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**Economy for the Common Good vs Neoliberalism and its effects on
interdependence perception and attitude toward wealth redistribution:
an ecofeminist lens on economic inequality.**

Relatrice

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“A mio giudizio, la storia del pensiero economico è anche e forse soprattutto, la storia della costruzione dell'economico come pratica e come pensiero: in altri termini, la costruzione dell'economia politica. Si tratta dell'emergere di un immaginario economico.” (Serge Latouche - L'invenzione dell'economia)

“Gli antropologi ci dicono che quando la struttura di un mito fondatore inizia a cambiare, tutto il resto nella società cambia intorno e si aprono prospettive nuove”. (Hickel - The Divide)

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Introduzione

L'incremento esponenziale delle disuguaglianze economiche rappresenta uno dei problemi più pervasivi e urgenti della società contemporanea, con effetti drammatici che si diffondono ad ogni livello della società con ricadute trasversali sul benessere psicofisico (Wilkinson e Pickett, 2017; 2010; 2009), le relazioni interpersonali (Buttrick & Oishi, 2017; Graafland, & Lous, 2019; Wilkinson e Pickett, 2017) fino all'ulteriore esacerbazione del disastro ecologico (OECD, 2021). L'aumento della distanza di potere economico tra una piccola percentuale di popolazione estremamente ricca e la restante parte sempre più povera è stata ulteriormente acuita dalla pandemia Covid-19 che ha portato alla luce e ampliato il divario strutturale preesistente (Oxfam Italia, 2022; World Inequality Lab, 2022). Nonostante numerosi economisti (Chancel et al., 2022; Stiglitz, 2014; Piketty, 2014), organizzazioni internazionali (Oxfam International, 2022; Tax Justice Network, 2021) e laboratori di ricerca (World Inequality Lab, 2022) abbiano messo in luce la necessità di riforme strutturali possibili per permettere un'inversione di trend, queste non sono ancora state concretamente considerate a livello di politiche economiche. Quello che preoccupa ulteriormente è il dato per il quale al mantenimento dello status quo contribuiscano sia i gruppi in posizione egemonica, che quelli in posizione svantaggiata (Jost, 2019; Jost et al., 2017; Jost & Banaji, 1994) rendendo in tal modo difficile coadiuvare una richiesta politica efficace. Risulta dunque evidente la necessità di studiare ed individuare quali variabili psicosociali intervengono nel mantenimento delle disparità per poter progettare comunicazioni efficaci nella direzione di un cambiamento possibile.

Nel primo capitolo, *Economic Inequalities at the current state*, viene presentata la situazione contemporanea delle disuguaglianze economiche sia a livello di popolazione mondiale che circoscritta alla situazione italiana. La prima parte si focalizza sulla disparità di reddito e di ricchezza nonché l'intersezione delle due con particolare attenzione alle politiche economiche che hanno permesso questo trend, riassunte sotto l'etichetta di Neoliberalismo (Piketty, 2014; Harvey, 2007). Nella seconda parte vengono evidenziati quali effetti siano ad esse correlati con ricadute a livello psicologico (Kelley & Evans, 2017, Buttrick & Oishi, 2017), sociale (Buttrick & Oishi, 2017; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017; Fairbrother & Martin, 2013) e ambientale (OECD, 2021; Oxfam & Stockholm Environment Institute, 2020; Chancel & Piketty, 2015; Berthe, et al., 2015, Mikkelsen et al., 2007) nonché il modo in cui la pandemia Covid-19 abbia esacerbato le disparità strutturali preesistenti (Oxfam International, 2022; Oxfam Italia, 2022; World Inequality Report, 2022).

Nel secondo capitolo *Maintaining the status quo* vengono trattati i recenti modelli psicologici, in particolare la Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius & Pratto 1999) e la System Justification Theory (Jost, 2019; Jost & Banaji, 1994), che descrivono la differenza di percezione e i processi di legittimazione delle disuguaglianze nonché gli atteggiamenti rispetto alle politiche redistributive che permetterebbero l'attenuazione delle stesse. Particolare attenzione viene posta su quella che appare essere una dissociazione tra i motivi a sostenere politiche redistributive targhettizzate ai gruppi con alto potere economico e quelle dirette a quelle con basso potere economico. Quest'ultimo punto rappresenta la premessa portante del disegno di ricerca,

approfondito in seguito, che riguarda la (dis)percezione di interdipendenza all'interno del sistema economico.

Nel terzo capitolo *An Ecofeminist lens on economic inequality* viene introdotta la prospettiva utilizzata come strumento fondamentale per disegnare la ricerca. In particolare viene descritta l'analisi proposta dalla letteratura ecofemminista rispetto alla produzione e riproduzione delle asimmetrie di potere, mostrando come tutti i tipi di oppressione (di genere, classe e *razza*¹) derivino da un'origine strutturale comune (creazione di dualismi e gerarchizzazione degli stessi) incarnata nel nostro sistema economico (Cox, 2019; Kings, 2017; McMahon, 1977) e come questa intersezione sia stata evidenziata anche in psicologia sociale in particolare per quanto riguarda Social Dominance Orientation, sessismo e sfruttamento della natura (Wang, 2009). Un particolare focus viene posto sulla critica alle esternalità dei modelli economici "ortodossi", ovvero alla disgiunzione tra il sistema economico e gli impatti ecologici/sociali dello stesso, che viene incarnata nella moneta e negli scambi economici microsistemici, riproducendo l'asimmetria strutturale macrosistemica e i suoi effetti.

Nel quarto capitolo *Future-Forming Psychology* viene presentato il tentato valore aggiunto di questa ricerca nello sviluppare studi complementari alla "*mirroring psychology*" (Gergen, 2014) intesa come ricerca descrittiva, aggiungendo una "*world-making*" psychology, ovvero una ricerca che indaghi altri mondi possibili e le conseguenze degli stessi. Viene quindi presentato come sistema economico

¹L'uso del termine "razza" deriva esclusivamente dall'utilizzo di una lettura intersezionale delle oppressioni e non vuole assumere alcun valore discriminatorio.

alternativo a quello neoliberista, il modello dell' Economy for the Common Good (Fersen, 2019), utilizzato come matrice concettuale e metodologica per disegnare una delle manipolazioni della ricerca. Quest'ultimo, proponendo una visione olistica e relazionale della moneta, degli scambi economici e della tassazione attua una (re)internalizzazione delle esternalità.

Quinto e sesto capitolo sono dedicati alla descrizione della presente ricerca, nello specifico per quanto riguarda le ipotesi, la metodologia, i risultati e l'interpretazione degli stessi. Tramite uno studio sperimentale svoltosi online, è stato indagato il ruolo della reintegrazione delle esternalità all'interno degli scambi economici sulla percezione di interdipendenza misurata a livello di (a) Costruzione del Sé (Interdependent vs Independent Self Construal), (b) Thinking Style (Analytic vs Holistic Thinking) e (c) Relazioni economiche (Belief in a Zero Sum Game). Nello specifico i partecipanti sono stati assegnati a due tipi di società (Economy for the Common Good / Neoliberalism) attraverso una versione ridefinita del Bimboola Paradigm (Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., 2017, Jetten et al., 2015), che consiste nell'immergere i partecipanti in un gioco interattivo all'interno di una nuova società in cui compiere decisioni per la loro nuova vita. Sono stati poi misurati gli atteggiamenti rispetto alle politiche redistributive, alla tassazione progressiva e le credenze rispetto alla tassazione del sistema attuale.

1. ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AT THE CURRENT STATE

Economic inequalities in our present society are profoundly and increasingly pervasive, with the distance between advantaged and disadvantaged individuals exponentially widening over the past few decades (Oxfam 2022; World Inequality Lab 2021; Piketty 2014). According to the World Inequality Report 2022, contemporary global inequalities can be compared to those existing at the beginning of the 20th century at the peak of Western imperialism, as *“the share of income presently captured by the poorest half of the world’s people is about half what it was in 1820”*. It is important to clarify that, when economic inequality is under analysis, it can be declined focusing on different interrelated forms. Specifically, we can refer on the one hand to income inequality that considers income as *“the quantity of goods and services produced and distributed each year”* and on the other on wealth inequality where wealth corresponds to *“the total wealth owned at a given point in time”* and *“comes from the wealth appropriated or accumulated in the past”* (Piketty & Sanchez, 2014). This initial distinction is important for several reasons. First of all, because, as expressed by Piketty in its fundamental essay *“Capital in the Twenty-First Century”* (2014), the roots of the present phenomenon can be explained only in a way that considers these two variables in a loop of causality, reinforced by economic policies named under the label of Neoliberalism. Second of all, because when we investigate psychological attitudes and beliefs of people toward economic inequality and policies that can effectively reduce the economic gap, the co-occurrence of these variables has to be taken into consideration.

1.1 Structural existence and resistance of economic inequality: the past reinforces the present

As previously introduced, economic inequality can be declined focusing on different variables: income and wealth. Nevertheless, there is a strict and interconnected relation between the two and there are mainly two factors that can be detected as causally increasing inequality: the process of disconnection of higher wages from others and the processes of wealth accumulation and concentration (World Inequality Lab, 2022; Sanchez & Piketty, 2014; Piketty, 2014). In a nutshell, when the capital return rate is much higher than the growth rate of the economy the weight of inheritance becomes much stronger than the weight of savings. This is how the past tends to reinforce the present and erodes the future: inherited wealth grows automatically and much faster than wealth produced by labor. This process, after a post World War-II situation that witnessed a spread of equality, went under a global acceleration starting from the 1980s' with most of Western Countries embracing neoliberal policies of financialization and deregulation of markets. Globally, inherited wealth has grown on average more than incomes and, in general, higher assets grow more than others (Piketty & Sanchez, 2014).

As the most recent projections depict, the current situation is extremely dramatic: considering global income, data shows that the richest 10% of the global population currently takes the 52%, whereas the poorest half of the population earns 8.5% of i. (World Inequality Report, 2022). This can be translated to the fact that on average, an individual from the top 10% of the global income distribution earns €87,200 per year, whereas an individual from the poorest half of the global income distribution

makes €2,800 per year. Considering global wealth inequalities, the differences are even more exacerbated than income inequalities. In fact, according to the World Inequality Report, in 2021 the richest 10% of the global population owned 76% of the global wealth, the poorest half of the global population owned no wealth at all, possessing just 2% of the total (World Inequality Report, 2022).

The condition in Italy is in line with the global trend. Although income inequality in Italy declined considerably over the course of the 20th century, following the economic shocks of the period 1910-1940s, as well as the effects of post WWII policies (World Inequality Report, 2022), since the early 1980s the top 10% income share rose considerably, while the share of the bottom 50% dropped from 27% to 21%. Furthermore, as a result of the austerity policies applied after the financial crisis of 2008 and the European debt crisis of 2012-14, the bottom 50% average incomes dropped to 15%, while national income per adult dropped by 12% (World Inequality Report, 2022). The alarming data show that at present time the average national income of the adult population is €27,340 and while the bottom 50% earns on average or €11,320 on per year (21% of the total), the top 10% earns on average €1,166,520, that correspond to eight times more (32% of the total; see World Inequality Report, 2022). Italy is one of the countries with the highest wealth to income ratio. In 2021, the top 10% held 48%, while the middle 40% and the bottom 50% respectively held 42% and 10% of the wealth (World Inequality Report, 2022).

What frightens most is that the level of economic inequalities has been furthermore exacerbated due to the effect of Covid-19 pandemics and its political and consequently economical management (Chancel et al., 2022; Oxfam International,

2022; Oxfam Italia, 2022; Aspachs et al., 2021). In facts, in the first 2 years of the pandemic, the 10 richest people in the world doubled their assets from \$700 billion to \$1.5 trillion (a rate of \$15,000 per second). During the same period, an estimated 163 million people fell into poverty as a result of the pandemic (Oxfam International, 2022). These effects have also been observed among Italian families, widening the pre-existing economic and social disparities. At the end of 2020, the richest 5% of Italians held more wealth than the poorest 80%, more than 1 million individuals and 400,000 families have plunged into poverty (Oxfam Italia, 2022; 2021).

1.2 Inter-related effects: psychological, social and environmental consequences

Unsurprisingly, the increasing body of literature documents the effects of economic inequality at different levels. Researchers have reported how it affects economies (Stiglitz 2015), psychophysical wellbeing (Buttrick & Oishi, 2017; Wilkinson and Pickett; 2011; 2009; 2007) and environmental conditions (OECD, 2021; Oxfam & Stockholm Environment Institute, 2020; Chancel & Piketty, 2015; Mikkelsen et al., 2007). There is now a longstanding literature starting from the first pioneer socio-epidemiological study (Rodgers, 1979) investigating how inequality harms societies. The most intuitive results show how regions with higher levels of economic inequality show worse health outcomes (Blázquez-Fernández et al., 2018; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015; Truesdale and Jencks, 2016; Marmot & Wilkinson, 2011; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; 2007). This could be, on the one hand, explained by the multi-dimensional relationship between inequality and poverty, (Duque & Mcknight,

2019; Hills et al., 2019) considering the latter as a fundamental determinant of health with negative outcomes (Tøge & Bell, 2016) because of the impact of material deprivation. On the other hand, in explaining cross-national differences there are other variable distinctions that need to be discussed. First of all, the predicting determinants of health and wellbeing outcomes are not only associated with objective material deprivation alone, but is also the *relative deprivation* embodying a fundamental role, specifically regarding the magnitude of the gap between the income/wealth level of the bottom and the top of societies (ex. calculated for GINI index). In this sense it has emerged that more unequal societies show lower life expectancy (Kondo et al., 2009; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2006; 2009; 2010; Marmot & Wilkinson, 2011), higher levels of mental illness (Burns, Tomita, & Kapadia, 2014); depression (Patel et al., 2008; Messias, Eaton, & Grooms, 2011); crime, especially murder and assault (de Courson & Nettle, 2021; Kim et al., 2020); obesity and obesity-related death (Pickett et al., 2005); as well as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). In addition, it has emerged a negative relation with both level of social trust (Buttrick & Oishi, 2017; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017), as well as solidarity and willingness to take proactive efforts to support better conditions of more disadvantaged co-nationals (Paskov & Dewilde, 2012), generosity and cooperative behavior (Nishi, Shirado, Rand, & Christakis, 2015). On the other hand, more equal societies perform better in life expectancy, child mortality, non-communicable diseases incidence (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018; Buttrick, et al., 2017; Marmot & Bell, 2012) as well as index of happiness and life satisfaction (Yu & Wang, 2017; Hajdu & Hajdu, 2013).

This is found also at the individual level. An increasing body of research has shown that not only the *objective economic index* predicts alone for health and psychological wellbeing but what comes to matter as a strong predictor is the “*perceived economic inequality*” (Kelley & Evans, 2017; Marmot, 2004). This link had been explained through psycho-social mechanisms (Elstad, 1998) that may affect health and other behavioral outcomes. The theories behind these mechanisms refer to two fundamental processes that could act altogether: on the one hand the perception of higher social distance (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2015) and on the other the elicitation of status anxiety (Marmot, 2004) stressed by the perception of high competitiveness. These hypotheses are supported by evidence showing the mediating role of status anxiety in creating the so-called “*Status Syndrome*” (Marmot, 2004). The inter-relation of these factors is also supported by laboratory experiments showing that the induction of perceived economic inequality and social distance brings people to increase the level of status anxiety, mediated by the role of the perception of high competitiveness (Melita et al., 2021). Overall, this evidence suggests that people in more unequal societies tend to feel more socially distant and competitive and more independent from others. The latter effect is supported by studies investigating the socio-cultural premises that shape a more or less independent self-construal (Singelis, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), founding that an independent self is not only predicted by socioeconomic status but also by perceived economic inequality, that promote a more independent self-construction when the perception of inequality is high compared to more interdependent counterparts in a lower level of inequality condition (Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., 2017).

Another increasing field of studies regards the impact of economic inequality on the environment. Different theories have emerged in order to connect and explain all the multi-leveled mechanisms that could co-occur. At the current state there's no theoretical or empirical consensus but the two most availed positions are structured in two channels: one based upon the economic behaviors of citizens and households and the second based upon the determination of environmental policies. On the one hand theorists suggest that the psycho-social mechanisms carried by more unequal societies (social distance and status anxiety) promote a conspicuous consumption behavior and a self-centered individualistic life that undervalues and exploits the common good (Boyce, 1994; Mazzocco et al., 2021; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010) and this is supported also by laboratory experiments showing that inducing perception of high economic inequality increases the will of people to consume to gain higher social status (Velandia-Morales et al., 2022). The other line of theory regards the embracement and request for policies that protect the environment, suggesting that economic inequality is associated with political inequality, meaning that the higher the inequality is, the less political pressure there is to pro-environmental policies (Magnani, 2000) because the possibility for high income people to compensate the exploitation of common good through private solutions. A recent study (Berthe et al., 2015) has tried to analyze both theories, finding that there are still methodological limitations to compare studies with different theoretical frameworks and ultimately define a conclusion, nevertheless both areas seem to confirm the hypothesis that higher inequality causes environmental deterioration and biodiversity loss.

What is fundamental to take into account is that despite the increasing evidence of the multileveled and interdependent consequences of economic inequality that invest

society at every social layer and its effects on common good and environment, this situation is far from radically changing. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

2. MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO

“The rich persuade themselves that they acquired their wealth through merit, ignoring the advantages—such as education, inheritance and class—that may have helped to secure it. The poor begin to blame themselves for their failures, even when they can do little to change their circumstances.” (Monbiot, 2016)

In this chapter it will be presented the current evidence from social psychology literature investigating what are the psycho-social reasons for the maintenance of imbalance of power and legitimization of economic privileges, both for advantaged and disadvantaged social groups. The second part focuses on the different attitudes toward redistributive policies, seen as the most effective way to reduce wealth gap (World Inequality Lab, 2021; Tax Justice Network, 2021; Piketty 2014; Stiglitz, 2014) and how it has emerged the existence of a psychological “dual routes” toward redistribution, meaning a disconnection between motives in supporting policies targeted to low income class and those targeted to high income, suggesting a misperception or resistance in perception of economic interdependence.

2.1 Perception and legitimization of economic inequalities

Given the premises of the pervasive impact of economic inequalities presented in the first chapter, it could be intuitively expected that people accurately perceive both causes and consequences of the current situation. On the contrary, social

psychological research has accumulated over the past decade showing that people misperceive and legitimate inequalities.

When considering misperception there is evidence that citizens underestimate both wealth (Franks & Scherr, 2018; Norton & Ariely, 2011) and income pay-gap inequalities (Kiatpongsan & Norton, 2014). Even if part of the explanation can be superficially linked to a general level of innumeracy, referring to the incapacity of people to treat adequately numbers and probabilities, research has shown that even when correcting the misperceptions this does not effectively influence attitudes and beliefs about economic and social inequalities (Hauser & Norton, 2017). The inconsistency of the *"innumeracy explanation"* is supported by results showing that the correction of perception of economic inequality produces different outcomes. Specifically, only people who overestimate their position then become more supportive of redistribution compared to those who underestimate their position, who seem to justify more the existing inequalities (Hauser & Norton, 2017). Moreover, even when asking people to imagine an ideal world, they still wish and choose some degree of social stratification with a slightly richer class at the top and a larger part of the population at the bottom (Norton & Ariely 2013; Norton et al., 2014). That people choose a more equal structure of society has been replicated in different countries, showing a preference for a slightly unequal distribution that is still hierarchically structured. This has been replicated not only when asking to choose between different social structures, converging to a *"poverty prefers company"* results (Eriksson & Simpson, 2014), but also when considering the CEO-Worker pay gaps, with people wishing for a lower income ratio than reality, but still preferring a highly unequal (Norton, 2014; Kiatpongsan & Norton, 2014). The preference for more "unequality", as Norton (2014) labeled it, has been detected both in higher-income

and lower working-class people (Jost, 2017; Shariff et al., 2016; Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015; 2017). These data suggest that innumeracy and self-interest explanations cannot be sufficient to explain this phenomenon.

In fact, what has been found to be a strong psycho-social predictor in the maintenance of the status quo is legitimization, meaning the process that brings people to believe that a society is fair. What disentangles the divergence between the “equity bias” of laboratory results and the real world “inequality preference”, is that unequal distributions are different from unfair ones (Starmans, Sheskin, & Bloom, 2017; Mijs, 2019). As supported by research, people tend to tolerate and prefer economic inequality as long as they perceive the system as driven by fairness (Starmans et al., 2017; Garcia-Sanchez et al. 2019). When inequality is seen as being produced through meritocratic means (ex. people working harder than others) rather than randomness or nepotism, even those at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy (Wienk et al., 2020) show less negative self-reported and physiological responses to inequality the more they support the economic system (Goudarzi et al., 2020). There are different theories that try to explain legitimization processes but the most best known are Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and System Justification Theory (Jost and Banaji, 1994). The former (SDT) was constructed to theorize and investigate, within capitalist societies, *“the general desire to establish and maintain hierarchically structured intergroup relations regardless of the position of one’s own group(s) within this hierarchy”* (Sidanius et al. 2016). Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) has been found to be a relatively stable individual trait, which is highly predictive of a multitude of attitudes and behaviors such as sexism, racism, support for hierarchy enhancing ideologies and intergroup exploitation (Kleppesø et al., 2020). Interestingly, SDO is a reliably gendered

phenomenon, with males displaying higher average Social Dominance Orientation than females (Sidanius et al., 2017). Also, Social Dominance Orientation tends to be lower in more democratic and egalitarian countries (Fischer, Hanke, & Sibley, 2012). On the other hand, System Justification Theory states that people have relational (ex. share realities with others), existential (ex. reduce threats and insecurity) and epistemic needs (ex. avoid uncertainty) that motivate them to support the status quo (Jost, 2019; Jost 2017; Jost et al., 2008). According to SJT, people are driven by an aware or unaware system-oriented need “*to defend, bolster, and justify existing social, economic, and political institutions and arrangements*” (Jost & Kay, 2010) which manifests most strongly when people's need for predictability is higher (Jost, 2017). While these theories have initially been construed as competing approaches, some researchers have recently proposed that they are complementary and interconnected, supported given that their measures are reliably related (Vargas-Salfate, Pratto et al., 2018; Brandt, 2012).

2.2 Dual routes to redistributive policies

As already mentioned in the previous sections, economic inequality is an increasingly widening phenomenon and one of the most effective ways to reduce it is through redistributive policies. It was theoretically assumed that a greater proportion of inequality could bring a higher level of awareness and general dissatisfaction and this would be associated with higher levels of political demands for redistribution (Meltzer & Richard, 1981). Moreover, this would be expected all the more considering the long line of research demonstrating human attitudes toward equal resource distribution and specifically the so-called *inequity aversion* (Fehr & Schmidt,

1999) that brings people to dislike situations where resources are distributed in an unequal manner and even to incur personal losses to avoid them (Dawes et al., 2007).

Research about the attitudes toward redistributive policies show incongruent results. Although some studies have observed a small association between the more voicing of citizens in support for redistribution in more unequal countries (Anderseen & Curtis 2015; Finseraas, 2008), others have found no evidence of an association between objective inequality and support for redistribution (Breznau & Hommerich, 2019; Ashok, Kuziemko, 2015), suggesting that the psycho-social variables that affect equality demandingness are complex. As already mentioned in the previous paragraph this lack of direct causality can not be fully explained by the misperception of the level of inequality of citizens (Eriksson & Simpson, 2012, Norton & Ariely, 2011) or by self-serving reasons. In fact, even when showing the rising level of inequality people don't show a parallel increase in support for redistribution (Kuziemko et al., 2015; McCall et al., 2017). Even if it is impossible to exclude the fact that in our so-called post-democratic societies the greatest impact on political decisions are big corporations and lobbies, it is still interesting looking at measured forms of resistance and misperception toward downward redistribution within the general public. As it was briefly introduced in the first chapter, the way through which societies can reach a more equal economic distribution could be through: protective (ex. free public education/health services) and redistributive strategies (ex. income/capital tax). What is considered to be the most effective strategy is progressive taxation that could target both incomes and wealth. Income taxes in particular are considered as the most effective because of their power in reducing both post and pre-tax inequality (World Inequality Report, 2022). In addition,

according to literature, progressive taxation is associated with more happy societies (Oishi et al., 2018) and subjective life satisfaction (Oishi et al., 2012). Despite these premises what is detected in real life are far from theoretical assumptions. In fact, it has emerged what can be called as a “*redistribution asymmetry*”, meaning that people are more inclined to reduce the economic burden for the disadvantaged strata of the population, but less to ask for higher contributions by the higher strata and earners. This has been replicated across different countries and using different methodologies, both asking for the evaluation of tax bills fairness and when asking to self-generate a taxation scheme, or even the results that people agree with the idea of the government have to reduce the burden for the poor but not contemporaneamente reducing the gap between rich and poor. (Dietze et al., 2021) This could suggest that there is a misperception and/or resistance in perceiving economic interdependence that emerges in a dual route toward redistribution. The explanations and interpretations of what are the socio-cognitive barriers toward a downward redistribution are multiple and interrelated. First of all, even if people demand for social and economic equality at an abstract level this does not mean a concrete implementation, emerging in a “*Principle-implementation gap*” (Dixon et al., 2017). More over people can be generally subjected to a “Negativity Bias” that describes how people are most attracted and express higher emotional impact when they get into adverse events and information, bringing them to engage more in social actions (Alvevs et al., 2016; Fazio et al., 2015). Moreover, tax illiteracy has been associated with attitudes toward redistributive policies (Nichita et al., 2019), such that people with more training tend to support taxing rich people more, tend to perceive, taxes more as “*common good*” and tend to endorse lower merit beliefs.

Nevertheless, these explanations are insufficient to exhaustively describe the phenomenon.

Even if it is objectively wrong to consider the economic system a zero-sum game in an absolute way, it has been widely demonstrated even with mathematical computer modelization (Liu et al., 2021; Tobochnik, J. et al., 2015) that the capital system in a neoliberal policies framework is set to widen inequalities so that when an amount of capital is concentrated in one strata of society means that others are losing economic power. For this reason, it appears important to increase the perception of interdependence within the economic system. In fact, it has recently been suggested the Belief in a Zero-Sum Game (Różycka-Tran et al., 2018) may play an important role as it describes the level of perception of interdependence within the Economic System and is specifically described the belief that “*a finite amount of goods exists in the world*”, together with the belief in the unfairness and delegitimization of the social system (Wojciszke et al., 2009).

3. AN ECOFEMINIST LENS ON INCOME INEQUALITY

*“The inability to recognize our dependence upon each other is reflected in an inability to acknowledge the extent of human dependence on the Earth and in attempts to seek tyranny over it”
(Cox, 2010)*

In this chapter I will discuss the theoretical lens, labeled Ecofeminism, which will serve as the basis for designing the current research. In order to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations one fundamental premise is needed: When referring to Ecofeminism it has to be specified that, as an investigative tool, it is not circumscribed to “gendered” outcomes, as gender is not the ultimate object of Ecofeminist study, whereas social and ecological justice is. Ecofeminism is a lens that applies a system and complex thinking approach to analyzes the intrinsically linked and overlapping historic-cultural processes that have produced and reproduced as outcome our socio-ecological crisis, social power asymmetries (classism, racism, sexism) and exploitation of Nature (human-nature power asymmetry, see Ruder & Sanniti, 2019).

3.1 The reproduction of dualisms and hierarchies

One of the most striking contributions of the Ecofeminist approach is about advancing the level of analysis of structural forms of oppressions. Because it is impossible to develop it here in an exhaustive way, only the core concepts will be high-lighted, in particular, the shared historical-cultural roots of all forms of

oppressions (sexism, racism, classism, naturism) (Kings, 2017, Gaard, 2011) that had been constructed through two intrinsically tied processes:

- 1) The creation of dualisms (Men-Women, Men-Nature, Rich-Poor, Reason-Emotion, Mind-Body, etc.)
- 2) The hierarchization of the previous categories (Men upon Women, Men upon Nature, Rich upon Poor etc.)

For Ecofeminist theories the oppression of nature, classes and women cannot be faced if not altogether because they have been constructed from the same origin.

These two processes are premises and supports of capitalist society in its extractivist and growth-oriented character (Salleh, 2017; Gaard, 2011). The capitalistic system of accumulation is supported by the idea of infinite resource exploitation and is sustained by non-monetized “reproductive” and care work (that is naturalized) and exploitation of common natural resources (Salleh, 2017). The effects of the artificial separation and hierarchization of life spheres is embodied in the capital system where economic processes are virtually distinguished from the social and ecological ones (Salleh, 2017; Gaard, 2011; Perkins & Kuiper, 2005; Perkins, 1997), artificially separating the practices and the premises and consequences of these practices (Ruder & Sanniti, 2019) as ahistorical and transcultural.

3.2 Intertwined psychological constructs: Social Dominance Orientation, Environmentalism and Sexism.

In a nutshell, what the previous paragraph describes is the theorized structural historical-cultural interrelation between different types of hierarchies (classism,

sexism, exploitation of nature). Some studies have tried to investigate if this interrelation emerges also at a psychological level. As already mentioned in Chapter 2 (*Maintaining the Status Quo*), one of the strongest predictors of the support of social hierarchies is Social Dominance Orientation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Under an ecofeminist lens, it is intriguing that socio-psychological studies and meta-analyses found an association between SDO, environmental attitudes, sexism, and attitudes toward economic inequalities. Regarding the association between SDO and environmental attitudes, Jyhlä, Cantal, Akrami and Milfont (2016) have demonstrated that Social Dominant Orientation represents the best mediator between political conservatism and environmental attitudes, indicating that the individual endorsement of social hierarchies can effectively explain the relationship between political orientation and environmentalism. People with high levels of social dominance show less concern about the environment, and are more accepting of the exploitation of natural resources (Milfont et al., 2013; Milfont & Duckitt, 2010). Furthermore, people who endorse these ideologies tend not to believe that pro-environmental actions can have a positive impact (Van Hiel & Kossowska, 2007), or that preserving nature is necessary (Milfont et al., 2013). Because the nature and extent of these relationships was unclear, Stanley and Wilson (2019) run a meta-analysis that demonstrates that SDO strongly correlates with a range of environment-relevant variables, both together and independently, even after controlling for political attitudes. As the authors put it: *“This in itself is surprising, given that the ideological variables were created to explain intergroup attitudes (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).”* This is less surprising under an ecofeminist lens that connects all these variables at the roots. Moreover, Ecofeminist theory predicts a correlation between the endorsement of attitudes toward hierarchies, gender and

nature. In line with this idea, Wang (1999) has found that there is a correlation (independent of participants' gender) between the endorsement of social hierarchies, attitude toward women, and endorsement of exploitative attitude toward nature. These results were replicated by a more recent study (Uenal et al., 2020) that tried to extend classical Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and that showed the correlation between intergroup attitudes (classism and sexism), human-environment and interspecies relations, that go hand by hand to more recent and updated Ecofeminist theorizations (Gaard, 2011).

3.3 The need of internalizing “externalities” in economic thought

This process of separation and hierarchization not only reflects critical theoretical speculation, but is embodied in the way in economic theories modeling everyday life at the macro- and the microlevel. The main points are that *“contemporary economic models float free from biophysical reality, blind to the energy and material flows essential for human existence and to the ‘natural capital’ stocks that produce them”* (Rees et. al, 2016) and is supported by *“non-monetized ecological and social reproductive labor”* (Ruder & Sanniti, 2019). In neoclassical economic models, the ways in which economy is described and constructed also linguistically is quite explanatory. Simplifying, Nature assumes the form of a commodity and is regarded as value in exchange of the product of labor, exchanges on one side and on the other are the so-called “externalities” that refer to the social and environmental consequences of economic exchanges and are calculated after the exchange of money/credit and product/services has been implemented. At a macrosystemic level this means that Nations calculate their wealth on the basis of GDP that exclude

social and unpaid care work that sustain the monetized processes. Similarly, firms and corporations calculate their success on the basis of productivity in the sense of capital return without taking into account long-term, socio and environmental consequences. At the microsystem level this implies economic decisions everyday consumption, where the product is distant and separate in time and space from the origins and consequences of its production. This could be rephrased by saying that we exclude “externalities” and neglect interdependence and distant causality within the economic system.

(Re)internalizing externalities, to use neoclassical terminology, means going through a common-good oriented process (Perkins, 2017). This is not intended as a common-property regime and a corresponding political apparatus. Rather, Elinor Ostrom and Charlotte Hess define the term as follows (2007): “*Commons is a general term that refers to a resource shared by a group of people. In a commons, the resource can be small and serve a tiny group (the family refrigerator), it can be community-level (sidewalks, playgrounds, libraries, and so on), or to international and global levels (deep seas, the atmosphere, the Internet, and scientific knowledge). The commons can be well founded (a community park or library); transboundary (the Danube River, migrating wildlife, the Internet); or without clear boundaries (knowledge, the ozone layer)*”. The concept of commons appears to be the most effective way to stop reproducing asymmetries, because it is more clearly opposed to capitalism than terms such as “sustainability” or “development” (Linebaugh 2009).

Although the climate disaster and the widening of economic inequality suggest that externalities have to be considered very urgently, this seems insufficient or too difficult to implement. What some authors and practitioners propose is to challenge

the system in a realistic way. Some of these solutions can be under the umbrella of Ecology Economics that have produced a broad literature about degrowth, sustainability, green economies, post-growth and recently, Wellbeing Economy (De Vogli et. al, 2022; Costanza et al., 2018). The Ecofeminist analysis stresses that all these approaches need to consider the common historic-cultural roots that shape our cognition, beliefs, and behavior, and to focus on the common good. The Economy for the Common Good (Felder, 2015) is one of these examples and will be discussed in the next section.

4. FUTURE FORMING PSYCHOLOGY

“To illuminate, reflect, or understand a given state of affairs, sustains a tradition in which this “state of affairs” has acquired ontological status. Or, one might say, in conducting research on what exists, we lend inertia to conventional forms of life. We do not readily ask about what does not yet exist, or about ways of life that could be created.” (Gergen, 2014)

Social psychology has tried to illuminate how money shapes self-construction (Boucher, 2020), drives attention (Dietze et al., 2016), showing that most of these results converge into how money triggers unethical behavior (Piff et al., 2017; 2012; 2010. Gueguen et al., 2013; Kouchaki, et al., 2013), self-entitlement (Piff et al., 2014; 2012), and behaviors that harm social reciprocity that are at the basis of human life. What has not been studied is how to challenge those characteristics that embody structural significance of money that ultimately provoke all these effects. For this reason what is complementary needed is to explore through the power of imagination, utopian thinking and a future forming psychology, what all of these ought to be.

4.1 Exploring ways to decolonize economic imaginary

After the 2008 financial crisis, an increasing debate has emerged around the vulnerabilities and contradictions of our economic system. Professional researchers, activists, and civil society had started questioning the economic structure we are in. One of the interesting focuses is the fact that the current economy is not a natural force, but derives from historic-cultural events and political decisions. One of the

prominent voices is the father of the “degrowth” or “a-growth” theories, Serge Latouche, who claims that economic thought has literally colonized our imaginary (Latouche, 2010; 2004) so pervasively that we tend to describing our social and personal lives by economic labels, as if everything could be commodifiable. As Latouche put it: *“Economy is an invention”*, not in the sense that it does not exist in our life, but in the sense that is human-made and, hence, can be changed in line with the contributions of anthropology (Graeber, 2012), history (Bregman, 2021; 2014), critical economics such as eco-socialism (Löwy, 2015), eco-anarchism, (Clark, 2020), feminist Gift Economy (Cordiero et al., 2018), Ecological economics (Costanza et al., 2020; Costanza 2020) and recently Wellbeing Economy (De Vogli et al., 2022; Costanza et al., 2018). As Gergen (2014) put it, we need to use social psychology complementary to what he labeled *“mirroring psychology”* and adopt a *“future-forming”*, *“world-making psychology”*; while illuminating *what is*, we need to start *“to create what is to become”*. The renewed interest in Utopian thinking in socio-psychological research (Jost et al., 2020; Badaan & Jost, 2020; Fernando et al., 2018) goes into a synergic and interesting direction. In these studies, priming utopian thinking decreased system justification and increased intentions to participate in social change. Even if it’s critical taking into account in this studies the different content of the utopian thinking rather utopian thinking per se, what it has been found is that both liberals, moderate and conservative’s prefer a Pro-Green utopia in contrast to more Sci-fi” (Fernando et al., 2018) and despite ideological differences explained by the Moral Foundation Theory (Jost et al., 2019), what emerges as being shared is the “family, community, commons” intentions. (Badaan & Jost, 2020). As it was already mentioned, it seems that even when people are asked to imagine an ideal world and wealth distribution, they still prefer a slightly

unequal social stratification. What is the common denominator of all these studies is that participants are not exposed to a radically different society or money use/value, but immersed in the same structure that, as we already mentioned, through an Ecofeminist perspective it could do nothing but reproduce itself.

4.2 Neoliberalism vs Economy for The Common Good

Neoliberalism can be defined as the guiding principle of the Western political-economic system since the 1980s, when it was embraced by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States. It can be described as *“a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade”* (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Specifically, Neoliberalism is related to support for laissez-faire capitalism, where the market is free and thought of being best advanced through competitiveness where businesses are not regulated by governments. Most of all in its overlap of social, civil and economic freedom rights creates a distance between individual present dimension and communal impact on common resources both at present and future projections. In support of this analysis, research has shown that introduction of the neoliberal market institutions can trigger a *“market instinct, ”orienting individuals to become more self-interested contributing less to public goods games”* (Reeson & Tisdell, 2010). It is interesting to underline that studies show that not only citizens despite the political level of sophistication, *“the endorsement of pro-capitalist, neoliberal economic attitudes was associated with social dominance orientation and general, economic, and gender-specific forms of system justification.”* (Azevedo, Jost and colleagues, 2019)

Moreover, priming Neoliberalism brings people to increase levels of individualism and the feelings of self-sufficiency (Codou et al., 2012).

The Economy for the Common Good (ECG) is a comprehensive economic model that *“represents an alternative to both capitalism and communism”* and that *“emerges out of a holistic worldview.”* (Felder, 2019). This model empathizes what Ecofeminism has underlined: *“At the marketplace consumption rights (rights for utilization) are traded, but the responsibilities tied to the use of a resource are not integrated into market processes or the establishment of property rights”* (Biesecker & Winterfeld, 2016).

The cornerstones of this model are:

- (a) (re)internalizing externalities within the value of money, *“that is no more an end but a means”*;
- (b) Redefining success according to a company's contribution to the common good;
- (c) Taxing more individuals and companies that use exploitative methods and harm the common good in both the short and long term;
- (d) Tax relief to companies that contribute positively to the public good;
- (e) Banking System that is no longer based only on defining risk that allows only already wealthy individuals to afford investments without considering the effects replaced with loans based on the impact the business can have on society.

ECG model is a multi-layer and structured model, with a matrix designed to define a valuation process of all the parameters mentioned above and the way to implement them (*“Common Good Balance Sheet ”*). Without the need to go deeper in this kind of technical analysis what is necessary and sufficient needed is to know that this had

been used as a already existing model (ora anche usato dall'unione europea) of (re)internalization of externalities to design the experimental manipulation that confronts the effects of two different societies (Neoliberalism / Economy for the Common Good) that will be explain in the next chapter.

5. RESEARCH

Walden-3 is a tribute to B.F. Skinner's utopian novel "Walden Two" (1948). Skinner is well known for being one of the fathers of behavioral psychology but unknown for his desire for an utopian society. Walden Two is a community where psychology is applied for the common good, there is no need to sell ourselves as a labor force, no gender gap, no beauty standards, everyone receives what they deserve and pursue what they desire as human beings.

Previous research on economic inequality has tried to illuminate the determinants of misperceptions of inequality, psycho-social processes that guide preferences to a, even if slightly, still unequal distribution (Norton, 2014; Norton & Ariely, 2011) and existential and epistemological needs to maintain and legitimize the status quo (Jost, 2019; Jost, 2017). Moving from this evidences most of the research with applicative purpose has been focused on linguistic (Chow et al., 2021) and/or moral framing (Dietzse et al., 2021), measuring the degree to which different messages could bring about different attitudes in order to promote social equity and equality through support to redistribution.

As broadly discussed in the previous chapters, what is missing are researches that try to manipulate the structural roots of the maintenance of the status quo, exploring the idiosyncrasies embodied by money and exchanges and through a future-forming lens, starting to explore unexplored ways of living together, looking not only for *what it is*, but also to *what it could be* (Gergen, 2014). What has not been studied is how to challenge those characteristics that embody structural significance of money that ultimately provoke all these effects. For this reason, what is complementary needed is to explore through the power of imagination, utopian thinking and a future forming psychology, what all of these ought to be.

5.1 Aim and hypotheses

The aim of this study was to investigate whether, using an ecofeminist lens on economic inequality, trying to reintroduce externalities into money value can have an impact on increasing interdependence perception inside the economic system and subsequently increase support for wealth redistribution. To do so, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions. In the experimental conditions, participants were exposed to a fictitious planet (Walden-3), that simulated two different societies, namely either Neoliberalism or Economy for the Common Good. In the control condition, participants were not exposed to any manipulation. Participants in all three conditions were then asked about their support for wealth redistribution, including both interventions explicitly targeted at reducing poverty and those targeted at taxing the rich, and about their agreement regarding progressive taxation.

The main hypotheses were:

HP1a: Participants in the Economy for the Common Good condition will score higher in Support for Redistributive Policies targeted at the Upper Class than those in the control condition.

HP1b: Participants in Neoliberalism condition will score lower in Support for Redistributive Policies targeted to High Class than those in the control.

HP2: Participants in Economy for the Common Good condition will score higher in Support for Progressive Taxation than the control condition.

HP3: Participants in Economy for the Common Good condition will score higher in Believe in a Zero Sum Game Scale than those in the control condition.

5.2 Participants

In all, 451 participants completed the survey. Of these, 145 were excluded because they did not provide informed consent to participate or did not complete the survey. The final sample consisted of 306 participants (55.2% females, 42.5% males and 2.3% non-binary), whose age ranged from 20 to 79 years ($M_{years} = 42.59$, $SD = 13.72$). The majority of the sample identified themselves as belonging to the middle class (61.1%). The remaining identified themselves with the lower (3.3%), lower-middle (21.6%), upper-middle (13.1%) and upper (1%) classes. The sample was slightly left-skewed considering political opinion ($M = 40.4$, $SD = 27.741$), economics opinion ($M = 44.5$, $SD = 27.572$), and social policies opinion ($M = 37.82$, $SD = 29.279$) on a scale from 0 = left wing to 100 = right wing).

5.3 Independent variables

The experiment lasted approximately fifteen minutes and took place entirely online on the Qualtrics platform. Through a qualtrics randomization function each participant was randomly assigned to one of three conditions.

Manipulation. Participants in the two experimental conditions were introduced to one of two fictional societies on a twin planet of Earth: Walden-3. They went through a semi-interactive game that was a redefinition of the Bimboola Game Paradigm (Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., 2017, Jetten et al., 2015), used in experimental social psychology to manipulate perceived inequality and then measure its different outcomes and behavioral effects.

For this study, the perception of inequality was not manipulated, but every participant was convinced of being randomly assigned to the “GROUP B” (middle class) of Walden’s societal structure. This choice was made in order to reduce additional complexity since most respondents to questionnaires of psychological research refer to themselves as middle-class participants (and this was then confirmed by descriptive statistics).

Participants in the experimental conditions were then exposed to one of two different societies on Walden-3 organized on two different economic structure:

- (1) Neoliberalism
- (2) Economy for the Common Good

For practical and methodological reasons the characteristics of the two societies were taken to the extremes and the main characteristic made salient. The baseline from which the societies were designed were based on Hartwich and Becker (2019) studies that exposed participants to Neoliberal vs Communism society. For designing Economy for The Common Good society, the distinct values were taken into account (Fersen, 2019). In particular what distinguishes this study from the previous one, leaving out the immersive part, is that Economy for the Common Good is a hybrid society: *“It represents an alternative to both capitalism and communism. It emerges from a holistic worldview based on “sovereign democracy” as “common good”, where the distinctive character is the re-internalization of externalities in money value.*

Specifically the two societies differed on different levels as shown in Table 1. The exact text of the manipulation is presented in Appendix A.

	Neoliberalism	Economy for the Common Good
Value	individual success	common good
Planetary Wealth	productivity	social and ecological good
Money Value	sensible to quantitative economic exchanges	sensible to the impact on common good
Property	everything can be privatized	only products can be privatized
Tax System	progressive on the basis of income/wealth	progressive on the basis of impact on common good

Table 1 Structural differences of the two experimental conditions: Neoliberalism vs Economy for the Common Good. See also *Materials at the end of the thesis to see the presentations shown to participants.*

To motivate the participants and create a more immersive experience, after every descriptive section they were asked to make a choice for their new life on Walden (ex. *buy a house / car etc.*). Additionally, they were exposed to a series of questions that serves as manipulation checks to see if they had grasped how the economic-value system worked (ex. *How much of the following amount of money do you think corresponds to the annual income of an ecological operator?*)

In the control condition participants were only exposed to an introductory phrase. Specifically: *“Dear participant, we will now ask you some questions about society, economy and money. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers.”*

5.4 Dependent variables

Following the experimental manipulation, participants answered the second part of the questionnaire, which investigated the perception of interdependence declined into a cognitive, self-construal and economic level. For those who were exposed to the manipulations two items about Walden-3 were added. Secondly, it measured their attitudes toward redistributive policies and support for progressive taxation.

The Analysis-Holism Scale (AHS) This scale was developed by Martín-Fernandez and colleagues (2022) to examine cognitive differences regarding holistic versus analytic thinking style. The original scale was designed by Choi et al. (2007) and consisted of 24 items. This 12-item version was created to reduce length and redundancy of the previous one, maintaining the original four factors conceptual model: Causality (e.g., *“Everything in the universe is somehow related to each other”*), Attitude towards contradiction (e.g., *“It is more important to find a point of compromise than to debate who is right/wrong, when one's opinions conflict with others opinions”*), Perception of change (e.g., *“A person who is currently living a successful life will continue to stay successful”*), and Locus of attention (e.g., *“It is more important to pay attention to the whole than its parts.”*). Participants indicated how much they agreed with items on a 7-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (*“strongly disagree”*) to 7 (*“strongly agree”*). Higher scores indicate greater holistic cognitive style and lower scores indicate greater analytic cognitive style.

Short 10-Item Singelis's Self-Construal Scale (SCS): Independent vs Interdependent Self This scale is the Italian validated short version of the Singelis Self-Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994) created by D'Amico and Scrima (2016). This scale is intended to measure individuals' feelings of connectedness to and/or separateness from others. Specifically has the purpose to measure the degree to which every participant explicitly reports an independent or interdependent self-construal (e.x. " $\alpha = .68$)

The Belief in a Zero Sum Game Scale (BZSG) - adapted This scale was developed by Różycka-Tran and colleagues (2010; 2015) to explore a new social axiom specifically referring to the belief that, because of the existence of a limited amount of resources, social relations are governed by the rule of "*one person's win always at the expense of another and vice versa*" (Różycka-Tran et al., 2015). The original scale was translated in Italian and adapted ($\alpha = .77$) substituting the items of Factor 2 (Joint Profit Exchange) that were critical because of their ambiguity and closeness to measuring moral/prosocial attitudes (e.g., "*Those who give much to others receive much from them.*") instead of economic ones. Specifically the new items consist of:

9. "*The wealth of a few is acquired at the expense of many*",

10. "*When one part of the population gets rich, typically some benefit is generated for others as well*",

11. "*When wealth moves/is accumulated into the hands of some people, it is because they are the ones that generated it.*"

12. *“Requiring greater contribution from the rich is unrelated to producing greater benefit for the poor.”*. Participants indicated how much they agreed with items on a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (*“strongly disagree”*) to 7 (*“strongly agree”*).

Attitude toward redistributive policies. These items focused on participants’ attitudes toward redistributive policies expressing their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale. The items were aggregated in 3 subscales targeted to different classes: High (e.x. *“High taxes for upper class individuals”*, $\alpha = .83$), Middle (e.x. *“Promoting Social Housing projects”*, $\alpha = .72$) and Low (*“Promoting Universal Basic Income”*, $\alpha = .77$).

Support for Progressive Taxation. We added these items to measure the participants’ attitudes specifically towards progressive taxation in Italy. Because other studies have shown that the general population responds to a less supportive progressivity because of not understanding tax brackets, more simple items were used. Participants answered on a 7-point Likert scale to four items: *“The government should tax everyone at the same rate”*, *“Taxes in Italy should be equal for everyone”*, *“In Italy rich people should pay higher taxes than the rest of the population”* and *“In Italy, the wealthy should be taxed more heavily.”* ($\alpha = .82$)

Perceived economic inequality. This measure was a readaptation of the the Graphic Notes Inequality Measure (GNIM) by Rodríguez-Bailón et colleagues (2017) consisting of six graphs representing different wealth distribution between five income classes, from an almost equal condition (*“The richest people in the country*

own less than twice what the poorest people own") to a strongly unequal society ("Wealthiest people in the country are 100 times richer than the poorest."). Participants had to choose one graphic figure out of six that they believed most accurately represented the economic structure of contemporary society.

Social Dominance Orientation Short Scale: This scale is the shortened version developed by Ho and colleagues (2016) of the original Social Dominance Orientation Scale (Pratto et al, 1994) and measure individual differences in the preference for group based hierarchy and inequality (e.g. "Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups. ($\alpha = .72$) Participants indicated how much they agreed with items on a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 ("*strongly disagree*") to 7 ("*strongly agree*").

Tax belief: Contribution vs Penalty Participants were introduced to a statement describing two general beliefs about taxes. Specifically: "*Some people see taxes as a contribution they can make to the collective good. Although they are not happy to pay taxes, they still see them as a kind of charitable contribution they make to society so that it can continue to function. Other people, on the other hand, perceive taxes as a toll or a penalty that is imposed on them. Despite the benefits to society, these people see taxes as a penalty imposed on them. To what extent do you think of taxes as a contribution or an imposed penalty?*". Participants have to position themselves on a slider where "*Absolute Contribution*" and "*Absolute Penalty*" were the extremes.

Utopian world: To measure the perceived discrepancy and desirability of the two societies two additional items were added. Specifically: *"How distant do you think Walden-3 is from the society you live in?"* and *"How much would you like to live on a planet similar to Walden-3?"*

Womens' unpaid care work: An additional item was added to do a preliminary test about the possible effect of exposure to two different societies and correlation with SDO and support for unpaid care work, that from an ecofeminist perspective are structurally inter-related (Wang). Specifically participants were exposed to this brief text *"Forms of personal care and assistance (parents caring for their children or elderly parents) should be supported financially. Most of the people that do this are women."* and express their level of agreement on economically sustaining them on a 7-point Likert Scale.

Lastly, participants answered socio-demographic questions investigating gender, age, degree, occupation, political orientation (left vs right wing), perception of familiar economic conditions and social class belonging.

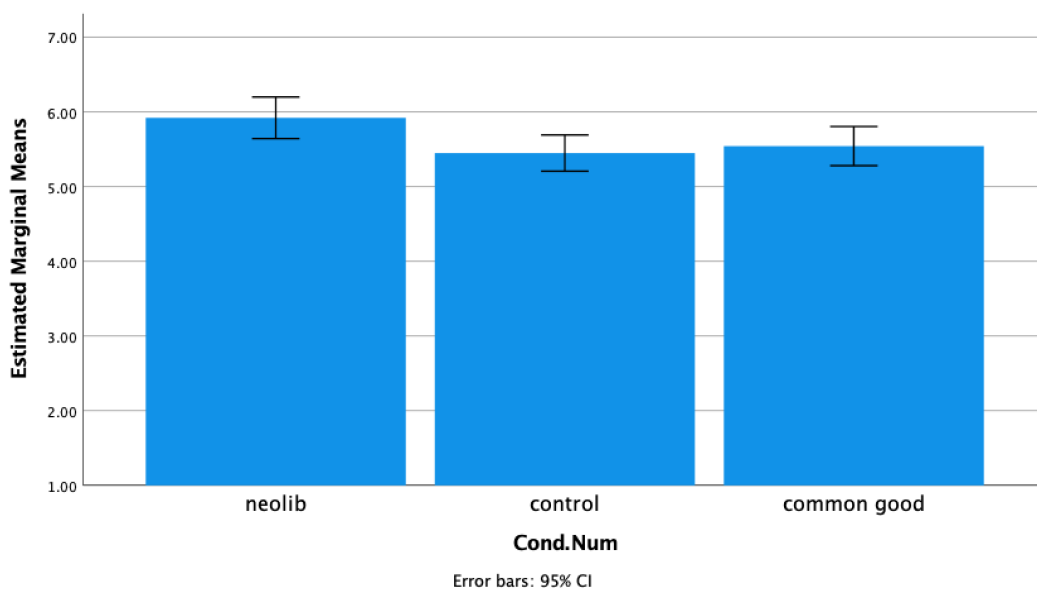
5.5 Results

For all dependent variables a one-way ANOVA with conditions (Neoliberalism, Control, Economy for the Common Good) as independent variables was run. In case of significant effects, means were compared pairwise with Bonferroni adjustment.

Progressive taxation

The ANOVA revealed a main effect for the condition, $F(2,303) = 3.41$, $p = .034$, $\eta^2_p = .022$, that is represented in Figure 1. Participants in the Neoliberalism condition endorsed progressive taxation to a greater degree than those in the control condition, $p = .037$, and, as a non-significant trend, those in the Economy for the Common Good condition, $p = .156$.

Fig. 1: Mean endorsement of progressive taxation as a function of experimental condition



Attitude toward redistributive policies

The analysis revealed no significant effect of conditions on attitude toward redistributive policies targeted to High Class ($p = .225$), Middle Class ($p = .882$) and Low Class ($p = .186$).

Womens' Unpaid care work

The analysis revealed no significant effect of the conditions on womens' unpaid care work ($p = .72$).

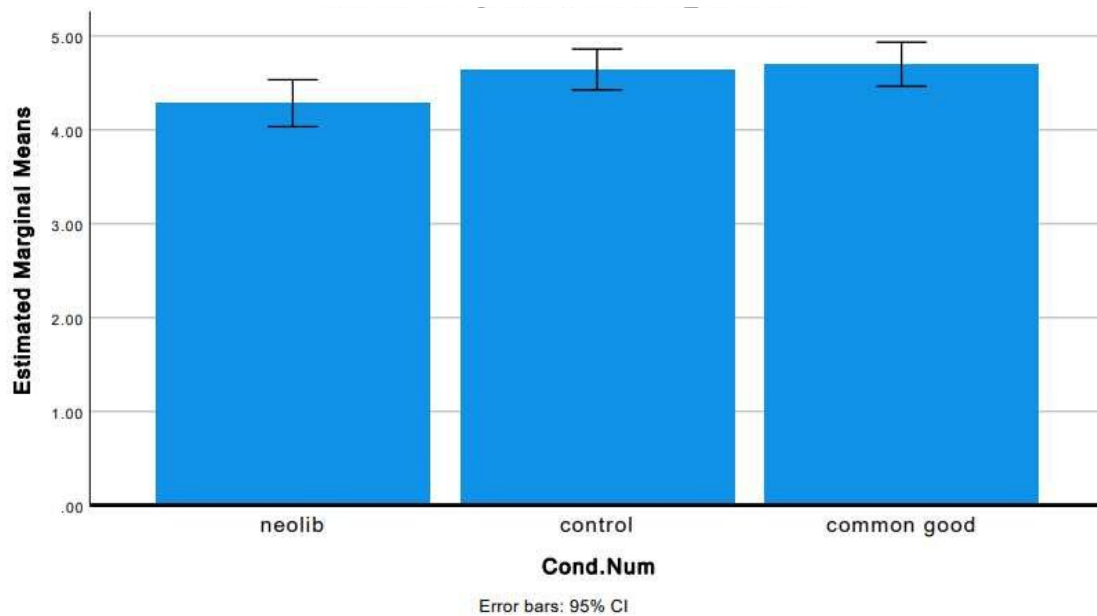
The Belief in a Zero Sum Game Scale (BZSG) - adapted

The analysis revealed no significant effect of Belief in a Zero Sum Game Scale ($p = .72$).

Interdependent vs Independent Self-Construal:

The analysis revealed no significant effect of conditions on the Interdependent Factor of Self Construction ($p = .882$) but revealed a significant effect on the Independent Factor of Self Construction $F(2,304) = 3.32, p = .037, \eta^2_p = .021$, that is represented in Figure 2. Surprisingly participants in the Neoliberal conditions perceived themselves as less independent than participants in the Economy for the Common Good conditions.

Fig. 2: Mean Independent Self Construal as a function of experimental condition



The Analysis-Holism Scale (AHS)

The analysis revealed no significant effect of condition on Analysis-Holism Scale ($p = .72$).

Utopian world: Walden-3 Similitude and Likeness

The ANOVA revealed a main effect for the conditions. Surprisingly, as represented in Figure 3a. participants in the Neoliberalism condition perceived it as less similar to the actual society than the Economy For the Common Good Condition ($F(1,187) = 39.96 <, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .18$). Despite that, participants in the Economy for the Common Good Condition significantly prefer to live in this type of society in comparison to the Neoliberalism participants ($F(1,88) = 26,74, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .12$), as reported in Figure 3b.

Fig. 3a: Mean perception of Similitude of the fictional and actual society as a function of experimental condition

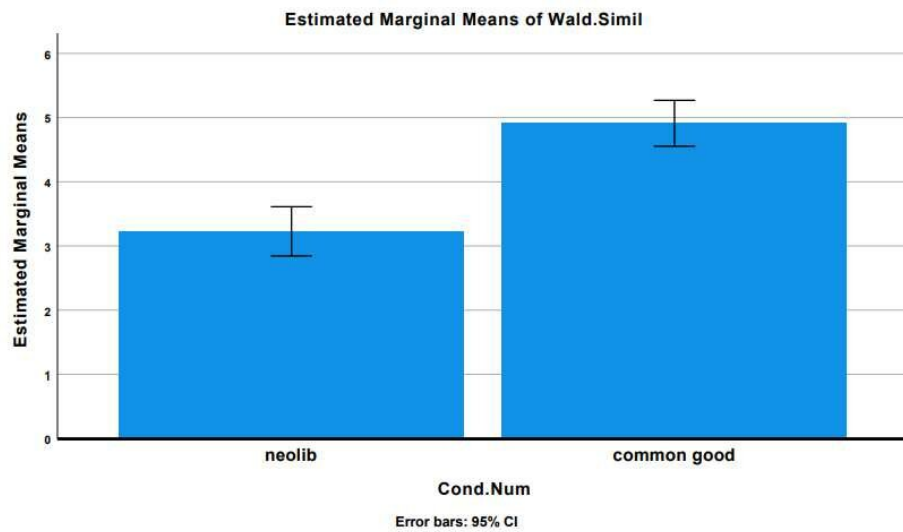
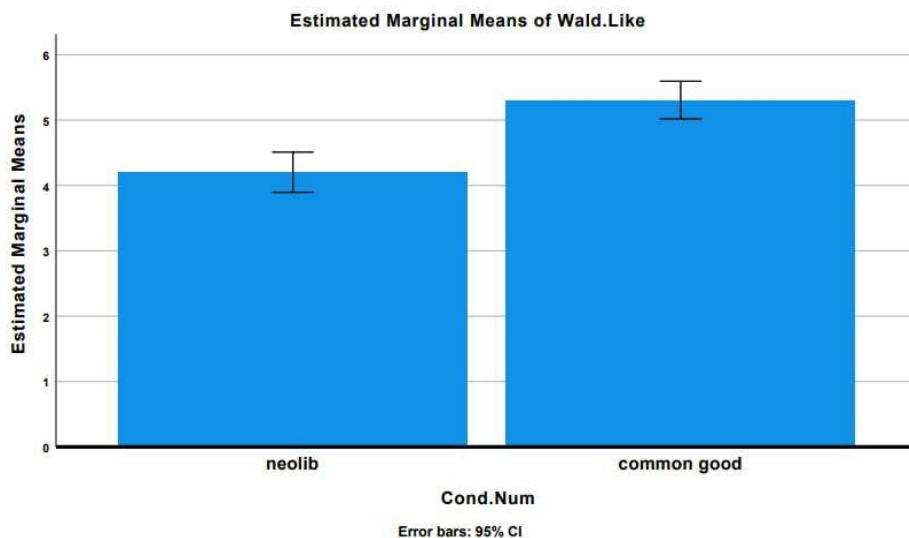


Fig. 3b: Mean perception of Likeness for the fictional society as a function of experimental condition

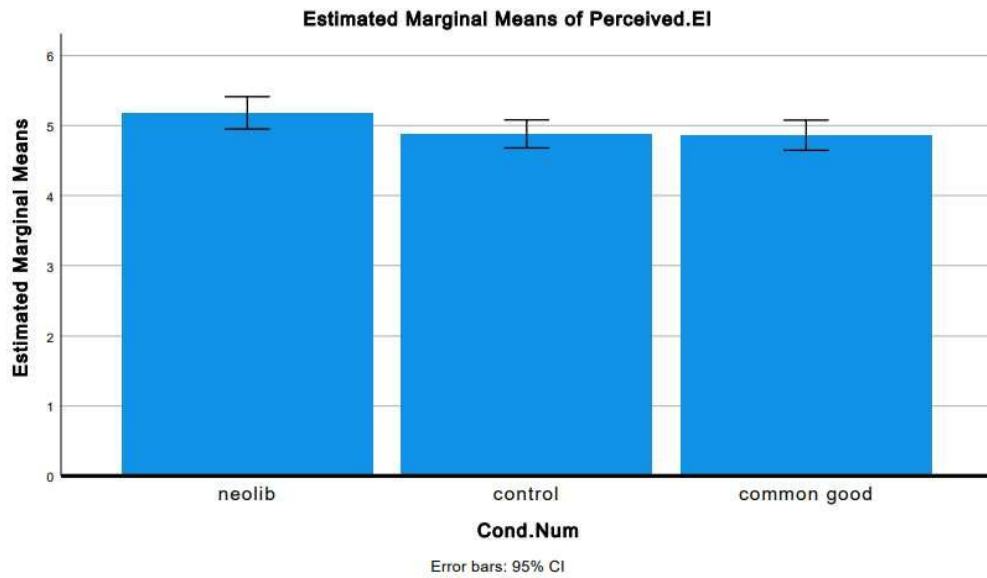


Perceived Economic Inequality

The analysis revealed no significant effect of the conditions on perceived economic inequality ($p = .08$) but it detected a slight non-significant tendency of participants in Neoliberalism to perceive more economic inequality ($M = 5.18$, SD

=-92) than participants in the Economy for the Common Good (M = 4.88, SD = 1.16) and control (Mean = 4.86, SD = 1.15) as reproduced in Fig. 6.

Fig. 6: Mean of Perceived Economic Inequality as a function of experimental condition.



5.6 Correlational analysis

In the next sections the correlational analyses and in particular the significant results will be reported with a special focus on Social Dominance Orientation, Analysis-Holism Scale and the other variables.

Social Dominance Orientation

As revealed by the results reported in *Table 2a*, Social Dominance Orientation figured to be positively correlated with Political Orientation ($r(305) = .0449^{***}$ $p < .001$), Economic Orientation ($r(305) = 0.388^{***}$, $p < .001$) and Social Policies Orientation ($r(305) = .414^{***}$, $p < .001$). These results are in line with previously cited literature reporting that Social Dominance Orientation is positively associated with more conservatives and right-wing political dimensions.

In addition to the previous research, these results show some novel findings. First of all, regards the perception of interdependence within the economic system, Social Dominance Orientation shows a negative correlation with the Believe in a Zero Sum Game Scale ($r(305) = -.301^{***}$, $p < .001$). This could be described as the observation that the more people support social hierarchies, the less they believe that an interdependence intervenes throughout the economic system. This result is coherent and reflected by the negative correlation between Social Dominance Orientation and the Tax Progressivity Scale, ($r(305) = -.222^{***}$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the more people embrace the legitimacy of social hierarchies, the less they believe that a Progressive Taxation is needed to redistribute wealth.

In line with the previous correlations, Social Dominance Orientation figured to be negatively correlated also with Redistributive Policies measure for all the targeted classes. Specifically for Redistributive Policies targeted to High Class (e.i. *“High taxes for upper class individuals”*) ($r(305) = -.267^{***}$, $p < .001$), to Middle Class (e.i. *“Promoting Social Housing projects”*) ($r(305) = -.278^{***}$, $p < .001$) and to Low Class (e.i. *“Promoting Universal Basic Income”*) ($r(305) = -.416^{***}$, $p < .001$), showing the resistance of Social Dominants participants to embrace and support policies that allow the decrease of economic inequalities. The intriguing observation is embodied by the fact that participants were never exposed to economic inequality as a contemporary issue or a problem to be confronted with, that hypothetically could have strengthened the opposition and maintenance of the status quo, meaning that high SDO people reproduce the status quo even when it is not explicitly challenged. Social Dominance Orientation correlated positively also with the Tax Belief Scale ($r(305) = .193^{***}$, $p \leq .001$), indicating that the more people support hierarchy and desire their in-group to be superior to out-groups, the more they perceive Tax as a penalty in contrast to being a contribution to society, despite their gender or self reported political orientation.

Interestingly, Social Dominance Orientation correlated negatively with the Womens' unpaid care work item (*“Forms of personal care and assistance (parents caring for their children or elderly parents) should be supported financially. Most of the people that do this are women”*), $r(305) = -.194$, $p < .001$. This novel finding suggests that the more people support social hierarchy and desire their in-group to be superior to out-groups, the less they think that Womens' Care work has to be paid. This could be interpreted as being in line with the Ecofeminist lens that state that Social Dominance Orientation is associated to measures that maintain the

economic status quo as a system rooted in the capital growth oriented structure supported by the non-monetized social and caring labor, that is sensibly carried out by female people. One intriguing result is represented by the negative correlation between Social Dominance and the degree to which people would appreciate to live in the experimental fictional societies, both in the Neoliberal condition ($r(305) = -.313^{**}$, $p < .001$) as in the Economy for the Common Good Condition ($r(305) = -.280^{**}$, $p < .001$). This suggests that the more people endorse a social hierarchical preference the less they would desire to live in the two fictional societies. This data could be interpreted as additional evidence that SDO people are resistant to systems that are different from the status quo, and this is interesting considering the Neoliberal conditions that were a reproduction of our contemporary society, simultaneously meaning an indiscriminate resistance and a level of unawareness.

	Pearson's r	p-value
Political Orientation	.499***	<.001
Economic Orientation	.388***	<.001
Social Orientation	.414***	<.001
Beliefs in Zero-Sum Game	-.301***	<.001
Support for Tax Progressivity	-.222***	<.001
Redistributive Policies (High)	-.267***	<.001
Redistributive Policies (Middle)	-.278***	<.001
Redistributive Policies (Low)	-.416***	<.001
Tax Belief	.193***	<.001
Womens' Unpaid Care Work	-.194***	<.001
Walden-3 Neoliberal Likeness	-.313**	0.003
Walden-3 ECG Likeness	-.280**	0.005

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 2a. Reported significant Pearson's Correlations between Social Dominance Orientation and the variables of the study

One of the most interesting results is the correlation between Social Dominance Orientation and the Analysis-Holism Scale, particularly with two Factors of the scale. Specifically, as reported by Table 2b, Social Dominance Orientation correlated negatively with the “Causality” Factor of the Analysis-Holism Scale (e.g., “Everything in the universe is somehow related to each other”, “Even a small change in any element of the universe can lead to significant alterations in other elements.”), $r(305) = -.244, p < .001$. This means that the more people support social hierarchies, the less they explicitly believe that there could be a distant causation between events. And this is in line with the general thesis question regarding the relation between the misperception of interdependence and the support for the status quo. The surprising fact is that these emerged from self-report measures. Moreover, SDO Scale correlated negatively with “Attitude towards contradiction” Factor of the AHS Scale (e.g., “It is more desirable to take the middle ground than go to extremes.”), $r(305) = -.141^{***}, p < .001$, suggesting that the more people support social hierarchy, the less they think that it is more important to look for a middle ground when opinions are divergent.

	Pearson’s r	p-value
Analysis-Holism Scale (Causality)	-.244***	<.001
Analysis-Holism Scale (Perception of Change)	.077	.178
Analysis-Holism Scale (Contradictions)	-.141*	0.14
Analysis-Holism Scale (Locus of Attention)	-.040	.490

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 2b. Reported significant Pearson’s Correlations between Social Dominance Orientation and the Analysis-Holism Scale Factors (Causality, Perception of Change, Contradictions and Locus of Attention)

Given that the association between SDO and the Causality Factor of AHS was one of the fundamental results in line with the theoretical framework, further correlational analyses were carried out with respect to the latter factor and the other variables. Significant results are reported in the next section.

AHS (Causality Factor)

First of all, as shown by Table 2c, “Causality” Factor of the Analysis-Holism Scale (e.g., “Everything in the universe is somehow related to each other”, “Even a small change in any element of the universe can lead to significant alterations in other elements.”), positively correlated ($r(305) = .187^{***}$, $p < .001$) with Belief in a Zero-Sum Game. This means that the more people explicitly support the idea that there is a causal relationship between even distant events, the more they perceive that there is an interdependent relationship also in the economic system. This result is interesting considering that the Holistic level measured by the AHS is a self-report belief of general and universe-related events, suggesting that there could be stronger associations with indirect measures of the same constructs. This is coherent with the general thesis question regarding the misperception of interdependence and the degree to which people embrace social and economic equality.

In line with the previous finding, “Causality” Factor of the Analysis-Holism Scale positively correlated both to support for Tax Progressivity ($r(305) = .144^{**}$, $p = .001$), as with attitude toward redistributive policies targeted to High. ($r(305) = .195^{***}$, $p < .001$), Middle ($r(305) = .142^*$, $p .013$) and Low class ($r(305) = .167^{***}$, $p .00$), suggesting that the more people explicitly support the idea that there is a causal

relationship between even distant events in time and space, the more they support economic redistributive policies targeted to all classes. Furthermore, “Causality” Factor positively correlated” with Tax Belief ($r(305) = -.139^*$, $p = .015$), suggesting that the more Holistic participants perceived more tax as a contribution to society than a penalty.

Interestingly, “Causality” Factor of the Analysis-Holism Scale positively correlated with Perceived economic inequality ($r(305) = .165^{**}$, $p = .004$), evidencing that the more Holistic participants are the more they perceive the degree to which our society is economically unequal. Even if the correlation is not strong this is still an interesting result considering the fact that the “perceived economic inequality” general mean of the sample was high.

Coherently with the previous findings, “Causality” Factor of the Analysis-Holism Scale positively correlated” with attitude toward womens’ unpaid care work. ($r(305) = .142^*$, $p = .013$) This means that the more people explicitly support the idea that there is a causal relationship between even distant events, the more they support the idea that unpaid care work carried mostly by women should be sustained economically to a more fair economic distribution.

Lastly, “Causality” Factor of the Analysis-Holism Scale positively correlated only with the measure of degree of likeness the participants desire to live in Economy For the Common Good fictional society. $r(305) = .287^*$, $p = .013$ This means that the more people explicitly support the idea that there is a causal relationship between even distant events, the more they would desire to live in a society driven as described in the Common Good manipulation.

	Pearson's r	p-value
Beliefs in Zero-Sum Game	.187	<.001
Support for Tax Progressivity	.144*	.011
Redistributive Policies (High)	.195***	<.001
Redistributive Policies (Middle)	.142*	.013
Perceived Economic Inequality	.165**	.004
Tax Belief	-.139*	.015
Womens' Unpaid Care Work	.193***	<.001
Walden-3 Neoliberal Likeness	.063	0.559
Walden-3 ECG Likeness	.287***	0.005

*p < .05, **p < .01. *** p < .001

Table 2c. Reported significant Pearson's Correlations between Analysis-Holism Scale and the variables of the study

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 General discussion

This study aimed to investigate whether, using an ecofeminist lens on economic inequality, trying to reintroduce externalities into money value can have an impact on increasing interdependence perception inside the economic system and subsequently increase support for wealth redistribution.

Contrary to the initial hypotheses, results show that even with a slight difference participants in the Neoliberalism condition strengthen support for progressive taxation compared to the Economy for the Common Good condition. This could be less surprising if explanations that cover several levels are taken into consideration. First of all, as found in a recent study carried by Hartwich and Backer (2019) the exposure to an explicit description of the Neoliberalism system (compared to a socialist one) increases resentment to the people that occupy the higher economic strata of society, mediated by an anomie feeling, bringing to a higher attitude to penalize them. Secondly, the higher support for redistributive policies can furthermore be explained by an anchoring bias, meaning the tendency to use and rely on previously given information to configure an idea/decision when asked to. In fact, people in Neoliberalism condition, before responding to support progressive taxation were exposed to a progressive taxation tax brackets, similar to Italian tax system and as a result people may have used this cognitive shortcut. Lastly, participants in the Neoliberalism condition, that highlighted explicitly the structural characteristic of our society, may have created greater revulsion to the system itself and reported a higher level of reactance, an effect broadly explored in the literature that strengthens an attitude that is contrary to what was intended. The same

explanations can be applied for participants in Economy for the Common Good Condition, which results in high and similar average regarding the support for redistributive policies, but instead could not have had an anchoring bias effect because they were exposed to a different taxation system than ours (High/Medium/Low social and environmental impasse).

Regarding the Independent Self Construal which was significantly lower in Neoliberal condition, people exposed to Neoliberalism might have responded with more revulsion with the system and hypothetically showing reactance effects. Also interesting is the significance finding with respect to similarity with the current society where participants in the Neoliberalism condition found it to be less similar than those exposed to Economy for the Common Good, showing a widespread unawareness of our current economic system.

On the other hand, correlational analysis resulted in findings that are coherent with the theoretical framework and show some novel and interesting findings. One of the main theoretical premises was that the Ecofeminist lens sees oppressive systems as stemming from the same cultural-historical matrix embodied in the capitalist economic system. Referring to studies that find correlation between SDO, sexism, naturism, the negative correlation between SDO and womens' unpaid care work is interesting. Specifically, one of the theoretical pillars of the ecofeminist analysis is that the hierarchical and exploitative system is maintained on the exploitation in equal measure and manner of all that is non-monetized: unpaid care work that is usually carried by women and the exploitation of nature and the consequences on it (externalities). What in fact was found is the negative correlation between SDO and women's unpaid care work and therefore the more people support social hierarchies the less they believe that care work should be paid for economic

redistribution. If the item had been better constructed, it would have been possible to investigate this correlation further (e.g., make explicit reference to the gender pay-gap, refer to women in one condition and remove them in the other etc.). Another finding in line with the theoretical framework concerns the correlation between Analysis-Holism Scale and Social Dominance Orientation, coherently with the theoretical framework concerning the division of society into dualisms and hierarchies bringing to an atomistic and not relational/holistic view of social and economic practices. This evidence shows how the cognitive structure of system thinking is in some way connected to a social attitude in a way that is not so intuitive. The results show that people who have a more holistic and relational System Thinking and believe that distant events in space and time can have a causal relationship are less supportive of social hierarchies. Furthermore, this is consistent also with the finding about the perception of interdependence and support for redistributive policies. Particularly focusing on the correlation finding between AHS (Causality Factor) and of all measures of redistributive policies including also the Belief in a Zero-Sum game, the results has shown that the more people embrace an holistic approach and thinking style, the more they support policies that seek to decrease inequality. All these results are intriguing especially taking into consideration the fact that within the manipulations there was no reference to targeting inequality as an urgent problem or explicit expressions with respect to inequality.

In general, these findings open up possible new research directions involving the study of the perception of interdependence in all its declensions and how it can impact beliefs, attitudes and behaviors within the economic system. Although numerous studies have been implemented with respect to cross-cultural differences

(Martin-Fernandez, 2022; Nisbett, 2003; 2001), other authors suggest that there are differences found even within the same culture and it can be contextually elicited and/or trained (Choi et al., 2007). Understanding what the premises and predictors that contribute to the creation of one System Thinking over another can be fundamental considering that as suggested by Nisbett (2003): *“social practices and cognitive ones maintain each other in a state of equilibrium”* and one of the greatest challenges of our contemporary times is to deal with complex, globalized systems characterized by interconnections between interrelated events in a way that is not self-evident, as broadly discussed in the first chapters about the case of economic inequalities and how they have been reproduced and reinforced.

6. 2 Study limits and implication for practice

This study shows several limitations. First of all, although immersive, the questionnaire was very long and many participants were in fact eliminated because of the manipulation checks, showing how the experimental manipulations could alternatively either require a high level of concentration and cognitive energy or that were not easily understandable. One of the most important critical issues may had been the construction of the "Economy For The Common Good" manipulation and in particular the ambiguity of the term "impact" used to refer to the value of currency, (specifically in the ECG condition: *“the money value is calculated on the basis of the social and environmental impact of economic exchanges”*) crucial to represent the (re)internalization of externalities, which was one of the cornerstone of the research. For this reason for further exploration of the impact of alternative economics systems

a better and clearer design is needed. A pre-test study could have been conducted to early identify what could have been the critical items and/or test different ways to describe and explain the ECG (re)internalization of externalities structure to detect the most understandable.

Secondly, the manipulations targeted only cognitive-based motives and made no reference to or elicit emotional and ideological ones, which had been proven to be the strongest when attitudes are to be manipulated. Specifically, in reference to System Justification Theory (Jost, 2019), in this study there was no reference to fairness and meritocracy, which have been shown to be the strongest triggers when the focus is to challenge the system and the status quo.

Lastly, one of the most evident issues is that all of the investigated variables were made through self-reported measures and this could attenuate the effectiveness of the manipulations because people tend to use shortcuts and express beliefs and attitudes that are already stabilized in their own life or mitigate/exacerbate them for social desirability when confronted with unfamiliar scenarios. For further investigation a more interactive as real experiential scenarios and/or game-play design could have been structured, trying to explore the impact of different economic structures using implicit measures.

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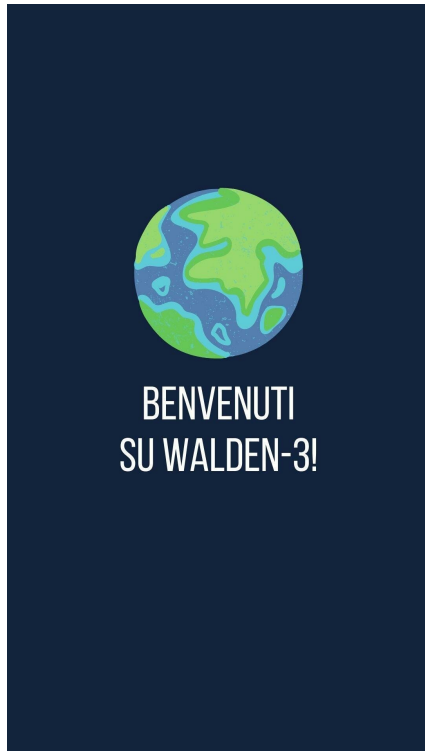
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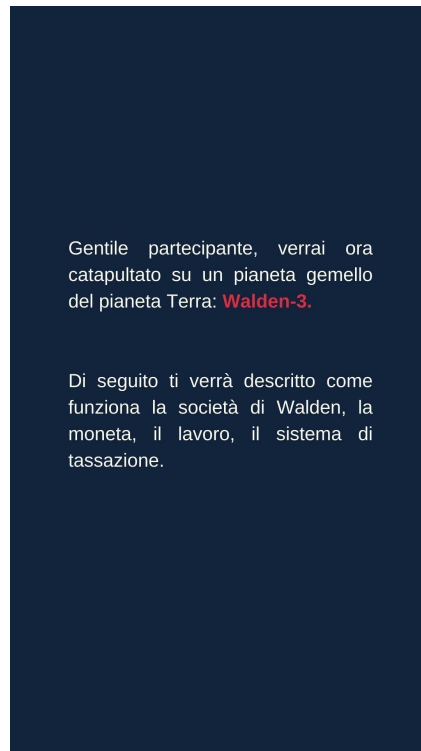
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Appendix A. Materials

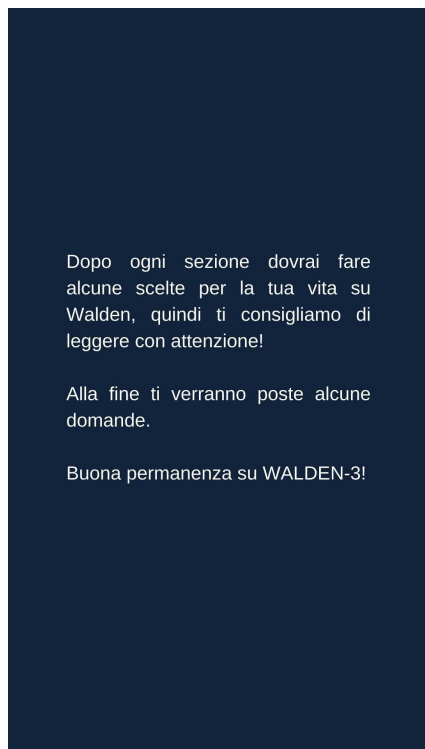
1. Common introduction to both experimental manipulations



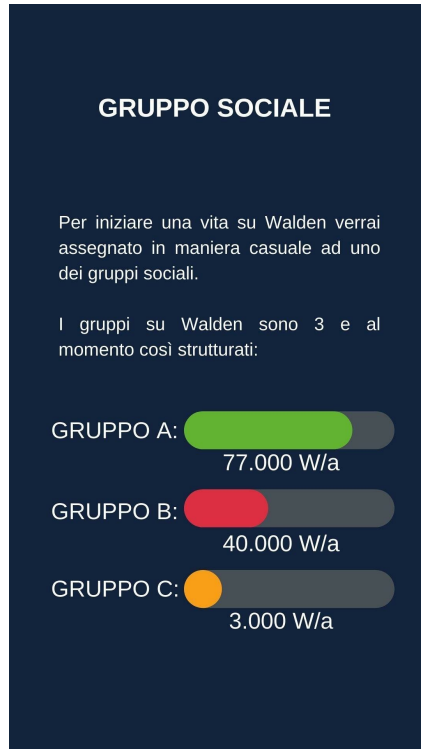
1a



1b



1c




1d

2. Example of Walden-3 Economy for The Common Good manipulations


VALORI

Su Walden-3 il **bene pubblico** è ciò che ha maggior valore (es. servizi di cura, scuola e ricerca, acqua, protezione ambientale)



2a

MONETA



La moneta di Walden-3 è il **WALDO**

Ora ti spiegheremo in versione semplificata come viene calcolato il valore del Waldo

2b

MONETA

Walden-3 è **più ricca** quando ci sono **molti scambi** che hanno **impatto positivo** sul bene pubblico.

es.
rigenerazione ambientale
spazi di aggregazione
servizi di cura alla persona

2c

MONETA

Il valore del Waldo è sensibile quindi **all'impatto sociale e ambientale** che **gli scambi** (es. l'acquisto/vendita di prodotti e servizi) **hanno sul bene pubblico**



2d

3. Example of Walden-3 Neoliberalism manipulations

VALORI


Su Walden-3 il **successo individuale** è ciò che ha maggior valore



A bar chart with three green bars of increasing height from left to right. A green arrow points upwards and to the right, starting from the top of the first bar and ending above the third bar.

3a

MONETA



La moneta di Walden-3 è il **WALDO**
Ora ti spiegheremo in versione semplificata come viene calcolato il valore del Waldo

3b

MONETA

Walden-3 è più ricca quando c'è più produttività

3c

MONETA

Il valore del Waldo è quindi sensibile agli **scambi economici che avvengono su Walden** (es. l'acquisto/vendita di prodotti e servizi)



An illustration showing two hands. The left hand holds a yellow coin with a 'W' on it. The right hand holds a red shopping bag. Two red curved arrows form a circle between the coin and the bag, indicating a cycle of exchange.

3d