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DEBATES AND DEVELOPMENTS

"Second generation": a theoretical reflection on an ever-changing concept

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, the issue of migrants' children has received increasing attention within scientific research. This is due to the ongoing nature of the most current global migration phenomena. "Second generation" is the category often used in studies to define the field of reference, namely that of youth with foreign origin. However, this definition is sometimes generic or rather crossed by different interpretations depending on the application context, references considered or even used approaches. This contribution of theoretical nature aims to examine this concept by highlighting its empirical complexity. Based on a critical revision of classical and contemporary definitions, the analytical reflection focuses on a particular context, specifically the Italian one, about which the most recent conceptualisations proposed from below, for instance by the youth associationism's world, are also considered. In conclusion, a broad conceptual reflection emerges that seeks to problematise the use of this ever-changing category.

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Introduction

In the evolution of the migratory process, it is through the arrival, birth, and growth of "second generation" that a relevant process for the receiving society becomes visible: the stable settlement of immigrant populations, previously considered as a temporary presence unwanted, as far as necessary. The scientific interest in migrants' children has thus been fuelled from the beginning by the understanding that with their presence, there is a substantial change in social interactions and relationships between migrants and receiving society.[1] Further it is observed a profound inner change in the reference communities, both those of origin and those of new settlement. This is why the issue of "second generation" continues to be studied. It is examined, directly or

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indirectly, in the more recent textbooks on migration studies (Martiniello and Rath 2012; Samers and Collyer 2017; Castles, de Haas, and Miller 2019).

In the last fifteen years, much research about people with a migrant background has appeared in academic journals and books (Thomson and Maurice 2007). These publications have stirred up a broader theoretical debate on intergenerational processes.[2] But, most of all, on new generations in recent migration flows. They look at the paths of inclusion, social inequalities, citizenship, civil rights, culture, gender, and transnational issues (Çelik 2015; Iskander 2018; Sandberg 2018; Creese 2019; Tran, Lee, and Huang 2019). Scholars have been at the forefront in producing research results and theoretical models on this topic.

In this scenario, the definitional issue concerning migrants' children or, more generally, youth with a migration background is not secondary but rather interesting to consider. Two main observations have inspired this work: on the one hand, it is significant to consider the multiplicity of life paths, the young people who form new generations are truthfully very diverse in terms of gender, age, religious orientation and, in general, the biographical path taken. Moreover, to a greater extent than at the beginning of the twentieth century, young people today confront with a pluralistic, fragmented social environment. It offers them many opportunities but also many unfamiliar risks (Portes, Fernández-Kelly, and Haller 2005).

On the other hand, the theoretical approaches scholars use are increasingly diverse. They are from many fields, widening the range of reference categories. Over decades, definitional complexity has led to various definitions about children and more generally descendants of immigrants. These groups include both young and older people. The definitions are not necessarily interchangeable.

Aware that an analytical category is also fruitful or not depending on the research question, what is being studied, and the type of study, this contribution of a theoretical nature is to examine the concept of "second generation" in the light of social studies that are now available to the scientific community. In the first part, the analysis is based on the most well-known definitions proposed by classical and contemporary authors. The second part observes the term's evolution in a more current scenario. Finally, the focus is more on scholars who have investigated the issue of "second generation" regarding the Italian context. By limiting the theoretical framework, it is also possible to discuss the emerging and most innovative definitions proposed not only in the academic field but also from below, in the views of youth with a migration background also through their social activism experiences.

Although the concept of "second generation" is widely spread and used in public debate as in the scientific community, this paper aims to reflect and explore the complexity of this social category, which has become "popular" *lato sensu*, but certainly not trivial.

Second generation: a debated concept from traditional to contemporary scholars

The literature on the second generations has a long tradition in the US a country of traditional immigration. American scholars have dominated the international discussion, especially in terms of theoretical models used to explain the position of these generations in society. From historical treatments of the early waves of European immigrants (Hansen 1938) to contemporary research into the "new" second generation (Portes and Zhou 1993) scholars have viewed second generation outcomes as central to the understanding of immigrant adaptation and progress (Ramakrishnan 2004).

The category of the "second generation" was born within the scenario outlined by the assimilation paradigm and the optimistic expectations of the *meltingpot*. A common assumption of assimilation theories has been the notion of unilaterality or *zero-sumness* (straight line theory). This notion assumes that to the extent persons assimilate into a new culture to that extent they lose their ethnic identity, and vice versa, to the extent they retain their ethnic identity, they fail to assimilate. Historically, the American scholars of *Chicago School of Sociology* used this concept to refer to all those born of immigrants who arrived in the United States. One can detect this assumption in the work of the early sociologists, such as Park (1922), Park and Miller (1921) and Thomas and Znaniecki (1927). It is interesting to recall how ever since Thomas and Znaniecki's famous study *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, the need to distinguish between those born in the US to foreign parents and those born abroad and then emigrated was highlighted.

The first studies on the second generations appeared in the 1930s and 1940s and focused on the identity of Japanese descendants (Smith 1928) or Italian immigrants (Child 1943), relying on the earlier works of the *Chicago School of Sociology* and its peers. The key idea was that concerning immigrants' children, the social system has consistently improved when comparing these with the first generation (Warner and Srole 1945).

It was the historian Marcus Lee Hansen who in an essay developed from an address delivered on May 15, 1937s to the Augustana Historical Society and published independently in the next year as *The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant*, developed the principle of third-generation interest, raising the question as to whether there is a reversal of the assimilative process as one proceeds from the second to the third generation.[3] This hypothesis concerning generational dynamics has come to be known as *Hansen's Law*. The law has been highly criticised for simplifying the complexity of drivers and contextual factors that produce variable effects on generational behaviour.

Nevertheless, he raised important questions about time and passage from one generation to the next; the process of transmission of norms, cultural

values, and identity; the interplay between state, family, and community and their impact on the process of immigrant integration. Considerations later taken up and expanded upon by the sociologist Alejandro Portes in the famous essay *The New Second Generation* (1996). This definition had the merit of emphasising the differences between the first generations– who have crossed the borders of one or more states– and their children born in the country of their parents' settlement or arrived there in pre-school, childhood, or adolescence.

This new theoretical perspective emerged in the 1990s beginning with Gans' concept of "second generation decline" (1992) and Portes and Zhou's (1993) theory of "segmented assimilation", according to which the assimilation process takes place in the context of specific socio-economic conditions of the immigrants that mediate the outcome of the process. Perlmann and Waldinger (1997) further argued about the distinctions between contemporary and past second generation. As a result of immigrants' experiences and demands for proliferating sources and changing consumption standards, the second generation revolution emerged. That also means that migrant's children began to demand more from life itself. However, in terms of social and economic traits, today's second generation differs from past ones.

Some specifications have been introduced to this broader and more generic definition. More precisely, the context of birth, age and thus the schooling pathway are considered to a greater extent. An example is the migrant children's classification proposed by Rubén G. Rumbaut (1997). By examining the paradoxes of immigrant adaptation that emerge in the conceptual interstices between rhetoric and reality, he advances a reformulation of this fundamental sociological concept. According to the proposed definition, "second generation" can be divided into graded categories. The first, referred to as "Generation 1.75", includes children from birth until their fifth birthday, who therefore migrate during the pre-school age. The second category, the so-called "Generation 1.5", includes children between the ages of 6 and 12, who begin the process of socialisation and primary school in their country of origin, but complete their school education abroad. Finally, we find the "Generation 1.25", which includes young people who emigrate between 13 and 17. In this case, "Generation 2.0" refers to the children of migrants born in their parents' country of arrival who do not experience migration directly.[4] Second and in-between generations differ greatly in one key way. The second generation is born into the society of immigration. Unlike their parents and the in-between generation's children, they have no migration experience.

The definition of "second generation" had also a great resonance in Europe but changed its meaning due to the different characteristics of migration processes and the historical conditions. As a whole, second generation groups in Europe are ethnically very different compared to US groups.[5] The parents of

the largest second generation groups come from ex-colonies or were recruited as labour migrants. They came under "guest worker" policies. Compared to labour migrants in the US, those in Europe are less diverse in terms of their economic background. Most, but not all, came from rural areas and had hardly any schooling (Thomson and Maurice 2007). However, European scholars are catching up and reacting to the theoretical notions produced within the American context. While US studies have focused on group analysis, European research has concentrated more on the impact of each country's political, historical, and educational contexts on migrants' inclusion.

The category "second generation" was introduced and became popular in Europe in regard to the precarious situations of migrants' descendants in the residence country and to their putative lack of integration. The category was first used in the 1970s concerning the right of former *guestworkers* to reside permanently, for example Italians in Switzerland and Turks in Germany, as well as in relation to the large-scale migration of Black and Asian Commonwealth citizens to the UK (Chimienti et al. 2019). At that time, the concept "second generation" and the term "integration" both highlighted the colonial and assimilationist perspectives towards migrants which had long-term impacts, as illustrated by the difficulty these countries had in considering the descendants of migrants born on their soil as citizens (Wihtol de Wenden 2005). Against this problematic background of the category, in several countries of immigration the 1980s and 1990s marked a moment of growing visibility and claims by the second generation. Over time, the use of the second generation category expanded in Europe. It did so, as in North America, to other, more diverse, categories of descendants of immigrants. This allows to add complexity into the analyses. For instance making more visible the presence children of upper class migrants in the definitions and comparisons.

Considering the aim of this contribution, it seems important to note that a *Recommendation of the Council of Europe* (1984)[6] specifies and defines "second generation migrants" as "children born in the host country of immigrant foreign parents, who have accompanied them or who have joined them under family reunion and who have accomplished there a part of their education or vocational training". Within this historical context the will to reappropriate the problem and redefine themselves was clearly articulated. This was a time of mobilisation and creation of different associations which led some groups to position themselves politically as a "social movement", an "ethnic lobby" or just "new citizens" (Wihtol de Wenden 2005).

The current debate between interpretative challenges and semantic extensions

Still today, in the international literature, the term "second generation" is most used. This is also why, given the fast and complex changes in worldwide

migration, we have to consider that this concept poses challenges both as a descriptive notion and an analytic category (Chimienti et al. 2021). Due to a rather too-flexible use of the term, definitions risk appearing blurred and therefore imprecise (Christou and King 2010).

The most common usage alludes to the offspring of the first generation, the initial migrants to the host country. Complications arise when children have one immigrant parent – through "mixed marriages" – or when children's early lives are divided between two countries. These are some of the cases for which the concept is particularly challenged and affected by different perspectives.

With few exceptions, the scholarship on immigrant adaptation has defined the immigrant second generation as native-born residents who have at least one foreign-born parent (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). As observed by (Ramakrishnan 2004) such a formulation is problematic because it conflates the experiences and outcomes of those who have one native-born parent and one foreign-born parent with those who have two foreign-born parents (the "2.0 generation").

Most of the literature on migrants' children born in Europe or the US argues that second-generation individuals' economic, social and political lives are different from those of their peers with no migratory background and those of their migrant parents (Çelik 2015; Iskander 2018; Sandberg 2018; Creese 2019; Tran, Lee, and Huang 2019). Some authors (Chimienti et al. 2019) discuss a further hypothesis which assumes that the experiences of second-generation migrants from refugee backgrounds might be different from those of other second generation members because of the violence and/or trauma that their parents may have suffered from and the limited rights that some have been subjected to as asylum-seekers when they arrived in the receiving country.

Over the past decades the transnationalist approach suggests a semantic extension of the concept, with the idea of a "second transnational generation" including all those who share the experience of growing up in transnational social fields (Zanfrini 2007, 48). Referring to Levitt's studies (2009), transnational families place children and young people in a social field characterised by ties that cross the boundaries between home and host societies. Second generation transnationalism is also part of this debate, which examines the relevance of ties to origins for immigrant children's integration paths and future in American society (Smith 2002). As pointed out by Caponio and Schmoll (2011, 105), while it may be natural for first migrants to show some form of attachment and maintain relationships with the country of origin, this is much less intuitive in the case of children who were born in the country of settlement or who came here at a very young age (the so-called 1.5 and 1.75 generations). The US debate on transnational second generations invites a new view of how migrant youth integrate. It pays more

attention to their ties beyond the settlement context. European research ignores these ties. It focuses more on schooling, job placement, and the systems and structures of integration and segregation.

In other words, it is a question of analysing the long-term effects of transnational ties, which are not necessarily destined to end with the passing of generations (Levitt and Waters 2002). Transnational practices and orientations result from an ongoing process of negotiation and redefinition of identities between cultures of origin and host societies through profoundly different ways and experiences from those experienced by their parents (Caponio and Schmoll 2011).

Transnationalism is not in itself an opportunity or a possibility for all. However, what is reconsidered and problematised is the actual capacity of the subject (the so-called "agency issue"). The most recent research shows, in fact, that not all second generations are necessarily transnational, let alone equally so. But, this recent semantic extension of the term "second generation" considers how one cannot ignore the fact that those living in a transnational context find themselves exposed to a complex of expectations, cultural values and models of human interaction forged by more than one social and cultural system of reference (Huynh 2022).

Also in relation to this issue, studies on second generations have considered, especially in the last ten years, gender issues radically embedded in processes of socialisation, inclusion and, above all, cultural renegotiation (Idema and Phalet 2007; Al-Sharmani, Tiilikainen, and Mustasaari 2017). Another terminological extension requiring clarification is the "return project" of second generations who consciously decide to relocate to the homeland, which is often independent of their parents who remain abroad. Most of the small but growing literature on "second generation return" consists of long-distance and transcontinental case-studies (Potter and Phillips 2008; Reynolds 2008). Along with Wessendorf's (2007), Cristou and King (2010) address second-generation return in an intra-European migration context. Within this field we can also find recent studies that look at the issue of second generations between traditional migration and new mobility, adding a further temporal *nuance* to the meaning of the concept (Ramella 2013; Schmoll, Dubucs, and Pfirsch 2016; Vellucci 2019; Del Prà 2021; Tirabassi 2021).

A further proposed reflection concerns how and to what extent this category can be a description but also an indicator of their exclusion. The notion of "second generation" may in this sense underline that these people and youths are often not seen as belonging to the country where they were born and grew up; people from this group are often still perceived as foreigners and sometimes discriminated against for this reason (Wihtol de Wenden 2005).

At the end of this paragraph, before focusing the analysis to a national level and more circumscribed context, it seems interesting to report those

definitions of the term "second generation" that are elaborated and applied in statistical reports on migration phenomena.

Into the recommendations for the 2010 *Censuses of Population and Housing*[7] (2006, 84), the group referred to as "second generation" is considered as "descendants of foreign-born": "this is the group of persons born in the country whose parents were born abroad. Several generations of descendants can theoretically be distinguished: persons whose parents, grandparents, etc, were born abroad". However, in population censuses the focus is generally restricted to those persons whose parents were born abroad (this group is often referred to as the "second generation"). Those persons having one parent born in the country and the other one born abroad represent a special case (they form the group of persons with a mixed background).

According to The EMN Asylum and Migration glossary[8] "second generation migrant" is defined broadly speaking as "a person who was born in and is residing in a country that at least one of their parents previously entered as a migrant". It was also specified as this term is not defined in legislation but has a more sociological context and how strictly this term does not relate to a migrant, since the person concerned has not undertaken a migration, but this concept is included as it is commonly used in publications and the media.

The development of the scientific discussion in the Italian context

The term "second generation" has sparked a broad debate in the scientific community over the decades. This paragraph analyses a specific socio-historical context. The aim is to take a closer look at how scholars have considered and interpreted this concept in the Italian context, where the growing attention to this topic has stimulated a conspicuous production of sociological research over time. Italy has different characteristics from other European contexts: compared to other countries such as France or Great Britain, the awareness of the social issue of second generations has been acquired rather recently in the Italy (Caneva 2011).[9]

From a historical point of view, until the early 1990s, Italy was mainly a country of emigration or internal migration: it is understandable that both the analytical and methodological instrumentation developed by scholars until then focused on these specific research themes. The last decades of the twentieth century have given this country a new role in international migration. Data published in the new report on migration edited by ISMU Foundation (2023) also show that as of 1st January 2022 there has been a move beyond the symbolic threshold of six million present, raising the ratio between the number of foreign citizens living in the country and that

of the population "habitually resident" in the territory from 9.88% of last year to 10.07% in 2022 (Blangiardo and Ortensi 2023). It is a population increasingly characterised by elements of stability such as the presence of students with a migrant background, which remains 10.30 per cent of the total number of students enrolled in Italian schools (from pre-school to secondary schools) (Santagati 2023).

Among the many effects of this profound change was a phase of reorientation of Italian migration studies from which the need for a specific focus on the growth trajectories of second generations began to emerge with increasing clarity (Ambrosini and Molina 2004; Colombo 2010; Ricucci 2010; Barbagli and Schmoll 2011; Caneva 2011; Ceravolo and Molina 2013; Lannutti 2019; Santagati 2019). Also in this context, scholars have tried to deepen the general concept of "second generation" to make it more representative of the evolving social reality and its complexity.

As Rosoli and Cavallaro (1987) suggested, it is possible to distinguish the *native* or *primary second generation*, which refers to the children of migrants who were born and raised in the context of their parents' arrival and towards whom national legislation does not have a uniform attitude. In some countries they are considered citizens (countries with prevalence of the acquisition of citizenship by *ius soli*) in others they are considered foreigners (countries with prevalence of the acquisition of citizenship by *ius sanguinis*), in others still they can apply for citizenship, but only under certain specific conditions. The *improper second generation* includes those born in another country from which they emigrated between the ages of 1 and 6, starting their schooling in the arrival country. Finally, the *spurious second generation* includes those who emigrated by interrupting a schooling cycle or after completing it in their country of origin.

Other scholars have revisited these classifications, considering the life histories, migration projects and socialisation processes of youth from migrant backgrounds (Favaro and Napoli 2004). According to the authors, the first group includes young people born in Italy or arrived here in early childhood. These are "second generation" in the strict sense, *de facto* citizens who the Italian state considers foreigners until 18, when they can apply for Italian citizenship. The people belonging to this group have experienced the process of socialisation and schooling in the host country. In particular, those born in Italy have not experienced the migration process directly, and many of them only know their country of origin through their parents' stories. This is followed by the group of "unaccompanied minors", who either arrive in the host country alone or are included in actual child trafficking. Finally, there is the group of those who arrived in Italy between 12 and 15 years of age following family reunification. They are suspended between two worlds, the one of origin and the new host country, tied to memory, like

their parents, but simultaneously able to commit themselves to building a different future, close to that of their native peers.

The definition discussed is related to another often used in social research to define the children of migrants that of "immigrant minors". This expression, while overcoming the limitation of the concept of "second generation"– i.e. that of indicating mainly minors born in the host society to immigrant parents– ends up considering immigrants even those who, being born in the arrival society of their parents, do not experience any migratory process (Ambrosini 2020). Therefore, even this definition proves to be neither precise nor satisfactory. It would be more correct to speak of "minors of immigrant origin".

As specified by Ambrosini (2011, 165) more restrictive definitions "limit the use of the term "second generation" to children of two foreign parents only or, in other cases, to children of foreign mothers (given the relevant role played by the mother figure in early socialisation) or, in others still, to children of foreign fathers (by reference to social status)".

In order to make the complexity surrounding migratory phenomena and the biographical paths involved in it more understandable, Demarie and Molina (2004) when speaking of "second generations" emphasised the importance of using the definition with a plural meaning. An interpretation that also allows us to grasp and understand the nuances related to migration flows, the stages of migration cycles, and the socio-demographic and cultural transformations present in each country, which impact the lives of migrants' children. Following this approach, the category of "second generation" would rather become a *frame* within which to include all those subjects who have behind them a specific migratory condition, whether personal or linked to their parents' life course, which in some way has influenced or affected their life stories (Lagomarsino 2010). An example of this is the transnational approach already mentioned, which also in the Italian context is becoming an important branch of study in relation to young people from a migrant background (Boccagni 2015).

As noted by Riniolo (2019) from a theoretical point of view, in the sociological literature, despite the objections, the second generations' category is still the most widespread and widely used. In any case, it is an analytically indispensable definition "because it evokes the specificity of the experience of the members of this social group and their family history (irrevocably marked by migration)" (Zanfrini 2018, 54). Overall, this definition has the merit of emphasising the differences between the first generations– who have crossed the borders of one or more states– and their children or descendants who were born in the countries of their parents' settlement or arrived there in pre-school, childhood or adolescence.

Looking instead at the various critical issues discussed, the term "second generation" may seem, in some ways, limitedly explanatory and

representative of the real situation, since it reduces a life path to its origin, family of origin and ethnic community, emphasising continuity with something that came "before" (Zanfrini 2018).

In 2006, Queirolo Palmas, reflecting on the use and meaning of the definitions adopted to describe the issue of migrants' children (such as *second generations, children of immigrants, foreign minors, students of ethnic minority groups*) observed: "whatever denomination is used, it is not difficult to prove its reductive and often misleading character. Reductive because it reduces a biography to an origin, and misleading because it removes the subjects' ways of freely defining themselves, playing among the many identity and symbolic holds in a fluid and irreversible space" (2006, 17).

In this theoretical contribution relating to social research, it is therefore important to finally emphasise how any categorisation, although necessary for the study of social reality, proves to be somewhat fallacious in the face of the complexity of reality. It seems useful, but above all intellectually honest, to recall how, like other categories used in studying social phenomena, even that of "second generation" in its various reinterpretations, is socially constructed and can take on different meanings with reference to the specific historical, political, and social context. This also helps to grasp its ever-changing identity.

Youths with migrant backgrounds and social change: their views on the issue

Especially outside the academic field, the terms used to define migrants' born and/or raised in their parents' countries of settlement are extremely varied and differentiated according to the national context. In Italy, in addition to "second generation", expressions such as "new generations", "new Italians", "first-generation Italians", "bridge generation", "intercultural natives", "second generation immigrants", "immigrant minors" and "young people with a migration background" are often used in the public debate (Riniolo 2019). In this phase of migration processes, which is no longer so recent but rather structured over time, as partly mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the growing presence of young people with a migrant background has led to a greater awareness of their own expectations but above all of their potential for social renewal also due to their heterogeneous and plural cultural capital. An aspect that also emerged clearly in the recent pandemic experience when, while in the public debate prevailed and continues to prevail even today a vision of the foreign population marked by an idea of social weakness, in practice the resulting initiative in voluntary activities has instead demonstrated an image of responsibility, planning and protagonism (Ambrosini 2023). Although the theme of participation in volunteering and associations by people of foreign origin is still little explored, some recent

studies show how these dynamics are inextricably linked to the inclusion's processes and above all "citizenship from below" (Paret 2017) or rather of "lived citizenship" (Lister 2007). In recent decades more specifically, an important activism's experience promoted by youths with a migrant background has thus developed in Italy as well. Within this analytical reflection, which reaches from tradition to present days, it is therefore seemed relevant to also pay attention to categorisations proposed through these advocacy experiences. In the awareness that these conceptualizations do not have a scientific origin nor claim to be, it is important to consider them as an expression of self-representations that are part of a counter-narrative of the migratory phenomenon and its many facets.

Given this, the conceptualizations proposed by two important organisations at the national level, *G2 Network– Seconde Generazioni* and CoNNGI– *Coordinamento Nazionale Nuove Generazioni Italiane*, will be discussed below.

The *G2 Network– Seconde Generazioni*[10] is a national non-party organisation founded in the early 2000s by children of immigrants and refugees born or arrived in Italy as children. As specified through the network's official channels: "those who are members of the G2 Network define themselves as 'children of immigrants' and not as 'immigrants': those born in Italy have not migrated, and those born abroad but raised in Italy did not migrate voluntarily but were brought to Italy by parents or other relatives". Following this interpretation, "G2" therefore does not stand for "second generations of immigrants" but for "second generations of immigration", thus emphasising the processual nature of the migration phenomenon, which is subject to continuous evolution.

Compared to the definitions previously discussed, in this case the term "second generation" is clearly accepted given that it is found in the name of the association with the acronym 2G, at the same time it is also highlighted how migration is not a deliberate choice but rather an inherited cultural capital from the migratory experience directly or indirectly lived.

The G2 Network presents itself in a broader sense as a network of world citizens from Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America, who work together on two fundamental issues: the rights denied to second generations without Italian citizenship and identity as an encounter of several cultures. As explained by the G2 Network, if access to citizenship is the only way for the children of immigrants to be truly considered equals, in rights and duties, with respect to their peers, the children of Italians, so too is the cultural transformation of Italian society to be more aware of and recognise itself in all its children, regardless of their origins.

Instead, the expression proposed by the CoNNGI– *Coordinamento Nazionale Nuove Generazioni Italiane* (National Coordination of New Italian Generations)[11] which gathers associations rooted on the Italian territory and referring to young people with a migration background, has a very

different approach. From their point of view the most current concept to define young people with a migrant background turns out to be "new generations" where the adjective "new" next to "generations" evokes an idea of change, innovation, evolution, and potential enrichment.

This definition has the advantage of untying the meaning from immigrant origin, which could also be a limitation for some. However, above all: "it more accurately reflects the variegated presence of young people with a migrant background in Italy, which includes not only young people born and raised in Italy (second generations, but now also third generations) by foreign or migrants parents (or second generation parents) but also young migrants who arrived in our country at an early age" (Manifesto of the New Generations 2022, 9).[12] In this case, the intention is to propose a broader category than "second generation", in the awareness that categorising the plurality of individual biographical paths is perhaps too daring a goal given the complexity of society as a whole, not just the migratory phenomena.

Conclusions

This essay drew inspiration from the observation, emerged through the study of surveys and research on young people with migratory backgrounds, in many of which the concept of "second generation" is defined, redefined or criticised making it sometimes unclear or ambiguous. The issue is not only about terminology, as the use of certain concepts rather than others has theoretical, political, and practical implications. Therefore, the paper aimed to explore this category with a theoretical approach, trying to highlight the evolutions of the different definitions but above all the limits and motivations that these changes have caused through the main interpretations proposed by scholars over time.

The topic of young people with a migrant background, as we have also observed in relation to American and European literature has become increasingly relevant today to an interdisciplinary and heterogeneous scientific community. But as emerged through the theoretical reasoning presented through the paragraphs, the expression "second generation" is not a recent category. As pointed, the American scholars of *Chicago School of Sociology* used this concept to refer to all those born of immigrants who arrived in the United States within the scenario outlined by the assimilation paradigm. It has been then re-discussed and reworked over time, from traditional to more contemporary authors, especially concerning the need to study and categorise an increasingly complex reality. As said, in the sociological literature, despite the objections, the "second generation" category is *de facto* the most widespread and widely used.

It reveals some limitations in relation to its nature as a social category, like others used in social theory, it is socially constructed and can take on different

meanings with reference to the specific historical, political and social context. At the same time, its supporters or detractors' authors highlight its most inclusive and exclusive traits. This term seems suitable when the experiences of young people want to be linked to a family history, marked by migration or, on the contrary, when the differences between the first generations– who have crossed the borders of one or more states– and their children want to be emphasised.

Looking instead at the various critical issues discussed, the concept "second generation" may seem, in some ways, limitedly explanatory and representative of the real situation. It shows in this all its weakness, and in fact many of the reconceptualization presented have tried over time to enrich and detail the meaning of the term, as far as possible.

In view of this, although perhaps risky, it was interesting taking the opportunity of this contribution, to try to get around the obstacle and perhaps look for new expressions and new categories, instead of continuing to rework familiar ones. For this reason, analysing the narrative proposed by young people with a migratory background, who today, even in Italy, thanks to the evolution of a now structural migration phenomenon, are increasingly visible and participate in the social arena, proved to be a fascinating experiment.

To what extent and whether it is possible, even in social theory, to supplement or replace the use of "second generation" with other, broader expressions such as "new generations" or "young people from a migration background" used by young people themselves when proposing their own representation, is unknown to us. The certainty, actually a confirmation, that remains in the conclusion of this reflection, is that the different definitions considered in relation to the new generations clearly highlighted the relevance and complexity of this issue.

This allows us to remember that whenever we observe this theme, we find ourselves in the presence of a plural population, characterised by the great variety of biographical paths, which is intertwined with the equally wide variety of generational affiliations. But above all, this helps us to grasp the never definitive but ever-changing meaning of this social category.

Notes

1. With regard to settlement processes, it is important to mention how in the "four-stage scheme" proposed by Castles and Miller (1993), in some ways similar to that of Böhning (1984) but more focused on the social networks' influence, in the third stage, thanks to family reunions and the growing awareness of long-term settlement, a progressive orientation towards the arrival society is achieved. Also, Bastenier and Dassetto (1990), within the 'migratory cycle' identify in the third stage the establishment of the population of foreign origin, thanks to the arrival of children and the affirmation of movements that require a redefinition of relationships. This means that the

appearance of "second generations" is an outcome, almost taken for granted of the migratory process, despite attempts to privilege the temporary nature of mobility.

2. The "Generation" itself is a polysynthetic concept with several meanings that captures the relation between the individual and the collective in both societal and kinship relations, the concept of the life course as individuals age, and collective existence as lived out in the company of time-based cohorts of contemporaries. For a specific discussion see the contribution of Bolland and Lopes (2014).
3. According to this principle, second-generation migrants are eager to assimilate the cultural norms of their host country, whereas third-generation migrants are more likely to revert to the ethnic and religious norms of their grandparents" generation, thereby asserting their difference from mainstream /culture (Attias-Donfut 2015).
4. For an empirical test of this typology see Oropesa and Landale 1997.
5. Note the profound critical contribution of the author Sayad Abdelmalek in France (1999) who discussed, among other issues, the concept of "double absence".
6. Recommendation of committee of ministers to the member states on second generation migrants, No. R (84) 9 1 (1984).
7. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses Of Population And Housing. Prepared In Cooperation With The Statistical Office Of The European Communities (Eurostat). 2006. United Nations Publication. ISSN 0069-8458. Pp. 1-213. Consulted at the link:
8. The European Migration Network (EMN) is a Europe-wide network consisting of National Contact Points (NCPs) in the Member States and Norway, providing information on migration and asylum. The EMN was officially set up in 2008 by the European Commission on behalf of the European Council in order to satisfy the need for a regular exchange of reliable information on migration and asylum related issues on a European level. The EMN Asylum and Migration Glossary offers an EU-wide multidisciplinary vocabulary of approximately 500 terms and concepts, with terms translated into a number of languages. A consultative approach is used to keep the EMN Glossary up-to-date and relevant. The EMN Glossary is developed by a dedicated working group which collaborates with the European Commission, EASO, FRA, FRONTEX, the Council of the EU, the Court of Justice of the EU and international organisations, such as UNHCR and IOM. It is available at the link: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary_en.
9. At the European level, the debate on second generations in Italy could be more closely associated with that in Spain (Portes, Aparicio, and Haller 2016), in a comparative perspective that could also be explored in further studies.
10. G2 was born in Rome in 2005 and has now grown to a national level so much so that second generations from other Italian cities (Rome, Milan Perugia, Florence, Arezzo, Turin) also participate in the National Workshops organised every year by the Network. The G2 also meet and discuss virtually on Facebook and Twitter. The reference site is: https://www.secondegenerazioni.it/about/.
11. Since 2016, the CONNGI has also been the promoter of a Manifesto, updated in its contents to the 2022 version, in which the coordination's programmatic

outlines are collected, but above all the relevant issues related to the new Italian generations. The reference site is: http://conngi.it/chi-siamo/.

12. The Manifesto of the New Italian Generations proposed by CONNGI in its updated version of 2022 is available at the link: http://conngi.it/il-manifesto/.

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