

# Policy Innovation through a European Youth Perspective

## The Italian Path towards Local Generational Impact Assessment

**Luciano Monti**

Luiss Guido Carli

**Claudia Cioffi**

Luiss Guido Carli

**Federico Engaldini**

Consiglio Nazionale Giovani (CNG)\*

**Giulio Vannini**

Luiss Guido Carli

The paper examines public policy innovation through the Youth Perspective, highlighting the role of youth participation in multilevel governance processes. After analysing European tools such as Youth Dialogue and Youth Empowerment, it explores the Italian local implementation of Generational Impact Assessment (VIG). Empirical evidence from Parma and Bologna shows how tagging methodology and a performance-based approach represent innovative and scalable practices in public policymaking.

### **L'innovazione delle politiche nella Youth Perspective europea. La via italiana della valutazione di impatto generazionale locale**

*Il contributo analizza l'innovazione delle politiche pubbliche attraverso l'introduzione del concetto di Youth Perspective, evidenziando il ruolo della partecipazione giovanile nei processi di governance multilivello. Dopo aver esaminato strumenti europei quali Youth Dialogue e Youth Empowerment, l'articolo approfondisce la sperimentazione italiana della Valutazione di Impatto Generazionale (VIG) a livello locale. Le evidenze empiriche su Parma e Bologna mostrano come la metodologia di marcatura e l'approccio performance-based costituiscano elementi innovativi replicabili nelle politiche pubbliche.*

DOI: 10.53223/Sinappsi\_2026-01-11

#### **Citation**

Monti L., Cioffi C., Engaldini F., Vannini G. (2026), Policy Innovation through a European Youth Perspective. The Italian Path towards Local Generational Impact Assessment, *Sinappsi*, XVI, n.1, pp.154-166

#### **Keywords**

Social change  
Young people  
Public policies

#### **Parole chiave**

Cambiamento sociale  
Giovani  
Politiche pubbliche

### **Introduction**

The demographic winter affecting large parts of Europe – particularly Eastern and Mediterranean countries, with Italy at the forefront – the depopulation of internal areas, the persistent generational divide (Marchetti and Monti 2017; Monti 2017), the talent trap constraining numerous European regions, brain drain, income inequalities (Treu 2018), and the asymmetric impact of recent crises on younger cohorts (Morlino and Raniolo 2019) all urgently call for a reconfiguration of public policies at every level of governance, placing youth development and participation at the core of democratic life.

Against this background, this contribution emphasises the importance – indeed, the growing necessity – of innovating public policies by systematically integrating a *Youth Perspective*, grounded in genuine youth participation in governance processes and in meaningful co-design practices.

After examining how appropriate youth engagement (*Section 1 – Actors*) can act as a multiplier of benefits for the broader community and after outlining the role of young people as changemakers, the article focuses on the enabling factors of youth participation in institutional activities, namely

\* Former member of the Training & guidance commission of the Italian Youth Council

*Youth Dialogue and Youth Empowerment (Section 2 – Tools)*, within the broader framework of the *EU Youth Strategy*. It then illustrates European models of co-participation, such as the *EU Code of Conduct* and the *European operational Manual on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (Section 3 – Governance)*.

Within this framework, the analysis concentrates on the innovative features of the *Generational Impact Assessment* – known in the Italian policy framework as *Valutazione di Impatto Generazionale (VIG)* – adopted in Italy at the local level (*Section 4 – Early local-level experimentation in Italy*). The empirical investigation, conducted through Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) with officials from Italian local administrations that have already implemented VIG, aims to understand, first, why the instrument has been rapidly adopted in specific social contexts, and second, how youth co-participation processes translate locally into shared governance practices for generational impact assessment. Innovative elements emerge, such as the preliminary tagging process and the performance-based approach, positioning the Italian experience as a best practice in the implementation of the Youth Check (*Conclusions*).

### **1. Actors: Young People as Drivers of Development and Changemakers**

In order to ensure the sustainability of the national system in the face of current social dynamics – particularly demographic and migratory ones – a driving force can and must come from the youth population, which has been significantly affected by these dynamics and has so far received limited support from policymakers (Ferrera 2019). Young people can become drivers of development starting from local contexts, where the concept of proximity takes shape in both its physical dimension – relating to access to essential services for individual and collective well-being – and its immaterial dimension, which concerns the ways in which individuals and political, social, and economic actors are “close” to one another in terms of relationships, interactions, communication, participation, affiliation, emotions, and beliefs (Mecca 2023).

In societies characterised by high life expectancy, such as Italy, the term “youth” generally refers to individuals aged between 15 and 34, within which three sub-groups can be identified: school age (15-19), university age (20-24), and post-university age (25-34) (Cognetti and Ferro 2023).

Youth development can be understood as a multi-level extension of a given territory: the broader residential community, neighbourhoods, and educational institutions. This development

is intertwined with the influence of significant individuals in young people’s lives, such as parents, relatives, and peers (Brennan and Barnett 2009).

All these different and interrelated levels play a crucial role in shaping youth engagement within the community – understood as a group of people sharing a territorial area as the basis for their daily activities (Parsons 1951) – by offering opportunities to participate in local economic and social development and, more broadly, to exercise active citizenship. When young people are encouraged to assume responsibility and to act as full actors in this process, they are more likely to engage in sustained forms of participation and to contribute to their communities over the long term (Brennan and Barnett 2009). Youth engagement in community life represents both a pathway to achieving better outcomes and an intrinsic benefit for young people themselves. Through active participation, they learn about their communities and contribute to creating more supportive places in which to live; they develop research skills, leadership, community organising capacities, and decision-making abilities. Finally, as young people progressively develop their full civic potential – thus becoming, potentially, the problem-solvers of tomorrow – their own lives, as well as the well-being of their wider communities, improve (Center for the Study of Social Policy 2007).

At the same time, local policymakers are expected to involve young people as partners in advocacy processes, working with them to identify problems, develop solutions, and draft legislative proposals at the territorial level (Perkins *et al.* (2001).

Within this interactive context, young people assume the role of *changemakers*, a term popularised by Ashoka, the international non-profit organisation founded in the 1980s to support social entrepreneurs and innovative solutions to global challenges. A changemaker is defined as an individual who seeks change and actively works to achieve it, often through teamwork and adaptive learning for the benefit of the community (Wells and Schindler 2022). More specifically, a number of core characteristics contribute to the effectiveness of a changemaker. These include:

- Conscious empathy, understood as the ability to recognise and understand one’s own perspective as well as those of other individuals and specific population groups, and to use this understanding to identify patterns over time and guide action towards purposes that contribute to the common good;
- Teamwork, namely the capacity to contribute and thrive within a fluid ecosystem of groups that mobilise around emerging problems or opportunities;

- Change leadership, expressed in the ability to recognise that, in a constantly evolving world, the key role lies in imagining, enabling, and ensuring that every potential actor is empowered to act within a clear overarching framework;
- Change action, understood as the process of creating new solutions to social problems that are more equitable, effective, efficient, and sustainable than existing ones, generating significant value for society (*Ibid.*).

Although widely used in social innovation discourse, the concept of changemaker encompasses a broad spectrum of actors, including activists and community members effecting incremental changes in everyday contexts (*Ibid.*).

Supporting young people in implementing change – so that they can effectively become *agents of change* starting from their local contexts – can be seen as a commitment to a set of broad and deeply interconnected outcomes. These include, for example, young people being civically engaged and active in their communities or societies; actively contributing to positive change through youth-led initiatives or effective intergenerational partnerships; possessing leadership skills to operate at both local and global levels; and participating in formal political and governance structures (Collins and Clark H. 2013). At the territorial level, governance can be understood as the process of coordinating, planning, and managing resources, services, and decisions related to a specific area, involving a wide range of actors. Through territorial governance, decisions can be taken in a more informed and participatory manner, better responding to local needs (Casagrande *et al.* 2010; Turco 2013). In this respect, many of the imbalances currently observed in territorial and community development can be traced back to failures of territorial governance, often attributable to the concentration of decision-making power at a single apex. Such unidirectional governance structures exclude other local actors, resulting in partial understandings of both problems and solutions (Fiorenza 2022).

The macro-areas of youth support in implementing change outlined above are interrelated, and one may represent an important prerequisite for another. For instance, establishing mechanisms that allow young people to participate at various levels of governance and policymaking may prove ineffective if young people lack the necessary skills or leadership capacities to engage

meaningfully (the issue of *empowerment*). Similarly, encouraging participation will not yield results if participation channels do not exist or if they are merely symbolic (Collins and Clark 2013).

Moreover, youth inclusion neither begins nor ends with involvement in projects focused exclusively on young people. Young people and their leaders should be actively consulted and sought out as partners in the majority of development interventions (Sultan *et al.* 2025).

To provide a more concrete understanding of what it means to be a changemaker today, “The Possibilists” – a global alliance of leading youth-focused social innovation networks reaching hundreds of thousands of young changemakers, activists, and social entrepreneurs worldwide – has conducted scientific studies to explore the impact, challenges, and needs of young changemakers. Based on the data collected, collective action projects are launched to improve the global support ecosystem for engaged youth, with the ultimate aim of providing a reliable resource for governments, foundations, civil society organisations, and all actors committed to supporting them.<sup>1</sup> One of the most recent studies, focused on the European context and presented in 2024, demonstrates that young people across Europe are indeed generating significant positive change across multiple areas of society.<sup>2</sup> The survey, which involved 229 changemakers from across the continent, identifies both key findings and significant challenges. First, the majority of young participants focus on education, which they regard as the most effective driver of change, followed by climate action, which – although no longer the dominant priority – remains highly relevant for today’s youth. Furthermore, young Europeans engaged in change-making activities are not primarily motivated by employment-related needs, but rather by an intrinsic desire to improve their own lives and those of others, at both local and global levels (*Ibid.*). These positive outcomes are counterbalanced by significant challenges, particularly financial instability, which respondents identify as the primary obstacle. Although European changemakers perform slightly better than their counterparts in other world regions, only 15.5 per cent manage to cover all necessary expenses through their initiatives. Stress and burnout follow closely, with three out of ten young respondents reporting burnout and 83 per cent indicating a need for support to improve both their own well-being and that of their teams (*Ibid.*).

1 Cf. The Possibilists, About Us <https://thepossibilists.org/about-us/>, retrieved on 28 August 2025.

2 Cf. The Possibilists (2024), *Europe report 2024* <https://thepossibilists.org/the-2024-europe-report/>, retrieved on 28 August 2025.

## 2. The Tools: Youth Perspective, Youth Dialogue and Youth Empowerment

The document *Elements for a Council of Europe Reference Framework for a Youth Perspective*, adopted by the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ)<sup>3</sup>, constitutes a key reference text for the definition of a conceptual and operational framework aimed at integrating a *Youth Perspective* into all intergovernmental and institutional activities of the Council of Europe. This initiative stems from the implementation of the *Reykjavik Declaration* (Summit of Heads of State and Government, 16 May 2023), which introduced a renewed dimension of youth participation, complementary to the long-established principle of co-management within the Council of Europe's youth sector. The document proposes the systemic and cross-cutting integration of the *Youth Perspective* in order to: enhance the relevance, openness, and sustainability of Council of Europe policies; strengthen youth participation in public decision-making processes; expand cooperation with civil society; and promote more effective intergenerational dialogue.

The Council of Europe defines the *Youth Perspective* as an integrated approach articulated around four interrelated dimensions:

- Thinking with youth – adopting an attitude oriented towards understanding the realities, aspirations, and challenges faced by younger generations, including through evidence-based research;
- Learning from and with youth – fostering transparency and cooperation through open and inclusive dialogue, and valuing the issues brought forward by young people within political agendas;
- Participating with youth – strengthening participatory skills and capacities through formal and non-formal education, and investing in infrastructures and in the role of the European Youth Centres and the European Youth Foundation;
- Acting with and for youth – adopting operational strategies and shared accountability mechanisms to ensure the tangible impact of youth initiatives and of decisions affecting young people.

The document explicitly recognises that the integration of a *Youth Perspective* represents a significant evolution beyond the traditional concept of *Youth Mainstreaming*. It is grounded in genuine participation and co-decision by young people within governance processes, in line with the values of the *Youth Sector Strategy 2030* and the *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*.

This approach aims to consolidate the role of the Council of Europe as a pioneer in promoting multi-level youth participation, providing a model that is also replicable within other international and regional organisations.

Over the past decades, the European Union has increasingly invested in structured instruments for youth participation, recognising young people as active agents in shaping the policies that affect them. Within this framework, two fundamental pillars of European youth policy can be identified: *Youth Dialogue* and *Youth Empowerment* strategies, both embedded in the broader context of the *EU Youth Strategy*. The main normative reference for these processes is the Resolution of the Council of the European Union of 18 December 2018 on *A Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field*, which defines the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 and identifies three key action verbs: engaging, connecting, and empowering young Europeans.<sup>4</sup>

A central instrument for ensuring structured and continuous dialogue is the EU Youth Dialogue, which represents the institutional evolution of the “Structured Dialogue” launched in 2010.<sup>5</sup> It is conceived as a permanent mechanism for exchange between young people, policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders, organised in thematic cycles lasting 18 months and articulated across multiple levels: local, national, and European.<sup>6</sup>

The primary objective of the EU Youth Dialogue is to foster the inclusion of a plurality of youth voices within EU decision-making processes, with particular attention to underrepresented groups. The Dialogue combines a range of participatory tools, including online and offline consultations, focus groups, peer-to-peer exchanges, transnational questionnaires, public deliberation events, and the

3 Council of Europe (2023), CMJ (2023)44\_rev, *Elements for a Council of Europe reference framework for a youth perspective*.

4 Council of the European Union (2018), Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: *The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027*, *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 456/01, 18 December 2018.

5 Council of the European Union (2009), Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018), *Official Journal of the European Union*, 2009/C 311/01, 19 December 2009.

6 Council of the European Commission, 2018 (cf. note 4).

direct involvement of National Youth Councils and grassroots youth organisations.<sup>7</sup> The outcomes of these cycles are consolidated into recommendation documents that feed into the EU Council's triennial work periods, presented in the EU Work Plans for Youth. As reported in the *Report from the Commission on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy (2022-2024)*,<sup>8</sup> the Dialogue has enabled approximately 130,000 young people to express their views on public policy initiatives.

One of the most concrete outcomes of this process is the definition of the 11 European Youth Goals, which serve as a strategic reference framework for orienting policies across a range of domains, including inclusion, gender equality, employment, citizenship, mental health, access to information, and spaces for participation.<sup>9</sup>

Alongside the permanent Dialogue, the European Commission has also established a series of annual Youth Policy Dialogues between European Commissioners and selected groups of young people.<sup>10</sup> These moments of direct exchange serve not only to monitor the effectiveness of policies, but also to promote political and civic empowerment among participants, strengthening their advocacy capacities. These dialogues are characterised by a dynamic and horizontal format, in which young people are not treated as passive actors of policies, but as relevant actors involved in their co-design.

Concurrently, the EU Youth Strategy promotes youth empowerment through the recognition of non-formal learning, support for socio-educational youth work, and the strengthening of active citizenship.<sup>11</sup> Within this framework, instruments such as *Erasmus+*, the *European Solidarity Corps*, and the *Youth Wiki* platform play a key role in data collection, capacity-building, and the financing of bottom-up initiatives.

A further instrument for meaningful and concrete participation is the *Youth Empowerment Fund*, launched in October 2023 as a pilot initiative under the *Youth Action Plan*<sup>12</sup> (for EU external action 2021-2027). With a budget of € 10 million, the Fund aims

to mobilise resources and opportunities for young people active in the EU's partner societies, enabling them to contribute locally to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, within the framework of the *Global Gateway Strategy*. The Fund promotes a youth-led and inclusive approach by lowering barriers to access to funding through the provision of micro-grants ranging from € 500 to € 1,500 for individual applicants or informal groups, and from € 3,000 to € 5,000 for formally registered youth organisations. In addition, young people are involved in all stages of the initiative – from the selection of beneficiaries to participation in governance bodies, and from mentoring to the design and implementation of interventions – thereby establishing a model of participatory empowerment. Through its partnership with the *Global Youth Mobilisation*, a movement founded by the *Big Six Youth Organisations*, the Fund is characterised by a specific focus on underrepresented communities, addressing key challenges such as climate change, gender equality, education, and employment.

Within a broader effort to strengthen participatory European governance, the European Commission has recently established the *President's Youth Advisory Board* (Von der Leyen 2024), a new consultative body fully aligned with Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which enshrines the Union's objective to "encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe".<sup>13</sup> The Advisory Board is composed of young representatives from all Member States and is tasked with providing direct advice to the European Commission on policies affecting younger generations. It acts both as a sounding board for emerging youth priorities and as a mechanism for coherence and coordination among the various EU initiatives dedicated to young people, including the EU Youth Dialogue, the annual Youth Policy Dialogues, and the *Youth Check*.

The Youth Check aims to promote the integration of the youth dimension into decision-making

7 Council of the European Union, 2018 (cf. note 4), Annex 1, Section 3, Implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue.

8 European Commission COM (2025) 117 final, Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy (2022-2024).

9 Council of the European Union, 2018 (cf. note 4), Annex 3, *European youth Goals*.

10 European Youth Portal, *EU Youth Dialogue initiatives* [https://youth.europa.eu/youth-policy/dialogues\\_en](https://youth.europa.eu/youth-policy/dialogues_en), retrieved on 27 October 2025.

11 Council of the European Union, 2018 (cf. note 4).

12 European Commission (2022), Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Youth Action Plan (YAP) in EU external action 2022-2027 Promoting meaningful youth participation and empowerment in EU external action for sustainable development, equality and peace, JOIN/2022/53 final.

13 European Commission (2025), Commission Decision of 25 June 2025 setting up the President's Youth Advisory Board, Brussels, C(2025) 3967 final.

processes and into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies, applying this perspective across all sectors that affect young people's lives.<sup>14</sup> It therefore represents a monitoring system that ensures the concrete implementation of what emerges from participatory processes.

Taken together, these instruments testify the evolution of European youth governance towards greater systematisation and inclusiveness. The establishment of the President's Youth Advisory Board further reinforces this multi-level architecture, promoting coherence among strategies, programmes, and youth voices, in line with the founding objectives of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027.

### 3. Governance: European Co-participation Models, the EU Code of Conduct and the European Operational Manual on Youth Participation

The European scientific literature on youth co-participation offers a wide range of policy instruments that can be effectively applied to strengthen institutional innovation policies, moving beyond episodic, one-off participation and embedding youth involvement within permanent arrangements of collaborative governance. Translating these models into concrete policy practices, starting at the local level, represents not only an administrative challenge but also a critical test of institutional capacity to integrate youth voices meaningfully into the definition of the public interest, in line with the multi-level approaches promoted at the European level. In this context, the *Youth Perspective* does not merely reflect a value-based orientation, but rather constitutes a policy design criterion that requires continuous mechanisms of interaction between institutions and young people, comparable to structured forms of youth dialogue capable of influencing priorities, instruments, and policy evaluation. European co-participation is characterised by its systemic nature, combining principles, tools, and practices within a consolidated framework of policy learning. An analysis of European regulations and standards allows the identification of a set of recurring methodological factors associated with participatory quality. These factors provide a shared reference framework for assessing and strengthening youth

participation experiences, as well as enabling conditions for their sustainability and scalability. They offer an interpretative lens – both normative and methodological – for analysing emerging practices and, at the same time, for assessing their capacity to generate institutional innovation through a *Youth Perspective* approach. These factors include:

- (i) the structural nature of participatory arrangements and their integration within the policy cycle;
- (ii) the representativeness and inclusiveness of the actors involved;
- (iii) the transparency of procedures and the traceability of decision-making processes;
- (iv) the effective sharing of power and decision-making responsibilities, ranging from consultation to co-decision;
- (v) the availability of resources, skills, and support instruments;
- (vi) the presence of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms oriented towards impact;
- (vii) multi-level coherence between the local, regional, and European governance frameworks.

A primary methodological reference in this area is the *European code of conduct on partnership for Partnership Agreements*,<sup>15</sup> adopted within the framework of cohesion policy. The Code establishes common standards aimed at improving consultation, participation, and dialogue between Member States and partners, including regional and local authorities, public bodies, social partners, non-governmental organisations, and entities promoting social inclusion, gender equality, and non-discrimination.<sup>16</sup> Through shared objectives and criteria, partnership has become an integrated component of the entire policy cycle of the European Structural and Investment Funds, involving public, private, and third-sector actors from the planning and implementation stages through to monitoring and evaluation. Within this framework, the participation of civil society bodies, including youth organisations, is recognised as a structural dimension of multi-level governance, contributing in particular to representativeness, transparency, and the continuity of participation throughout the policy cycle.

14 Council of the European Union and Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council (2023), Conclusions on promoting the integration of the youth dimension in political decision-making processes in the European Union, *Official Journal of the European Union*, C/2023/1342.

15 European Commission (2014), Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 240/2014 of 7 January 2014 on the European code of conduct on partnership in the framework of the European Structural and Investment Funds, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L74.

16 European Commission, 2014 (cf. note 15), artt. 3 and 4.

This principle is further reinforced in the Resolution on the *EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027*,<sup>17</sup> which identifies participation as a cross-cutting guiding principle to be applied “in all policies and activities concerning young people.” The Resolution emphasises that youth inclusion in the design, implementation, and evaluation of public policies constitutes a prerequisite for social cohesion and participatory democracy. Within this framework, young people are recognised not only as stakeholders to be consulted, but also as actors with the capacity to influence decisions, in line with an empowerment-based approach and shared responsibility. Participation, therefore, is not confined to electoral processes or formal representation, but extends to civic and associative engagement as a core dimension of public life.

In this context, the Resolution reiterates that institutions “should uphold young people’s right to participate in the development, implementation and follow-up of policies affecting them by means of meaningful participation of young people and youth organisations”<sup>18</sup> and further stresses the importance of vertical coherence across governance levels, stating that “in order to ensure sustainable impact on young people, it is important that EU youth policy be implemented with the interlinkages with regional and local levels in mind”.<sup>19</sup>

This approach seeks to operationalise participation through concrete instruments supporting dialogue, co-decision, and monitoring (Fondazione per la Ricerca Economica e Sociale ETS 2023). One of the most significant references in this regard is the *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*<sup>20</sup>, developed by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. Initially adopted in 2003, the Charter defines youth participation as “the right, the means, the space, the opportunity, and the support to influence decisions and engage in actions that contribute to building a better society.” The Charter is structured around several dimensions, including sectoral policies affecting youth participation, implementation tools, and institutional involvement in local and regional

affairs. It effectively functions as a European Code of Conduct for co-participation, guiding subnational governments towards collaborative governance models based on stability, adequate resources, dedicated institutional spaces, and formal recognition of youth participation. The implementation of the revised 2017 Charter<sup>21</sup>, is supported by an operational manual<sup>22</sup> that provides a reference framework for cooperation models, governance instruments, and evaluation methodologies aimed at strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of co-decision processes between young people and public institutions.

Among the key methodologies is *Hart’s Ladder of Participation*, a tool designed to assess the quality of power-sharing within participatory arrangements. The ladder identifies eight levels of participation, ranging from the lowest forms of manipulative (*level 1: Young people manipulated*) or symbolic participation (*level 2: Young people as decoration*) to the highest level of effective shared decision-making (*level 8: Shared decision-making*). The revised Charter explicitly states that “local and regional authorities should develop the Council of Europe co-management principle and system of decision-making in partnership with young people and youth organisations in policy areas relevant to young people”<sup>23</sup> Co-management models, which involve shared responsibility throughout the entire decision-making process—from strategic definition to implementation and evaluation—have been tested in several European contexts, including regional youth councils and youth-focused participatory budgeting initiatives. These models allow young people to exercise equal responsibility alongside public authorities, thereby shaping forms of co-produced governance.

For this reason, participation levels corresponding to degrees six to eight of Hart’s Ladder can be considered appropriate benchmarks for authentic and meaningful co-participation, characterised by medium to high levels of youth responsibility: at level six, consultation mechanisms involve shared decision-making power and responsibility between authorities and young people acting as equal

17 Council of the European Union, 2018 (cf. note 4).

18 Cf. note 4, *Par. C* “2. Guiding principles”.

19 Cf. note 4, *Par. D* “2. Guiding principles”.

20 Council of Europe (2003), *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe.

21 Council of Europe (2017), *Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168071b54d>

22 Council of Europe (2016), *Have Your Say! Manual on the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life*.

23 Cf. note 22, p. 80.

partners; at level seven, young people initiate and lead the process; while at level eight projects or ideas originate from young people, who then invite adults to participate as partners in decision-making.

Within this framework, the Charter recommends various organisational formats for youth councils, forums, assemblies, and parliaments, which should be permanent bodies endowed with representative legitimacy. At the same time, local authorities are encouraged to support youth participation structures by providing formal instruments, such as regulatory frameworks and operational venues, as well as adequate financial and material resources to ensure continuity. This guidance further reinforces institutional capacity-building, organisational sustainability, and the reduction of reliance on sporadic initiatives. A central role is attributed to an independent guarantor<sup>24</sup> responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of participation support structures. This figure, appointed jointly by youth representatives and local authorities, acts as a mediator between young people and elected officials, contributing to accountability, transparency, and the rebalancing of potential power asymmetries.

Taken together, these methodologies and participatory arrangements show a high degree of scalability across different levels of territorial governance, particularly at the municipal level. In recent years, a number of experiences have introduced co-decision practices that can be traced back to the models described in the *Manual*, especially in connection with the adoption of *Generational Impact Assessment at the local level* (hereafter VIG), applied to territorial development planning instruments such as the *Single Programming Document* (trad. *Documento Unico di Programmazione*, hereafter DUP).

In this context, as will be discussed in the following chapter, youth co-participation has taken on a dual function: an epistemic one, relating to the analysis of needs, discussion of how policy measures may generate stronger generational impacts, and the identification of the most suitable generational social

indicators for monitoring and impact performance evaluation; and a normative one, as shown by some municipalities that are considering the involvement of Youth Councils in these processes, including the Municipality of Casalecchio di Reno, situated in the Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy.

#### 4. The First Local-Level Experiments in Italy

##### *The Context*

The scope of VIG applied to young people was defined for the first time through the work of the Committee for the Evaluation of the Generational Impact of Public Policies (COVIGE), established in 2021<sup>25</sup>. In June 2022, the Committee promoted the *Operational Guidelines for the Generational Impact Assessment of Public Policies* (in it. *Linee guida operative per la valutazione dell'impatto generazionale delle politiche pubbliche*)<sup>26</sup>. The overall objective of the Guidelines is to promote the assessment of impacts on young people generated by public policies, by "providing analytical and methodological support to public administrations". The generational impact assessment model proposed in the COVIGE Guidelines is structured around four domains only: employment, well-being, education, and inclusion. It includes economic, social, and environmental impact indicators and explicitly requires youth co-participation. The national process, introduced by Article 4 of Law No. 167/2025 on legislative simplification and still lacking its implementing decree, operates on a much broader scale. It extends the assessment to impacts on future generations, while limiting the analysis to social and environmental dimensions, and embeds the procedure within the general framework of *Regulatory Impact Analysis* (in it. *Analisi di Impatto della Regolamentazione*, AIR).<sup>27</sup> Due to its breadth and lack of operational definition, this process has raised significant concerns regarding its future effectiveness (Monti 2024).

The Italian approach to generational impact assessment has therefore found rapid and substantial implementation at the local level,

24 Cf. note 22, p. 35. Among the recommendations included in the Manual concerning support for youth participation structures, it is stated that: "– local authorities should provide both formal and informal structures for youth participation, including the necessary spaces, as well as financial and material support (while also having a duty to seek additional sources of funding); – local authorities should appoint a guarantor responsible for overseeing the implementation and monitoring of support structures; – the guarantor must be independent, and his or her appointment should be agreed upon between youth representatives and local authorities; – the guarantor should act as an intermediary between young people and locally elected representatives, represent the interests of young people in cases of misunderstanding or conflict between young people and local authorities, and serve as a channel of communication between the two."

25 Italian Government Presidency, Ministerial Decree of 3 June 2021 as subsequently amended.

26 Italab Government Presidency, Ministerial Decree of 24 June 2022. *Linee Guida per la valutazione dell'impatto generazionale delle politiche pubbliche* (Annex), trad. *Guidelines for the Generational Impact Assessment of Public Policies*, Italy.

27 Law 28 November 2005, no. 246, Simplification and regulatory restructuring for the year 2005, Published in Official Journal no. 280, 1 December 2005.

raising two research questions. The first concerns the reasons behind the rapid diffusion of VIG at the local level, despite the persistent uncertainties in the national regulatory framework (Fondazione per la Ricerca Economica e Sociale ETS 2026). The second relates to the dynamics through which Youth Dialogue processes are activated at the local level.

### **Methodology**

In order to address the two research questions outlined above, an exploratory qualitative study was conducted involving local administrations currently experimenting with territorial VIG. At present, considering both municipalities that have formally adopted VIG and those that are in the process of doing so, it is possible to identify approximately ten administrations, including metropolitan areas and provincial capitals. However, as of the end of 2025, only two municipalities could claim concrete and consolidated experience in implementation.

These municipalities acted as early adopters in applying this innovative evaluation tool. After conducting an initial ex post local VIG on their DUP, they continued along a path of ex ante integration of VIG, characterised by a high level of interaction with local youth networks. These municipalities are the City of Parma and the City of Bologna, both located in the Emilia-Romagna region.

More specifically, several interviews were conducted using the CAPI methodology (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) in October 2025. The objective was to identify the factors that led administrations to adopt the tool, the elements of institutional innovation introduced, operational challenges, and the relational dynamics emerging from interactions between local administrations and young people in the application of VIG, and beyond.

The interview guide was structured into two main sections: the first part (I) focused on the implementation of VIG, examining the criteria for selecting the young people involved, the stage of the policy cycle at which they were engaged, and the degree of co-design or co-evaluation of the adopted measures; the second part (II) addressed future perspectives, focusing on strategies to consolidate youth involvement, the possible engagement of secondary schools and universities, and prospects for strengthening *Youth Empowerment* at the local level.

The interviews conducted in October 2025 involved, for the City of Parma, the Head of the Youth Unit within the General Directorate Staff and Youth Policies Sector, and the Head of Programming and Control within the same Directorate. For the City of Bologna, the interviewee was the municipal councillor who authored the motion initiating the

adoption process of VIG. All interviewees played a pioneering role within their respective institutional contexts, promoting a cultural shift in approaches to youth policies and, in particular, to their evaluation and long-term monitoring. The interview structure is designed to be scalable, with a view to the future introduction of VIG in a larger number of municipal administrations.

Despite the limitations resulting from the involvement of only two administrations with concrete and multi-year experience in local VIG, the study sought to capture perspectives from different institutional roles: a political representative, a youth policy officer, and a senior official responsible for programming and expenditure control. This distinction is particularly relevant, as territorial VIG, unlike the national framework, primarily aims to conduct an economic evaluation.

### **Youth Participation in the City of Parma**

The experience of the City of Parma represents one of the most advanced practices in Italy in the local experimentation of VIG. The process was designed to make youth involvement in municipal decision-making and evaluation processes structural and continuous.

The first step was to establish a collaboration with *Junior Enterprise Parma*, a university-based youth organisation selected for its experience in participatory design and for its contribution to Parma's bid for European Youth Capital. The municipal administration provided young participants with the methodological tools required to apply the local VIG and with the 2023-2025 DUP, asking them to carry out an independent assessment of existing measures that had previously been tagged, under the VIG methodology, as *generational* or *potentially generational*, that is, directly or potentially addressed to young people (defined as a "tagging" process) (Cioffi and Monti 2024).

This approach proved highly educational, not only for the young participants but also for the administration itself. A notable example concerns a measure related to adult education, initially tagged by municipal offices as "neutral" in terms of generational impact, which was reclassified by the young evaluators as "potentially generational" if delivered by young trainers (Monti 2022). The results of this work were presented directly to the municipal council by the young participants, inaugurating a public and transparent mode of dialogue between the administration and younger generations.

Concurrently, a cycle of meetings entitled *Parma Passe-partout* was designed and implemented. These monthly meetings provided opportunities for direct dialogue between young residents and municipal

councillors. Organised and facilitated by young people using participatory and game-based methods, the meetings enabled discussion of the city's strategic issues with the councillors responsible for the relevant policy areas. In one such meeting, for example, the councillor for commerce, responding to young participants' questions regarding vacant retail spaces in the historic centre, acknowledged the need for shared solutions and explicitly requested youth involvement in the development of policy proposals. This episode signalled a tangible shift in the relationship between the administration and youth citizens.

A further outcome of this process was the preparation of the dossier for Parma's bid as European Youth Capital, developed in collaboration with an informal group of young people who subsequently formalised themselves as the Local Youth Council. This body draws normative inspiration from regional legislation and from the law establishing the National Youth Council, and acts as a stable interlocutor for the municipal administration. At present, the Council operates as an independent entity with responsibilities related to policy design support and the dissemination of municipal youth policies.

Collaboration with young people also led to the launch of focus groups dedicated to generational impact assessment, structured to include both ex ante and ex post analysis of measures contained in the DUP. These meetings, supported by formal minutes and summary reports, aim to build a replicable evaluation system based on shared indicators and distributed responsibility among participants. The administration is also experimenting with the inclusion of generational impact criteria in public procurement processes, for example in tenders related to the renovation of youth spaces within the municipal library.

The Parma experience is also characterised by strong attention to internal cultural change within municipal offices, supported through in-house training activities on the VIG methodology and intergenerational co-design. These training initiatives, delivered through workshop-based formats, have contributed to an organisational shift recognising youth participation as a resource for administrative innovation. A significant example is the adaptation of certain cultural initiatives, such as the introduction of free evening access to the civic museum for young people, which emerged directly from dialogue with the VIG working group.

Ongoing collaboration with the University of Parma and the Department of Public Administration opens new perspectives aimed at making local public administration more attractive to young people and at introducing dedicated training pathways

on generational impact assessment. The stated objective is to involve a growing number of young participants – between 100 and 150 in the planned training activities – and to strengthen the civic and technical skills required to sustain informed and continuous participation.

In conclusion, three main challenges were identified by municipal representatives: consolidating youth leadership as a lever for shared public responsibility, defining impact indicators at the municipal level and fostering internal cultural change within administrative offices, so that participation does not remain confined to episodic initiatives but becomes an integral component of the policy cycle.

### *Youth Participation in the City of Bologna*

Bologna is widely recognised as one of the most actively engaged Italian cities with younger generations, characterised by an internationally renowned university district, a high number of structured youth organisations, and a relatively strong youth population compared to the national context. Unlike Parma, youth involvement in participatory public action in Bologna – particularly with reference to VIG – emerged at a later stage. The introduction of the tool occurred through a motion adopted by the City Council in connection with the municipal budget and was therefore assigned to the relevant department and the Statistical Programming Office.

Due to this specific origin, the involvement process has been strongly oriented towards data collection, indicator selection, reporting activities and, at a later stage, the revision and integration of DUP. In comparison with the more bottom-up trajectory observed in Parma, Bologna has followed a predominantly top-down approach aimed at developing an ex-ante evaluation platform and a monitoring system for measures identified as generational or potentially generational.

Bologna does not currently have a Youth Council; however, during the most recent mandate, the role of *Additional Councillor* was introduced. In this specific case, the positions are held by the President and Vice-President of the Student Council of the University of Bologna. These representatives are entitled to participate in council committees dealing with university-related issues or topics concerning the student population, a scope that has been extended through the implementation of VIG to encompass the youth population more broadly. Although *Additional Councillors* do not have voting rights, they are entitled to speak, to request hearings or dedicated committee sessions, and to submit proposals.

The mismatch between the administrative mandate and the electoral cycle of student bodies generates a discontinuous dynamic, as newly elected student representatives may participate in committees convened after each renewal. To facilitate continuity, targeted training on the subject could be provided at each transition. At the same time, a notable strength of this arrangement lies in the ability to engage consistently with two elected, competent, and committed individuals, rather than with a large number of actors whose involvement within political structures might slow down processes and reduce the effectiveness of engagement, monitoring, and evaluation. Through the role of additional councillors, dialogue and proposal development are clearly facilitated.

The most closely examined issues during the engagement phase have been housing, particularly the strengthening of monitoring processes related to housing policies, and mental health, now widely recognised as a key determinant of youth well-being. These concerns were formally raised with the relevant councillors and administrative offices, which have taken responsibility for addressing the issues identified.

Looking ahead, the objective is to implement broader consultation processes. However, the municipality currently lacks specific instruments or bodies, such as a Youth Council, capable of facilitating structured dialogue with younger generations. While various consultation mechanisms exist at the municipal level, including public assemblies, there is still no dedicated structure specifically targeting youth participation. Nevertheless, the administration has demonstrated sensitivity to the issue, and the short-to medium-term goal is to translate this awareness into concrete participatory pathways.

## Conclusions

The overview of the instruments available at the European level shows how the *Youth Perspective* can represent an effective and innovative approach to addressing the ongoing demographic decline and the resulting constraints on the country's resilient development.

The *Youth Perspective* is grounded in three essential pillars: *Youth Dialogue*, *Youth Empowerment*, and the *Youth Check*. Among these, the *Youth Check* has found concrete space for experimentation in several Italian municipalities, representing a unique case within the European context and the specific focus of this study. This instrument undoubtedly represents an opportunity to provide initial responses to younger generations;

however, it cannot do without a parallel and lasting investment in youth emancipation (*Youth Empowerment*) and in the creation of stable structures for dialogue at the different levels of governance (*Youth Dialogue*). Without such conditions, there is a risk that the youth check may be reduced to a purely formal requirement, unable to activate the broader processes necessary to shape effective public action capable of responding not only to young people, but to the wider community that will inevitably depend on them in the future (Monti and Rosina 2022).

The pioneering experiences of Parma and Bologna presented in this study show that the path ahead remains long and cannot exclude the direct involvement of youth organisations and upper secondary education institutions operating at the local level.

Two particularly relevant innovative aspects emerge from the current experimentation with local Generational Impact Assessment. The first concerns the strong concentration of both experiences on measures identified as *potentially generational*. Such measures do not fall strictly within the scope of youth policies, yet they may be more effectively oriented towards younger generations. In this respect, the experience of Parma points to the emergence of a genuine cultural shift within the municipal administration, in which the *Youth Perspective* is placed at the centre of policy interpretation. This shift reflects a different way of assessing the potential of public interventions, with a view to ensuring a meaningful impact on the youth cohort.

The second innovative aspect relates to the adoption of a performance-based approach within VIG, an approach that is increasingly applied in European programming frameworks. The experience of Bologna shows how the rigorous application of a performance-based logic – linking output and outcome indicators to specific impact domains – represents a key element of the robustness of the instrument. This approach reflects the legacy of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, which has contributed to the widespread introduction of performance-based evaluation also in local projects. The experiences analysed may therefore be regarded as readily replicable in other municipal contexts in Italy and scalable at the regional level. At the European level, however, the transferability of this good practice depends on the regulatory framework of each Member State and on the competences attributed to municipal administrations. Nevertheless, local generational impact assessment may find favourable conditions for wider diffusion within the field of European urban policy (Tati 2020).

## References

- Brennan M.A., Barnett R.V. (2009), Bridging community and youth development: Exploring theory, research, and application, *Community Development*, 40, n.4, pp.305-310
- Casagrande P., Centanni C., Marinelli G. (2010), *Territori creativi. Manuale per la governance territoriale*, Ancona, Il Lavoro Editoriale
- Center for the Study of Social Policy (2007), *Engaging youth in community decision making*, Washington D.C., Center for the Study of Social Policy
- Cioffi C., Monti L. (2024), Rethinking policies for the younger generation in the era of recovery and resilience: The Italian Youth-check challenge, *Forum di Amministrazione in Cammino*, 24 September
- Cognetti F., Ferro R. (2023), *Politiche giovanili innovative a base territoriale: i protagonisti, le pratiche e le sfide*, Milano, Fondazione di comunità
- Collins E., Clark H. (2013), *Supporting young people to make change happen. A review of theories of change*, Working paper, ActKnowledge and Oxfam
- Ferrera M. (2019), Le strategie europee, *Sinapsi*, IX, n.3, pp.5-13
- Fiorenza M. (2022), *Rigenerazione e politiche giovanili: Quale collegamento per rispondere alle attuali sfide sociali?*, Milano, Franco Angeli
- Fondazione per la Ricerca Economica e Sociale ETS (2026), *Nuove generazioni, vecchi squilibri: rompere l'inerzia. VII Rapporto 2025*, Roma, Luiss University Press
- Fondazione per la Ricerca Economica e Sociale ETS (2023), *Le politiche pubbliche alla prova della VIG. VI Rapporto 2023*, Roma, Luiss University Press
- Marchetti F., Monti L. (eds.) (2017), *Il Divario generazionale tra conflitti e solidarietà. Vincoli, norme, opportunità: generazioni al confronto. Report 2017*, Viterbo, AlterEgo
- Mecca S. (2023), *Prossimità. Il benessere nella città del futuro*, Firenze, Didapress, Università degli studi di Firenze
- Monti L. (2024), *Anche in Italia arriva la sfida europea dello Youth-check: una opportunità o l'ennesima occasione sprecata?*, Working Paper n.1, Roma, Luiss Research Center for European Analysis and Policy (LEAP)
- Monti L. (2022), PNRR e divario generazionale. Dalla misurazione alla valutazione di impatto delle politiche per i giovani, *Politiche Sociali*, n.1, pp.113-128
- Monti L. (2017), Generational Divide: A New Model to Measure and Prevent Youth Social and Economic Discrimination, *Review Of European Studies*, 9, n.3, pp.151-175
- Monti L., Rosina A. (2022), L'impatto intergenerazionale di una mancata strategia per le politiche giovanili, in Auser Emilia-Romagna (eds.), *Pensare la Longevità dopo la pandemia*, pp.59-65, Bologna, Editrice socialmente
- Morlino L., Raniolo F. (2019), Gli effetti della crisi economica, *Sinapsi*, IX, n.3, pp.14-24
- Parsons T. (1951), *The Social System*, New York, Free Press
- Perkins D.F., Borden L.M., Villarruel F.A. (2001), Community Youth Development: A Partnership for Action, *The School Community Journal*, 11, n.2, pp.7-26
- Sultan S.M., Espinoza S.A., Hellali S. (2025), *Change-Makers: Empowering Youth for Inclusive Societies*, Washington, World Bank
- Tatì E. (2020), *L'Europa delle città. Per una politica europea del diritto urbano*, Milano, Franco Angeli
- Treu T. (2018), Protezione sociale ed equilibrio intergenerazionale, WP C.S.D.L.E. "Massimo D'Antona", IT-374/2018
- Turco A. (2013), *Governance territoriale. Norme, discorsi, pratiche*, Milano, Unicopli
- Von der Leyen U. (2024), *Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024–2029*, Strasbourg, 18 July
- Wells D., Schindler A. (2022), Everyone a Changemaker: A Strategic Lens, *Social Innovations Journal*, 11, n.1

**Luciano Monti**

lmonti@luiss.it

Adjunct Professor of European Union Policies at Luiss Guido Carli University in Rome and at the Luiss School of Government, where he coordinates numerous courses in graduate and post-graduate master's degrees, dedicated to European programming, sustainability, and the protection of Italy's cultural heritage. A former member of the Committee for the Evaluation of Public Policies (COVIGE) established by the Draghi government and advisor for youth policies opinions for the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). He directs the Youth Policy Observatory and the Private Cultural Heritage Observatory of the ETS Foundation for 2 Economic and Social Research (RIES).

**Claudia Cioffi**

ccioffi@luiss.it

Senior researcher for the Economic and Social Research Foundation and teaching assistant in EU Policies at Luiss Guido Carli University, where she is also involved in teaching activities within postgraduate and executive programs on policy evaluation, youth, cultural and EU policies. Recent publications: (with other authors), *Mapping youth policies across 32 countries*, AHCD Working Paper n. 01/25; (with other authors), *Le nuove frontiere della valutazione delle politiche pubbliche. Europa, Italia e le sfide per il futuro* (2024), Luiss working paper series.

**Federico Engaldini**

engaldinifederico@outlook.it

(Youth Check, Youth Empowerment and evaluation of the generational impact in Europe and Italy) He is a former member of the Training and Orientation Commission of the Italian National Youth Council (Consiglio Nazionale Giovani). He has completed executive training programs at Luiss Guido Carli University on Youth Check, Youth Empowerment and Generational Impact Assessment in Europe and Italy, as well as on public policy evaluation and its impact on young people. He holds a bachelor's degree in Law and Economics from the University of Padua.

**Giulio Vannini**

gvannini@luiss.it

Senior researcher for the Economic and Social Research Foundation and the Luiss School of Government, where he conducts studies and research with a particular focus on youth policies, cultural heritage and corporate sustainability. He collaborates with local and national organizations and institutions such as ANCI (National Association of Italian Municipalities), the National Youth Council, the Italian Youth Agency, the Union of Italian Provinces, Unindustria Lazio. He is also teaching assistant in the European Union Policies course at Luiss Guido Carli University in Rome.