Employability & Competences

Innovative Curricula
for New Professions

edited by
Vanna Boffo
Monica Fedeli

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Graphic design: Alberto Pizarro Fernández, Pagina Maestra

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TELLING TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCES…
TO BE PROFESSIONALLY PROMOTED*

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ABSTRACT: This article introduces experimental reflection on the experiences at an 'Employability Skills' laboratory[1] of a group of young volunteers from the National Civilian Service under the 'Support and Inclusion' project of the Employment Promotion Section (SPO in Italian) of the University of Naples Federico II *SInAPSi* Centre. Young volunteers were included as unstructured support figures in activities that sought mainly to assist and serve students with disabilities. More specifically, these activities included: accompaniment and support during lessons; digitization of teaching material; providing support for the assorted services offered by the University Centre; general training implemented by AMESCI staff; specific training implemented by SInAPSi operatives. The experiences, which were accomplished in cooperation with the Europe 2020 programme, included the creation of an integrated system to recognize and validate formal, non-formal, and informal skills, as a tool to promote youth employment (Striano, Capobianco 2016).

KEYWORDS: employability, narration, skills, storytelling, social services.

1. *The synergy between the SInAPSi Centre and National Civilian Service*

Italian National Civilian Service (SCN in Italian) is an opportunity for young people between the ages of 18 and 28, regardless of gender, to spend twelve months of their lives supporting community service commitments, social cohesion values, and realizing everyone's wellbeing, collectively and individually.

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* The contribution is the result of a collective work. For academic reasons, it should be noted that Marianna Capo is the author of the third and fourth paragraphs, Valentina Cesarano of the second paragraph, Maria Papathanasiou of paragraph 2.1 and Maura Striano is the author of the conclusions.

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[1] [Author's note] The work described in the article was carried out by Dr. Marianna Capo, PhD in Psychological and Pedagogical Science, and Carolina Galdo, Psychologist. Among the most recent publications of Dr. Capo, the following should be mentioned here: Capo 2016c and 2016d; Capo, Navarra 2016; Capo 2017.

As ratified by the National Civilian Service Act (Law 64/2001, Article 1), the goal is to:

- foster implementation of the constitutional principles of social service (Article 1, para. b);
- promote solidarity and cooperation at national and international levels, above all with regard to the protection of social rights, services for the people, and the bringing of peace to communities (Article 1, para. c);
- participate in the safeguarding and protection of the nation's heritage […] (Article 1, para. d); and finally,
- contribute to the civic, social, cultural, and professional education of young people through activities that may also be carried out at authorities and administrations operating abroad (Art.1, para. e).

As stated above, civilian service is to be considered an active citizenship experience that guarantees the young volunteers both human and professional growth. Moreover, for the entire duration of the project, it allows them to devote time to themselves and others, thus enriching their education from various perspectives: personal, professional, cultural, social, and civic. In this way, young people reap the opportunity to become citizens who are participants and protagonists of their own future and that of others (Muroni 2017). All made possible by the heterogeneity and multiplicity in the sectors of intervention the SCN addresses, i.e.: education; cultural promotion; the protection and safeguarding of historical–artistic, cultural, environmental, and forestry heritage; civil protection and assistance. The civilian service volunteer experience as job creation in an organized context is conceived as an occasion for knowledge and training, especially and above all of the professional variety (Capo *et al.* 2015) whose outcome and failures are rarely formalized and validated through instruments and tools specifically tailored to the user's profile. For this reason, it was suggested that the training of volunteers should not only include a specific section to assess inbound and outbound cross–skills, in order to provide volunteers with an opportunity to discover knowledge and acquired skills as well as measuring the occupational levels possessed. The introduction of a functional narrative instrument through the dedicated use of multimedia technologies was also suggested, with the aiming of promoting and evaluating the volunteers' employability levels.

The long–term objective is the development of a Balance of Competence tool that allows operationalization of the construction of employability and exploration of the related competences according to the model prepared by INAPP (previously ISFOL 2016), which, starting from this experimental encounter, can be systematized, and extended to other types of user (university students, graduates, research fellowships,

research doctors). From the perspective of further education, orientation is a necessary interface to ensure continuity and significance for training processes, facilitating the recognition of a personal and professional development project consistent with the expectations, needs, resources, and potential of individuals, in relation to their life contexts (Striano 2004; Savickas *et al.* 2010). The Occupational Promotion Service (SPO) plays a strategic role in enhancing and promoting integrated actions of guidance, motivation, and support to civilian service volunteers in developing their training and work scheme through analysis of intersecting skills possessed by the following aims and objectives, i.e., it proposes to:

- offer a comparison space to learn from the experience of others;
- help individuals become aware of their own transverse and professional skills;
- help reveal often latent knowledge, aptitudes, skills, interests, and aspirations that define them as particular individuals;
- maintain the definition of a professional project consistent with the skills developed in the various training paths (formal, non-formal and informal) and with personal expectations

and also aims to:

- promote ability in self-assessment and activation;
- help define and valorize individuals' strengths and room for possible improvement;
- know themselves and their potential (with specific reference to the potential of internal employability);
- develop interests and motivation.

This is therefore a way to intensify volunteers' training and professional pathways by means of a narrative description of the skills and knowledge gained during a work experience placement. From this standpoint, the training proposal is an intervention that allows volunteers to acquire explicit awareness of their personal and professional identity, an indispensable outlook to successfully address their own educational and professional pathways (De Mennato 2006; Cunti 2008; Lo Presti 2009).

2. *The participants in the training experience and the methodological proposal*

The reference sample consisted of 40 volunteers from the National Civilian Service (27 females and 13 males) of whom 5 had high school qualifications, 5 were university graduates (seeking employment) and 30 were undergraduates from the following university courses: Law (4); Engineering (5); Psychological Science (9); Social Service (4); Ge-

ology (1); Languages (3); Biology (3); Biotechnology (1). The proposed promotion of employability for volunteers at the University SInAPSi Centre was based on the use of diversified tools, and used a methodology founded on the narrative approach of Life Design Counseling (or Narrative Career Counseling) (Savickas *et al.* 2010; Savickas 2005, 2012; Savickas, Porfeli 2012). As Savickas points out, this is a frank attempt to bring meaning and shape to our future. In addition, the ability to narrate leads clients to better understand the driving motives of their own existence, their vocational personality, and their personal adaptability resources (Savickas 2005). Alongside this approach, the Balance of Competence was adopted according to the French model (Le Boterf 2000; Lemoine 2002; Lévy Leboyer, 1993; Aubret 2009), which requires self–assessment to activate the re–appropriation and enhancement of individuals' competences. This investigation was structured in 4 phases, for a total of 6 encounters, involving the following steps:

- reception (plenary session);
- exploration (group and individual mode);
- in–depth analysis (group and individual mode);
- conclusion (group mode).

The operational proposal for civilian service volunteers focuses on studies and research that support the use of narrative/autobiographical instruments that 'tell the story of one's life'. This can encourage greater awareness, revealing to the subject unimagined possibilities for change, and thus activating a power of existential and design reconfiguration. Indeed, the narrative is presented as a 'sense organizer', since it restores a sense of direction to heterogeneous and composite subjective experiences (Delory Momberger 2015; Formenti 1998; Pineau 2000).

Furthermore, the operational proposal refers to the outcomes of the European KVALUES project, revised within the Biographical Self Labs project: Objective Portfolio Worker, funded by the Puglia Region (*Bando Giovani Idee* 2012) (De Carlo 2014), considering the plurality of approaches and instruments for validation of learning, collected, and distributed by CEDEFOP in the European Inventory on Validation of Non–Formal and Informal Learning (Brussels 2005–2011) and ISFOL (2014).

2.1 The promotion path to employability and the autobiographical Self

The training process to promote employability (including the Balance of Competence) is a qualitative/quantitative tool that can prompt autobiographical reconstruction, that is not merely a description of the past anchored to an ephemeral dimension, but a dynamic connection

between one's own self and the designability of one's own self. This reconstruction is intended as a journey through which subjects discover and re-elaborate experiences, grasping not only objectives and orientation, but also the ability to re-invent themselves, recognizing a set of elements to lay the foundations of their own development strategy on. The specific autobiographical dimension of the evaluation allows the individuals who use it to generate, through a narrative exposition, self-defensive cognitive processes that clarify the significance of the personal cognitive-emotional paths of experience and create a 'broader' sense of self, embracing the past, the present and the future. In this sense, the focus of the entire evaluation is to outline precisely the Autobiographical Self, so dear to Damasio (2000), who, in *The Feeling of What Happens*, describes the Extended Self, also defined as the Autobiographical Self, present within the extended consciousness as an elaboration that can provide individuals with a developed sense of self that considers the past and the anticipated future. For Damasio «here and now is still present, but it is accompanied by the past […] and, equally important, it is accompanied by the foreseen future» (Damasio 1999: 237). The evaluation of competences is, in fact, a retrospective of the past, which individuals form, and which makes them 'competent' in return, to re-read their past in the present while creating a large opening towards their future: all this autobiographical reconstruction work of experiences is part of a pedagogical framework in which training is understood as a complex, dynamic, active, continuous, and multidimensional process, attentive to relationships, inter- and intro-subjectivity. The immense importance attributed today to the subjective dimension of the balance of competences rather than to the objective one, concerns the use of all those narrative practices that represent privileged opportunities to enable individuals to become better acquainted with themselves, their desires, their own projects, their own successes and failures, but also their own expectations and concerns, and, above all, those skills possessed or implemented. Indeed, in recent years, a series of narrative orientation practices have spread as the most suitable for exploring oneself, but also for knowing and relating to others and to contexts; in fact, «there are narratives that can stimulate narration on oneself, fundamental narrative, and necessary for a guidance path […]. Then the confrontation appears, where the listening to the narratives of others, the identification of the narratives of others on us, constructs the collection of narratives» (Batini 2005: 49). Parker too argues that

> behind any autobiography there is always a person who gives importance and priorities to certain matters over others. […] These are the essential 'goods' with which the subject lives, which determine choices and ac-

tions based on a particular ethic. […] Such goods […] inevitably form the stories the subject talks about when planning the future, reconstructing his or her past or present (Parker 2007: 1).

For this reason, the skills budget must be a sharing space 'where the subject feels free' to name these essential goods. A space of sharing that can reflect the subject, helping him to fully realize his or her cognitive and emotional skills. And is «the interweaving between the human, social, and psychological wealth of a person – mediated by situational variables – that allows subjects to re-enter the job market with a professional personal project in tune with the context» (Grimaldi, Porcelli, Rossi 2014: 58). Through this training to promote employability, individuals can connect, integrate, and articulate their resources in the light of a reflexivity that becomes an articulate analysis which then makes it possible to recognize the motivations that have guided their actions and also the skills and abilities gained in other experiences.

3. Variation in educational training for SCN volunteers operating at the SInAPSi Centre

The course is structured in two modules, Inbound (BdC1) and Outbound (BdC2), each divided into different training days where individual work moments alternate with activities in groups and/or subgroups. The work is based mainly on the direct experience that participants have through exercises, games, moments for reflection, focus groups, and brainstorming. Each volunteer is invited to collect all the material produced in a personal 'archive', a personal 'Travel Diary' representing the memory of their experience. Below we illustrate the three steps of the incoming route and the related tools used. The first phase is devoted to the reception, the creation of a collaborative environment, and the formation of the group. The group instrument is assumed as a context suitable to accommodate the «stresses of a plurality of models, each of which bear a selective enhancement of one or more structural dimensions of competence» (Galdo, in Striano, Capobianco 2016: 187). Through reciprocal presentation and interactive exchange, the relationship between the participants begins: the main dimensions the work emphasizes are motivation and relational attitudes. At this stage of the work, the participants are also given a 'Travel Diary', a folder to collect the tools used, which represents the memory of each participant's route. At this point, the contract or training agreement has also been clarified, which is where the presentation of the content of the training (inbound and outbound modules) is also planned. The second exploration phase is aimed at

subjective exploration through the distribution of a self–assessment questionnaire on cross–skills, and the AVO Giovani (ISFOL 2016) to assess internal employability potential. The third step is «to present an autobiographical narrative instrument, the *My Skills Patchwork*, an instrument designed to 'activate personal promotion' with the aim of supporting volunteers in reconstructing and presenting their personal history and training with particular attention to the various formal, non–formal, and informal contexts» (Capo, in Striano, Capo 2015: 142). This session is therefore key in «activating a subjective reconnaissance and reflection on personal training experiences, but also in interpreting students' expectations and aspirations» (Capo 2015: 142). At this stage, some time is also dedicated to the clarification of motivations, expectations, and general reflections: participants are offered the opportunity to reveal their personal motivations and expectations on the path they are facing through guided reflection. The ultimate step follows the final phase during which the skills profile returns in a paper version (Fig. 1), elaborated both by an analysis of *My skills Patchwork* and by the questionnaire on the self–evaluation of skills (quantitative analysis). From the analysis of the training experiences in the various contexts (formal, non–formal, and informal), initial and non–professional experiences, but above all through analysis of the questionnaire, «it becomes possible to identify for each student those skills that we could identify and define as "weak" and "strong", while photographing the set of core competences possessed by the subject» (Striano, Capobianco 2016: 145) as illustrated in the following chart:

Figure 1 – Graphic representation of the individual profile of cross-competences.
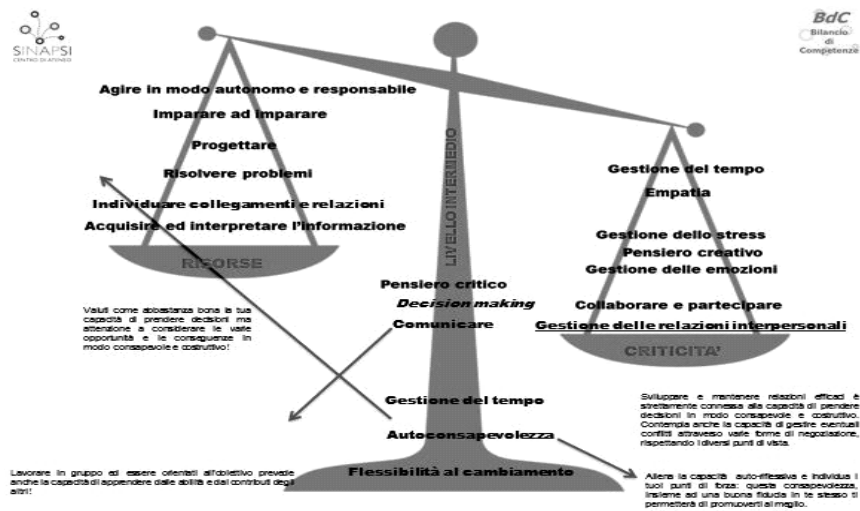
The reception phase of the incoming module (T0) provides an introductory moment during which the goals and stages of the entire evaluation path are presented to the volunteers. At this initial stage, and at the opening of subsequent workshops, the group is offered the use of the photo set 'Inside the photo' created and developed by ISFOL (2006). After specifying that this is a game of imagination where there is no right or wrong answer, the trainer asks each volunteer to choose one or more photographs (up to three), among those available, on the basis of which the person presents him- or herself and explains the expectations nurtured by the SCN experience. Volunteers point to a Post-it note positioned next to each selected image, with the size and characteristics identified. Then, positioned in a circle, they are invited to present themselves based on the reflections triggered. The introduction of such a procedure is particularly effective in facilitating exchange between the various members of the group and the establishment of a positive climate, essential for carrying out subsequent experiential activities. Within this game of imagination, the descriptive features of stimuli can be elaborated by the participants in a subjective manner. Each volunteer tends to attribute the pictures in the photos, their expectations and feelings, to the experience, as well as their own personal characteristics, skills and competences: the images become the starting point to narrate their own personal and professional experiences, facilitating the emergence and sharing of thoughts and emotions. After the presentation ends, the activity continues with a later stage of work, to be held this time in a group. In the absence of the trainer, the participants will arrange the photos, individually selected, on a single noticeboard: the task is to choose, from images and individual representations, a name and/or an allegorical figure to represent the group's identity. The goal is to work on defining the identity of the volunteers' group and to bring out its motivations and expectations. The next exploration phase is dedicated to the distribution of the My Skills Patchwork tool which each volunteer will have to deal with individually (Tab. 1).

This is a narrative instrument divided into two thematic sections of in-depth analysis:

1) 'My Educational Experiences', with a focus on: a) the context's learning experiences (formal, non-formal, and informal); b) perception with respect to the educational implications of the experiences.

2) 'My Portrait' with a focus on: a) personal events considered particularly significant for professional growth; b) attitudes; c) the relationship with the professional context (Capo 2016b).

Below is a chart of the sections the narrative instrument is divided into.

Table 1 – Diagram depicting the sections of *My Skills Patchwork*.

My learning experiences
Formal experiences: indicates all those formal pathways (school, university, etc.) or any training course that led me to the acquisition of certificates, professional qualifications.
Non-formal experiences: indicate all experiences - personal activities (reading, cinema) in which I felt that I learned something significant, even though no formal recognition was obtained.
Informal Experience: Shows all experiences gained outside the formal circuits (eg. workplaces, etc.) that usually do not lead to official certifications but leave a lot of implied skills.
Professional Experience: Indicates all work experiences, including short-term or occasional ones.
My personal portrait
I define it with 5 adjectives: indicate 5 adjectives with which we define and present ourselves to the others.
Why I chose to do the Civil Service ...: Explain the reasons which led you to choose to experience Civil Service. And why did you choose the Sinapsi - Centro di Ateneo ?
My 'biographical evidence' indicates those milestones that have represented significant moments for personal growth and which have helped me achieve greater personal awareness
My interests: indicates the interests that at this time seem to be the most important
My Attitudes: Indicates your attitudes, that is, what you think to do independently of your own interests.
I volunteer to: ... tell how you live 'your' volunteer civil service.
My projects: try to expose your future personal / professional projects.

Therefore, the biographies/fiction sheet, *My Skills Patchwork*, for volunteers on the course is a useful tool to facilitate the approach to and comparison with different subjective dimensions such as self-image, interests, motivations, and attitudes. From this point of view, the subjects, with the trainer as a facilitator, can identify their skills more clearly, positively surpass critical situations, and, as far as the 'biographical wealth' is concerned, gain and increase their skills, abilities, and knowledge (Malrieu 2003; Guichard 2005; Rossi, Fabbri 2005; Delory Momberger 2013; Capo 2016a). It is therefore «a process that facilitates the recognition of personal abilities and competences for the subject, meaning the latter "not as static", given components but rather as "emerging" dimensions, or distinctive elements of a subjective dynamic and reflective reconstruction» (Capo 2016b: 4). The subject is promoted through the act of narrating and self-telling, therefore, the account does not favour access to a story that is already there, instead, the narration represents the space-time through which subjects create their own story and establish themselves as the subject of this story (Delory Momberger 2004; Guichard 2004). From this standpoint, the life story represents a «performative act» (Pineau 2000).

Subsequently, in the phase to intensify the evaluation, the volunteers are provided with a self-assessment questionnaire on cross-sectoral skills based on the key competences of the European Qualification Framework (2008), and Life Skills (OMS 1999, 2004). These skills are considered fundamental, especially in the field of work and in other aspects of life in general. In addition to these competences, as indicated by the EQF, the questionnaire examines Life Skills, a range of basic cognitive, emotional, and relational skills that enable individuals to work with both individual and social competence. Of the ten Life skills, eight were taken into consideration, since problem-solving and effective communication, which are two Life Skills, were already part of the EQF's competences. The questionnaire, consisting of 46 items with *Likert*-type scale *responses* (from 1 = nothing to 5 = very much), allows the subjects to express and attribute their value to the skills they are examining. This compilation formula is a training highly focused on the subject, since it uses a methodology aimed at the investigation and promotion of a subject's personal resources (Capo 2016a; Capo 2016b; Capo, Navarra 2016). Subjects', by expressing their own opinion with respect to the characteristics of a given competence (i.e. indicating what is consistent with a mark from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 5) reflects and gains greater self-awareness (Maiocchi, Porcelli 2007).

Beginning from 2016, the Occupational Health Services (SPO) section started collaborating with INAPP (previously ISFOL) and allowed the BdC orientation path specialist to administer a pilot experiment, anchored to the employability construct for a new audience of users, or young volunteers from the National Civilian Service (SNC). The AVO Giovani questionnaire (ISFOL 2016) identifies the employability profile (Fig. 2) of a subject based on some of the personal resources available that permits recognition of internal employability potential. The AVO Giovani questionnaire is subdivided into several sections which allows the investigation and elaboration of those aspects that have a major impact in determining subjects' employability (Grimaldi, Porcelli, Rossi 2014), e.g.:
• networking ability;
• knowledge and enjoyment of local services;
• social support;
• perception of the job market;
• endurance − coping;
• perceived self-efficacy;
• adaptability;
• locus of control

Figure 2 – Employability profile. [AVO Giovani questionnaire, 2016]
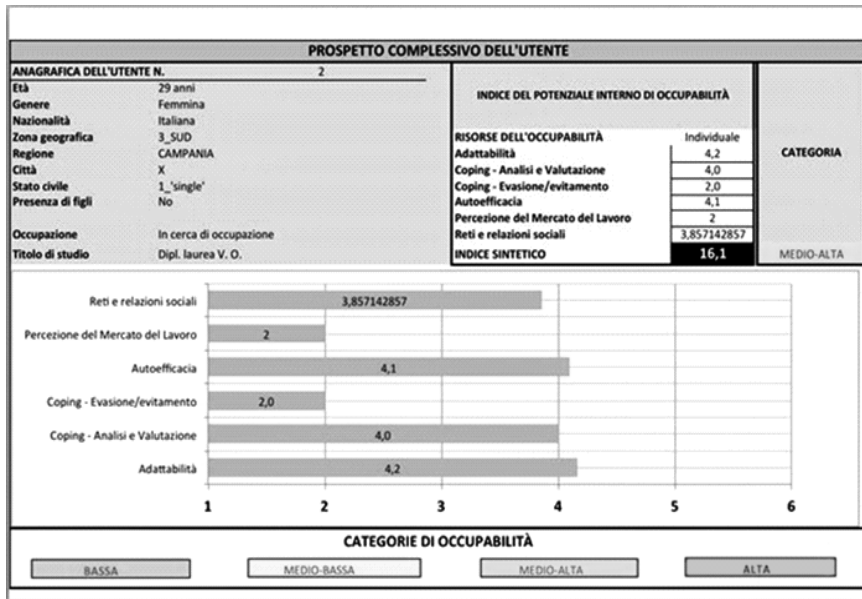
As can be seen from Figure 2, the calculation of the questionnaire scores allowed us to obtain both a score for each measurement scale, and an internal employability potential index. At the in–depth analysis phase, which follows the concluding one, feedback is given to each volunteer, in a paper version, as well as an individual skills map developed from the questionnaire analysis and the employee employability profile. Through recognition of professional and firsthand experiences, personal events, representation of the current state of volunteering, knowledge, and personal resources, and above all through the compilation and analysis of the questionnaires, it becomes possible to identify the 'strong' skills that represent the personal assets of the core competences possessed by the volunteer, as well as the 'weak' ones, i.e., those skills present at a medium to low levels. During feedback in a group context, from an individual evaluation, subjects are offered the opportunity to talk about their employability profile and the skills highlighted by the course.

4. *Reflection on the data obtained during the training course*

As part of the 2017–2018 year, the set of 40 young people from the National Civilian Service was divided and organized into two

groups: Group 1 and Group 2. Compared to the 'Inside the Photo' activity proposed during the reception phase, the first BdC1 group proceeded to implement their commitment by first selecting the photos chosen by its individual members. Subsequently, a second skimming allowed the removal of a further series of photographs. Once the most important choices had been made, members thought about applying the images, leaving a space to fit the chosen phrase into.

   As can be seen from Fig. 3, the title of the poster is the result of the observation and analysis of the participants in the training course. The Civilian Service Project collects boys and girls of different ages, culture, profession, and education. In this diversity, it is possible to find a common element which needs to be emphasized: the emotion of working together with a shared purpose. This is how the title 'The Rainbow of Identities' was born. The term 'identity' was chosen deliberately to indicate what goes beyond the skills or competences that emerge in a given context. In this sense, there is a need to refer to the concept of identity spoken of by Erickson (1982), namely, the individual's awareness of a constant and continuous sense of self within time, and also the recognition by others of such qualities of an individual's self.

Figure 3 – The outcome of the 'Inside the Photo' activity carried out by the 1st BdC1 group.

Figure 4 – The outcome of the 'Inside the Photo' activity carried out by the 2nd BdC1 group.

Tribe traveling

The identity dimension, not yet well defined, of the 'tribe' (group) and the travel metaphor, found space in the work of the second sub-group (Fig. 4) which was to support the recovery of a temporal and emotional dimension of the newly formed training experience, enabling an explanation of motivations and expectations. The pivotal point of the image configuration proposed by the group was the fire around which the 'tribe' gathered, after numerous experiences (represented by the horizon and the sea behind the tribe). Fire becomes the element of a design thinking: the tribe is reunited, determined to enhance its ability to be, and to improve its knowhow – the 'tribe' wants to learn. The tribe is therefore in the game. The goal, not yet visible, has to do with intentional change (Boyatzis, McKee 2006), with both personal and group growth. It strongly emerges in the discussion when each member of the 'tribe' brings out any desires and dreams related to the goal yet struggling to define him- or herself around a clear personal and professional project. In this case, the group becomes a privileged place to learn, slowly coming to define itself as a space of self-awareness, as a reflection on its designing experiences in a design perspective. The group context becomes an opportunity to establish relationships and a place to achieve an active confrontation with oneself and with others, with multitude points of

view, motivations, and attitudes and «yet just by listening to such a wealth of visions, a small (but significant) change [can be inaugurated]» (Formenti 2017: 75). The collection of 'biographical' materials produced during the training has made it necessary for a qualitative analysis of the collected narrative material from the compilation of the *My Skills Patchwork* instrument using specific software: NVivo 11 Pro (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorizing Vivo). This is a programme to analyse texts, images, and multimedia, and is part of the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) programme (Pacifico, Coppola 2010; Coppola 2011). Primarily, we identified the 'parent' node, which is a principal category, and then their respective 'child' nodes, which are subcategories. Below we show a graphic representation (Fig. 5) of the dimension explored with the respective 'child' nodes that emerged:

Figure 5 – Graphic representation of the 'parent' and 'child' nodes found during the analysis with NVivo 11 Pro software.
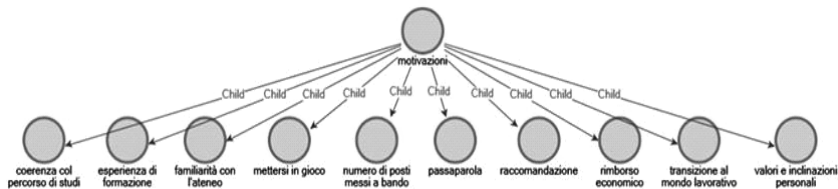
The next step shows the compilation of charts related to the dimension of motivation, as core-categories in the speech produced by volunteers through the support of the narrative-autobiographical instruments (Fig. 6).

Figure 6 – Graphic representation of the motivations that led volunteers to choose to try SNC.
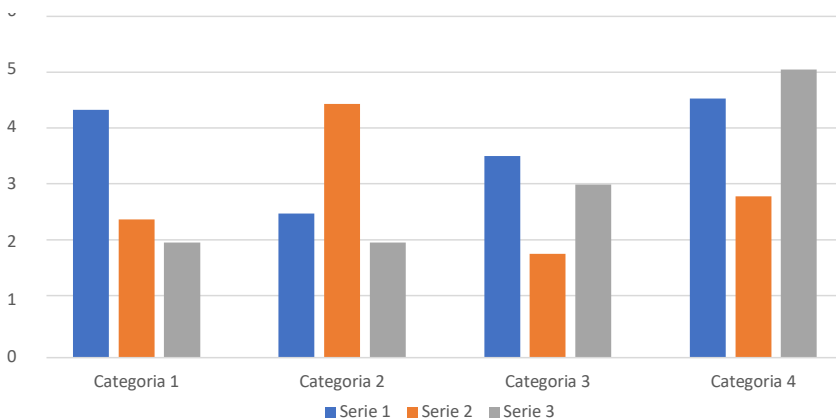
From the graph above, it emerges that the motives which stimulated the volunteers who chose to try National Civilian Service, and in particular those that led them to choose the SInAPSi Centre project were:

- Personal values and inclinations: 20% of the volunteers stated that they chose to do this experience because it seemed to be in line with their values, ideals, and interests. For example, in the narratives stimulated by the My Patchwork skills some responded: «I chose this project because it complied with my personal inclinations and values»; or, «I have always tried before to help others, but the SInAPSi centre allowed me to develop this inclination through volunteering, acquiring new skills at the same time […] it has turned out to an opportunity that has enriched me significantly»; «I chose to do civilian service in this area because it was adapted to my personal disposition»;

- Consistency with a study course: 16% of the volunteers claimed to have chosen to undertake National Civilian Service, and in particular to have become involved in this project in the 'Assistance' field, because it was in continuity with the course of studies they were attending or had already completed. Some of them stated: «I wanted to do an activity that was close to my study course»; or, «I was interested in having experience in a context where the knowledge and skills I had acquired during my studies were involved»; «The SInAPSi Centre project caught my attention because it belonged to a field related to my social studies»;

- Training experience: 15% of the sample stated that they wanted to undertake National Civilian Service in order to enjoy a training experience that could serve them at multiple levels (personal, professional, social, civic, etc.) and that would accompany them for the rest of their life as a pleasant reminder of their youth. Some volunteers said, «I wanted to live a new experience, but at the same time one that was highly educative, learning directly in the field»; «I chose this project because it promoted interesting activities, able to enrich my collection of theoretical and practical knowledge»; «In my eyes, the civilian service experience was an opportunity for personal, professional, and civic growth»;

- Transition to the working world: 11% of the volunteers involved in the research said they had completed this National Civilian Service experience because it was midway between university and work. In this way, young volunteers, still students, or who had just completed their university and/or higher education, were given a 'taste' of what the working world entails and requires, namely: respect for rules, responsibility, interpersonal confrontation, etc.). In this regard, the volunteers stated: «Volunteering for me represented an opportunity to have an experience that was a bridge between study and work»; «I wanted to do a volunteer experience that I could add to

my curriculum at the same time, […] have an experience that would give me the opportunity to discover new awarenesses and abilities, working in a relatively secure context»;

• Becoming involved: 9% of the volunteers claimed they had chosen to do National Civilian Service because it offered them the opportunity to test themselves as people «learning how to handle new situations and thus assuming tasks that require a sense of responsibility, the management of emotions or stress, etc.»; or to kick–start their life situation, which had stalled for various reasons. Others asserted: «I wanted to have an experience which I would get by myself»; «I wanted to get into the game of life, to discover a different world from mine, and then to measure and get to know better my own abilities, talents and resources»;

• Economic reward: 9% of the volunteers stated that amongst the motivations that led them to choose National Civilian Service was to benefit from the monthly payment of €433.80, which could be useful not only to cover their expenses but also to save small sums of money to invest in other areas of their lives. Some volunteers stated in this regard: «I wanted to have a new experience, but also one that was profitable»; «I participated in the civilian service call out of an economic issue, […] I had just lost my job and then I decided to take this road because […] it gave me the guarantee of a monthly reimbursement of expenses»;

• Familiarity with the university: 7% of the sample involved in this study stated that they chose to do National Civilian Service while taking part in the project proposed by the SInAPSi Centre, because the latter was part of an already familiar context, namely, the university where they were studying or had already studied (University of Naples "Federico II"). Some volunteers stated in this regard: «Being in service at the SInAPSi Centre was convenient for me, since it was on the university campus that hosted my study course»; «I chose the SInAPSi Centre project because, being located at my university centre, it gave me a sense of security and protection»;

• Number of vacant posts: 6% of the volunteers stated that they chose to do National Civilian Service because the latter, unlike most other Calls, made 40 positions available to candidates. This strikingly increased the chances of being selected and winning the contest. In fact, the volunteers said: «I honestly chose this project because it made 40 positions available and I was more likely to become a part of it»; «I chose this project because it is one of the few at a national level that offers such a high number of places»; «I thought: the project seems interesting to me, there are several places, I want to try it!»;

• Through word of mouth: 5% of the volunteers claimed to have become aware of the existence of National Civilian Service and the project in question through word of mouth, or through stories of positive experiences among their friends, former volunteers, or those in service at the

University Centre. Some volunteers said: «I was convinced about participating in this project because people who already knew the SInAPSi Centre talked about it in a very positive way»; «I became aware of the project through a professor who had contacts with the SInAPSi Centre»; «I chose the SInAPSi Centre thanks to a person I knew, who had worked with professionals collaborating with the centre».

The outlining of a *mapping* of skills, both through the BdC questionnaire and on the basis of the survey and reconstruction of each person's training past, offered volunteers the opportunity to focus on the skills they had acquired during the various training experiences. The following graph (Fig. 7) shows the aggregate results of the self–assessment questionnaire of cross–skills of the volunteers at time T0 (BdC entrance module). In general, the self–evaluation carried out by the volunteers on the dimension of the analysis proposed by the questionnaire, shows scores are mostly medium–high, which is, most probably, a consequence of the sample's characteristics. In fact, the group mostly consisted of young graduates (LM) or others who had already had initial work experience. As can be seen, Creative Thinking, Problem–Solving, and Self–Awareness are, however, the skills that volunteers allocated rather low scores. At an intermediate level, we find the skills: Communicating (in the macro–category relationship with reality), Emotion Management, Interpersonal Relationship Management, Planning, Critical Thinking (in the Life Skills category), Identifying Links and Relationships − category 'relationship with reality'); Learning to Learn (in the macro–category 'building the self'). Among the skills identified as 'strong' because they re–enter an elevated level of competence, are: Collaborate and Participate; Act Autonomously; which are followed by Empathy; Time Management, Interpretation of Information and Planning (of the macro–category 'building the self').

Figure 7 – Summary of the average cross-sectional skills of groups 1 and 2.
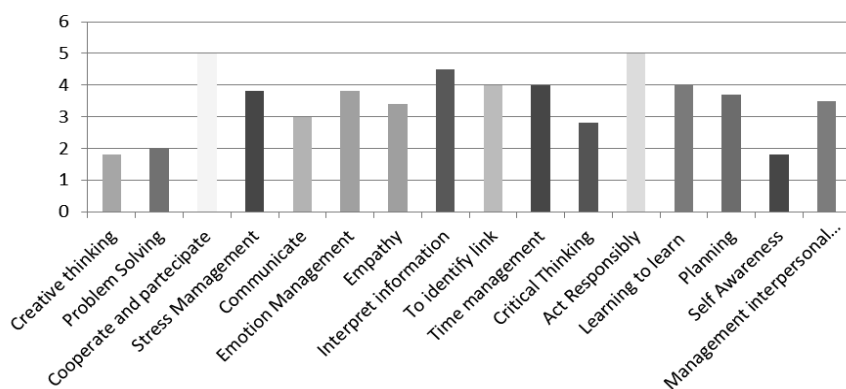
The graph (Fig. 7) was shown to the group as a component to initiate reflection on the results of the self-assessment questionnaire to provide them with the opportunity to share impressions, comments, and thoughts. The ability to Collaborate and Participate is anchored to the discussion on university experiences where, according to most participants, it seems that it was the privileged context of development and enhancement for that competence. Collaborating and Participating is mainly related to the pursuit of study activities during university years, but respectively important are the learning experiences in non-formal and informal learning contexts (such as sports, associations, or group travel). Probably these experiences have also 'experienced and/or well-trained' volunteers to interact with others, understanding differing points of view, enabling them to recognize the value of diversity and to collaborate with others. Moreover, the competence to Act Autonomously and responsibly, closely related to Collaborate and Participate, was evaluated by the young volunteers as a strong point, the subjects themselves declaring that, at the appropriate time, they can enforce their rights and needs within the various contexts of reference, while recognizing those of others, as well as their own and others' responsibilities. Certainly, personal responsibility depends on an ability to design, that is, to complete a project without the support of an adult, assuming responsibility for the consequences of one's own actions. Equally, on medium to high values, the focus was on acquiring and Interpreting Information: the young volunteers valued being able to critically capture and interpret all information received, assessing its reliability and usefulness, distinguishing facts from opinions. It seems that the competence to critically evaluate the flow of information is closely linked to the competence of Planning, that is, the ability to use knowledge learned to achieve meaningful and realistic goals. Designing, therefore, requires the ability to identify priorities, evaluate existing constraints and capabilities, define action strategies, and subsequently test their outcome. This demonstrates how the volunteers were prepared to actively participate in the various experiences and to design, or at least identify and grasp, elements that enabled them to plan and design future actions. Among the Life Skills, therefore, if Empathy, Emotion Management, and Interpersonal Relationships which were all at an average level, are excluded, young volunteers demonstrated reduced Self-awareness. If the latter competence which is closely related to problem-solving and creative thinking, also showed very low scores, this confirms that the volunteers were not always properly accustomed to recognizing their strengths and weaknesses and, consequently, translating the cognitive elements into new perspectives for change in the future.

The following graph (Fig. 8) shows the total responses provided for the individual scales of the AVO questionnaire (ISFOL 2016).

Figure 8 – Graph of the resources involved in calculating the A and B Groups' Volatility Index of volunteers.
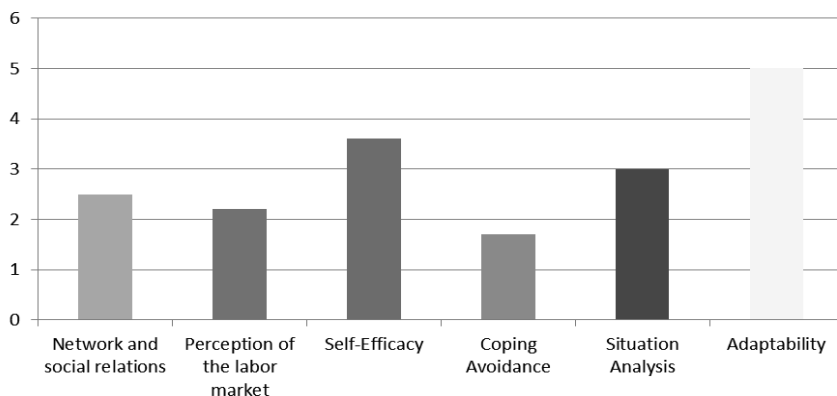
This instrument, as specified previously, was administered at time T0, before the start of any training activity (general and specific) envisaged by the civilian service project. Once the inbound training activities (BdC1) began for each volunteer, the individual result report was returned, where both the scores for individual scales and the concise employability index could be displayed in the form of a total score and graph. Re-establishing individual profiles was used within the group to initiate reflection on the dimensions involved in computing the synthetic index. In response to clarification by volunteers, manual calculations for scoring each measurement scale was considered (professional adaptability, coping, self-efficacy perceived in job searches, perception of the job market, social networks, and perceived support). Overall, the data for the entire volunteer group had a medium-high synthetic index of 18.55. Volunteers were perceived as adaptable and learning-oriented. They said themselves that they used the most active ways to deal with challenging times, supported by an above average self-esteem. The average scores pertaining to the self-efficacy scale found in job searches were above average: the views of the effectiveness of volunteers for the various activities which they could undertake to enquire about a job are therefore positive. Among the factors related to this scale, frustration tolerance was one that averaged the lowest scores: volunteers did not seem to perceive their ability to tolerate and manage any kind of difficulties or possible failures in job searches. The coping scale, as can be seen from the graph, produced two distinct scores in relation to the two specific dimen-

sions, namely, Analysis and Assessment of the situation and Evasion–Avoidance. The latter refers to the amount of passive coping whose score is understood to be inversely proportional to a calculation of the synthetic employability index. The data also shows a rather confusing, mostly static, and insecure perception of the job market as well as the presence of inadequate social networks that guarantee worthwhile support in the search for employment. Overall, a perception of the job market was documented that was not very welcoming nor supportive of concern, anger, and resignation, and which influenced the proactivity and thereafter the potential of employability. Recent studies (Gilardi, Guglielmetti 2015) relate the perception of employment opportunities and the feeling of self–efficacy to the perception of individuals' employability; pointing out that feeling the job market hostile can affect both the sentiment of perceived employability, and the active search for work.

4. Final remarks

The formative training presented in this contribution is intended to be a guidance experience for young volunteers of the National Civilian Service (SNC) in the hope of becoming an effective and transferable model for further orientation contexts in the transition to the professional world from a point of view of self–empowerment and the promotion of sustainable employability. Volunteering is constitutionally a privileged place for learning. In the Volunteering Charter of Values, adopted in 2001 in the Attitudes and Roles section, it is written that: «Volunteers are committed to training with perseverance and seriousness, aware of the responsibilities they are taking on, especially towards the direct targets of their interventions. They receive from their organisation the necessary support and training necessary for their growth and for implementing the tasks they are in charge of» (Volunteering Charter of Values 2001, Article 14).

This summarizes the twofold nature of volunteering, firstly as a vehicle for personal growth and secondly for social consistency. Training outcomes, in terms of skills acquired during volunteering, deserve to be recognized, certified, and valued in the same way as in other areas of school, university, and workplace training: with their responsibility volunteers produce 'strategic skills' for themselves and for the company they are committed to. The aim of the laboratory for the promotion of employability is to comprehend and realize the need to update the vocational, organizational, and professional components of volunteering, pursuing the growth of volunteers by accompanying and promoting employment opportunities that can increasingly satis-

fy their needs. Cross–skills constitute a framework that every subject should cultivate in a particular way since they are characterized by a high degree of transferability to different contexts and demands. They are, in other words, a resource of fundamentally subjective means to achieve the social and ethical goals of volunteering. The main goal of the formative action of the outgoing Laboratory Module (BdC2) is to provide transitional orientation activities aimed at promoting awareness among young volunteers for their work and training career and, in particular, promoting in volunteers «a positive self–evaluation of the self–concept, [and therefore] a feeling of having control over the events of one's life, solving problems in a creative way, [...] applying decision–making skills to the various aspects of one's own life, and making decisions in a careful and rational manner» (Di Fabio 2014: 100). Formative training for volunteers within the University SInAPSi Centre seems to pedagogically reflect on their skills set by making explicit the abilities, knowledge, and resources that would otherwise remain implicit. To 'educate' young volunteers is, in the first place, as Striano maintains, «to think that it can be seen, in the educational function, as a conscious thinking of someone's Self, or else [of that thought that is capable to inaugurate a tale, recognizing the value of experiences], a thought that formulates hypotheses and tends to an incessant search for meaning» (Striano 1999: 47). Secondly, from the point of the AVO questionnaire, it is about encouraging young people to reflect on their employability potentials, and on the various dimensions (and related sub–dimensions) that the questionnaire looks at, such as: professional adaptability, coping, self–efficacy perceived in job searches, etc., in a society like today's, in which self–redesign, grounded on an awareness of the skills acquired in various formal, non–formal, and informal contexts, the accomplishment of one's own personal life project becomes the winning card. The very experience of volunteering and its educational implications thus become a fundamental element, not left to the mercy of oblivion, but reflexively 'embedded' in the puzzle of one's own personal and professional realization, considering the skills and knowledge acquired before the beginning of volunteering as a prerequisite for giving meaning to the experience itself.

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