




Article

How Young Italians Negotiate and Redefine Their Identity in the Mobility Experience

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Abstract: In this article we analyze the formation of different identity models of Italian young people experiencing mobility. The article contributes to study the link between youth mobility and identity. It does so through the development of a theoretical perspective that combines Butler's post-structuralism with Bourdieu's category of embodied cultural capital. Drawing on this theoretical framework, we analyze the identity formation of young Italians who emigrated to Australia in the last 10 years. The data show the emergence of an identity made up of a complex set of interconnected levels, composed of an incorporated dimension that constitutes the basis of their roots and the performative part that represents the mobile dimension subject to transformation in the course of life evolution. This interpretative lens enables the understanding of how the process of incorporation is connected to the performative and self-transformative one of identity, but also how the different combination of fixed and mobile aspects defines different profiles of identity and a different way of perceiving being Italians.

Keywords: mobility; identity; young people; performativity; cultural capital



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1. Introduction

The relationship between mobility and the formation of youth identity [1] represents an important sociological line of inquiry. Within the field of youth studies, this relevance is attributed due to the plurality of meanings this relationship takes as it is increasingly associated with the theme of transitions to adulthood [2], unequal social trajectories [3], and the relationship with places and sense of belonging [4]. It is important to state from the put set, that here we refer to geographical mobility in the sense of movement of people from one place to another, particularly the transnational mobility of young Italians, rather than issues of social mobility related to class matters. This idea of transnational mobility has been strongly associated in studies of young people as one of the new markers in the transition to adulthood [2]. For new generations of young people mobility is conceived as an experience aimed not only at improving one's skills and competences, but also as a process of searching for one's Self which is built through encounters with others.

Despite this sociological relevance, the effects on identity formation have not yet been widely explored. Further, although the relationship between mobility and ethnic identity has been addressed by different theories and in different fields (sociological, anthropological, psychological) [5], the common denominator within this landscape of research is the tendency to develop a contrasting and polarizing interpretative perspective. For example, post-structuralist theorists [6] examine the ethnic identities of transnational migrants in their diasporic experiences as a performative process but often ignore the relevance of ties to places, roots and socialized cultural dimensions. Psychological perspectives of identity [7] investigate how identity construction processes develop within a stable framework but neglect the role of cultural and social practices in modifying and reformulating the path of identity construction [1,8,9].

Against this background, the aim of this article is to develop a theoretical perspective that contributes to a more complex understanding of the process of identity formation. To do so, we focus on the experiences of Italian youth who have emigrated to Australia in the last decade. We draw on survey and interview data emanating from a mixed-methods research projects with migrant Italian youth, aged 18 to 35 years to illustrate the link between mobility and identity formation. The article, in particular, intends to analyze the interdependence between the persistence of a core aspect, that persists in him/her regardless of the social circumstances that he/she is going through at a certain time, and the mobile dynamic part of identity. If mobility has been considered a field in which identity is transformed and modified, highlighting above all the fact that it is not constituted by a fixed dimension, it is equally true that mobile young people increasingly express a desire to be anchored with a stable dimension, foundation of one's identity [10–12].

In order to grasp these two levels of analysis, the core and mobile aspect of identity, and thus provide a more complete vision of the dynamics of identity formation connected to mobility, we draw on a theoretical approach that combines the concept of post-structuralist performative identity [6] and that of embodied cultural capital [13]. Post-structuralist theorists conceive identity (subjectivity) as socially constructed and processual and highlight the role of social factors, rather than the individual traits, in identity formation [6]. Bourdieu's category of embodied capital [13], on the other hand, helps the understanding of the different capacities for adaptation, resistance, innovation and re-elaboration of the identity practices of young people in mobility. It represents a reservoir from which to draw cultural and symbolic resources (linguistic skills, disposition to taste and aesthetic sense) through a continuous assembly process, allowing the creation of anchoring processes even if not definitive. Ultimately these two perspectives highlight how the performative aspects and embodied elements of identity are intertwined with each other.

The paper is divided in two parts. In the first part we provide the salient issues from the new field of studies on Italian emigration to Australia. This is followed by an examination of the relationship between mobility and identity formation. The first part concludes with an outline of the theoretical approach from which identity is understood as the joint result of embodied and performative practices.

In the second part of the article we present our research study, followed by a discussion of the results of a mixed-methods project. Here we discuss the process of identity formation of young Italians through the theoretical framework outlined in the previous section. From the analysis it emerges that the identity of young Italians in Australia consists of an incorporated dimension, constituted by the basis of their roots, and a performative part which represents the mobile dimension that is subject to transformation during the course of life. Ultimately, this shows how the cultural resources that young people have incorporated into their identity are used to produce anchoring but also processes of change and adaptation in mobility contexts.

2. Studies on Italian-Australian Identity

The study of Italian emigration to Australia is a rich, complex and composite field of research. This field was significantly expanded in 1980s and 1990s, where different reflections, analyses and studies were produced in the sociological realm but also historical [14–16], demographic and linguistic space [17]. Despite this rich research foundation, only in recent years social science studies have focused on the processes of transmission and reinterpretation of the formation of the Italian identity in Australia.

These studies predominantly focus on second and third generations and their identity formation, through the role of the family and linked to the different Italian diasporas. For instance, ref. [18] studied the discursive construction of identity in a bilingual sample of Australians of Italian origin. Their research shows the presence of the complex and fluid nature of Italian identity from which a different meaning of authenticity arises. In the field of intra-diasporic relations, ref. [19] highlight how the migratory project of the new qualified cohort of Italian migrants in Australia is dependent on the structures, resources

and networks of the previous cohort (especially the post-war one) but also how this new migration cohort poses a problem and a need for revision of the historical Italian identity in Australia. Further, in two articles, refs. [12,20] analyze the revival of ethnic identity and the theme of return emigration in the second and third generations. In the first article, they show how ethnic identity, rather than weakening in the transition from the first to the second generation, takes on a greater cultural and symbolic vigor. In their second article, they highlight how the emotional-family dimension represents a fundamental driver for the return emigration of third generation. More recently [12], through an ethnographic study, examine the construction of ethnicity (Italianness) over time by comparing two cohorts of Italian-Australians (post-World War II and post-1980s). From this research, although a fundamental cultural discontinuity emerges between the two cohorts, the first linked to the derogatory expression “wogs”—a stereotype of post-war Italianness—, and the second more connected to a cosmopolitan vision of identity, both build their identity through the model of and connection to the family (intimate culture and family habitus) of the Italian emigrant.

From an anthropological perspective Marino [21], adopting Sayad’s concept of double absence and Bourdieu’s category of cultural capital, illustrates the diachronic evolution of the identity of three different generations of Calabrian Italians who emigrated to Australia. This research highlights the dynamic and multiple nature of identity and also undermines the idea of the presumed cultural homogeneity of Italian emigrants. Marino shows how regional and cultural differences are a central aspect of the way in which Italians adapt and negotiate their identity within Australian society. In another study Marino [22] focused on the concept of authenticity of Italianness between two groups of Calabrians: those who live in Calabria and have not moved and the other who instead emigrated and live in Australia. The aim of the research is not to establish who the “real Italians” are but to understand, through ethnographic data, the differences in cultural practices through which the two groups construct their Italian identity.

More recently there has been a revival of both historical and sociolinguistic studies which have focused on the relationship between memory, history and identity, and also on the role of language in the formation of the social identity of third and fourth Italian generation. Within this research space, the first example concerns the work of [23] who uses an unconventional reconstruction of Italian emigration to Australia by providing a complex profile of the history, memory and identity of the Italian community. An identity emerges that is not only subaltern [19] and ambiguous (neither white nor black) but also an active and creative community capable of expressing a transnational identity that is not limited only to the past and the celebration of social memory.

Another example involves a pilot project carried out by a research group of sociolinguists [24] with the aim of studying the processes of identification and identity formation among young people of Italian origin. The research consists of a qualitative and quantitative analysis of a sample of individuals aged between 10 and 18 years old, both belonging to the fourth and fifth generation and the children of the new wave of Italian migration to Australia. From the analysis emerges a very complex and differentiated relationship between the identity of young people and the Italian language and culture. In particular, for the interviewed people language represents a link with their family’s migratory history, a fundamental resource for their sense of belonging, and a central dimension for the formation of their identity as new migrants.

These studies have provided a notable contribution to the topic of transmission and revision of identity within and between generational cohorts using a theoretical approach in which an essentialist and constructivist vision of identity is combined. Although these studies offer an important picture of the process of symbolic and cultural reformulation of the Italian identity of the second and third generations, they do not offer an in-depth exploration of the processes through which the new youth mobility addresses, negotiates and reformulates the theme of identity in particular in Australia and in general within a global cultural context in which mobility represents an important field of experimentation and transition of youth identity and the realization of their life projects. As a result, what

emerges is a poor conceptualization of the potential connection between the new mobility paradigm and the effects on the mobile life of young people, characterized by an identity made up simultaneously of fixed, mixed and cosmopolitan aspects and dimensions.

3. Identity and Mobility

The conceptual background from which to start to understand the formation of hybrid, changing, multiple and transnational identities in the youth world is represented by the affirmation, in the social sciences, of the mobility paradigm [25]. This paradigm, underlining the complex ways in which the different mobilities (of the body, objects, imaginary, virtual and communication) are connected and assembled together, configures a field in which the new generations experience a process of formation and reformulation of identities. Mobile life, or being mobile, is seen as a new space of identification for young people, a constitutive element of the contemporary meaning of youth, an important marker in transitions to adulthood, and a creator of youth experiences [2,4,26]. Mobility, therefore, is configured not only as a complex strategy implemented by a reflexive agency aimed at solving the problem of job insecurity, improving personal skills and constructing a brighter employment prospect, but also as a process that involves a restructuring of identity in terms of flexibility, adaptability and rapid transformation capacity [26,27]. Mobility can be then considered a field in which young people can experiment and generate processes of change and negotiate and reposition their identity.

Within the space and time of late modern society these transformations have been examined by contemporary sociologists. For example, ref. [28] argues that the process of individualization produces a deterritorialized subject with a do-it-yourself identity; ref. [29] discusses identity in terms of self-development in which the subject plans and organizes his/her own life in a reflexive manner within a “desembedding context” in continuous movement, and with a high level of risk; while ref. [30] proposes a reading of identity in the context of the transition from modernity to postmodernity in which the subject’s identity transforms from fixed and solid to liquid and open.

Although these approaches use different perspectives, they all consider identity as a social construct. And while these studies have highlighted how a mobile society produces flexible but also unanchored identities, they offer little reflection on how bonds and sense of belonging are reproduced and reformulated with the different social worlds that young people experience and traverse. Nevertheless, recent theories on identity formation have focused on the notion of mixing, hybridity and multiple identities [31,32], showing how young people are capable of mixing multiple cultures and developing multiple senses of belonging. Further, it has been argued that in a context of global interconnection, transnational identities emerge in which the new generations tend to take on the basic elements for identity formation both by drawing from the flows of global culture and from the local contexts of belonging [33,34]. In this case, mobility has a fundamental value for identity and life projects as it takes on the character of a system of social relations in which young people are located in particular networks of belonging, not as separate individuals but with a connected self. In this sense, the perspective of transnationalism has become an important field for studying the formation of ethnic identity within social worlds that span multiple locations but has also contributed to analyze how young people develop new strategies aimed at reconciling tension between mobility, identity, family, and place [9,35].

An important area of study has recently developed [36] focusing on the relational dimension of the practices through which young people build their sense of belonging and face the construction of their identity in transition processes. The approach developed by [36,37] uses the relational metaphor to interpret belonging, showing the fundamental role it plays in the formation of identity. Recent studies have also shown how these connections are built through elective belonging in which young people form their connection to the place and their identity on the basis of a conscious decision and not only on the basis of historical or previous ties [38,39].

From this perspective, mobility increasingly presents itself as the new context in which a reformulation of old forms of belonging/identity (based on class and ethnicity) are implemented in the direction of new forms of identification and connection; that is, models of hybrid belonging [31]. These are made up of fixed cultural categories and also of dynamic processes [40]. This determines an intercultural disposition that allows young people to recognize their belonging but within a social framework characterized by cultural diversity [41]. Such a transcultural approach opens a conceptual space for a better understanding of the capacity of young migrants to deal with differences and disadvantage of resources [42,43].

This requires the development of a critical approach to the concept that conceives the connection between mobility, belonging and culture of origin in conflictual, static and unchangeable terms. Ref. [44] show that young people who find themselves “between mobilities” develop a concept of belonging and culture that is built on the basis of practices that simultaneously connect their place of origin with new communities. Beyond the different conceptualizations developed to define the identity of young migrants, all these categories are united by having a common vision based on the idea that identity is a social construct that is constantly negotiated and reworked, especially within the migratory experience.

Ultimately, what emerges from this research space is the need to avoid slipping into binary approaches in the analysis of identity (essentialism versus post-structuralism) and to develop an interdependent and above all complex perspective of the processes of identity formation [1] practiced by young people in the new context of an increasingly mobile world.

4. The Theoretical Approach

Within the mobility research field, young people’s identity is viewed as likely to be changed and shaped by the ability to be mobile but also as producing a desire to be anchored to a stable, foundational dimension [10]. To interpret this process the aim of the article is to develop a theoretical perspective as a hub of negotiation between the subjective self-transformation of identity and the sense of belonging to a place in order to grasp the interdependence existing between the persistence of a core aspect and the dynamic mobile part of identity. To examine these two aspects and provide a more complete vision of the dynamics of identity formation connected to mobility, we intend to use a theoretical approach that relates the concept of post-structuralist performative identity [6,45] with the category of Bourdieu’s embodied cultural capital [13].

Post-structuralist theorists conceive identity (subjectivity) as socially constructed and processual and highlight the role of social and relational factors, rather than individual traits, in identity formation. This approach rejects the idea that identity is a fixed and essential property of individuals destined to become stable once they reach maturity. This is so because it is considered the result of social and relational practices that are determined in specific historically given contexts. Within this framework, identities are conceptualized as incomplete, “constantly in flux” [46]. This concept is expanded and deepened by [6] through the category of performativity, outlining a social theory of agency that affects the formation of identity. According to [47] the sequence of acts (interaction of ritualized practices), in a specific social context, highlights how identity is constructed through a progressive process of incorporation of the social dimension within the individual. Although this process shows how identity is formed through repetitive, forced and sometimes unconscious practices, it does not mean that it must be conceived in deterministic terms. From this perspective, identities can be rethought and reinterpreted, encouraging a new social positioning and a process of self-transformation.

This definition of identity is in line with the concept of embodied cultural capital developed by Bourdieu. It represents one of the three forms (objective, embodied and institutionalized capital) [48] mainly used to understand how the production and reproduction of social stratification is connected to the unequal distribution of cultural resources (formal and informal knowledge and skills). While Bourdieu’s theory of capitals (social, cultural and economic [13]) has been revisited and reworked through the use of the concept of

transcultural capital [43] to interpret the abilities of young emigrants to mobilize resources (social networks, knowledge and so on) and to apply them selectively in new social contexts [42]; it should be noted that this concept has rarely been connected to the theme of mobile youth identity. Nonetheless, embodied cultural capital recalls, as it was defined by Bourdieu, lasting forms of disposition of the mind and body which constitute an integral part of the subject's habitus [13].

The embodied capital is distinguished from the other two forms in that it presupposes some characteristics that cannot be traced back either to the concept of an objectified resource (cultural goods) or to the institutionalized form but as a resource that constitutes an integral part of the formation of the subject's personality. Starting from Bourdieu's definition it is possible to identify some aspects that allow to conceive incorporated cultural capital as a constitutive and transformative element of the subject's identity. These aspects recall a conception of capital as: (a) linked to the body as it presupposes an incorporation of culture; (b) an incorporation process that costs time (individual investment); (c) a subjective process of incorporation that converts an external good as an integrated part of the person (habitus); and, (d) a process that occurs in an unconscious way that is not programmed through the mechanism of socialization and requires teaching and learning time [13].

The characteristics outlined above show a dynamic process based on a performative incorporation of culture in which the production and transmission of immediate knowledge practiced by social agents combines with the internalization of cultural models and forms structured in the social context [49,50]. This means that the social agent, through ritualized performative acts produced over time, incorporates objective (external) culture as an integral part of its habitus through an unplanned but continuous process. From this point of view, although the process of incorporation involves learning and socialization, production and reproduction, it can be subject to change due to the performative practices implemented by the social agent. In this sense it can be stated that embodied cultural capital is embodied and performative as it is linked to the body but also to practices experienced daily by social agents [51]. In this perspective, identity represents the product of the process of incorporation and performativity which represent two moments of a broader and more complex process in which the acquisition of culture becomes a stable element of the individual but also a transformative aspect. This allows us to conceptualize identity as a category that is neither culturally fixed nor completely fluid [1] but rather as an identity that it is defined through a variable process of identification that occurs through a recovery of the relationship with a Self that connects the future, the present and the past within a context characterized by mobility.

5. The Research Study

This article is based on data from a mixed-methods project that examined the mobility of Italian youth to Australia. In this article we focus on the sense of belonging and the formation of identity for these Italian young people in the Australian society. The sample consisted of Italian youth and young adults, aged between 18 and 35, who arrived in Australia after the great financial crisis of 2008. The choice of age groups between 18 and 35, rather than between 18 and 24 years old, is in line with the categorical notions of youth used by Italian researchers [52]. The sample is made up of young Italians living in the states of Victoria and South Australia as residents, with dual citizenship or with a working holiday visa and temporary (skilled) work visa (457 visa). The research techniques consisted of an online survey, followed-up by semi-structured interviews with a subset of 25 participants. The research project was originally conceived to answer four main research questions: (1) What are the motivations that drive young Italians to migrate to Australia? (2) What are the structural and personal resources necessary for young Italians to experience a sense of belonging in Australia? (3) What does it mean to be Italian in Australia? (4) How is identity formed and transformed during the experience of mobility?

The survey was divided into three sections: demographic data (sex, age, territorial origin, educational qualification, family background, work experience in Italy and Australia,

living conditions in Italy and Australia), relational (quality of relationships with Italians and Australians, with institutions and communities; sense of belonging/identity), and attitudinal (attitudes towards others, attitudes of others towards themselves, expectations towards the future and norms and general values).

For the administration of the questionnaire, a non-probability ‘avalanche’ sampling plan was adopted by publishing the questionnaire on different Facebook pages of organizations in Adelaide and Melbourne which have the purpose of bringing together Italian citizens in Australia – for example, ‘Italians in Melbourne’, the Italian committee ‘Nomit’ (The Italian network in Melbourne), and ‘Italians in Adelaide’. The adopted sampling design is informative because the distribution model of the population differs from that of the sample, nor it is possible to use sample weights to eliminate any biases of the sample estimates using the results of surveys previously carried out, since there are no similar researches to refer. For this reason, it is not possible to generalize the results to the population of young Italians abroad, but the data offer a very interesting representation of the phenomenon [3].

The questionnaire was completed by 79 participants (51% male and 49% female). The average age is 32.08 years (standard deviation = 4.62). As stated above, this is a recent emigration, and thus on average the interviewees have been in Australia for around 4 years (mean = 3.9 and standard deviation = 3.4). Fifty-two per cent of the interviewees come from Northern Italy and 23% from Central and Southern Italy. Two per cent of those interviewed already lived in a foreign country before moving to Australia.

With respect to educational qualifications, 5% of the participants have a middle school diploma, 33% have a high school diploma, and 62% have at least a university degree (half of these individuals also obtained a master’s degree and/or doctorate).

For the qualitative analysis, 25 in-depth interviews were carried out with young people who work/study in Adelaide and Melbourne. They were recruited by using both personal contacts and through frequenting places of work and social and cultural (e.g., cafes, Italian quarter in Melbourne) aggregation of young Italians. The interviews were carried out face-to-face or via Skype by the researchers in the project. The average duration of the interviews was 50 minutes. The purpose of the interviews was to reconstruct the migratory experience of participants by delving into the themes covered in the questionnaire. During the interviews participants talked about their relationship with the context of origin, their mobility experience, the process of identification with Italy and Australia, the processes of adaptation and transformation of their identity.

Participants are characterized by a heterogeneous configuration with respect to socio-economic and territorial origin [3]. They are mainly graduates working in jobs related to their qualifications in the fields of management, catering and training. In this work, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.

6. Young Italians in Australia

As stated above, the identity of mobile young Italians can be viewed as the result of a process in which the embodied cultural capital [13] is associated with the performative practices experienced in the host country [47]. The use of this theoretical framework, which integrates the concept of performativity (taken from post-structuralist literature) with the category of embodied cultural capital, allows us to understand how the cultural resources that young people have incorporated within their identity are used to produce anchorages but also processes of change and adaptation in mobility contexts.

To verify this theoretical hypothesis, we analyzed the results of a questionnaire administered to young Italians in Australia. For this purpose, we asked participants to express their level of agreement on a Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree, no opinion) to the following questions:

- (1) I feel like I belong to Italy;
- (2) I feel like I belong to Australia;
- (3) I feel like I belong to Italy and Australia;

- (4) I feel like I belong to the University where I study;
- (5) I feel like I belong to my workplace;
- (6) I feel like I belong to the area I live in;
- (7) I feel I belong to more than one culture;
- (8) It is important for me to maintain my cultural heritage;
- (9) I feel like I belong to the Italian community in Australia.

In the questionnaire belonging was considered as a constitutive resource of embodied cultural capital which, through a performative process, contributes to forming and reformulating the identity of young Italians in mobility and showing the interdependence existing between the persistence of a central nucleus (embedded cultural capital) and the dynamic, mobile and performative part of identity.

The results of the multiple correspondence analysis (M.C.A.)¹ allowed us to reconstruct the semantic areas in which the common responses are located and outline a first reconstruction of the process of identity formation of young Italians. More specifically, in the second quadrant of graph 1 there are the items 'multicultural' and 'heritage' ("I feel I belong to more than one culture" and "It is important to preserve cultural heritage") for which the interviewees expressed the maximum agreement. Quadrant III includes items 'Italy' and 'Italy & Australia' ("I feel like I belong to Italy" and "I feel like I belong to Italy and Australia") on which the interviewees are quite in agreement. In the I and IV quadrants there are the items for which the interviewees expressed their disagreement or did not express any opinion: they do not feel they "belong to Australia" ('Australia'), "at the workplace" ('workplace'), "to the place where they live" ('current residence') and "to the Italian community in Australia" ('Italian community'). No opinion was expressed regarding the item "I belong to my university" ('university') (Figure 1).

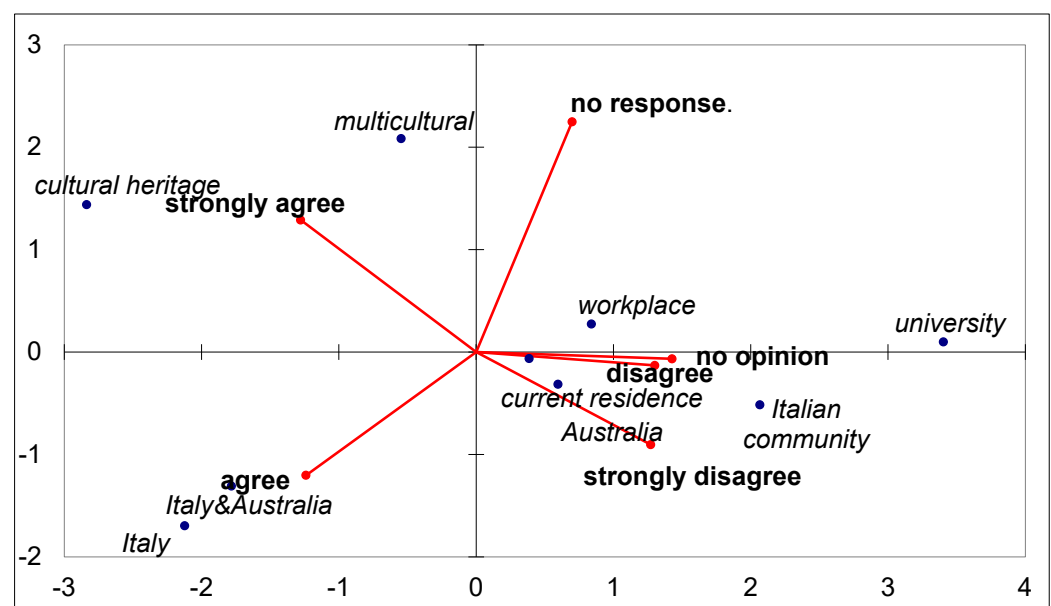


Figure 1. Patterns of identity formation and belonging of young Italians in Australia.

From the analysis of graph 1 identity emerges as a complex set of interconnected levels composed of an embodied dimension that constitutes the basis of their roots and the performative part that represents the mobile dimension subject to transformation in the course of the evolution of life. The interesting aspect of this interpretative lens is that it allows us not only to highlight how the two levels are essential to understand how the process of incorporation is connected to the performative and self-transformative one of identity, but also how the different combination of the fixed and mobile aspects outline different identity profiles [1].

It is possible to notice the presence, throughout the sample of interviewees, of a central nucleus (“I feel I belong to more than one culture” and “It is important to preserve the cultural heritage”). It is interesting to note how this basic nucleus is—as Bourdieu claims—marked “by the conditions of its first appropriation (primary socialization) leaving behind more or less visible traces” (the roots of Italian culture) [13] (p.18). However, it is also the product of subsequent secondary incorporations performed by the individuals in the new contexts in which they find themselves living (“I feel I belong to multiple cultures”).

The specificity of this nucleus, characterized by a dynamic and evolutionary process of incorporation, also clearly emerges from the qualitative interviews carried out to young Italians emigrated to Australia. When he was asked: “What does it mean for you to be Italian in Australia?”, Marco, 32 years old, graduated at Business School LUISS in Rome and emigrated to Australia in 2014, stated: *“I bring my Italian, or rather Roman, cultural background within a multicultural system. The other cultures I came into contact enriched me but I retained my cultural roots”*.

The presence of an Italian culture incorporated into social practice represents an anchor from which the process of building new identities develops in a multicultural context. Although the need to reactivate incorporated cultural capital arises from the need to rebuild a family relational and cultural environment, it does not occur through a strengthening of the origin experienced as a source of security and defense but as a process that helps to produce new anchors. This aspect emerges very clearly from the response provided by Rosa, 30 years old, from Bologna, with a degree in Economics, living in Australia since 2017: *“I have noticed that in reality, compared to previous study and work experiences, living in Australia I tend to rebuild a family environment with cultural canons acquired since childhood that have characterized most of our lives, but trying to have an international mindset that is more open to other cultures”*.

These young people provide a complex understanding of the process of cultural reproduction of their identity. The data show that it is not a simple transmission or move from one place (home) to another of one’s cultural heritage but a new repositioning of one’s identity in which the cultural dimension takes on the function of identification with Italy. These results confirm what is reported by other researches (see for example [53]) according to which young Italians conceive Italy in cultural terms and not through national and state symbols. This is in line with the statement of Giacomo, 24 year old, graduated and originally from Cosenza: *“I don’t feel like I belong to the Italian nation but there is an underlying culture that unites us. I’m not tied to the idea of Nation or border, but I feel I have many things in common with other Italians”*.

In this regard, the quantitative analysis confirms the disjunction of the identification process between the cultural/relationship dimension and the organizational and institutional aspects present in young Italians. Among the questions asked in the questionnaire, we asked to assign a score from 1 (not at all important) to 10 (very important) to some items relating to cultural, social, organizational/institutional and economic aspects which best bring out the differences and similarities between the two countries. Figure 2 shows the average values obtained for each item based on their answers: the higher the average value the more important the rating of the item is for the respondents.

A clear difference emerges between Australia and Italy. The former country stands out for efficiency, meritocracy, job opportunities, rights, self-realization and citizen services, while for the latter the community, social, relational and emotional aspects prevail. The analysis of the responses highlights how the identity of young Italians is connected to the incorporation of the cultural and symbolic dimension and not to the organizational and institutional aspects that characterize Italy as a nation. To this purpose there is a vast historical, sociological and political literature which has highlighted the weakness of the Italian republican state (see Journal “Identità Italiana” (Italian Identity) edited by Galli della Loggia E., ilMulino, Bologna).

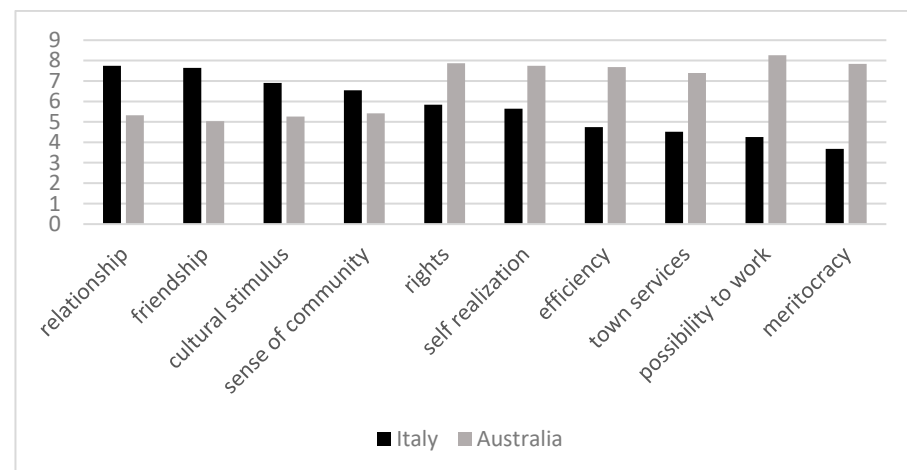


Figure 2. A comparison between Australia and Italy.

7. The Two Profiles of the Italian Youth Identity

The quantitative data show that, starting from the core aspect, it is possible to define two different identity profiles which include the different ways in which young Italians reformulate their identity path based on the experience lived in the Australian society. The first is made up of those who feel they belong to both Italy and Australia; the second refers to those who perceive themselves as exclusively Italians. In the first case we have a graft within the central nucleus of some aspects of Australian culture. This is the product of practical performative relationships that emerge in the interaction with the new context, generating, in some of the young people interviewed, a process of identification and internalization of new socio-cultural practices and lifestyles. This process is described by Ruggero, 30 years old, who claims: *“My roots are Italian but with respect to my way of being I feel closer to the Australian system than to the Italian one. . . . An adjustment has occurred in my way of behaving”*.

The dynamics of adapting one’s cultural background to the new social reality is also well described by Antonello, 31 years old, who states: *“When I arrived in Australia, I wanted to behave like when I was in Rome, then I realized that there was no need. I have adapted to the rules of the Australian system”*. It is not, however, a process of instrumental accommodation aimed simply at carrying out the roles and functions imposed by the new context in the best possible way but a process from which a different way of being Italian, a new Italianness, arises.

This aspect can be seen from the response of Stefano, 30 years old: *“Yes, yes I have always felt Italian...but oh well, a slightly different Italian. Because I see the Italian who is in Italy, then I see an Italian who perhaps comes from other places with different backgrounds and Italians like me. There is an Italian that abroad is a little different from the Italians who live in Italy. Not better but he/she is more attentive, more aware of how Italy is, of the problems he/she has and, in short, he/she glosses over certain controversies...”*.

The aspect that emerges from these interviews is the presence of a tension between the incorporated cultural capital and the way in which young people use it to give stability and anchoring to their own established identity experienced during mobility. It is not a conflictual tension but rather an evolutionary dynamic that does not generate splits but a constant process of negotiation in which, through a dynamic of continuous balancing, the traits and dimensions that belong to the Italian culture and aspects of the Australian society coexist.

This is illustrated by Alessandro’s statement: *“Australia has changed my identity. From a cultural point of view, I am Italian but I have adopted the Australian way of thinking. Then when you find yourself in a system that works you understand that it is not necessary to transgress it. And this change remains even if you go to another country, even when you return to Italy”*.

The second profile concerns young people who define their identity in a more essentialist way based on attachment to the roots and cultural heritage of Italy. This can be identified in the statement of Antonio, 31 years old: *"You carry your identity within you when you are born, if you are Italian you remain Italian, you can promote who you are and your traditions, if you go to a place you respect the country where you go and do know your traditions"*. The stability and anchoring function of the embodied cultural capital of the identity is also confirmed by Stefano, 27 years old: *"You can be Italian anywhere if you maintain your identity. Identity makes you feel connected to your roots, that feeling that makes you say that even if I became an Australian citizen, I will never be Australian, I have my culture and my traditions in which I firmly believe"*. Although the formation of this profile is ascribed during primary socialization in the family or in the community to which one belongs, it is nevertheless characterized by a dynamic process rather than one of closure or identity resistance.

The data shows how within an identity framework characterized by the search for roots and stability, the mobility experience produces and generates processes of reactivation of resources which in the original context were dormant or unrecognized. It is a process of awareness that we could define as dynamic and performative which is connected to three aspects: firstly, when the need to reproduce one's, own cultural baggage emerges; secondly, how it is reproduced in the new context; and thirdly, to the activation of the process of recognition of the cultural capital incorporated in the context of mobility.

For the first aspect, the data shows how the need to transmit one's cultural heritage arises when one becomes a parent. This dynamic is highlighted by the testimony of Giovanna, 33 years old: *"Maintaining Italian culture is even more important now that we have two children . . . Being Italian means maintaining a series of habits and ways of doing things that belong to the Italian culture, such as food which for us Italians represents an important moment as it is an element that is always present on every occasion"*. The second aspect concerns the activation of new forms of rituals aimed at the transmission and incorporation of cultural capital to the new generations. The data shows that the emergence of the different family context activates new ritual practices such as organizing family parties or moments of conviviality. This is highlighted again by Giovanna: *"Since we have been parents we have asked ourselves the problem of how to transmit our culture. With our children and the children of other Italian friends we try to create moments of meeting such as going to the restaurant to have lunch on a Saturday evening or having parties with Italian families"*.

The third aspect concerns the necessary process of social recognition that young people need in order to recover their cultural identity and promote it. What emerges from the research is that mobility generates among the interviewees a transition from a condition of misrecognition of subjective resources (experienced in the Italian context) to a situation of recognition of one's own cultural capital incorporated in the new Australian context. This aspect is highlighted by Michela: *"I feel more Italian here than in Italy, because I feel like carrying on my traditions and my culture, which I didn't do in Italy. In Italy I don't feel protected, recognized and I don't know if I will ever return to Italy. It's a question I can't answer"*. The appreciation of the cultural dimension as an incorporated element of the Italian identity becomes a recognized and esteemed mark in Australia. This is also highlighted by Giorgio: *"Our cultural heritage is not valorized by the Italian state, however in Australia 'being Italian' is a positive brand, which recalls art, culture and food, aspects which have penetrated Australian society thanks also to presence of first generation Italians"*.

Two important aspects emerge from these results. The first concerns the fact that in Italy there is a lack of recognition of cultural heritage and of the subjects who promote it while in Australia, Italian culture is recognized as a brand. The second aspect concerns the fracture that once again emerges from the results, between the cultural dimension and that of Italy as a state. This discussion which connects the theme of recognition [54] to the experience of mobility shows how among young people there is a change in the perception of themselves and their degree of participation as active citizens with a specific cultural capital as recognized valued and promoted.

8. Concluding Remarks

The relationship between the experience of mobility and the formation of young migrants' socio-cultural identities have become a focal point of contemporary sociological research in Western countries of immigration [31]. Traditional research on the identities of young migrants has been dominated by a dichotomous emphasis between essentialism and a fluid approach, neglecting the procedural dynamics that underlie the formation of new transnational and translocal identities. Although numerous studies have developed alternative conceptualizations, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of young migrants' identities [31,43,55]; fewer research has been conducted on the connection between fixed and transformative aspects of identity within a globalized world characterized by a high degree of youth mobility.

Based on the critical debates regarding the theme between mobility and identity and analyzing recent studies on the processes of transmission and reinterpretation of the formation of the Italian identity in Australia, the article offers a theoretical perspective capable of providing a more complex picture of the process of identity formation of the mobile Italian youth who emigrated to Australia in recent years.

In particular, the interdependence between the persistence of a core aspect and the dynamic, mobile part of identity is highlighted by combining the post-structuralist perspective [6] with the category of incorporated cultural capital [13]. This has allowed to formulate a heuristic model capable of taking into account both the creative and self-transformative dynamics of identity and the processes of cultural incorporation embodied in young Italians in mobility.

The results presented in this study allow not only to understand identity as the product of processes of incorporation and performativity in which the acquisition of Italian culture becomes a stable and transformative element of young people's identity but also to offer an important contribution to the specific characteristic of the identity of young Italians in Australia and more generally on their perception and evaluation of their country of origin.

On the basis of this theoretical framework, we examined the identity formation of young Italians who emigrated to Australia. The data show that identity is made up of a complex set of interconnected levels composed of an incorporated dimension, constituted by their roots and the performative part which represents the mobile dimension subject to transformation in the course of life evolution. In this way it is possible to understand how the process of incorporation is connected to the performative and self-transformative one of identity, but also how the different combination of fixed and mobile aspects define different profiles of identity [1] and a different way of perceiving being Italian.

The core aspect is composed of the cultural dimension which is porous or capable of innovating, adapting but not completely assimilating to the culture of the host country. This involves the emergence of an identity for young Italians made up of an intercultural disposition that allows them to recognize their belonging but within a social framework characterized by cultural diversity. From this basic nucleus, two different identity profiles are co-defined which include the different ways in which young Italians reformulate their identity path on the basis of the experience lived in the Australian society. The first is made up of those who feel to belong to both Italy and Australia and is characterized by the presence of a dynamic of accommodation of their cultural background to the new Australian reality. However, it is not a process of assimilation but a creative dynamic from which a different way of being Italian and a new Italianness arises.

The second profile concerns young people who define their identity on the basis of attachment to the roots and cultural heritage of Italy. A key aspect of this identity is the connection with the recognition process. The young people interviewed underline how their roots were dormant in Italy and were discovered only in Australia due to the presence of a process of social recognition which gave a high symbolic and material level to Italian culture. Seeing a high status attributed to their cultural practices is part of a general evaluation and perception of young Italians of their nation as a cultural field and not as a State.

A complex repertoire of the identity of young Italians is outlined in which different identity levels converge contributing in unison to formulate a unified picture of the culture of young Italians who have emigrated to Australia. This narrative suggests that a new identity is being structured and anchored in one's roots but open to cultural diversity, while also aware of the value of one's cultural heritage not only for oneself but for the host society. It is an open but not indefinite identity, without borders, which arises from a critical process and where it reinterprets its own cultural capital within a context in which the certainty of the rules and the functionality of the system are appreciated.

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Notes

- ¹ Multiple correspondence analysis (M.C.A.) is a multivariate statistical technique that investigates the associations among the modalities of qualitative variables. M.C.A. has been carried out by using R 4.3.2. software (<https://www.r-project.org/>), accessed on 10 October 2023.

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