IMAGES OF ALCOHOL IN THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

Comparing different geographies: examples from Italy and Finland

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Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by due permission of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University Main Building Auditorium XII (Unioninkatu 34, 3rd floor) on Friday, 18 September 2015 at 12 o’clock noon
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ABSTRACT

The aim in this study is to narrow the gap in knowledge about how young people understand their direct (personal) and indirect (others’) drinking experiences by investigating images of alcohol (Sulkunen, 2007) among Italian and Finnish adolescents and young people on the threshold of adulthood.

Italy and Finland are considered examples of “geographies” (Sulkunen, 2013) characterised by different social values and socialisation practices, but also facing common global challenges (Beck, 2005). The concept of individualistic and collectivistic cultures is used as a framework to describe the variations observed in young people’s images of the risks related to alcohol consumption and responsible drinking. Individualistic cultures represent a socio-cultural system in which individuals are expected to develop an independent personality, and autonomy and self-maximisation are the prominent values, whereas collectivistic cultures encourage adherence to norms, values, roles and familial authority (Dwairy 2002). Within this framework, Finnish and Italian cultures are perceived as exemplifying individualism and family-oriented collectivism, respectively.

The six published research articles, which together with this summary comprise the whole work, were co-authored by various Italian and Finnish researchers and are based on three main sets of data collected in focus-group (FG) interviews: 1) 32 FGs involving 191 participants from four different cohorts organised in Helsinki (FI) and Turin (IT); 2) 40 mixed-gender FGs involving 220 pupils aged 15-16 organised in Turin and Cosenza (IT) and Helsinki, and 10 FGs involving 30 parents and 32 teachers organised in Italy; 3) 32 FGs including 105 male and female pupils aged 13-14 and 15-16 and living in urban (Milan and Helsinki) and rural areas (Ciriè and Orivesi).

The Reception Analytical Group Interview (RAGI) technique was used for collecting most of the data (sets 2 and 3), with visual images as stimuli, the aim being to enhance comparability in qualitative research (Sulkunen and Egerer 2009). Data set 1) was collected by means of verbal questioning and photographic stimuli.

The results indicate that collectivistic, and particularly family-oriented cultures have thus far contributed to shaping less risky drinking patterns among young people. There are many reasons for this, including the more coherent and active role of parents in the socialisation process, the presence of shared social norms, and a greater awareness of the risks of drinking that are beyond the individual’s control. Conversely, a parenting model that places more emphasis on independence and self-efficacy, which is typical of the more individualistic geographies, conveys trust in an individual’s own competence to handle drinking, which in turn leads to a lack of attention to risks that are beyond the individual’s control, in other words risks that are contextual, social and inherent in the substance. However, the global trend towards individualisation and the complex nature of the transition to adulthood could soon undermine the more protective “collectivist” images of alcohol.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first thanks must be to you, Franca. You, passionate researcher, wise leader and generous mentor, have accompanied me this far, and your example of unsparing work has encouraged me to try to be as unsparing with myself. I am proud to be on your team!

Pekka, you have been the best supervisor that a PhD student could possibly desire. I thank you for the trust you have shown in me, for your excellent advice and for the sincere interest with which you welcomed and encouraged my ideas.

A special thanks to the pre-examiners Mirja Määttä and Jeanette Østergaard, for their valuable comments and suggestions, and to Joan Nordlund, for his thorough language check.

Thanks also to all the many other Finnish colleagues and friends who, from the beginning, have received me in your teams and homes with an affection and a hospitality that was anything but ‘individualistic’!

Pia, my first host, thanks particularly for having raised a question once in Majvik that I have kept in mind ever since, and which I have tried to answer with this work: "What is the point of continuing to do these comparative studies between countries that are so very different?"

Jukka and Toffy, I will never forget the wonderful dinner together in Turin, when you first suggested the idea of applying for a doctorate at the University of Helsinki. This work originated in that moment, at the end of my first instructive and fruitful comparative study.

Thanks Matilda for your brilliant ideas, which inspired some of the concepts underlying my thesis, and thank you for the valuable advice that you have given me as both colleague and friend. You are an example to me.

Thanks Anu, for the numberless stimulating discussions about the data, for the shared thoughts on all aspects of comparative research, sometimes exciting and sometimes daunting, and for all the countless tips and assistance that, along with those from Maija, have shortened the distance that separates me from Helsinki. You have been my guardian angels.

Thanks to you, Antonella, Enrico, Manuela and everyone at Eclectica, for putting up with me with the affection of a second family at times when the workload threatened to overwhelm me.

The last and most important thanks goes to you, Cesare, who have always supported my work and study with full trust. If I was able to face this challenge, and have come this far, it is because I knew I could count on you, irreplaceable companion and father.

Torino, 10th of July 2015

Sara Rolando
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• STUDY I
  Education, Prevention, and Policy, 19(3):201-212

• STUDY II
  Hellman M., Rolando S. (2013). Collectivist and individualist values traits in 
  Finnish and Italian adolescents’ alcohol norms. Drugs and Alcohol Today, 
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• STUDY III
  Rolando S., Katainen A. (2014). Images of alcoholism among adolescents in 
  individualistic and collectivistic geographies. Nordic Studies on Alcohol and 
  Drugs, 31(2):189-205

• STUDY IV
  Rolando S., Törrönen J., Beccaria F. (2014). Boundaries between adult and 
  youth drinking as expressed by young people in Italy and Finland. YOUNG, 
  22(3):227-252

• STUDY V
  Rolando S., Beccaria F., Petrilli E., Prina F. (2014). Adults’ views of young 
  people’s drinking in Italy: an explorative qualitative research. Drugs: 

• STUDY VI
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1All the articles have been through a peer-review process and the candidate is the first author of four of 
them. The articles have been reprinted with the kind permission of the journals.
1. Introduction

1.1 Background and aims

Youth drinking is currently a major area for public concern across Western countries (WHO, 2007). Interest among those responsible for health and social policy is growing even in countries such as Italy where the levels of risk are far below the European average, both among adults (WHO, 2010) and young people (Hibell et al., 2012). Despite the high level of interest, however, there are still gaps in knowledge. Many researchers do not take people’s thoughts and experiences into account, particularly if the research is targeted on young people, who are often seen as vulnerable actors and as passive to all kinds of external influences (Hellman, 2011). Given the strong focus on health and social problems, there is a tendency to overlook both the influence of socio-cultural factors on the meaning of consumption and the significant role of alcohol in youth lifestyles (Measham and Østergaard, 2009; Griffin et al., 2009).

Comparative research may well uncover the various socio-cultural aspects affecting consumption patterns. Nevertheless, most comparative studies on the use and misuse of alcoholic beverages among young people focus solely on quantitative data that yields information on average consumption in the previous year/month, the different types of drink, the amount of drunkenness and the negative consequences, for example (e.g., Hibell et al., 2012; Currie et al., 2012; Kunstche et al., 2004). There have been only a few attempts to analyse the symbolic aspects and the meaning of drinking among young people in different geographical areas. This lack of knowledge also reflects the scarcity of comparative qualitative research, not only because of the predominance of quantitative studies but also because of the increased methodological complexity of qualitative research (Tigesterdt and Törrönen, 2007; Sulkunen and Egerer, 2009). For this reason, even if drinking patterns among young people in Europe have sometimes changed in unexpected ways, most changes are charted in a simplified scheme of convergence. Finally, studies tend to overlook the transitional nature of youth, and to underestimate the changes that occur when adulthood is approaching, in other words when drinking habits tend to stabilise (Beccaria and Scarscelli, 2007; Neve et al., 2000).

The aim in this study is to narrow the gap in knowledge about how young people understand direct (personal) and indirect (other people’s) drinking experiences by investigating the images of alcohol (Sulkunen, 2007) held by Italian and Finnish adolescents and young people on the threshold of adulthood. Meanwhile, there will be systematic reflection on data comparability and qualitative comparative methods. As has been observed in relation to comparison between Western and Eastern societies (Hsiung, 2012; Flick U., Gobo G., Ryen A., 2013), discussion about methods implies discussion about different types of societies, in other words about shared values, norms...
and habits, as well as other aspects that affect the data collection such as interviewee availability and the experience of being interviewed. Do different geographical areas require specific methods that are sensitive to specific cultures? Does comparison require the same methods? Do the same methods necessarily imply the same approaches? The series of studies included in the present work gave the opportunity to reflect on these questions, and yielded useful data in terms of contributing to the debate about comparative methods in qualitative research.

In terms of country comparisons, Italy and Finland represent paradigmatic cases in Europe in that they have traditionally been considered two radically different drinking cultures, the Mediterranean (or wet) culture and the Nordic (or dry) culture (Sulkunen, 1976). Most of the categories that have traditionally been used to identify drinking cultures (e.g., type of beverage, level of consumption) have been contested in recent years following changes in European patterns of alcohol consumption (Tigerstedt and Törrönen, 2007). There are references to cultural globalisation as a phenomenon affecting drinking habits (Simpura, Karlsson, Leppänen, 2002) and young people (Bjarnason, 2010; Ahlström and Österberg, 2005). However, the aim of the comparisons made in this study is not to confirm or deny previously identified distinctions between the two countries, but rather to enhance understanding of the meanings that tend to be attributed to certain drinking patterns in different contexts associated with specific characteristics not directly related to alcohol consumption or limited to national boundaries. I refer to Italy and Finland as examples of larger areas or “geographies” (Sulkunen, 2013) characterised by different social values and socialisation practices, and by the adoption of a global perspective (Beck, 2005) I also reflect on the common challenges that young people in Europe are facing, and their potential impact on youth drinking practices.

In sum, the specific aims of the present research are:

A1. To enhance understanding of the images young people have of alcohol, and of the extent to which they change as adulthood approaches, by comparing adolescents’ and young adults’ images of youth and adult drinking.

A2. To enhance understanding of the globalisation of alcohol consumption, clarifying what aspects of youth drinking are converging and what aspects are not.

A3. To complement existing theoretical work on cultural imagery as a mediating mechanism linking environments and behaviour.

A4. To develop more comprehensive methods of comparison for use in qualitative research.

Before addressing the specific aims I will describe in more detail the main concepts and theories that have inspired my research work.
1.2 From drinking cultures to drinking geographies

Differences in alcohol consumption between Southern and Northern European countries are well recognised, and include different aspects of consumption, most notably in terms of use values. A classification system was introduced in the 1970s referring to American consumption styles (Cahalan and Room, 1974; Room and Mitchell, 1972), which was subsequently applied to reflect European differences in attitudes towards drinking and the regulation of alcohol consumption (Sulkunen, 1976; Mäkelä et al., 1981). Various Italian scholars further developed this continuum, known as ‘dry’ vs. ‘wet’ cultures (Cottino, 1991; Beccaria and Prina, 1996). They expanded the categories used to describe cultures (mainly total volume consumed, abstinence rates and frequency of drunkenness) so as to reflect the relationship between consumption patterns and use values on the one hand, and culture, social policies and control on the other, thereby combining the micro and macro levels of analysis. Mediterranean, or wet drinking, is described as daily wine consumption, quantitatively (relatively) limited to single occasions but high overall, and generally aimed at complementing the meal and socialising (Lolli et al., 1959). From the health perspective this ideal-typical consumption pattern has been associated with low death rates attributable to intoxication, but high levels of health problems attributable to long-term extensive drinking. It is also associated with a weak treatment system as well as policies aimed at quality control rather than availability restriction, largely on account of the high economic impact of wine production and the limited prevalence of social problems related to drinking. On the other hand, characteristic of the prevalent ‘dry’ drinking pattern is the consumption of large quantities of spirits mostly at weekends, the aim being intoxication. This pattern has been associated with various social problems including violence, as well as medical problems related to the short-term effects of intoxication, including death. All this led to the spread of temperance movements and stricter formal control, aimed mainly at reducing the availability of alcohol. Characteristic of dry cultures is a widespread and multi-professional treatment system, as well as a more highly developed and multidisciplinary research field (see Table 1).

This classification seems dated now, given the many changes in recent decades resulting in modified drinking habits among Europeans and the reversed consumption trends (increasing in the North and decreasing in the South). Total consumption has steadily declined in Italy and has risen in Finland in the last 40 years, to the extent that Finnish levels now exceed Italian levels (recorded alcohol consumption per capita in 2010 was 9.72 and 6.1, respectively; see Figure 1). Both countries faced similar changes in the same period related to urbanisation, the family structure, gender roles and leisure pursuits, but they affected drinking habits in different ways (Beccaria, 2010). For instance, both countries experienced extensive migration from rural areas to urban centres during the 1960s and 1970s due to the rapid processes of urbanisation and industrialisation.
As a consequence of the wider availability of alcoholic beverages in cities than in the countryside in Finland, there was a significant increase in consumption (ibid). In Italy, on the other hand, the extensive industrialisation helped to change the daily habit of abundant wine consumption that was typical of farmers and was not compatible with the new lifestyles and occupations such as factory labour and, later, clerical work. It also belonged to an identity that migrants wanted to erase so as to integrate fully into city life (Scarscelli and Beccaria). The drop in consumption in Italy, which was also typical of other southern countries, has been termed “the Mediterranean mystery”
(Karlsson, Lindeman, Osterberg 2012), given that it was not attributable to the alcohol policies that came into effect long after the decline started (Allamani et al., 2014). In fact, the first framework law was introduced only in 2001 and was not primarily aimed at reducing alcohol availability, apart from lowering the maximum BAC level allowed when driving and prohibiting alcohol consumption in certain work places (Beccaria and Rolando, 2015). Thus it could be argued that the decrease in consumption relates mainly to informal norms and self-regulation (Allamani and Prina, 2007), which have traditionally played a prominent regulatory role in Italian drinking habits (Cottino 1991). Otherwise, the increase of consumption in Finland has coincided with a long-term policy-liberalisation process, the main stages of which are reflected in the 1969, 1995 and 2004 laws (Härkönen, 2013).

![Fig. 1 – Recorded alcohol consumption per capita in Italy and Finland, 1965-2010 (L)](image_url)

Source: Global Information System on Alcohol and Health (GISAH), 2013

Following these changes, factors used to describe drinking cultures in the past lost their relevance. Although wine is still the most common alcoholic drink in Italy, consumption declined dramatically during this period - as it did in other Mediterranean countries - as new habits formed, in particular beer drinking, especially among younger generations. Other noticeable trends include an increase in consumption other than with meals, a reduction in daily consumption and an increase in the number of female drinkers, even if the gender gap is still wide. According to the WHO (2010), today alcohol consumers (aged 15+ who had taken a drink at least once during the previous year) comprise 82 per cent of the eligible Italian population, whereas abstainers (who had not taken a drink in the previous 12 months) comprised 18 per cent, with a big gap between men and women (9.7 vs. 25.4%). Respectively in Finland - as in other Northern countries - beer has been the most popular alcoholic drink since the late 1980s, replacing spirits, which are now favoured by less than 30 per cent of
drinkers. In comparison with Italians, more Finns who were of age consumed alcohol in the previous year (88.2%), and there were fewer (lifetime) abstainers (11.8%), with a smaller gender gap (9.1% among males vs. 14.2% among females).

There have also been major changes in drinking situations and motives in recent decades: alcohol is present on a wide range of everyday occasions, and light drinking is more common (Beccaria et al., 2010). However, together with the increase in light drinking, heavy episodic drinking has systematically increased among younger cohorts: this formerly typically male drinking pattern has expanded into new population subgroups, primarily women, whose alcohol consumption constantly increased during the same time period (Härkönen, 2013). This seems to indicate that differences are still wide, despite the hypothesised homogenisation process between Southern and Northern countries (Karlsson, 2010; Ahlström and Österberg, 2005). Indeed, “neither changes in aggregate levels of consumption nor changes in beverage preferences can ascertain that national or regional drinking practices are becoming more “alike” (Beccaria, 2010 p. 13). As qualitative comparison has shown, the cultural position of alcohol is still very different in the countries under observation, especially with regard to use values and attitudes towards drunkenness (ibid).

Even among young people, who should be more susceptible to processes of globalisation than other population groups (Ahlström and Österberg, 2005, Bjarnason, 2010), two types of culture are distinguishable, one intoxication-oriented, including English-speaking and Scandinavian countries, and the other not-intoxication-oriented, namely Mediterranean countries (Järvinen and Room, 2007). Within the first group, young Finnish people show a high propensity for risky drinking and positive expectations of the consequences of alcohol use (Järvinen and Room, 2007, Hibell et al., 2012). Peer-group expectations and norms also play a stronger role in regulating drinking. On the other hand, young Italians show negative expectations of drunkenness, and seem to be more conscious about possible risks, even if their first drinking experiences generally occur earlier than among Finns (Hibell et al., 2012). In any case, changes are underway, and somewhat unexpectedly. For instance, the rate of abstinence from different substances, including alcohol, has been growing in Finland in recent years (Hibell et al. 2012), whereas concern about binge drinking has intensified in Italy as well as in other Mediterranean countries such as Spain (Beccaria, Petrilli, Rolando, 2014; Calafat Far, 2007). Several studies refer to the cultural convergence of youth drinking and drunkenness (see e.g. Järvinen and Room, 2007; Bjarnason, 2010; Ahlström and Österberg, 2005), although quantitative data give only partial support to this hypothesis. For instance, according to ESPAD, beer is the favourite drink in both countries, and 35 per cent of 15-19-year-old Italians engaged in binge drinking during the previous 30 days, the same as in Finland (Hibell et al., 2012). However, there is a big gap in the case of estimated average alcohol consumption (in the previous 30 days): it is still much lower among Italian young people (4.1 vs. 7.5 cl), as is the percentage of young people reporting having been drunk in the previous month (13 vs. 21) (ibid.).
Numerical trends can be misleading in terms of explaining drinking habits because they do not reveal the underlying meanings. Qualitative, and particularly comparative studies thus have a crucial role in explaining these apparently contradictory data and shedding light on the process of consumption globalisation, clarifying the aspects of youth drinking that may or may not be converging. This is one of the aims of the present research, which follows on from previous work showing that aspects of similarity and diversity coexist in Finland and Italy (Beccaria, 2010). However, the starting point in the present work is that previous categorisations related to the concept of drinking cultures no longer suffice to explain all the complex elements affecting alcohol consumption, not least because “patterns of and norms about drinking, as with other social behaviours, are not uniform in a large modern nation” (Room, 2015, p.13). Moreover, references to drinking cultures may lead to circular self-explanations of differences, which would not effectively capture the possible impact of current changes on young people’s lifestyles and their transition to adulthood throughout Europe (see 1.4).

As Beck (2005) convincingly points out, the concept of “methodological nationalism” is inherently flawed, implying truths that are no longer valid in the current globalised “second modernity”: the congruence of territorial and state boundaries, distinguishing between internal and external factors, and cultural homogeneity within a state. Traditional reasoning about nations, which was typical of early modernity, first “commits the circular error of internal causality, and second, it restricts historical developments to the either/or of evolution or decline” (ibid p.320). My perspective could be thus considered global: although for convenience I refer to Italy and Finland when I present and discuss my data, I consider the two countries parts of the “global whole”. In other words, I aim to extend my discussion of the results to reflect a global perspective, given that both countries are influenced by the development of a single economic system and the consequent processes that affect young people’s lifestyles in particular.

Furthermore, I consider Italy and Finland to be examples of broader ‘drinking geographies’. Sulkunen (2013) introduces this term in connection with sociological research on drinking habits, indicating an expansion of the concept of culture to include national or regional aspects of a country with regard to alcohol policies, research traditions and socio-economic factors that are not limited to national boundaries. I use the term to indicate a willingness to go beyond both the concept of nation and the aspects directly related to alcohol consumption, in search of a wider and deeper understanding of drinking among young people. As will become clear, I specifically refer to features such as social values, parental practices and the process of identity formation. The challenge that lies beyond this approach – which I consider via the concept of geographies – is to focus on drinking issues and traditions while keeping in mind societal processes embedded in the social structure and also under the influence of political and cultural (global) processes. As researchers in the field of human geography point out, despite the large number of studies on alcohol, the lack
of inter-disciplinary research has led to “a general problem where drinking is depicted in an abstract manner or around specific issues that, while being based on particular people, places, practices or processes, does not enable generalizations to be made” (Jayne et al., 2008, p. 249). In order to alleviate this problem I will attempt “to make connections between different people, places, practices and processes” (ibid.) and thereby to enhance understanding of drinking on spatial scales other than the national level.

1.3 Alcohol socialisation

Socialisation “reflects the attitudes and beliefs shared by society by large” (Velleman, 2009 p. 20), and is the main process through which a culture is reproduced. Societies transmit informal norms regulating drinking to younger generations via the process of alcohol socialisation: children learn what drinking behaviour society expects of them from socialisation agents such as family, friends, peers and the media. As with any other social behaviour, observation and modelling play a central role in learning, even more influential than personal and direct experiences (Bandura, 1977). Children acquire knowledge, attitudes and expectations about alcohol consumption through the process of socialisation long before they start drinking (Velleman, 2009). Parents and other significant relatives exert the strongest influences on initial attitudes and intentions. It has been shown that children are already aware of their parents’ “alcohol schemas” at the age of between three and five years (Donovan et al., 2004), and that the internalisation of parental drinking norms influences their offspring’s subsequent personal behaviour (Brody et al., 2000).

Given the primary role that the first contact with alcohol and parenting models have in shaping drinking later on in life (Warner and White, 2003), most studies on alcohol socialisation focus specifically on drinking onset. Among those, the majority emphasise the age at which drinking starts, a strongly supported argument being that the earlier the age of onset, the higher is the likelihood of subsequently developing drinking problems (see Velleman, 2009 for a review). Consequently according to the evidence, preventing adolescents from drinking at home offers protection from heavy and frequent drinking (Yu, 2003; Dalton et al., 2006). However, most studies have been conducted in the US or Northern European and English-speaking countries. The few studies conducted in Southern countries offer apparently contradictory evidence that has not thus far attracted much attention on the international level. It is suggested that drinking alcohol within the family environment, even at an early age, may encourage safe consumption behaviours and subsequently reduce the risk of excessive drinking during adolescence (Strunin et al., 2010; Bellis et al., 2007; Bonino et al., 2005; Simons-Morton, 2004). These studies emphasise that context and supervision are crucial variables in relation to first drinking experiences and their effects. Yet, despite the number of surveys on the topic, not many studies describe the context in which first experiences with alcohol take place, or the related meanings and values.
It would be useful to know how adolescents and young people conceptualise drinking in order to understand how adult drinking habits develop. Drinking practices engaged in during adolescence or later on relate to identity formation, which tends to be a dual process of identification with equals or peers, and differentiation from “others” (Törrönen and Maunu, 2005). Young people as well as adults commonly reveal their social identities through their drinking practices, choosing what, how much, with whom and where to drink, mimicking or contrasting the practices of adults and “others” (Järvinen and Gundelach, 2007; Kolind, 2011). Choices related to drinking also serve to draw symbolic boundaries, which are socially negotiated and culturally bound rather than individual constructs (Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Törrönen and Maunu, 2005). Consequently, comparative, qualitative empirical analyses of such boundaries could yield useful insights into youth drinking and shed light on the ongoing changes in different geographies.

One specific aim of the present research is to enhance understanding of how young people’s images of alcohol evolve once they experience it and until they approach adulthood. Indeed, a large number of studies on youth drinking conceive of it either as an independent life stage or as a risk factor for adult alcohol misuse, without acknowledging the fact that drinking habits tend to become more homogeneous in one’s 20s, and that most individuals adopt conventional adult drinking behaviours (Pape and Hammer, 1996; Beccaria and Scarscelli, 2007; Neve, Lemmens, Drop, 2000). The progressive abandonment of drunkenness upon entering adulthood has been identified in Italy, in parallel with a change in the reasons for drinking and in drinking patterns that become increasingly oriented to being sociable with friends around the dinner table (Beccaria and Scarscelli, 2007). Responsibilities, such as having a job and a new family also play a significant role in shaping this evolution and limiting excessive consumption. All these findings are supported in a recent study involving young Italian people aged 15-17 and young adults aged 22-24 (Beccaria, Petrilli, Rolando, 2014). In Finland, on the other hand, it has been found that heavy drinking is also evident among young adults and young parents, whose habits are characterised by a change in the prevalent drinking venue (from public places to homes) and company (friends vs. partner), rather than in quantities consumed. Indeed, the data reveal no decline in heavy drinking between the ages of 22 and 61 among women born in 1946 and 1969, which was not the case with older cohorts (Härkönen, 2013: p. 56).

1.4 Transitions towards adulthood

From a ‘global’ perspective (Beck, 2005), studying young people approaching adulthood implies pondering on various consequences of the big changes that are currently affecting young Europeans, and on the impact of the economic crisis on their life projects within different national systems. It is well known that there has been a general shift towards precariousness and away from collective and individual support in youth transitions, which are becoming increasingly difficult and uncertain because
of the crisis in Western democracies and the expansion of neo-liberalism. Indeed, the labour markets and welfare systems are clearly exposing the weaknesses in these models in terms of guaranteeing rights and securities that seemed obvious to previous generations. Moreover, young people have little influence in political structures and institutions (Pirni, 2008). Even before the crisis started in 2008-09 the trend was towards prolonged, de-standardised transitions and the individualisation of risk. Walther (2006) refers to ‘yo-yo transitions’, meaning that – due to diminishing security and ‘valued’ positions – the move from youth to adulthood is no longer linear. The concept of ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett, 1997; 1998; 2000), which has attracted a lot of attention in European social studies, refers to the self-perceived progressive extension of the transition to adulthood over a longer and longer period, lasting from the late teens until the late twenties. This concept helps to explain the impact of globalisation on youth life courses, primarily the increasing uncertainty. Hypothetically, the individual now has more autonomy and a greater choice of path, but complex choices are not necessarily positive, especially when there is less collective support (Côté and Levine, 2002). Indeed, structural factors and exclusions mechanisms clearly affect and limit youth choices (Bynner, 2005). Referring to the prolonged period of suspension between childhood and adulthood’, Alcinda Honwana (2014) coined the term ‘waithood’. This state of limbo, attributable to the failure of liberal economic policies, has replaced conventional adulthood on the global level. It is a powerful concept reflecting the marginalisation faced not only by African youth, but also by well-educated young European people when they start to look for a job. In fact, this seems to be the most learned generation with the direst future prospects (Mason, 2012; Standing, 2011).

Even if this could be considered a global issue, whereas Northern regimes combine welfare, social rights and assistance to support young people during this difficult transition, assistance coverage is weaker in ‘sub-protective’ Southern regimes, where rates of unemployment are much higher. For instance, the Finnish rate of youth unemployment in 2013 was half the Italian rate (19.9 vs. 40%; Eurostat, 2014). It is therefore clear that family and casual or illegal work, which are typical of Southern countries, fill the gap only partially. The Italian habit of living in the family of origin longer compared to other countries is no longer purely a matter of choice or an expression of a cultural trait, but is primarily linked to economic circumstances (Tuorto, 2002) and social policies: young people cannot rely on unemployment benefits, only on parental resources, and are dependent on their families through necessity (Bison and Esping-Andersen, 2000). Clearly, the social divide between EU states is growing, as is the generational divide (Schraad-Tischler and Kroll, 2014).

The global changes described above have a strong impact on identities. With the breaking of the social contract between the state and young citizens, and the strengthening influence of individual choice and responsibility on the life course, young people are increasingly required to ‘individualise’ their lives and identities,
with a stronger focus on agency (Schwartz, Coté, Arnett, 2005) and individualistic personality traits. Individualistic actions such as deciding on ones’ beliefs and values seem nowadays to be the most important markers of the transition to adulthood among adolescents and midlife adults (Arnett, 2001), indicating a general shift towards individualism.

Surprisingly, there are no studies that focus specifically on these global challenges and their possible associations with changes in drinking habits among young people, even if some aspects of their alcohol consumption have been interpreted in the light of neo-liberalism (see 2.2.).

2. Theoretical background

2.1 The concept of images

Pekka Sulkunen (2002; 2007) introduced the concept of images, referring to embodied and culturally embedded classifications, explanations and interpretations, which are not fully conscious and through which people express their perceptions of different phenomena in a way that “makes sense” to them. Images are subjective ideas about the world and are necessary to meaningful action (Sulkunen and Eger, 2009), being at the heart of everyday life in giving meanings to individuals’ actions and the actions of others, and rendering them interpretable to others. This concept is rooted in Bourdieu’s work (1980, 1979), which represents a shift in focus in cultural sociology from norms and functions to meanings (Sulkunen, 2002). According to Sulkunen (ibid.), this semiotic turn replaced the illusion that human behaviour was determined by the environment and was objectifiable, introducing the mediation of ‘le sens pratique’ through which individuals can adapt to very different situations, adjusting their role from time to time depending on concrete cases. Images can therefore be situated between ‘culture’ and ‘nature’, affected by culture as part of the environment but also retaining a natural, instinctive component. Moreover, images of phenomena that are traditionally subject to moral judgments – such as alcohol consumption – also imply a distinction between culture and nature as parts of an imaginary cycle in which those who are too heavily engaged in such cultural practices regress to nature, in other words lose their willpower and the competence expected of an adult and civilised person (Sulkunen, 2007). Within this framework, the aim of the present research is to build on previous theoretical investigation into cultural images as a mediating mechanism between environments and behaviour.

Images are not fully conscious, meaning that unlike ‘representations’ they do not necessarily imply awareness of who is representing what. Moreover, even if they condition and are conditioned by behaviours, they are “often imaginary rather than based on direct experiences” (Rantala and Sulkunen, 2010:5). This is particularly relevant in the case of adolescents, who may not yet have had personal experience of
alcohol, as it has been shown that early cognitions and beliefs about the consequences of drinking play an important role in the development of drinking habits among adolescents (Martino et al., 2006). Indeed, images constitute one’s personal web of meanings, a symbolic system regulating actions and experiences (Geertz, 2011): when people talk about alcohol use, whether their own experiences or those of others, they naturally articulate not only their opinions about drinking, but also their self-definitions and their personal sense of “being-in-the-world”. Images therefore also have a regulative function: in organising people’s experiences in practice, they establish a connection or a distinction between “us” and “others” (whatever it means in each case) in order to maintain group cohesion and control over behaviour, and for this reason they differ in different societies or social groups. Lastly, images are interactive, which implies that they are not fixed but can change and be changed even in the same context, such as during a focus-group discussion.

Comparative qualitative research strategies can be described with reference to two main dimensions, concerning the ontology of the object studied and the epistemological aspects (Tigerstedt and Törrönen, 2007). On the former dimension it should be borne in mind regarding the concept of images (see chapter 2.1) that the objects of study are not environments and behaviours as such, but in relation to how they emerge from the images. This also applies to other aspects that are taken under consideration in studies on alcohol use, such as gender, social class, values and norms. These aspects are not analytical categories, but are articulated in young people’s images of alcohol. Focusing on images avoids the problem Tigerstedt and Törrönen (2007) identified as “the assumption of a single ontology” of the object studied in acknowledging the fact that what seems similar in different countries is not always so in a deeper sense (ibid.). For instance, I do not compare binge-drinking experiences on the assumption that they constitute the same phenomenon in both Italy and Finland, but rather compare how young people express their conception of binge drinking.

On the epistemological dimension, the concept of images implies an approach in which it is recognised that researchers’ and interviewees’ accounts belong to the same symbolic world, and that users and observers are not necessarily aware of and clear about who is representing what (Sulkunen, 2007). For this reason I conducted qualitative interviews using stimulus texts, which makes it possible for the researcher and the interviewees “to sort of step out of themselves in a comparable manner, although in such a way that they can at the same time express their own experiences by following, citing or abandoning the concrete and externalized marks of stimulus text” (Törrönen, 2002: 359).

Starting from these assumptions, the studies included in this research represent different comparative-research strategies (e.g., looking for similarities and looking for differences), in order to analyse different aspects and levels of the phenomenon under study and to enhance understanding of the properties of the alternative strategies. Nevertheless, my starting point is closer to the “individualising comparison” approach, referring in this context to the juxtaposition of two quite different
geographies in the search for new insights that shed light on youth drinking in both (Tigerstedt and Törrönen, 2007; Pyörälä, 1995).

2.2 Individualistic and Collectivistic (I-C) Cultures

I came across the I-C framework as a co-author reporting a comparative study (Hellmann et al., 2010). In that case the concept of I-C cultures was applied to explain the variation in discussions about beer commercials among a sample of teenagers from five European countries (Italy, Finland, Poland, Germany and the Netherlands). The Italian data differed from the rest in many ways. First, the Italian pupils (aged 13-16) had a better understanding of the concept of ‘responsible’ drinking and a more critical view of commercials. Their reasoning about drinking motives and regulation turned out to be more ‘mature’, focusing on social relationships rather than individual desires. In sum, the results indicated that the I-C concept could be useful in explaining observable differences among the meaning making of European teenagers with regard to alcohol (ibid.).

Subsequently, having explored the I-C concept in the context of the humanities I thought it might prove useful in explaining differences between Italy and Finland beyond national boundaries and the concept of drinking cultures. In other words, it seemed to me that the I-C categorisation could be applied to delineate different geographies, affected by aspects that extend far beyond drinking cultures and traditions. Thus, in this work I refer to the I-C concept as one feature that facilitates the description of different geographies and the explanation of differences in drinking habits among European youth.

It may seem odd to refer to Italy as a collectivistic culture and to Finland as an individualistic culture given the more common association of collectivism with welfare systems. It is well known that the Scandinavian countries have developed a universalistic welfare system, in which social protection is a right of citizenship in a Marshallian sense. In Esping-Andersen’s (1990) classic categorisation Finland is included among the social-democratic regimes with extensive public responsibility, whereas the Italian model represents a Southern subtype of the continental regime (Fenger, 2007). The Italian welfare system developed late and relates to employment on the individual level, hence it is characterised by a high level of "particularism". However, the concept as applied in this research reflects socio-psychological and pedagogical rather than economic thinking, and refers to societal values and identity formation. Individualistic cultures are thus intended as a socio-cultural system in which individuals are expected to develop an independent personality, whereas a collectivistic culture rather encourages individuals to comply with norms, values, roles and familial authority (Dwairy, 2002). This different orientation is also a basic dimension of cross-cultural marketing strategies (see e.g., de Mooij, 2010). The ‘collectivistic personality’ is understood in most I-C studies as a trait, or a type, to which different needs (orientation towards collective rather than individual goals),
emotions (other-focused rather than ego-focused), values (emphasising interpersonal responsibilities more than individual rights) and social behaviour (situational and contextual rather than dispositional) are attributed (Dwairy, 2002; Triandis, 1995).

Within this framework Italy is clearly an example of a collectivist culture, and particularly of ‘family-related collectivism’, or ‘familism’. Even if it could be argued that familism is different from collectivism and also represents what has really prevented the full development of public ethics in Italy (Ginzborg, 1998), I refer to the concept as a type of collectivism (Realo, Allik, Vadi, 1997; Realo and Allik, 1999), a cultural system in which respecting parents and traditions is considered important and a guiding principle for most people. This aspect is strongly confirmed in all recent studies on Italian youth, according to which the family still plays a big role as a socialising agent and a transmitter of values, and represents, even among younger generations, a strong affective and normative bond (Perussia and Viano, 2009; Garelli, Palmonari and Sciolla, 2006). The data on cohabitation further confirms this: more than 60 per cent of 18-29-year-olds live with their mother and around 26 per cent live less than 30 minutes away from her (Censis, 2014). The economic crisis has clearly influenced this trend, but it has been common practice in Italy for a long time.

Finland, in contrast, shows many traits of an individualistic culture, thus placing more importance on values such as independence, achievement and freedom (Hellmann et al., 2010; Sulkunen, 2009). Individualism in this context relates to the concept of ‘individualisation’ as discussed in theories of modernity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, Giddens, 1991). Individualisation refers to the increasing reliance along the life path on personal autonomy and self-reflexivity, and less and less emphasis on traditional forms of collective identity such as family life and permanent employment (Beck, 2000). This may exemplify a society such as the Finnish one that experienced a very rapid process of modernisation that transferred it in a generation from a backward agricultural society in the 1970s to an advanced industrialised and urbanised nation. The massive migration from rural to urban centres – implying the breaking up of families and the cutting of other traditional ties – may have left individuals alone in their struggle for a better future. Matilda Hellman (2010) shows how Finnish cultural representations of addiction reflect this process of individualisation. Indeed, it is evident from the coverage in national newspapers since the 1960s that addiction problems are increasingly depicted as individual, attributed to non-competent consumption and a lack of self-governance. As the author notes (ibid.), this is happening despite the emphasis on the social dimension under the influence of Temperance movements in the past, especially in relation to causing harm to others. As Sulkunen (2009, p. 188) points out, “autonomy is transformed from a right to a duty” in modern Western societies such as Finland: autonomy here means self-determination and self-responsibility.

People, including the young, are expected to be responsible for their own success, fulfilment and healthiness, and individual agency has an expanding role in shaping parent-children relationships and young peoples’ life-course transitions. As Giddens
(1998) points out, the ideal of a democratic family has strengthened the emphasis on children’s autonomy and self-monitoring in recent decades. In the field of alcohol studies it has been argued that youth drunkenness represents deliberate behaviour as a counter-reaction to the obligation of orderliness and self-control determined by the neo-liberal social order (Griffin et al., 2009; Measham and Brain, 2005). However, at the same time, consuming and risk management are mandatory in the process of forming a social identity, especially when both traditional sources of identity such as permanent employment and the interventionist welfare state are disappearing. The more individuals are expected to manage the risks of their own lives, the more social responsibility loses ground (Simon, 2002; Rose, 1996a; 2000). Indeed, via neo-liberalism social problems are transformed into and perceived as individual problems through a process that Rose (1996b) calls ‘responsabilization’, which also has moral implications (Shamir, 2008). Unhealthy behaviour could therefore be interpreted as a consequence of an individual’s inability to achieve autonomy (Crawford, 2006). This aspect is in accordance with results reported in several Finnish studies on addiction (Sulkunen, 2013). For instance, popular perceptions about the causes of addiction emphasise individual responsibility, whereas the effects of the social environment and living conditions are downplayed (Pöysti and Majamäki, 2013; Hirschovits-Gerz, 2013).

It should nevertheless be borne in mind that I-C cultures are ideal-type concepts, which means that they should not be considered opposite and mutually exclusive. Indeed, a certain level of collectivism is present in individualistic cultures, just as certain aspects of individualism can be present in collectivistic cultures. From this perspective, individualism and collectivism are better described in terms of a gradient that even exists on the country level. For instance, it has been said on the evidence of socio-economic data that there are two “Italies”: the family structure in the South, where the process of globalisation started later, is more traditional than in the North (e.g., lower rates of employment among women and higher birth rates). According to the results of an Italian study on binge drinking (Beccaria, Petrilli, Rolando, 2014), some notable differences between North and South Europe are also detectable, on a different scale, between North and South Italy: a more negative connotation is attached to both drinking and drunkenness among young people living in the South. On the other hand, Finnish drinking habits also reflect both individualistic and collectivistic aims, depending on personal characteristics and the particular drinking situation. Törrönen and Maunu (2009) draw a distinction between social partying, when the aims of ‘I’ are focused on the common will and avoid personal issues, and individual partying when the drinker is more likely to be concerned about personal desires or private problems, and loosening his or her social bonds. The authors argue that the second type of drinking “may produce a vicious circle that draws the individual ever deeper into a private world of imaginary and fantasies, and may degenerate into addictive behaviour” (p.444).
The theory of images and the I-C concept discussed above constitute the framework within which one of the main questions of the present research work is addressed: does the I-C concept enhance understanding of the differences in images of alcohol in different geographies?

3. Data and methods

This research work draws material from three data sets. Many researchers were involved in the data collection, but I personally compiled and analysed more than half of the Italian data, and shared interpretations of both the Italian and the Finnish data with my Italian and Finnish co-authors and project coordinators.

Most of data were collected in Turin (IT) and Helsinki (FI). With 902,137 inhabitants in 2013 (Demos 2015), and 1,750,014 in the metropolitan area, Turin is the fourth largest Italian city by population. It is the capital of Piedmont, a “wet” region including the famous wine-production area of Langhe. As one of Italy’s main industrial centres it ranks third in terms of overall economic productivity, and is also one of the largest university cities and centres of artistic, tourist, cultural and scientific activities. In recent years it has been facing the consequences of economic crisis, with an unemployment rate that has been increasing since 2007 and in 2013 reached 11.4 per cent (ISTAT, 2015). Immigrants comprise 15.3 per cent of the population, most of them coming from Eastern Europe (Romania) and the Maghreb region (Morocco). Like other Northern cities Turin has a high ageing index, with people over 65 comprising 24.9 per cent of the population (ibid).

Helsinki is the most populous municipality and urban area in Finland, with a population of 621,863 (väestörekisterijärjestelmä, 2014): the metropolitan area (including Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Kauniainen) having 1,091,271 inhabitants (Tilastokeskus, 2014). It is also the national political, educational, financial, cultural, and research capital, as well as one of northern Europe's major cities. Like Turin, it experienced rapid urbanisation during the 1960s and 1970s. Nowadays, foreign citizens account for 8 per cent of the population representing over 140 nationalities, the largest groups coming from Russia, Estonia, Sweden and Somalia.

The first data set was collected in connection with the international project entitled “Changes in the Cultural Position of Drinking”. This project was originally part of the Academy of Finland’s Research Programme on Substance Use and Addictions, whereas the parallel Italian project “Alcohol and generations” was funded by the

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2 In Finland: Matilda Hellman, Maija Majamäki, Anu Katainen, Jenni Simonen, Christoffer Tigerstedt, Jukka Törrönen; in Italy: Franca Beccaria, Massimo Cerulo, Francesca Olivero, Enrico Petrilli.
3 I conducted half of focus-group sessions for Studies I and IV, all of them for Study II, more than half for Studies III and VI, all of them for Study V.
4 Academy of Finland 2007–2010, project no. 118426, project leader: Prof. Jukka Törrönen
Osservatorio Permanente sui Giovani e l’Alcool (located in Rome) and led by Franca Beccaria.

The focus-group method was considered the most appropriate given the research aims and its suitability for cultural comparison: it facilitates understanding of how opinions on a given topic are socially constructed and of those on which there is greater consensus (Barbor and Kitzinger, 1999). Furthermore, the technique allows for the collection of a large amount of data at various times and relatively low cost. This aspect was decisive given the research aim to enhance understanding of differences between cohorts, genders and socio-cultural levels, which would have required a very large number of individual interviews.

Sixteen focus-group sessions were conducted in each country in 2007, divided by age (4 cohorts), gender and socio-cultural level\(^5\). Parents gave their informed consent to the participation of underage informants. Given the different economic, social and cultural circumstances that characterise the two nations, the division of cohorts differed slightly: the aim was to identify cohorts whose members had experienced the effects of cultural or socio-economic changes in each country. Recruitment strategies were also adapted to suit the circumstances. Foreignness and coming from a different educational/working background was favoured in the Turin sample, whereas the Helsinki sample mainly comprised natural groups, thus the participants come from a smaller number of social environments. However the group interviews in both countries were set up on the basis of age, gender and socio-cultural level, given that homogeneity is at least perceived to promote openness and communication. Although homogeneity is more likely to generate conformity, on the other hand, the potential risk is not a major limitation in cross-cultural comparisons given the need to identify views that are culturally the most commonly accepted and supported (Beccaria, 2010).

The focus groups were moderated by native-speaker researchers in both countries within the framework of a common semi-structured outline, including questions to be verbally asked and a series of stimulus images. The interview outlines covered three main themes: first and youth memories related to drinking, current drinking patterns, and perceived changes compared to the past. Members of the Italian and Finnish research teams selected the pictures used as stimuli to represent different drinking situations and styles, both moderate and excessive (e.g., drinking and eating, drinking alone, drunkenness…) and different drinkers (young people and adults, both genders). The researchers also made sure to select images that were balanced in terms of representing ‘northern’ or ‘southern’ drinking styles. As they showed the pictures to the participants the moderators asked them to comment, indicating if they were familiar and if so, why. All the focus-group sessions were audiotaped and transcribed. The data were then coded using Atlas.Ti software in Italy and more traditional tools in Finland, although the coding schemes were similar and covered the basic themes included in the interview outlines.

\(^5\) In the present work the socio-cultural level as well as gender differences are not under analysis.
Table 2. The data set used in Study I and (partially) in Study IV (in bold)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Italy (Turin)</th>
<th>Finland (Helsinki)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. of FGs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only Study I refers to the whole data set, including all the cohorts, whereas Study IV is based on data referring to young people aged 17-24, from eight focus groups and involving 28 Italian and 23 Finnish young adults.

The collection of the second data set (Table 3) started in 2010 within the project “Images of alcohol use among adolescents - Qualitative comparison of cultural and class differences in Finland and Italy”, funded by the Academy of Finland. Studies III, V & VI are all based on these data, even if, due to temporal differences in the collection process, the three studies refer to different and only partial data.

Table 3. The second data set, used in Studies III, V and VI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Target group</strong></th>
<th><strong>Italy</strong></th>
<th><strong>Finland</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15-16 years old)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>131 (63 M, 68 F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(parents/teachers)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62 (30 P, 32 T)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research protocol was agreed on, and the recruitment of young participants followed the same procedure. They were randomly chosen from lists of pupils provided by the schools involved in the study, four in Italy and six in Finland. Pupils and their parents were asked to sign a letter of consent containing a brief description of the research objectives and methods. The Italian data were collected in two cities, one in the North (Turin) and one in the South (Cosenza), whereas all the participating

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6 Post-doctoral project, led by Anu Katainen at the Centre for Research on Addiction, Control and Governance (CEACG), located at the Department of Social Research at the University of Helsinki.

7 Studies III and VI are based on 10 focus-group sessions organised in Turin and 18 in Helsinki, involving a total of 145 pupils aged 15-16. Study V is based on 10 focus-group sessions with 62 adult participants (parents and teachers).
schools in Finland are located in the Helsinki area. The research group decided to organise mixed-gender groups, because conversation within homogeneous groups could have overstated gender-specific images: the main aim was to compare different geographies in terms of the general level of agreement on specific topics. In addition, given the aim of the comparisons, we decided to exclude immigrant pupils from the study, even if a few Finnish participants – born in Finland – had an immigrant background. In both countries the chosen schools were located in different areas with different socio-cultural-economic indicators (higher and lower) in order to differentiate the sample. The selected pupils were invited to participate through a personal message asking them to fill in, sign and return an enclosed consent form as well as a letter of parental consent. To improve the comparability of the data we used the Research Analytical Group Interview (RAGI) method, which is based on the theory of images (see 2.1.) and is intended to improve the comparability of qualitative research (Sulkunen and Egerer 2009). Images, which are interactive, are best grasped in focus groups. Nevertheless, given that images are not necessarily linked to personal experiences (which indeed are not directly investigated here), the question of understanding the relationship between what people say and what they actually do (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) is not included in the analysis.

The RAGI technique involves showing a set of selected clips to participants and giving each one a shortlist of questions (Table 4) so as to stimulate group discussion. The participants are asked to discuss the clips freely, while following the written questions, thereby yielding data on how they perceive the scenes, how they frame them and what they know about the things they see. The interviewer should not intervene, unless the conversation goes completely off the subject. This minimises the influence and variability of the interview situation, and enhances data comparability.

Table 4. The written questions given to the participants

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Please, describe what is happening in the picture and what kind of persons are involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>What do you think might have happened before this event?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Imagine what might happen immediately after this scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Please describe what the same person or persons might look like in ten years time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>In your opinion, could something like this happen in real life?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research team carefully chose the clips to be shown to the participants, the aim being to give examples of different drinking situations involving young people, implying different characters (male vs. female, adolescents vs. young people), consumption styles (e.g., binge drinking and drinking with meals) and settings (open spaces, public locals and private houses). The aim was to provide stimuli for thinking about possible reasons why young people drink: peer pressure (clip 1),
shyness/disappointment (clip 2), relaxation (clip 3), having fun in a private context (clip 4), integrating with adults (clip 5) and having fun in a public place (clip 6). The clips, each lasting a few minutes, were retrieved from the visual archive of the University of Helsinki and via free web-search tools such as Youtube. The videos contain pieces of dialogue that were translated and subtitled in Italian and Finnish by the researchers. The dialogues are short and simple, and did not pose any particular translation problems.

Table 5. The clips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clip Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mean Creek (USA 2005)</td>
<td>Male teenagers are drinking on a boat. One of them persuades the little one, still a child, to taste a can of beer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fucking Åmål (SWE 1998)</td>
<td>At a private party a teenage girl, disappointed in love, drinks from the bottle and vomits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My Summer of Love (UK 2004)</td>
<td>A young (teenaged or a little older) girl is taking a bath while drinking and smoking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fjorton Suger (SWE 2004)</td>
<td>Two girls in their teens drink and then sing and dance on the bed in a bedroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Krampack (SPA 2002)</td>
<td>At dinner a boy of about 18 is invited by an adult to take a glass of wine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Eurotrip (USA 2004)</td>
<td>A group of friends (young adults) are drinking and dancing at a disco.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Obviously, showing young people clips that represent youth drinking raises an ethical dilemma. However, the researchers reasoned that the selected scenes merely represented what was familiar to most young people of the participants’ age. Furthermore, the clips are very short and do not promote drinking, in other words they do not show characters whose drinking makes them perform better or who seem to be ‘winners’ from any point of view. We did not select clips that show particularly negative consequences of drinking either, so as not to provoke overly critical reactions.

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded according to a common procedure theoretically based on an ‘abductive approach’ (Timmermans and Tavory 2012) and applying a template analysis (King, 1998). Having compared the first results obtained in the two contexts in the light of relevant theories and the aims of the research, we individuated and agreed on the main topics or ‘families’: people (characters shown in the clips), reasons (for drinking), risks (of drinking) and regulation (governing drinking). However, the researchers were able to add as many (sub-) codes as they needed both within and beyond the main families on the base of the actual data. Quotations – in other words portions of text labelled under a code – are understood here as semantic units of varying length, many of which include
multiple interviewee voices. Some codes turned out to be the same in both countries, but those that differed were also taken into account. A preliminary summary report giving the main results was compiled in each country, then exchanged and discussed between the Italian and Finnish researchers with a view to identifying common topics – in other words specific family codes - for further comparative analysis. The whole process required several reporting steps and discussions in order to formulate and test the hypotheses. The use of specific software for qualitative analysis (Atlas.ti), which guarantees the traceability of data, was essential as it ensured constant return to the original data in the process of interpretation, and allowed the recursive checking of the wider context of the single quotations.

Study II is the only one based on the third data set (Table 6 below). The data were collected within the Alcohol Measures for Public Health Research Alliance (AMPHORA), funded by The 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development’s Specific Programme ‘Cooperation’, during the project period of 2009–2011.

Participants were recruited from two schools in each country, one in an urban area (Milan – IT, Helsinki - FIN) and the other in a rural area (Ciriè – IT, Orivesi – FIN). The pupils were randomly sampled from classrooms of 13-14-year-olds and 15-16-year-olds, and the parents were asked to sign and return the consent form that was provided. We aimed at a total sample of 28 pupils from each school, grouped by gender and age (i.e. 7 girls and 7 boys aged 13-14 and 7 girls and 7 boys aged 15–16). Girls and boys were separated with a view to fostering openness and avoiding “gender skirmishes” among the participants. Nevertheless, the data obtained from one focus-group session in Finland (Boys 13-14/ Orivesi) was not even transcribed because of the poor quality. Unlike the Italian pupils, the Finnish pupils did not take the task seriously, laughing and joking about it.

Table 6. The third data set, used in Study II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Finland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gender</td>
<td>age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>13-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of FGs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of participants</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total=</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with the second data set, the data were collected in line with the RAGI method (Sulkunen and Egerer, 2009). Pupils were shown four beer commercials and were

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8 The qualitative study was part of Amphora WP4 and was led by Matilda Hellman.
9 The number does not correspond to that given in the published article (Study II - Hellman & Rolando, 2014) due to a statistical mistake that has been reported to the publisher.
asked to discuss the clips freely while following the written questions provided (Table 4), describing the scene and imagining what might have happened before and what might happen immediately afterwards. We used a meaning-based approach to explore the informants’ ideas about drinking that were embedded in their interpretations of the advertisements. The data were then coded in line with a shared coding scheme, proposed by the first author, through the use of software for qualitative analysis. After that, selected code reports and related interpretations were discussed and agreed on depending on the specific purposes of the single studies.

In the case of Study II in the present work, the researchers considered the reactions to a commercial showing a couple supposedly on their first romantic date (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHcL40ALOJ8). The scene is set in Venice. The man is holding the women’s hand and is taking her for a ride in a small boat. She sips a glass of champagne. Suddenly, the man hauls a large fish out of the water on a fishing line such that the fish strikes the woman. She is clearly stunned, but the man acts as if nothing has happened. He opens a bottle of beer and starts to drink. The woman is portrayed as angry and disappointed, whereas the male character is content to sit with the fish in his hand. The commercial was chosen because of the densely layered images of value-based differences between drinkers: man/woman, beer drinker/ wine drinker, hedonistic individualistic enjoyment/ pair-oriented romance. The researchers’ intention was to stimulate direct and indirect participant talk on all or many of these issues.

The analysis focused on the youngsters’ interpretations of the violation of informal drinking norms, and in particular on two main aspects (related to specific codes): 1) the youngsters’ identification of the situation, and 2) their ways of signifying the styles of drinking in the plot. Then we translated the coded material from the two countries into English, and discussed and shared hypotheses and interpretations about the results.

I will conclude this chapter with a few words about how the gap in the data collection (2007-2011) may have affected the results. According to various surveys (Hibell et al., 2012), there were no changes in the drinking patterns of Italian and Finnish youth in 2007-2011 with regard to the consumption of any alcoholic beverage during the previous 30 days, whereas the estimated average consumption (during the last alcohol-drinking day) in the same period increased in Finland and decreased in Italy (p. 131). However, the aspects of drinking under study are linked to regulation and value orientations that are deeply rooted in the two geographies and are not easily influenced by passing trends, as youth drinking styles could be. As such, the results may better explain long-term consumption trends and characteristics.
4. A summary of the studies

Study I, entitled “First drink: what does it mean? The alcohol socialization process in different drinking culture” (Rolando et al., 2012), focuses on first experiences of drinking, even indirect experiences, which are likely to be the most powerful in shaping the relationship between an individual and alcoholic beverages. The alcohol-socialisation process is the most powerful means through which a drinking culture is transmitted to new generations, and as such is a suitable basis on which to enhance understanding of the cultural position of alcohol in the two geographies under study, in other words to identify and analyse the main symbolic values attached to alcohol. The results show, first, the differences in the forms of and the meanings attached to the process. Among the Italian informants almost all the first memories of people drinking were positive, related to parents or relatives and thus associated with familiar values and traditions. This was not the case among the informants in Finland, whose earliest memories reflected the ambiguity attached to alcohol: contrasting images emerged, related to parents having fun and scary drunks roaming around the neighbourhoods. Second, whereas Italian parents and relatives play an active role in shaping the first drinking experiences of their offspring, allowing children to taste wine or beer within the family context and using the occasion to teach them the rules of moderation, Finnish parents are more likely to prohibit the consumption of alcohol among young people within the family. In a sense, therefore, they do not play an active role in the early alcohol experiences of their children, who consequently turn to their peers, which in turn attaches a sense of transgression to alcoholic beverages. Not surprisingly, most of the first experiences of the young Finns resulted in drunkenness, whereas for most of the Italian informants the real first drink was preceded by a series of supervised tastings over many years. A more recent trend among the younger generations is for the first drinking experience to occur among friends rather than with parents, however only in rare cases it is excessive. First drunkenness, an experience shared by almost everyone in the younger cohorts, usually came later, and in many cases was unintentional. Surprisingly, despite some signs of change, not many differences in meanings and symbolic values attached to drinking emerged from the informants in either country, which attests to the key role of the socialisation process in shedding light on traditional drinking cultures. Lastly, the study clearly exposes the limitations of surveys focused on drinking onset, showing how the concept of ‘the first drink’ can have very different meanings in different geographies: more attention should be given to how the first drink was experienced rather than to when it happened.

The aim in Study II (Hellman and Rolando, 2013), “Collectivist and individualist values traits in Finnish and Italian adolescents’ alcohol norms”, was to compare group discussions among adolescents concerning a commercial portraying a social situation inherent in which were expectations related to the agency of the (male) drinker. Some features of the Individualistic-Collectivistic concept turned out to give useful insights into cultural variation in youth drinking patterns. The Italian informants harshly criticised the male character’s conduct, which was seen as interrupting the proper way
of acting in that specific situation. Both the boys and the girls referred to an internalised set of rules according to which individual drinking should be adapted according to the context and the expectations of others. They thus condemned the use of alcohol purely for personal pleasure and satisfaction, with no thought given to other people’s expectations. The Finnish participants, on the other hand, did not criticise the male character’s behaviour particularly harshly. Although they recognised it as “wrong”, they did not interpret it as breaking any social rules, nor do they discuss the need to adapt one’s drinking to the context and the expectations of others or the interactivity between the two characters. On the contrary they identified and somehow appreciated the humorous component of the scene based on the betrayal of the woman’s expectations by a man who was drinking purely for personal pleasure. These findings shed light on some features related to the I-C concept and personality traits that lead to different negotiations related to the risks attached to drinking. It seems that Finnish adolescents conceptualise risk in this context mainly in terms of level of intoxication and personal risk, whereas Italian adolescents evaluate it in relation to the context and the needs and expectations of others. Personal desires and self-maximisation\(^{10}\) are not highly valued among Italians with respect to drinking choices, being secondary to compliance with both the social-drinking context and interpersonal responsibilities. There are also indications that some aspects, unrelated to those generally discussed in relation to drinking cultures, may influence and explain the differences identified in the different geographies. Another factor to consider relates to the different quality of the collected data (more detailed and reasoned in Italy and much less elaborate in Finland): it appears that Finnish adolescents are less willing to comply with researchers’ expectations. This may reflect the tendency in individualistic more than in collectivistic cultures to perceive adolescence as a period characterised by tensions between adolescents and adults. It could thus be concluded from the results of this study that the I-C concept could be used more extensively in the field of alcohol research.

This, indeed, was the aim in Study III, entitled “Images of alcoholism among adolescents in individualistic and collectivistic geographies” (Rolando and Katainen, 2014). The study focuses on how Italian and Finnish adolescents conceptualise the risks related to drinking alcohol, and particularly to possible addiction. The objective of the analysis was to find out how collectivistic and individualistic traits contributed to the different conceptualisations of risk attached to drinking, and the extent to which these general traits are combined with aspects that relate more directly to alcohol traditions and socialisation processes. A number of similarities were found in the two data sets. For instance, adolescents in both countries considered drinking alone and drinking because of personal problems to be very risky practices that were not common among young people, and discussed the norms aimed at minimising the risk of alcoholism. However, the Italians’ references to safe and risky drinking were rather

\(^{10}\) Which means the belief that there are no limits in what you can accomplish (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008, p. 186)
more detailed and more highly contextualised, whereas the Finns were less specific and more general. Reflecting the social-drinking norms adopted during the long socialisation process within the family, the Italian adolescents distinguished several levels of risk based on the context, various drinking practices and the type of beverage. The strongest influence on the development of addiction problems was identified as the context in which people grow up. However, the participants were also very aware of the dangerousness of alcohol, and of the need to use it with caution. It is worth noting that the family – as well as familial norms – was a constant presence in the Italian talk, starting from the conceptualisation of alcoholism as something that prevents one from having a family, whereas in Finland it represented an obstacle to personal career development. Thus, familism (Realo and Allik, 1999) and contextualism (Owe et al., 2012), which are two aspects of the collectivistic pattern, help to explain why the Italian drinking tradition developed in a certain way and why it appears to be more protective than the Finnish tradition. Indeed, consistently with the drinking tradition and the individualistic perspective, the Finnish adolescents’ images refer to alcoholism mainly as attributable to personal shortcomings and problems. Conversely, they seemed to be convinced that anyone who drinks in the right way and for the right reasons runs no risk of becoming an alcoholic. In any case, the concept of risk did not attract much discussion among the Finns, nor was it related to the context of drinking. It would seem, then, that risks over which there is no personal control may be underestimated in an individualistic culture that emphasises individual responsibility and self-maximisation.

Study IV, “Boundaries between adult and youth drinking as expressed by young people in Italy and Finland” (Rolando, Törrönen, Beccaria, 2014), analyses more deeply how young adults conceptualise appropriate and inappropriate drinking with reference to youth and adulthood. Various boundaries (Lamont and Molnar, 2002) with regard to what are perceived as normal or deviant drinking habits referred to in the discussions among the Italian groups imply a detailed set of norms covering quantities (e.g., one bottle of wine for two people was considered too much), context (e.g., wine is not fine outside of the home), time (e.g., drinking during the day is unacceptable), company (e.g., drinking with colleagues), age (e.g., drinking as a couple is not “yet” fine at his age), and beverage type (e.g., drinking spirits is in itself considered a sign of problematic drinking). The most frequently recurring norm concerns the need to avoid drinking other than with meals, which is indeed a very old feature in the Italian culture. From their talk it seems clear that Italian twenty-year-olds know of and eventually experience many different drinking patterns, some of which are shared with adults and are moderate, such as drinking wine with dinner. There were frequent references to “us”, thereby including parents, so that drinking serves as a bridge between generations. The only clear demarcation line between adults’ and young people’s drinking patterns concerned drunkenness, which is considered acceptable – within certain limits – during youth, but not in adulthood. Once again, the Finnish data are much less detailed. Boundaries separating youth and
adult drinking as well as proper and improper drinking are typically unclear. Rather than categorising drinking as appropriate vs. inappropriate, the Finnish participants tended to describe the situations in terms of whether the behaviour was more likely to lead to light vs. heavy drinking. Indeed, intoxication turned out to be a constant topic and reference frame in their interpretations and discussions, which mostly revolved around the dichotomy between light and heavy drinking and the likelihood that the former will lead to the latter, even among adults. However, heavy drinking was not described as irresponsible, neither was it related to the drinker’s age. Thus, in this case intoxication was attributed to both adults and young people, but this did not end up functioning as a bridge between generations: on the contrary, the Finnish interviewees seemed to perceive older generations as belonging in separate worlds, to the point that seeing pictures of adults drinking did not trigger in these people in their 20s talk about their own drinking experiences. It appears from the findings of the study that the sense of separateness and ambivalence that emerged in the discussions could reflect the ambiguity of messages about alcohol these young people received from adults. Moreover, the more general relationships between young people and adults may contribute to shaping the drinking habits of young people. On the other hand, the complex and detailed set of informal norms debated among the Italians could indicate that the socialisation process is still effective in transmitting common values and images, and in establishing ties and open communication.

Study V, “Adults’ views of young people’s drinking in Italy: an explorative qualitative research” (Rolando et al., 2014), compares Italian adults’ and adolescents’ images of youth drinking, complementing a previous national study (Petrilli et al., 2014). In addition, the discourses of Italian parents and teachers are discussed in the light of similar studies conducted in other European countries. It seems that Italian parents are more confident than parents from Northern Europe in their ability to protect their children from the risk associated with drinking alcohol, primarily by finding a balance between authoritative (Baumrind, 1991) and permissive parenting. They are also able to share some powerful images with young people, such as the idea that the family represents the main source of influence on youth drinking, either as a protective force or as the main cause of subsequent alcohol-related problems. However, the most interesting and significant finding of the study relates to the questioning among Italian parents of their attitude to drinking onset and the traditional practice of giving their children the opportunity to taste alcoholic beverages. This result supports the hypothesis put forward following the analysis of the first data set, collected in 2007 (Beccaria, 2010). It is argued in study V that the alarm spread by the media about the issue, along with the scarcity of Italian studies on the topic, is challenging the way in which Italian children have been introduced to alcohol for generations. Interestingly enough, this is happening just as parents from northern countries such as Denmark (Østergaard, 2009) and the UK (Jayne et al., 2012) are becoming more tolerant of their offspring’s drinking and drunkenness. In addition, as happens in other countries, adults focus mainly on changes that affect youth lifestyles and contexts (e.g., the night-
time economy), but seem to be unaware that their own drinking patterns are changing, too, and that this could have an impact on young people’s drinking. Lastly, some gaps in understanding about youth drinking emerged when the adults’ and the adolescents’ images were compared. Parents and teachers seem to overestimate young people’s appreciation of drunkenness on the one hand, and on the other hand to underestimate the possibility that young people sometimes drink to ‘forget’ worries and problems, in other words with a pharmaceutical aim and in a typically adult way.

Finally, Study VI “Adolescents' understandings of binge drinking in Southern and Northern European contexts – cultural variations of ‘controlled loss of control’” (Katainen and Rolando, 2015), focuses on a specific drinking pattern, binge drinking, which is considered synonymous with drinking aimed at intoxication. The aim was to compare its association with different concepts of self-control and perceived reasons for drinking in different geographies. The results are discussed in the light of the discourse on the neoliberal social order and the individualisation of risk management (Rose, 1999). The findings reveal the difficulty of using one conceptualisation to describe binge drinking, given the different meanings it assumes in different situational and cultural contexts. Adolescents seem to show an awareness of the risks related to drinking, and in both study contexts they emphasised the importance of self-control. This finding challenges the universal validity of the concept of ‘controlled loss of control’ (Measham, 2004), and also the hypothesis (Hayward and Hobbs 2007) of determined drunkenness as a reaction against the need for self-control required by the new social order. However, definitions of control vary according to the culture. The Italian informants took a more problem-oriented approach, discussing many external aspects that could influence the capacity for control, such as social pressure, alcohol properties, lack of experience, and negative emotions. Even though their Finnish peers referred to some of the same concepts, they put more emphasis on individual competence: if you drink for the right reasons, in other words for fun and of your own free will, you are safe because you can manage alcohol. Self-control in this context is perceived in Finland as the ability to maintain the right level of intoxication, whereas in Italy it connotes not getting drunk, drunkenness being perceived as something that spoils the pleasure of being with friends.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Results</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Study I</strong></td>
<td>What are the first images of alcohol in different drinking cultures?</td>
<td>Various images and meanings, positive and related to parental and moderate drinking in Italy vs. ambiguous and related to peers and intoxication in Finland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study II</strong></td>
<td>Does the concept of individualist and collectivist (I-C) value traits help to explain drinking norms in different cultures?</td>
<td>I-C defined as personality traits and parental goals for children correlate with some aspects of the culturally anchored meaning making of agency and autonomy emphasised in definitions of appropriate drinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study III</strong></td>
<td>Do the adolescents’ images of risky drinking follow the pattern of individualistic and collectivistic cultures in Southern/Northern geographies?</td>
<td>Collectivist images of alcoholism could be considered more protective in terms of alcohol-related risk behaviour, making attitudes towards alcohol more cautious. A greater emphasis on individual competence may correspondingly result in a lower perception of the risks of drinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study IV</strong></td>
<td>How do young people on the threshold of adulthood perceive appropriate vs. inappropriate youth and adult drinking in Italy and Finland?</td>
<td>Young people’s images of appropriate adult and youth drinking are quite the same when the reference is to drinking as opposed to drunkenness, which is considered normal for young people but not for adults. Finns separate their images of youth and adult drinking, and articulate an absence of explicit norms of drunkenness, even when talking about adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Study V</strong></td>
<td>What are Italian parents’ images of youth drinking and of alcohol-related parenting styles?</td>
<td>Parental images emphasise the role of the family as the main factor influencing youth drinking and eventual alcohol-related problems, but there are doubts about what the best alcohol-specific parental practices are.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Study VI</strong></td>
<td>Do images of binge drinking relate to the concept of ‘controlled loss of control’ in Northern and Southern European contexts?</td>
<td>The competence and self-control of the drinker is emphasised in both sets of data, thereby contradicting the interpretation of binge drinking as loss of control. However, self-control in the Finnish data refers to maintaining the right level of drunkenness, whereas for the Italian participants it is about not getting drunk.</td>
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5. Methodological reflections

There were distinct and consistent differences between the Italian and the Finnish data used in the present study. The Italian participants were more talkative, more involved in the research setting and more task-oriented than their Finnish counterparts, thus the analyses of their discussions were broader and deeper. This applies to the adolescents and also the young adults and other cohorts involved in Study I, regardless of the methods used: more traditional group interviews (Study I), picture stimuli (Study IV) and the RAGI technique (all the other studies). It seems that a method developed in Finland worked better in Italy.

It is posited in Study II that differences between the two data sets could be attributable to I-C cultural variance, in other words related to the fact that adolescents living in individualistic countries are less willing to comply with adults’ expectations and requests, adolescence being associated with intergenerational conflict (Dwairy et al., 2006). As a consequence, the researchers decided not to use the data from one of the focus-group sessions in Finland because the participants did not take the task seriously, and continuously interrupted the discussion by laughing and joking. I would even extend this reflection to other contexts. First, in the case of Studies I and IV, the Finnish researchers decided to interview people in natural groups, explaining that even adults in Finland are generally not very eager to participate. On the contrary, and to have a broader picture, the groups in Italy comprised people who did not know each other, informal grouping and snowball sampling having proved successful. Reaching people from different socio-cultural contexts requires the exploitation of informal contacts and strategies, and the strong personal commitment of the researcher. This does not apply to the same extent when natural groups are used, recruited via formal contacts with specific institutions such as universities and schools. Second, one of the aims in Study V, to compare parents’ and adults’ images of adolescents’ drinking, had to be dropped because of the difficulties encountered in organising groups in Finland. The fact that schools are often asked to participate in research projects could have been a contributory factor.

Given the above-mentioned differences, one could question the need to use the same methods to obtain comparable data: it may be better to differentiate methods (e.g., ways of conducting group interviews) and approaches (e.g., sampling strategies) to obtain similar information in different societies. Indeed, internationalisation in qualitative research implies discussion about methods, which in turn implies discussion about society and ‘cultural sensitivity’ (Hsiung, 2012). The observed differences between Finland and Italy justify reflection on cultural differences, which applies to researchers and informants as part of the same symbolic world (Sulkunen, 2007). Thus, not only may people representing an individualistic culture be less willing to participate in research, the researchers may also be less favourably disposed to using personal and informal contacts to reach potential participants.
Some specific characteristics of the data sets may be related to the same social traits. For instance, the Italian interviewees were more willing to talk about personal experiences even if, when clip stimuli were used, this was not explicitly requested, whereas the Finnish participants were more likely merely to discuss the depicted scenes. However, this was not necessarily a problem: when they talked about the clips the participants were indirectly talking about themselves and their experiences, and probably felt more comfortable and were less likely to lie because they feared being judged. The different kinds of data also required different epistemological and analytical approaches. Whereas the Italian interviewees explained and justified their opinions, the Finnish informants did not do so extensively, so that meanings had to be deduced from what remained unsaid rather than from what was said. This is particularly clear in Study IV, even if the RAGI technique was not used and the interviewer was free to intervene and to ask for clarification. Both the method and the semiotic approach used in the data analysis (Törnönen 2002) highlight these differences. If the Italian participants were not very familiar with stimuli they discussed how they should be ‘modified’ so that they could talk about their experiences. The Finnish interviewees, on the other hand, simply stated that the picture did not concern them, if this was the case, without spontaneously giving an explanation.

Bearing in mind the possible differences in cultural contexts, and in the light of my own experience, it seems to me that comparative qualitative research requires agreement on common guidelines during the data collection and the analysis, and the allocation of time for a full discussion about these issues among researchers from the countries involved. Moreover, the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) and the adoption of common coding protocols is, in my view, to be highly recommended to improve the analytical comparability. Provided there is agreement on the coding strategies and logic, software such as Atlas.ti makes it possible to obtain a global picture of the coded material that would be useful in guiding the interpretation of the data. For instance, it is possible to identify respective differences in the numbers of quotations under different codes, which gives an indication of the themes that attracted the most discussion, which the participants may have considered more interesting or important. This is not an irrelevant issue in qualitative research, there apparently being as many opinions as participants, and is particularly relevant in comparative qualitative research in which the analysis is even more complex.

Naturally, this is possible only if researchers adopt the same coding strategy. For this reason, in my view, of the various procedures applied in the present study, the preferred option in comparative qualitative research is template analysis (King, 1998), in other words initially adopting a coding template referring to topics expected to be relevant to the research questions, but open throughout the analysis to the addition of new codes based on actual data, in accordance with the ‘abductive approach’ (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). The idea is to proceed on the basis of logical
inference but to extend it into the sphere of insight, thereby generating new knowledge. In practice, the initial family codes should be as objective as possible, avoiding too much theoretical categorisation that could be open to different interpretations. More theory-based coding could be applied in the second step to add more depth, when the basic differences in the data have been retrieved and shared, and are understood.

In sum, keeping in mind all the limitations discussed above and the significant differences between the two sets of data, I would conclude that the images collected via the RAGI technique were powerful in explaining the connections between the environments – in other words geographies in which people live – and the behaviours. Even if the focus was on behaviours, the results of the studies are consistent and enhance understanding of information coming from surveys and other kinds of data. More precisely, they show how statistics about consumption patterns associated with the same label (such as “first drink) can hide various meanings and purposes, thus referring to substantially different experiences and behaviours.

The results obtained via the RAGI technique are, in my view, particularly valuable with regard to this risk: the lower level of interviewer intervention, in other words using the same visual stimuli and allowing the participants to discuss the issues freely, immediately brings out the cultural differences in that the conversations seem to focus on what is more important to the people involved rather than to the researchers. For instance with regard to Study III, although freely commenting on the video clips the Finnish participants did not mention social background as a possible explanation for risky drinking or alcohol addiction. If we had asked them what the reasons for such problems were, they would probably have made an effort to give appropriate answers by listing the possible causes, including the social context, but the differences would have been less evident than those that emerged. When they interpreted the clips they obviously applied schemata based on their own direct and indirect experiences, thereby making the drinking behaviours understandable from their own perspective. Consequently, they made it very clear what they really believed and “felt” – and probably what they considered when making a choice – about drinking, rather than testing what they only “knew” or considered a proper answer to a specific question addressed to test their awareness. In other words, the use of video stimuli and minimising the moderator’s role seemed to be more effective in capturing emotions in addition to knowledge, that is nature in addition to culture (Sulkunen, 2002), than traditional focus-group discussions. This applies in particular to comparative studies: the fact that participants guide the flow of the discourse brings out differences that lie deeper than drinking cultures, and touch on self-identity.

The use of stimuli showing young people drinking obviously raises ethical questions. For instance, the RAGI technique could result in the strengthening of risky cultural images, especially if more experienced young drinkers assume a powerful position within the group discussions. However, the risk is related to the prevalent youth images about “cool” drinking behaviours, such as if risky drinking is perceived as a
sign of maturity. Nevertheless, even if group discussions can overestimate/underestimate the influence of certain images, and are not necessarily representative of all participants’ attitudes and behaviours, they serve as a useful indicator of the levels of consensus among young people in different geographies. Moreover, if attitudes to excessive drinking are not considered very positive and are not collectively supported, group discussions may foster awareness and criticism of cultural constrains. Unexpectedly, the discussions provoked strong criticism, which served to deconstruct the most common stereotypes and increase risk awareness among the participants. Study II, in which adolescents discussing advertisements showed a high level of ad literacy and critical competence, exemplifies these possible indirect effects. The specific setting facilitated the exchange of ideas and the unmasking of persuasive marketing strategies. Indeed, listening to other people’s opinions may help participants to modify and develop their own images: group discussions tend to enhance the individuals’ understanding of the subject matter in highlighting different opinions and points of view (Panyan, Hillman, Liggett, 1997; Glitz, 1998). I suggest, therefore, as shown in other fields of study (Cohen et al., 2010), that focus groups could be used as an educational method in projects aimed at discouraging risky drinking among adolescents. I would also recommend the use of visual stimuli, which are more attractive and permit young participants to discuss the topic freely without making them feel that their own behaviours are under scrutiny.

In sum, and with reference to the main objectives of the research as a whole (see A3 and A4 p. 8):

- Using images as a mediating mechanism between general cultural environments and behaviours helps to avoid epistemological problems related to correspondence between opinions and statements expressed by interviewees and actual behaviours. Images also bring out cultural differences, thus providing valuable insights into apparent similarities and differences identified in surveys.

- The RAGI technique is recommended as a method to be used in comparative qualitative research, despite the implied need for cultural adaptation and different epistemological approaches to the analysis when data is collected in different geographies. Furthermore, given that comparative research requires detailed common guidelines during the processes of data collection and analysis, the use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) software and the adoption of common coding protocols based on a template analysis model are highly recommended.
6. Conclusions

The studies included in the present research project, which are based on the comparison of Italian and Finnish data, draw a map that can be read from different perspectives. The findings shed light on the role of traditions related to alcohol or drinking cultures, the elements that are rooted in more general features aside from alcohol and deal with social values and family relationships (I-C cultures) (Hellman et al. 2010), and the kind of changes that seemingly affect youth on the global level (Beck, 2005). All these aspects are intertwined within a coherent framework.

The alcohol-socialisation process is the fundamental mechanism societies use to transmit to new generations shared attitudes and beliefs about drinking, via different agents and through direct and indirect experiences (Velleman, 2009). The first images of alcohol seem to be particularly powerful in shaping the later relationship with the substance, as they influence attitudes towards specific drinking patterns from early childhood (Study I). The first significant difference in individual experiences with alcoholic beverages between Italians and Finns emerged at this point: among the former the most common image is positive and relates to ordinary situations, whereas among the latter it is ambiguous and relates to out-of-the-ordinary situations. The first memories of alcohol among the Italian informants almost always related to family get-togethers in which parents or older relatives were the main actors. If parental observation and modelling are central processes in social learning (Bandura, 1977), it is clear that parental drinking behaviours are remembered by most young people as proper and moderate, placed in a context of ordinariness or family celebration. This also relates to the fact that alcohol is an ordinary commodity in Italy and, especially for elderly people, a source of nourishment. It also represents the result of hard work, economic value and tradition. Given the context of most first drinking experiences, wine tends to symbolise the same family ties and values. Besides, Italian parents are the providers of the first taste. In other words they knowingly let their children taste a little wine (nowadays beer, too) under their supervision, not abdicating this role but taking the opportunity to give them clear rules about drinking. They choose to play an active role in regulating their children’s drinking by being there for their first experience. This is not the case in Finland, where most parents do not encourage their children to drink at home, and first experiences happen outside, with friends: breaking the rules set by adults gives them a transgressive meaning.

The socialisation process reflects the drinking tradition, as well as more fundamental societal habits and values. General features such as societal values more or less oriented towards the family and community or towards independence (according the I-C framework) also contribute to shaping drinking traditions. It is well known that the family context influences substance use among children (Velleman et al., 2005). Family relations and cohesion (e.g., the habit of regularly eating together), family communication, and parental monitoring and supervision – not necessarily related to drinking – are all strong protective factors that reduce at-risk drinking. This helps to
explain why Italian family-oriented collectivism serves as a protective mechanism with regard to drinking among young people. It has been shown, for instance, that the family structure has more influence on substance use than living in a specific country (Ledoux et al., 2002), hence the differences found between the British and the French data are attributable to the much lower significance of paternal relationships in UK than in French society (ibid.). Something similar could be posited with regard to Finland and Italy, or more generally to northern and more family-centred southern countries. It is suggested in Study V (Rolando et al., 2014) that Italian parents are aware of these matters. As observed in the literature, they believe that authoritative parenting – in other words a balance between care and control – is effective with regard to their offspring’s drinking. Interestingly, they seem to be more confident about the significant role of the family in predicting higher or lower levels of drinking-related risk among young people than parents in other European countries such as Denmark and the UK (Østergaard, 2009; Valentine et al., 2010). Such awareness and beliefs seem to encourage Italian parents to take an active role in the whole socialisation process through different forms of monitoring, including the provision of alcohol on family social occasions. The role of informal control is still strong in the Italian parents’ discourse, especially in more family-oriented Southern Italy. However, as young people have more freedom and mobility than previously, parents are seeking new ways of monitoring their offspring. By way of contrast, it seems that parents investigated in similar studies conducted in other countries feel powerless to influence their children’s drinking, overestimating peer influence - as some research seems to do (Velleman, 2009). It is possible that these beliefs discourage parents from effectively monitoring their sons’ and daughters’ drinking. In Denmark, for instance, even if parental opinions are more nuanced, many adolescents and parents believe that youth drinking should not be restrained by parental rules and monitoring (Järvinen and Østergaard, 2009). However, if parents “push their children’s right to autonomy and right to self-determination too far, they risk putting themselves out of influence in the socialization process, thereby breaking the link between parental government and adolescents self-government” (ibid. p. 5). According to some young Finns, parents are not even willing to talk about drinking with them (Jaatinen, 2000). Youth drinking is thus likely to be experienced mostly as something that does not concern adults and is shared only with peers. Interestingly, drinking among young people is both a sign of the transition to adulthood and a form of protest against adults and their restrictions and conventions (Maunu and Simonen, 2010). This feature does not reflect the situation in Italy, where youth drinking tends not to connote transgression (Petrilli et al., 2014), although it should be noted that adolescents everywhere have different and even contradictory expectations of their parents, meaning that they want to be independent but are also in search of role models (Simonen et al., 2015).

According to the literature, children need to develop a sense of self-efficacy if they are to be protected from risky drinking (Velleman, 2009); many studies in the areas of psychology and social psychology report a positive effect of self-efficacy in limiting
risky behaviours. However, it has been pointed out that the results in some cases are equivocal, depending on which aspects of self-efficacy are under study (McKay et al., 2012). The results of the present work seem to confirm the ambivalent role of self-efficacy, suggesting that too much sense could constitute a risk factor leading young individuals to underestimate risk related to the context and the inner properties of alcohol that is beyond the drinker’s control. Studies III (Rolando and Kattainen, 2014) and VI (Kattainen and Rolando, 2015) clearly show how a strong and broad sense of self-efficacy affects the conceptualisation of risk and of control. This, in turn, may shape risky drinking behaviours given that self-efficacy can relate not only to the ability to resist peer pressure (so-called drinking-refusal self-efficacy), but also to the belief of being able to manage drinking. Heavy drinking could even be a way of testing, and showing, the individual’s ability to regulate the level of intoxication, as happens in Finland (Study VI). It would thus seem that a young, Finnish person is more confident than a young Italian in his or her ability to manage alcohol and its effects, and less aware of other external circumstances that make the situation either more or less safe. Another aspect of the individualistic pattern, self-maximisation, also constitutes an indirect risk factor. This is understandable given the extent to which the attitudes of young Italians towards drinking relate to, in other words are limited by, other people’s expectations and not wanting to bother other people. This emerged in Study II (Hellman and Rolando, 2013): the adolescents harshly criticised the male character in the advertisement who drinks beer from a bottle despite the romantic and refined context in which sharing a glass of champagne with the woman would have been proper. Other people (mainly friends and partners, but also relatives) are a consistent point of reference in the discourse of these young Italians on the subject of drinking and its potential consequences (Beccaria, 2010), individuating precise “cultural recipes” that indicate where, what, when and how drinking alcohol is socially proper or improper (Roche, 2001).

This type of social norm, aimed primarily at moderating drinking and associating it with meals, is familiar to and accepted by Italian adolescents (Studies II, III, VI). This is not surprising, given that young people who are not yet engaged in drinking practices seem to be more judgemental of excess (Padget et al., 2006). What is more interesting is that the same discourses and agreement with social norms or cultural recipes seem to persist among twenty-year-olds (Study IV). Young Italians discussing appropriate drinking used the same images as adults and referred to similar drinking patterns. The only exception related to drunkenness, which turned out to be the only significant difference between the drinking habits of young people and adults. As also shown in this research, drunkenness is considered incompatible with adults’ responsibilities related to work and parenthood, even being described as ‘pathological’ by some young people (Studies III, IV). Unlike their Italian peers, young Finns seemed to perceive drinking among adults as being totally different from their own drinking. No clear boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate drinking emerged from
their discussions, the point of reference again being the individual – being either adult or young – rather than the context, the situation or other people.

Comparing the adolescents’ (Studies II, III, VI) and young adults’ (Studies I, IV) images, and looking at the process of drinking socialisation as a continuum from the first images to entry into adulthood, give some coherence to the whole picture in the light of the main research question (A1 p. 8). On the one hand, children in Italy acquire knowledge from and are supervised by their parents and relatives, and share drinking situations with adults from an early age. Informal norms adopted by adults with regard to drinking are consistent with their consumption behaviours (modelling), and the early images of young people remain fairly stable until they are approaching adulthood, shaping their ‘collective’ attitudes, aims and expectations about alcohol. Both adolescents and young adults clearly distinguish between “proper” and “improper” drinking, depending on the context and other peoples’ expectations, and their images do not differ significantly among themselves or from the rules that regulate adult drinking. On the other hand, drinking in Finland is restricted to the realm of adults, and is rarely talked about during adolescence: it becomes an experience exclusively associated with peers and disassociated from adults. Drunkenness represents a transgression of parental rules – ‘do not get drunk’ –, which seem to be inconsistent both with adults’ behaviour and with the world of youth. It thus seems that the drinking-socialisation process in more individualistic cultures, where intergenerational bonds are weaker than in collectivistic cultures, reproduces the distance, preventing the transmission of coherent and shared social norms. Thus, young people’s decisions about how much to drink are likely to be individualistic, related exclusively to personal aims.

This aspect reveals the profound differences that persist between youth drinking in Northern and Southern countries, despite the apparent homogenisation on the global level. With regard to the second main research aim (A2 p. 8), I would say that the differences found in the data relate to the participants’ sense of “being-in-the-world” as members of a certain kind of good society, rather than to their isolated opinions about or experiences of drinking alcohol. It seems that images of alcohol could be described as more protective in more collectivistic geographies, in other words in ‘familistic’ Southern European countries, than in Northern Europe: inter-generational closeness and the active involvement of parents in their children’ drinking socialisation in the former foster appreciation of norms and tradition and make the drinking a collective experience. Interpersonal responsibility is also emphasised, meaning that young people are aware of risks that are beyond the control of the individual (e.g., contextual, social and inherent in the substance), and are more cautious in their attitude towards alcohol. On the other hand, a parenting model that emphasises independence and self-efficacy, which is typical of more individualistic geographies, conveys trust in their offspring’s competence to handle drinking, which in turn leads to a lack of attention to risks that are beyond their control. It could be argued that drinking cultures, especially via the socialisation process, reflect and
reinforce prevailing I-C cultural patterns (e.g., in relation to parenting practices), thereby acting as protective or risk factors (see Figure 2).

**Fig. 2. Alcohol images in Collectivistic/Southern vs. Individualistic/Northern geographies**

From this perspective, the global process towards individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s 2002; Beck, 2000) could explain the higher propensity for risk-taking behaviour among young Nordic people (Järvinen and Room, 2007). As such it constitutes a real challenge for Western societies and should be investigated with respect to various risky behaviours among young people. With regard to alcohol consumption, the growing emphasis on self-efficacy and self-maximisation, combined with the economic and welfare crisis, could change traditional images of alcohol and increase the propensity for risky behaviours. Indeed, signs of change are also evident in Italy, as the present work demonstrates. According to the findings from Study VI, the Italian adolescents and their Finnish counterparts considered the capacity to exercise independent choice a prerequisite for a ‘good’ and morally acceptable drinking experience. This capacity plays a protective role when it is related to the competence to resist social pressure to engage in drinking, but on the other hand it could also facilitate resistance to social pressure aimed at limiting drinking. In any
case, the emphasis seems to be on drinking as an individual experience, whereas thus far in Italy it has been primarily a collective experience.

Moreover, given that entering adulthood is commonly considered a threshold beyond which drunkenness is avoided, one might well wonder about the consequences of the increasing complexity of the transition (Walther, 2006; Arnett, 2000). What, for instance, will be the impact of the progressive postponement of life steps such as embarking on a career and starting a family, which in the past have been interpreted as identifying adulthood and protecting against heavy drinking? Could the complexification also affect the motives for and effects of drinking, and explain the presence of the ‘pharmaceutical’ use of alcohol also among young people, which is a novel feature in Italy (Petrilli et al., 2014). As indicated in Study V, adults tend to overestimate the hedonistic aspect of drinking among young people, not considering that it could also ease their worries (or improve their social performance): the same young people perceived such behaviour as risky and typically related to adults rather than young people. It could be said that young people face more challenges than their parents did at the same age. With regard to facing external global challenges related to economic and welfare crises, southern countries have less effective social-protection mechanisms and a higher degree of intergenerational injustice (Schraad-Tischler and Kroll, 2014) (see Table 7). In this sense, given the time gap between when the data for study IV was collected and the present, it should be noted that the consequences in terms of youth unemployment in Italy and uncertainty in Finland were not as strong in 2007. If similar data were collected now the theme of drinking to soothe anxiety may be more prominent.

Table 7. The potential impact on youth drinking of global challenges affecting the transition to adulthood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global challenges</th>
<th>Southern/collectivistic geographies</th>
<th>Northern/individualistic geographies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social protection</td>
<td>lower</td>
<td>higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(welfare system)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational gap</td>
<td>larger</td>
<td>smaller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(labour market)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➔ Level of risk</td>
<td>major</td>
<td>minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, over time the alcohol-socialisation process could be modified, despite the fact that it has been the same for many decades. Some signs of change are in evidence, namely those that could affect the characteristics I suggest have had a protective function thus far. For instance, wine making is not as popular an activity as it used to be so new generations are less likely to understand the art of viniculture – and perhaps for this reason young people also seem to have less vivid memories about their first taste of wine than elderly people. Moreover, adults’ drinking habits are changing: daily
alcohol consumption is not as prevalent as it was in the past, and this could transmit an image of alcohol as an out-of-the-ordinary substance. Parents also seem to be less confident about allowing their children to taste wine, possibly because of alarmist media messages about youth drinking and concerns about public health (Studies I and V).

In sum, it could be said that collectivistic – and particularly family-oriented – cultures have until now contributed to shaping less risky drinking patterns among young people for many reasons, including the active involvement of parents in the socialisation process, the presence of shared social norms, and a greater awareness of the risks of drinking that are beyond the individual’s control. Italy and Finland represent two paradigmatic cases and show how differences in meanings and regulations are still significant – despite the apparent convergence process revealed in the statistics (Bjarnason, 2010). However, the global trend towards individualisation and the complexification of the transition to adulthood could undermine this virtuous circle, and bring the drinking practices of young people in collectivistic and individualistic cultures closer together. In other words, the global tendency would be to engage in self-centred and risky behaviour because of the fewer limitations imposed by shared social norms and over-confidence in the ability to control risks.

The present work offers some insights that could be useful for policy makers and health professionals on both the international and the local level. As (Simonen et al., 2015) stated with regard to Finland, parents should generally encourage open dialogue on the subject of alcohol, and realise that they may play a central role in guiding adolescents’ drinking. Moreover, prevention strategies addressed to parents should be more solidly based on scientific evidence, and should take into account the complexity of the factors that can shape parental influence on young people’s drinking habits. On the global level, I would again stress the need for alcohol policies based on geographical and cultural aspects: the uncritical application of scientific evidence in contexts other than the one in which it was produced could be ineffective or even counterproductive. Moreover, alcohol policies, and especially those targeted on young people, should consider youth drinking from a multi-faceted perspective, paying more attention to the fact that it somehow reflects adult drinking, for instance, as well as relationships between adults and young people in general. From the global perspective, researchers should also focus more attention on the possible links between changes in young people’s social position and their drinking patterns.

On the local level, parents in Italy should retain their role in the alcohol-socialisation process, and prevention initiatives should exploit specific alcohol-related images and social norms that may have contributed to the significant decrease in alcohol consumption that has been going on for decades. Parents should be made aware of the apparently positive impact traditional socialisation practices have had on youth drinking from a comparative perspective. Furthermore, efforts should be made to mitigate the alarm spread by local media, reflecting the practice in other European countries and based on evidence produced elsewhere, which could undermine trust
between parents and young people. Researchers may well ask with regard to Finland if, as in Denmark (Järvinen and Østergaard, 2009), parental abdication of their strong socialisation role may have helped to keep adolescent drinking on a high level. On the one hand, cultural differences have deep roots: it is not sufficient to import some habits from other cultures to achieve desired results given that the influence of the whole context is stronger than that of any single rule or practice (Plant and Miller, 2007). On the other hand, changing a drinking culture requires acknowledgement of “the social and normative nature of most drinking” (Room, 2015, p. 14), including that of young people. Finnish adults should perhaps be more aware of the effect of their own behaviour, and should avoid conveying ambiguous or contradictory messages.
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Väestötietojärjestelmä rekisteritilanne 30.11.2014


