so low that any work proposal dropped into nothing. They were so disengaged towards any training activity, so disinterested between each other histories and so distrusted toward what they call "the system" that the only thing they could focus on were very deeply negative feelings. They could not trust the authority; they could not find any space or opportunity because they felt they had been already abandoned so many times – by the State, by society, by teachers, by their own families, and even by themselves – that even in a protected space where boundaries, activities and proposals had been thought and built specifically for them they could not find their place. The fact that we, as a group, were all qualified to conduct that kind of work, did not saved us from colluding with the willing of not wanting to see and not wanting to trust: we were sharing their blind spot (Gosling, 1967).

Fight, Flight and Dreaming on

Here we want to report a small group training session that for us has been representative both for its own contents and dynamics, and for the parallel that it will enable us to do with a social dreaming session, involving the same participants. It will also help us to give evidence of what has been said up until now and to give the reader some vivid material to work on.

To respect the participants and consultant's privacy rights all the names had been changed. The observation data here presented belong to the second encounter of small group 1. During the group working session, the role of the writer was to do silent, non- participant observation and take pencil and paper notes, and to give a feedback at the end of the session to the Service's consultant.

At the beginning of the small training group, since two new participants had showed up, we let time for the boys and girls to present themselves again.

The first one to present himself was Luca. He is 28 years old and says immediately that he could not find a job since 2013: "The last job I've done was as butcher in an industrial slaughterhouse and it…well it destabilized me a bit…". He repeats the word "destabilised" many times, as if he would unconsciously underline it and remind to the presents who already know his history, what happened from 2013 until now. For the record, we will only say that despite his belonging to a very rich Italian family, his intelligence and interest for human sciences, he never finished any kind of school and ended up being an alcoholic, spending two years inside a rehabilitation community, trying to detoxify himself.

Right after him Fadua takes the floor. She is 23 and looks very pretty, both for her aspect and for her manners. She came with her head covered with typical Muslims dresses. She should have already been present in the previous meeting, but the woman for whom she is working illegally did not allowed her to come. From very brief parts of conversation, we became aware that her elder brother has also been introduced in a Social Service project, without reaching any success. Fadua instead has a high school diploma as chef's assistant and a certificate that enables her to assist elders. Every time she speaks about her family and brother, her eyes get immediately filled with tears, and she closes herself in silence. We can understand almost immediately how problematic and conflictual is the family context in which the girl lives and how much work would be necessary to help her and give her the possibility to run out of a claustrophobic condition and live a life of her own.

Third in line is Jasmine. She arrived during Fadua's presentation, apologising for the delay and limiting herself to take place into the circle, listening.

Now it's Olga turn. She came back in despite of a physical aggression episode towards Luca that took place during the previous encounter. She does not say much, she only remarks her Rumanian origins and her age. She says she is 24 and that she has done

many different jobs in the previous years that helped her a bit. We know that she has not a study title and that she has never worked, but we are also aware of her psychiatric problem so we just let her free to speak. She highlights how demoralising and frustrating it is not been able to find a stable job: "It's really a trauma". She says it making reference to my research and continues saying: "I hope the Govern will do something, I hope in a better word and I hope I will see everyone here happy." She says this to her groupmates, as if she assumed that they are living the same frustrations and pains she is feeling.

Jasmine is the last one presenting herself: "We are the reform ones, the ones that when we tell the name of our high school degree no one understand what we have done. I wanted to go to university, in an economy faculty, but I couldn't. So, I started the great adventure of finding a job. I've also founded an association to teach Italian language to strangers". Jasmine is 19 and looks like a very promising girl, full of initiatives. She is a second generation's son, as Fadua is, but even if she is not carrying a veil she seems more tied to her Turkish origins and to her native country. She, in despite of the discomfort and frustration given by the impossibility of realise her desires, has decided to channel her energies and talents inside an activity that even if not remunerative, gives her some satisfactions and a bit of hope. The same sense of hope that in other group members has left place to a deep rage and sense of discomfort. She is also the first one introducing the theme of trust into the group: "Everyone is saying us different things about how they're going to help us, what is Youth Guarantee and what we can do with the money and time they are spending for us. I went to many presentations in many different places but I guess I still haven't figured out who am I supposed to trust 'cause everyone is telling it differently! I have to find someone I can trust."

That is the first time the Consultant takes words, to explain how her Service is interpreting Youth Guarantee's boundaries and restrictions, but also how they are exploring its possibilities, adding personal resources and combining it with other minor projects to make it work at best. While listening to her users all looked quite suspicious or even absent. Whereas looking at them I could not free my mind from one single word: interrupted. That was how they all looked to me, like interrupted histories. They all had in their eyes a deep sense of confusion and dismay.

Consultant: "…I'm just asking you, to come here and let me see if you're willing or not. It's very simple to me!".

Olga is sitting next to me, and she is watching the socio-analytical triangle that the consultant has drown on the whiteboard. She always looks like she is totally absent, annoyed or really bored, but then she suddenly shouts out loud, slamming her hands on the table: "I would like to change everything! I would put the young at the bottom of the pyramid because they are the base! Firms and States must be responsible for them! And if they would take care of them, then they would work more!".

Those words spread inside the group as a wave. Every member seems to agree, and the reason was very easy to understand: Olga's voice was the voice of frustration. You can try to take all the responsibilities on your shoulders, but when you are 19 and have already done 50 jobs interview without any success, like Jasmine had, even if you are smart and well trained, you just cannot hold it anymore. You need to put the blame on someone, and you need to shout it. That was a cry for help that nobody could ignore.

Consultant: "[…] taking care…what does it means for you?"

Olga: "To give more opportunity!"

Luca: "To give more mentoring…"

Jasmine: "A boy that has just finished to study is already lost by himself. In job advertisements they ask so many requisites that they can't stay neither in heaven or hell!"

Consultant: "Could you give us an example?"

Jasmine: "I don't know…like previous experience in the field, having a car, knowing other languages…but, I mean…that's for every proposal! It's non-sense!"

Consultant: "And what kind of proposal would you accept? What kind of work would you want to do?"

Chorus: "Anything!"

That was a very common idea, transversal to any small group, deeply-rooted inside everyone's mind, that the right strategy to get a job was presenting yourself at a job interview and to declare that you are willing to do anything. To accept any job, because the need for having an income is so desperate that they would do anything. The problem is that nobody can do any job without distinction. Nobody can work 8 hours a day, 5 days in a week, making a work that does not fits him/her or that does not reflect at least a part of himself/herself, of his/her dreams and wishes.

And in fact, in the voices of the boy and girls that were speaking, you could clearly feel a desperation and frustration note emerging. They have searched an employment for so long, without any result, that now even hope has gone. But how can you live without hope at that age?

It is on this central focus that the Consultant tries to introduce the Desire theme, but it does not seem to grasp the attention of the users.

Consultant: "Anything it's not true. It's not an option. Every work has its boundaries. This is a factual data. This is reality."

She gives also a certain numbers of very concretes examples of how even the simpler work has its own boundaries, and how we must be able to see and consider them before declaring ourselves willing to accept it. But how can you make people reason

upon boundaries, if they do not even know what they would like to do? When we asked them what would be their desire if they could have any job in the world, the answer was always the same: "I don't know…really, anything".

How can you prepare people to do any job? How can you work with them if they can not even put in words their desires and dreams? How can you work on the building of a training project, if you do not know what they want to achieve? Again, the answer is simple, and tragic at the same time: you cannot.

While we were trying to explore these topics we could see the users' reactions changing: from the curious and energetic ones of Jasmine to the completely disoriented and confused ones of Luca and Fadua. At the end there was always Olga, with her level of frustration rising so fast and so high that looking at her was almost painful. She was sitting there in a chorus of snorts, trepidations and sighs, refusing to speak for all the time. But when the Consultant asked them how did they felt, it was her again to cry: "I am suffering!!!".

Olga needs for sure to be helped in a psychological path, but her psychic fragility and her lack of self-containment helped us to see what was going on beneath the group's surface. Dream and Desire could not be put on words for these young adults, because only thinking of them made them suffer. Desire is repressed because it is not realizable and this statement made it intolerable. There is no space for dreaming, no space for illusions. Every potential success becomes a question of luck, like in the movies: "maybe you get the job of a life, and then…". They miss is the capability to stay; staying with themselves and with their own thinking to let a dream free to emerge and give time to a project to be built. These young people are missing the capacity of tolerate the frustration of the waiting. Bion would probably call it "negative capability" (Simpson, 2006). Or maybe, they had just finished their resources to land over in that dark and unknown space that is the time of wait and uncertainty. Like if their negative capability has been eroded by the events that involved them.

After the statement about the film, which remind us a story of "American dream", the consultant takes the chance to tell her personal story, in a very disenchanted manner, without any sense of poetic heroism: real life, not a movie. "You have to build everything for yourselves. Luck isn't an option, everything is included in the project. Everything lays in the ability to keep on holding your dream tight".

But is it possible to try to live a dream when the reality is so frustrating and empty of possibilities? In that way, you suffer. And so, you remain tied up in restrictions. It's a tie that you don't even see, but that ties you up to a certain form of auto-commiseration, where there is no reason to search for other frustrations: their fragile reality is already full of them.

The session is going to end and the Consultant made a proposal: "Next time, we will create something together. Your duty will be not only going in search of 4 job

advertisement you would like to answer to, you will also try to build your own firm project".

Everyone remains silent, but the feeling that is circulating is clear: we are asking them an impossible task. And sudden Olga's voice rise, declaring explicitly that she would not do it. Even Fadua seems very scared by the idea of adhering to such a demanding request. Jasmine tries to show herself strong enough, but you could tell by the way she is compulsively writing that the whole thing made her very nervous. Luca just kept silent.

Social Dreaming: a bridge to the future

Small group training sessions went on, but we could not see many changes in the users' attitude. They still looked confused, scared and undetermined. Moreover, we kept on fighting to put them in contact with their desire dimension, that was constantly negated by them.

It was after a very exhausting session, in which awfully images of apocalypse and end of the world came out, that we decided to try something completely different. Since they refused to talk about future, desire and projects in this reality, the only solution to was carry them into another. That is why we decided to try Social Dreaming (Lawrence, 2003; Lawrence Gordon, 2005; Snell, 2010).

Social Dreaming is a group setting that works as a Matrix, ignoring the part of the group dynamics to let the participants able to set themselves into a dimension of pure associations and free thinking. Interpretations of the single and their dreams are denied, to let the creativity process gone freely, letting powerful insight happen. Emotions are the dominant elements of the SD matrix, and the group usually use them to make new connections and reach new levels of awareness.

"In dreaming, these connections between experiences of the day, and life, become auto-associative, linking in diverse, unexpected, and surprising ways to weave a, sometimes bizarre, narrative." (Lawrence, 2010)

This narrative was what we aimed to stimulate in our users. We decided to change the traditional setting, where people are sitting following the snow-flake scheme, and let our users to dispose the chairs as they preferred, trying not to disorient them too much.

Below we are going to present the very first Social Dreaming session, showing how it almost immediately allowed our users to take a jump into the emotional dimension and start to see themselves and express their thoughts and feeling in a completely different way.

The session started between the feeling of uncertainty and scepticism of the users involved, with the holder inviting them to close their eyes and tell their dreams and visual associations freely, trying to stay into a dreamy dimension, without thinking rationally.

Fadua: "when you don't dream, how do you do to dream?"

Olga: "I dream that I'm on a beach, I dream diamonds, sparkling wine, jewels, parties…I would like to live in that dream!".

Luca: "I'm in very crowded place with a friend of mine. There are people drinking and playing and chatting. Then I go in the back of the shop with him and I saw young people making things in group, I don't understand very well what they are doing, it seems like they are doing some esoterical playing, with enchantments, and I think that they are doing it wrong. They are too young to manage those kind of things. One of them says an enchantment wrong and opens an enormous gash behind the table that swallow everyone. I manage to grasp myself to the border, but in the end I decide to let myself fall down inside this dark hole even if I don't know what there is behind…maybe a lake. I fall but I don't find myself in the water. Near me there's an enclosure and I start running following the perimeter because I want to exit from there. While I'm running I see my car on the other side of the enclosure and I see also a man telling me that I'm not out yet. So I jump on the other side of the enclosure and I start running again in the opposite direction."

Jasmine: "I'm on a beach also. I'm in front of the sea and there are two different images, one at the sunset and one at dawn and I am reflecting while I'm looking at the sea. There are a lot of people all around me, but I feel lonely."

Fadua: "I never dream…but I have this dream: I'm stucked between this world, like...the reality world, where you have duties and you cannot dream. The dream is all in the other world, in the infant world, where you can imagine, create and be free and without duties and people to have care to. I feel like I'm closed between these two worlds."

Holder: "When I was a child I often dreamt of being on the Pinocchio's beach, with the wale waiting to eat me into the black see. I'm a nude child, and I run to escape. I cry and shout with all my might, but it's like I'm mute. Nobody hear or see me while I'm searching for help."

Consultant: "Yesterday I dreamt I was on a suspended wood bridge. Behind me there was a river and there was a lot of wind, shaking me while I was crossing the bridge. I had a mandarin in my hand and I was peeling it while crossing, but then the wind shakes the bridge too much and I let fall all the mandarin pieces, and in my hand remains only the peel."

Olga remerges from the dramy state with a terrible laughter and shouts to the Holder with rage: "At least you have the diamonds! I have them only in my dreams!!!". The Consultant had to intervene to calm down the girl and tried to carry her back again in the suggestion, but time was almost over and reflexions about the experience were needed.

Luca sayd that “sleeping is like dead time. When you are sleeping and dreaming you are doing nothing, you are just loosing time”

Holder: “But if you don’t sleep, you can not survive. Bodies need resting.”

Luca: “I often dream that I’m with a guide underwater, and that he takes me to see all the wrecks that are there and I have this strange sensation that I can breathe under water…”

Olga: “I don’t have your phantasy. I didn’t watched cartoons so I don’t have all these images. I dream only reality.”

Jasmine: “The images of dreams, even when they are not real, makes you remember of someone and make you…feel him.”

Olga: “Is there an age to dream?”

We finished the session with this open question and our users where both dismaid and exited at the same time. They asked us to do it again and so we organised other sessions involving also people from other groups. One data that we can report for sure is that their level of engagement raised a lot even in other training activities that leaded everyone toward a new path.

Conclusions

The Social Dreaming session that had been carried out inside the Social service with the aim to find successful measures to help young adults to redesign their reality (Reid & West, 2015) and approach differently with the world of work (Urlrich Beck, 1999) demonstrate in our view that this young people need different type of experiences before starting a rigid training which aims only to throw them in a reality that they would not be able to sustain in any case.

It is indeed possible that a rigidly focused concern with the NEET status of these young people risks to divert the attention from more threatening situations that they are living, which might require more urgent interventions.

This also confirm us that the act of identifying a part of the nation’s youth by defining them for what they are not fails to understand the profound differences of their situations, or to take account of the reasons for their being ‘NEET’ status and the diversified needs for support that they may have.

This is the main reason why we considered Social Dreaming as a possible solution of integration and auto-formation when approaching very hard situations. Working with collective dreams and images, keeping the attention on people’s feelings and desires, could be the key to engage young adults in need and find a way to support them in their personal emotional growth, even when they have very different backgrounds and problems.

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