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Career project. Counselling and vocational identity construction

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my loving grandmother *Eleonora*.
I am who I am because of your loving hands. In my heart, I will hold you close.
Always and forever.

Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that except where specific reference is made to the work of others, the contents of this dissertation are original.

This dissertation is the result of my own work unless stated otherwise.

Tiziana Di Palma

Naples, December, 2017

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Abstract

My research project focused on topics regarding work and school counselling in the theoretical framework of vocational identity development in late adolescence and first adulthood.

As known, Italian students have to make vocational choices during the transition from one level of education to another or from education to work. Those choices are difficult and demanding, more than in the past because today's job market is weak and not inclusive especially for young people. Those vocational choices single out personal instances and motivations that, from one hand they regard future self-projection, from another hand they are the products of one's personal history. Thus, they are strictly linked to capacity of synthesis that regards the resolution of identity crisis (Erikson, 1950; 1968), amounting to one of the main developmental tasks of high school students at the end of their educational path and young people in transition from one level of education to another and/or from school to work.

However, several studies showed that in this phase of transition most Italian students are still in a moratorium and/or diffusion phase, given that they have not elaborated yet a definition of their own identity (delay syndrome, Livi Bacci, 2008).

Despite this, the Italian educational system asks them to design their future educational and work paths, first of all deciding whether to continue their studies or not and in which direction.

Starting from considerations touched upon, the present research project aimed to design and to implement a model of educational and vocational intervention, inspired by life designing counselling (Savickas, 2011) developed on the base of Italian context peculiarities and delay syndrome typical of Italian students. According with life designing guidelines, the model takes into account life trajectories that form the backdrop of career development. In order to aim the general goal described above, the research is articulated in secondary goals needed to the model implementation.

The research is articulated in four studies, related to one other, elaborated to contribute to the finalising of career counselling/intervention model. Each contribution is respectively aimed to explore: a) vocational identity statuses (Porfeli et al., 2011) of Italian high school students attending their last years of school. In addition, the study analysed, variables as work-learn trajectories and early work experiences during education within vocational identity development; b) career development and meaning making processes. Through a narrative approach and a psychosocial point of view, similarities and differences between two different samples of people in transition (high school students attending their last two years of school and university students attending their first university year) from a large city of the South of Italy and from a village in the East-South of England were analysed; c) Career development and meaning making processes, of Italian high school students at two different periods of

their transition. This analysis is always through a narrative approach but in longitudinal terms.

Then, d) it was designed, implemented and experimented a pilot career counselling/intervention, in order to complete the picture of Italian school and university students' situation about career development and choices. This was designed and implemented starting from literature regarding mainly the career construction and life design and on the base of first study results, the implementation of a career narrative approach and contextual factors related to job market, finding work opportunities, and national statistical analysis.

Starting from findings of studies and pilot career counselling/intervention, a career counselling/intervention model for high school students was designed.

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Introduction

Current society context was analysed from different points of view, sociological, political, and psych-sociological but according to Guichard et al. (2012) every points of view describe today society as more complex, fluid and unstable than in the past (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991) both regards evolution of societies in general and world of work. The latter seems to be more flexible and this has as consequence work trajectories less defined and a continuous definition and re-definition of workers' pathway by themselves (Hall, 2002). These processes of definition and re-definition mean simultaneously a definition and re- definition of their lives and of their identity (Savickas, 2005).

Despite this situation, Guichard et al. (2012) underline that work is still an important domain even if with new characteristics. There is major instability, uncertainty and less trust in the work organization, these conditions had as consequence a focusing on the worker who set up on his/her own, on his/her skills and abilities rather than on the company. This causes, as Hall (2002) says, a career *boundaryless* as consequence of no longer work relationships, more focused on individual decisions and responsibilities.

Situation described above is typical of western societies but every society has its own peculiarities. European countries are characterized by a deep crisis about job because of economic distress, situation that seems more critical in the south. The percentage of unemployment is still high (Euro area unemployment at 9,5%; Eurostat

04/2017); about youth unemployment in the Eurozone is at 19,4 %, Italian youth unemployment is at 35,2% and it means that despite a small improvement, Italy remains third to last among European countries. Italian problems fall within the southern European problems but with some peculiarities (Delay Syndrome, Livi Bacci, 2008). Italian young people delayed transition to adulthood postponing moving away from home and so a longer cohabitation with parents, entrance to the job market and the transition to parenthood (Leccardi, 2005). In addition, there is a prolonged education; recent statistical data (Miur, 2016) show that is still high the percentage of students that decide to continue their educational path at university and, after that, some of them choose to add other specialisations.

According to Guichard et al. (2012), society and work organization changes have had several consequences both in terms of career development and of career counselling.

In line with that, the present research project aimed to design and implement a career counselling/intervention model able to face the Italian society challenges.

In order to design the model, a part of the present research aimed to study in depth career development of Italian high school students using both a qualitative and a quantitative approach.

A first part of dissertation introduces the theoretical framework of studies and of career counselling/intervention model. The second part shows the articulation of research project in four studies, related to one other, to explore: a) vocational identity

statuses (Porfeli et al., 2011) of Italian high school students attending their last years of school. In addition, the study analysed variables as work-learn trajectories and early work experiences during education within vocational identity development; b) Career development and meaning making processes. Through a narrative approach and a psychosocial point of view, similarities and differences between two different samples of people in transition (high school students attending their last two years of school and university students attending their first university year) from a large city of the South of Italy and from a village in the East-South of England were analysed; c) Career development and meaning making processes, of Italian high school students at two different periods of their transition. This analysis is always through a narrative approach but in longitudinal terms. Then, d) it was designed, implemented and experimented a pilot career counselling/intervention with Italian high school students at their last two years of school.

Finally, the third part is focused on a counselling/intervention model, designed and implemented on the base of findings of the first study, of the implementation of the narrative approach, and of results of implementation and experimentation of pilot career counselling/intervention.

Theoretical Framework

Chapter 1 Career development

The last decades are characterized by fast changes of the job world synthetized as “de-jobbing” meaning the passage from stable and continuous jobs to temporary and unstable jobs (Savickas et al., 2009). These changes have requested more adaptability to the context from workers and the consequent development of different and new skills because the difficulty and insecurity of the transition to the job world. Workers are in continuous upgrade and learning of competencies for facing challenges linked to maintaining their jobs and, at the same time, to creating new opportunities (Savickas et al., 2009; Leccardi, 2006). This conception underlines, more than in the past, the role of the person in the career development (Duarte, 2004).

These changes request a new approach to career and vocational development and a reformulation of career interventions and counselling (Savickas et al., 2009).

As suggest Bassot and Reid (2013) career counselling in post-industrial societies still means to help people to find a job rather than to consider how career is interlaced into other life domains (Curie & Hajjar, 1987).

In fact, Guichard (2008, 2009a) underlines that career choices are linked to personal wishes about life style, and who people want to become. This requests a process of reflection in depth and exploration of possible selves (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006).

Savickas et al. (2009) assume that current approaches would be insufficient to face problems of today world of work mainly because of two aspects: a) they take into account the stability of personal characteristics in relation to relatively stable environments; b) career is conceptualised as a fixed sequence of stages.

Skorikov and Vondracek (2011) in their analysis on research about career development pinpointed that the majority of them focused on vocational identity, studied individually or in the framework of career development.

According to Savickas (2002), theories about career can be categorised in those focused on individual differences and individual development, and on the base of this differentiation it is possible to speak about *person-environment fit theories* (e.g. Holland, 1973; 1985; 1994); *developmental theories* (e.g. Super, 1969; 1980; 1990; Gottfredson, 2002); *social learning theories* (e.g. *The learning theory of career counselling* – LTTC, Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996; *Social Cognitive Career Theory* – SCCT based on Bandura's (1968) theory); and *Post-modern theories* (e.g. Savickas, 2005; 2010; Guichard, 2002; 2008; 2009).

1.1. Career development from modernity to post modernity

Developing a career is, according to Erikson's theory (1968), a central task since adolescence when young people should do the first attempts to synthesize values, beliefs, attitudes and possible future career paths developed during childhood in a structured career project. Despite that, as Skorikov and Vondracek (2011) underline, the main theories recognise that career development starts since childhood and continues in adolescence (Kielhofner, 2007; Kroger, 2007; Skorikov and Vondracek, 2007; 2011), a few studies focalized those periods of life both from a developmental point of view and from an assessment point of view. Most of the studies and theories are focused on first years of adulthood and especially in terms of vocational identity development (e.g. Goossens, 2001; Meeus et al., 1999; Porfeli et al., 2011).

Within vocational psychology, it is possible to pinpoint the development of different theories about career. Although there are specific differences, a large part of theories underlines the continuous interaction and adjustment between individual and their career environment (Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas, 2005).

This means that career development is the result of personal characteristics and capabilities and of the influence of several contextual factors, such as significant relationships, fast changes of work environment, different norms and technological

changes as suggested by Skorikov and Vondracek (2007) within a developmental contextual perspective (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberge, 1986).

Skorikov and Vondracek (2011) tried to systematise the main contributions to the study of career developed. They highlighted that starting from the central role of interaction, several Authors have developed different approaches, each one underlining different and specific aspects such as Personality characteristics (Holland, 1985, 1997), work values system (Super, 1957, 1990), and more recent proposals that take into account contextual prospective (Lock & Strong, 2010; Savickas, 2005; Vondracek, Lerner & Schulenberg, 1986).

Holland (1985) was one of the first Authors to attempt a systematization of theories about career development. Holland's proposal, namely a personality-theory-based approach, stresses the relationships between personality types and work environment. Holland has postulated that vocational interests and career environments can be categorised in six different typologies. The acronym RIASEC indicates those typologies (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional). In brief, Holland assumed that people aim to individualise environments fit to their own career, interests, needs, and skills.

Holland's theory is explained by three main concepts: congruence, consistency, and differentiation. Career life goal is described as finding "congruence" in the interaction between people and career environment. The degree of congruence indicates

the level of satisfaction and stability of each person concerning his or her career.

Regarding consistency, it is linked to the similarity between personality characteristics and vocational orientations. Finally, differentiation refers to the possibility to distinguish clearly high and low interest types in one's profile.

In the 1970s, Holland, integrated his theory studying in depth aspects linked to vocational identity. The Author defined vocational identity as a stable whole of career goals, interests and capabilities that an individual develops over time. According to Holland, personality types and vocational identity can be meant as predictors of vocational choices and success. He studied vocational identity as lifelong task focusing on changes (in terms of activities, interests, values, skills, and capabilities) and strength of identity but overlooking vocational structure and processes. Despite its limits, this theory has been used and developed in successive theories.

Super's life span theory (1990, 1996) is inspired by Holland's proposal but mainly focused on Self-concept. Career development is the result of development and implementation of self-concept with particular emphasis on the social context and its influences. In fact, self-concept is conceptualised as a product of the interactions between different personal, social and environmental factors.

As with Holland's theory Super's proposal also conceives that career development is a life process and it evolves over the time thanks to new experiences, going through developmental stages and several life and work roles. Super (1990)

suggests that career development follows specific stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. Every stage is characterized by specific career developmental tasks linked to the age range. Facing positively or not those tasks indicates the degree of career maturity. Another central concept of Super's theory is about life and work roles that can explain better the interaction between people and context. Super theorises that any stages is characterized by a different constellation of life and work roles that come in succession and alternate in different social contexts. The interaction can create conflicts, interference and confusion when individuals are not able to integrate their multiple roles.

Both proposals (Holland and Super) have influenced the following career theories and career guidance as well as career assessment.

Among the more recent career theories, it is possible to mention briefly Gottfredson's theory (1981, 1996, 2002, 2005) according to which career choice requests cognitive abilities in order to organize career information congruently with age and general intelligence. In the latest reviews of theory, much attention was given to the interaction between genetic factors and environment assuming that career interests, values and skills are the results of genetic characteristics, whose expression is influenced by environmental factors. But in this process an individual has an active role that can influence career development.

Career choice is an elimination of vocational alternatives. This process is guided by the specific aspects of self-concept that characterise developmental stages. In addition, this framework considers another process namely compromise. According to the Author, this process is necessary in order to cope with changes linked to the labour market, instability and economic difficulties.

Savickas' Career Construction Theory (2005) starts from three different points of view on vocational behaviour: a) differential perspective focuses individual differences in terms of personality types and vocational interests (e. i. Holland, 1985); b) developmental perspective that is focused on psychosocial adaptation and coping strategies used to face developmental tasks, work transitions and problems correlates; and c) narrative perspective that takes into account meaning making processes in the analysis of life themes.

The guideline of Career Construction is to synthesize these three perspectives in order to study career construction processes using life themes and to be a framework for vocational counsellors. This theory seems to be fit to answer to the needs of the current labour market characterized by uncertainty, fast changes, more mobility and flexibility request to workers (Savickas et al., 2009).

In particular, a main role is given to life themes and meaning making processes. This theory focuses on the interpretative and interpersonal processes about how people

have dealt with the main events of their lives and the career choices and paths, emphasising such narrative career stories.

The attempt, as underlined in Savickas and colleagues (2009), is to overcome the limits of quoted approaches still linked to personal and social stability and their interpretations of career development articulated in sequences of stages at a specific range of age.

Savickas (2005, 2009, 2010) stresses in his theory both construction processes of career and about life. He maintains that, in today's fluid society, a congruency between personal characteristics and interests and environment is not always reached and this situation requests flexible capabilities. In order to face that situation, people modify their own self-concepts to the new work roles. Savickas defines this process as adaptability meant as capacities and resources useful to face vocational developmental tasks, transitions and personal problems.

In this sense, Career Construction Theory does not separate career construction and life paths but rather underlines how building career means at the same time designing life.

1.2. Career Development in the framework of Vocational Identity

Another point of view on Career Development is based on Erikson's psychosocial approach on identity (1968) that represents an alternative that considers structural and process aspects of vocational identity and for these reasons largely used and developed.

The main point is that to achieve occupational choices and roles and career commitments are important elements of identity development (Porfeli et al., 2011). Vocational identity is meant as a specific-domain of overall identity that provides a framework to regulate one's own career goals and self-regulation processes (Hirschi, 2012). To develop a sense of wholeness during a psychosocial crisis is more complex, difficult and stressful than in the past because of the dynamic nature and complexity of adult roles in today society (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). According to Christiansen (1999), to achieve a job is one of the preferential ways to express one's identity and of social integration. Several studies showed positive associations between vocational and overall identity especially in transition periods (Flum & Blustein, 2006; Nauta & Kahn, 2007; Kroger, 2007; Skorikov, 2007). Despite this, several empirical studies showed an asynchrony in terms of development between identity domains (e.g., Goossens, 2001; Solomon-Kountouri, 2008; Aleni Sestito et al., 2015).

Vocational identity refers to one's perception of career interests, values, goals, capabilities (Kielhofner, 2007) and to a structure of meanings by which people try to

find a link between their own motivations and competencies with available career roles (Meijers, 1998).

As Skorikov and Vondracek (2011) took up, developing a career is one of the main tasks of development especially during adolescence; it is possible to say that the construction of vocational identity can represent the index of progress in career development (Kroger, 2007; Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2006).

Vocational identity construction is a lifelong process (Erikson, 1968) and as well as for overall identity, the goal is to face positively psychosocial crisis. According to the author, the way in which people face identity task produces specific consequences in terms of adjustment and this condition is an important precursor for further career.

Marcia's operationalization (1966, 1993) of Erikson's theory in terms of identity statuses is the base for several following proposals. Every status is characterized by different levels of exploration and commitment in dealing with vocational identity crisis. Statuses are *Achievement*, characterized by a high level of commitment in vocational goals and values achieved after exploration; *Foreclosure* status with a high level of commitment but not as a consequence of exploration but rather as consequence of early identification with career role models of parents and/or peers; *Moratorium*, characterized by a high level of exploration but not finalized to career choices because of a temporary incapacity to make career commitments at long

term; *Diffusion*, low levels of exploration and commitment. Individuals in this status are not able to make commitments even if they have already experienced identity crisis.

On the base of Marcia's operationalization, a recent proposal have underlined that to study in depth exploration and commitment processes clarifies better identity formation. Crocetti et al. (2008) proposed a three-factor model adding to commitment and exploration a third factor namely *reconsideration of commitment*. This latter consists in an evaluation of present commitments on the base of a comparison between achieved commitments lately not satisfactory on long term and new possible alternatives. During this process of reconsideration, previous commitments are explored in depth if this process calls into question those commitments, these latter are discarded choosing other alternatives which in turn will be put under reconsideration process.

These three processes are interrelated; specifically reconsideration of commitment is shown to be positively related to the exploration process. This means that those who are exploring current commitments are at the same time gathering new information about possible alternative commitments (e.i.; Luyckx, Goossens, & Soenens, 2006).

The way in which these dimensions are associated among them defines five different identity statuses: *Achieved, Foreclosed, Moratorium, Searching Moratorium, Diffused*.

Luyckx and colleagues (2006; 2008) proposed an extension of Marcia's model that includes two dimensions for commitment, namely identification with commitment and commitment making, as well as two dimensions for exploration, in breadth and in depth. Actually this extension is based on previous conceptualizations of exploration in breadth and commitment making by Marcia (1966) and Grotevant (1987) and on Meeus's contribution (1996) about identification with commitment and exploration in depth.

Also Luyckx and colleagues' model (2005; 2006) defines six different identity statuses: *Achieved*, *Foreclosed*, *Moratorium*, *Diffused Diffusion*, *Carefree Diffusion*, *Undifferentiated*.

Exploration In Breadth refers to researching information about possible alternatives considering personal goals, values and ideas before making commitment; *Exploration In Depth*, instead, is an exploration process acting after making commitment in order to evaluate achieved commitments. *Commitment Making* refers to made identity choices. The second dimension of commitment refers to the internalization of those identity choices and the feelings related to these latter.

Porfeli's proposal (2009; 2011) about vocational identity is based on previous described models. The author considers two dimensions of commitment namely *career commitment making* and *identification with a career commitment*, two dimensions of

exploration, *in breadth and in depth career exploration*, finally two dimensions of career reconsideration namely *career self-doubt* and *career commitment flexibility*.

The way in which these dimensions are associated among them produces six different vocational identity statuses which are: *Achieved*, people with this status have achieved career commitments after an active exploration; *Searching moratorium*, individuals search for new career commitments perceived as more suitable to their career aspirations; *Moratorium*, people in this status explore actively possible career alternatives but without career planning; *Foreclosed*, people made early career choices without exploration of other possible alternatives; *Diffused*, individuals who do not actively explore different vocational alternatives and who do not have strong vocational identity commitments; *Undifferentiated*, people that show moderate scores in all six dimensions and so it is not possible to identify any vocational statuses.

1.3. Vocational identity as developmental task in adolescence and late adolescence

As said, vocational identity development is a life span process aimed to construct the self as worker (Kielhofner, 2007). According to *Developmental Life Span Psychology* perspective, identity development is a complex, dynamic and on-going process that occurs over life and is influenced by individual and contextual factors (Aleni Sestito, 2004; Bosma et al., 1994). On the base of this conceptualization, and

especially taking into account factor interactions, it is inferable that to postpone adult roles can have an impact on identity developmental processes. Thus this is describable as not progressive and linear than in the past (Aleni Sestito et al., 2012; Sica et al., 2014). The construction of Self as Worker is ascribable to criteria for adulthood (Nelson & Barry, 2005) that assume new peculiarities due to social changes with consequences on developmental trajectories in the transition to adulthood. As underlined by Skorikov and Vondracek (2007, 2011) in their work, career development starts in childhood with early identification with meaningful adult work roles, attributions from others of work roles, parent's ambitions and children's first work ambitions that can be the base of career formation processes.

But according to Kroger (2007), the process of identity development is to consider starting from adolescence because cognitive capacities in childhood could not be adequate to begin that process considering its complexity. In fact, a new capacity of a way of thinking emerges during adolescence that Inhelder and Piaget (1958) defines as formal operational thought. This capacity of thinking allows adolescents to think in an abstract way, to question parental values even those related to work. This questioning involves an exploration broadly and deeply of different life domains; first a process of exploration in breadth is activated in order to explore all possibilities and then, after having selected some possibilities, these latter are the object of an exploration in depth aimed to find more information about selected careers in order to make career commitments. During life span, especially due to post modern society

characteristics, these two kinds of exploration can be activated several times in case of reconsideration of career commitment, in work transition or in job dissatisfaction (Porfeli & Lee, 2007). They can have different effects on career development; in breadth exploration promotes flexibility but it can be related to an absence of career planning especially in case of prolonged time. In depth exploration, instead, facilitates career planning and makes stronger career commitments (Porfeli & Skorikov, 2010). This latter exploration supports career commitment in adolescence.

The global look at career development proposed by Skorikov and Vondracek (2011) suggests that this latter is the result of a combination of several personal characteristics and several environmental factors, thus it is not possible to indicate a common career developmental path and a specific moment in which an individual chooses a career. But even if there is agreement about defining career development as not predictable, Vondracek and colleagues (1986) underlined that it is possible to identify three more frequent vocational identity statuses which are: *occupational identity diffusion* quite common to a large part of adolescents; *occupational identity foreclosure* typical of individuals that after having experiment diffusion, making choices in an uncritical way without exploration, often as result of others' pressure; or, finally, adolescents can think about their own career beliefs, and attitudes doubting, in some cases, their parents' values to face identity crisis as theorized by Erikson (1968). This process has as consequence a phase of *occupational identity moratorium*

characterized by exploration in order to achieve a career but, at the same time, by a temporary incapability to make a career choice at long term.

Several researches showed (Fadjukoff, et al., 2005; Skorikov, 2007) that this period of *moratorium* can be prolonged in time due to today's job market and social conditions that could make difficult formulating and achieving career commitments.

Passing to *achieve vocational identity status* depends on how adolescents face those difficulties and how they finalize the career exploration process. If they are characterized by a good level of agency and by proactive behaviour, according to Schwartz, Cotè, and Arnett (2005), adolescents are more likely to finalize the exploration process in a career commitment. On the contrary, if adolescents do not feel confident and capable to face an uncertain job market, to overcome obstacles in their career projects and in absence of an active exploration of career choices, they can stay in *moratorium*.

Another contribution to the study of vocational identity on the base of Marcia's identity status model is Skorikov and Vondracek (2007) *Occupational identity status classification*. This classification considers two categories definable: *Occupational Commitment* articulated in not made and made, and *Occupational Exploration* articulated in Limited, Active, and Completed. The interrelation between these categories products six different identity statuses: *Occupational Identity Diffusion*, as result of a not made occupational commitment and a limited occupational exploration;

Occupational Identity Moratorium, as the result of a not made occupational commitment and an active occupational exploration; *Occupational Identity Confusion*, as the result of not made occupational commitment and a completed occupational exploration; *Occupational Identity Foreclosure*, as the result of made occupational commitment and a limited occupational exploration; *Dynamic Occupational Identity Achievement*, as the result of made occupational commitment and an active occupational exploration; and, finally, *Static Occupational Identity Achievement*, as the result of made occupational commitment and a complete occupational exploration.

1.4. Factors implicated in career development

Skorikov and Vondracek (2011) analysed factors implicated in career development by reviewing several researches. Authors underlined how vocational and avocational activities (Vondracek et al., 1986) have direct and indirect role in career development. Vocational activities like work experiences during school has been the topic of several studies but with contrasting results. A part of these studies has shown that an early work experience could not have a positive role in career development for different reasons; in some countries it is not allow to work while schooling but, even in countries in which working is encouraged, this latter is qualitatively poor and thus it cannot be significant in career development (Arnett, 2000; Ferreira, Santos, Fonseca, & Haase, 2007; Skorikov & Vondracek, 1997).

On the contrary, Skorikov and Vondracek presented several studies (Zimmer-Gambeck & Mortimer, 2006; Porfeli, 2007; Skorikov & Vondacek, 1997) that have shown that work experiences are positively related to development of career goals and work value settings, these latter in terms of stability, discrepancy and coherence between standard- and goal-oriented (Porfeli, 2007).

Moreover, Authors highlighted that there is more agreement about the role of schooling in career development. It is largely recognised that a positive and rich school experience allows students to learn work skills, and to development career interests and values (Bynner, 1998; Dellas & Gaier, 1975; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011; Vondracek & Skorikov, 1997)

Yet, many studies (e.g. Blustein, Palladino-Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Flum, 2001) included relational factors among factors implicated in career development. As suggested by Skorikov and Vondracek (2011) a factor that finds large agreement is the role of significant figures (e.g. parents, peers, teachers, professional help and guidance). In particular, parents' and peers' roles have had attention from researchers even if, especially for the role of family, it is complex analysing the multivariate relationships that determine effects on career development (Skorikov and Vondracek, 2011). One of the aspect studied about family role regards parental styles, it seems that authoritative parents facilitate career exploration, this kind of parents seem to be more supportive in developing a career project in autonomy (Kracke, 1997; Vignaroli et al., 2005). On the contrary, parents perceived as uninterested and not supportive or a source of pressure in

the process of making career choices could be a negative factor in career development (Kracke, 1997).

Regarding peer influence, Skorikov and Vondracek (2011), according to Johnson (1987), suggested that it seems to be stronger in the middle adolescence. In general, this kind of influence is a support in the progress of career development, this is true especially in peer groups that share the same interests and values (Flaxman et al., 1999).

Chapter 2 Vocational narrative identity

The approach of narrative identity emphasises subjective construction of meanings, and self-reflection and self-construction processes, as well as individuals' subjective assessment of their personal experiences and the stories that they tell about themselves (McAdams, 2011).

This approach underlines that a part of Self is cognized through narratives, that provide insights into personal interpretations of experiences not accessible through other kind of measures. In particular, narrative approach allows examining identity domain contents and so it seems to be useful to explore vocational domain especially in particular moments like transitions. The impact of some experiences on individuals' identity development, in fact, depends also on the meanings that people give to the events. In this sense, meaning-making processes are the manifestation of the current state of an individual's identity (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007).

On the base of these assumptions, narrative vocational identity integrates and supplies what is possible to study with vocational identity statuses approach.

To construct a life story, and simultaneously to construct a coherent sense of overall identity, means to connect individuals' memories of past experiences with present and possible future, also in terms of future work plans. In line with this, as

Savickas (2005, 2011) assumes career identity could be expressed through telling individual's life themes and the way the identification with a specific occupation or career is based on these life themes.

For these reasons, this kind of approach seems to be useful also in career practices in terms of intervention and counselling. On the base of this assumption, also in Savickas' theory this approach is one of the main points that characterized life design (2005, 2011).

2.1 Vocational Narrative Identity Approach

Erikson (1968) in his theory about identity has suggested that one of the major functions of identity is to organize a life in time, for doing this “telling a story” seems to be the most suitable way. *Narrative identity* can be defined as a story of Self (McAdams, 2011), in terms of a reconstruction of past experiences in order to understand and make meaning to one's own development, commitments made in several identity domains, choices made in the personal and career paths and anticipates of the future. This process of reconstruction and meaning making starts at late adolescence and lasts all life courses.

McAdams (1985, 2011) speaks about narrative identity as a product of exploration and commitments processes in terms of Self Story structured in a plot, chapters, main characters, turning points, key events and representations of whom a person was, would be and will be; in this sense, narrative identity can be analysed in its complexity and coherence.

McAdams and Cox (2010), increasing previous theories, included narrative identity in an integrative framework like James' conceptualization of selfhood (1892) for a better understanding. James theorized two components of the Self, namely *I* and *Me*. The first one as Self that learns (self as subject) whereas the *Me* as the Known Self (self as object). The whole Self appears throughout the life course in three ways, different from a qualitative point of view: the self as actor; the self as agent; and the self as author. During adolescence the "*I*" becomes an author and tries to shape the "*Me*" into a narrative about selfhood (self-defining story).

Several authors (e.g. Bruner, 1995; Brockmeier, 1997; McAdams, 1996, 2005, 2011; Trzebinski, 1997) indicated Autobiographical Narrative as a privileged way to show self-construction. It can be conceptualized as a storytelling in which and by which a person constructs and re-constructs the Self, his interpretation of events and their meanings, his points of view, his motivations and goals, in a time perspective in the attempt to integrate past, present and future. Narrative is to consider into the framework of cultural and symbolical influences of one's social and cultural context.

Moreover autobiography seems to be the most suitable way also to construct and re-construct the self as worker also. According to Giddens (1991), the function of stories in developing and maintaining a coherent sense of identity is fundamental in nowadays "reflexive modernity" that demands to face fragmented identities and social rules caused by personal and social changes.

2.2. Career stories

Meijers and Lengelle (2012) in their model proposal analysed existing narrative approaches and quoted Wijers and Meijers (1996) in accordance with whom a career story, through meaning making to one's experiences and reconstructing one's own career paths, allows individuals to define themselves as worker and how they have acted and should act in a career context.

As underlined in the analysis, according to the Authors, it is possible to pinpoint two macro-approaches to career development in term of career story: a) "constructivist approach" according to which, career narrative is the product of an individual process of construction concerning individual and cognitive process (Young and Collin, 2004); b) constructionist approach that, on the contrary, interprets career stories as the product of an interaction with others, in terms of socio-construction (LaPointe, 2010).

Cochran's theory (1997) represents an example of the first position, the Author asserts that narration allows to create a subjective construction of meanings in which the Self is the main character in a career defining story. In his theory, career stories are a sequence of seven episodes, from the first defined as elaborating a career problem to the last identified as crystallising a decision. In the recalling those episodes, individual can explain and better understand why s/he has made specific career choices and which motivations and meanings have guided those choices.

The sequence of episodes in Cochran's theory is meant as a coherent narrative in its whole. He assumes that career narrative is not a construction but a re-construction of a story already present at an unconscious level.

As a counterpoint, Savickas' theory (2005) can be mentioned. He stresses largely the cultural-historical point of view on the career development, meant this latter as the result of a co-construction.

Without taking into account the mentioned approaches, there is a largely agreement about the fact that constructing career narrative is constructing career/vocational identity.

Through career stories people express their own vocational identity in terms of life themes (Savickas, 2005, 2011), and the identifications with a specific careers/occupations (Ashfort, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Meijers and Lengelle (2012) hypothesized that the capability to re-construct their paths of career identification allows them to face social and contextual changes, characteristics of uncertainty and unpredictability of job market, and career changes, interpreting those as opportunities.

As Meijers and Lengelle (2012, p. 3) underline, career identity is "*a practice (doing identity rather than having one) of articulating, performing and negotiating identity positions in narrating career experiences*".

In line with these, during the time there are many and several proposal of career counselling in terms activities and methods refer to different theories and approaches.

Chapter 3 Narrative Career Counselling

McMahon (2005) suggests that a narrative approach facilitates connectedness, reflection, meaning making, agency and learning. For this reason, this kind of approach has a large application in career counselling that, according to Patton and McMahon (2006), has to take into account the interactions and the influences of several systems in which people are. Using narrative career counselling seems to allow people to achieve career counselling goals that McMahon and Watson (2012) synthesize in one main goal consisted in a co-construction by a counsellor and a client of a future story that is the product of reasoning on and meaning making of life themes and patterns of past and present stories.

In line with this, also Cochran (1997) assumes that career narrative is not a construction but a re-construction of a story already present at an unconscious level. Regarding narrative career counselling he suggests that the counsellor has the role to help the client to take the story, as said above it is present at an unconscious level, at a conscious level.

Yet, Savickas confirms these positions suggesting that counsellor and client together construct career stories, since to arrive to create a coherent narrative namely macro-narrative.

Thus, career counselling has to take into account personal, cultural and environmental aspect and so it has to design to answer both to personal characteristics

and to social changes. In line with this, it is possible to identify a development of career counselling coherent with social and world of work changes.

3.1. Career Counselling

For a long time, proposed counselling models have been in line with some characteristics typical of past society such as: stability of personal and social characteristics, certainty of job market, and the conceptualization of career development in terms of stages based on social needs as it was in Super's theory (1957). Thus, career counselling was mainly based on concepts like predictability.

As argued Savickas and colleagues (2009), analysing today societies characteristics, previous assumptions seems to be anachronistic especially because the concept of stability is not applicable in a context characterized by fast and sudden changes. Actually, in a context like this, stability can not to be functional because today context demands abilities concerning capabilities like flexibility, adaptability, and learning over the life course (Savickas et al., 2009). As a consequence, it should be necessary a counselling model inspired by dynamic approaches in order to support people to explore possible selves (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006), to face social and work changes that request new skills and adaptability (Savickas et al., 2010).

Traditional proposals of vocational guidance were based on a diagnostic model in terms of assessments of characteristics and interests in order to identify and so indicate the most suitable job to the client. But one of the great critiques to this

traditional counselling concerns that career interests can change during the time influenced by age, social context, and work experiences (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Moreover, people can adjust their career goals on the base of opportunities (Massey, Gebhardt, & Garnefski, 2008) and contextual and work chances (Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986).

This has revealed the necessity to change the point of view on career counselling emphasising the meaning making processes and stressing the fact that individuals are positioned in several systems and so they can be object of different influences, as theorized by Patton and McMahon (Systems Theory Framework – 2006).

According to this framework, in a career counselling is necessary to take into account: 1) the individual system and so all personal characteristic meaning individual as an active actor in the process of career construction; 2) the social system, as a place of interactions and so the possible influences by peers, family, media and so on; 3) the environmental-societal system regarding the influences by political and socio-economic situation, conditions of job market, and globalisation.

These systems of influences are to be meant in a reciprocal and mutual interaction and so in terms of dynamicity characterized by nonlinearity, a-causality, and multi-directionality over the time (*ibidem*). From this point of view, it does not make any sense to distinguish personal counselling from career counselling because vocational problems are influenced and intertwined with personal problems.

In line with these assumptions, the narrative approach to career counselling seems to answer to the specific aspect brought to light.

3.2. Narrative career counselling

Approving McIlveen and Patton (2007), that suggest that a unique definition of narrative career counselling is limitative because of several methods and practices by which that can be exercise, Herr and colleagues (2004) proposed a description that underlines main aspects of this career counselling: it is a verbal process in a collaborative and dynamic interaction with the goal to support the client in the process of self-understanding, career decision making, better understanding about career behaviour and choices, recognising in this process an agentic role of the client.

As McIlveen and Patton (2007) suggest this process is more than a simple recalling of a series of events rather it is a narrative in which life events are connected into a meaningful and coherent whole (Christensen & Johnston, 2003; Reid, 2006). In narrative career counselling, connecting life events mean to analyse career issues as a part of broader life story in which cognitive and emotional aspects are considered in the process of self- construction as worker (McIlveen & Patton, 2010). This process aims to clarify client's career-decisions and career-related actions made that can be used as guidelines for future choices and to support people to face today job market circumstances. Or in other words, the relationship between counsellor and client helps clients to learn skills useful to face next career challenges (Savickas, 1993).

Independently from theories of reference, narrative techniques that are mainly verbal (conversation or written tasks) aim to explore life themes evoked by and present in the career story that will be object of self-understanding.

A narrative career counselling which makes life themes the core of the work with the counsellor, is the "Life Design Counselling" by Savickas (1993, 2005, 2011). His counselling model has as goal to help individuals to deal with career indecision and problems, underling the value of autobiographical method, recollections and structured interviews.

3.3. Life Design Counselling

Career construction theory (Savickas, 1993), Self construction theory (Guichard, 2005) are the framework of Life designing. This proposes a way of thinking about designing a career and life at the same time on the base of viewpoint that in today society is not possible to divide life domains because of interaction between them. Considering that the uncertainty of finding and maintaining a job can have influences on personal projects as to create an own family.

In line with that, Savickas suggests to speak about life trajectories rather that vocational guidance. This implicitly requests the capacity to think about one's own self, environmental requests and possible selves. A main assumption is that self-concept is the result of past experiences but that it can change over the time on the base of new

experiences and as a consequence the individual is in a continuous process of self-construction.

As guidelines of career construction theory assert, life design counselling emphasises a continuous evolution of people, society and economic situations. In this sense, this counselling model respects five prerequisites considered basic and distinctive meeting traditional approaches.

First is considering in the counselling intervention all involved variables in the complex dynamic between individual and his ecosystem characterized by a reciprocal and adaptive self-organization. Secondly, assumed that the world of work changes a career counselling it is ought to be offered help in the answering to the continuous requests of adaptability with a focus on coping strategies and on skills needed to face new career challenges. Moreover, it is needed to go beyond the linear and logical of cause-effect assumptions based on the traditional approaches according to which there is a connection between career interests and attitudes and career success in favour of a counselling more articulated and based on problem solving strategies. Yet, today society is characterized by a non-linear path in the achievement of adult roles thus the individual can live multiply subjective reality. According to Savickas (2005) another important point of life designing is to consider those multiplicities and their constructions and re construction over the time. The goal is to support the client in identifying that the multiple reality corresponds to multiple point of views and interpretations and as consequence multiple life paths. Finally, the last prerequisite concerns the assessment of career counselling intervention that should focus on

configurations of variable as outcome of the intervention and not a single variable for example adaptability or satisfaction of the client avoiding in this way the risk to simplifying the results of the career counselling intervention.

Life design counselling is definable as a contextual model; in other terms, this model recognises that one's knowledge and identity are the result of social and cognitive processes in the interaction with others; the meaning of reality is co-constructed in the context. Several authors (e.g. Collin & Young, 1986; McIlveen & Patton, 2006; Savickas, 1993; 2005) underline that the career construction is a process that occurs in a socio-cultural context.

Considering the prerequisites of life designing and its framework, the actions of this model should be considered throughout life; they should focus on construction of the different self, not only the self as worker; they should take into account the context and so include in the counselling, significant roles and environments; they should not be practiced only in the transition period but also in terms of education and prevention. In these terms, life design counselling has a prospective life-long, holistic, contextual and preventive. Respecting these aspects allows to the life design counsellor to facilitate adaptability, narrability, activity, and intentionality (Savickas et al., 2009).

Life designing model aims to increase the capacity of career adaptability meant as adaptive and flexible answers to developmental tasks and to increase the five C: concern, control, curiosity, confidence and commitment (Savickas et al., 2009). The capacity face the future with optimism and hope concerns the time perspective of the

individual; the sense of control on the context and the perception of influencing it; the curiosity linked to exploration of possible selves (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006) and social opportunities; the confidence is the capacity to pursue personal aspirations and goals despite limits and obstacles; finally, the achievement in a life project rather than in a single career project. Yet, life designing interventions through narrative should help the client to understand his life themes, professional personality and adaptability. The capacity in telling produces a sense of coherence and continuity, the adaptability produces a change; together these capacities produce flexibility and confidence (Savickas, 2005, 2010; Savickas et al., 2009). Life designing should take into account actions on the assumption that the experience of several and different activities allow people to understand which capabilities and interests cultivate. Finally, this model of intervention should focus on meaning making processes in the construction of career projects.

The emphasis is, thus, on the interpretative and interpersonal processes under the capacities illustrated. Savickas (2005, 2011) recognises the main role of life themes in career development and counselling. The author suggests that the narrators select meaningful events of their life related to life themes and that the counsellors has to facilitate and listen to the story lines also linked to vocational personality and adaptability. Moreover, it is important to facilitate the emerging of contextual aspects of narrative because this latter is not a simple report of events but socially mediated.

The Career story tells “how the self of yesterday became the self of today and will become the self of tomorrow” (Savickas, 2005, p.58), this telling has its application

in the Career Style Interview (Savickas, 1989, 1995, 2004, 2005). The latter is the vehicle for constructing narrative and life themes. This kind of intervention is articulated in several steps: the identification and the defining of the problem and the consequent goals of counselling. The first implicit goal is to create a relationship of cooperation that allows the counsellor to help the client to identify the context of each problem and to be more conscious of life domains. At this point, the counsellor supports the exploration process of the Self, how the client perceives him/herself and how he/she acts in specific domains inviting him/her to think about past and present experiences, expectations, significant interactions and future prospective. The result of this thinking (self-reflection) is the possibility to read the told events from another point of view and analyse if it was possible to face them with other strategies or if there were other choices. Changing the point of view allows a re-construction of the story. The consequence of this re-construction is to put the problem in a new prospective in order to identify new coping strategies and experiment new identities. The main goal of this step is to help the client to synthetize previous and new identities and roles. Finally, the counsellor proposes new activities by which experimenting that synthetized previously (Savickas et al., 2009).

This sequence of steps reflects different levels of career construction: construction of a career story, de-construction and re-construction of plot and themes, and finally a co-construction of a life portrait (Savickas, 2005).

In conclusion, life-designing model takes into account five assumptions in counselling activities with people and their work lives: contextual possibilities,

dynamic processes, non-linear progression, multiple perspectives, and personal patterns
(Savickas et al., 2009).

Research

Introduction

The research project developed during PhD course is articulated in four studies, related to one other, elaborated to contribute to the finalising of career counselling/intervention model. Each contribution is respectively aimed to explore: a) vocational identity statuses (Porfeli et al., 2011) of Italian high school students attending their last years of school. In addition, the study analysed, variables as work-learn trajectories and early work experiences during education within vocational identity development; b) career development and meaning making processes. Through a narrative approach and a psychosocial point of view, similarities and differences between two different samples of people in transition (high school students attending their last two years of school and university students attending their first university year) from a large city of the South of Italy and from a village in the East-South of England were analysed; c) Career development and meaning making processes, of Italian high school students at two different periods of their transition. This analysis is always through a narrative approach but in longitudinal terms.

Then, d) it was designed, implemented and experimented a pilot career counselling/intervention, in order to complete the picture of Italian school and university students' situation about career development and choices. This was designed and implemented starting from literature regarding mainly the career construction and life design and on the base of first study results, the implementation of a career narrative approach and contextual factors related to job market, find work opportunities, and national statistical analysis.

The studies and the pilot career counselling/intervention experimented with a small group of high school students provided support and guidelines to design and implement a final proposal of career counselling and intervention articulated on the last two years of high schools.

In order to explore both vocational identity and career development it was first used a quantitative approach (study of point a) which aims to define different vocational identity statuses and profiles of Italian late adolescents (Porfeli et al., 2011). This kind of approach underlines especially vocational identity statuses that result from different associations between commitment, exploration and reconsideration of commitment dimensions (Crocetti et al., 2008). Then, it was used a qualitative approach and, in particular, identity narrative approach that allows studying in depth both process and content aspects of career development and vocational identity. The process dimensions can be focused analysing meaning making processes and subjective evaluation by individuals while they are telling a story about themselves and searching a sense of coherence and continuity in their own life stories (Bruner, 1986, 1990, 1993; McAdams, 1985, 1993; McLean & Thorn, 2003). Whereas, the content dimensions, linked to career development and vocational identity, can be gathered through the projections of Self made by individuals referring to work roles, feelings and thoughts about job, and the meaning that they confer to job and to their career goals (Ibarra, 2003; Savickas, 2011).

An integrative perspective seems to be the path undertaken by researchers in different domains of development in order not to lose the contribution of different

approaches and methodologies. This kind of integration seems to be more suitable for developmental dimensions articulated in multiple aspects and dimensions like career development, relatively stable during the development but subject to changes due to contextual, personal, environmental factors (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011).

The structure of the present research project tried to consider the different perspectives using both quantitative and qualitative approaches and methodologies in the study of career development to explore this multidimensional topic from different point of views in the belief that this richness of information is to consider needed in the implementation of the career counselling/intervention model.

Italian context

To better understand methodological choices and the results of studies, brief information about social context are considered needed. According to literature (Baumeister & Muraven, 1996; Kielhofner, 2007; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011) the development of vocational identity and career are influenced directly and indirectly by social factors such as changing, economic conditions, and cultural aspects. They can be considered as a form of adaptation to the social context. Current societies have specific characteristics as result of globalization, changes linked to technological innovation, a job market characterized by uncertainty, no long-term career paths, growing demand for flexibility, and low loyalty of the system (e.i. Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011; Guichard et al., 2002; Savickas et al., 2009). About Italy we can speak of a properly path of transition to adulthood and identity construction namely “delay syndrome” (Livi

Bacci, 2008) designed by also a prolonged education. First of all, most of Italian students chooses to continue their educational path at university and then, after having finished the degree courses, they are pressed by Italian job market characterized by instability and uncertainty (Berton, Richiardi, & Sacchi, 2009; Boeri & Galasso, 2007; Iezzi & Mastrobuoni, 2010) to add specialisations and job experiences often without salary (Istat, 2015). In this way, the entrance in the job market is delayed for a significant time. The peculiarities described above can influence career projects of high Italian adolescents bring out these latter to postpone career choices. The future seems to be perceived as uncontrollable and unpredictable and that pushes more than in the past Italian young people to be more focus on the present even for what concerns career projects (Livi Bacci, 2008).

National statistical data have shown a critical situation regarding the unemployed Italian people (Istat, 2015) especially for what concerns the difficulties of job inclusion for young people. According to Eurostat data (2015) the Italian employment rate is equivalent to 56,3 %, for this reason Italy is only third to last between European countries. The national employment rate about Italian young people is worst respect to European average. In fact, is lower by almost 17,5 percentage points, and it persists a gap between north and south of the country, where the situation in the south is more critic.

The Critical Role of Work Experiences during High School Years: Vocational Identity Statuses of Italian Adolescents.

Abstract

According to Porfeli (2007; 2011) vocational identity can give rise to different configurations or statuses such as vocational identity achieved, moratorium, foreclosed, diffused, searching moratorium and undifferentiated. Young people construct their career plans by exploring vocational preferences, attitudes, imagining and preparing their career goals (Super, 1957; Savickas, 1999; Skorikov, 2007); this process is supported and influenced by several environmental, emotional and cognitive factors. The present study aimed to: 1) the exploration of adolescent's vocational identity statuses using a cluster analytic approach; 2) the comparison vocational identity statuses and to identify eventual differences between high school students attending work-learn trajectories and high school students not attending work-learn trajectories. The peculiar Italian context seems to have a significant influence on the vocational identity formation processes; finally, the results confirm positive relevant roles of work experiences in the vocational identity construction of adolescents.

Keywords: vocational identity, high school students, career development, work experiences

The current study

Vocational identity can be meant as one of the main components of agentic control over one's career development (Meijers, 1998; Skorikov, 2007; Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Along this line, this specific identity domain offers and supports specific goal setting and career choices. So adolescents are encouraged to explore their

career interests and realistic preferences in order to develop a coherent sense of self as worker.

General aim of the present study is to assess vocational identity formation process in adolescent high school students in the Italian context and to evaluate how early various work experiences during schooling interplay with that process.

The government, in order to face the current problematic economic situation and the difficulties met by Italian young people to enter to job market after educational path has designed a proposal to make closer school and job work during the educational path. This proposal, named “work-learn trajectories”, was at a first step imagined only for technical school and then an integrated part of educational curricula of every kind of high school. The proposal consists in trajectories planned, evaluated and supervised by schools on the base of specific agreements with private company, associations, and public institutions such as chambers of commerce, industry, handicraft and agriculture and universities that accept high school students in formative programmes of learning in work situations. The main goal of the proposal was to improve students’ flexibility, capabilities to answer to specific needs of job market changings. Moreover, it was an answer to the needs of students about being guided and make known about job dynamics perceived as distant from their daily schooling experiences (MIUR, 2016).

Along this line, the present study assumes that vocational identity formation processes can be different for adolescents that have had the possibility to have an early contact with work world since that time only imagined and, in some case, feared because of the critical conditions of Italian job market. Indeed, according to literature,

the study hypothesizes that an early work experience as part of school curriculum can interplay with vocational identity processes.

For this purpose, it was employed a person-centered approach in order to identify vocational identity statuses among Italian high school students identified by the Italian language version of the VISA. In this regard, our hypothesis was that a different cluster solution could emerge in the present Italian sample as compared to previously Italian study because of different level of age (Sestito et al., 2015) and to U.S. sample for socio-cultural differences.

Then, it was explored vocational identity statuses of Italian high school students attending work-learn trajectories comparing with high school students not included in work-learn trajectories and finally, it was identified their relative vocational identity statuses and eventual differences between two groups of participants.

Also in this case, it was used a person-centered approach dividing the sample in two groups considering the variable “work-learn”. In details, for each groups it was done new cluster analyses. The hypothesis was that, in according to literature, the cluster configuration was different between two groups. In addition, the study aimed to explore how and whether the cluster configuration changes considering the variable “work experience” within the group of students attending work-learn trajectories.

Method

Participants

The participants in the study consisted of 850, 46 % males and 54 % females aged 16 to 20 years ($M_{age} = 18,79$ years, $SD = 1,19$). They were all students attending high schools in a large Italian city (Naples) and enrolled in various kind of high school: high school focused on humanities and sciences (51%) and techniques (49%). Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymity was guaranteed.

Procedure

Before the study, permission to administer questionnaires was obtained from the School Head of high schools involved, parents and participants with age of consent. Students were provided with written information about the research and asked if they wished to participate. They completed the study measures as an anonymous self-report questionnaire.

Measures

Vocational identity

The Italian version of *Vocational Identity Statuses Assessment* (Di Palma, 2015) is composed by 30 items of which 10 items for each of the three dimensions of *career exploration* that are subdivided into 5 items per sub dimension. Example items for the *career exploration* construct included: “trying to have many different experiences so that I can find several jobs that might suit me” (*in-breadth career exploration* $\alpha = .752$) and “learning what I can do to improve my chances of getting into my chosen career”

(*in-depth career exploration* $\alpha = .643$). Items for the *career commitment* dimension included “I know what kind of work is best for me” (*career commitment* $\alpha = .790$), and “I chose a career that will allow me to become the person I dream to be” (*identification with career commitment* $\alpha = .737$). Finally, items for the *career reconsideration* dimension included “My work interests are likely to change in the future” (*career commitment flexibility* $\alpha = .715$) and “I doubt I will find a career that suits me” (*career self-doubt*, $\alpha = .718$).

All VISA subscales employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Data Analysis

It was used hierarchical cluster analyses employing Ward's method and Euclidean distances in order to identify the appropriate number of statuses resolved by the VISA , using as initial cluster centres those derived in the original study conducted by Porfeli et al. (2011). This cluster solution was obtained through a two-step procedure (Gore, 2000), which is becoming customary in identity dimensions classification research (Crocetti, Rubini, Luyckx, & Meeus, 2008; Crocetti et al., 2011).

It was found different cluster solutions of 6 clusters for all the groups of participants as well as a peculiar cluster configuration considering the variable “work experience”.

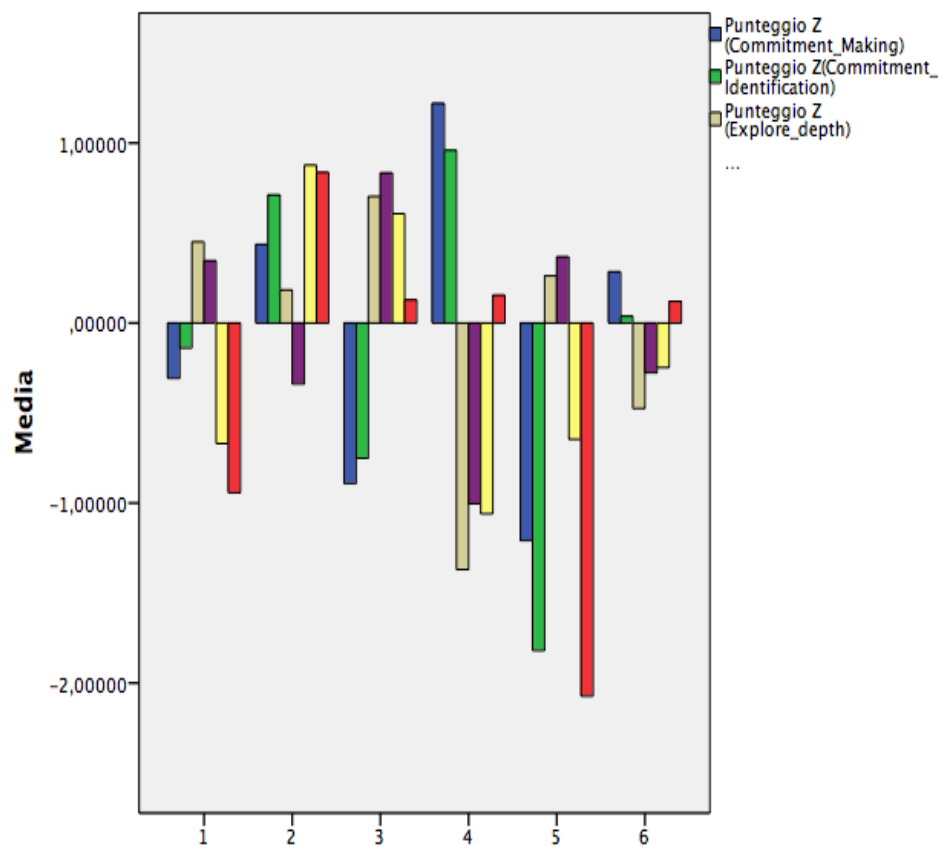
Results

Vocational identity statuses

The six-cluster solution obtained by Porfeli et al. (2011) and confirmed in the validation of the VISA for young adults (Aleni Sestito et al., 2015) and for adolescents (Di Palma et al., 2015) was found also in our sample. This cluster solution offered substantive interpretability, parsimony, and explanatory power. That shows differences from U.S. configuration. The *vocational identity attenuated diffusion* status (Cl 1; 15,3%) was characterized by mean scores on identity dimensions of commitment and exploration and mean (middle) low scores on identity dimensions of reconsideration (flexibility and doubt); the *vocational identity searching moratorium* status (Cl 2; 21,4%) by middle-high scores on the two commitment dimensions and high scores on flexibility and self-doubt, middle on in depth exploration and middle-low on exploration in breadth; the *vocational identity moratorium* status (Cl 3; 23,5%) by low scores on both the commitment dimensions, middle-high scores on exploration in depth and exploration in breadth and flexibility and middle scores on self-doubt; the *vocational identity doubtful foreclosure* status (Cl 4; 13,8%) by high scores on both the commitment dimensions and low scores on both the exploration dimensions and on flexibility and middle scores on self-doubt; the *vocational identity diffusion* status (Cl 5; 5,5%) was characterized by low scores on both the commitment dimensions and moderate scores on in depth exploration, high scores on in breadth exploration, middle-low scores on flexibility and low scores on self-doubt; the *vocational identity*

undifferentiated status (Cl 6; 20,5%) was characterized by moderate scores on all dimensions.

The particularity of the optimal cluster solution is that the Italian sample did not resolve a vocational identity achieved status.

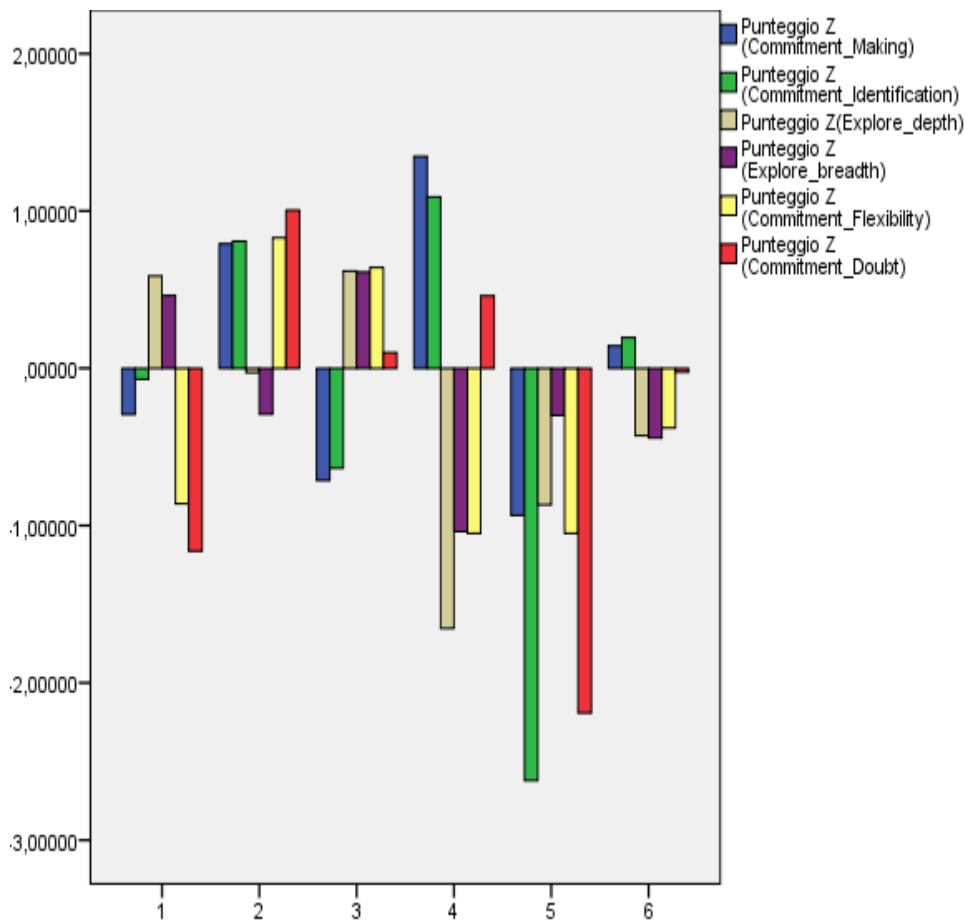


Cluster configuration of Italian high school students

Work experiences and vocational identity statuses: which relationships

Different vocational identity clusters between two groups and both show different statuses from US sample and Previous Italian research with young adults. Both Statuses do not show Achieved Status but an Italian peculiar cluster definable Doubtful Foreclosed confirming previous research on Italian young adults (Aleni Sestito et al., 2015).

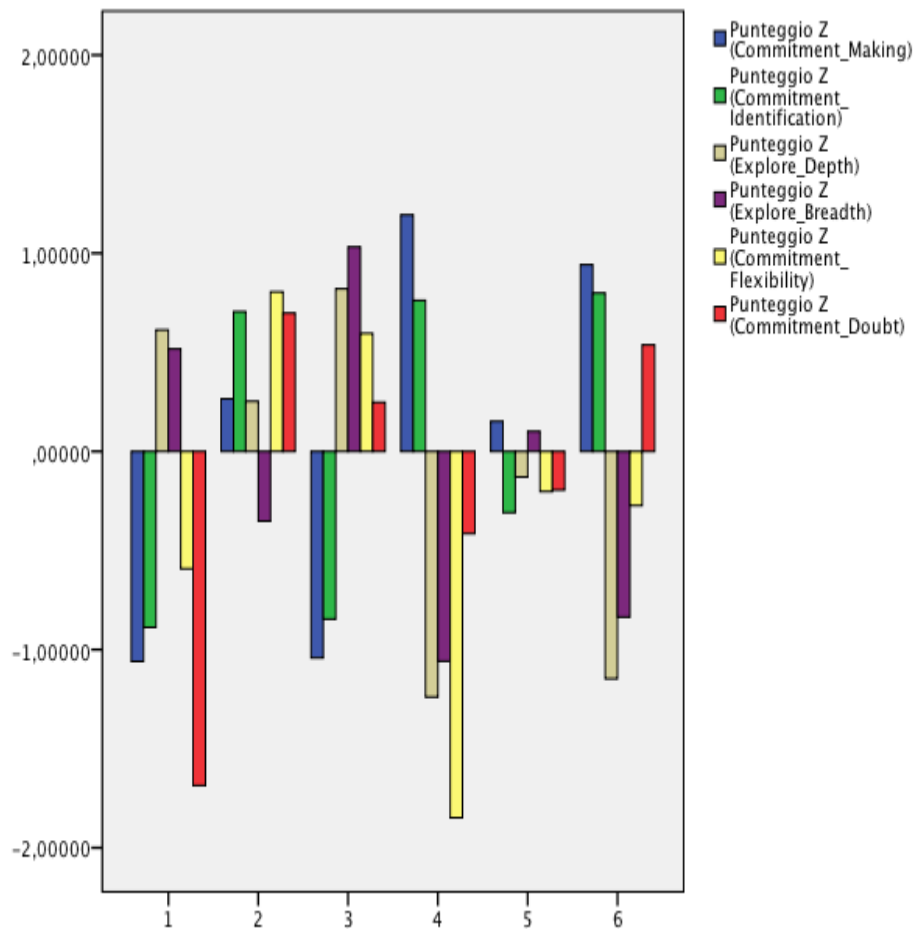
The cluster configuration of students attending work-learn trajectories was characterized by the *vocational identity diffusion statuses* (CI 1; 15,3%) by low scores on both the commitment dimensions and moderate scores on both explorations and middle-low scores on flexibility and on self-doubt; the *vocational identity searching moratorium status* (CI 2; 17,7%) by middle-high scores on the two commitment dimensions and high scores on flexibility and self-doubt, middle on in depth exploration and middle-low on exploration in breadth; the *vocational identity moratorium status* (CI 3; 31,7%) by low scores on both the commitment dimensions, middle-high scores on exploration in depth and exploration in breadth and flexibility and middle scores on self-doubt; the *doubtful foreclosure vocational identity status* (CI 4; 9,2%) by high scores on both the commitment dimensions and low scores on both the exploration dimensions and on flexibility and middle scores on self-doubt; the *vocational identity uninvolved status* (CI 5; 3,1%) by low scores on both commitment dimensions and on flexibility and self-doubt, and middle-low scores on both exploration dimensions; the *vocational identity undifferentiated status* (CI 6; 23%) was characterized by moderate scores on all dimensions.



Students attending work-learn trajectories

The cluster configuration of students not attending work-learn trajectories was characterized by the *vocational identity diffused status* (C1 1; 12,4%) by low scores on both the commitment dimensions and moderate scores on both explorations and middle-low scores on flexibility and on self-doubt; the *vocational identity searching moratorium status* (C1 2; 21,7%) was characterized by middle-high scores on the two commitment dimensions and high scores on flexibility and self-doubt, middle-high scores on in depth exploration and middle-low scores on exploration in breadth; the

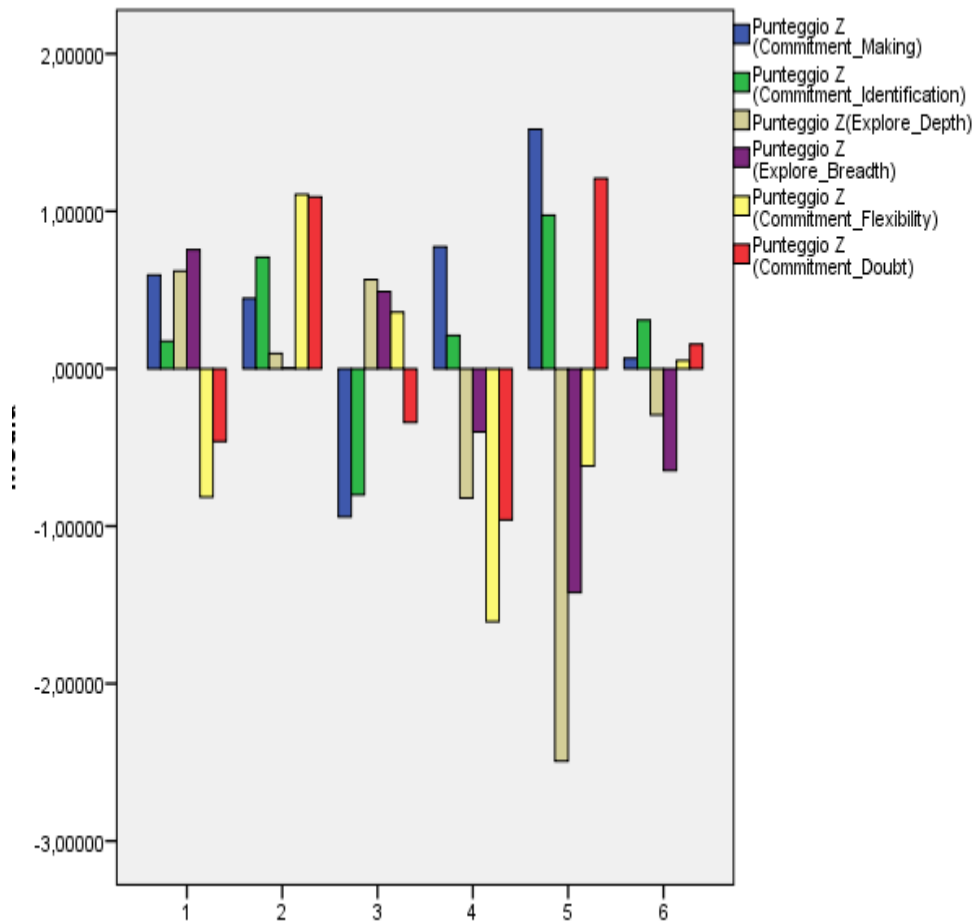
vocational identity moratorium status (C1 3; 19%) by low scores on both the commitment dimensions, middle-high scores on exploration in depth and exploration in breadth and flexibility and middle scores on self-doubt; the *vocational identity foreclosure status* (C1 4; 10%) by high scores on both the commitment dimensions and low scores on both the exploration dimensions and on flexibility and on self-doubt; the *vocational identity undifferentiated status* (C1 5; 23%) was characterized by moderate scores on all dimensions; the *vocational identity doubtful foreclosure status* (C1 6; 14,5%) by high scores on both the commitment dimensions and low scores on both the exploration dimensions and on flexibility and middle-high scores on self-doubt.



Students not attending work-learn trajectories

Considering the variable “work experience” (meant as extracurricular work experiences not necessarily linked to schooling) in the group of students attending work-learn trajectories, the cluster configuration was characterized by the *vocational identity achieved status* (C1 1; 14%) by middle-high scores on both the commitment dimensions and on both explorations and low scores on flexibility and on self-doubt; the *vocational identity searching moratorium status* (C1 2; 14%) by middle-high scores on the two commitment dimensions and high scores on flexibility and self-doubt,

middle on in depth exploration and on exploration in breadth; the *vocational identity moratorium status* (C1 3; 34,1%) by low scores on both the commitment dimensions, middle-high scores on exploration in depth and exploration in breadth and flexibility and middle-low scores on self-doubt; the *vocational identity foreclosure status* (C1 4; 8,5%) by middle-high scores on both commitments and low scores on both the exploration dimensions and on flexibility and self-doubt; the *vocational identity doubtful foreclosure status* (C1 5; 6,2%) by high scores on both the commitment dimensions and low scores on both the exploration dimensions and on flexibility and middle scores on self-doubt; the *vocational identity undifferentiated status* (C1 6; 23,2%) was characterized by moderate scores on all dimensions.



Students with work experiences

Discussion

Italian high school students' cluster solution is similar to the six-cluster solution of Porfeli and colleagues (2011), showing however some particularities respect to U.S. sample. It was characterized by the absence of achieved status, a peculiar status named doubtful foreclosed and a status nominated attenuated diffusion. The *vocational identity doubtful foreclosure status* confirmed a previous Italian research on young adults (Aleni Sestito et al., 2015), thus it is confirmed to be e peculiarity of Italian people

considered. Instead, the result concerning the vocational identity attenuated diffusion status seems to be a peculiar vocational identity status only of Italian high school students.

For definition, vocational identity diffusion status is own of people that have not made commitments with not or limited exploration (Marcia, 1966; Porfeli et al., 2011); in this case, instead, there are commitment making processes (moderate scores) and it is possible to say that there is exploration given that the scores in those dimensions are medium high. Thus, it is conceivable that these students are diffused but they have started exploration aimed to career goals.

Comparing vocational statuses of high school students attending and not attending work-learn trajectories both cluster solutions were characterized by the absence of achieved status despite the goals of work-learn programs and showed different configurations.

This result, from one hand confirms some research (Arnett, 2000; Skorikov & Vondracek, 1997) according to which a poor or far away from career interests work experience could not influence career development, and from the other hand the realization of work-learn plans seems not to be always congruent with the proposal because of organisational reasons, insufficient funds, or unavailability of industries, companies and institutions.

In opposite, some researches (Porfeli, 2007; Hirschi, 2011) have shown that work experiences can have effects on career development. Along this line, cluster findings about high school students with work experiences showed how students who

have the possibility to elaborate and consider their personal motivations, interests, and attitudes regarding career projects through early work experiences are in more advanced status in the processes of vocational identity construction (as Achieved status points). This evidences the benefits in encouraging, during schooling, students to attend concrete work experiences, drawing up work-learn trajectories more practice in order to introduce them in a “how the job market really is”, as well as it is important to have new services of career counselling at school. The results represent an important evidence of how support and intervention, especially with students within education in a static timing of educational and vocational choices do not always converge with an advanced process of vocational identity.

Limitations and future directions

The results of the present study should be considered taking into account a number of limitations, such as the use of only self-report measures and the cross-sectional design. Future studies should consider longitudinal design in order to evaluate the progress and eventually changes in the vocational identity and career construction; yet, the use of a quali-quantitative approach could allow exploring in depth career choice processes.

Career development through time told by stories of Italian high school students

Abstract

Planning career choices and commitments is one of the main tasks in adolescence. Most of people attend high school during adolescence so they are mostly involved in educational experiences that could have a significant impact on career development via the acquisition of work skills and career interests and values, together with the chance to be involved in career guidance, and social-contextual factors (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011). Thus career development seems to be a complex and not linear process.

Aim. The present longitudinal study aimed to explore content and process of career development of Italian high school students assessed at the second last year and at the last year of high school. It was expected that during the time-frame between Time 1 and Time 2 students should have to face many new meaningful experiences that could activate processes of self-reflection, analysis and revision of their choices just made and commitment reconsiderations.

Method. For this purpose, it was adopted a narrative approach to highlight the intersection of career development process and content. 18 high school students answered at two different times within one year to the following narrative prompt: *“Tell me your life story. Tell me what point of your life story you have reached, and how you have arrived here...Start from wherever you like. In your story, remember the main turning points or changes and explain how you dealt with them. And now, what your plans for the future are”* (Sankey & Young, 1996; Pizzorno et al., 2015; Aleni Sestito et al., 2016).

Results. The analyses showed the most of participants is in a vocational identity diffusion status at time 1 and a part of them remained in that status also at time 2. These students seem to be more focused on overall and relational identity and to postpone career commitment making processes.

Conclusions. Findings suggest supporting career development especially for the young people in a context with a difficult labour market and provide evidences for counselling interventions.

Keywords: *Career development; longitudinal narrative approach; adolescence*

Current study

The present longitudinal study aimed to explore content and process of career development of Italian high school students assessed at the second last year and at the last year of high school. It was expected that during the time-frame between Time 1 and Time 2 students should have to face many new meaningful experiences that could activate processes of self-reflection, analysis in order to achieve or focus on career commitments, revision of their choices just made, and commitment reconsiderations.

To verify this hypothesis it was used a longitudinal narrative approach in order to study in depth content and process dimensions about career development. In particular, some dimensions considered important in career development were analysed. The process dimensions analysed were: Meaning making, and Vocational Identity; yet, the content dimensions considered were: Starting Points, Turning points and Main Themes; Typology of project, Time Perspective of Project and its Content; and, finally, Quality of Emotive Tone.

Finally, lexical psychological elements of narratives were simultaneously analysed, such as Social, Affective, Cognitive, Time, and Personal Concerns.

Method

Sample and participant selection

The sample was composed by 18 high school students (time 1 $M_{age}=17,16$ $SD=0,51$; time 2 $M_{age}=18,1$ $SD=0,58$) attending at time 1 the second last year and at time 2 the last year of high school. They were all students attending high school in a large Italian city in the South of Italy. They were recruited via collaboration of one of their teachers and they have completed a two-wave longitudinal study. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymity was guaranteed.

Procedure and Measure

It was used a narrative device that, according to literature (e.g. Bruner, 1986, 1990, 1993; McAdams, 1993, 2001; Lengelle et al., 2013, 2014) facilitates the production of autobiographical segments. The prompt was inspired by the works of Sankey and Young (1996) and Pizzorno and colleagues (2014) and implemented in previous research studies in the Southern Italy (e.g. Sica et al., 2014; Aleni Sestito et al., 2016).

The researcher introduced the purpose of the research and it was asked to participants, who decided to take part in the research, to write down answering to the following narrative prompt at two different times within one year:

“Tell me your life story. Tell me what point of your life story you have reached, and how you have arrived here...Start from wherever you like. In your story, remember

the main turning points or changes and explain how you dealt with them. And now, what your plans for the future are.”

The narratives were used as raw data for analyses.

Data Analysis

Narratives were analysed using content analysis through the guided multiple reading approach (Schachter, 2004; Tappan, 1990). After several readings in order to highlight the different concepts regarding career construction, the content of narratives was codified. The coding system was developed by the author according to literature.

Narratives were codified by two coders with a level of agreement of 84%.

Narrative data of both Time1 and Time2 were analysed and compared through a content textual analysis (see table 1) focusing on: a) Process, in terms of Meaning making (McLean & Pratt, 2006), and Vocational Identity (Porfeli et al., 2011); b) Content in terms of Starting Point, Turning points (Bruner, 1986; McAdams & Bowman, 2001;Kroeger, 2007), and main themes (McAdams, 2008); c) Project (Savickas, 2005) in terms of typology (career-related or not), timing of project (short or long term), and description of project content; and finally d) Quality of emotional tone (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001)

	Thematic Categories	Thematic Sub-Categories	Description
Process	Meaning making (McLean & Pratt, 2006)	Level of sophistication Scale 0 to 3	Complexity of autobiographical reasoning
	Vocational Identity (Porfeli et al., 2011)	Commitment Exploration No commitment/no exploration	Commitment as result of exploration Exploration of career alternatives Absence of commitment and exploration
Content	Autobiographical reasoning (Habermas & Bluck, 2000).	Starting point of each narrative	From what time of life story and what experience each narrative starts
	Narrative Identity (McAdams, 2001)	Autobiographical turning points (Bruner, 1986; McAdams & Bowman, 2001; Kroger, 2007)	Description of turning points meant as changes in perspective
	Narrative Identity (McAdams, 2001)	Main Themes (McAdams, 2008)	Content of themes emerged from narratives
Project (Savickas, 2005)	Typology of personal project	Project career-related/Project not career-related Timing of project	Description of project career-related Description of project not career-related Project focused on short or long time
Emotional tone	Quality of emotional tone (McAdams et al, 2001)	Positive tone Negative tone	Figurative language implied in the narratives

Table 1: Coding system template

Then, to analyse psychological processes, personal concerns, it was used the software Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC - Pennebaker, Booth, and Francis,

2007) to analyse the text of narratives. The LIWC usually arranges the mentioned categories hierarchically.

In details, the software was used in order to: a) count the total words for each temporal segments (Time 1 and Time 2); b) count the words referred to typologies of told events; c) count the dimension related to meaning making processes taking into account linguistic dimensions linked to cognitive processes; c) count the words referred to affective processes; d) count the words referred to relativity dimensions and in particular time dimensions; and e) compare all dimensions at time 1 and time 2.

Results

Textual data analysis

Time 1. The first categories identified in the coding system were used to study the dimensions of process of career development. In detail, narrative data allow exploring how the individuals learn from their experiences and integrate this information to better understand themselves and their life stories. This process is defined meaning making (McLean & Pratt, 2006) and it can be drawn from the implied thinking in the construction of the story. The level of meaning was translated in degrees of sophistication meant as the kind of meaning in terms of complexity of autobiographical reasoning (McLean & Pratt, 2006). Analysing this category at time 1, the narratives showed mainly a not advanced level of sophistication (medium-low).

Thus participants did not show to have integrated past experiences and turning points in the construction of their life stories.

Concerning dimensions of vocational identity processes (Porfeli et al, 2011), the most of participants seem neither to be in exploration nor to have making career commitment. This absence of vocational exploration and vocational commitment seems to configure a diffusion status in which individuals. The reading of narrative accounts allows characterising the vocational diffusion status emerged as arrested in their vocational identity development. In the framework of autobiographical reasoning it was analysed, as dimension of content of career development, the starting points of each story. According to McLean and colleagues, the autobiographical reasoning allows evaluating scarce connections between the self and individual's past experiences were emerged (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007; Pasupathi & Mansour, 2006). The analysis of this thematic category showed that participants started their life stories from the present and they are involved in their current experiences that are especially linked to school and to their relational world. This result seems to be coherent with vocational diffusion status emerged and underlines that, at the second to last year of high school, participants are not very active and not very involved in the process of vocational identity development. They spoke especially about school troubles and tasks, and their negative and positive experiences with friends and family but also their first love affairs. Career projects, planning of future, but also desires, aspirations, future projections seem not to be part of participants' present and of their more significant experiences elaborated at a narrative level. The daily experiences, focused on school,

friendships and love relationships characterise also turning points described in the narratives and they are also the main themes emerged across them.

The vocational diffusion seems to be associated to the presence of few clear career projects. When these are told, their topic is especially linked to university choices. In other words, more than a planning of a career project at long term is a project about university choices. In fact, all participants decided to continue their educational paths, but they do not know the topic of the university degree, and no one decided to try to enter into the job market.

Finally, analysing the quality of emotional tone, it is mainly positive.

The latter element seems further characterises the vocational diffusion status and the absence of designing in adaptive terms. The absence of elements of discomfort and distress can induce, in fact, to consider that participants postpone the time of identification and in-depth analysis of their career development to a following phase, felt as physiologically more suitable to this commitment.

	Exemplar	Text extracts
Starting point	Female 17 years	<i>I believe being at a moment of confusion of my story, I'm in the middle of life where I have to decide consciously who I want to be</i>
Meaning making	Female 17 years	<i>Defining precisely the turning points is complex especially in an age like mine, where everything changes fast. Only after a while I was able to understand how many events, from the least to the most important, are able to change you</i>
Vocational Identity	Male 17 years	<i>I think I'll be a merchant like my father or a math professor, who knows! Rather than thinking about what to do, I would rather stay in the present because tomorrow is uncertain</i>
Turning points	Male 17 years	<i>I fell in love with her, a real trouble indeed? After several months and my friends' pressures, I decided to tell her my</i>

		<i>feelings at her birthday. Do you want to know the end? about two years later we still do not talk. The girl who jumped on me to say hello to me now is totally unknown, and this is where the change is going on because I thought I could not break that line that kept me tied to her and instead I turn completely page</i>
Main theme	Female 17 years	<i>I realized that I was pushing away people who loved me and they were serious about me, while I was close to some opportunistic people. Personally, it was also very difficult because I found myself alone in the real sense of the word, but I have dealt with all this with strength and tried to rebuild my life from the beginning.</i>
Project	Male 19 years	<i>I want to go to university and study chemistry or psychology and become able to take care of myself and help others without getting tired too.</i>
Emotional tone	Male 17 years	<i>For many years I've been "projecting" my life, and I will never let anything prevent me from doing what I want, I'm not afraid of my future, because in the end we are alone and only us to build it.</i>

Table 2: text extracts of narratives at time 1

Time 2. The content analysis of narratives at time 2 concerning dimensions of process of career development showed a little improvement concerning the meaning making (McLean & Pratt, 2006). In fact, according to the coding of the Authors, the level of sophistication became medium while at time 1 was codified as medium-low. This result suggested a better capability of self reflection because of a better integration between past and present experiences in life stories comparing to time 1 even if feeble. Concerning dimensions of process of vocational identity, the group of participants seems to be split in two contrary halves in vocational terms. A part shows career commitments; instead the other part seems not to be in exploration or not to have making commitment. Furthermore, some high school students remained in diffusion vocational status that has characterized narratives at time 1 despite the narratives at time 2 showed the emergence of career commitments. The readings of narrative accounts allow underlining that commitment making concerns especially the choice of

university topic. The latter is not meant as a part of career project. In this sense, that choice seems to be, more than an internal change in the direction of identity development, the perception that the timing of choices in which students are obligated, by the context, to make a choice is arrived.

Analysing at time 2 the dimensions of content of career development in terms of starting points, participants still focused on present and on the closer future (as end of school). Indeed, they spoke specially about the choices that they have to make at the end of high school in terms of educational topic because all confirmed to want to continue their educational path. It is hypnotisable that this can depend by the timing of choice closer. Despite that, analysing the content of turning points and main themes, the relational dimension seems characterised also the narratives at time 2. Both turning points and main themes are focused on daily events, sometimes stressful, or on their relationships with significant others. Thus, even if it was observed a light future relocation, probably it is linked to the perception of closer end of high school and to the unavoidability of university choice, the turning points and the main themes are still focused on daily life and events and are not strictly linked to the choice of future educational path. Finally, about typology of personal project, coherently with the results of the dimensions of vocational identity and career development, the analysis showed the number of participants with a career project grew up at time 2. However, also this result seems more linked to the end of high school, felt as unavoidability, than to a maturation process.

That is confirmed by emotional tone also at this time is mainly positive. That shows that participants are very little involved but also very little worried about and scared.

	Exemplar	Text extracts
Starting point	Male 18 years	<i>This is the time of the choices we have to start thinking about what we want to do.</i>
Meaning making	Male 18 years	<i>my way of seeing things and my person has radically changed since November, maybe when I saw the most important person in my life go away in a moment without an explanation. So I wonder what a way to plan and plan a future if, from time to time, life could change the cards on the table?</i>
Vocational Identity	Male 18 years	<i>My only goal in life is to save lives for this I want to be a doctor</i>
Turning points	Male 19 years	<i>My turning point was just let it go and from that moment I'm back myself, I would almost say that I've also lived better. I lived better, at least until a month ago, when someone or something decided to send me a "devil" (in a good way) dressed as an angel</i>
Main theme	Female 17 years	<i>I learned that because the future is so uncertain, projects are not so important. Before I thought so much about the implications of my decisions, now I understand that to please others means living not an enjoyable life</i>
Project	Female 18 years	<i>My projects for the long-term future are finding a job in the science police or research field and getting married to a guy I really fell in love with</i>
Emotive tone	Female 18 years	<i>Not to be discouraged in front of a country that prevents you from realizing your dreams, nothing is impossible!</i>

Table 3: text extracts of narratives at time 2

Linguistic analysis

The findings of linguistic analysis showed that, comparing the narratives produced within the year, the total number of words used grew up at time 2.

Furthermore, considering linguistic dimensions indicated above, it was emerged a significant difference between time 1 and time 2 only in two psychological dimensions (see table 4). The first one was Cognitive Mechanisms Dimension which the mean point was higher at time 2 as well as for Discrepancy Dimension the mean is higher at time 2.

Categories	Time 1	Time 2	F	Sig
<i>Cognitive Mechanisms</i>	7.27 (1.78)	9.01 (2.79)	3.39	.074
<i>Discrepancy</i>	2.07 (1.06)	3.16 (1.74)	8.07	.008

Table 4: Linguistic dimensions between time 1 and time 2

What happened within one year?

Comparing content textual analyses at time 1 and 2 it is possible highlight that neither at time 1 nor at time 2 participants seem very little involved in the vocational identity processes and career development; however, they seem oriented not to consider the choice to enter into the job market after educational path. All participants indicated to continue their educational paths.

As said above, the Italian context is characterised by specific cultural, social and economic conditions that can influence identity processes and, in particular, facilitate a prolonged moratorium. The latter is especially related to prolonged education path,

typical of the Italian context. Some Italian researches (e.g. Aleni Sestito et al., 2011; Aleni Sestito et al., 2013) have shown that this status of stand-by allows Italian young people to avoid the identity definition task.

Analysing the comparing between time 1 and time 2 concerning dimensions of processes, it showed a feeble improvement of level of meaning making in the time-frame and the activation of vocational exploration and commitment making processes. Findings confirmed, for a part of the participants, the hypothesis that students, due to have to face many new meaningful experiences, could activate processes of self-reflection, analysis and revision of their choices just made and commitment reconsiderations. In detail, at time 2 participants active process of exploration (in one case exploration in depth and one in exploration in breadth), commitment making and reconsideration of commitments. But, according to a feeble improvement of level of meaning making at time 2, participants are not able to articulate clearly the processes hypothesised. Yet, participants did not active exploration and commitment making processes at time 1 confirmed the same diffusion statuses at time 2. In two cases, career commitments told at time 1 were confirmed at time 2 without the activation of exploration or reconsideration processes aimed to confirm career commitments previously made.

Concerning the comparing between the analysis of dimensions of content of career development in the time frame, both at time 1 that at time 2 the starting points are focused on present, but at time 2 narratives start from speaking about their next university choices. Instead, turning points and main themes are especially linked to

relational dimensions. Along this, narratives seem to be focused on overall and relational dimensions.

Finally, the comparing between linguistic analysis at time 1 and time 2 shows a higher cognitive discrepancy at time 2. This data seem to be coherent with the vocational diffusion statuses in which some participants remain in the time frame.

Discussion and Conclusions

Analysing the findings in terms of continuity and discontinuity (Lichtwark-Aschoff, van Geert, Bosma, Kunnen, 2008) within the year, five typologies of trajectories are emerged (Sica & Aleni Sestito, 2016; Sica, Aleni Sestito, & Di Palma, 2016). Three in terms of change (change as activation of exploration in depth processes, change as activation of exploration in breadth, change as activation of commitment making processes) and two in terms of not change (not change in absence of commitments, and not change in presence of commitments). Changes, happened within the time-frame, are in activation of commitment making processes while in one case there is the activation of exploration in depth processes and in one case whit the activation of exploration in breadth processes. Among the participants who did not show changes within the time-frame, it is to notice that in two cases not change is in presence of career commitments. Thus, for these two participants there is continuity between time 1 and time 2 because the absence of change is related to not to active reconsideration processes of career project indicated at time 1.

Yet, those who show continuity in the diffusion identity status seem to be influenced negatively by many variables felt as out of their control such as a weak job market, difficult economic conditions, and a weak welfare for young people, and the fear to make wrong decisions in career construction processes. The result is that the career construction is delayed in time. Designing a career project produces in young people confusion and uncertainty as consequence of critical job market and instable society. But, participants of the present study seem not to feel confusion and uncertainty due to postponing in time of choice and cognitive and emotive distance.

Postponing critical dimensions as described above could make the vocational diffusion status adaptive and developmental.

This difficulty would seem to be confirmed by the differences perceived between students' ideal career project or life designing and the real world characterized by critical aspects named above. The cognitive dimension namely discrepancy refers, in fact, to the comparison between an ideal model and the reality so it is possible to hypothesises that the context, life events and concrete chances in world of work could have an influence on students' career path both in terms of choice that in terms of realization.

The qualitative and explorative nature of this study requires that the findings are evaluated carefully; however, they suggest supporting career development especially with the difficult labour market and provide evidences for counselling interventions.

A narrative cross-cultural study on career development: Italian and English high school and university students

Abstract¹

Career development is influenced by several factors, among which contextual factor seems to play an important role in today society characterized by uncertainty and instability. The present study aimed to study eventual cross-cultural differences in career development of high school and university students came from a Southern European country characterized by delayed transition (Italian Delay Syndrome – Livi Bacci, 2008) and another European country with different characteristics.

For this purpose it was used a narrative study to highlight dimensions of process and content. Participants were 20 Italian high school students attending the last two years of High School (Mean age = 17,45 years; Standard Deviation= 0,60) and 21 Italian students attending the first year of a Social Services university degree in a large city in the south of Italy (Mean age = 20,25 years; Standard Deviation=1,74), and 23 English students attending the level 3 of qualification (tertiary education) (Mean age = 16,39 years; Standard Deviation= 0,58), and 20 English students attending the first year of a BA Counselling university degree in a town in the East-South of England (Mean age = 25,72 years; Standard Deviation=10,08).

It was asked to them to answer to the following narrative prompt: *“Tell me your life story. Tell me what point of your life story you have reached, and how you have arrived here...Start from wherever you like. In your story, remember the main turning points or changes and explain how you dealt with them. And now, what your plans for the future are.”*

The analysis of narrative products showed that, despite all participants are at the same transition, the groups showed differences more linked to the country they belong rather than age. In fact, intergroup

¹ This study contributes to enlarge the spectrum of a research conducted with English students in collaboration with Prof. Hazel Reid.

differences and no intragroup differences emerged. Findings suggest supporting career development especially with the difficult labour market and provide evidences for counselling interventions.

Keywords: *Career development; transition; narrative approach*

The Current Study

The present study has aimed to explore career process and content in two different groups of high school and university students. The two groups of students, one from a large city of the South of Italy and one from a village in South East England, are at the same level of education and timing of transition. In particular, all students attended the last years of high school and the first year of a university degree, both considered transitional moment (e.g. Wintre & Morgan, 2009). Transitions are considered as biographical turning points because processes of re-elaboration, reconsideration, and construction and reconstruction are activated in response to changing life circumstances (Kroger, 2007).

Method

Recruitment and Participants

Sampling was based on the availability of participants and their interest to take part in the research. This type of sampling is defined as convenience sampling and it is the result of non-probability method. This method allows a more flexible data

collection, consistent with the explorative nature of the present research (Burke Johnson & Christensen, 2013).

Participants consisted of 20 Italian high school students attending the last two years of High School (Mean age = 17,45 years; Standard Deviation= 0,60) and 21 Italian students attending the first year of a Social Services university degree in a large city in the south of Italy (Mean age = 20,25 years; Standard Deviation=1,74), and 23 English students attending the level 3 of qualification (tertiary education) (Mean age = 16,39 years; Standard Deviation= 0,58), and 20 English students attending the first year of a BA Counselling university degree in a town in the East-South of England (Mean age = 25,72 years; Standard Deviation=10,08).

Participants were recruited at one of their courses via collaboration of one of their professors. Participation in the study was voluntary, and anonymity was guaranteed.

Procedure and measure

It was used a narrative device that, according to literature (Bruner, 1986, 1990, 1993; McAdams, 1993, 2001; McLean & Thorn, 2003; Meijers & Lengelle, 2012; Lengelle et al., 2013, 2014) facilitates the production of autobiographical segments. The prompt was inspired by works of Sankey and Young (1996), Italian studies (e.g. Pizzorno et al., 2014) and implemented in previous research studies (e.g. Sica et al., 2014; Aleni Sestito et al., 2016).

In a cross-sectional design, the narratives were produced by all students based on the following written prompt:

Tell me your life story. Tell me what point of your life story you have reached, and how you have arrived here...Start from wherever you like. In your story, remember the main turning points or changes and explain how you dealt with them. And now, what your plans for the future are.

The narrative prompt was administered after an introduction of purpose of the research and the goals of the data collection. Those who wanted to take part in the research, after have signed the consent, were invited to take a sheet of paper and, individually, write a narrative based on the prompt shown above. Participants could write as much as they wanted and without limits of time. They were invited to write on the paper their gender and age but not their name in order to guarantee anonymity and privacy.

Data Analysis

The approach to analysis was inspired by Merrill and West's work (2009) on conducting biographical research. The rationale for a narrative and interpretive research methodology was to gather the lived experiences of participants in an unstructured account.

The analysis was conducted by several researchers separately, following the same guidelines and steps inspired by Merrill and West (2009). In particular, the analysis of the English data was conducted by Italian and English researchers separately. Concerning the analysis of the Italian data, two Italian researchers codified and highlighted the themes and then, once translated those data into English, the results were fully discussed by Italian and English researchers.

In detail, the researchers read each narrative several times using “career development” as key of reading, in order to go through the individual stories; secondly, they used a process to highlight key paragraphs, sentences and words career-related; thirdly, the individual stories were coded to highlight the emerging themes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Finally, they read across all the stories, in order to check for shared experiences and patterns which connected across the narratives (Merrill & West, 2009).

Results

Italian and English high school students

To read narratives focusing career development has shown findings that differentiate the two groups. These differences could be linked to different contexts.

Concerning high school students, the Italians did not indicate a clear career project when they spoke about their future plans, even if one of their main themes emerging from their narratives is about a focus on the imminent transition. Some of these projects are based on intrinsic motivations, after a process of exploration or early

job experiences. Yet, in some cases, projects for the future are vague or generalised, in others they are more linked to personal and relational identity. Finally, from one narrative emerged the pressure made by significant others in the planning and the influence on his career project that, in his opinion, would be the result of that pressure instead of his personal exploration.

Slightly more than the majority of English high school students' narratives spoke about a clear career project. Some of them matches passion and hoped work; others are based on personal experiences. Finally, the others project consist of general plans.

Italian high school students	
Main themes	Example text
Career project based on intrinsic motivation	<p><i>“My dream is to become a doctor, to be exact a paediatrician. Since I was a child I have this innate desire to help others, sometimes even neglecting myself, and I know that to achieve my purpose I will have to work hard”</i></p> <p><i>“I am working as an animator for children at the moment, it can be said that the animator was the turning point of my life (...) I learned, rather I discovered, that animation is my passion and it will be my job”</i></p>
Vague o general project	<p><i>“In addition to these maturations, my projects also progress: to take the diploma, the driving license, passing the admission tests to university, to graduate, to find a job, and to have a family”</i></p>
Project linked to personal aspects	<p><i>“My project for the future, as I have</i></p>

	<i>already said, is first of all to work on myself to change some aspects of my character that cause me to suffer and that do not allow me to live well in the situations that I face, and above all, I want to improve my self-esteem. And trust in myself, because I came to the conclusion that I am the greatest enemy of myself”</i>
Influences on designing career project	<i>“I consider more the others than myself, so probably in three years you will find me with a robotics / computing book to study for something that others claim from me, and not what I want to do”</i>
 English high school students 	
Career project	<i>“I want to do Events Management at university and hopefully one day to manage a business or events company on my own”</i>
Career project based on passion	<i>“My plans for the future are to try to become an animator as I really enjoy drawing and making things into animation. (...) I think after I have finished my two years of sixth form I am going to go to university to study animation so I can try and reach my goal in life”</i>
Career project based on personal experiences	<i>“I would like to go to university to get a teaching degree. I want to teach children with disabilities like my brother”</i>
General project	<i>“I would like to have children and would also go into some sort of law enforcement. This is all I know about what I’d like to have in the future”</i>

Italian and English university students

The Italian university students, despite the apparent vocational choice in undertaking a social care degree, do not show a precise decision making in terms of their career project. In one case, career project emerged from their narratives but as a generic career realization. In one case, the hoped career is different from the university choice. When there are defined career projects, these seem to be the product of reflections about their own experience since adolescence, especially if they are about work experience.

Concerning English university students, one of the main themes in common is about the motivations of vocational university choice which were linked to personal experiences and problems. So, it is possible to hypothesis that there were strong intrinsic motivations on the base of this vocational university choice.

Italian university students	
Main themes	Example text
No career project	<i>“My future, instead, is not defined so well yet, the only thing that I know is that I want to complete my study as soon as possible and then to decide what to do about my life”</i>
General project	<i>“My projects for the future consist of graduating, studying what I like, and in the meantime doing some jobs that allow me to grow, to gain experience and to develop”</i>
Career project different from vocational choice	<i>“Future projects? Actually, I do not know what I want to do, of course there are dreams but I have some difficulties. I would wish to become a child psychologist, but I know that it is very difficult - but I like the path that I am following.”</i>

Career project based on early work experiences	<i>“A turning point in my life was when I was at high school. I took part in a project aimed to help children at their school ... I understood that I would like to help others and for this reason I decided to choose this degree course”</i>
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English university students

Career project based on intrinsic motivations	<i>“...plans for future are to work with young people struggling with similar issues I struggled with because I know how much it can improve their life as a whole”</i>
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Comparing Italian and English narratives

Considering career development in terms of project as key of reading it was possible to understand some differences between considered groups.

	Italian students	English students
High school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generic ideas in progress • Intrinsic motivations of career project • Project about Self development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear career project • General project in progress
University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No career project • Vague project • Career project not consistent to university choice • Career project inspired by personal experiences and motivations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrinsic motivations to university choices meant as first step of career

Italian high school students seem to be more varied in terms of content of the narratives. They seem to be in progress in designing their life paths and not only in terms of career. In fact, they seem to be more Self-oriented than English high school students who create a group less varied in terms of content comparing to the Italian one. Furthermore, Italian high school students seem to be more focused on planning both in career and in general terms.

Also the English university students seem to be focused especially on planning their career of which the vocational university choice is meant as the first step of their career project. Whereas, Italian university students seem to be more similar to the Italian youth despite they have made a vocational university choice. Also they seem to be more focused on overall identity rather than on vocational identity. In fact, their narratives spoke about more generic project that regarding both career than personal aspects.

Thus, considering the limits of this kind of comparing, it seems that there are more differences between groups considering as variable nationality rather than age.

Discussion and Conclusions

Comparing stories told by Italian and English students, despite all participants are at the same transition, the groups showed differences linked to their country of origin rather than age. It is possible to speak about intergroup differences rather than intragroup differences.

The differences between Italian and English high school students could be linked to the fact that even if both Italian and English students are in transition, the latter have had already the chance to think about their future given that their educational system answered them to choice if continue their educational path at the end of secondary level (16 years of age) and eventually to choose the topic of their tertiary level of education. So, there is a sort of intermediate transition. This condition does not happen in Italy where, even if the mandatory school ends at 16 years, high school students have to face their transition at 18 years of age.

Yet, English educational system supports exploration processes with the supports of counsellors at school and facilitates the development of critical thinking using mixed age classes to speak about specific topics. Moreover, to find a job during school is encouraged from society and families.

In Italy, instead, the educational system is still articulated in one-to-group class and they rarely have involved in career counselling/interventions. Moreover, designing a career is postpone according to Italian delayed situation (Livi Bacci, 2008) and that could explained why they seem self-oriented.

Concerning university students, the Italian delayed situation (Livi Bacci, 2008) seems to have the same effects that those had on younger Italian students. Also they seem to be focused on an overall identity and their projects do not concern only career. The vocational university choice does not seem to be intended like the first step of a project but as an extra step in their educational path. In fact, the Italian university students continue their educational path from high school; instead, the English students

have different paths. In fact, a part of them is classifiable as adults back to education after several experiences or exploration of different possibilities, this latter especially for young adults. Also this group, like the English high school students, seem to be less varied and more focused on career projects.

Taking into account the limits of a qualitative research and the impossibility to generalise this findings to a larger population, they suggest interesting implication for career counselling interventions. In fact, these results confirm that career construction is influenced by several factors among which cultural context plays an important role (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011), and that this factor have to be considered in counselling activities especially with people that live in society characterised by difficult labour market. This latter, in fact, could influenced people's perception of career chances and/or obstacles in the realization of their projects.

A pilot career counselling/intervention for high school students

In order to complete the picture of Italian school and university students' situation about career development and choices, it was designed, implemented and experimented of a pilot career counselling/intervention. This counselling/intervention, within career narrative approach, was inspired by life design counselling and was responding to Italian contextual factors such as job market, choice timing and career development.

Career planning

In line with the literature examined in theoretical part of this dissertation and the characteristics of Italian job market, it was designed, implemented and experimented a pilot career counselling/intervention with 48 high school students at their last two years of school (Mage = 17,36 years, SD= 0,64) attending two different high schools in a large city of the South of Italy. The pilot career counselling/intervention aimed to promote and support: narrative construction of vocational identity, future-oriented processes, and career planning given that this aspect emerged as critical from previous researches. Moreover, considering the criticisms typical of Italian context (see the introduction to research) the counselling/intervention had as general aim to promote positive identity. The career intervention, according to Life Design Model, was based on a qualitative approach to support future-oriented through the possible selves' elaboration and to explore their link with vocational identity.

The exploration of possible selves in career development and in career counselling was highlighted by several Authors (e.g. Markus & Nurius, 1986; Savickas, 2005; Sheppard & Marshall, 1999; Meara et al., 1995; Oyserman et al., 2006). Oyserman and colleagues (2004) define Possible Selves as what individuals imagine about the selves they hope to become, the selves they are afraid to become, and the selves they expect to become. These selves can be related to personal experiences, past behaviours and achievements, others expectations, personal ideas and values. Specifically about career, possible selves regard to possible role as worker and interests and values career-related.

The different typologies of Possible Selves (Positive, Expected, and Feared) are the result of a social construction because values, ideas and aspirations are the product of the interaction with significant others, social role models, and social values (Oyserman et al., 2004). They can be studied separately taking into account only expected and feared selves, and the balance between possible selves in the same domain (Oyserman & Markus, 1990).

Articulation of pilot career counselling/intervention

The pilot career counselling/intervention was conducted in a time of three months by psychologists and psychologists in training; these latter under supervision of psychologists with expertise in the educational field over the time of the pilot career counselling/intervention. It was articulated in three several stages aimed different goals (see fig. 1).

The pilot career counselling/intervention has involved voluntary participants that after a brief presentation of the program activities wrote down an autobiographical narrative answering of the following prompt: *Tell me your life story. Tell me what point of your life story you have reached, and how you have arrived here...Start from wherever you like. In your story, remember the main turning points or changes and explain how you dealt with them. And now, what your plans for the future are.*

The prompt was designed on the base of Sunkey and Young' work (1996) and on more recent elaboration by Pizzorno and colleagues (2015), and implemented in previous researches described above. The results indicated that this prompt was useful to produce autobiographical accounts and meaning making processes.

Then, the program was articulated in two *focus groups* meetings focalized on vocational identity formation processes related to desires, hopes and fears emerged from the previous measure (narrative accounts), and on the definition of a final vocational identity project. Students attending pilot career counselling/intervention were divided in small groups. In particular, the first focus group was focused on Expected and Feared Possible Selves, Future-Orientated, Turning Points, and Strengths and Weaknesses. At the end of this focus group, students were invited to design a possible selves map (Sica, & Aleni Sestito, 2016; Sica, Aleni Sestito, & Di Palma, 2016), a sort of graphical path with career project as final place/stage and characterized by the follow elements: life line, strengths, life-spaces, and possible selves. Then, the second focus group was dedicated to the reading of possible selves map in group, on career projects and choices of participants.

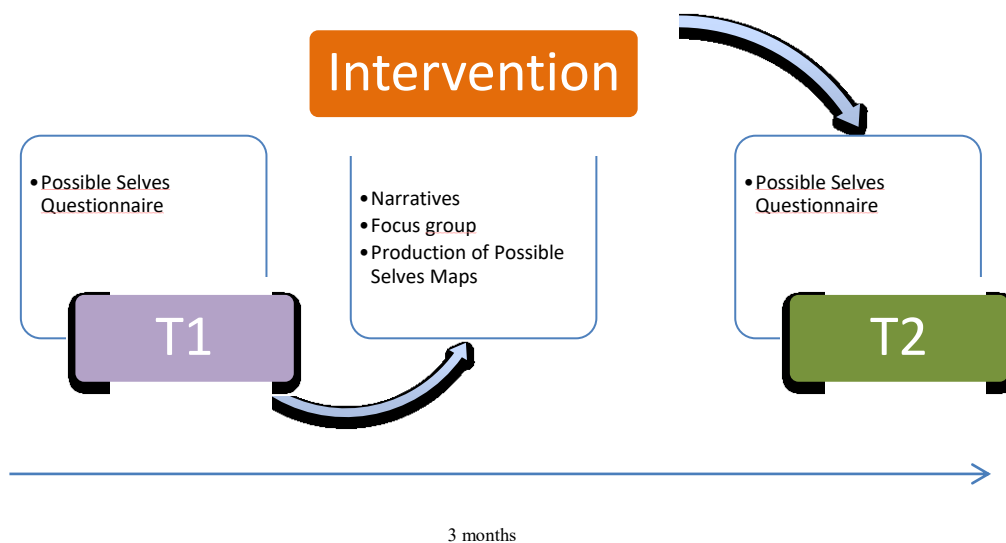


Fig.1 Scheme of the pilot career counselling/intervention

Evaluation of the pilot career counselling/intervention

To evaluate the efficacy of the program it was used, at the beginning and at the end of intervention, the *Possible Selves Questionnaire* (Oyserman et al., 2004), articulated in opened questions about possible selves. This measure assesses ideas about hopes, fears, and goals linked to what people might to become, what they would like to become, and what they fear to become.

According to the coding developed by Oyserman and colleagues, the count of the number of expected and feared possible selves, strategies used to achieve them and balanced between possible selves in the same domain indicated by each participant were compared in the two time steps (at the beginning and at the end of the pilot career counselling/intervention) (see fig 2). Moreover, it was used the non-parametric McNemar test.

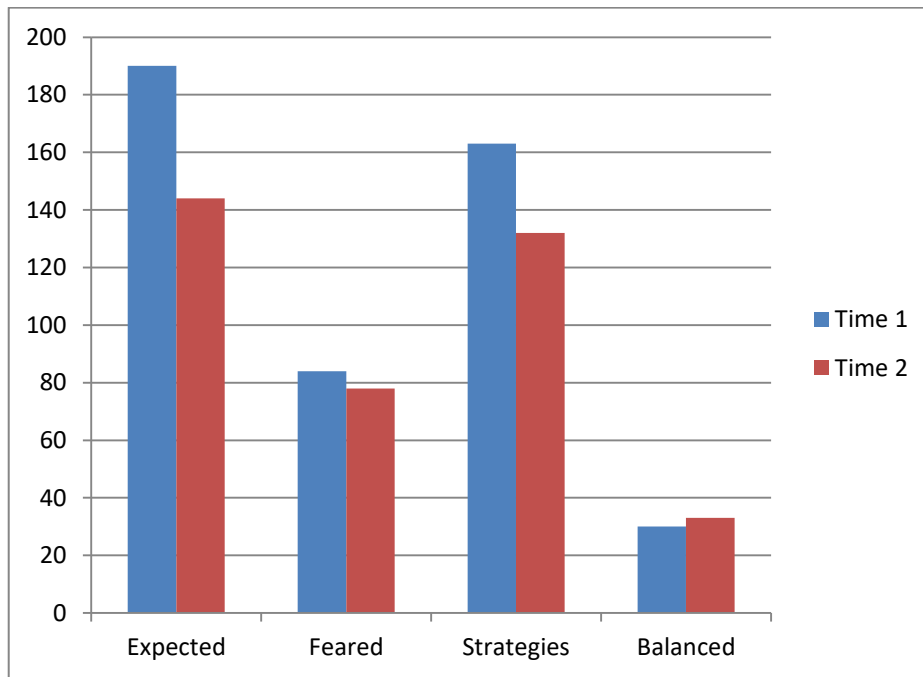


Fig. 2 comparing Possible Selves at time 1 and 2

The number of Expected Possible Selves is lower at time 2 as well as Feared Possible Selves and Strategies, instead balanced grows at time 2.

Then, it was used code categories proposed by Oyserman and colleagues (2004) to analyse the content of Expected (fig.3) and Feared (fig.4) Possible Selves: 1) Achievement ($\chi^2.023$; $\chi^2.0864$) Interpersonal Relationships ($\chi^2.023$; $\chi^2.864$); 3) Personality Traits ($\chi^2.655$; $\chi^2.461$); 4) Health/Body ($\chi^2.727$; $\chi^2.1$); 5) Material / Lifestyle ($\chi^2.023$; $\chi^2.1$); 6) Negativity/not normative ($\chi^2.1$; χ^2-).

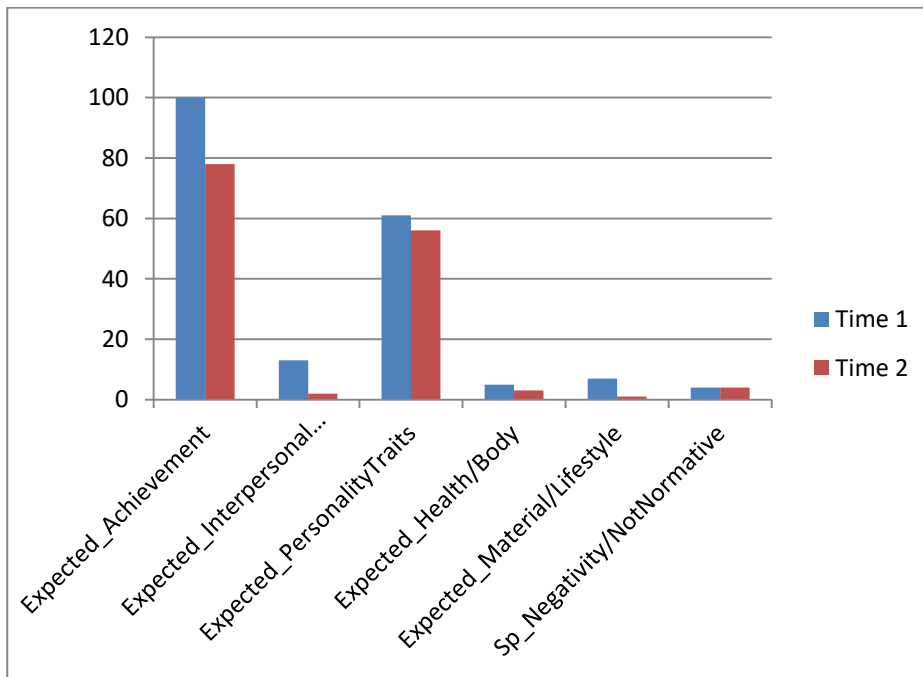


Fig. 3 Expected Possible Selves

Analysis of categories about Expected Possible Selves showed that these latter concerned mainly achievement and Personality Traits both at time 1 that at time 2.

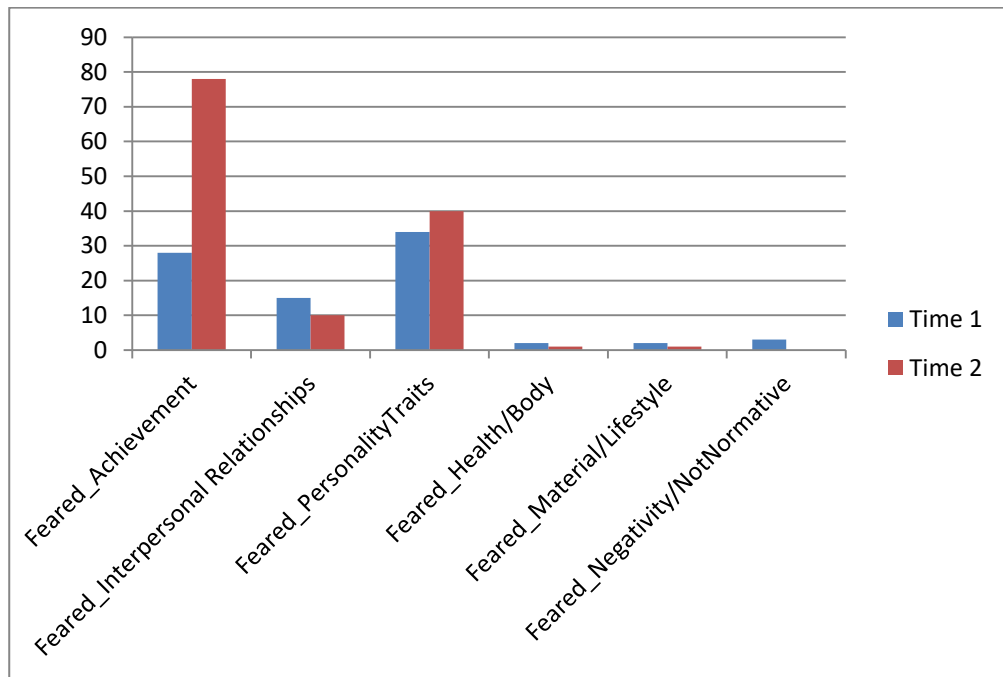


Fig. 4 Feared Possible Selves

About Feared Possible Selves, analysis showed mainly Achievement, Personality Traits, and Interpersonal Relationship categories.

Discussion and Conclusions

The pilot intervention seemed to foster the growing of congruence between expected and feared possible selves (balanced), as result of exploration processes.

The results showed a focus of Italian students on present time orientation: in both negative and neutral terms. In details, the results showed a lower count of expected and feared selves about achievement at time 2 but analysing in depth the category was possible to describe better it using subcategories indicated by the Authors.

The category achievement at time 1 was mostly characterized by subcategories related to school commitments and activities as sports, for instance; instead, the same category at time 2 was characterized mostly also by subcategories linked to work and carrier. Moreover, the content analysis at time 2 showed that feared selves have a role of orienting the vocational identity choices. Only a small group of participants results to be future-oriented and with vocational identity processes congruent with hoped for selves (in depth- exploration and commitments).

The pilot career counselling/intervention saw the active participation/involvement of high school students. As said above, they are usually involved in informative guidance so the pilot was for them a concrete and aimed chance to explore their career interests and values and to be supported in the process of career exploration and commitment making.

This pilot seems to have filled a gap in Italian educational path, in line with literature and in view of the results and the feedbacks received from participants.

Despite the limitations linked to number of participants and the short time of intervention, the findings of the pilot career counselling/intervention and the feedback received by participants provided supports and guidelines for the implementation of a counselling/intervention model articulated in two years and in a bigger number of focus group meetings.

Model

Career counselling/intervention model

Starting from the implementation and experimentation of the pilot career counselling/intervention, it was developed a career counselling/intervention model which refers to high school students, on the base of theoretical approaches and peculiarities, criticisms of Italian context described above and on findings of several studies in which was articulated the present research project.

At the end of high school, Italian students have to face a transition moment due to timing of choices scheduled by context. In fact, at the end of high school they have to choose if to continue their educational path and, if so, what kind of educational path (what kind of degree course or what kind of specialisation), or to try to enter into the job market. Despite this important transition (from a level to another of education or from education to work) school often offers only informative supports to the students, who have to make important choices often without a counselling program aimed to support process of career exploration and positive identity development (Tsang, Hui, & Law, 2012) especially in a context, as the Italian one, characterised by a prolonged transition to adulthood with which coincides a prolonged identity moratorium phase.

In an attempt to answer to the issues outlined, the pilot aims to promote and foster a proactive and agentive way with which young people manage to navigate into the modern and unstable labour market to define their overall and vocational identity (Aleni Sestito, Sica, & Di Palma, 2017). Moreover, to support students to develop agentive resources useful to face identity-related work construction and to

understand and negotiate the various obstacles and opportunities commonly encountered throughout late-modern life (Aleni Sestito et al., 2017).

The model matches the narrative approach both in terms of identity construction processes and career counselling on the base of the concept that identity development is, as McAdams (2012) says, the internalized and evolving story of the self, constructed by people in order to make sense and meaning out their life.

The model is articulated on two years (last two years of high school) and in several stages (Aleni Sestito et al., 2017). It is conducted by counsellor experts in the field of educational and vocational counselling. *First year* (second to last year of high school) prefigures a presentation of the main goals of the intervention and how it is articulated; after that, counsellors invite students to participate. Who decides to take part in the counselling program for its entire duration is invited to write down a narrative on the base of a prompt previously implemented (see research section). The goal is to enable students to explore their vocational identity development. Then, all participants, in small groups (6-8), are involved in a monthly series of six focus group discussions (audio and video recorded), conducted by a psychologist counsellor, in order to analyse and explore life themes and critical features of vocational identity emerging from their narrative, especially focusing past experiences and autobiographical reasoning. The last goal is to support them in their in-depth exploration of identity and encouraging them to reconsider their career commitments (Porfeli et al., 2011). Finally, at the end of focus group discussion sessions, it is asked to students to complete individually a graphical map of their vocational identity

development (Identity Map adapted on Shepard's graphical approach (Shepard & Marshall, 1999), taking into account their life paths from the past to the present. The main goal is to help them to figure out the components of their identity that have emerged through their written narratives and the focus groups. The stages of the *Second year* (last year of high school) of counselling program are quite similar to the previous one but the main goals of each ones change. Also at the starting stage of the second year, students produce a written autobiographical narrative answering a prompt similar to the previous but with the addition of a specific part with a reference to future plans. This because to facilitate a focus on a possible future paths and, consequently, on possible selves especially in career context. Also in this second year, participants (small groups of 6-8) are involved in a monthly series of focus group (audio and video recorded) conducted by a psychologist counsellor. Here, one more main goal is to analyse and explore especially critical features of vocational identity. As the Possible Selves Theory states (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Oyserman, 2004) we could speak about who everyone hopes or expects to become, as well as who everyone fears to become, emerged from the narratives of this year. Finally, the participants are invited to complete individually, as at the end of the first year, a graphical map of vocational identity but, in this case, they have to define a goal (in terms of expected or feared vocational possible selves) and a starting point (actual self), thus creating a Possible Selves Map (Sica & Aleni Sestito, 2016). How they arrive from actual self to expected or fear selves represents an illustrating possible selves, internal and external resources and obstacles, coping strategies used and steps made. Its final goal is to it

support participants in the future orientation of their vocational identity, in their career projects and in their school/work choices (Aleni Sestito et al., 2017).

The first year of the described counselling model was experimented during the last year of high school with students from different educational paths, in a large city of South of Italy, Naples. The second and final year is starting in November 2017.

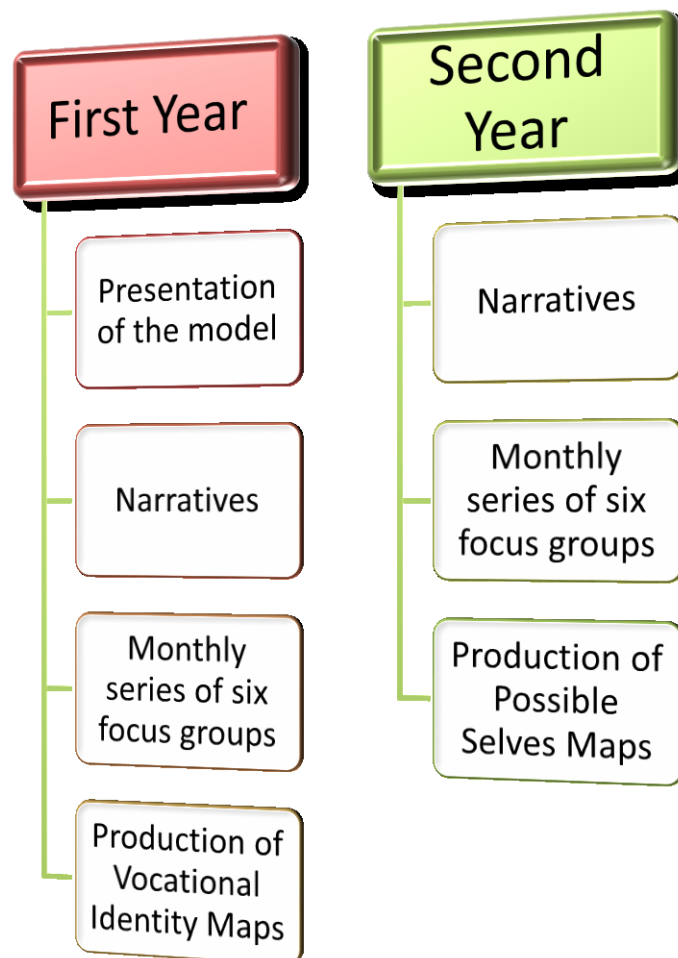


Fig. 1. Articulation of model

Conclusions

In line with main reviews and critiques to traditional approaches to work guidance and counselling and analysis from sociological, political, economic, and psychological points of view of job market and changes related to, the present research project aimed to design and articulate a counselling model refers to high school students.

The research project was articulated in different studies in order to have a picture of Italian school and university students' situation about career development and choices. Then, this picture was used to design and implement a intervention responding to Italian context in terms of job market, choice timing and career development. The first study aimed to explore vocational identity statuses of high school students. The results, in brief, showed Italian Vocational Identity Statuses configuration was characterised by the absence of Vocational Identity Achieved Status and the presence of Vocational Identity Doubtful Exploration Status and Vocational Identity Attenuate Diffusion Status. The Vocational Identity Statuses emerged, confirmed results of a previous study on Italian young adult attending university, thus the Vocational Identity Doubtful Status seems to be peculiar of Italian youths, and instead, the Vocational Identity Attenuate Diffusion Status seems to be peculiar of Italian adolescents considered. Then, the study took into account two variables: work-learn trajectories and early work experiences. In line with European community guidelines, MIUR (Ministry of Education and University of Research) had introduced

mandatory work-learn trajectories in educational paths of technical and professional schools and then also for high schools since third year of school. One of the secondary goals of the study was to explore the possible vocational identity statuses differences between students attending work-learn trajectories and students not attending work-learn trajectories. Even if the Vocational Identity Statuses configurations are different, also in this case the Vocational Identity Achieved Status did not characterise the Vocational Identity Statuses configuration of students attending work-learn trajectories. Taking into account the variable early work experiences, instead, students with work experiences during educational paths showed Vocational Identity Achieved Status confirming that this variable can have a role in the vocational identity construction processes.

These results had suggested the necessity to explore Vocational Identity contents implementing a narrative approach to clarify the peculiarities of Vocational Identity Configuration emerged from previous study. In the present research project the Vocational Narrative Identity was used both as analysis approach that as instrument of intervention. Indeed, this kind of approach can be used to explore content and process and meaning making level but at the same time can active process of reflection and exploration.

The longitudinal narrative study was based on the hypothesis that during the time-frame between Time 1 and Time 2 (coincident respectively to the penultimate and final years of high school) students have to face many meaningful experiences that could activate processes of self-reflection, analysis and revision of their choices just

made and commitment reconsiderations. Content and linguistic analysis showed that one year later a half of participants confirmed to be in Vocational Identity Diffusion Status confirming previous results.

According to literature, contextual factors have a main role in career development; along this side, a part of the research project explored career development of high school students attending last years of school and university students attending first year from two different contexts (Italy and England), characterized by similarities and differences about job market and different timing of choices. The results of this study showed that career development is interrelated with life domains, could be influenced by and affect other life domains. The emerged differences can be explained by the contextual differences.

On the base of results and implementation of narrative approach, a pilot career counselling/intervention with high school students attending their last two years of school was designed. This pilot career counselling/intervention, within narrative approach, used career writing and focus group inspired by Possible Selves Theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Analysing globally the results of studies and pilot model, career development confirms to be a complex process affected by several factors and so confirmed its non-linearity in terms of advancement. Along this side, to design a career project could to be more complex than in the past because of many variables felt as out of their control and the fear to make wrong decisions. As consequence, young people could postpone career development. This hypothesis, together with the students' feedbacks after the pilot

career counselling/intervention, highlighted the Italian students' need to be supported in career development especially with a difficult job market. Italian educational paths do not include career counselling but rather an informative guidance about possible university choices; this kind of guidance is usually offered at the last year. This possibility is considered by our participants as not responding to their needs. Italian school is still felt far away from world of job and significant adults like teachers and parents are felt as not well informed or, at the extreme, not competent because the fact that the main characteristics of job market are deeply change during the time.

On the base of global results, it is possible to suppose that the timing of choices does not coincide with an advanced process of vocational exploration directed to make vocational commitments and that could explain a prolonged period of Vocational Identity diffusion, data that confirms previous findings (see study at page 58).

Studying career development from different points of view and with different approaches, together with to exchange views directly with students and to collect narrative data, allowed to design a counselling/intervention model articulated in two years (the last two years of high/professional/technical schools) that could be insert permanently in the educational paths according to European guidelines and main assumptions of Life Design Counselling.

Limitations and Future Directions

The findings of this research project show some limitations. The quantitative study used a cross-sectional design and this did not allow studying aspects as impact, causality and/or directionality. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were used

separately; a future research could consider the integration of both approaches (mixed approach) in order to analyse simultaneously aspects related to both of them.

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