

YOUTH ON DISCRIMINATION: A PLATFORM FOR SELF-EXPRESSION
THROUGH THE PHOTOVOICEGreta Persico* - Oana Marcu** - Ulderico Daniele* -
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Abstract. Within the European project Story_S, supporting successful educational paths for Roma youth through peer to peer education, a participatory anti-discrimination campaign was built with young people of different backgrounds, in Milan and Rome. An intersectional approach is proposed to reflect together with young students on the topic of discrimination and to build, through the photovoice, a photographic campaign addressed to their peers.

The photovoice process fostered group dynamics, reflection, and a photographic work, during two Awareness Raising Workshops of 3 days each. Discrimination is recognized and experienced by the youth on grounds of gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, in definitions of normality, poverty, online, offline and in the media. Metaphors of coexistence or of the beauty of diversity were represented through photos; also experiences of discrimination regarding housing conditions and public services were captured. Strategies to combat discrimination have been proposed and discussed by participants. Through the online and offline dissemination of the campaign, counter narratives were promoted and reached wider audiences, in an attempt to support anti-discrimination cultures and empowerment in schools and youth environments. By discussing both the process and the results of the photovoice, we contribute to the understanding of young people's perspective on discrimination and on participation to social change.

Keywords: Photovoice, Participatory action research, Peer education, Counter-narratives, Discrimination, Roma youth.

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The construction of an anti-discrimination campaign through visual and participatory methods with youth is the main topic addressed in this article; this activity was part of a broader, two-year action-research project, in the framework of European Commission's funding. "STORY_S - Springboard to Roma Youth Success" is a two-year project (2018-2019) carried out by a partnership of organisations in 4 countries¹. The main objective of the project was to raise awareness and combat stereotypes related to the Roma and to promote integration by encouraging and supporting the school careers of Roma girls and boys through a participatory approach. The project also developed a one and a half-year peer-to-peer mentoring program with 24 Roma mentees, aged 14 to 26 years, pairing with almost 13 Roma and non Roma mentors². The present article only refers to one activity of the project: the photo voice carried out in Italy in order to develop an anti-discrimination campaign, involving young people from the project and from high schools, universities and volunteering associations. A first objective of this article is an in-depth, qualitative analysis of young people's perceptions and representations of discrimination. A second aim is to add to the methodological reflection regarding the photo voice process and its application with youth by reflecting on how the process (group composition, engagement, settings) influenced group discussions and the representations through the produced images.

Moreover, we aim to describe young people's ideas about contrasting discrimination in order to compare them to the existing literature and support the diffusion of some of these ideas by means of an online and offline campaign.

After introducing the main categories and concepts on discrimination in social research and theories, we present the potential of participatory and visual methodologies and their potential to produce counternarratives; the following method section describes the photo voice process applied to this research and discusses the ethical issue intrinsic to working with an intercultural, mixed group in a project dedicated to the Roma.

In the results section we analyse statements and images produced by young people: first we will consider, from a general point of view, the ideas and themes that emerged from group discussions; then the selected pictures will be analysed, focusing also on strategies to contrast discrimination identified by the participants. In the conclusions we intend to present a general overview and the results of the entire process and the choices made by the participants. We will take into consideration the existing literature to identify elements of continuity and discontinuity and to give value to the strategies identified by them in order to combat discrimination.

¹ University of Bergamo (Italy), Hesus and Bulgarian Youth Forum (Bulgaria), BIR (Italy), Carusel (Romania) and Fagic and Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain).

² It aimed at building positive relationships among Roma and non-Roma offering multiple occasions for interaction between them in order to contrast social distance and foster the inclusion of young Roma. The peer mentoring action involved both young Roma and non-Roma as mentors. Mentors acted as positive role models and supported the young Roma in their educational paths, in some cases by building significant relationships with them. By promoting a relationship based on trust between mentors and beneficiaries, the young Roma were encouraged to share fears, doubts and expectations about their own future.

I - THEORETICAL FRAMES AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES

The topics of prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping are becoming ever more important for a super-diverse society, in continuous change. Together with the growing *métissage* of Western societies, we are attending a wave of nationalisms, intolerance and hate speech at political levels that are threatening social cohesion. The overall positive attitude of young people towards immigration, connected with a decrease in prejudice at this stage of life (Hoover - Fishbein 1999; White et al. 2009) and with flexibility regarding gender roles (Katz - Ksanskak 1994), make adolescence a promising period for research and educational programs targeting all sorts of discrimination.

In Italy, ethnic and racial discrimination are the most widespread forms of differential treatment, according to official data (OSCAD 2017). Ethnic stereotyping activates representations on people who hold a particular ethnic identifier (such as skin colour or way to dress). Ethnic identifiers are reified objects of traditions which arrive to mediate expressions of difference; they may not be shared by all members, but are claimed to be more important than others as they reinforce difference, and thus, on the other hand, identity (Baumann 2003).

Still today, Roma groups, the largest minority in Europe, experience multiple forms of discrimination, cultural racism and their condition of poverty is an important topic in hate discourses (e.g. accused of being homeless and living in shacks) (ISTAT 2012; Pew Research Center 2014; NAGA 2013).

Gender-related issues also play an important part in stereotyping and, in the case of the Roma, they are labelled for holding a patriarchal approach to gender relations within the communities (Tauber 2000; Okely 1983). At the same time, women can be criticized for having too many children and thus being bad mothers (Marcu 2014). Young Roma are sometimes criticized for being “incapable” of discipline or being soaked in a culture that doesn’t value education (Persico 2015).

Discrimination refers to the concrete, enacted effects of prejudices and stereotypes and it can be a process involving individuals, groups and institutions throughout generations, leading to structural inequalities. According to the Italian National Office Against Racial Discrimination (UNAR 2010), discrimination is a non-equal treatment acted towards an individual or a group on the basis of their belonging to a specific category (often discredited).

1.1. *Young people and discrimination*

Young people of immigrant background (first and second generation) experience a gap in educational attainment, in Italy, even after accounting for socio-economical background (OECD 2011), and early school leaving rate is double as compared to the native students population (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019, based on Eurostat data).

These effects are influenced by policies implemented at various levels and by institutional and systemic discrimination. Research shows a significant effect of national anti-discrimination policies on immigrant children’s truancy (Kyung-Eun - Seung-

Hwan 2017). Interaction patterns and recognition at school are also factors leading to these disadvantages. PIRLS³ (2016, in European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2019) data shows that young people who do not speak the language of instruction at home experience a significantly lower sense of belonging and more bullying at school, and this holds true for Italy both in primary and in secondary school cycles.

In making friendships, a survey on a sample of 17.255 Italian students aged 11-14 shows that a majority of Italian pupils have friendships with immigrant peers. Still, when looking closely, outside of school, Italian pupils frequent more Italian friends, and this holds true especially for males. Immigrant pupils have three times less frequency of meetings with Italian friends than their Italian counterparts. A specific situation is that of immigrant-background girls, who have less friendships with Italian peers than all the other groups (Gilardoni 2008). The study observes that a wide array of integration and lifestyle indicators (friendships, self-esteem, consumption, sports) vary not only on the axis of ethnicity, but also on the axis of gender, meaning that the experiences of immigrant girls and immigrant boys differ (*ibidem*), making it highly important to adopt an intersectional approach.

Roma youth, although most of them Italian or from EU countries, share with immigrant youth the stigma of being “foreigners” (Arrigoni - Vitale 2008). They also share globalized consumption practices with natives and other immigrant generations that support the affirmation of a positive, inclusionary identity, as opposed to stigma and prejudice (Caneva 2008; Conte et al. 2008).

They represent the group with the highest rates of early school leaving in almost all EU countries among young people aged 18 to 24 (FRA 2016) and show the lowest rates of secondary school graduation (Brüeggemann 2012). Also, in this age range, about two thirds of Roma youngsters are not in work, education or training (FRA 2018), and 14% of Roma students reported having felt discriminated against within the school system (FRA 2018, 2014; Garaz - Torotcoi 2017). Roma students can rarely access the costs of higher education and lack accurate options regarding it, facing low expectations about their performances in subjects traditionally considered as challenging (Torotcoi 2013).

The relationship between Roma groups and educational institutions has been extensively explored by multidisciplinary research; the role of prejudice against children and parents, also held by teachers, has been pointed out as being heavily determining of the school careers of these pupils in the last decades (Piasere et al. 2004; Bravi 2009; Sarcinelli 2014; Persico 2015; Liégeois 1987).

According to Bravi (2018), a considerable example aiming at modifying this scenario is the “*Rom, Sinti and Caminanti (RCS)*” National Project involving 5,580 students between 2017-2020; counting 600 Roma and Sinti students and 81 schools. The project followed a systemic approach in considering Roma youth in schooling (Persico 2015), intervening on all the axes of their families’ daily life (among others housing, education, relation among families and schools, local policy etc.): targeting not only

³ Progress in International Reading Literacy Study.

Roma pupils and families, but also peers, teachers, school managers, the local service network and the living context (Bravi 2018: 51).

1.2. *Intersectionality*

As pointed out above, in the case of immigrant and Roma youth, discriminatory processes occur at various levels influencing both their relationship with school and with peers in the spare time. Discrimination manifests itself both in institutional effects of exclusion and in day-to-day interaction practices, which involve gender, ability, sexuality scripts and hierarchies.

Among the types of disadvantage touched by participants in this research, those related to gender and sexuality were: body image pressure and body politics, romantic relationships and parental control (De Meyer et al. 2017; Tolman - Striepe - Harmon 2003; Hall - Brown-Thirston 2011).

Young girls of immigrant origin are under the pressure of gendered traditions in sexuality, marriage practices and body display, reified as central elements of their cultural identity, as has been explored for the Roma (Marcu 2014; Daniele 2013), for Filipino, Indian, Latina or Chicana girls, among others (Das Gupta 1997; Espiritu 2001; Hall - Brown-Thirston 2011).

Research investigating the experiences of girls across race, ethnicity and sexual orientation have paid attention to how condoned discourses, ideology and power reproduce wider gender inequalities, and consequently impact their wellbeing and sexual health (Tolman - Striepe - Harmon 2003). Social class, race and gender are associated in a complex web of teacher-student expectations for school involvement, thus research into young people's experiences needs to consider all of these overlapping identities (Oyserman - Bybee, Terry 2003; Madon et al. 1998). Young people interact among each-other during their spare time by creating peer cultures with variably hierarchical cliques, using exclusionary/inclusionary, racialized and gendered dynamics, which creatively adapt adult cultures (Moore 2001).

Given this scenario, an intersectional approach seemed the most appropriate and for an anti-discrimination campaign, taking into account multiple discriminations, reflecting on the underlying mechanisms of exclusionary discourses, and not focusing only on a specific, culturally defined, ethnic group. As Crenshaw intended since 1989, demarginalizing intersectionality is essential: discrimination efforts should be recentered to focus on the needs of those who are mostly disadvantaged by their position in complex, not discrete, hierarchies.

By introducing this approach that gained much attention in social theory, she criticizes single axis discrimination programs, as disadvantage is not produced on a single axis at a time, while the common "conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination [is done] by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group" (Crenshaw 1989: 140). The anti-discrimination campaign presented in this article brings forward, in a balanced manner, the experiences of minority young people and of girls, along with issues related to poverty, thus tackling multiple forms of discrimination.

1.3. *Counter-narratives in contrasting stereotypes*

Counter-narratives are stories – told and experienced by people – that offer resistance, implicit or explicit, to dominant cultural narratives (Andrews - Bamberg 2004). A counter-narrative is not necessarily a counter-narrative itself, but needs to be provoked in response, criticism and opposition to a dominant discourse.

Counter and alternative narratives (Andrews - Bamberg 2004; Ottaviano 2017; Ottaviano - Persico 2019) can contribute to combat bias, hate speeches and discrimination by discrediting and deconstructing the narratives on which they are based. They also propose (alternative) narratives based on democratic values, such as openness, respect for difference, freedom and equality. They may do so by providing alternative and accurate information, by using humour and appealing to emotions on the issues involved, and by accounting for different perspectives and views. This process can take place thanks to the ability of the subject to position him/herself critically against hegemonic discourses proposed by society. In some cases, and for those involved in the actions analyzed in this paper, this has also meant adopting a reflective look at participant's own biographical path and experiences of discrimination – in the role of victims or witnesses. Taking the floor to express one's point of view by proposing narratives contrasting discrimination generates awareness of social scripts, allowing the creation of strategies to distance oneself from them (Nelson 2001; Gagnon - Simon 1986). Our idea is that collecting biographical experiences as we did with youth, means to all intents and purposes producing counter-narratives. This is because, in the first place, the narratives respond to a critical and collective reflection on hegemonic discourses of discrimination. Secondly, in line with Bamberg (2005), counter narratives aren't in dichotomous relationship with respect to hegemonic discourses: our lives and our narratives on it are full of hue, changing shape. We consider those shreds as "little stories" (Bamberg - Georgakopoulou 2008), recognizing to these stories the transformative potential they have both for those who live them and for those who listen to them. It is through the whole process – from a special setting in which the young had the chances to think, share thoughts and personal episodes and to transform them in images and clear explicit messages to peers and general public – that simple biographical experiences acquire power and became counter narratives. The awareness of the implicit meanings in these narratives and the intentionality in their use, make 'small stories' an instrument of individual transformation and collective metamorphosis (Beck 2017).

1.4. *Visual methods and discrimination*

Visual methods and participatory processes facilitate the engagement of the groups that rarely have voice over the decisions that affect their lives and that suffer marginalisation, such as young people, girls, immigrant pupils or the Roma. They do so while enriching the possible means of expression, allowing people to spend more time with the ideas stemming from research topics (Gauntlett 2007). They use the power of self-representation in challenging established discriminatory practices and worldviews and have the potential to reach larger, targeted and more engaged audiences, and thus

they support the possibility of producing change by de-colonizing communication processes (Frisina 2013).

Such a tool is the photovoice (Wang 1996). The goals of the photovoice process are to empower people to record and reflect on their lives, from their own point of view, to increase their collective knowledge and “to inform policy makers and the broader society about the issues that are of greatest concern and pride” (*ibid.*: 1391).

Recent photovoice projects to tackle discrimination focused on: stigma associated with psychiatric disorders and mental health issues (Becker et al. 2014; Flanagan et al. 2016), women’s and women’s of colour issues (Wang 1996; Davtyan et al. 2016), indigenous and black youth on health inequalities (Goodman et al. 2019; Evans-Agnew 2018), racial identity (Sackett - Dogan 2019), LGBTQ former foster youth (Capous-Desyllas - Mountz 2019), latino adolescents’ health in the USA (Lightfoot et al. 2019), African American men’s perceptions of racism and gender (Ornelas et al. 2009), female to male transsexuals’ access to healthcare (Hussey 2006), among others.

A photovoice research carried out with a majority of Italian youth on the perception of immigration and the integration process revealed that school, sports and volunteering are environments where young people’s attitudes regarding the immigration process are formed and can support contact with different people (Rania et al. 2015). The solutions to support the integration process of immigrants that young people identified are the contact between people of different origins and a deeper knowledge of immigration and other cultures, along with integration at the socio-political level and granting citizenship rights (*ibidem*).

Frisina (2009) conducted participatory visual research with Muslim girls in Italy on the topic of the spaces of their everyday life, gendered and ethnicized. She presents these and other second-generation Muslim discourses as critical counter-narratives, and discusses the power of visual methods in transforming visibility (of the religious belonging, in this case) from an oppressive stance (a form of control), to a recognition stance. The photo-elicitation method is applied to reflect on self-presentations in public spaces of everyday life and brings forward “visual/discursive positionings of those who do not surrender to being relegated in the role of the foreigner” (Frisina 2009: 138). Inspired by this approach, the photovoice process in this article aimed at bringing forward similar stances, as it will be detailed below.

II - METHOD

2.1. *Research questions and aims*

The process of designing the anti-discrimination campaign through participatory and visual methodologies proved highly significant for an in depth, qualitative study how young people perceive, represent and respond to discrimination, which we propose here.

The second aim of this article is to reflect, starting from this experience with the photovoice method, on how specific choices (in participant group composition, work-

shop settings and in introducing the main topics) brought about meanings and context to the discrimination narratives and images produced by participants. Within the context of a project dedicated to Roma, we specifically tailored the workshops in order to facilitate their participation but at the same time we approached discrimination issues in an intersectional way rather than specific to an ethnicity. We argue that intercultural and intersectional approaches in such programs can make anti-discrimination efforts more effective for the most marginalized groups.

The aim of the research is also to bring to light young people's proposals to combat discrimination: which tools they imagine or used in their daily life when facing directly or speaking about discriminations. As a further step of the photovoice process, the campaign aiming at exhibiting the photos and their messages is described.

2.2. *Participants*

Project Story_S included a mixed group of Roma and non-Roma in all its stages, inspired by an intercultural approach, even though its main purpose is supporting young Roma in their education.

This choice was made to take distance from an excessively culturalist vision of Roma groups. Since the design phase of the project, the team decided not to put at the core of the activities the Roma cultural identity, nor to use it as a pivotal or compulsory tool for the educational activities. This choice was made referring to the large and complex debate on Roma identity and its politicization by politicians, activists and social workers⁴. Reflections coming from recent research on a schooling project (Bravi 2018; Persico - Sarcinelli 2017) and on Roma youth in Italian cities and camps (Daniele 2013; Marcu 2014), suggest that the idea of Roma cultural identity should not be used as a premise, especially when working with youngsters who are approaching their sense of belonging in their coming of age.

This idea is further supported by the intersectional approach, underlining that identity politics' tension is to essentialize attributes of group belonging, while ignoring intra-group differences shaped by other dimensions such as gender, age and class (Crenshaw 1991). According to Crenshaw (1991), anti-discrimination made on separate and exclusive terrains (only on grounds of gender, race or ethnicity) are not effective in meeting the experiences and improving the conditions of those at the intersection of more than one axis of inequality (such as Roma women or Roma young people).

In the photovoice process, the diversity in the group was also a tool to multiply the interaction possibilities of participants and extend their networks, but also to represent different points of view, to speak to larger audiences and to create an environment of exchange and mutual learning. We purposefully involved participants from Project Story_S, already part of a peer-to-peer mentoring activity, in the decision of

⁴ Referring to the Italian debate, Bontempelli (2015) provides an interdisciplinary overview of the historical process through which the idea of a "Gypsy" or "Roma" identity was created and put into play by scholars and politicians, most of which aiming at targeting and excluding the Roma, but also in recent years by pro-Roma scholars and activists deploying an essentialist view of the identity.

the composition of the group by involving their friends, peers or classmates, making sure that Roma young people and their friends would be encouraged to take part in the workshops. We also invited other volunteers, with a public call, and students from the high-school hosting us, of approximately the same age.

The beneficiaries of mentoring in Project Story_S studied mainly in vocational schools, and came from a marginalized minority, having experienced housing insecurity and family poverty in their childhood. Volunteers and high-school students were young people living in the same city, some were migrants.

Considering these choices made for forming the group, the project differs from the original photovoice application, with members that share belonging to the same community and are in marginalized positions (Molloy 2007; Jarldorn 2019; Wang et al. 1996). The project took the wider approach of bringing together people who belong to the same age group and live in the same urban space, putting forward the age inequality axis, as suggested by educational applications of the photovoice (Strack et al. 2004).

The voluntary, informed participation was also a self-selection factor, as young people who chose to participate to the public call were already sensitive to discrimination issues and solidary to the Roma.

In Italy, the workshops took place in Milan and Rome. The participants – aged 15 to 28 –, were 15 Roma and 17 non-Roma, two thirds girls and one third boys in Milan and 13 Roma and 7 non-Roma, with a balanced male/female ratio, in Rome. While Roma young people's experiences of ethnic discrimination did come out, they were not targeted, but supported with particular care of the facilitators to create a safe space, where one could choose whether to disclose personal experience or not.

2.3. *The photovoice process*

Inspired by its creators, we applied the photovoice as a visual and participatory research method to identify, represent, and enhance communities through a specific photographic technique (Wang - Burris 1997). We aimed to create active knowledge, as participants record and reflect on the current issues affecting them, to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about these through large and small group discussions on photographs, and to reach policymakers, or other decision makers related to the proposed topic (Wang - Burris 1997).

We developed the photovoice method through a series of workshops entitled “Lo Sviluppamenti”⁵. In Milan, a private high school, Liceo Orsolino, hosted the workshops. In Rome, La Rampa Prenestina was chosen, a center for cultural and integration-oriented projects which three of the mentees of Project STORY_S attend on a regular basis.

The topic that was proposed to participants was discrimination, with an intersectional and dialogical approach. We used some exercises for initiating group discussion and reflection. The first, called “the weight of the jackets”, consists in reading a

⁵ The title, meaning “Developing minds” was given by mentors, while the staff referred to them as “Awareness raising workshops”, the title written in the project proposal.

list of sentences describing discriminatory behaviours and in asking the group to put their jackets on the shoulders/head of a volunteer sitting in the middle if they have found themselves in that specific situation, being victims or witnesses of discrimination. At the end of the activity, the participants are invited to share some situations they have experienced and to reflect on practical ways of facing those situations, if they ever find themselves there again. Another exercise we proposed is the “20 statements test” (Kuhn - McPartland 1954), which makes the participants reflect on their multiple identities, individuality and reasons for belonging to and identifying with various social groups. This process supported the collective identification of discrimination as an issue affecting young people and others around them. Group discussion and elicitation following the stimuli proposed above were aimed at grasping young people’s view, experience and feelings regarding the phenomena that had just been evoked, and at the same time was a way to focus and facilitate the photo production process by bringing forward concrete ideas of what to depict.

The photovoice method consists of asking participants to shoot photos on an important topic for their everyday life, to comment and discuss on them and then to present them to a relevant audience (Wang - Burris 1997). The photovoice technique was put in place in the following manner: during the first session(s) a photographer explained the basics of this expressive language, of composition and shared some examples such as photos with powerful anti-discrimination messages from existing campaigns.

Participants took photographic walks, sometimes in groups, having two or more weeks to complete the shooting, between one workshop session and the other. They used mostly cell phones to shoot the pictures, but we did make available photo cameras for those who did not possess one.

Five selected photos were then discussed in small groups or in plenary during the next meeting with a facilitator guiding each group discussion and taking notes. The participants were asked what their pictures were representing, where they were taken, what they wanted to express, what should each picture transmit, with a script more similar to that proposed by Chonody et al. (2013) than the original SHOWeD script (Wang 1999). The other participants could discuss, make questions or share experiences related to the topics of the photos, as it often happened. Titles and categories were attributed to each photo by the person/group who took them, in respect of a participatory approach to the interpretation and analysis of the visual material produced. These were shared in plenary, and common leading themes were identified and written on billboards. The identified leading themes and the group discussion concurred to the interpretation of the results detailed below in this article.

The final 15 photos of the anti-discrimination campaign were selected either by common choice (Rome) or voting (Milan), depending on the size of the group.

2.4. Participation meeting expertise

An interesting issue to analyse is the balance between the input of researchers, facilitators and artists and young people, negotiated at each step, but conditioned by financier’s standards, time and resources. It brings forward project design choices

which impact on the degrees and manners in which participation and empowerment actually occur, allowing for spontaneous group enthusiasm to sparkle.

According to methodological literature on visual research, participants, photographers, researchers create “forms of polyphonic authorship”, co-constructing the visual product (Frisina 2013:11). In the photovoice, specific attention is given to the choice of the words accompanying the photos (photo-text), a moment in which researchers should let go of their authority and respect the knowledge creation process initiated by participants (Jaldorn 2019; Capous-Desyllas - Morgaine 2018). In our project, the photo-text was worded by researchers, using the notes taken during the workshops, intentionally using the same expressions and clarifying the meaning with participants, when doubts arose regarding the interpretation.

Still, in order to give more “voice” to participants, we facilitated the involvement of participants in the thematic coding of the data and in choosing which photos to display at the exhibition; representing the voice of the participants in academic publications, with pictures, quotes, captions (Evans-Agnew - Rosenberg 2016).

The presence and contribution of the photographer was also an element in the production of knowledge, visual, in this case. The reason for her presence was to maximize the quality of the photos, in view of their promotion through a printed campaign, intervening with suggestions in the selection of the best 5 photos per person or group. On one hand, images communicate more convincingly if they have been produced by people sharing (even partially) a similar background with that of the audience (age, gender, places of reference, cultural interests or taste); on the other, an aesthetically and communicatively efficient product might need the involvement of experts or artists that transmit the competencies needed to use techniques and media. As for the analysis stage, it followed both a formal and an interpretive approach (Knoblauch - Baer - Laurier - Petschke - Schnettler 2008), it was both researcher and participant driven. Some stages of the analysis were applied during the workshop, in the thematic analysis and the classification of the themes. Researchers then analysed the choices of composition of the campaign photos, the type of situation/experience chosen, persons or objects in the picture. The interpretive analysis put these elements in correspondence with the meanings expressed by young people in group discussions which helped identify topics, narratives, characters and metaphors.

2.5. Photovoice and social change

As mentioned above, the last stage of a photovoice project consists of challenging dominant discourse and communicating participants' vision to stakeholders and decision makers on important issues affecting their communities (Wang - Burris 1997).

As literature suggests, most photovoice studies only succeed in raising awareness and that the change effects are not all that clear (Sanon et al. 2014). In the Story_S campaign, awareness raising was the main goal, and mostly peers were involved. The project aimed mainly at a peer-education effect and not so much at a political, policy or legislative change. The expected change regarded the attitudes of peers and school personnel towards discrimination affecting themselves and other people, reducing the stereotypes

and increasing understanding of the ways in which discrimination works and of the people affected by it. Peers are stakeholders regarding discriminatory and bullying behaviours at school, while teachers, also for systemic and institutional discrimination affecting some of their pupils. Local authorities' representatives, school managers, national organisations and public and private social services are among the other stakeholders we reached – in part – when the project team organized or participated in institutional events, where the young participants were invited as speakers. The development of the campaign for displaying and discussing the photovoice images and texts will be detailed below. Although these meetings were interactive, they cannot be considered indicative of participants' ideas on discrimination, as they did not represent a methodologically accurate group interviewing process. Teachers and schoolmates were present, increasing the social desirability of young's interventions, and the groups were very large, counting around 40 people at once, while no specific conversational method was used in order to guarantee that everybody could speak their minds. Also, they were not recorded because it was not possible to obtain informed consent from all of minors' legal representatives.

In order to measure attitudes and attitude changing effects, we applied a survey on independent samples of young people in the places where campaign events were organized, before and after the campaign. The results of this survey will be analysed in a forthcoming paper, while this paper focuses on the qualitative analysis of the process.

2.6. *Ethical issues*

The privacy of the people involved was protected not only in academic publications, but also in group processes and in the promotion of visual contents. An informed consent from participants or from their parents (when underage) was requested. Participants chose to be visible and recognizable in some of the pictures, the staff ensured that this would not be of harm to them or disclose the identity of those who showed body parts without being recognizable. Many participants were Roma, and facilitators did not disclose their ethnic belonging. Some of them did choose to disclose publicly being Roma, a gesture to reclaim a positive group identity. Others did not disclose their ethnic identity even to teachers or classmates. Thus it was important to have a mixed group; having a Roma-only group would have violated the privacy rights of those involved, making them recognizable as Roma. As research shows, even only being associated to Roma people (e.g. friendship bonds) brings about stigma and ethnic identification as Roma, especially in schools (Kisfalusi 2018).

The workshops were therefore intended to ensure a safe space where everyone could express themselves; this was possible thanks to a “no-judgement” logic guaranteed by the approach of the staff to the facilitation of the events.

III - RESULTS

In this section we will describe the results stemming from the discussions and images of the young people in the photovoice, trying, as much as possible, to be consistent with

their words and points of view. We bring forward, in the discussion section, an analysis of these results anchored in the theoretical framework and literature review.

The risks of viewing people through the lens of stereotypes was related to the threat of being misrecognized and, on the opposite, to the opportunities of being acknowledged as someone different from before. This connection between “how I see the other” and “how the other sees me” was clearly the focus point of several debates, and the participants underlined the fact that stereotypes can impoverish our look, but can also erase our personal identity. As an example, participants referred to gender and sexuality-based discrimination. They clearly recognize and stigmatize words and behaviour that discriminate girls and women but also homosexual people; moreover, some of them critically recognize stereotypes about masculinity. Connected to this, “body” and body shaming was the focus of a debate, stressing the point that among the youngsters, especially among girls, there is a strong pressure on how bodies should be and how far these ideas are from boys’ and men’s expectations.

FIGURE 1 – *“Appearance is different than reality. Do not reason stereotypically”*



Another related debate was focused on the “white man” as the stereotype of normality and, consequently, on the resulting ethnic stereotyping; participants highlighted how strong and common this image is, so that when a picture represents “other” persons (non-white, non-western, non-men), our attention usually focus on their diversity and not on their actions. Moreover, the youngsters recognized that this idea of normality creates a clear hierarchy in which all the non-white persons, but also all the non-men persons are less considered, if not subordinated.

Indirectly, also ageism was tackled. Some of the Roma youngsters associated gender discrimination to their personal experience describing the different expectations that elders have when speaking about boys’ and girls’ behaviours. It appears interesting that this debate gave the opportunity to some of the Roma youngsters to describe a generational gap between their parents and grandparents and to define it in terms of discrimination.

Although it was decided not to focus on a specific category – Roma people – but to talk about discrimination in general and see what specific topics the youth themselves focused on and wanted to talk about, in Milan some experiences of discrimination against Roma came out and were shared by some participants who did not fear exposing their ethnic belonging with the group (although not all of them did). In Rome, all the young Roma expressed their ethnic belonging, probably because most of the participants already knew each other at that time and because of the role played by the venue in making them feel comfortable. Furthermore, they highlighted the long list of discrimination suffered by those who have to live in the so-called nomad camps.

FIGURE 2 – *Photo of a the external wall of a camp hosting Roma: “In our city there shouldn’t be ghettos or places where people are excluded from society” (Rome)*



Stereotypes, misrecognition and differential treatment can be connected to other themes recalled by participants to be at the core of the campaign: the ideas of “poverty”, “exclusion” and “loneliness”. Being homeless, and the idea of losing all the relations together with all the properties and all the possibilities, seemed to be a strong and recurrent element in the imagination of these youngsters, an element that they used to represent as a real risk. Also, being homeless is a common and public display of extreme poverty most of us come across on a daily basis in the city streets. It seems important to underline that this fear is one of the elements which Roma and non-Roma youngsters clearly and easily agreed on.

Most of the examples of discriminatory behaviours made by the youth in Milan were about online videos, posts and online comments. In particular, a video about two

Roma women who have been locked in a recycling container after being caught going through the bins at a Lidl supermarket which went viral was discussed (Pasta 2018b: 30-32) and condemned by the participants. This opened a discussion specifically on discrimination on the social media channels, on how fake news spread so easily and what are the challenges in fighting these phenomena on the internet.

3.1. *The selected pictures*

The formal and metaphorical construction of the images are also rich with relevant meanings regarding young people's view on the phenomenon. The six categories presented in this section are the result of the analysis conducted by the researchers, for the purpose of deepening and intersecting interpretation stances, as well as facilitating the connections with visual sociology literature, put forward in the Discussion section below.

At a first analysis it is possible to distinguish between images that describe concrete situations and photographs that express their message through a metaphor (1).

For example, one of the participants described the question of coexistence by photographing some trees and commenting on the image with the following words: *"We have roots planted in different places, but our paths cross like branches"*. Another photo depicts pencils of different colours, which are all made of the same material: wood. The words commenting on the image are *"Diversity is beauty, it would be bad to live in a world of a single colour"*. The messages expressed through metaphors are general and do not refer to concrete episodes experienced by the authors of the images.

FIGURE 3 – *"Diversity is beauty, it would be bad to live in a world of a single colour" (Rome)*



Another example of visual-metaphor is an image portraying one of the participants with the glasses fogged up, on which she wrote the word “prejudice”: the message is very direct and clear: “prejudice is a distorted, biased view”. Moreover, in exposing her face, the protagonist has made a courageous choice. This image leads us to a second category of analysis that concerns the way in which the participants and their bodies are engaged (2). Some of the youth decided to make public their faces but also their bodies, or photomontages of parts of their and of their friends’ bodies. The clearest examples are two photographs denouncing body shaming. The first image, first of a sequence of two, portrays the body of a girl from the torso up to the neck, dressed in a white bra. The second image shows another girl’s lower part of the torso, from the abdomen to under the pelvis, with blue underwear. The comments accompanying the first and second photo are respectively: “*Our peers judge us according to unreal standards...*”, “*we want to show our real bodies*”. The protagonists have shared negative experiences related to the perception of their bodies because of teasing and jokes made by their peers and because of the standards promoted by the media. Unrealistic, unhealthy standards that crush the wonderful heterogeneity of bodies on a single, questionable, model of beauty.

Two images belonging to this category are photomontages: in the first one, there is a collage composed of part of the face of a black girl and the blue eyes of a white girl. The background of the photo is green, the girl does not smile, she stares at the camera and her expression is neutral. The image denounces the fact that the skin colour, even today, may be a ground for discrimination. The second photomontage represents two halves faces placed side by side and characterized by elements that indicate a religious affiliation, mixing them. A rosary and a hijab worn by people whose physical appearance would not make them be, stereotypically, associated to that particular religious affiliation. The participants who showed their faces and bodies were aware that the images would be publicly disseminated, even in contexts frequented by themselves and their peers (their schools). In a phase of life in which the judgements coming from the group of peers is of great importance, finding a space in the campaign to affirm one’s ideas and position was an important goal achieved by the action research.

A third category is related to the daily life of the participants and experiences of discrimination (3) they lived and shared through photos. In this category of images, the points of view of the photographers are various: spectator, discriminated person, person who helps those in need etc. The photographs describing the direct experiences of the participants allow us to understand how intimate the involvement in the production process can be. The most striking example of this category is a photo that denounces the housing segregation imposed to some Roma groups (in this case in Rome, but it happens in several Italian cities). The picture shows a wall separating a green meadow, clearly situated in a place far from the built-up area, from a precarious settlement, with piles of debris and garbage. The comment of the author says: “*In our city must not exist ghettos or places where people are excluded from society*”. For those who do not know the reality of the nomad camps and the degradation caused by the institutional abandonment, it is difficult to think of it as a place where people are forced to live. In this specific case, housing segregation is only one of the many aspects that the young participant has experienced together with his family and the minority group to which

he belongs. The image describes a rupture in the biography and tells of the uprooting experienced by this boy, evicted and forced to move from the neighborhood near the center of Rome where he was living, to a suburban area of the city.

A second image represents two cups of coffee, one with a euro coin next to it and the other with coins for a total of one euro and ten cents. It tells of the discrimination suffered by foreigners and members of ethnic minorities, who experienced paying more than locals for their consumption at some coffee places, and in general of differential treatment in commercial spaces. Being able to see the apparently smaller forms of discrimination and name them for what they are, allows young people to train their gaze and raise their level of awareness.

An image with an inverted message represents a young boy volunteering in an elderly daily centre, talking about commitment towards a category of people often subject to discrimination: the elderly. "*Happiness is not real if it is not shared*" says the caption attached to it.

The message is similar to the ones in the next category, comprising photographs that encourage action (4), to take the initiative, to become actors and promoters of a fair society. Another positive message comes from the picture that shows a road junction where people of different origins are crossing, others are talking at the edge of the road and typical Chinese lanterns alternate with Christmas lights in the background. The authors of the photo, in the comment, exhort the meeting between different cultures, as it already happens in their city.

A positive attitude emerges also in the fifth category, represented by a single picture: the image of a crowded subway wagon with the comment "*No matter where you come from, we're all crushed in the subway!*". Irony (5) is another approach emerging from the campaign.

A last group of images is characterized by a denouncing of situations that anyone can see every day (6). This category includes photographs of homeless people sleeping under the banner of a famous brand, or sitting on a bench in a park in the indifference of those around them. These images aim to denounce situations in which socio-economic status becomes a reason for discrimination and social isolation. These glimpses of everyday life complete the excursus on the different forms of discrimination and the different perspectives in which each of the participants can find themselves depending on the situations.

Discussing the topic, comparing the images and selecting them, also led the youngsters to talk about the possible forms of contrast to discrimination asking themselves: what can I do when I have to face discriminatory behaviours occurring around me?

The idea of a "common future" came out. Sharing the everyday life has been the main positive message that participants formulated for fighting discrimination. The same idea of a common future was used to criticize stereotypical visions of the world: showing that "diverse people are already living together" states a strong criticism to a stereotypical vision of the identities.

Another modality they made concrete use of in some pictures was the deconstruction of the stereotype in dimensions they then puzzled together in a composition: thus, pointing out to the variability within ethnic, religious, racial categories.

FIGURE 4 – *“Our peers judge us according to unreal standards. We want to show our real bodies” (Milan)*



Volunteering appeared twice; we can consider it as a strategy proposed by the youth.

Another answer came from a Roma girl who told her own story and affirmed that the main tool for triggering a real change is dialogue, the ability and the patience in explaining, together with the personal involvement in the relations with others; this involvement means also for her publicly declaring one's Roma identity, as many Roma hide it in order to avoid being victims of ethnic violence. She clearly decided not to hide being Roma, and, on the opposite, she suggested to use it as a tool in the fight against racism and discrimination. Her positioning was partially shared with some other participants.

Based on the debate that led to the choice of the pictures for the campaign, we can say that the participants mainly focused on which picture was the best and clearest representation of discrimination. The denunciation of discrimination was chosen as the main anti-discrimination strategy.

We could explain this choice referring to the fact that Roma youngsters and all participants have a clearer idea of what discrimination is, while they have little or no experience in anti-racist practices; therefore, when thinking of how to change a racist person, the only solution the participants could share was an individual, personal solution: learning to be patient and slowly trigger a change through personal relations, while collective actions are not imagined. In this situation, choosing photos for a public exhibition appeared as a new tool to be considered and used.

3.2. *Completing the circle*

The last phase of the process was the dissemination of the campaign, focused mainly on peers, but also involving teachers. The overall format of the ten planned opening events was proposed by the facilitators, and consisted in a one or two-hour presentation in schools and some places that young people frequented in their spare

time. The participants in the photovoice proposed locations and contents for the presentations. They proposed to make a video telling their experience, as not all of them could participate to all the events and share it in person. The video comprised testimonials regarding the importance of the message of the campaign and the experience of the photovoice. The Opening Events were not simply a showcase, they were conceived and put in place as an opportunity for comparison and exchange among peers on current issues such as discrimination, by means of open questions, presentation of the photos and the video. Students from different classes shared their personal experiences in front of a large audience, exposing themselves and trying to make their own experience a matter for reflection, comparison and criticism.

The photos and texts were displayed in 10 locations in Milan, Rome, Bergamo and Como for 2 weeks up to 1 month. The locations were Secondary Schools (some of which attended by the participants), a University, a Volunteer Center and a Sports Center. Among the 593 youngsters that took part in the presentations (accompanied by their teachers), 70% were in vocational secondary schools (technical and professional profiles), schools with the highest concentration of immigrant background students (MIUR 2019). The attitudes and self-reported discrimination of the young people who were exposed to the campaign were measured by means of a convenience-sampled survey, the results of which will be presented in future publications.

The campaign was also promoted through the social media (Instagram and Facebook), where photos and related texts were posted. On the project's Facebook page, the Italian campaign reached 3.322 persons (views), with a page fanbase of 448 persons, 55% girls, 43% boys (21% aged 18-24; 31% aged 25-34; 22% aged 35-44). Still, many more reactions were obtained on a partner Facebook page⁶. Of less impact was the Instagram project page, followed by 229 people, where a contest was set up, to encourage the audience in face to face events to be actively involved and vote for the pictures which caught their attention the most.

Other events (an international conference, an exhibition and a presentation) targeted other stakeholders and were organized by the project team, where young participants were invited and openly talked about their experience in front of a professional public. We decided not to involve them as organizers of these latter events for the limited time they had to dedicate to the project and for language and target limitations⁷.

IV - DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Participatory processes with young people, especially if supported by visual, peer and creative learning, can become powerful tools for research and education. The

⁶ Associazione BiR Onlus, a project partner, shared the campaign on its page, with a considerable larger fanbase (4.357 followers). Unfortunately, we could not have access to the impact measurement of the campaign on this page.

⁷ Participants were not familiar with academic English nor interested to participate to an entire day of professional talk regarding social interventions.

photovoice method, leading to an anti-discrimination campaign as the one described above, reveals interesting insights regarding the participation of young people in action-research regarding their perception, experiences of discrimination and their version of an anti-discrimination narrative.

We have argued for an intersectional approach to discriminations while our innovative choice was to include young people living in the same city (sharing the discriminated status of being young), but with different belongings in terms of ethnicity and class, rather than having all members experiencing the same disadvantaged condition, as in classical photovoice processes. At the same time, we ensured that Roma young people and girls would be numerous in the group.

Young people reflected on the living space they shared – the cities of Milan and Rome – but we explicitly proposed a narrower, more specific topic – discrimination, implying a diversity of positionings of the participants involved to create narratives and images. The topic was explored departing from theoretical standpoints (translated to common language) and eliciting bottom-up, brainstorming ideas, leading to the co-creation of the knowledge needed to familiarize with the issue, as in other photovoice processes (Jarldorn 2019). Some issues came out, while others didn't, and this was connected with the specific, embedded experience of participants, already envisaged in group formation. Sexual minorities or disabled young people, to take two examples, were not significantly represented in the group and this limited the possibility for discriminatory phenomena against these categories to be tackled.

The research further discusses the relationship between expertise and participation, between the importance attributed to the participatory process and the final product. While the process is the valuable element of an action research, we cannot underestimate the relevance even of the final product – in our case the anti-discrimination campaign and its communicative efficiency. By choosing to limit to the minimum interventions on the choice of the images and during the post production phase, we left more space to participants' expression than to the aesthetical effectiveness of the campaign.

The process explored in depth their perspectives and experiences of discrimination by analysing group discussions, interactions, the images produced and their meanings, supporting the importance of involving young people in producing and disseminating active knowledge for social change.

Despite the fact that the meetings took place inside a school, the stories that were told concern experiences lived outside the school world, in line with other studies (Gilardoni 2008) pointing out to the friendship bonds outside the school context. Moreover, young people have denounced not only individual acts, but hierarchies and inequalities linked to multiple discrimination. For example, they talked about discrimination based on ethnicity but also on gender, or with respect to the spatial location in urban space. In some cases, they have been able to identify how these hierarchies intersect and overlap giving substance to an intersectional approach as Crenshaw (1989) defines it.

In many photographs there are images of homeless people living or sleeping on the street, alone, in the indifference of those around them. Being homeless seems to represent the image *par excellence* of poverty, with all the consequences related to it. This glance on homelessness seems consistent with the branch of scientific literature

that identifies homelessness as a complex phenomenon which, not limiting itself to housing deprivation, affects the socio-economic sphere as much as the political, cultural and relational one (Avramov 1995; Tosi 1999).

Discrimination is recognized and denounced by youth on multiple grounds, such as gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, in definitions of normality and in images of poverty and these categories and their intersections are represented through a metaphorical, experiential, bodily engagement with the photographic tool. Participants demonstrated awareness and an in depth look at the reality and dynamics of discrimination; moreover, they formulated and exemplified strategies to face or contrast discrimination.

The first strategy is the reporting of discriminatory facts, to make visible a phenomenon that, remaining submerged, is more difficult to combat, study and address effectively. Increasing complaints and visibility of discrimination is also the first objective of official anti-discrimination networks⁸. Ethnic discrimination, denounced by participants, counts a majority of discriminatory acts, half of these also is punishable by law, as OSCAD (2017) data shows for the last 7 years.

A second identified strategy is volunteering and sharing positive experiences with members of other social categories, not necessarily peers, but also elderly or homeless people. Also in this case young people have identified an effective strategy: according to existing literature, volunteering has the positive effect, among others, to increase empathy in the youth involved (Salvini - Corchia 2012). This helps to develop positive attitudes towards people in need by avoiding superimposing a person's worth with their economic situation.

The use of irony and self-irony was also a strategy that, although not very widespread among the participants, is interesting to point out (Cadei 2016).

The very experience of participating in the workshops was an opportunity to confront counter narratives (Bamberg 2004) of peers, and among them, of Roma youth in secondary education. For example, when some young Roma have expressed their ethnic belonging, it was an opportunity for everybody to experience a positive role model represented, e.g. by a young peer, who despite years of eviction, had managed to build a normal life together with his family and to continue studying or finding an employment. Youth have reflected in their narratives the intersectionality of discriminatory phenomena, returning this concept through the images they used to describe their perspective; they had the chance of exposing themselves honestly and courageously, including their bodies and origins, as living counter narratives (Ottaviano - Persico 2019). We can therefore identify in those kind of counter narratives, role models that represent a possible strategy of conscious action in the complexity of discriminatory phenomena, able to widen more and more the spaces of sustainability, visibility and accountability (Butler 2004); also and perhaps especially for those subjectivities historically discriminated and for a more sustainable future for all.

⁸ The joint work of UNAR (National Anti-discrimination Office) and OSCAD (Security Monitor Against Discriminatory Acts) aims precisely to create territorial points to which anyone can refer in case of discrimination or witnesses.

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