

STIFTUNG FÜR DIE RECHTE
ZUKÜNFTIGER GENERATIONEN
GENERATIONENGERECHTIGKEITSPREIS 2007/2008

„GENERATION P“ –
UNGLEICHBEHANDLUNG VON JUNG UND ALT IN DER ARBEITSWELT

A Different Perspective on the “Precarious Generation” in Germany and Italy

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To Uncertainty

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Halle and Cognola, March 15, 2008

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1 Introduction

During the 80s, European students started realizing that finishing their university careers did not necessarily mean the beginning of a proper job life¹. In Germany, it was only in 2005 that this phenomenon was given a name: “Generation Praktikum” (“Internship Generation”). The term was introduced with an homonymous article in the newspaper “ZEIT”². Since then, the topic was a matter of controversial debates not only in Germany, but all across Europe – under different names. In Italy for example, we have different terms for referring to it: “generazione 1000 euro” (like “los mileuristas” in Spain) or “precarious generation” (like “Génération Précaire”³ in France). The quantity of 1000 EUR refers to the maximum salary that young people can expect to be paid from their job. As a matter of fact, most of young Italian people cannot earn more than this sum, no matter how specialized they are⁴.

Exactly almost three years later, the debate about job chances of young graduates in Germany angles off in a new direction. A representative survey from 2007 has shown that in 2006, 12,5 – 14% of young graduates undertook an internship.⁵ According to the author, the fears of students and young academics are thus highly exaggerated. He mentions that nine months after finishing the first traineeship only 4-6% remain unemployed.⁶ Why is this fact formulated as a positive point? The declaration implies that a single traineeship does not justify the “Generation Praktikum”. Moreover, the study does not consider the situation of graduates immediately after studies (and namely, that without the traineeship the unemployment rate would be significantly higher). Considering this point, the optimistic tone cannot be justified.

In response to the study, newspapers speak of “a legend”⁷, “a fairy tale”⁸, of “the invented Internship Generation” and of a “mere phantasy”⁹ of the journalist in 2005 who started the discussion. The “Generation Praktikum” is on its way to be discussed into insignificance.

¹ List, 1997

¹ List, 1997

² Stolz, 2005

³ At the same time, name of the French movement (Génération Précaire, 2007)

⁴ Antonio Incorvaia & Alessandro Rimassa, *Generazione mille euro*, Rizzoli, Milano 2006

⁵ Briedis / Minks, 2007

⁶ [Focus](#) online, 2007

⁷ Astheimer, 2007

⁸ Süddeutsche.de, 2007

⁹ NZZ, 2007

Another study, conducted in 2007 as well, shows a different and more alarming picture.¹⁰ According to the non-representative Survey of the Federation of German Trade Unions (DGB), 37 % of the German graduates decide to do a traineeship – mainly to bridge unemployment. “Transitional unemployment” is the researchers’ term for this development.¹¹ The media response to this study is a significantly lower one.

Yet, while all this is going on, German youngsters turn with indignation against the denial of the existence of the “Generation Praktikum”. They speak of “falling ill due to existential fears” after undergoing long phases of unpaid traineeships, of payments “that would make a cleaning lady laugh” and of former fellow students who accept one internship after the other just in the hope to get one’s foot in the door one fine day. The bottom line to the media debate above is: “ridiculous”¹².

In Italy, newspapers tend to look at the problem only with regards to the Italian low birth rate or 30+ year old “youngsters” who still live at home with their parents (around 60 % of young people between 18 and 34 are still living at home with their parents)¹³. However, in the daily Italian press, the tendency is either presenting a denial of the actual situation (or statements that young people should be happy just to find a job, even as cleaning maids or factory labourer, no matter their educational background¹⁴), or presenting it as a dramatic reality, a problem impossible to overcome. Clear and deep analysis of scientific data about the issue is less spread.

Meanwhile, companies advertise reams of traineeships for post-graduates on pages called “career entry”.¹⁵ National Initiatives have established and their demands are quite similar¹⁶. In 2007, European initiatives have linked together in the network “Generation P” and are currently fighting for continuous data collection of traineeships and European standards for trainings.¹⁷ Beyond the media discussion, the “Generation P” is now a fact.

Which of the scenarios above comes closer to reality? The genuine truth may lie somewhere in between dramatisation and trivialisation. The intention of the authors of this article is to enter the discussion and take a stance on whether we can justify or

¹⁰ Grün/Hecht, 2007

¹¹ Ibid.: 6

¹² See comments on the article (Focus online, 2007)

¹³ Intravaia, 2007

¹⁴ Eco, 2007

¹⁵ For example, see Stepstone. 2008. An extraction of the website is shown on the front page of this work.

¹⁶ See Hutter, 2006

¹⁷ Generation P, 2007

deny the “precarious generation” by merely counting the numbers of graduated trainees as it was done in previous studies¹⁸. We are speaking about a problem of such complexity that it is more than what is visible on the surface. Brigitte Schawan, secretary of the ministry of education (Germany), sees no need to blandish the situation. She warns to take the concerns and fears of young seriously.¹⁹ A person being in a precarious job situation without perspectives to stabilisation does not care about how many people share this fate.

Current debates lead to the assumption that the “precarious generation” might not be a mass phenomenon but rather an awareness of life of young graduates, partly because of their own or fellow student’s reality, and partly as result of the appraisal of their future employment outlook. Fact is, young people are concerned with the idea of facing unknown times of job instability after finishing their studies. The answer cannot just be that these fears are exaggerated. In fact, nobody up to now has taken the time to find out how students *perceive* the problem.

As a result from these thoughts, the authors decided to approach the problem from another point of view. We designed a study to examine how far the “precarious generation” is present in the mind of those people who are most likely to be affected: current students. This will be the substance of the second part of this work. The first part will provide background information and clarify terms as well as give an insight into the situation of youngsters entering the job market after finishing studies.

In this research, the authors wish to look beyond national borders to be able to compare the situation of young Europeans. Germany and Italy were chosen as these are the native countries of the authors. Thus, the researchers will be able to examine interdependencies of precarious phases after studies and national conditions such as legislation and employment situation.

Germany and Italy are two countries which are very different (culturally speaking), and yet there are significant economic similarities. As will be presented in 3., the precarious situation of young people in both countries shows some differences, but it cannot be denied that something is going on for both of them. Disillusion, instability, worry about the future, impossibility of young people to be just youngsters and to become adults might be disregarded as “emotional factors” not supported by numbers and datas. Yet this could lead to very dangerous changes in society. People living with their parents until they are 30-40 years old is not normal for an Italian;

¹⁸ See for example the HIS study (Briedis/ Minks, 2007) and the DGB survey (Grün/Hecht, 2007)

¹⁹ Wiarda, 2007

just as much as living with government allowances or from parents in order to complete a postgraduate traineeship is not normal for a German. The situations and conditions are certainly different, yet the result on society is the same.

The authors also wish to examine whether part of the contradictory arguments are ultimately attributable to a wrong labelling; whether the term “Generation Praktikum” is eligible to describe the situation of insecurity of a number of young graduates in Germany or rather leads to misunderstandings. Especially when it comes to international comparison, the term is inappropriate as will be shown in 3.2. Also, this limited view may entrap to playing the problem down, as in our view is happening at the moment. Complications in entering job life after graduation are much more complex and need to be measured in its entirety.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Generation

When speaking about “Generation Praktikum” or “generazione precaria” in this work, the authors are referring to their sociological meaning and implications:

Sociological definitions add to the genealogical and temporal/historical aspect of the term “generation” (as is seen from a biological and chronological point of view) features of “contemporaneity” (people who live at the same time) and, resulting from it, similarities in experience and action. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), a German philosopher, stated that shared experiences form a generation create a *generational identity*.²⁰ The sociologist Mannheim (1893-1947) differentiates this idea further²¹: Coevals do not necessarily have a common awareness of things, but only a *generational arrangement in the social space*. It is not until they participate in contemporary events that we can speak of a *generational coherency*. Only if these events are perceived, dealt with and evaluated similarly, a *generational unit* is given. A generational unit is expressed in a collective view of life, similar mentalities and lifestyles. A popular example for a generation unit is the 60s generation.

One of the criticisms of the opponents of “Generation Praktikum” is that, taking in account the findings of the HIS survey, this term is statistically not justified since it does not reflect the life situation of a majority of young graduates. Yet defining the “precarious generation” as a sociological category is still appropriate. It was only a minority of the young people in the 60s who wore flowers in their hair or were involved in the Italian and German student movement of 1968 (about 10%).²² Still they were chosen to represent their age group and given the name: Flower-Power-Generation and 68s Generation.

2.2 Intergenerational Justice

The debate between young and old about “what needs to be kept and what needs to be dismissed for the benefit of progress”²³ is as old as mankind itself and is the key to historical progress. Each generation has its needs, and demands to the society to address them.

²⁰ Dilthey, 1957

²¹ Mannheim, 1970

²² Bude, 1995

²³ Kade, 1998: 40

Intergenerational justice is given when the needs of all generations are treated equally. In 1979, the philosopher Jonas phrased what was called the Imperative of Responsibility (as extension to the Categorical Imperative of Kant): “Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life.”²⁴ The SRzG provides us with a more concrete definition: “Act so that upcoming generations have at least the same chances to meet their needs as today’s generations.”²⁵ When we speak about intergenerational justice, we relate to justice between different generations. We can identify two forms which will be relevant in the course of the work: intertemporal intergenerational justice and temporal intergenerational justice. The first refers to justice between former, current and future generations; the second to justice within generations of different ages living at the same time, for example the “Generation Praktikum”, their parents, their grandparents and their children living together today.

Intergenerational justice is a principle that can be applied to all social and political levels: the rooting of political participation of young people in law; protection of the environment in order to preserve the earth for upcoming generations; limiting public debts as a form of transferring today’s costs into the future and of course equal access to public goods such as education, work, health and much more. For example, it is a form of legalised intergenerational injustice, when burdens of the old age are being socialised and burdens of the childhood are being privatised²⁶.

To cut a long story short: intergenerational justice is all about equal chances and opportunities independently from age.

2.3 From stable to precarious hiring conditions: intergenerational (in)justice

First of all, it needs to be clarified that when speaking about payments, the authors are not only referring to money; they are also including all the benefits stemming from having a proper job. Such benefits include: paid days of sick leave, paid parenthood, paid holidays, security of a proportional pension when workers retire, extraordinary hours of work paid, dismissal protection, and, of course, a salary.

Until the 80s, a peaceful and stable Europe brought better opportunities for working and studying, and an improved quality of life for all its citizens.

²⁴ Jonas, 1979: 36

²⁵ SRzG, 2004

²⁶ Zirfas/Wulf, 2004: 420

During the last three decades, people experienced the effects of the “limits to growth”²⁷. The situation started changing, affecting especially the generation born from the 70s onwards.²⁸

Speaking about intergenerational (in-)justice in payment, let us draw a short comparison with the situation lived by our grandparents (born from the 1915-1920 onwards), our parents (born from the 1950s onwards) and us (the generation this work is donated to, born from the late 1970s onwards) as to the labour market²⁹.

Our grandparents were born during the climax of a first global economy. They experienced Europe in a time of drastic, fast changes (compared with other historical periods) affecting society at all levels. They witnessed the breakdown of the London stock market and the following global economic crisis as children and adolescents. Our grandparents were young adults under the Second World War. They spent the main period of their working life in a long period of social progress and enormous economic expansion, marked by stable conditions of employment and a great demand for labour power.³⁰ It can be agreed that, averagely speaking, the “grandparents” generation was not so well educated, experienced educational breaks, and normally tended to have a very simple working life (excluding the periods of the war).

Our “parents” generation grew up as a generation that had experienced no war, but just reconstruction. Educational processes slightly started to modify; they were able to study more, the economic boom continued under a very successful mixed economy. Back then, people had to work hard in order to achieve their needs; yet there was space for everybody, as the job market was hungry for educated people during the long economic expansion phase of the post-war period. Full employment and continual rising of wages marked the 70s (in the long term, leading to labour market inflexibility and difficulties in keeping up with the global market)³¹. Many academics were already working when studying at university, and they were specializing in the field of their interests. There was a feeling of trust that they were walking towards a more prosperous and equal society. This was true, up to a certain extent; most of them were able to find a job with a contract on indefinite-bases; they were able to make plans, get married, have children, buy their own house, and letting

²⁷ See the famous report of the Club of Rome (Meadows, 1972)

²⁸ See List, 1997

²⁹ Colarizi, 2000

³⁰ See van der Wee, 2005: 10 et sqq.

³¹ Van der Wee, 2005: 23

their children go to university. They had a successful life, when the stagnation of growth and the weaknesses of the mixed economies began to show its concrete effects. In the 80s, the fight against inflation was highest political priority, involving a flexibilisation of the labour market.³² This was the time when our generation grew up and was confronted with the shady side of neo-liberalism: a high level of structural unemployment³³, as the following story describes:

“My history starts, in reality, with the one of my father and my uncle. My father, 55 years old in 1985, employee by Fiat was asked to retire early because there was a decrease in the production and somebody had to stay home; in return, this person would get the salaries of the contribution years still missing for retiring and a compensation, for a total amount of approximately 80.000.000³⁴ liras. He accepted and got the money, with which he was still able to maintain 3 sons. My uncle was fired without due cause in 1987, filled a complain against Fiat and after many years he got all the salaries he would have gained and a compensation for a total amount of 500.000.000³⁵ liras. Now it comes to me, skilled labourer, I got fired because there is no work anymore; I turn to the trade union to ask for my rights and they tell me the employer should give me 2,5 salaries as compensation for a total amount of 3.000 euros, which is a bit less than 6.000.000 liras. Now, these are the numbers and the factual figures (...)”³⁶

Having compared the conditions of work of our generation with these of our parents and grandparents, of intertemporal generational justice in terms of stability and income cannot be spoken. What happened to our generation is a combination of the globalization effects and the destabilization they brought about; bad economic management; short-sighted policies. When referring to this generation, most of the times we are speaking about people who are normally very well trained, holding bachelors and masters degrees. As students, they lived the European unification and were able to travel where they wanted, to do what they wished to do. There was almost no limit to one’s desire. And yet, no matter their education, or how many experiences abroad they had, it is almost impossible for them to enter the job market in a stable way. And the precarious job situation leads to a precarious life situation itself, with all the consequences that can be imagined, from 40 years old “children”

³² Van der Wee, 2005: 25 et seq.

³³ See Kaufmann, 1997: 83et sqq.

³⁴ Around 40.000 euros.

³⁵ Around 250.000 euros.

³⁶ Grillo, 2007: 142-143

living with their parents to exceptional low birth rates. It is almost impossible for young people today to think they will be working in the field they wished to work; those who start studying are pushed to study what society considers to matter the most (mainly economy or engineering) without really following their personal skills and talents. And yet, when they finish their career at university, they find out that no matter what they did, it is almost impossible to have the life their parents had³⁷ - or to have even a better life³⁸ (parents' eternal wish for their children and the expression of a continually rising of prosperity). Why is this the case? In the effort to find answers, the authors venture to make some provocative cases.

First of all, it is a very simple economic reasoning: the more products of a certain type you have, the more their value falls. A question of supply and demand. Therefore, the more educated people we have, the less value we give to them. "Educational inflation", the sociologist Beck called it in 1986.³⁹ We have loads of well educated people; they are all looking for a proper job; why should we give them one if they can easily be exploited? And this is true on a transversal level, for the private and the public sector alike, for profit and no-profit entities all the same. From a pure economical point of view, it is much more reasonable having skilled and talented people working for low salaries or for free rather than having to pay them. The unions founded over the last few years in order to fight exploitation of internships have to work hard to find attentive ears⁴⁰. It is a structural problem of democracies to favour the present.⁴¹ This can lead to the fact that younger peoples' concerns are depreciated: Short term success is what counts to be re-elected and due to demographic changes most of the voting people are older people. The costs for today's wealth are shifted to the future.

Temporal injustice is given when the labour market holds different opportunities for different ages. Current debates that centre around the topic are led from another side: job discrimination of older people against the backdrop of partial retirement and unemployment of older people. The injustice for the younger generations has a different face: lower social benefits, less employment rights and job uncertainty (see 3.).

³⁷ Istat, 2006

³⁸ See Tremmel, 2005

³⁹ Beck, 1986

⁴⁰ For example, the process of the petitions around a German and European Internship regulation law is progressing only slowly. Politicians keep the "Generation Praktikum" waiting (see Stegers, 2007)

⁴¹ See Tremmel, 2006: 1

Of course, other generations have a right to complain about disadvantages as well. Our grandparents for example, were taken the chance to a live in peace and they had to cope with breaks in their education, having witnessed at least one of the World Wars. But this is not a discussion about injustice due to catastrophes or misfortune. It is about shouldering cutbacks of the welfare society together.

It is a very complicated situation which involves different levels. Let us analyse what happened as to salaries and benefits, i.e. let us see what kind of contract options young graduates have when entering the labour market in the two countries of comparison.

3 Graduated! – And now what?

The following elaborations will provide an in-depth insight into the variety of employment relationships in Germany and Italy with a focus on atypical forms of employment that are characterising the career entry of young graduates.

3.1 “Generation Praktikum”: young graduates entering the job market in Germany

The flexibility and mobility of the labour market comes along with an increase of insecure employment opportunities.⁴² Taken the full time permanent position as a normative working model, these types of work can be defined as “atypical” employment forms. In Germany, more than a third of all jobholders are employed in this manner⁴³; working part time, being marginally employed in “mini-jobs”, having short term contracts, being rented as temporary workers, having a telecommuting job or a franchise-agreement. The labour market shows a tendency to de-centralisation, flat hierarchies and self-responsibility. An employee, such is the challenging theory, is looking more and more like a self-employed. Work power is no longer permanently kept by full employment but purchased on demand.⁴⁴

Atypical employment forms are often linked with lower payment, insecurity, a lack of prospects as well as subordinate social allowances. These are criteria that identify precarious situations. Short term jobs are precarious as well, being strongly connected with the risk of unemployment which for academics was at 4,1 % in 2005.⁴⁵

Increasingly, young academics after finishing studies find themselves in these employment forms.⁴⁶ One of the leading atypical employment forms for graduates is self-employment.⁴⁷ The flexibility and autonomy of self-employed people and freelancers is not infrequently accompanied by unfavourable working conditions such as narrow profits, few days of holidays and the permanent stress to attract new businesses.⁴⁸ Even freelancers who do not have to cope with fluctuations have to live near the financial existence minimum, due to inflationary fees. Apart from that, in

⁴² Kaufmann, 1997: 92 et sqq.

⁴³ Böckler Stiftung, 2007

⁴⁴ Blanke a.o., 2002: 22 et sqq.

⁴⁵ IAB, 2007

⁴⁶ Stegemann, 2007

⁴⁷ Cp. Wischmeier, 2004; 106 et sqq.

⁴⁸ Grunt, 2007

various fields of work, self-employed have no obligation to contribute to social insurance. Those who are voluntary insurants cannot share the contribution to social security with the employer as it is usual in full time jobs.⁴⁹

Atypical employment forms are not necessarily the first choice of graduates. Let us consider part time job as an example. This way of working has been on continual rise over the last decades. Originally seen as a possibility of work-live-balance, it is now being used as an instrument to reduce unemployment.⁵⁰ Graduates being employed part time often did not choose to be, but accept it due to the lack of full time jobs.

Another sphere of precarity is addressed by Phese and Kerst.⁵¹ They introduce the idea that it is not only a question of how fast graduates enter the labour market, but whether they can find an appropriate job according to their studies. A current research showed that one in every six/seven graduates are employed inadequately to their educational background.⁵² Depending on the field of studies, internships come with great variety (see next paragraph). The authors differentiate between two forms of inadequacy: vertical inadequacy (the formal requirements of the job stay behind the qualification of the employees) and horizontal inadequacy (this applies to the extent to which own skills gained in studies are demanded). The former can be differentiated further: in adequacy of the task and adequacy of the position and status. The authors refer to graduates who do professionally demanding work that often have an insecure formal structure in terms of payment, status, social security and job perspectives.

The most common way for graduates to ease their career entrance is to undertake a post-graduate traineeship. According to the HIS study, one in every eight people with a degree from technical colleges and one in every twelve people with a university degree complete at least one traineeship after finishing studies⁵³. There are great variations according to study fields as to architecture, biology, psychology, economy and language/culture being on top of the list of post-graduate traineeships, whereas technical studies are hardly affected by these phases after studying. Most traineeships have a duration of three months, one third of the trainees works a period of six months and only a few are completing a one year internship or more. Motivations are closely linked to the entrance in the labour market: gaining experiences,

⁴⁹ Cp. Blanke a.o., 2002: 183; 267

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 121

⁵¹ Phese/ Kerst, 2007: 72et sqq.

⁵² Ibid.: 76

⁵³ Briedis/ Minks, 2007

specialising in a certain field and the hope to be employed on a regular basis after the training (which is true for only 2,3% of all trainees⁵⁴). A latent reason is mostly that traineeships are seen as emergency solutions to avoid periods of unemployment. Most trainees give a positive feedback on their traineeship but this does not mean that the necessity to do traineeship in order to avoid periods of unemployment is to be considered positive! While two thirds of the trainees state to be satisfied with the quality, there is a tendency to discontentment with payments.

Our main criticism concerning the HIS research is the considerable tendency to trivialise the problem: “For most of the trainees, the first traineeship is *closely* followed by a regular employment”⁵⁵. This quotation reflects the delusive fundamental note of the survey; covering the fact that *half a year* after finishing traineeships narrowly three in four people with a technical college degree and half the people with a university degree have a proper job. Out of the graduates from University, 13% start as teachers on probation, 10% continue studying and 15% start a Doctoral thesis. It is to be questioned if these groups have escaped their precarious situation as is suggested by the survey or just *modified* its form.

Internships or similar forms of entering the job market are originally designed to support the career entry. Trainees have the possibility to broaden their skills and to find out about their interests. Thus, internships are a sensible component of studies or to gain a certain required competence. At the same time, companies have the chance to get to know potential employees without obligations.

This form of training is abused when interns replace regular workers, but are not paid equivalent to their range of responsibilities. The current labour market forces many young people to accept those offers. If companies ask for graduated trainees with working experience; if the traineeship extends over half a year or more; if the focus is not on training or if people work on a high level of self-responsibility on a set of tasks that would be appropriate to fill a job, then we are speaking of pseudo-internships. This not only leads to wage dumping but can also turn out to be a career killer. Depending on the length and frequency, internships can be interpreted as a failure in job entrance. An unbeatable offence is when companies do not accredit traineeships as real work experience.

With the examination of atypical employment forms mentioned above, the spectrum of precarious working forms is not captured. There are forms that are hardly

⁵⁴ See Spiegel online, 2007

⁵⁵ Briedis/ Minks, 2007: 7

recognised as such but have similar criteria: substandard payment, insecurity and a lack of professional perspectives. The authors cannot go into detail here about all variations but at least they wish to show the range of those forms. Many of them are emergency solutions; the “escape” into graduation, for example.⁵⁶ Another form is becoming a self employed out of dire straits. We have spoken about self-employment before. The matter in hand here is about graduates who start up a business due to a lack of other job options.⁵⁷ Some people decide to take a second degree. Female graduates may decide to move up their plans to starting a family.

Of course, these forms of masked precarity are almost improvable since they highly depend on peoples’ subjective reflections of their situation. Even if this was exposed as a topic of a survey the question is if do people admit – to others and to themselves – that the path chosen was mainly a back door to escape labour market pressure.

Taking in consideration the variety of employment relationships related to intergenerational injustice in payment, the term “Generation Praktikum” might not be eligible to describe young academics’ precarious situation in Germany. Instead, it seems more appropriate to use the term “prekäre Generation” or “Generation prekär” in the style of the usage of *Génération Précaire* in France. However, in Germany this term could cause confusions with the “Prekariat”, a term that is used by media usually not to describe any unsafe form of employment, but rather when referring to a class of people socially excluded and at risk.⁵⁸ A memorable term that is not engaged otherwise is “Generation P” which is at the same time the name of the European lobby for exploited interns⁵⁹. Apart from the advantage of being internationally understandable, the term allows the association as to both “Generation Praktikum” and “Generation prekär” and therewith widens the angle of view in order to include other insecure or poorly paid working forms.

3.2 “Generazione mille euro”: young graduates entering the job market in Italy

“Generazione mille euro” refers to the maximum amount of the salary for young graduates in Italy, normally around a thousand EUR per month. It recalls the situation in Spain, where they use the term “los mileuristas” (people of a thousand EUR). It is not only a problem which refers to the salary; rather it involves the

⁵⁶ Bonstein, 2003

⁵⁷ Kohn/ Spengler, 2007: 7

⁵⁸ See for example Broder, 2007

⁵⁹ Generation P, 2007

precarious life conditions of workers. According to the ILO (International Labour Organization), 2005 saw precarious workers increasing up to a number which is over 50 % of the total amount. Yet Italian people are told that the situation is going fine, as numbers show that the unemployment rate dropped from 11,2 % in 1995 to 6,8 % in 2006⁶⁰. Where does the truth lie then?

In order to understand fully the implications of the concept of precarious generations for young graduates, looking at the most commonly types of contracts which is used by employers to hire their workers in Italy is necessary, see the table below⁶¹.

Table A: different types of job contracts in Italy, Agenzia del lavoro, 2008

	Volontarii	Tirocinio	Apprendistato	Co.Co.Pro.	Tempo determinato	Tempo indeterminato
Sick leave	Not paid	Not paid	Paid	Not paid	Paid	Paid
Holidays	Not paid	Not paid	Paid	Not paid	Paid	Paid
Parenthood	Not paid	Not paid	Paid	Not paid	Paid	Paid
Pension contribution	Not paid	Not paid	Paid	Not paid	Paid	Paid
Salary	Not paid	Most of the time not paid; sometimes you have a reimbursement of the expenses.	Around 800-900 Euros per month, depending on the job	Around a thousand euros per month, depending on the job	Around a thousand euros per month, sometimes 1100, depending on the job	Around a thousand euros per month sometimes 1100, depending on the job
Months of salary paid	Not paid	Not paid	13-14, depending on the job	12	13-14, depending on the job	13-14, depending on the job
Extraordinary hours of work	Not paid	Not paid	Paid	Not paid	Paid	Paid
Trattato di Fine Rapporto ⁶²	Not paid	Not paid	Not paid	Not paid	Paid	Paid

Volontariato means social engagement; normally it takes place in the social sector. It comprises work at all levels, only unpaid.

Tirocinio means internship, it is supposed to help young graduates and students to gain working skills, but in reality what normally happens is that people work like normal employees, with the same responsibilities, not having any benefit from it beside “making some experience”.

The phenomenon traineeship has dispread over the last years (i.e., when the Bologna process changed the education model) and some concrete forms are regulated by law. This applies to course-related internships during studies and to the career entrance. A representative survey has shown that 11% have undertaken a traineeship before

⁶⁰ ILO, 2007

⁶¹ Agenzia del lavoro, 2008

⁶² Allowance given when your contract expires

entering job life but there is no statistical data as to duration and sectors. The regulations by law do not provide standards for payments.⁶³

Apprendistato is a special contract; basically it is studied for young people (by young we mean until 29 years of age) who are entering the job market. A company hires the person for few years (depending on the type of *apprendistato*), training him/her with the final objective of keeping the person. Since the company is training somebody, the government helps it. Therefore, the company pays the salary to the worker, and the benefits are paid by the government. Following the design of the contract, after a certain period of mostly 3 years (the most common formula for *apprendistato* used, when the person can be as old as 32⁶⁴) the worker gets employed on a regular basis. In reality employers tend not to renovate the contract and recruit somebody else for the next 3 years. This short-sighted policy is already giving its results in the framework of the economic Italian situation.

Co.co.pro (lavoro a progetto) is a project-based contract⁶⁵. The person is hired for the time of the project as an independent expert. Being independent and not employed, the person has to pay for his/her contributions, not the employers. This contract was studied to help flexibility in the fossilised Italian situation, and indeed it could be an effective instrument, if social security measures were guaranteed. Yet these measures were not envisaged: the law was being studied by Mr. Biagi, a left-wing economist, who was killed in 2002 by the Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse). He was still working on it, but did not manage to finish. What the right-wing decided to do was enforcing this law anyways, basing their reasoning on an emotional level, making of Mr. Biagi a national hero. The law was then approved with no much discussion. Yet, as the Joseph Nobel prize for economy J. Stiglitz puts it,

“(…) I share the view according to which rigid structures which are an obstacle for the economic growth are to be reduced. Yet I believe that every reform implying an increase in the precarious conditions of workers has to go hand in hand with an increase of the means of social protection. Without them flexibility turns into a precarious way of working. Of course such means are costly. Legislation cannot assume that working flexibility comes with lower wages;

⁶³ Generation Praktikum, 2008

⁶⁴ Here it depends on the Italian region: in Lazio, until 35; in Basilicata, Molise, Puglia, and Sicily until 45 (Padrone, 2007: 212)

⁶⁵ *Legge Treu, 1997 and Legge Biagi, 2003.*

paradoxically, the higher the possibility of being fired, the lower the salaries, when it should be the opposite. (...)

The salaries paid to flexible workers should be higher and not lower, because their possibility to get fired is higher. In Italy, a precarious worker is nine times more likely to get fired than a regular worker and has a probability of finding another job afterwards which is five times less. Up to 40 % of precarious workers have graduated from university. But if you put them to sell French fries or in call centres, why do you spend so much money to educate them?"⁶⁶

This type of contract has, indeed, positive aspects; only the way it is implemented in Italy is not the appropriate one to guarantee young people a proper job. For example, by this contract you should not have a fixed working time but work on demand, basically; this way you could have more than one project contract with different partners, thus gaining enough to live with. Yet most of the times employers make their future workers sign a document apart from the contract, stating that the person will work on a full time bases. They calculate the days per month, and if the employee is sick or decides to take a day off, they do not pay for these days. Even worst, when it comes to hiring women: on the document apart they "voluntarily" agree not to have children until the contract expires.⁶⁷ Very unfortunately, it is impossible to have information for a clear picture of the dimension of this problem, because nobody wishes to speak about it. On the employers' side, it is not convenient; on the employees' side, they are afraid they will lose their job. A bad one, but still better than nothing.

Initially, as stated, this type of contract was introduced to facilitate the entrance in the labour market, and up to certain extend, it has indeed met this objective. Yet according to Istat, in 2004 only 10 % of precarious workers were granted access to another type of contract (and only 5 in every 100 had a *contratto indeterminato*). It means that now it is easier to enter the job market, but it is almost impossible to stabilize in it. Without mentioning the poor contribution paid to pensions. Most likely, these workers (which now depends on their families) will later have to depend on their children (hopefully their children will go back to proper working conditions?).

A contract called *a tempo determinato* means that the worker is hired for a definite amount of time, with all the benefits included; generally this is the contract used by

⁶⁶ Stiglitz, 2007: 4-5

⁶⁷ A female precarious worker is ten times less likely to have children (Grillo, 2007: 307)

temporal job agencies or companies wishing to hire somebody, but also wishing to try him/her out before; or to replace somebody who was sick or left for the parenthood period. Sometimes workers are confirmed for a longer period of time, or an indefinite one: this is the case for people working under a *contratto a tempo indeterminato*. The last one was the normal (typical) contract under which grandparents and parents were hired, and it allowed people to make plans for their life.

This is the framework within which employees are mostly hired in Italy. A dangerous trend in this country needs to be highlighted, which is the tendency not to hire under the last two contracts, but rather to have more graduated workers doing internships or working Co.co.pro. than from the other categories. Once again, it is very hard to find data and figures about the real situation: statistics only show if people were hired or not, they tend not to draw any difference according to the type of contract. Yet one thing is crystal clear: if people work 6 months, then there is a pause when they do not work for 2 months, then they work again for other 4 months...what kind of life is waiting for them? Would they be able to make some plans about it? Earnings are not enough to save some money and afford being unemployed for a few months. Nobody lets them rent his/her house, because it is not sure whether they will be able to pay the rent every month or not (let alone buying a house, no bank will ever provide them with a loan, or if they do, it is with a very high interest rate because of the risks it involves). If wishing to get married and having a child, they do not know if they will be able to provide for the baby. What kind of society will these changes bring forth? What kind of world will this generation leave to the (not so many) children of the future one?⁶⁸

Moreover, another recent worry that has been coming out is about black work:

“(...) In Italy more than 3.2 million workers do not even know the meaning of the word “contract”. Black jobs are considered better than precarious ones. That is why they are spreading again: they pay you more with the same guarantees.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Most of these questions can be found in numerous interventions of young Italians in the book “Schiavi Moderni” (modern slaves), published by the comedian Beppe Grillo. Precarious workers decided to write him to be heard about the situation: it is a very depressing and worrying book, but it gives an idea of how a part of Italians are feeling. The fact that citizens are heard only through the web, and by a comedian, and cannot find a space in the normal and current newspaper or by politicians, is a clear indicator of how far the situation has been going to. The worries expressed are pretty much the same all over the book, only divided by categories (women, academics, call-centres,...), giving altogether an appalling picture of the phenomenon.

⁶⁹ Grillo, 2007: 212

This is as to the economic situation. It is not to be underestimated, however, the emotional implications it leads to: a growing feeling of frustration and uselessness among young graduates who feel they studied in vain. In today's society, people who do not earn enough tend to be considered useless. Perhaps it is time to start giving value again, even to those activities which do not bring substantial monetary gains. Emotionally speaking, something which is really getting on the nerves of young Italians is the political class as well as the media sector in general. The general feeling is that there is nothing worse than living in poor conditions in a country where everybody is telling you that everything is going marvellously fine. A journalist, Ms. Padrone, was even able to write a book about how well the current generation is doing.⁷⁰ As a matter of fact, to her

“among young people under 24 years of age they say that one out of three is precarious. A lot or not too much? It is hard to answer.”⁷¹

According to German statistics, Italy has the fourth-highest youth unemployment rate in Europe, after Poland, Slovakia and Greece (Germany ranks 17th).⁷² Precarious employment forms among youngsters in Italy have strongly increased. But there is no specific debate around unpaid traineeships in the country itself.⁷³ If a journalist states candidly that a third of Italian youngsters are precarious and it is hard to say whether it is a lot or not, then there is something deeply wrong about society. A systematic denial of the truth on the situation, not recognizing that there is a problem and refusing to give it name and dimension does not help in finding a solution to it. There is not even a clear and recognized number of precarious workers: the only thing that is known is that it affects between 2 and 4 millions of people in Italy.⁷⁴ Now, despite all of this which has been described, when analyzing the employment situation in Italy according to national statistics, one might get quite confused. As a matter of fact, in the past years unemployment has been officially decreasing (11 % for women, 6 % for men⁷⁵).

The interesting thing to notice is that for the first time since World War II there are more workers than work. There is work, but not too much. And the worst performance

⁷⁰ Padrone, 2007

⁷¹ Padrone, 2007: 201

⁷² Statistisches Bundesamt, 2006: 51

⁷³ BMAS, 2008

⁷⁴ Padrone, 2007: 11

⁷⁵ Hausmann/ Thyson/ Zahidi, 2007

comes right after the enforcement of the new project contracts (*Co.Co.Pro*): in 2005, 12,5 % were hired with this contract, while in 2000, only five years earlier, percentage was 9 %.

“During the second trimester of 2004 Istat stated that people working under a project contract were approximately 400.000 (...). If we translate it into words, this number is to be read as follows: “In the day when we carried out the interviews there were 400.000 Italians working under a project contract”. What happens if a call centre decides to fire 10.000 of them and change them with other 10.000 ones? That a month afterwards Istat is still counting 400.000 (...) but we are speaking of 410.000 people. (...) to know about real numbers we need to ask Inps⁷⁶, which has just published online its report on employees. Well, considering only the people for which this collaboration is the only way of working and they only have one contract – the weakest category – in 2004 they were 840.000. How much work do we have? A hundred. How many people are trying to take advantage of it? Two hundreds.”⁷⁷

This sample should teach us to use statistical data carefully. As to unemployed people, the number seems to be decreasing.⁷⁸ How do we read this data? According to Istat, unemployed people are those looking for a job. When people stop searching they are just not considered unemployed anymore. In other words, the more people get discouraged and stop looking for a job, the less official unemployment we have. One form of escaping local precarity is called brain drain, illustrated by a young man from Rome:

“(…) Where is the assistance for those who wish to stay in Italy! Having a future in our country, hoping to find a project for our lives in our cities. And then I have to hear that young Italians enjoy staying at home with their parents! (...) Let us go back, I like pasta and pizza, I don't like paella. But how can I think of working 8 hours per day, attending university and still not having a euro to live on my own, not even being able to rent a room? Perhaps nothing will ever change, but if it is useful I could collect the impressions of the first community of young immigrants in Barcelona, Italians. We are more than 30.000!”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Italian Institute for Social Security

⁷⁷ Gallegati/ Leombruni, 2007: 301-302

⁷⁸ Istat, 2008

⁷⁹ Grillo, 2007: 90

As a matter of fact, the percentage of Italian graduates working abroad is 2.3 %, while a significantly lower number of European graduates are working in Italy (only 0.3 %).⁸⁰ Therefore, as to Italy we cannot speak of European brain exchange.

⁸⁰ See Morano-Foadi/ Foadi, 2008:2

4 Study: Predictions towards the own job situation after graduation

4.1 Objectives

The objective of this research was not only investigating about the situation of young graduates. Following, the authors wish to enter the experimental part. As was betoken in the Introduction (see 1.), we aimed to get a picture of youngsters' perceptions: To what extend are they aware of the problem and what do they feel according to their own future career? From analysing both the normative and perception level, a clearer picture of the precarious generation will be drawn.

4.2 Hypotheses

We had to deal with the research also from an intercultural point of view. This affects not only the sequence of answers but also answer models (see e.g. Italian answers in question 2) and of course the authors' expectations towards the results. At the beginning of the analysis, the authors' needed to differentiate between the two countries. Four hypotheses were pointed out as to the German sample:

- (1) Most students are familiar with the term "Generation Praktikum".
- (2) Significantly more students will *expect* precarious situations than they might be *facing* in reality, according to current research.
- (3) Answers will show great variations according to study fields of the interviewees.

In Italy, there is a lack of scientific material that would allow formulating concrete expectations as to the results. Moreover, the transitions to regular employment are more smoothly. Therefore we can only apply to hypothesis (1). Apart from that, the authors considered that in the Italian case an exploratory approach without formulating assumptions about answers is most appropriate.

4.3 Method

In order to obtain a general opinion trend of students towards the "precarious generation" – we conducted a quantitative study in form of a *Quick Survey*. Another advantage of this method is the manageable effort that surely raised the readiness of

students to take part. Students were asked to answer only two dichotomous questions (questions with two response options: yes and no), which are:

- (1) Are you familiar with the term “precarious generation⁸¹”?
- (2) Do you think it will affect you after finishing studies?

Apart from that, we collected statistical information (sex, field of study and study year).

4.4 Samples

Altogether, the sample comprised 46 students; 25 from Germany and 21 from Italy (50% female, 50% male). The participants were contacted through email⁸² and then asked to forward the questionnaire to acquaintances, for data collection purposes.⁸³ The study focussed on students who were born between 1977 and 1987, thus involving the generation affected the most by new developments of the labour market. Italian interviewees came from nine fields of studies; Germans from 14 fields. Students came from both East and West Germany, without regional restrictions. The Italian sample was drawn from the Northern part of Italy.

In Germany, the frequency of post-graduate internships highly depends on the field of studies. For example, in 2006, 26% graduates from Culture and Language studies started their working life with an internship. In contrast, this number for Electrical Engineers is only 2%.⁸⁴ Therefore, we wanted to ensure that all fields are represented in the survey similarly to current numbers of students per field in order to have an authentic picture (See Appendix 2). In Italy, the situation is different. The dissemination of traineeships among study fields is more evenly. Therefore, it was not significant to reflect the total sample.

German respondents did not reflect the student population. Existing variances in the structure characteristic *field of study* were balanced out by a quota sample.⁸⁵ Still, we

⁸¹ In the German questionnaires, the term “Generation Praktikum” - the most widely published term - was used. In Italy, we decided to use “Generazione precaria” since the term is already commonly used

⁸² See Emailquestionnaire Appendix 1

⁸³ A snowball sample is a method where in the first step few randomly selected people are questioned and then on their part forward the questionnaires to people they know. Using the network of students that way helped us in approaching students from all academic fields (see Ilmes, 2007)

⁸⁴ HIS, 2007: 3

⁸⁵ In this method, elements of the main unit are divided into groups (in our case: students are classified according to their study fields). After identifying the proportion of the main unit, random samples are separately drawn from each group equivalent to the relations in the main unit. For example, the

had to accept minor variations due to the relatively low number of interviewees. For the Italian part, results collected were quite balanced as to the fields of studies.

4.5 Evaluation of Results

4.5.1 The Case of Italy

As to Italy, 21 people answered, 11 were male and 10 were female students.

The term “precarious generation” (see Figure A) was familiar to 95% of the students. Only one person stated not to know it, but added that she might guess what it is referring to. As to the Italian case study, it is significant to notice that despite the clear directions set out in the email from the author, in some cases people felt they needed to add some comments about the questions, thus enriching the final results.

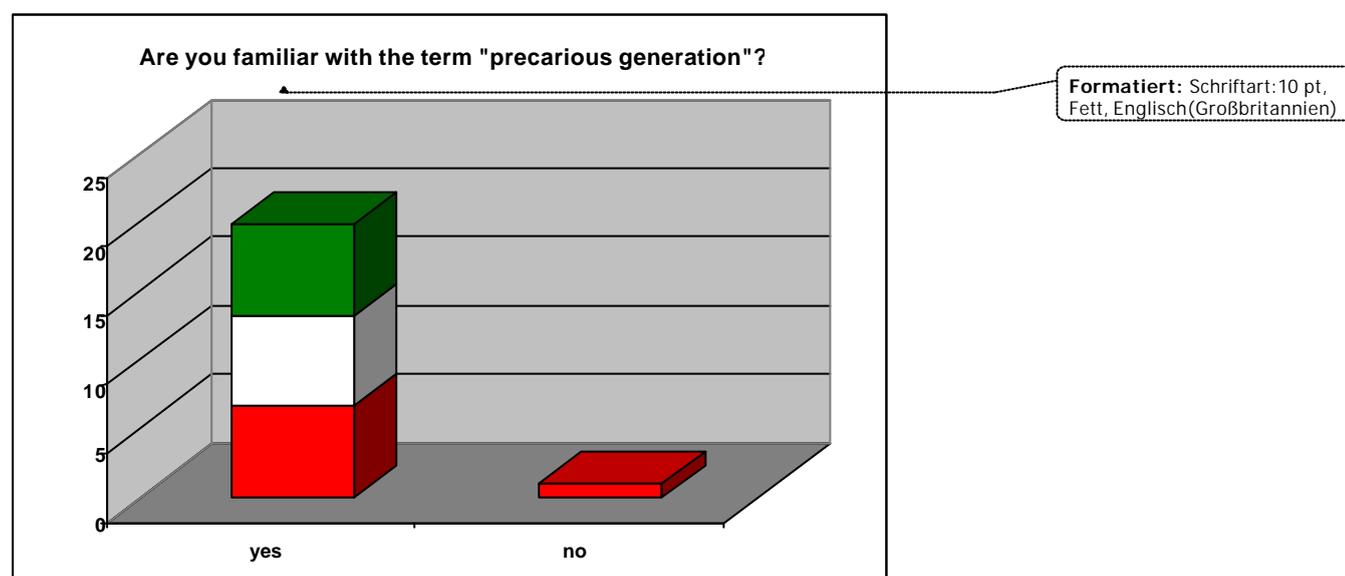


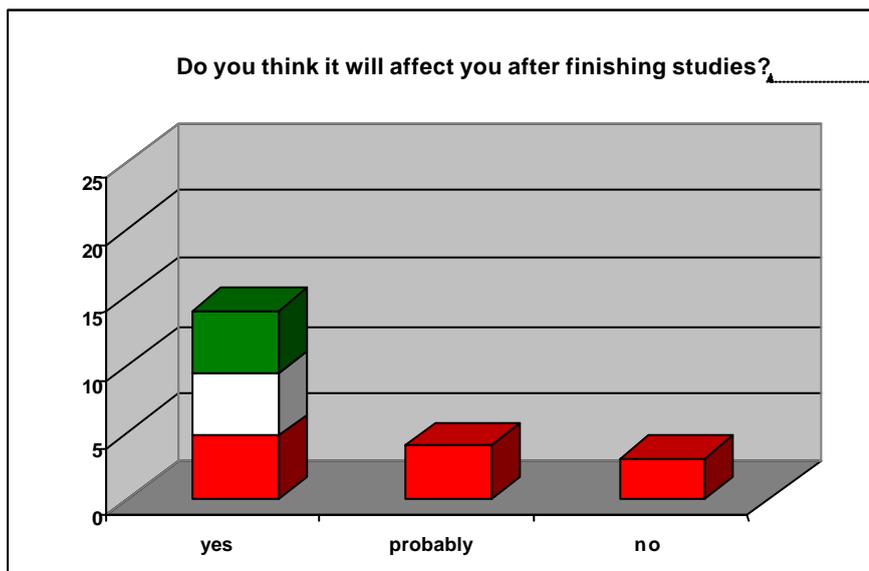
Figure A: Are you familiar with the term “precarious generation?” (Italian Sample)

To the second question (see Figure B), “Do you think it will affect you after finishing studies?”, even though the instructions asked clearly for a yes/no answer, in four cases out of 21 (almost 20 % of the total) students decided to answer: probably. This could be taken as an indicator of how uncertainty is already striking this generation. 66% had the expectation of being affected by precarious situations (14 out of 21). The fact that two third of the students asked have this perception of their entrance into the labour market leads to the assumption that they do not have a clear idea

proportion of students studying Natural Sciences in Germany is 18% (for Germany, see diagram 1). Having a total sample of 30, we drew five random samples from all students of natural sciences that took part in our survey (a total of 15). For details about the methods, see ILMES, 2008

about what their future job should or could be. Hence, insecurity already starts in university.

Interestingly, one of the persons who answered with “yes”, added that it should not be seen as a negative aspect. This is an indicator how deciding attitudes are whether a situation is precarious or not. For example, completing internships can be seen as a possibility to gain different experiences. Flexibility has a great value on today’s labour market. Depending on the way of thinking, we could therefore speak either of the flexible generation or precarious generation. The authors believe there is a great difference to be drawn here. A flexible generation is a generation able to adapt to the challenges of the new globalized world and of the new labour market. Yet, being flexible should not imply that you give up trying to earn a living by your work. A precarious generation is a flexible one, but with the negative added “value” of the impossibility to think about a future and to establish a livelihood. This is expressed in the medial invention of the term “flexicurity”, which means how to be flexible without being precarious. Interestingly, Italian politicians hardly use the term “precarious” but rather flexibility.



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Figure B: Do you think it will affect you after finishing your studies?” (Italian Sample)

For the Italian sample, different scientific backgrounds (as shown in Figure C) do not necessarily lead to different answers. Rather the opposite is true: it was confirmed the assumption that no matter what someone is studying, the precarious generation is something which is affecting all young graduating students alike. Perhaps a

difference could be found as to students coming from medicine and engineering, yet nobody from these faculties answered the questionnaire.

The results stemming from this little investigation should also be analysed under a sociological, economic and geographical point of view. Most graduating students who were interviewed, studied in the Northern part of Italy, in Trento (95%). The Trentino-Alto Adige region is known to be peculiar one. Currently, it is one of the richest regions in the whole country. If even people living and studying here feel uncertain about their future, what shall the same generation but living in another part of the country, for example Campania, think? Further studies could reveal interesting answers. Economic factors such as unemployment and black work vary greatly between the two regions: black work, for example, is very rare in Trentino-Alto Adige, while in Campania is a quite common and general way of living.

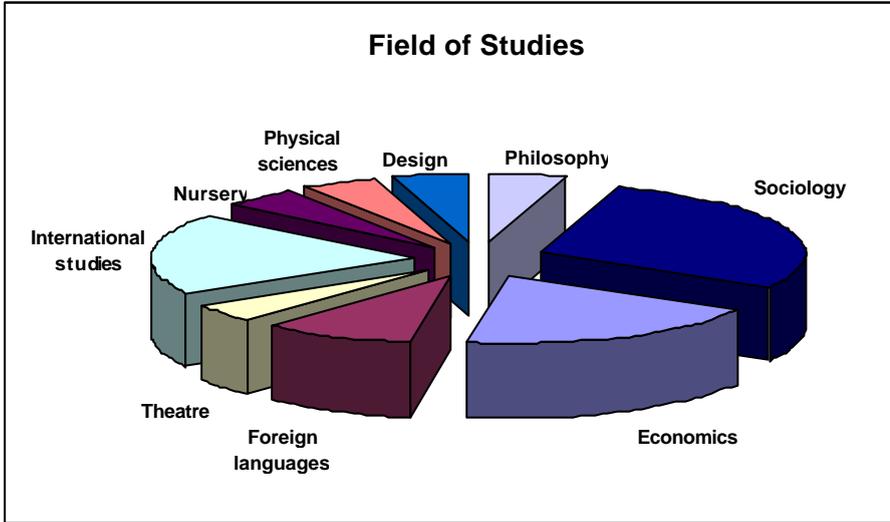


Figure C: Field of Studies (Italian Sample)Figure

4.5.2 The Case of Germany

The German part comprised 25 samples, 13 female and 12 male. The answers to the first question disclosed a picture similar to the Italian responses: the vast majority (92%) knew the term “Generation Praktikum” (see Figure D). Only two students did not know what was spoken about. This confirms our first hypothesis. The high profile of the term could be rooted in two facts: On the one hand, students will have recognised the media hype around the topic over the last three years – even more because this is a problem which is strongly affecting them.

Apart from that, students might have made first hand experiences, discovering the phenomenon with former fellow students. Once students start to anticipate their own entry into working life, they will naturally come across the topic.

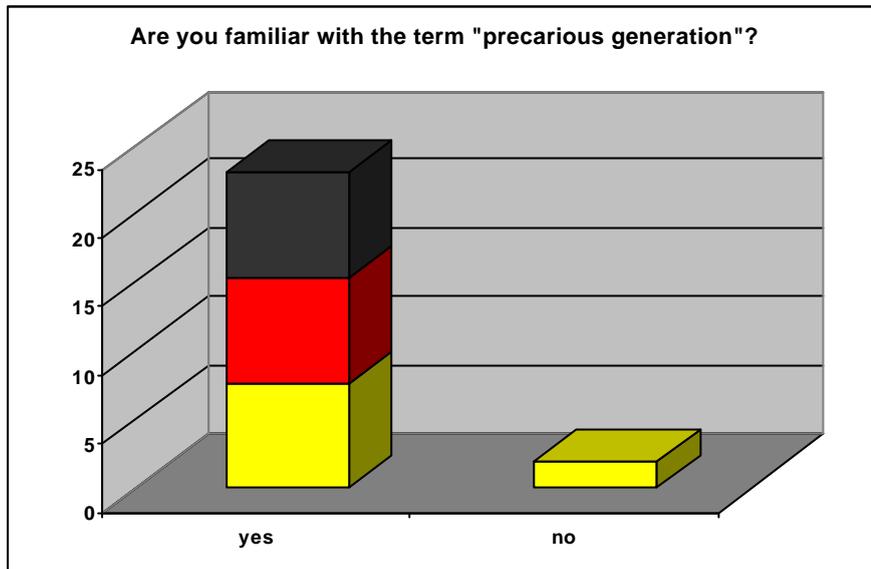
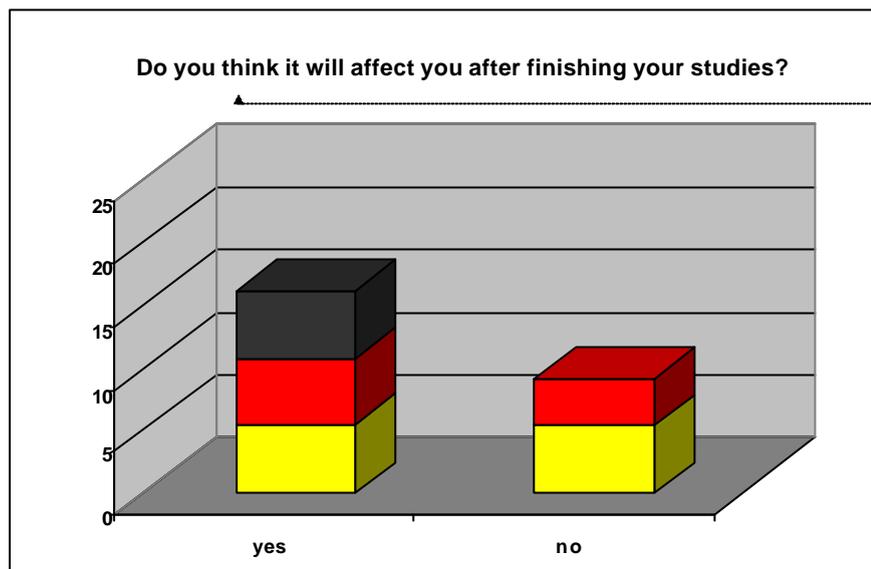


Figure D: Are you familiar with the term “precarious generation?” (German Sample)

To the second question: “Do you think it will affect you after finishing your studies”, 16 German students out of 25 (64%) answered with “yes”, and 9 (36%) with “no” (see Figure E). If we compare this result with the average of traineeships after studying in Germany (12 – 15%), we find an imbalance here. The authors’ expectation stated in the hypothesis (2) was fulfilled to a surprising extent. Still, there is no justification of speaking about “exaggerated fears” of the students (see Introduction). They sense the instability of the labour market and *perceive* their own likelihood to complete a traineeship- it is not that they *know* they will enter job life like this. But they cannot be sure to belong to the lucky 85% who start into working life without situations of insecurity – and they are aware of it. As will be shown later, we are not speaking about unthought-of concerns but of a differentiated view depending on the own academic background.

A connection between the answer and the field of study could be identified as assumed in the third hypothesis which will be examined in more detail in the analysis of study fields in the next paragraph. At this place, the authors wish to enter the discussion about backgrounds of student’s perceptions.



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Figure E: Do you think it will affect you after finishing your studies?" (German Sample)

One third of the interviewees are not expecting a precarious job entrance period after studying. We can assume they are expecting a full time permanent employment after finishing their studies – or they have different plans that are connected to neither practical training nor entering the job life (for example, starting a second degree or a family).

Two thirds of the respondents connect their job future with a traineeship period. Since this study did not have a qualitative design, evidence to students' feelings or concerns as to these perceptions cannot be provided. Yet it can be pointed out that motivations to undertake a traineeship are closely connected with the perceptions discussed in the media and the research: Graduates' motivations for a traineeship are mainly to gain work experience and to find access to the labour market⁸⁶. It is just a small notional step to understand that graduates would not have these motivations if the employment situation did not require it. It seems strange that this connection was not directly made in the current surveys but remained hidden behind the motivations stated before. An in-depth study should be able to reveal motivations not verbally expressed. Such studies ask for consideration of psychological aspects. The question is whether graduates *wish* to continue training in such a form after achieving their university degree (the highest qualification available in educational institutions) or if people are *forced* to do it in order to avoid unemployment.

⁸⁶ Briedis/ Minks, 2007: 5

The investigation about the study fields was made mainly to explore whether there are interdependencies with student’s perceptions according to their job future. As was displayed in 3.1, in Germany post-graduate internships strongly vary depending on academic fields. Finding out how *individuals* consider future job chances shows evidence on how they see the *general* position of their field in the labour market.

It is interesting to notice that the only engineer in the survey stated the possibility of experiencing precarious phases after studying. Engineers are in great demand on the German and European employment market and graduates have excellent job chances. Out of the group “Natural Sciences” three people answered question (2) with yes. Their professional background was Geography, Biology and Nutrition, all fields were the percentage of traineeships is above-average.⁸⁷ Out of the 10 people studying law, economy and social sciences there is a great internal variety. Out of four students in the educational field, three answered with “yes”; only one denied the possibility to complete a training after studies (the percentage of postgraduate internships is 14%⁸⁸). People studying language and culture all expect a precarious situation after graduation. However, according to current research, only one in four students of these fields (with 26% the most affected field⁸⁹) will actually start a traineeship after studying.⁹⁰

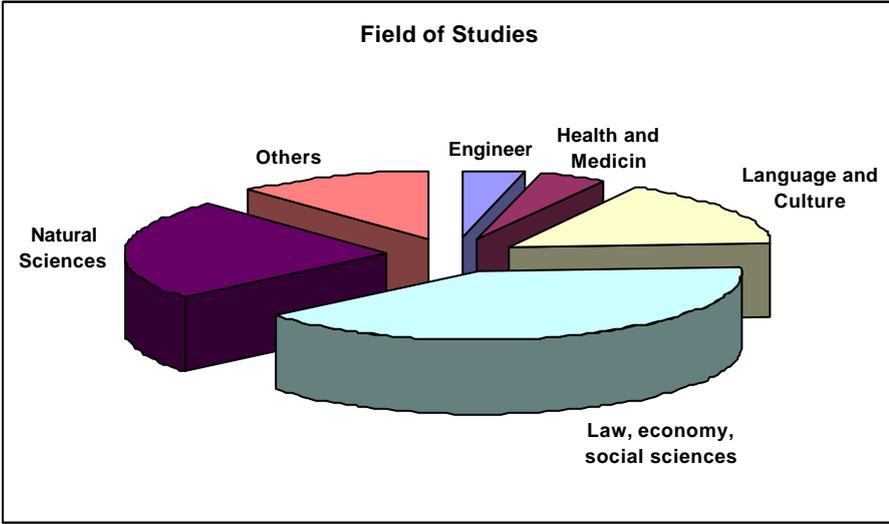


Figure F: Fields of Studies (German Sample)

⁸⁷ Briedis/
⁸⁸ Ibid.
⁸⁹ Ibid.
⁹⁰ HIS, 2007: 3

4.5.3 International Comparison

Both in Germany and Italy the answers to the questions were similar and showed that firstly there is a high awareness of the phenomenon “precarious generation” and secondly that a significant number of all interviewees (two third) estimate their future to be connected with precarious phases.

With the background of both countries revealed in 3. this similarity is surprising. It gives evidence that different economic and labour market specificities may lead to similar phenomena.

The perceptions of students in both countries are a mirror of the factual situation of graduates in astonishing preciseness. In Germany we find confirmed that insecure situations in the transition to labour market differ strongly depending on the study field whereas the “precarious generation” is present in the perception of Italian students of all faculties to a similar extend. Students demonstrate a sense of labour market trends according to their fields.

Summarising, it can be said that the student generation surveyed by the authors appraises itself clearly as the “precarious generation” of tomorrow.

4.6 Study limitations

We are aware of the fact that this small survey conducted to the purpose of this work has its limitations as to its significance. A sample of 46 people cannot be representative for 2 Million students in Germany⁹¹ and over 1,8 Million students in Italy⁹². Taking into account our limited resources, our aim was to give a first impulse to examine “behind the veils”; to consider the concerns of students who have to tackle the career entry in the very near future. These people reflect the labour market situation in a unique way since the objective observations are combined with a focussed view due to personal concerns. The field leaves enormous potential to undertake further research (see Résumé and Outlook). Due to the design of the *quick survey*, it was not possible to find out about subjective estimations or attitudes towards the problem but this is essential for a deeper interpretation of answers. A key focus of such a complementary qualitative approach should be the emotions connected with the prospect of a precarious period after studying.

⁹¹ In 2007, see Statistisches Bundesamt (2), 2007

⁹² Istat, 2008

5 Resume and outlook

The aim of this work was to draw a comprehensive picture of precarious phases in the life of young graduates, examining their occurrence, their sociological dimensions and trying to consider social as well as emotional implications. One of our main methodological approaches was to find out about student's perceptions towards their own future. Having approached the topic theoretically and on an empirical basis, we find that insecurity and precarity is present in our society, both in Germany and Italy. There is no use in either dramatising or trivialising. In order to tackle precarity it is required to explore its appearance from different perspectives, as we just started to do in this study.

The questions raised in the small survey designed for this work need to be asked on a larger scale and should consider different aspects. For example, in continuative research it would be necessary to consider East-West-differences for Germany as well as to stress on gender differences. An extension should also be done regarding types of precarious employment forms. Also, it would be useful to have a study trying to show how precarity influences – probably negatively – economy (an unhappy generation is likely to be a less productive one).

As to the challenge of improving the uncertain job situations of young graduates, it is essential to know how students and recent graduates cope with this situation. It was pointed out repeatedly that precarious situations of young graduates need to be investigated by qualitative research as well. Being permanently employed still is a desired status. Being unsuccessful in entering working life is often judged as personal failure. Success is demanded to be demonstrated. The transparency constructed by online platforms (e.g. Xing, Facebook, Studi-VZ) imposes even more pressure on individuals. People concerned by precarity find it hard to admit – even to themselves - not to have met social standards. Therefore, we should not rely on quantitative research only or deal uncritically with answers given there. They might not always mirror reality, but could as well contain socially desired answers. Dealing with this topic, we cannot remain on the surface, but have to analyse in more depths. For future research, we suggest to focus on how young graduates cope with precarious job situations (qualitative research on mental health, coping strategies and problems of young academics).

Fears regarding insecurity should be taken seriously and must not be dismissed as irrelevant. For young people, precarious phases not only relate to mere employment. Moreover, it affects all fields of life, such as settling down, building a stable social network, starting a family.

Another proposal of the authors is reformulating the German term “Generation Praktikum”. It is too limited and does not comprise the variety of insecure employment relationships and alternatives to the classical full time permanent model. The term “Generation P” should be disseminated by social scientists in order to replace the mistakable concept of the “Generation Praktikum”. The same can be applied to the Italian “generazione mille euro”, which reflects only one part of young peoples’ precarious situation. Therefore, instead of using this terminology and the term “generazione precaria” without making any difference, only the latter term shall be used. In order to support an international understanding of the problem, it would be sensible to introduce the term “Generation P” as well.

Precarious employment highly depends on the legal framework. With the following proposals, the authors support the petition of the network “Generation P”:⁹³

- Establishing a statutory framework for traineeships. Internships should have a clear focus on learning and gaining work experience.
- Establishing European standards for traineeships (according duration, holidays, insurances, country-specific social benefits and, of course, salary)

Fighting intergenerational injustice in general is a responsibility of policy makers, One important step is to decrease public debts. As to Germany, the government is speaking about the “historic opportunity” to “break even” in 2011. To what extend this is a realisable way – only future will tell. As to Italy, the situation is even more dramatic, with a public debt growing constantly (by 1.34 % in the period between 2006 and 2007, such fact being presented by the Italian media as a “good result”⁹⁴), and there is no evidence that the new government will deal constructively with this topic.

Of course, providing equal chances for all employees independently from age is the key to intergenerational solidarity. Yet, the authors’ last recommendation concerning

⁹³ Generation P, 2007

⁹⁴ Corriere della Sera, 2007

intergenerational justice, and probably the most crucial one, goes to young and old at the same time. It makes no sense to play one generation's needs off against the need of the other one. It is the responsibility of both to build a society that fits all generations, to work together "towards a society for all ages".⁹⁵

⁹⁵ This is the motto of the United Nations Programme adopted at the World Summit for Social development (United Nations, 1995).

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7 Appendix

7.1 Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Survey:

Predictions towards the own job situation after finishing studies

Please tick or fill in as appropriate

Statistical information

Sex: Study Course:

male

female

Year of Studies:

1. Are you familiar with the term “precarious generation⁹⁶”?

Yes

No

2. Do you think it will affect you after finishing studies?

Yes

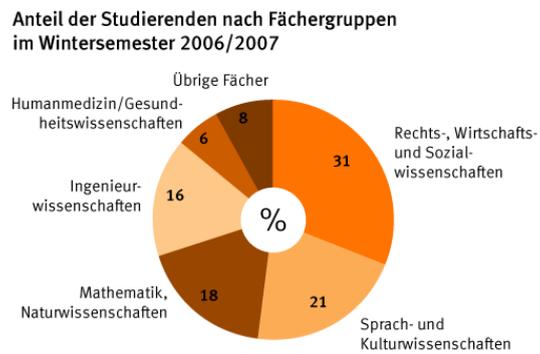
No

Thank you very much for your Participation!

This short questionnaire was designed in the course of a survey about precarious job situations of young academics. Your answers will be of great value for the survey and will, of course, be treated confidentially.

⁹⁶ In the German questionnaires, the term “Generation Praktikum” - the most widely published term - was used. In Italy, we decided to use “Generazione precaria” since the term is already commonly used

7.2 Appendix 2: Proportions of students according to study fields (Germany, study year 2006/2007)



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