

***Schoolmates...but also Friends?***  
***Analysis of Closed Friendship Networks between Italian and Foreign Pupils***

**Extended Abstract**

The increasing presence of foreign residents in Italy is transforming the sum of men and women workers into a population in demographic terms, where young people – currently the underages are over 1/5 of foreign population – play an important role in society and in the process of integration.

Among all the factors useful for describing empirically the process of integration, the analysis of friendship relationships show a not yet widely explored and full of interesting implications perspective.

The school attended by native and foreign pupils represent a privileged observatory to analyse social relationships: in daily life at school the young immigrants may play the role of “integration vehicles” transferring to their ethnic communities new cultural and social models and at the same time offering to natives important opportunities for enrichment. Friendly and day-to-day contact with classmates of other ethnic backgrounds is argued to break down existing inter-ethnic prejudice and thereby reduce inter-ethnic tension and antagonism. This should reduce pupils’ inclination to restrict their personal relationships to people of the same ethnic group, and thus generate more intra-ethnic relationships.

The social capital, the formative credentials, the openness to the host society, the belonging community of the family are also important to the richness of the relationships developed between the pupils. The nature in which they were brought up to socialize is also fundamental for young immigrants. In this contribute we define the second generations as native, improper or spurious. To the first category belong minors who are born in Italy and who have developed a relationship with their living environment without any abrupt change of context. With the expression "improper second generations", one refers to young foreigners who, although born in another country, came to Italy before initiating school, that is before turning six. These children share with the former group the condition of «multiple identity», the «multiple belonging». Finally, "spurious second generations" are those children born in another country, who come to Italy after having completed the whole or part of their scholastic education in the country of origin.

Thanks to a survey conducted during 2006 on 17277 pupils (Italian and foreign), aged 11-14 and attending secondary school in Lombardy (where Lombardy - NUTS 2 - is the most foreign-populated region in Italy, with about ¼ of the total population), this study intends to investigate the friendship relationships observed in schoolclasses and how the actors’ (pupils) characteristics (individual, family and migratory) support their inter-ethnic social relations.

The survey, carried out by the Ismu (an autonomous and independent organization promoting studies, research and projects on multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, and focusing in particular on the phenomenon of international migrations) is part of the first national project on the children of immigrants living in Italy (national coordinator Prof. Dalla Zuanna, University of Padua). With regard the Lombardy the survey has involved secondary schools, where the proportion of foreign pupils was greater than 10%.

Moreover, the data on closed friendship networks are collected asking pupils to indicate persons (belonging to the class) with whom they have a good friendship relation. This way of data gathering allows the use of special statistical models for social networks (in particular the  $p_2$  model). Following this approach we are able to estimate the actors’ and structural effects on the friendship ties’ presence.

The first results illustrate how the networks are all rather sparse.

With regard the main actors' characteristics, in this particular age group, the gender plays a significant role, even if we control for ethnic background: in general there were more relationships between pupils of the same gender (less than 1/5 of the observed ties is gender mixed).

For the young immigrants the probability of a friendship tie between pupils with the different ethnicity (Italian or other foreign pupils) is higher than between pupils with same ethnic backgrounds.

This can be observed inside as well as outside the limited area of the classroom.

This result can be certainly explained by a dominant presence on Italian pupils inside and outside the classes. This shows an "openness" peculiar to young immigrants, not unisimilar from that one of Italian pupils. The sociableness indicator indeed doesn't show significant differences between the two groups. Nevertheless the young immigrants aren't so popular as the Italian: they rarely play role of leader within the circle of friends.

Focusing on the more problematic aspect, the popularity, and with deeper analyses, it can be noted above all how in Italian context an higher sociable disposition is connected with an higher popularity. Similar effects on the popularity, other conditions being equal, are observed for the good school performance, an high self-esteem and to feel Italian. All these variables shows an higher popularity for the most "italianised" immigrants who have less frailnesses. Furthermore the application of  $p_2$  multilevel models allows to estimate also the role of familiar determinants. The intergenerational relationship can transfer different ways to follow the new cultural approach. As well the presence of a strong kinship or ethnic network can be influent.