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A Vision for the Future: Reconsidering Education, Neoliberalism, and Career Paths in Italy

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"Education does not transform the world. Education changes people. People transform the world."

-     *Paulo Freire*

Abstract

Considering the growing relevance of the strategic role of vocational guidance and career counseling in educational contexts, the present thesis investigates how Italian high school students express their future perspectives based on their principal interests. The study is divided into a literature review on the Italian educational system, the labor market in the country, and the social role of vocational guidance and career counseling, and a quantitative survey with 91 adolescents in their final school year, using thirteen questionnaires with open and closed questions about their interests and future visions. Among the main results found, the interest of male participants, as well as participants from more conservative economic backgrounds, positively connects to topics related to war. Additionally, some results demonstrate that anticipatory thinking can positively influence the future development of adolescents due to its relationship with "career adapt-abilities" and "future orientation" constructs.

Key words: education, neoliberalism; career counseling; students; future.

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Introduction

The present thesis consists of a dissertation on the Italian educational system and the future perspectives of adolescents in their fifth year of high school, which also constitutes the final year of schooling in Italy. The research is based on a literature review, which encompasses texts from classical and contemporary authors, and on a quantitative analysis from data collected at the *Liceo Artistico Statale Amadeo Modigliani*, located in Padua, in November 2023. Thus, the following work will be divided into two parts.

In the first section, a bibliographic study will be presented in an attempt to offer a general overview of the current Italian school system, and its historical and social characteristics. Among the aspects presented, the creation and the consolidation of the European Union as a solid organization, the globalization process, and neoliberalism itself will be mentioned.

Following, into a new chapter, concepts of future and work will be presented, associated with the previous contexts, and with contemporary research that have been developed by career counseling and vocational guidance academics, in a way to illustrate the transformations, conflicts, and inequalities that take place in the present world and how these factors relate to neoliberalism and how they can impact adolescents' future career choices.

The third and last section will focus on a quantitative research based on 91 questionnaires administered to individuals aged between seventeen and twenty years old, who are currently coursing their fifth and last year of high school, regarding their gender, socioeconomic status, career adaptabilities, future orientation, and anticipatory thinking Following, the study will synthesize the findings from the quantitative part and will explore how these results align with the elements presented in the first section – first and second chapters.

Education in Italy and Neoliberalism

The Current Italian School System

According to the Ministry of Education and Merit (MIUR) (n.d., my translation), the Italian educational system is divided into five stages, being the first one the kindergarten, which encompasses the age group from three to six years old and aims to prepare children for the Primary School, also called Elementary School.

The Primary School constitutes the second stage of the educational system in Italy, and it is the first mandatory level. This phase lasts five years and is designed for children from six to eleven years old. During this stage, the literacy process takes place, along with the teaching of subjects such as Italian, English Language, History, Geography, Mathematics, Science, Music, Art and Image, Physical Education, Technology, Civic Education, and Religious Studies, the latter being optional (MIUR, n.d., my translation).

Successively, there is the Lower Secondary School, also named Middle School, which is also compulsory and lasts three years, covering the age range from eleven to fourteen. In this cycle, students learn the same subjects as the previous phase, with the addition of a foreign language from another European Union country. The options include French, Portuguese, Spanish, German, Dutch, etc. Additionally, the subject of Civic Education is replaced by Citizenship and Constitution. This cycle aims to stimulate independent study and social interaction skills, organization, and enlargement of knowledge and competencies related to cultural tradition, as well as the social, cultural, and scientific evolution of contemporary reality. The Lower Secondary

School is concluded with an official exam, also named State Exam, and its approval guarantees access to the second and subsequent cycle of education (MIUR, n.d., my translation).

Plus, at the end of this cycle, students can start a vocational training pathway that lasts from three to four years run by vocational training agencies accredited by regions. The three-year vocational course qualifies them as "workers" and the four-year course gives them the qualification as "technicians". There is another option which alternates between work experience and apprenticeship, starting at fifteen years old and allowing them to acquire basic knowledge and skills that may be useful once inserted into the job market (Salvucci, 2018).

The consecutive stage is the Upper Secondary School, also known as High School, which is a mandatory component in the education of adolescents and lasts five years. Therefore, it encompasses the age range from fourteen to nineteen years old. It gives students cultural and methodological tools for a deep understanding of reality, enabling them to approach situations, phenomena, and problems with a rational, project-oriented, and critical attitude. Consequently, students acquire knowledge, abilities, and competencies consistent with their personal capabilities and choices, suitable for further higher education, integration with social life, and entry into the world of work (MIUR, n.d., my translation).

This period is crucial in shaping individuals since it represents the moment in which students decide the subjects they prefer to specialize in, whether for access to the workforce or for a university admission. They can choose, then, between classical education, known as lyceum, which prepares them for the university, or a technical/professional institute, that can be a scientific, technical, or professional education, and is oriented towards the job market. At the end of this phase, students face another State Exam, and, with its completion, they receive a diploma enabling them to pursue higher education or enter the labor market (MIUR, n.d., my translation).

According to Salvucci (2018), vocational education in Italy refers to higher education institutes, and general education is related to arts and musical high school, polytechnics, and universities. The university, however, is optional, and comprises three years of bachelor's and two years of master's studies. It includes both an entrance examination, and the State Exam at its end, which has specifications related to each course. (MIUR, n.d., my translation).

In addition to this complete structure, the Italian educational system also includes a periodic evaluation program, named National Plan for Quality Assurance Education and Training. According to Grieco (2018), this plan was approved on the 21st of December 2017 through a conference among the State and Regions, after its upload on October 2017 by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, the Ministry of Education, University, and Research, by the Regions, Social Partners and Vocational Education and Training (VET) Providers.

According to Salvucci (2018), the Italian situation, at a national and regional level, is characterized by multiple institutional actors that contribute in different ways to the implementation of this plan, which constitutes of an institutional framework that incorporates different measures for guaranteeing quality in learning, maintaining them coherent.

This plan aims at reducing and preventing training failure and early school dropout and counts with the continuous improvement of the training supply, the promotion of a quality culture of systems and procedures, and the adoption of indicators for a qualitative assessment in order to manage the complexity of the training activities, as suggested by the European Recommendation (Salvucci, 2018).

It also counts on the development of existing implementation models to ensure compliance with the European Recommendation standards, and, at a system level, its possible mechanisms are

already organized and defined by the Law number 107, from 2015[1]. At a VET level, on the other hand, it promotes the consistency of the Annual Activity Plan produced by schools (Salvucci, 2018).

Nevertheless, the approach selected for the inclusion of this plan as a national model is based on the evaluation of quality of single schools, being considered, at a system level, as a tool to verify the school general situation and services, and a guidance for the creation of new policies, while the synthesis of the school data allows the definition of quality criteria for the Italian scholastic institutions (Salvucci, 2018).

Salvucci (2018) divides the phases of this process into schools' self-evaluation activities, external evaluation, improvement actions, and social reporting, and affirms (2018) that the results of these assessments are useful for the provision and improvement of the plan, and subsequently, the definition of new priorities and goals.

Another form of evaluating school improvement and students' achievement is through the Schools Self-Evaluation CIPP (Context, Input, Process, and Product) Model. This model assesses, in the contextual sphere, the territory and social capital, the school population, the economic and material resources, and the professional resources; the processes of educational and didactics practices, including curriculum analysis, learning environments, inclusion and differentiation aspects, continuity and guidance, etc.; the learning outcomes, results in standard testing, key and citizenship competences, and longitudinal results; and also some managerial and organizational practices, such as strategic guidance and school organization, development and valorization of

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[1]Legge 13 luglio 2015, n. 107 (Riforma del sistema nazionale di istruzione e formazione e delega per il riordino delle disposizioni legislative vigenti). Retrieved from https://www.normattiva.it/atto/caricaDettaglioAtto?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2015-07-15&atto.codiceRedazionale=15G00122&atto.articolo.numero=0&atto.articolo.sottoArticolo=1&atto.articolo.sottoArticolo1=0&qId=a5387d8c-2244-4906-a2c0-4f1f55bdf8bf&tabID=0.7992209586277317&title=lbl.dettaglioAtto

Human Resources, and Integration with the territory and relationships with families (Salvucci, 2018).

In summary, according to Salvucci (2018), the National Plan of Quality in Italy has been adopted following the model proposed by the European Recommendation and the European Quality Assurance Framework and aims to reduce and prevent training failure through continuous improvement of the training supply. It adopts many indicators suggested by the European Quality Assurance and Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET), and other statistical parameters, through qualitative assessments, in which for each phase of the quality circle, current quality assurance actions are specified (Grieco, 2018).

In conclusion, the mandatory Italian educational system is composed by the Primary or Elementary School, the Lower Secondary School or Middle School, and by the Upper Secondary School or High School. At this last stage, students must make an individual choice about the profession they intend to pursue in the future, and, therefore, they follow an educational plan focused on this purpose. Thus, in order to enter this phase, students need to choose between a technical/professional institute or a lyceum. The latter can be divided into artistic, classical, linguistic, musical or choreutics, focused on human sciences or focused on applied sciences.

At the end of the last compulsory school year, students are ordinarily between seventeen and nineteen years old. At this point, they must have a clear idea of which path they are going to pursue immediately after it: university or the work market. If the choice is oriented towards the former, they need to have clarity on which course to follow and the career they are supposed to build afterwards. If the choice is oriented toward the latter, they should have in mind which profession to pursue.

Finally, Italian schools undergo constant evaluation processes, which are part of a national plan to assess the performance of educational institutes around Italy in relation to their levels of development. This project is part of a plan that attends to the European Recommendations and insert Italian institutions into the European Quality Assurance Framework. As a result, students participate in these control projects, and are subjected to periodic evaluations aimed at analyzing their performances.

Differences Between Lyceums and Technical or Professional Institutes

According to MIUR (n.d., my translation), the lyceum provides a broad cultural education and a good study method, which makes this type of school particularly suitable for those who intend to continue their studies at the university level. Technical institutes, on the other hand, offer a solid cultural foundation with a focus on scientific and technological subjects, and promote the development of skills that enable an immediate entrance in the workforce. However, also according to MIUR (n.d., my translation), a technical diploma allows students to continue their studies at the university level too, specifically towards scientific and economic degree courses, or in further specialization, such as the Higher Technical Institutes (ITS academies).

In addition, professional institutes are territorial schools of innovation, open and designed as laboratories for research, experimentation, and educational innovation. In Italy, there are also new professional institutes, characterized by the individualization of learning paths and the development of teaching models that directly links those paths to reference production sectors in order to offer concrete employment prospects (MIUR, n.d., my translation).

They also employ didactic methodologies for inductive learning through laboratory experiences and in operational contexts, analysis and problems-solving related to deferment economic activities, cooperative for work projects, and the possibility to activate Pathways for Transversal Skills and Guidance (PCTO), starting from the second year of the biennium (MIUR, n.d., my translation).

Based on these definitions, we can assume that the biggest difference between the lyceum and the technical or professional institutes is that the last two ones are focused on preparing students for the labor market, right after the end of the superior study period, whereas the lyceum is engaged in preparing students for university studies. This also explains why this type of institution is divided by areas, according to the interests and abilities of the students, expanding their possibilities of studies after the end of the school years.

As stated by Argentin et al., (2017, p. 53, my translation), "in Italy there are essentially two tracks of upper secondary school: a lyceum, which provides a more academic training, and an institute, where more practical and technical disciplines are taught". For the authors (2017), the lyceum differs from the technical institutes not only for its academic performances, but also for social and economic characteristics. Additionally, research on educational disparities in Italy indicates that students from more educated families benefit from significant advantages in their chances in obtaining a high school diploma and a university degree (ISTAT, 2012, Checchi, 2014 and Blossfeld et al., 2016, as cited in Argentin et al., 2017, my translation).

According to Argentin et al. (2017, my translation), although children from less educated families would have enough academic performance to access the lyceum, since it is a relevant academic admission criterion, they still prefer enrolling for the technical or professional

institutions. For the authors (2017, p. 54, my translation), "these disparities clearly undermine social equity and the efficiency of school allocation and selection processes".

> The vast majority of graduated parents' children enroll for the lyceum, even when they show modest academic performances, while students from less educated families preferentially opt for technical and professional institutions, oftentimes even when their academic achievements would allow them to access the lyceum, since progress performance is a relevant admission criterion. (Argentin et al., 2017, p. 54 my translation)

Plus, "previous research developed by Contini and Scagni (2013), and by Azzolini and Ress (2014) showed that in Italy the disparities mediate between 30% and 40% according to the link between socioeconomic background and enrollment in the lyceum" (Argentin et al., 2017, p. 54, my translation).

For Argentin et al. (2017, my translation), this preference that wealthier families have for the lyceum can be justified by a plurality of factors, such as the economic security that allows them to invest in a longer study pathway, which includes the university, and the status provided by the academy itself. On the contrary, economically disadvantaged families often prefer professional and applied fields that may guarantee their children a future profession.

In conclusion, high school institutions in Italy can be divided into lyceums or technological or professional institutes. The former is preferred by those who intend to follow an academic path after school years, and tend to be chosen, as described in the chapter, by wealthier families. The latter, on the other hand, is focused on the development of professional skills, that can be used in the labor market and, for this reason, tend to be more suitable for those who intend to start working right after their school years.

Italian Educational School System and the European Union

The Italian educational system underwent a reform in 1997 in an attempt to be aligned with international standards, especially concerning conformity with the European Union (EU), established in 1993, derived from the European Economic Community (EEC), created in 1958. The EU was formed as means to encourage economic cooperation and, consequently, reduce conflicts among countries in the European continent.

Currently, the European Union consists of 27 countries from the European continent including Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden (European Union, n. d.). These countries use the euro, a common currency, in order to contribute to the internal market.

In addition to being an economic union among countries, the entity in question aims to affirm and promote its values, including the dignity of the human being, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights. It also strives to contribute to peace, sustainable development globally, collaboration for mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty, and protection of human rights, as well as a commitment to the strict observance of international law (European Parliament, n.d.).

According to Gil, as cited in Freitas and Costa (2019, my translation), the European Union represented the New Constitutionalism, a neoliberal political-legal dimension. This seeks to separate economic policies from broad accountability, making governments more responsive to market discipline and less accountable to democratic forces.

For the author (2019, my translation), therefore, the center of this governance lies in securing the property rights of investors and market disciplines of the State and labor, aiming to ensure credibility in the eyes of private investors in the financial market. These neoliberal characteristics have repercussions throughout the entire school system as they require students to demonstrate proficiency in their academic performances and achievement of high levels of productivity.

> These neoliberal politics contain principles and values of effectiveness and efficiency and impress upon the individual, who undergoes constant performance evaluations under the demand for ever-increasing productivity, an internal and external obligation for continuous self-improvement. (Menchise et al., p. 1)

Notwithstanding, for Newman and Clark, as cited in Grimaldi and Serpieri (2014), the Italian policy agenda has been influenced by global critics to welfarism since the 1990s, thanks to the pervasive influence of European and transnational agencies, which results in a constant reevaluation of the education aims. Thus, the Italian educational system needed to adapt to this international model throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. This pursuit later culminated in the format that the current educational system has.

> The Italian educational system was convoked to adapt to the prescription of European international organs, pressed by various quantitative assessment indicators, such as those from the Organization from Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)[2], in order to join a new global education project, with the aim to convince teachers to legitimize

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[2] OECD is an organization for Economic Cooperation and Development which encompasses 38 countries and works together with governments, police makers and citizens in order to establish evidence-based international standards and to find solutions to social, economic and environment mental challenges. Retrieved from: https://www.oecd.org/about/

reforms with promises of innovative advantages, such as an efficient school with certified students flows. (Freitas & Costa, 2019, p. 5, my translation)

In view of this necessity for adaptation, the then Minister of Italian Public Education, Luigi Berlinguer, suggested a reform for the country's educational system in 1997, titled Autonomy Reform, commonly known as the Berlinguer Reform. It came into effect in 2000 and aimed, among other functions, at introducing a compulsory educational model divided into two cycles – primary and secondary – and school autonomy. In this way, schools would take responsibility for the education process, proposing their own teaching methods, supplementary lessons, schedules, and calendars.

Furthermore, according to Freitas and Costa (2019, my translation), with this reform, education became compulsory until the age of fifteen, which was also considered the appropriate moment to conclude the second educational cycle. Additionally, it reaffirmed mandatory education as a state policy and established various educational paths, providing students with opportunities to enter university, pursue technical education, or entering the workforce immediately after completing the primary cycle.

For the Italian Republic, as cited in Freitas and Costa (2019, my translation), the Berlinguer Reform was one of the measures undertaken with theorizations about the reorganization of class power in the construction of a new Europe. For the authors (2019, my translation), this scenario is clear because it instituted changes in the school cycles, organizing the educational system into three levels: early childhood school; primary cycle (base school); and secondary cycle (secondary school), divided into five areas (technological, scientific, humanistic, musical, and artistic), where students obtained the high school diploma.

Freitas and Costa (2019, my translation) agree that the Berlinguer Reform incorporated neoliberal characteristics. Nevertheless, regarding school autonomy itself, there is no consensus in the literature about whether this reform effectively provided it to schools.

One example of these neoliberal characteristics is the so-called law of leadership, based on entrepreneurial morality, attributing to the school principal functions of an educational manager, imposing on them the application of management techniques peculiar to the private sector, legitimizing curricular changes. (Freitas & Costa, 2019, p. 7, my translation)

According to Grimaldi and Serpieri (2014) despite the School Autonomy Reform, the Italian school autonomy remained one of the most limited in comparison to truly decentralized systems. The authors (2014) stated that the main change of this Reform concerned the "introduction of a 'weak' site-based management where schools were given greater room to manoeuvre in financial, organizational, and educational matters, although not for human resources management" (p. 124).

The reform opened up new spaces for schools, entitled to outline the annual education school plan within which they can plan individual/distinctive school projects, define curricular priorities and design their international organization. Moreover, schools were encouraged to build partnerships with other public and private actors, in order to pursue their education mission (…) The reform promoted a new devolved governance environment, where regions and local governments became responsible for local educational planning and schools building, and their competence in educational transformation of the new role played by centralized education bureaucracies was coupled with a strong emphases on localism, that is, on the need to involve local authorities and

communities in the governance of education in the local level. (Grimaldi & Serpieri, 2014, p. 125)

Also, "the process of decentralization of school autonomy and the financial policy adopted by the center-left government aligned the Italian educational system with other OECD systems, favoring the change in the social rationale of the Italian public school" (Freitas & Costa, 2019, p. 7, my translation). This way, education in Italy was now aligned to international standards, despite the reform having promised a greater autonomy for schools.

According to Freitas and Costa (2019, my translation), school autonomy was established as a relationship between the school and its users in general, granting it the responsibility to carry out a process of local didactic autonomy that considered the methodology in line with the broader objectives of past reforms, as well as those still to come.

Along with these lines, the authors (2019, my translation) add that "time, space, and subjects in the basic curriculum were organized according to the needs of the students" (p. 7), who also started to a role of clients under this new perspective. In conjunction with this, "the reorganization of school cycles with the discourse of autonomy places schools at the center of the governance system, facilitating their relationship with businesses and even allowing techno-idealistic changes within them" (Freitas & Costa, 2019, p.7, my translation).

To summarize, as Freitas and Costa (2019, my translation) state, "for Italy, the 1990s were permeated by reforms of the state apparatus" (p. 4). This affirmation includes a new perspective on education in the country, as Italy needed to adapt not only to meet the requirements of the newly formed European Union, but also to develop in accordance with the economic and social aspects of the bloc and its member countries.

The change in the Italian education system proposed by the then Minister of Public Education, Luigi Berlinguer, in 1997, aimed at adapting to external conditions influenced by a neoliberal and market-driven standards. For example, the idea of providing autonomy to schools positioned their directors as education managers, in addition to an education that expanded possibilities for future entry into the job market (Freitas & Costa, 2019, my translation).

Welfarism and Neoliberalism in Italy

For the Michaelis dictionary (n.d., my translation) neoliberalism is defined as a doctrine that has been developed in the second half of the 20th century, in order to propose limited state intervention, especially in the economic area. Harvey, as cited in Menchise, et al. (2023, my translation), complements this concept by stating that "neoliberalism is masked by much rhetoric about individual freedom, entrepreneurship, autonomy, personal responsibility, and the virtues of privatization, free market, and free trade" (p. 5).

Thompson (2021) states that "neoliberalism has generally been understood as defined by an ideological paradigm shift from the social liberal or social democratic welfare state to one governed by free markets and private property" (p. v). By this sentence, it can be recognized that neoliberalist policies and practices can provoke deep social changes and, consequently, install new forms of interpreting and living reality. "It means a profound change in the ways that western democracies were shaped and how their cultures would develop" (Thompson, 2021, p. v).

Neoliberalism as an intellectual movement was first born in the interwar Europe in opposition to the planned economy, which a number of intellectuals, economist, and economic managers feared was creeping up everywhere: in the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and in democratic states, such as the United Kingdom. (Brown, 2015, p. 454)

Additionally, neoliberal policies embody principles and values of effectiveness and efficiency instilled upon the individual, who undergoes constant performance evaluations under the demand for increasing productivity and an obligation for continuous self-improvement (Menchise et al., 2023, my translation). This way of thinking and acting is not limited to the individual's professional sphere but also manifests in educational, familial, social, relational, and other functional areas of their life and interpersonal relationships.

For Adam and Markus, as cited in Nota et al. (2020), neoliberalism is a political-economic movement, "characterized by ideas, behaviors and beliefs that deeply affected social and institutional structures, not always in a positive way" (p.16). According to Nota et al. (2020, p. 17), neoliberalism was born in the United States as a "partially organized intellectual and political movement" during 1947 and bloomed in 1970, "with the wors of the School of Chicago, started by some professors at the University of Chicago, who integrated neoclassic economy with some elements of the Austrian School" (Nota et al., 2020, p. 17).

During the course of time, this school begins to receive financial and political backing, from the United States in particular, on behalf of billionaires and companies' big executive that were against every form of intervention and regulation of the State in the economic processes. (Nota et al., 2020, p. 17)

Milton Friedman, an important American economist who also won the economics Nobel Prize in 1976, highlighted three principal ideas for neoliberalism: the first one was deregulation, which means the elimination of the rules that regulate economic life; the second one was privatizations, in other words, replacing public services by private ones; and the third and last one was the reduction of social expenses, such as pension system, healthcare, and unemployment support (Nota et al., 2020).

In Italy, neoliberal policies gained strength with the decline of the Welfare State, which lasted approximately thirty years, beginning shortly after the World War II. It was contextualized within the framework of capitalist countries seeking alternatives in response to the demands of the working class, which showed signs of leaning towards socialist regimes inspired by the governments of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (Mustafá, 2022, my translation).

This period has been recognized as "the Glorious Thirty" and, for Nota et al. (2020), in a social perspective, "sectors of society that used to have a began mobilizing in order to make their instances clear, widening and spreading rights" (p. 15). In economic terms, however, Nota et al. (2020) affirm that "financial institutions were entrusted with the task of fostering opportunity with the circulation of resources and using a regulatory system to which banks were required to join. These regulations involved currency speculation and export of capital" (p. 15).

 We cannot discuss neoliberalism without analyzing the significance of the so-called "Glorious thirty years" for the countries that experienced the Welfare State model. This period is understood by most scholars based on the following characteristics: State intervention in regulating economic and social interests; universalization of education and health policies; coordination of the social welfare and social services policy system, with

special attention to the vulnerable ones; policies aimed at reducing inequalities. (Ascoli, as cited in Mustafá, 2022, p. 17, my translation)

According to Mustafá (2022, my translation), by creating conditions to reduce the risks of threats to the capitalist order, such as "differentiation between commercial banks and investment institution" (Nota et al., 2020, p. 15) and to foster a mindset favorable to this condition, convincing the working class that it is possible to coexist with inequality as long as it is controlled, just like the profits of the bourgeoise, political, social and welfare conditions are also established to ensure a "dignified life" for workers.

Therefore, the social, political, economic, and cultural situation of the countries that adopted the Welfare State model responds positively to the aspirations of employability and sustainability, in an atmosphere of "freedom", also understood as "free initiative", within the capitalist order (Mustafá, 2022, my translation).

The late-nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries saw a massive expansion of industrial capitalism along with abrupt social changes that fostered mass urbanization, working class impoverishment, social alienation, and political radicalism on both sides of the political spectrum. (Thompson, 2021, p. v)

For Keynes, as cited in Mustafá (2022, my translation), neoliberalism represents, in a certain way, the intensification of income concentration at the expense of an intensification of pauperism as well. This happens by delegating to the private sector, through plans for unrestrained privatization, control over the financial market, which simultaneously leads to the deterioration of living and working conditions and the dismantling of social and welfare policies.

According to Harvey, as cited in Menchise et al. (2023, my translation), neoliberalism cannot be understood merely as an economic phenomenon but also as sociological, political, and legal. It is a project that legitimizes policies aimed at restoring and consolidating the power of the financial system capitalist class and has been successful, considering the concentration of wealth. This modus operandis is what Chomsky, as cited in Menchise et al. (2023, my translation) defines as "a communism for the rich, as the losses of the wealthy are socialized while their profits remain entirely theirs" (p. 3).

In this way, the way Chomsky, as cited in Menchise et al. (2023, my translation) criticizes neoliberalism also concerns its nomenclature, as the author believes that neoliberalism is not new. According to him, the power of the economy, of individuals, and its dramatic effects on inequality has been known since the late 18th century. Moreover, he argues that it is not truly liberal, as this freedom only applies to large capital holders and market managers.

Hence, the weakening of the State occurs as global financial capital gains strength. According to Bauman, as cited in Menchise et al. (2023, my translation), "the State that once held the economic power of a nation is now hostage to global financial capital" (p. 4). For the authors (2023), since capital is not static and financial flows transcend the control of national governments, many of the economic policy levers of the State no longer have functionality.

For Nevrakadis and Giroux, as cited in Nota et al. (2020), what characterizes neoliberal politics is the idea that "economy is the core of everything, and it may divorce itself from social costs in order to support markets" (p. 16).

> The separation between economy and politics and the protection of the former against the intervention of the latter, resulting in the loss of power of politics as an effective agent, ensure much more than a simple shift in the distribution of social power. Deregulation,

liberalization, flexibility, tax relief, and facilitation of transactions in real estate and labor markets – the more consistent the application of this pattern, the less power is retained in the hands of the agent, who has increasingly fewer resources and autonomy to apply. It becomes progressively more challenging to address social issues through effective collective action. (Bauman, as cited in Menchise et al., 2023, p. 4, my translation)

The development of neoliberalism and, principally, of the policies aimed at promoting free enterprises, free markets and workers' autonomy in the Western Societies have been shaping and, consequently, producing consequences not only for Italian economy, but also for the educational system, in a way to influence students' thoughts about their future possibilities after concluding the school years.

As has been elucidated throughout the past few chapters, during the 1990s, the Italian scholastic system, in order to conform to the standards imposed by the European Union, needed to adopt new policies and practices primarily aimed at the autonomy of the school as an entity itself. This panorama is closely related to the precepts proposed by neoliberal agendas and must also be taken into consideration when analyzing concerns and choices for the future of students.

The effects of this combination of neoliberal policies that transformed European Union countries from the second half of the 20th century and the commitment of the whole Italian school system to adapt to this new brand paradigm continue to resonate even nowadays in students who are about to make an important choice for their future careers. As a result, areas focused on vocational guidance, career counseling and life-design interventions become essential within school contexts, as they assist this public in making choices for their future based on self-awareness and knowledge about their true interests.

How Neoliberalism Correlates with the Italian School System

As already explored in this work, the Italian education system underwent a significant reform in 1997 with the aim of aligning the country with the parameters stipulated by the European Union, in an attempt for its member countries to fulfill similar protocols regarding their citizens' education. Since then, Italian education system has been making constant adaptations to follow these standards.

Notwithstanding, authors such as Freitas and Costa (2019, my translation) affirm that the European Union exhibits neoliberal characteristics, particularly when it concerns market practices. According to them (2019, my translation), after the rupture of the Bretton Woods[3] agreement and the new neoliberal reason, new transformations in the dynamics of production, consuming, resource distribution, and acceleration of inter-capitalist competitions that had been occurring since the end of the World War II consolidated.

At the same time, the European economy was stagnated (Giersch, as cited in Freitas & Costa, 2019, my translation), and, consequently, emerged a necessity of "a strategy for restructuring the social order in this global economic and political instability" (Freitas & Costa, p. 2, my translation). In this scenario, neoliberalism is presented as a possible solution. Nevertheless, for the authors (2019, my translation), the 1990s were marked by the expansion of the internationalization of the world economy.

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[3] "Bretton Woods agreement was a new monetary system created by delegates from forty-four nations in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, United States, in 1944, who agreed to stablish the international Monetary Fund and what became the World Bank Group. The system of currency convertibility that emerged from this agreement lasted until 1971" (Ghizoni, 2013). Retrieved from: https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/bretton-woods-created.

Deindustrialization was a consequence of the current financialization, and since capital is value in motion and, in the process of circulation, its dynamics have accelerated towards the creation of more value (surplus value). In the educational context, since the turn of the 21st century, neoliberalism has been refining its business plan for a global education to feed back into the market of educational groups, distorting the social purpose of education. (Hill, as cited in Costa and Freitas, 2019, p. 3, my translation)

Based on the topics explored so far, it can be assumed that there is a correlation between the establishment of the European Union, the Neoliberalism and the Italian educational system, which has been going through adaptations throughout its history in order to fit the standards of the European Union, and also to run with an economy in constant development, regulated towards free market, profit-making, and consequently, an increasing demand for individuals' productivity.

These neoliberal ideas are supported by the idea of meritocracy, which means the attainment of power though merit. Nota et al. (2020) shows that this idea can be simple as the following formula "quotient + commitment = merit" and stated that the word means "power to merit, since the suffix 'cracy' is a suffix that means 'power'" (p. 31).

The problems that surround this concept are mainly related to the social position of individuals, a fact that tends to be ignored in order to measure their intellectual and professional abilities (Young, as cited in Nota et al., 2020).

Without fairness and solidarity, this system can only favor the favorites, those who already have the possibilities to be well instructed, well educated, and so on, to the point that the society is built around a "worthy" restricted caste and a majority of way less deserving individuals, more subtly humiliated, because rich people strongly believe that they deserve

their superiority, they think to be self-made, while poor people have to accept an inferiority perceived as "natural". (Appiah, as cited in Nota et al., 2020, p. 32)

For Boarelli, as cited in Nota et al. (2020) "children and adolescents are sent to different schools, hierarchically organized in the light of individual abilities" (p. 32), which sustains that intelligence can be measured and put together with commitment, consequently differentiating the ones who deserve from the ones who do not.

For Nota et al. (2020) meritocracy is dystopic because it is already known by experts, such as psychologist and scholars of development that "intelligence, commitment, and investment are the result of received stimuli, of familiar and social living conditions and educational opportunities" (p. 32) that one have had.

In this way, school system takes advantage of the possibility of measuring human intelligence through constant academic assessment system to perpetuate the belief that those who are more persistent and faster learners are more inclined to be successful in their lives than those who do not make as much effort.

Consequently, measuring intelligence and academic performance through these means can sustain the idea that academic success is closely related to individual effort. This can create an unfair environment, where those who excel in standardized tests receive more importance than those who learn in a different way or those who cannot face an evaluation at that moment, for any personal or contextual reason.

In addition, inequalities create different starting points among people, and this idea goes against the basic premise of meritocracy, which states that "everyone is able to climb the social ladder if they make a serious effort and are talented enough" (Nota et al., 2020, p. 32). This way, it can also be affirmed that meritocracy idea is much grounded in the relationships of oppression

that occur within some societies. For Beauvoir, as cited in Freire (1987, p. 34, my translation), "in fact, what oppressor intends is to transform the mindset of the oppressed, and not the situation that oppresses them".

> It is impossible for us not to mention that today those in charge of big companies belong to élitist groups, who studied in academic contexts that just a few people can afford. The majority of the population is involved in precarious working conditions that hardly give any possibility to develop, to professionally grow and so on (Nota et al., 2020, p. 32).

Beyond the points explored so far, it is interesting also to pay attention to the fact that the education in Italy does not only follow a neoliberal tendency but also tends to structure its relationships based on what Freire (1987, my translation) named as "banking education", which means a system in which a more powerful individual, represented by the educator, transfers their knowledge to those who hold less power, such as the students. Following this logic, "education becomes an act of depositing, in which students are the depositaries and the educator the depositor" (Freire, 1987, p. 33, my translation).

According to Freire (1987, my translation) in the banking concept of education, knowledge is a donation from those who judge themselves wise upon those whom they consider knowing nothing. For him (1987, my translation), this donation is based on one of the most basic manifestations of the ideology of oppression. Freire (1987, my translation) also draws attention to the fact that the classroom presents itself as an environment where the educator merely communicates a content, that will later be demanded of students to replicate.

Instead of communicating, the educator issues "communications" and deposits, that students, mere incidents, patiently receive, memorize and repeat. Here lies the banking concept of education, where the only margin of action offered to the students is to receive these deposits, store and archive them. (Freire, 1987, p. 33, my translation)

This passive and rigid form of education, according to Freire (1987, p. 34, my translation) "denies education and knowledge as processes of investigation". For the author (1970, p. 33, my translation) "the narration of contents tends to petrify or become something almost dead", in other terms, it is unchangeable for the individuals themselves.

But if, according to the "banking" conception, consciousness is, in its relationship with the world, this "element" passively opened to it, the expectation that the world enters it, one will logically conclude that the educator has no other role than to discipline the entry of the world into the students. Their job will also be to mimic the world, to organize what already happens spontaneously, to "fill" students with content. It is to make deposits of "communications" – false knowledge – which they consider as true knowledge. (Freire, 1987, p. 36, my translation)

Goulet (1974) synthetizes Freire's ideas by stating that in his literacy method, in order to effectively learn, students participate in the observation of educators, search for generative words in a syllabic rich and in an experiential involvement level, and then they codify these words into visual images based on a cultural circle and stimulated by the relationship between educator and "educatee".

After this process, individuals are now able to act, becoming subjects in their own destiny. The applicability of these points orients someone not only for their autonomy, but also for their freedom to create their own ways of thinking and drawing their owns paths. Considering these

concepts can be attractive regarding Vocational Guidance, Career Counseling and life design interventions as individuals should be the primary agents in their choices for the future, which will consequently be navigated by themselves. Therefore, self-awareness and autonomy can be considered as key elements in sustainable career decision practices.

Neoliberalism and War

Some authors associate the neoliberal wave that spread across Europe and the United States throughout the 20th century to a state contributive to the development of conflicts. According to Brown (2015), "the institutionalization of neoliberal rationality constates a grave political threat" (p. 453). For the author (2015), the entire idea of freedom expressed by neoliberal speeches is not in fact related to the same idea of freedom celebrated by democracy, which is replaced by "the economic argument that the market always knows best" (p. 453).

Bircan, Brück, and Vothknecht (2010), affirm that the "devastating effects of violent conflict on key economic and social areas such as physical infrastructure, human capital, or growth have increasingly been stressed in the conflict literature" (p. 33). Kaldor (2012), in addition, brings up the idea of "globalized wars", caused by the "fragmentation and decentralization of the state" (p. 94). In this type of conflict, Kaldor (2012) explains that "there is very little domestic production, so the war effort is heavily dependent on local predation and external support. Battles are rare, most violence is directed against civilians, and cooperation between warring factions is common" (p. 94).

For Kaldor (2012), this scenario in the contemporaneity can be justified by four factors: the privatization of military forces, the patterns of violence, the financing of the war effort, and the spread of violence. To better illustrate the first point, Kaldor (2012) states that "regular armed forces are in decay, particularly in the areas of conflict. Cuts in the military spending, declining prestige, shortages of equipment, spare parts, fuel and ammunition, and inadequate training all contribute to a profound loss of morale" (p. 96). The author (2012) adds as an example of this situation the fact that "in many African and post-Soviet states, soldiers no longer receive training or regular pay" (pp. 96-97).

The second point can be explained by revolutionary warfare, which its central objective is the "control of territory through gaining support of the local population rather than through capturing territory from enemy forces" (Kaldor, 2012, p. 102). The author adds that, in this case, "ideology was very important; even though fear was a significant element, popular support and allegiance to revolutionary ideas was the central aim" (Kaldor, 2012, p. 103).

Kaldor (2012) synthetizes the third point explaining that, since new wars happen into a globalized context, territorially based production may collapse as a result of liberalization and withdraw of state support, through physical destruction, by cutting markets off as a result of states' disintegration, fighting or deliberate blockades imposed by outside powers or by fighting units on the grounds, additionally, when parts are spared, raw materials and fuel are impossible to be purchased. As a consequence of this chaotic landscape, "governments, like privatized military groups, need to seek alternative sources of funding in order to sustain their violent activities" (Kaldor, 2012, p. 108). For the author (2012), this can be done through "asset transfer", which "simplest forms are loot, robbery, extortion, pillage, and hostage-taking, or by market pressure"

(Kaldor, 2012, p. 108). An example of this scenario are the checkpoints in which food and necessities are controlled in conflict territories (Kaldor, 2012).

The fourth and last point is explained by Kaldor (2012) as a "predatory social condition, in which neighboring countries are the most immediately affected" (p. 113). In these cases, "the cost of war in terms of lost trade, the burden of refugees, the spread of illegal circuits of trade, and the spill over of identity politics reproduce the conditions that nurture the new forms of violence" (Kaldor, 2012, p. 113). As an example of this scenario, the author (2012), cites the "war in Mozambique, which was an important trade route for land-locked countries such as Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana and Swaziland" (p. 114). In this war, Malawi not only lost all its trade with Mozambique, but also had an additional cost of transportation during the whole war (Kaldor, 2012).

Spoor (2004) presents the idea of a socioeconomic decrease in comprehensive sector of society after the economic improvement in Europe during the 1990s, which has also been "accompanied by increasing inequality and marginalization of large sections of the population. This affected not only traditional vulnerable groups, but also created a new class of 'working poor'" (Spoor, 2004, p. 47).

> Armed conflicts, mostly fought under ethnic banners, caused millions of internally displaced persons, refugees and hundreds of thousands of deaths and wounded, alongside the enormous destruction of infrastructure and losses of capital human. It is no surprise that internally displaced persons and refugees are amongst the poorest of society. (Spoor, 2004, p. 47)

Fearon and Laitin (2003) also analyze interrelationship between 45 civil wars and political, economic, and social contexts into different countries. For the authors (2003), economic variables matter since they "proxy for state administrative, military, and police capabilities" (p. 76). Plus, the authors (2003) added the importance of strengthening the State, because "where states are relatively weak and capricious, both fears and opportunities encourage the rise of would-be rulers who supply a rough local justice while arrogating to power 'tax' for themselves and, often, for a larger cause" (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 76).

The authors (2003) bring also statistical data relating per capita income and the capacity of starting a war in western countries and included former colonies in the African continent and in the Middle East. By the time their article was written, the per capita income was "measured as thousands of 1985 U.S. dollars and lagged one year" (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 83).

Additionally, Fearon and Laitin (2003) present the idea that the poorest the country is, the higher its possibility of starting a civil war and, in this discourse, it is necessary to find means to fortify a country's economy in order to avoid wars in their interior. "$1,000 less in per capita income is associated with 41% grater annual odds of civil war onset" (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 83). For the authors (2003), this situation shows some intensity in the principal former colonies in Africa and Middle East, in which the authors (2003) "estimate that $1,000 less in income corresponds to 34% greater annual odds of outbreak" (p. 83).

Bircan et al. (2010), add the information that while vertical income inequality was not found to increase the risk of war onset, as explored by Fearon and Laitin (2003) and by Collier and Hoeffler (2004), horizontal inequalities and economic disparities between societal groups seem to be positively related with the outbreak of conflict".

Another interesting fact about neoliberalism and war lies in the fact that the former is usually preferred by males, phenomenon that, for Cohn (1987), had been explored by gender theorists in order to better understand how gender aspects relate to militarism and pacifism, also to understand how gender ideology itself can be used in the service of militarization.

According to Cohn (1987), feminists have often suggested also that an important aspect of the arms race is "phallic worship" (p. 692). For the author (1987), by the ear of the publication of her article, there was no evidence that any feminist critiques had ever being effectively heard or sentimentally felt by men, and that in the case of the United States of America, its military dependency on nuclear weapons, for instance, explained as an efficient investment.

Additionally, Cohn (1987) argues that there is also a sexual imagery related to weapons, such as in the project of the atomic bomb, and states that "both the military itself and the arms manufacturer are constantly exploiting the phallic imagery and promise of sexual domination that their weapons so conveniently suggest" (p. 694).

In this way, it is observable that neoliberalism has a direct and indirect correlation with global conflicts throughout the second half of the 20th century, due to the weakening of states and strengthening of economies based on the market ideologies. The perspective oriented towards the theme of war can also be present in the quotidian of high school students who seek for possibilities for their future careers, given that this theme is also present throughout the 21st century in various countries around the world.

Furthermore, studies by classical authors demonstrate that this topic tends to be particularly interesting to a male public, which leads us to reflect on the theoretical relationships between the theme of war and the gender of adolescents evaluating their alternatives for their future careers.

Synthesis of the Elements Explored in the First Chapter

The "Glorious Thirty Years", extensively explored by Nota et al. (2020) and Mustafá (2022) was a period that Italy experienced between 1945 and the second half of the 1970s, that, along with the creation of the European Economic Community in 1958, and the subsequent consolidation of the European Union in 1993, had a significant impact in the education of young citizens, especially with the advances of neoliberalist practices in Europe.

From the Autonomy Reform, the Italian educational system has been increasingly focusing on individual's merit and performance evaluations through individual assessments and grading systems. These factors not only measure intelligence, attention, and productivity levels in students but also prepare them for their future careers, since within a neoliberal logic, individuals inserted in the labor market operate based on competition and on a constant necessity to be productive and able to perform perfectly any tasks assigned to them.

Inside the school context, the need to adapt to the demands of an educational and occupational universe mainly characterized by competitiveness and productiveness can have effects on students, especially regarding their career choices. In the Italian educational system, adolescents are required to reflect on this issue throughout the school years, and for this reason, vocational guidance, career counseling activities and professionals in the area available to intervene in this context prove to be indispensable.

Additionally, the idea about their future becomes particularly decisive in their lives in the final year of high school years, which, in the Italian schools, is the fifth year, when students are between seventeen and nineteen years old. At this point of their lives, students are forced to decide on the path they must follow the end of their scholastic years.

Furthermore, the neoliberal logic and the need for students to define their careers at a young age may have a different impact when considering their families' socioeconomic aspects. Nota et al. (2020) brings up the idea of meritocracy as a myth, as its principles cannot be equally achieved by all individuals, thereby ignoring the backgrounds of each single individual. The authors also expound that, differently from the ones that compound the basis of the market, on the top of it, assuming high leadership positions, there are elitist groups.

> In the light of meritocracy, aspects such as lack of merit, failures, and difficulties are perceived in a negative way, seen as the result of inability, of a lack of commitment, of too few investments. As a consequence, unemployed people are such because they do not make efforts, they do not work hard, they are 'worthless' because if they were worthy, they would have a job and be paid. This is how they become 'deserving' and not 'unlucky'. (Nota et al., 2020, p. 32)

Additionally, the literature suggests a correlation between neoliberalism and war, and identifies the latter as a determining factor for the outbreak of conflicts worldwide. Thus, the construct of war can also impact the lives of school-aged youth, as it is present in various parts of the world nowadays and, with the advances of technology and globalization, it becomes impossible to be totally abstained from the awareness of such a topic. Consequently, professionals responsible for guidance activities, especially psychologists, must pay attention to how this aspect impacts the lives of adolescents, peculiarly considering their gender and socioeconomic status.

Activities proposed by vocational guidance professionals and career counselors can be useful in uncovering in a deeper way how socioeconomic factors may influence students' career choices. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that ideas, perspectives, and choices can

always change throughout one's life and that decisions can always be modified, exactly like circumstances over the course of life, especially from adulthood onwards.

An educational plan focused on students' autonomy, like the one proposed and explored by Freire (1987), where teachers do not behave as ones who hold superior knowledge from a hierarchical standpoint, but rather as individuals with different experiences and insights compared to students, while acknowledging that their pupils may also possess knowledge in areas unfamiliar or unexplored by the educator, could be presented as a possible solution for the Italian education system, which still tend to adhere to a banking logic of depositing, transferring knowledge from a hierarchical perspective.

Not only for the relationship between professor-students, but the development of a similar methodology adapted to the Italian culture in consonance with a temporal framework, could be useful also as new way to conduct career interventions in schools. This approach could inspire students to reflect on their social, economic, and cultural realities, enabling them to critically assess their current life situations and make connections with their visions for the future. The goal would be to create alternatives so their aspirations could become increasingly achievable in their own reality.

Cohen-Scali (2018) also proposes a program based on the study and promotion of certain psychological processes, such as critical consciousness, which integrates the notion of responsibility, the identification of the meaning of work and values, the abandonment of social stereotypes, the personal and collective knowledge management, and the promotion of empathetic behaviors and prosocial attitudes as pillars of a sustainable human development to be explored in the educational context, in order to better orient students toward their future.

Visions of Future and Guidance

Vocational Guidance, Counseling, and Life-Design Interventions

For Sood (2016), "guidance in simple terms means to direct or provide assistance to someone who needs help. It can help a person solve a personal, vocational, educational, or any other problem for which he is unable to find a solution his own" (p. 6). The author (2016) affirms also that guidance can be considered both a process and a concept.

> As a concept, guidance deals with maximum development of an individual to ensure that the individual can take his own decisions. As a process, guidance involves making an individual aware of his capacities and skills. Guidance as a process helps an individual to make the right decision in various aspects of life so that a balanced development of the individual can be facilitated. (Sood, 2016, p. 6)

For Cicatelli and Giuliani (2000, p. 13, my translation), "guidance, in the school context, means learning how to orient oneself, which means being able to choose". However, it should not be resumed as "an accessory factor substantially external to a daily school practice or to an extraordinary moment that accompanies either the final phases of a study cycle to favor choices regarding subsequent paths or the initial choices just made" (Cicatelli & Giuliani, 2000, p. 13, my translation).

> Guidance is considered an integral part of education. It helps to achieve the goals of education which include enabling a person to realize his inner potential. The main objective of education is the overall development of an individual and guidance helps to realize this objective. (Sood, 2016, p. 6)

The National Association of Guidance Counselors (ASNOR) (2024, my translation) states that guidance means an internal compass that helps one determine one's life goals and achieve them with clarity. In this direction, when one syntonize their inner domains of values, dreams, and expectations, guidance becomes a powerful tool for manifesting the life they desire for themselves.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as cited in Cicatelli and Giuliani (2000), "guiding means enabling individuals to become aware of themselves and, consequently, to progress in their studies and professions" (p. 73, my translation). In such a way, this definition is related to the changes required by individual's lives, and it has the purpose of contributing to the progress of society and achieving the full development of the human person.

> Guidance is a process that extends throughout the entire lifespan and can involve both education and, consequently, the choice of educational training paths, and the exploration of professional opportunities, when aimed at understanding, even directly, the world of work. (ASNOR, 2024, my translation)

Ramakrishnan and Jalajakumari (2013) state that "guiding and counselling aim to orienting individuals to face the ever-changing challenges in today's fast-moving technological world" (p. 105). This point shows a significant importance as even eleven years after the explored article was published, the changes presented there continue to occur. This way, the authors (2013) point out the importance of researchers in the area of guidance "to visualize the needs of future generations in facing unknown realities and suggesting new methods of developing built-in resources for this purpose" (p. 105).

Vocational guidance is a process of assisting the individuals to choose an occupation, prepare for it, enter upon it and progress in it. It is concerned primarily with helping individuals make decisions and choices involved in planning a future and building a career. (Ramakrishnan & Jalajakumari, 2013, p. 106)

Cicatelli and Giuliano (2000, p. 13, my translation), affirm that "attention to guidance developed in Italy in the 1990s. Previously, the issue was addressed periodically". For the authors (2000, my translation), this situation can be justified by the historical delay in mass education in Italy. Also, the duration of compulsory education, the rigidity of education paths, and the high level of dropout rates had been, for a long time, reasons for such a weakness, especially if compared to other European countries.

According to the Education Commission, as cited in Sood (2016), "guidance should be regarded as an integral part of educational and not as a special, psychological, or social service which is peripheral to educational purposes" (p. 6). The author (2016) complements the idea stating that guidance encompasses problem-solving abilities, understanding a person's own qualities and their surroundings, so their development can happen concomitantly with the environment they are insert. To summarize, "guidance involves undertaking multifaceted activities to ensure that the developmental goal is achieved" (Sood, 2016, p. 7).

Guidance and counseling, despite being topics related to each other as both refer to the search of helping an individual to find solutions for an apparent dilemma, differ in terms of their praxis. For instance, Sood (2016) affirms that counseling is "a process that involves a lot of sessions wherein the counselee and the counsellor talk to each other, discuss the problem, and share information to find the best solutions for it" (p. 28).

Guiding, on the other hand, involves listening to a problem, discussing, and suggesting possible ready-made solutions. After that, it is the individual who must decide which solution they prefer to adopt. This process, however, can be repeated several times for the person to understand perfectly the problem and choose how to solve it (Sood, 2016).

Guichard (2018) states that nowadays the interventions offered to individuals in industrialized societies that help them direct their working lives have no longer being named "vocational guidance" or "career counselling and career education". According to him, the most recent nomenclature for these practices is "life-design interventions", which brings a broader idea of life design interventions that can direct people's lives in different roles, and not only guiding people to a suitable paid work and a professional career (Guichard, 2018, p. 15).

Duarte (2018) states that "counselling practices in a broad sense are adjusting to better assist the world's workforce in adapting and surpassing new and different situations" (p. 83). However, for the author (2018), just these elements are nowadays do not show to be enough, so there is a need for new models, and "the present-day consideration of career counseling as part of life design counseling helps individuals to design their own lives, in a society that no longer provides for the easy choice of a stable trajectory" (Duarte, 2018, p. 83).

Guidance and counselling enable students in enriching the perspective and promoting the attitude towards resolving educational, vocational, and personal problems. The world of work continues to change as a result of escalating economic globalization and technological advancements. As a result, the transition from school to work continues to become more difficult as the range of skills and dispositions need to compete for desirable occupations. (Ramakrishnan & Jalakumari, 2013, p. 109)

Thus, vocational guidance activities and counseling should not only consider the individual and contextual characteristics, such as economy, social status, family contexts, etc. of a student in relation to the society there are insert, but also the changes, especially the technological ones, that are constantly occurring, in order to obtain more realistic results regarding their self-awareness and career plans.

> Vocational guidance helps an individual choose the right occupation and then prepare for it and track progress accordingly. The main aim of it is to help individuals build a better future and choose the right career. Vocational guidance helps an individual to realize his potential and skills and then on this basis decide the right career. It also helps an individual to develop the right attitude towards work. (Sood, 2016, p. 7)

For Fuster, as cited in Ramakrishnan and Jalajakumari (2013), "counseling is a personalized and individualized process for helping the individual to learn and acquire habits, skills, attitudes and interests which make him a normally adjusted being" (p. 109). The goals and possible consequences of this process would be "helping the client move towards a greater level of self-understanding and self-acceptance" (Ramakrishnan & Jalajakumari, 2013, p. 109).

After this process, individuals may be more prepared to face the world of work, which "is changing fast and much more research is required to help the traditional worker to switch over to new technological gadgets and learn to be independent of others" (Ramakrishnan & Jalajakumari, 2013, p. 109). In addition to it, Sood (2016) recognizes that "the need for guidance has increased because of the advancement in technology, social change, globalization, need for outstanding leadership, changes in morality and integrity, lofty aspirations and so on" (p. 9).

Students have to be helped in developing an integrated and adequate picture of themselves and their role in the rapidly changing occupational world. The career guidance is provided by the consultants so that an individual can easily select an appropriate occupation and education which goes well with their capabilities, skills and interests. In these circumstances, it is essential to help and guide the youth to worthwhile channels through the introduction of guidance and counseling services on a universal scale in our educational institutions. (Ramakrishnan & Jalajakumari, 2013, p. 110)

According to Nota et al. (2020), "more and more research and studies underline the complexity and unpredictability of the labor market, of professional actions and individual careers" (p. 41). In this way, theories that made sense in the past may be considered inadequate nowadays, since this current generation do not encounter "the same linearity and predictability of professional life and personal characteristics and considered decision-making and professional development as logic and deterministic" (Nota et al., 2020, p. 41).

Moreover, these approaches interpreted professional life as a planned sequence of stages. Concepts such as career identity, career planning, career development and career stages, that were used to predict people's adjustments to different working environments, were based on the idea of stability of both contexts and people's behaviors. (Nota et al., 2020, p. 41)

Dealing with students and their prospectives for the future cannot be reduced to a simple cause-effect panorama, since adolescents are still developing themselves. According to Nota et al. (2020), it is important to consider that career counseling deals with the dynamism, sensibility and complexity of individuals, their group interactions and general connections, their constructed systems that can be susceptible to changes and its consequences.

Thus, in order to consider other alternatives for the classical models of vocational guidance, which have their roots in neoliberalism, professionals in charge of such projects must consider the individuality of each participant, the contexts in which they are inserted, and how they perceive the issue of work itself. Furthermore, understanding how they percept their futures and ways to prepare them to achieve their goals within their possibilities are decisive points for a sustainable career development.

Future Orientation and Work

According to Cambridge Dictionary Press (n.d.), the word "future" can be a noun that indicates "things that will happen to someone or something in a time that is to come", or a verb tense used to mention "something that will happen". HarperCollins Publishers (n.d.) define "future" as the period that will come after the present, or the things that will happen after the current time. In this way, based on its literal definitions, it can be understood that the word "future" refers to a period of time that does not exist yet. In other words, this term encompasses something that is unknown.

For Poli (2021, my translation), despite the future is essential to us for being a fundamental element of human nature, we do not know yet how to talk about, discuss, or articulate the idea of future. Comisso and Jeffrey (2023) assume that "critical future scholars should not predict the future but center it as an important object of inquiry through an individual and collective images of the future" (p. 6).

Poli (2021, my translation) also mentions that, when it comes about the idea of future, there are two widespread attitudes: one that sees the future as a collection of technological gadgets, and another one that sees a future characterized by multiple prophecies of catastrophic events. Unquestionably, understanding the concept of the future is important for the development of a pedagogy focused on the future of students.

> Studying the future is difficult for any type of scholar, as the future is uncertain, multiple, and complex systems require not just the inclusion of diverse groups, but also the consideration of the worlds that have been and are currently being created. (Latour and Simons, as cited in Comisso & Jeffrey, 2023, p. 5)

The idea of "future" and the uncertainty that such a concept brings with it can appear as a concern for students who find themselves confronted by the task of planning their lives and, consequently, their work careers after the school years.

Comisso and Jeffrey (2023) affirm that with this uncertainty comes a social preoccupation over individuals' futures as its images tend to be presented in a way that makes us uneasy to make sense of the future itself. Following these statements, the authors (2023) focus on the ideas of fear and anxiety attained to the concepts and observances about the future.

According to Peccei, as cited in Poli (2021 p. 25, my translation), "the most important factor upon which the human destiny will depend on is human quality itself". Hence, for the author (2021), shaping the future of new generations should be considered a central theme within the scope of the pedagogical sciences. Therefore, Poli (2021, p. 25, my translation) also argues that "a pedagogy that is not oriented towards the future makes no sense".

Nowadays, career counselors have to consider the idea that dealing with the future means also reflecting on how to face some alarming global threats, such as increasing inequalities, wealth and job polarization, increasing peoples' movements, with raising migration rates, natural resources' depletion, the impact of technology on the labor market and on living conditions, less and less dignified jobs, the paradoxical request addressed to people to become more competitive, more resilient, to be constantly ready and good enough to deal with unpredictable opportunities, to become self-employed, despite the absence of real capital to put into play. (Nota et al., 2020, p. 44)

When associated with the ideas of working or building a career, the future becomes something much more fearful, especially considering that the "evolutions in the world of work force people to adapt to increasingly chaotic and uncertain contexts, manage transition throughout their lives and face grater precariousness that in the past" (Cohen-Scali, 2018, p. 318).

In consideration of the topic of work itself, the term is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary Press (n.d.) as "an activity, such as a job, that a person uses physical or mental effort to do, usually for money". For Guichard (2018) "work is an activity that each human being must perform in order to produce something necessary to meet one or more human needs" (p. 17). Going beyond these definitions, work plays a substantial role in human subjectivity and development.

Work plays an essential role in the construction of each worker's self. Work activity produces in workers a development of knowledge and know-how. It usually involves a variety of relationships with others, such as cooperation, competition, support, domination, and tutoring (…) As a result, work activity is an object of expectations of self-achievement: the individual perceives a certain active life as being that by which they can achieve what they expect to be in the future. (Guichard, 2018, p. 18)

Another important characteristic of work itself is the assumption that monetary exchange is necessary for its definition. Although these two terms are intrinsically connected and the monetary system of exchange of work for money and vice-versa has prevailed for centuries, it does not mean that work happens necessarily on a monetary basis (Guichard, 2018, p. 18). One example that does not follow this rule is the housework, when women, for instance, take care of their children instead of working in a company, and are not paid for this activity.

Guichard (2018), adds an example of creators of art pieces that are perceived in their communities but do not find buyers. In this case, their work is exchanged for recognition. The author (2018) also mentions other areas that can be mentioned as examples of work that follow a different concept of exchanges, such as jobs, craftmanship, self-entrepreneurship and local systems of trade.

The changes that have occurred throughout the second half of the 20th century to the present days have been influenced by neoliberalism and its policies. "The evolution of the labor market is also reflected in the contractual changes that characterize postmodern economies" (Ferrari, 2010, p. 30). For the authors (2010), from the 1970s on, professional changes that adults come across in their working lives have become increasingly frequent, to the point that some authors started to consider them as a rule rather than an exception in today's work market.

This way, to cope with the demands of today's job market and the progressive limited control over events such as job loss or corporate reorganizations, a higher level of realism and the ability to plan or adapt are required. Consequently, workers must be always more and more adaptable, versatile, and tolerate with diversity and uncertainty to effectively work in changing environments. Not only all these requirements, but workers are also continuously stimulated to learn new job skills and complete their professional tasks (Ferrari, 2010).

Nevertheless, since the beginning of the twentieth century, the main purpose of guidance has been to prepare individuals to contribute to companies' economic development and improve people's employability, making them more productive, flexible and adaptable to the needs of business. (Plant, as cited in Cohen-Scali, 2018, p. 317)

The same levels of adaptability and organizational skills related to the future is expected from adolescents, especially regarding students in their last year of high school. This way, activities related to vocational guidance and career counseling play an important role in schools, as we know that this necessity to choose and prepare for the future and, consequently, the work market, can pressure students psychologically, putting them under considerable stress.

At the root of the neoliberal policies that characterized the last decades, there are the concepts of competition, individuality, egoism, and little attentions has been given to solidarity, collaboration, social responsibility, relationships, and, overall, to sustainability and inclusion. (Nota at al., 2020, p. 47)

Cohen-Scali (2018) recognizes that the scientific community has a mission to reconsider the purpose of vocational guidance and develop new methods and paradigms aligned with the idea of contributing to "the development of a peaceful society where individuals' needs and the common good would be fully compatible and articulated in the concept of mutualism proposed by Parsons, in 1984" (p. 317).

Nota et al. (2020) defend the idea that career counseling and guidance should "encourage people to look at the external reality and at what is going to happen in the future, by keeping in mind that this cannot be interpreted and manipulated depending on one's own interests, passions, and human capital" (p. 47). Moreover, the authors (2020) consider inclusion and sustainability as possible "strategies to improve the economic growth and the development of societies.

In the direction of making vocational guidance and career counseling more sustainable disciplines, it is necessary to engage in dialogue both with schools and with students themselves. Not only professionals responsible for these activities must understand the contexts in which each student is inserted, but it is also essential for the pupils to have this self-awareness. Furthermore, concepts such as inclusion, dignity, human and workers' rights, self-development and self-fulfillment need to be explored in order to make them clear to all individuals involved in the activities.

Alternatives for a Sustainable Vocational Guidance

In recent times, the labor market has been going through significant changes, especially due to the rapid technological advancements and job instabilities, which require employees to constantly update and adapt to new demands. Arntz, Gregory, and Zierahn, as cited in Massoudi et al. (2018) state that "the fast-paced and intense technological evolution put entire occupational sectors at risk of automation and computerization and, at the same time, create a need for new professional skills and profiles" (p. 94). Another problem, according to Duarte and Cardoso (2018) is "employment precarity as another consequence of globalized economies" (p. 215).

> In 2014, around 59% of the European Union's workforce had full-time permanent contracts while the remainder were in a more precarious position: freelance (11%), marginal part-time (9%), permanent part-time (7%), fixed-term employment (7%), temporary agency work (1%) and apprenticeship or training contracts (2%). (Broughton et al., as cited in Duarte & Cardoso, 2018, p. 215)

Nevertheless, the current work model still follows neoliberal standards, as explored in the previous topic, and, in an effort to prepare individuals for the demands of their future workplaces, vocational guidance and career counseling also tend to assume a neoliberal posture in their approach with students and in the way to provide feedback for their most suitable career choices, given that for more than a century, career guidance has been working to better adapt individuals for a specific job, in the direction of better economic results for the entire society and for the individual themselves (Cohen-Scali, 2018).

Plus, for Romito (2017) "post-Foucauldian studies have shown that guidance is used as an empowering technology and as an expression of neoliberal governmentality that aims to integrate subjects in practices of optimization and self-regulation" (p. 2). For the author, areas such as psychology, counseling, guidance etc. rely on "an increasingly relevant form of power-knowledge, establishing connections between the aspirations and the authorities and projects of individual lives" (Romito, 2017, p.2).

> Relying on the work of Michel Foucault, researchers of contemporary social policies have pointed out that programs promoting individual self-realization constitute key neoliberal technologies producing a particular kind of well-regulated freedom as both an effect and an instrument of government. (Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde, as cited in Romito, 2017)

In this way, professionals involved in vocational guidance and career counseling need to seek sustainable alternatives for such disciplines. Nota et al. (2020) consider needful to consider the concepts of inclusion and sustainability itself when thinking about vocational guidance and career counseling. "The global problems we are experiencing are encouraging us to take into consideration inclusion and sustainability as strategies to improve the economic growth and the development of our societies" (Nota et al., 2020, p. 47).

The idea of inclusion explored by Nota et al. (2020,) "is strictly connected to the one of unicity" (p. 48), in other words, "inclusion is recognizing that we are 'one' even though we are not the same" (Asant, as cited in Nota et al., 2020, p. 48). Considering these definitions, Nota et al. (2020) add that "the idea of common areas and contexts becomes more relevant and, therefore, also the idea of places that are inclusive from a structural standpoint" (p. 48).

In addition, Nota et al. (2020) bring up the idea that inclusion is intrinsically related to dignity, since it "involves the recognition of human dignity in all of its expressions as stated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948" (p. 48). The authors (2020) add the that "applying the principles and values of human rights to everyone is an indispensable condition for inclusion, even in those cases in which vulnerability and discrimination represent evident violations, too often tolerated, of said purposes" (p. 48).

> Inclusion implies that every person, with no distinction and valorization of his/her uniqueness, can actually own and exploit all of the rights and fundamental freedoms underlined by the International Rights and the democratic constitutions. There is the involvement of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. (Nota et al., 2020, p. 48)

In relation to career guidance, Nota et al. (2020) affirm that "in the field of career counseling and vocational designing, the topic of inclusion acquires a crucial role because it aims at professional design and at ensuring the right to work" (p. 49). It means that in this scenario, to be inclusive means to give everyone the opportunity to have access to a dignified work, even the ones in more vulnerable positions.

Realizing career counseling activities, to the benefit of people with vulnerabilities, acquires considerable importance from a social point of view since the help provided is inspired by normalization, inclusion, by guaranteeing active participation to educational, social, and professional contexts. It promotes the necessity to focus the attention on respecting rights and human dignity. (Nota et al., 2020, p. 49)

In relation to the concept sustainability, which, according to Nota et al. (2020), is also important to consider new models of career counseling and vocational guidance, refers "to the idea of maintaining/conserving over time, existing conditions and abilities to grant support and sustainment without creating degradation" (Nota et al., 2020, p. 51).

In order for sustainable development to acquire the connotation of sustainability it is important not to limit it to merely satisfy the needs of present generations, but also to self-regulate so that it becomes able to satisfy also the needs of the generations to come. A change in the system of values is also needed. (Nota et al., 2020, p. 51)

Nota et al. (2020), adds that for a "concept of sustainable development, the idea of being an integrative concept is of paramount importance. It involves as its three main dimensions environmental, social, and economic aspects" (p. 51).

In its environmental aspect, sustainability "primarily takes into account the integrity of the terrestrial ecosystem and the quality of the environment, intended as a good that allows the improvement of the quality of life and, consequently, development" (Nota et al., 2020, p. 52).

Following, "economic sustainability pertains to the ability to create income and work for people's sustainment with a view of long-term sustainable and intergenerational equality." (Nota et al., 2020 p. 52). The authors (2020) also include the fact that this type of sustainability cannot

be achieved without the first one. Plus, the contexts in which our society is inserted nowadays display economic and social instability and inequalities.

> Today we live in a context characterized by uncertainty, complexity, change, globalization, and inequality. All these phenomena have a great impact on the wellbeing of people, groups, and the community. An important aspect is, for example, the polarization of wealth and income, whereby within each country a small minority of the population own an ever-expanding wealth, while a large portion of the remaining population experiences difficulties, struggles to avoid falling in a spiral of poverty, and remains powerless when in front of the reduction of their level of wellbeing. (Nota et al., 2020, p. 63)

According to Hansmann et al., as cited in Nota et al., 2020, "this is a two-way interaction: the way in which economy is handled has an impact on the environment and environmental quality has its impact on economic results" (p. 52). Plus, for Rigamonti, Sterpi, and Grosso, as cited in Nota et al. (2020), "sustainable economy aims at modulating financial systems in relation to the regenerative capacity of the ecosystem" (p. 52). In turn, "social sustainability aims at an equal social distribution of benefits and coasts that come from a world in which men are able to manage the environment" (Nota et al., 2020, p. 52).

> Social sustainability is therefore based on the concept of social equity as an ethical principle since it is not possible to talk about development when inequalities in income distribution and in living conditions are present. It aims at ensuring well-being for all citizens, both within individual countries and on a global scale, while also giving attention to future generations. (Nota et al., 2020, p. 52)

Lastly, Von der Heijden and De Vos, as cited in Nota et al. (2020), present the idea of career sustainability as "the sequence of an individual's different career experiences, reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, crossing several social spaces, and characterized by individual agency, providing meaning to the individual" (p. 52).

> While the individual still represents the core of the process, at the same time that what happens in professional life is the result of interconnections, influences, contextual variables that are not always easy to detect and control. In this way, sustainable careers not only concern the individual management of what happens at a professional level, but mostly the need to create a strong collaboration among people with different responsibilities, such as family members, colleagues, employers, the educational system, the society as a whole so that the life of the individual can develop the sustainability trait. (Nota et al., 2020, p. 53)

Certainly, the authors (2020) recognize that "there is the idea that ensuring an individual strong relation between work activities, needs, values, and interests is a complex and dynamic process" (p. 52) in the contribution to the concept of social sustainability. Nota et al. (2020) also point out that the ones interested in career activities could give their contributions to the promotion of an equal and sustainable development along with their assessments.

> This implies that the focus of career activities has to be shifted from an analysis of one's own personal characteristics, interests, attitudes, and competences, as it is still the case of today, to the contribution a person can give in the promotion of equal and sustainable development. (Nota et al., 2020, p. 53)

For Baumgartner, as cited in Nota et al. (2020), "it is also a matter of integrating in an educational and professional path, the knowledge and skills needed in order to conduct a sustainable professional activity" (p. 54) not only for the promotion of sustainable career activities and plannings, but also for a sustainable idea of work. This brings a link with the idea of decent work, that the International Labor Organization, as cited in Di Fabio (2018) defines as "productive work under conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity" (p. 175).

The idea of decent work is consequently related to work sustainability and plays a fundamental role in considering the development of sustainable career education and vocational guidance. According to Massoudi et al. (2018) the first also lies in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) which its 23rd article bring the following ideas:

> Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment; everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work; everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.; everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests. (United Nations, 1948)

Duffy et al., as cited in Massoudi et al. (2018) present a "psychological perspective" (p. 96) to the concept of decent work. Duffy et al., as cited in Massoudi et al. (2018) agree that it is important "also considering people's subjective needs and experiences in order to offer a complete definition" (p. 96).

Following, they add the following components as essential for the concept of decent work: "physical and interpersonal safe working conditions, hours that allow free time and adequate rest, organizational values that complement family and social values, adequate compensation and access to adequate health care." (Duffy et al., as cited in Massoudi et al., 2018, p. 96).

For Massoudi et al (2018), in order to better conceptualize decent work, it is important to understand how workers perceive their workplaces, "since satisfaction with work contents depends on how workers perceive the characteristics of their tasks and attribute meaning to them" (p. 96). Plus, the authors (2018) also illustrate that decent work, in a worker's perception can be related to meaningful work, that is, "from work that people find worthwhile, as well as from work that gives people a sense of purpose" (p. 97).

> More recently, it has been emphasized that decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that are productive and deliver a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families. Decent work means better prospects for personal development and social integration, and freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives. (International Labor Organization, as cited in Di Fabio, 2018, p. 175)

In this way, Di Fabio (2018) agrees that decent work is completely related to the sense of purpose of one's life, by stating that "decent work is therefore inherently connected to the full realization of oneself and one's own authenticity for achieving meaningfulness in work and life" (p. 176).

Along with these lines, the concepts presented such as inclusion, sustainability, and decent work are directly correlated, and together they can be used as means to enable a new form of thinking and conducting vocational guidance, in order to move away from the neoliberal parameter

focused on productivity and competition with the finality to generate resource and enrich a small percentage of the population.

Furthermore, it is important for students to keep these concepts in mind, especially the ones related to decent work. In this way, they would be able to direct their aspirations towards a labor that is dignified, that provides them the security that they need, and that brings meaning and tranquility to their lives.

Synthesis of the Elements Explored in the Second Chapter

Based on the information explored so far, it is evident that education, labor market, career guidance practices, and career counseling in Italy still follow neoliberal models, especially concerning the ideas of producing to generate economic value and social prestige for oneself and for others. For these to be achieved, individuals need to constantly find new ways to adapt to the new models required by their workplaces and become increasingly competitive in order to exceed themselves and their colleagues' outcomes.

This logic is also explored by the Italian educational system, through the grading system, for instance, as observed in the previous chapter of this thesis. Consequently, students tend to initiate the stage in their lives where they must start the university or working with a mindset focused on competition and constant success in their productions and achievements, which can produce positive results for the system, but, at the same time, negative results for individuals, such as dissatisfaction with their professional or extending to their personal lives at a long term.

Moreover, the concept of merit is very present nowadays in Italy, both in the educational and in the professional fields. Currently, in the country, the ministry responsible for educational

matters, which previously was named Ministry of Education, has been called Ministry of Education and Merit since the decree-lay of November 11, 2022, no 173[4].

> The Ministry of Education and Merit is assigned the functions and tasks pertaining to the State in matters of school education, university, and advanced artistic, musical, and choreutics training, as well as scientific and technological research. In these three main areas of intervention, expect for fields of competence reserved for other entities and organizations, the Ministry also performs functions of regulation, support, and enhancement of the autonomy granted to educational, university, advanced artistic and musical training institutions, and research institutions. (MIUR, n.d., my translation)

The idea of merit can result in the meritocracy, which can lead people to erroneous thoughts of who deserves and who does not deserve success in their lives, especially considering that people who come from conservative familiar economies tend to have more opportunities in life and, consequently, more academic and professional success. "People who manage to have success, richness, and wellbeing tend to believe that what they have is related to talents, personal qualities, hard work, merits, considered as something natural and taken for granted, not as the result of privilege and exploitations" (Nota et al., 2020, p. 35).

Career guidance, whether vocational guidance or, in a more technical and professional oriented perspective, career counseling, should not only be aware that these aspects are structurally present in our current society and are part of a plan for the country to be adapted to the requirements and the agenda of the European Union, but should also consider alternatives to this system,

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[4] Decreto-legge 11 novembre 2022, n. 173. Disposizioni urgenti in materia di riordino delle attribuzioni dei Ministeri. Effective date of the provision on November 11, 2022, and converted with modifications by Law No. 204 of December 16, 2022. Retrieved from: https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:decreto.legge:2022-11-11;173

considering that this way of building a future for the young ones who are still in their school years may not lead to long-term success and may result in adults unsatisfied with their professional lives.

The alternatives presented for this situation already exist and need to be further explored and implemented in schools. Among them are activities focused on inclusion, as for Nota et al. (2020), this is a fundamental characteristic for a long-term solid career development, as well as a better understanding and application of the concept of sustainability itself, in its "economic, environmental, and social aspects" (Nota et al., 2020, p. 51). Hence, these concepts must be clear not only to career guidance professionals but also to the individuals participating in the proposed activities.

Furthermore, it is important to assess what participants consider decent work, in other words, a work that is dignified, that brings them personal satisfaction, financial stability, and familiar security. It is also important, when considering inclusion and sustainability in association with this one, to understand how it is possible for each individual to achieve this goal, taking into consideration that the labor market in Italy still follow neoliberal patterns and professional insecurity is still a reality. Therefore, bringing awareness in school contexts about human rights and dignity in work and labor is certainly an alternative to be considered for a better exploration of the concept of decent work.

Moreover, economic reality may also influence how people perceive their future career choices. The next section of this work will explore how it may happen in practice using data from students currently in the last year of high school, collected within an Italian school context. This way, we will be able to evaluate if student's socioeconomic status and gender influence somehow their anticipatory thinking.

Application and Analysis of Socioeconomic Status and Future Perspective Topics

Introduction

As explored in the first and second chapters of this thesis, educational systems, labor market itself, vocational guidance and career counseling practices that do not consider the constant changes in society and the contexts and subjectivities of individuals, tend to follow neoliberal patterns. When applied to students in the final school year, such models can influence their choices for the future.

According to Nota and Soresi (2010), and Cohen-Scali (2018), the ongoing changes in the labor market require workers to be increasingly adaptable, versatile, productive, and constantly updated. Therefore, professionals focused on vocational guidance and career counseling must be careful not to perpetuate this progressively demanding logic, especially when it concerns school-aged students, who, in the Italian society, are already inserted in a context that follow neoliberal demands.

Thus, to develop a more solid long-term career guidance model, it is important to add some points to the debate. Nota et al. (2018), for instance, present as fundamental pillars for this development, the themes of inclusion and sustainability in its environmental, economic, and social fields, in addition to the concept of social justice. Furthermore, the concept of decent work, largely explored by Massoudi et al. (2018), and related to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), can also be adopted for the formulation of more sustainable guidance activities.

Additionally, components such as gender and socioeconomic reality of individuals can influence their perspectives for the future, especially in cases where they consider meritocratic ideals as a guide for their decisions. Hence, it becomes necessary to consider the relationship between students' family economy and their future projections, and then analyze how they perceive their career possibilities and the paths for their possible achievements.

This way, vocational guidance instruments such as "Designing my Future" developed by Santilli et al. (2017), which focus on students' resilience and future orientation, "Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory", developed by Soresi, Nota and Ferrari (2012), as an instrument to understand how individuals deal with changes and transitions in life, "Thoughts on development and economy of the future", by Perry (2005), adapted to Italian by Soresi and Nota (2018), and a quantitative questionnaire about peace and war, that aims to evaluate people's propension to give value to these two elements in relation to socio-political aspects, in association with the analysis of students' parental economic conditions, are important tools for the understanding of the correlations between their economic reality, their interests, and their future career choices.

Another crucial alternative for this neoliberal situation in vocational guidance contexts is the consideration of a person's singularity, including their own subjectivity and how their previous knowledge can contribute not only to their learning as an alternative for the baking education model as proposed by Freire (1987), but it also places the individual themselves in the center of their learning and evaluating of their future possibilities processes.

Consequently, vocational guidance can be an individual practice without ignoring one's socioeconomic contexts and previous mental constructions and knowledge. Freire (1987) in the development of this Pedagogy of Autonomy theory sustains that this alternative is also a form of combatting social oppression.

Research Hypothesis

From the literature explored in the theoretical framework, this research aims to analyze how socio-demographic variables – gender and socioeconomic status – can impact on career guidance and planning in adolescents. Specifically, we hypothesize that:

1.   If there were significant differences in gender and socioeconomic status in the subsequent variables: concern, control, curiosity, confidence, conservative economy, social economy, propensity to sustainability, decision-making, internality, collecting information, peace, war, future, urgency, merit, and quiet quitting.

2.   If there were significative differences among participants with a conservative economy vision and the ones with a social economy vision in the following variables: career adapt-abilities inventory, optimism, hope, negative view, future orientation, resilience, concern, control, curiosity, confidence, propensity to sustainability, decision making, internality, collecting information, peace, war, future, urgency, merit, and quiet quitting.

3.   Finally, if the career adapt-abilities and future orientations constructs would predict the anticipatory thinking. In specific, we hope that these two constructs predict the anticipatory thinking in a significant and positive way.

Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted with a group of 91 adolescents aged between 17 and 20 years (average age = 18.2, DS = 0.65). The number of female participants was 62 (68.13%), of male was 26 (28.57%), and of other gender was 3 (3.3%). All participants are from a lyceum, the *Liceo Artistico Statale Amadeo Modigliani*, located in Padua, Italy, and attend to the 5th year of high school. Plus, regarding their nationalities, 80 students (87.91%) have exclusively the Italian nationality, 4 (4.4%) have dual citizenship, being 1 (1.1%) Italian-Argentine, 1 (1.1%) Italian-Tunisian, 1 (1.1%) Italian-Filipino, and 1 (1.1%) Italian-Danish. Other 7 students (7.7%) have other nationalities, being 2 (2.2%) Romanians, 3 (3.3%) Chinese, 1 (1.1%) Filipino, and 1 (1.1%) Moldovan. Furthermore, regarding the cities where they live, 89 students (97.80%) declare to live in Padua and its province, being 1 (1.1%) relative to Polverara, 1 (1.1%) to Albignasego, and 1 (1.1%) to Mestrino. The other 2 students (2.2%) declared to live in other cities, being 1 (1.1%) Vigonza, and 1 (1.1%) Venezia.

Instruments

In this study, one protocol developed by the La.R.I.O.S. – Research and Intervention Laboratory for Choice Guidance – of the University of Padua, was administered on the same day with the participant students.

The protocol consisted of the following instruments:

1)   A first part for collecting demographic data and students' thoughts related to the school contexts, such as subjects, performance, and interests. We also collected information about their family backgrounds, including parents' professions and educational fields, and their future expectations – professional and/or academic – in order to deduct their socioeconomic status. Hence, this first part was divided into three main information-gathering tools: one questionnaire about their future, one about how precise their ideas of future are, and the last one with questions about their expectations regarding their future.

- Questions about their future (La.R.I.O.S., 2023): This questionnaire consists of 5 open-ended questions, such as "Regarding my future, I would like to…, regarding my future, I worry about…, I foresee that in five years…, in five years maybe I should still…, and I think a job can be considered a good job only if…", in order to require participants to reflect on their personal and professional future, specifically on what they desire, their concerns, what they imagine that may happen in their personal and professional or academic lives at the end of their studies.

- How precise their ideas for the future are (La.R.I.O.S., 2023): One closed-ended question related to how accurate they ideas of future are, with answers like "I think I have very precise ideas", "I do not have precise ideas yet", "I have been reflecting on a reduced number of works and professions", "I know what profession I am interested in, but I would like to be more secure of my choice", and "I am already sure about the profession I want to pursue".

- Expectations regarding the future (La.R.I.O.S., 2023): This third tool consisted of four items to explore how much adolescents feel described by the following statements. Responses were measured by a 5-point scale, where 1 indicates "not at all", 2 "a little", 3 "enough", 4 "a lot", and 5 "extremely". The affirmations were:

a. It is useless for me to put an effort to think about my future… It will depend a lot on the case;

b. Even if I try to focus on what I could do in the future, something that will make me change my mind will happen;

c. Even if I make decisions about my future, something that will prevent me from achieving my personal goals will certainly happen;

d. Spending time thinking about my own professional goals is useless because what will be done will in fact depend on many other factors.

2)   PRO.SPERA (Soresi, Ferrari, Nota & Sgaramella, 2012): It consists of a questionnaire in which 22 statements are provided. Each statement refers to what a person might think or do. The modality of response to these affirmatives is measured using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 represents "describes me very little", 2 "describes me a little", 3 "describes me enough", 4 "describes me a lot", and 5 "describes me extremely". This tool aims to measure three main factors: optimism, hope and negative view. The dimension of optimism was calculated on five items and refers to statements such as "Generally, I am a person full of enthusiasm and optimism" ($\alpha = .89$). The hope factor instead is inferred from nine items including "At the end, I know I will have what I desire" ($\alpha = .88$). Finally, the dimension of negative view is calculated through the

remaining eight items of the questionnaire, and as an example of it, there are statements such as "The hopes I will have in the future will be few" ($\alpha = .81$).

3)   Designing my Future (Santilli et al., 2017): This instrument is aimed to assess the resilience and future orientation of participants. These two constructs are fundamental as they are associated with the construction and planning of the future. The questionnaire consists of 19 items, and the participants must answer using a 5-point Likert scale, expressing how much they agree with the statements provided. In this case, 1 represents "very little", 2 "a little", 3 "enough", 4 "a lot", and 5 "extremely". Resilience and future orientations aspects are measured as it follows:

- Future orientation ($\alpha = .91$): Refers to the thoughts, feelings, and ideas that one may have about their own future. This factor is measured by 11 items, including statements such as "Thinking about my future life fills me with hope", and "For my future, I have many precise goals".

- Resilience ($\alpha = .78$): Indicates the fundamental capacity to face adverse situations, challenges, and uncertainties that the future presents people with. This construct is measured through the 8 remaining items of the questionnaire. As examples of the affirmations related to this measure, there are "I consider myself capable of facing anything that might happen to me", and "After a failure, I do not get easily discouraged."

4)   Career Adapt-Abilities Inventory (Soresi, Nota & Ferrari, 2012): This instrument consists of a 24 items questionnaire that investigates how people deal with changes and transitions, such as transferring from one school to another, from on job to another, or from school to work

(α=.94). In this task, participants are expect to indicate how much they believe to possess each of these abilities, using a 5-point Likert scale where 1 represents "I possess this capacity very little", 2 "I possess this capacity a little", 3 "I possess this capacity enough", 4 "I possess this capacity very much", and 5 "I possess this capacity extremely". It is composed of 4 dimensions: the first one is the concern, in other words, how human beings see and prepare themselves for the following steps of their lives. An example of concern item explored in the questionnaire is "preparing for the future" (α =.86). The next one is the control, aspect that gives people self-responsibility after having been disciplined and persistent. An example of control in the tool is the item "counting on myself" (α=.84). Following the third aspect explored is curiosity, which allows individuals to perceive themselves in different situations. An example of this item in the questionnaire is "looking for the opportunities to grow as a person" (α =.80). Finally, the last category explored in this questionnaire was confidence, which expresses one's future actions in order to implement their life patterns. An example of this type of item in the tool is "overcoming obstacles" (α =.85).

5)   Thoughts on the Development and Economy of the Future (Perry, 2005; Italian adaptation by Soresi and Nota, 2018): This questionnaire consists of 11 items addressing topics such as the well-being and the future contentment of individuals. These topics are related to the influence of changes and developments that will be registered in the world of work and in the economy of a country. Due to these changes, economists and scholars of these actual transitions propose different hypotheses of development. In order to answer these items, the questionnaire counts with a 5-point scale in which 1 indicates that "you consider this way of thinking very inadequate for your job placement and professional fulfillment", while the value 5 represents that "you consider this way of thinking very suitable for your job placement and professional

fulfillment". Other values such as 2, 3, and 4 represent intermediate positions. This questionnaire requires reflecting on how students' labor market integration could be promoted after the end of high school education. Therefore, its objective is to evaluate which way of considering economy could facilitate or frustrate job placement and/or professional self-gratification. This tool is composed of two dimensions: social-economy and conservative-economy. The first one is more focused on analyzing social perspectives of economy. An example of these items is "To promote the development of the economy and employment, it is necessary to ensure that wealth and well-being are distributed equally" (α=.68). The second one is focused on a conservative perspective of economy and an example is "To promote employment and professional fulfillment, the focus should be mainly on competition, which stimulates people to strive and develop new ideas" (α=.70).

6)   2030 Agenda's Goals for Future Design Scale (Soresi, Nota & Santilli, 2019): This questionnaire focuses on 17 United Nations goals for sustainable and inclusive development (α=.92). It refers to the 2030 Agenda's projects and aims to encourage reflections and thoughts about one's future choices in an original and stimulating way. The main idea is to stimulate critical thoughts in participants and ensure that when making their future choices, they consider others but them, and on the possibility of accepting some renounces and postponing pleasures to pursue more challenging and social relevant goals. Participants are then supposed to answer to this type of questions by using one of the following options: "Almost not at all", "a little", "enough", "a lot", and "extremely". An example of questions that can be seen in this questionnaire is "In the future, there will certainly still be much to do to achieve a concretely equitable distribution of wealth.

How much could the issue of access to economic resources and their more equitable distribution influence your educational and career choices?".

7)   Ideas and Attitudes on School-Professional Future (Soresi, Nota, 2003): This questionnaire aims to encourage adolescents to reflect on how they approach the school-professional choices that they are about to make. It consists of 16 items to analyze these aspects. In this case, the scale used to answer these statements ranges from 1 to 7, and each value has a specific meaning. 1 means that the statement "perfectly describes your current situation and your point of view (decidedly YES)", 2 "greatly describes your current situation and your point of view (YES)", 3 "describes enough your current situation and your point of view (more YES than NO)", 4 "describes more or less your current situation and your point of view (neither YES nor NO)", 5 "describes a little your current situation and your point of view (more NO than YES)", 6 "does not describe your current situation and your point of view (NO)", and 7 "does not describe your current situation and your point of view at all (definitely NO)". This instrument is composed of three factors: the first one is decision-making and security about school and professional future; the second one is internality, and the third one is capacity of collecting information. An example of the first dimension is "Regarding the job I will have, my ideas are vague and confusing" (α=.93). An example of the second dimension is "Even if I decide to focus on what I could do in the future, something that will make me change my mind will happen" (α=.63). Lastly, an example of the third aspect is "I know how to collect the information that I need" (α=.72).

8)   Quantitative Instrument – Propensity to Value Peace or War and Related Socio-Political Aspects (La.R.I.O.S, in course of validation): This tool aims to investigate adolescents' propensity to value peace or war, in order to better understand how they position themselves on such issues in a historical moment marked by multiple changes. This questionnaire consists of 25 items derived from literature that has explored themes of peace and war, also in relation to the temperamental aspects of individuals. Participants were then invited to respond in order to express their level of agreement with these statements using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 means "Does not fit my idea at all", 5 for "Fits my idea perfectly", and 2, 3, and 4 represent the intermediate positions. This questionnaire includes 17 items that investigate the propensity to peace. Examples of this type of statement are "Peace helps us to respect all forms of life", and "I believe that peace is extremely important" (α =.78). The remaining 8 items examine their propensity for war and are described in statements such as "In some situations, war is necessary to ensure justice", "Sometime war is unavoidable" (α =.80).

9)   Is it better to have the egg today or the chicken tomorrow? (Italian adaptation of the "Consideration of Future Consequences Scale" by Strathman et al., 1994, La.R.I.O.S., 2023): This instrument is an adaptation of the 1994 version of Strathman's questionnaire and presents 12 statements that refer to how one tends to approach the future. Participants are invited to express their level of agreement with these items using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 means "Does not fit my situation at all" and 5 for "Fits my situation perfectly". In this case, we can assume that this questionnaire can be divided into two types of statements:

a. Present-oriented statements, so called "urgency" (α =.60), include 7 items that investigate how much a person is focused on today rather than on tomorrow. For example, "I am a person who prefers to take an action to address immediate concerns and problems, and that believes that future issues will somehow be solved.

b. Future-oriented statements, called "future" (α =.71), include 5 items that analyze how much the participant is oriented toward long-term planning and does not focus only on the present. An example of an item from this group is "I am a person who prefers to do today what will have positive consequences only in the long term, even decades from now, rather than acting based only on immediate and near-term consequences".

10)   Merit in School and in Society (Italian adaptation by Soresi e La.R.I.O.S., 2023, of the "Belief in school meritocracy as a system-justifying tool for low status students" by Wiederkehr et al., 2015, and "The meaning and role of ideology in system justification and resistance for high and low-status people, by Zimmerman, 2013, questionaries): This instrument presents 9 statements related to how individuals observe the concept of merit in the context of school and everyday life (α=.64). Participants were then invited to express their agreement with its statements using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 means "Does not fit my idea at all", 5 for "Fits my idea perfectly", and 2, 3, 4 represent the intermediate situations. Examples of affirmatives found in this questionnaire include "To succeed in school, one just needs to work hard", and "In Italy, working hard does not automatically lead to success".

11)   Quiet Quitting in Study (Italian adaptation by Soresi, La.R.I.O.S., 2023): This questionnaire presents 9 statements related to how individuals behave in their everyday lives, including both academic and work contexts (α=.81). Students are then required to answer to the first 7 statements selecting option 1 for "strongly disagree", 2 for "disagree", 3 for "neither agree nor disagree", 4 for "agree", and 5 for "strongly agree". Examples of statements that can be found in this part include "I am motivated to attend the classes" and "If a classmate can do the work for me, I let them do it". The two final affirmations, that consist of "How often do you take initiative during the lessons?" and "How often do you pretend to pay attention to avoid questions of interactions with the teacher" must be answered with "Never", "Rarely", "Sometimes", "Often", and "Always".

Procedure

To conduct this investigation, the laboratory, La.R.I.O.S., created a protocol composed by several questionnaires for students in the last high school year, which was administrated by me under the supervision of Professor Sara Santilli, with the collaboration of other interns of the laboratory, in written and presence modality on the 9th of November 2023. Its administration took one hour and a half, and the agreements for this practice were taken via email with the supervisor, professor Santilli, and the high school principal. We appositely created an informed consent and privacy treatment of sensitive data, that should have been signed by students who were over 18 years old, and by their parents if they were minors. As a matter of fact, before completing the protocol, all participants authorized the treatment of personal data in accordance with the Legislative Decree of 30th June 2003, n. 196, also called "Code regarding the protection of personal

data" and the Article 13 of the General Data Protection Regulation (EU Regulation 2016/679). Plus, in the presentation of my research, it was explained that they would receive a personalized report about their future projections and strengths.

Results

As a first step, we conducted a preliminary correlation analysis among the variables considered in this study. From *Table 1* emerges that the construct of optimism correlates positively with resilience (r =.640), future orientation (r =.632), control (r =.578), confidence (r =.522), concern (r =.454), and curiosity (r =.448). At the same time, it correlates negatively with the aspects of urgency (r = -.288), decision making (r = -.222), social economy (r = -.164), and peace (r = -.129). Hope is an aspect that correlates positively with the structures of future orientation (r =.736), resilience (r = .676), control (r =.718), concern (r =.596), confidence (r =.592), and curiosity (r =.535). Simultaneously, it correlates negatively with the aspects of decision making (r = -.370), and urgency (r = -.263). The construct of negative view correlates positively with the aspects of urgency (r =.403), and quiet quitting (r = .287). At the same time, it correlates negatively with the ideas of future orientation (r = -.636), resilience (r = -.450), control (r = -.475), concern (r = -.470), confidence (r = -.361), and curiosity (r = -.325). The construct of future orientation correlates positively with the aspects of future (r =.601), concern (r =.721), control (r =.682), confidence (r =.584), and curiosity (r = .528). It simultaneously correlates negatively with the constructs of decision-making (r = -.414), and urgency (r = -.377). The construct of resilience correlates positively with the aspects of future (r =.463), control (r =.750), confidence (r =.709), curiosity (r =.484), and concern (r =.460). At the same time, it correlates negatively with the

construct of decision-making ($r = -.320$). The construct of concern correlates positively with the aspect of future ($r = .651$), and negatively with the ones of urgency ($r = -.411$), and decision-making ($r = -.306$). The aspect of control correlates positively with the aspects of future ($r = .536$), conservative economy ($r = .323$), and propensity to sustainability ($r = .315$), and negatively with the constructs of urgency ($r = -.267$), and merit ($r = -.227$). The construct of curiosity correlates positively with the ones related to future ($r = .519$), conservative economy ($r = .372$), and propensity to sustainability ($r = .291$), and negatively with the aspects of urgency ($r = -.161$), and decision making ($r = -.157$). The aspect of curiosity correlates positively with future ($r = .446$), and conservative economy ($r = .438$), and negatively with decision making ($r = -.265$), and social economy ($r = -.232$). The career adapt-ability resources correlate positively with conservative economy ($r = .415$), and propensity to sustainability ($r = .415$), and negatively with decision-making ($r = -.320$). The aspect of conservative economy correlates positively with the constructs of war ($r = .413$), and future ($r = .347$). The construct of social economy correlates positively with peace ($r = .454$), propensity to sustainability ($r = .252$), and merit ($r = .233$). The aspect of propensity to sustainability corresponds positively with future ($r = .250$), and merit ($r = .259$). The aspect of decision-making corresponds negatively with future ($r = -.304$). The aspect of collecting information correlates negatively with the construct of peace ($r = -.218$). Peace correlates negatively with merit ($r = -.239$). The idea of future correlates negatively with urgency ($r = -.490$), and quiet quitting ($r = -.231$). Lastly, the construct of urgency correlates positely with quiet quitting ($r = .352$).

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1	.685**	-.636**	.632**	.640**	.454**	.578**	.448**	.522**	.594**	.271**	-0.164	0.181	-.222*	0.169	-0.016	-0.129	0.066	.315**	-.288**	-0.033	-0.161
	1	-.683**	.736**	.676**	.596**	.718**	.535**	.592**	.726**	.236*	-0.112	.309**	-.370**	0.132	-0.089	-0.135	0.060	.483**	-.263*	0.066	-0.155
		1	-.636**	-.450**	-.470**	-.475**	-.325**	-.361**	-.487**	-0.014	0.128	0.002	0.194	-.245*	-0.122	0.105	0.084	-.287**	.403**	0.073	.287**
			1	.564**	.721**	.682**	.528**	.584**	.750**	.262*	-0.110	.241*	-.414**	0.035	0.011	-0.061	0.052	.601**	-.377**	0.078	-0.177
				1	.460**	.750**	.484**	.709**	.712**	.299**	-0.112	0.186	-.320**	0.122	-0.028	-0.189	0.118	.463**	-0.137	0.106	-0.095
					1	.628**	.530**	.452**	.783**	.277**	-0.178	.237*	-.306**	-0.037	0.088	-0.152	.231*	.651**	-.411**	0.100	-.257*
						1	.641**	.767**	.904**	.323**	-0.045	.315**	-.341**	0.103	-0.024	-0.055	0.071	.536**	-.276**	.277*	-0.170
							1	.668**	.836**	.372**	-0.099	.291**	-0.157	0.077	-0.072	-0.021	0.107	.519**	-0.161	0.189	0.071
								1	.850**	.438**	-.232*	0.135	-.265*	-0.010	-0.085	-0.032	0.188	.446**	-0.127	0.136	-0.061
									1	.415**	-0.163	.292**	-.320**	0.040	-0.024	-0.079	0.177	.642**	-.295**	0.193	-0.130
										1	-.348**	0.006	-0.064	-0.014	-0.037	-0.185	.413**	.347**	0.106	0.168	0.060
											1	.252*	0.089	0.089	-0.148	.454**	-.439**	-0.060	-0.003	.233*	0.030
												1	-0.036	-0.069	-0.088	0.067	-0.113	.250*	-0.126	.259*	-0.027
													1	0.019	0.096	0.200	-0.128	-.304**	0.198	-0.126	0.144
														1	0.075	0.181	-0.178	0.062	-0.115	-0.048	-0.056
															1	-.218*	-0.035	-0.073	-0.032	-0.055	-0.059
																1	-.587**	0.009	-0.118	.239*	0.037
																	1	0.119	0.154	-0.035	0.100
																		1	-.490**	0.105	-.231*
																			1	0.063	.352**
																				1	0.094
																					1

Table 1 – Pearson r correlations

** The correlation is significant at 0,01 level (two-tailed).

*The correlation is significant at 0,05 level (two-tailed).

Label: 1 = optimism; 2 = hope; 3 = negative view; 4 = future orientation; 5 = resilience; 6 = concern; 7 = control; 8 = curiosity; 9 = confidence; 10 = career adapt-abilities inventory; 11 = conservative economy; 12 = social economy; 13 = propensity to sustainability; 14 = decision-making; 15 = internality; 16 = collecting information; 17 = peace; 18 = war; 19 = future; 20 = urgency; 21 = merit; 22 = quiet quitting.

To verify the first hypothesis, if there were significant differences in gender and socioeconomic status in the variable object of the study, we developed a multivariate analysis of variance. At an unitarian level we discovered significant differences in the gender variable for the construct of war among males and females [F (1;88) =14.848; p=.001]. As a matter of fact, the Wilks' lambda for gender is (16) =2.445; p=.006. Males showed a higher level than females for

the construct of war. The interaction effect between gender and socioeconomic status (ses) was not significant (MANOVA – table 2).

| | low ses | | | | medium ses | | | | high ses | | | |
| | males | | females | | males | | females | | males | | females | |
	m	ds	m	ds	m	ds	m	ds	m	ds	m	ds
concern	17.00	5.66	18.78	4.52	18.50	3.24	20.11	5.42	21.20	3.52	18.65	4.81
control	22.33	3.78	21.67	3.81	22.20	3.39	21.44	5.86	24.20	3.33	21.38	5.01
curiosity	19.00	5.29	23.44	4.75	21.10	3.00	21.37	5.34	23.10	3.07	20.12	3.40
confidence	22.17	3.87	21.11	3.89	21.80	2.53	21.93	5.17	24.30	2.95	20.46	4.45
conservative economy	14.67	2.88	16.00	2.74	16.40	3.24	15.89	3.46	17.50	2.42	14.96	3.19
social economy	22.33	3.72	23.11	3.76	22.50	3.47	22.67	3.22	20.00	3.13	22.67	3.22
propensity for sustainability	52.17	24.32	54.78	9.74	52.10	10.97	49.93	12.41	55.30	7.85	49.50	12.56
decision making	40.00	5.02	39.89	3.89	37.60	5.48	38.89	4.81	34.90	5.13	38.62	4.80
internality	12.33	4.08	13.78	2.44	13.40	1.71	13.93	2.66	12.70	1.70	13.96	2.24
collecing information	8.17	1.72	6.89	1.05	7.70	1.16	7.59	1.89	7.60	1.26	7.58	1.53
peace	38.00	5.29	37.67	4.00	35.00	5.60	38.41	5.38	33.80	8.07	38.15	4.76
war	18.00	4.47	16.89	4.78	20.30	5.96	14.93	4.58	21.60	4.77	14.77	4.08
future	16.50	2.81	19.11	3.48	21.00	2.83	20.56	4.19	20.10	3.35	18.27	3.54
urgency	18.83	1.47	17.56	3.21	17.50	3.27	16.26	2.63	15.90	3.78	16.62	3.51
merit	33.17	2.86	32.56	4.07	32.90	4.65	32.07	3.20	32.40	4.70	32.96	3.27
quiet quitting	25.33	2.73	25.78	3.46	26.70	4.22	24.15	2.98	24.70	2.50	25.15	4.18

Table 2 – Manova

Label: m = means; sd = standard deviations for males and females and their socioeconomic status (ses).

In order to verify the second hypothesis, specifically if there were significant differences among participants with a conservative economy vision and the ones with a social economic one in the variable object of the study, we conducted a univariate analysis, among and into groups, in order to understand which measured variables could affect social economy. It resulted that there is a correlation between the constructs of social economy and the ones of peace and war. As the propensity for social economy increases the propensity for peace also increases [$F_{(1;89)}$ =16.61; p=.001], and as the propensity for social economy decreases, the propensity for war increases [$F_{(1;89)}$ =13.507; p=.001] (ANOVA – table 3).

	Minor social economy		Major social economy	
	m	sd	m	sd
career adapt-abilities inventory	85.05	15.47	81.83	14.89
optimism	13.93	4.38	13.89	4.21
hope	27.86	6.10	28.06	6.13
negative view	17.98	5.45	18.09	5.38
future orientation	45.32	10.40	43.80	11.37
resilience	16.68	3.79	16.17	4.21
concern	19.86	4.73	18.26	4.65
control	21.82	4.85	21.86	4.61
curiosity	21.16	4.14	21.09	4.68
confidence	22.21	4.25	20.63	4.24
propensity for sustainability	49.88	11.26	53.40	13.98
decision making	38.07	4.78	39.00	4.96
internality	13.32	2.67	14.09	1.85
collecting information	7.73	1.46	7.31	1.62
peace	35.63	5.25	40.06	4.70
war	18.02	5.14	14.20	4.26
future	19.63	3.79	18.97	3.65
urgence	16.68	3.35	16.80	2.86
merit	32.21	3.83	33.00	3.06
quiet quitting	24.91	3.36	25.11	3.73

Finally, for the third hypothesis, we conducted an analysis of linear regression. The model considers career adapt-abilities and future orientation as predictors of anticipatory thinking. From this analysis, it emerged that the anticipatory thinking increases at the same pace of career adapt-abilities ($p = <.001$) and future orientation ($p = .025$) constructs. In specific, the model explains the variance of 44.5% (table 4).

Coefficient							
Model		Non-standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient		t	Sign.
		B	Standard error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	6.171	1.656			3.727	<.001
	Future orientation	0.095	0.042	0.275		2.287	0.025
	Career adapt-abilities inventory	0.107	0.029	0.436		3.628	<.001

a Dependent variable: Future

b predictor: (constant), future orientation, career adapt-abilities inventory.

Discussion

As discussed in the first section of this thesis, throughout chapters 1 and 2, neoliberalism is present in the daily-lives of school-aged youths. One of the ideas that underpinned the execution of this work was to consider the associations between neoliberalism in the country, the scholastic system, vocational guidance and career models, and how these points relate to one another and generate consequences for students in their final school year.

All these points were analyzed in a theoretical basis that focused on scientific productions already developed by Italian authors, such as Ferrari (2010), and Nota et al. (2020), who have a bibliography focused on the issue of vocational guidance, as well as authors from other nationalities engaged in the research of neoliberalism and education. From this analysis, it results that not only the school in the Italian context, whether the lyceum or the technical or professional institute, follow a neoliberal structure in its modus operandis, but also traditional vocational guidance models.

As extensively explored by Nota et al. (2020), classical vocational guidance patterns also tend to perpetuate neoliberalism when directing individuals to adapt to the current labor market and its dynamic paces of changes, instead of considering each individual's contexts and then developing a plan for their future based on their strengths and limitations.

In contrast to the neoliberal vision, it is interesting to recall the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for inclusive and sustainable development (Agenzia Coesione, n. d.). This plan is

structured around five main areas of intervention that correspond to the so-called "5Ps" of sustainable development, which highlights the interrelation between economic dynamics, social growth, and environmental quality, and are as follows:

1)   People: combating poverty and social exclusion and thus promoting the well-being and health of all individuals.

2)   Planet: ensuring a sustainable approach to natural and environmental resources.

3)   Prosperity**:** promoting sustainable models of both production and consumption, while also valuing the role of education and ensuring employment for all.

4)   Peace: fostering the development of an inclusive, non-violent global society free from any form of discrimination.

5)   Partnership: Proposing interventions that involve the collaboration of all countries on multiple fronts (Sustainability Award, n.d.).

This research aimed to analyze how the socioeconomic context and related variables can impact an individual's life from the perspective of vocational guidance. Specifically, this study was conducted in order to verify the relationship between gender and socioeconomic status in variables of our interest among participants with a high or low social economy in relation to the same variables, and lastly, the relationship between career adapt-abilities, future orientation, and anticipatory thinking.

From the preliminary analysis, it is perceptible that constructs such as "optimism" and "hope" correlate positively to "resilience" and "future orientation", "control", "confidence", "concern" and "curiosity", and negatively with "urgency" and "decision making". As part of "PRO.SPERA" questionnaire (Soresi, Ferrari, Nota, & Sgaramella, 2012), these two first aspects visibly relate in a positive way to constructs that indicate a positive view regarding the future and

oppose to those that report an imminent immediatism. As consequently expected, the construct of "negative view", which is part of the same questionnaire, correlates positively with the one of "urgency" and negatively with the one of "future orientation", since the construct itself suggests a negative prospect about the future.

On the other hand, "future orientation" and "resilience", which compose the questionnaire "Designing my Future" (Santilli et al., 2017), show a positive correlation with aspects related to career adapt-abilities inventory – "concern", "control", "confidence", and "curiosity" – and negatively with the immediatism of "decision making". Interestingly, the items of the "career adapt-abilities inventory", which considers the mechanisms and manners that a person has to face changes and transition moments in life, correlate positively with "conservative economy", and negatively with "decision making". Other interesting points to be observed are the positive correlations among the constructs of "conservative economy", "future" and "war", and "social economy", "peace", and "merit".

As regards the first hypothesis, the study has shown a correlation between gender and the construct of war. According to the result found in the data analysis, males have shown a higher level of interest in the topic of "war", than females. These results reinforce the ideas of Cohn (1987) about male preference for war and militarization, as a result of a military culture that perpetuates patterns of masculinity and sexist dominance, in which women's points of view are often excluded, and that should be, however, considered into gender studies.

Cohn's studies (1987) demonstrate that, since the past century, there is a strong gender component in the preference for war and militarism, with these being essentially preferred by men. The results of the research developed by me at the Italian school in Padua do not escape from this

logic, however, there is not enough data to analyze quantitatively why male students have shown a higher interest for the war topic than females.

Following, for the second hypothesis, it emerged, again, a correlation between the construct of "socioeconomic status" and the ones of "peace" and "war". This time, however, a positive correlation between social economy and propensity for peace is observable, and as the former increases, the latter increases as well. At the same time, as the propensity for social economy decreases, the propensity for war increases, since both constructs consequently have a counteractive correlation.

This correlation has already been explored in the past by Fearon and Laitin (2003), in research developed by them, that had as main characteristic the analysis of data from civil wars occurred from 1945 to 1999 in different countries, with different political, economic, and social contexts. "Using data on about 45 civil wars since 1960, Collier and Hoefler (1999, 2001) find similarly that measures of 'objective grievance' fare worse as predicators than economic variables" (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 76).

However, despite the classic literature based on data gathering and analysis of civil wars, many times indicating a present relationship between poverty and civil war, with poorer countries being the most affected by internal armed conflicts, the research developed by me with students from the last year of high school has actually demonstrated that the ones from a higher socioeconomic status has shown more interest in war topics.

Lastly, for the third hypothesis, it is clear that the anticipatory thinking construct can positively influence the future development of adolescents, as it emerged from the research that this construct increases at the same time as the "career adapt-abilities" and "future orientation" ones. According to Nota et al. (2020), although the current uncertainty that surrounds the world of

work can cause discomfort and amplify difficulties in the students, this situation can also be faced by them as a challenge, that "leads them to set goals to fight for, with all their hearts and soul, to compete in order to obtain the few possibilities available, in the meritocracy trap, experiencing, because of this, an intense pressure by family and educational contexts" (Kenny et al., as cited in Nota et al., 2020).

The results of the research show that the ones who can see their future from a positive pair of eyes and plan this moment of their lives are also adaptative to transformations that can emerge in their current and future lives. This way, these individuals can be considered more prepared for this context of work, which is characterized by such dynamism, as explored by Nota et al. (2020).

Hence, the challenge for psychologists and professionals involved with vocational guidance in the school context is, overall, related to the understanding of these issues faced by students in association with their socioeconomic realities, gender, war constructs, career adapt-abilities, and their anticipatory thinking.

After baring all this in mind, we may be able to create more sustainable environments not only in the educational set but also in work contexts, by shaping workers more aware of their contexts, real necessities, and skills, especially in what regards their future orientation and their response capabilities to the dynamism and urgencies of the environment, in other words, their ability to adapt to these challenges.

Plus, vocational guidance and career counseling tasks are important self-understanding tools, that should not be limited to school and work contexts for a period in which students or workers find difficulties moving forward. These instruments could be enlarged and used in different settings, especially from a psychological perspective, as self-awareness tools for patients.

Limits

Although statistically significant results have emerged from this research, as it happens in all research projects, this one has its limitations. The first one is that the participants did not participate in the project only by their individual willingness, but, in fact, they represented a convenience group chosen by me, after having my project accepted by the school principal.

Additionally, it is important to highlight that, even though the sample used was not small, future studies should consider a larger sample for a more significant generalizability, and not only 91 students. Also, regarding the characteristics of the participants, it can be affirmed that there is surely a disparity between the number of females (62), males (26), and others (3). The last one was excluded from the statistical analysis for being such a minor number. This significant difference could have influenced the results related to gender differences. Following, the fact that all students' participants in the research were part of the same school, the *Liceo Artistico Statale Amadeo Modigliani* in Padua, limits the generalizability of this study.

Other limitations are the type of instruments used in the administration and the time of the activity itself. In fact, only quantitative instruments were used, and those englobe the one protocol composed by 13 questionnaires, applied in one single meeting of one hour and a half. No qualitative methods, such as interviews, were applied. Quantitative instruments allow us to collect only a small portion of data, and it is known that, in order to achieve a more in-depth analysis and accomplish clearer insights on determined issues, it would be decisive to use qualitative methods as well.

Another limit encountered in this research is related to the first hypothesis formulated, in which we expected to find a significant result regarding the interaction effect between gender and socioeconomic status, and, contrastingly, we could not find the outcomes we had hypothesized.

After considering these limitations, it becomes clear that, for future works, it would be interesting to replicate the study with a larger number of participants, preferentially from different schools, and using quantitative and qualitative instruments, such as interviews and observations, also in a way to encourage adolescents' participation in research with this type of theme. This way, we could also obtain a more homogeneous sample in terms of gender, diverse socioeconomic status, and school backgrounds.

Practical Implications and Conclusion

Correspondingly to the arguments explored in the theoretical framework – chapters 1 and 2 – of the present thesis, and to the results we have reached, the observation of how necessary it is to consider the aspects that surround students' contexts in their last high school year become perceptible. From this perspective, professionals oriented to vocational guidance and career counseling can evaluate and maintain their interventions with this public more sustainable.

Among the various books and articles studied for the preparation of this present work, it is interesting how contemporary authors inserted in the Italian educational context (Ferrari, 2010, Nota et al., 2020) have already been considering such issues and developing plans to manage career interventions from a critical perspective to the neoliberalist perspective. This type of intervention also influences the lives of young ones, and therefore, old models need to be reevaluated and

restructured based on the social contexts of each moment in history, since quotidian elements can also impact the way how individuals perceive their reality and appraise their futures.

The school has a fundamental role as a bridge that links today's students with future professionals. Thus, interventions within the school environment are very important, especially those that encourage individuals to consider critically their current situations and evaluate their future perspectives based on that information. This is exemplified by the protocol developed by La.R.I.O.S. and applied by me and collaborators in the school where the practical part of this thesis took place.

The career adapt-ability inventory (Soresi, Nota, & Ferrari, 2012) is an important tool for evaluating students' anticipatory thinking, and it can be vastly managed by vocational guidance professionals and career counselors, as it stimulates students to think critically about their perceptions of current and hypothetical future situations, both in a professional and in a personal field. Notwithstanding, the questionnaire in question investigates adolescents' critical thinking based on the skills they already possess. Another significant tool to develop critical thinking in the target audience is the one called "designing my future" (Santilli et al., 2017), that provides insights into how students current feel when thinking about their future and how their skills support their ideas.

Nevertheless, based on our findings about students' interest for war topic, which has been heavily debated nowadays, given that serious conflicts that currently occur around the world, the "Quantitative Instrument – Propensity to Value Peace or War and Related Socio-Political Aspects" (La.R.I.O.S., in course of validation) is another instrument that shows to be very important for students, since it prompts them to evaluate their values in relation to such topics, and other economic, social, and political aspects related to the war, as explored by Kaldor (2007), Fearon

and Laitin (2003), and Cohn (1987). This way, classical studies on the topic of war showed, through this present thesis, to be still prevailing and in need of attention from educators, psychologists, counselors, and mental health professionals.

Freire (2005), another classical author in education studies, affirms that education can be a practice of freedom, that has as its main characteristic individuals' relationships with others and with the world. In this direction, career interventions in schools can also be effective by developing more instruments focused on strengthening the relationships among students and between them and the professionals responsible for such activities. The development of activities that strengthen the relationships among participants aligns well with the proposals of the 2030 agenda for sustainable and inclusive development in its five main areas of intervention: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership (Sustainability Award, n.d.).

To conclude, based on the material evidenced in the first and second chapters of this paper, in association with the research conducted by me at the Italian school, it is visible the necessity of complementing educational and psychological practices with students in their final school year with activities focused on their visions for themselves and for the future, through vocational guidance and career counseling.

These activities induce individuals to observe themselves and find their motivations, interests, priorities, abilities, synthesize everything and act towards what they consider important in their lives, making their decisions more autonomous, solid, and conscious. It is important for psychologists to be cognizant of the importance of vocational guidance and career counseling in society and, also, in political practices for the autonomy it provides to its users. In this way, it is important to consider these disciplines as essential aspects of individuals' lives continuously, rather than in order to address specific problems as they arise.

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