What Young People Think of Their Future

The results of an international sociological research project were recently presented in Rome. It looked to explore what young people think of their future. The surveys were conducted in four countries: France, Russia, Germany, and Italy. For France, the reference institute was the Institute for French Studies (IFR), for Russia, the Centre for Independent Sociological Studies (CISS), for Germany, the Forschungsgruppe Warentests (FW), and for Italy, the Centre for Social Research (CERS). From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. 

From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestants. More specifically, Russia underwent profound historical transformations in the 20th century, which to a large extent also affected the perceptions of its young people. From 1949 to 1990, Germany was divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the country was reunified as the Federal Republic of Germany. For Russia, the predominant culture is Russian Orthodox, with a small percentage of Catholics and Protestant...
The young people surveyed were given a series of 25 "life values." Researchers only took into account the answers on the ... expressed in the responses are quite homogeneous in the four countries considered, but with specific differences.

Health is in first place in Italy (97.8 percent), Poland (98 percent) and Russia (95 percent); in Germany the percentage ... it has been indicated as important in a percentage that varies between 81.2 percent and 88 percent of responses.

If one wishes to to glean general indications on some of the significant and interesting points, one should note, for ... existing today in all countries. It is therefore a value considered less important than Friends, Free Time and Leisure.

The values of Personal Independence and Freedom were judged to be important between 80 and 95 percent of young people, which highlights the desire to avoid parental control. The desire for independence grows with age.

Religion is held to have the lowest status in the ranking of values (between 36.9 and 32.8 percent in all countries). The ... The lowest places in the ranking, next to Religion, are generally occupied by Patriotism, Beauty, Business and Politics.

The importance of Work and of Money is obviously higher in the countries where young people face the greatest ... percent of those interviewed in Italy, 89.1 percent in Russia, 87.5 percent in Poland, but only 70.7 percent in Germany.

Patriotism does not arouse particular interest among young people. In Russia, Patriotism, Politics and Religion were at the bottom of the list of values, despite the great emphasis on these issues made by the media and the Church in this country.

Russia has some unique aspects compared to other countries, such as the low esteem of values such as Democracy (only 58 ... this category is more than 25 percent. Instead, there is greater interest in the material aspects of life and well-being.

The fundamental similarity in the structure of values indicates that the young people of these four countries belong to a common European culture, but the particular differences of each country and the specifics of social life also appear.

The emotional state of young people in 2018 and family planning

If we divide the emotional state of young people into three categories: Negative, Uncertain or Positive, we can conclude ... as negative ones: if they are multiplied, the emotions of joy and happiness can become the basis of public enthusiasm.

In Italy, 55.5 percent of young people in 2018 had positive emotions; 43.4 percent experienced negative emotional ... negative moods; 30.1 percent an attitude positive characteristics; and 32.6 percent frames of mind marked by uncertainty.

With regard to reproductive orientation, family planning, the creation of a family and the birth of children, it is clear ... especially in the area of employment. But this is not yet the subject of serious public debate in these countries.

Any growth in reproductive orientation is strongly correlated to a sense of confidence in the future. The comparison of ... possibility of social mobility are changed, with more optimistic forecasts of real success for young people in society.

It should be remembered that the orientation toward a low level of births does not imply that young people have abandoned ... of family life is found among Germans (3.9 percent), while Italians (82.2 percent) are the most family oriented.

Horizons for future planning

1) Lifespan. People define the duration of their life plans differently. Some plan the future for a year, some for 5 or ... clearly outlined in its main elements are factors that contribute to forming and clarifying the breadth of this horizon.

From the results obtained in all the countries surveyed one may conclude that young people have a horizon for planning ... but neither are they necessarily oriented toward living from day to day.

Important elements for long-term planning are life expectancy, but also the length of a healthy life. According to ... for Poles was estimated at 78 years, for Germans 81 years, for Italians 83.4 years: data confirmed by research results.

Young Russians reported their life expectancy was 68.8 years, almost 4 years lower than the official statistics, ... lower than those provided by modern medicine: 83.4 years for Italy, 81 for Germany, 78 for Poland, 72.7 for Russia.

2) Social mobility. Taking into account the perspective of 10-15 years, the young people of the four countries believe ... a focus on vertical social mobility" (p. 12). This also improves the position of each country in a competitive world.

The factor Confidence in the Future plays a crucial role. The assessment of Confident/Insecure About the Future varies ... positions lower than those of people who have confidence in their future, believe that their progress will be great.
The gender differences are interesting. In Germany and Russia, girls are very optimistic. In Italy and Poland young males are more realistic. The authors of the research believe that the bulk of the young respondents, as a whole, enjoys a healthy level of optimism.

3) Civil and political activity. The ability to interact with the authorities and to influence the decision-making processes is a key factor in the development of civil society. Young people in Italy think they can influence the policy of regional and municipal authorities.

With regard to the possibility of influencing national politics, opinions are equally divided between Yes and No. Young people in Italy think they can influence the policy of regional and municipal authorities. The ability to influence official policy allows you to plan your future in an appropriate and favorable environment. Young people in Italy think they can influence the policy of regional and municipal authorities.

With regard to the possibility of influencing national politics, opinions are equally divided between Yes and No. Young people in Italy think they can influence the policy of regional and municipal authorities. This risks undermining the credibility of the authorities.

It may be interesting, in order to define the maturity of civil society, to evaluate the participation of young people in various institutions. Young people in Italy think they can influence the policy of regional and municipal authorities. Institutions are actively involved in society and participation in religious activities is increasing, as in Italy.

The same applies to voluntary activities (including work for the poorest), which involve young people in Germany (35.6%) and Italy (34.2%). Young people in Italy think they can influence the policy of regional and municipal authorities.

In Germany and Italy there is a greater involvement of young people in political life – through participation in elections at various levels, in referendums, and in demonstrations – than there is among Poles and Russians.

If it is a question of evaluating a successful life the most important criterion for young people is Self-realization of their personal and social goals. They believe that their future is secure if they are able to achieve their goals independently. The ones who show the highest level of self-reliance are the young Italians.

Concluding remarks

We have presented some of the most interesting results of the research that was conducted with the idea of outlining the social atmosphere and the direction of development of the country in which they live. It is clear that the social horizon for young people as they plan for their lives extends to the medium term. However, it is also true that young people are more optimistic than adults. They are already part of it as participants, although often unaware and not always active.

This observation limits how one views future progress, but it also means that young people do not live day by day. They think about the future and plan for it. The ability to participate in leisure and recreation activities, which is important for young people, is also a key factor in their development. Young people in Italy think they can influence the policy of regional and municipal authorities.

In the four countries chosen for the survey, there are very similar guiding values, which speak of the common Christian heritage of young people of Europe. In addition, there are national characteristics in the public life and history of each country.

Young people seem to show a more marked social optimism than adults, who have generally compared the present with a past that was better. Young people in Italy think they can influence the policy of regional and municipal authorities.


[1] The initiative was promoted by three Russian scholars: Svetlana Varlamova and Elena Kayshauri, of the Federal Center for Social Research “D.I. Mendeleev” of Moscow. In Germany, the reference body was the Iwak Institute at the Goethe University in Frankfurt.

[2] The numbers cited in brackets in the article refer to the pages of the text made available online by Eurispes.

[3] Since the population of each country considered is greater than 100,000 people, the calculation of the sample showed a probability of reliability of 0.95, and a sampling error of ±5 percent.

GianPaolo Salvini, SJ - La Civiltà Cattolica