

The Multilevel Governance of the Pathways for Transversal Skills and Orientation (PCTO) in Italy

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During the complex path of identity development, adolescents are called to reflect on the professional role they intend to play in society (Arnett, 2004) and to manage the difficulties associated with the transition from school to the labour market (Caroleo et al., 2017). These difficulties often appear to be linked to the skills mismatch between school learning and labour market needs (Palumbo and Pandolfini, 2019), as well as to the inadequacy of career guidance services. In order to respond to these difficulties and improve the orientation of adolescents, educational systems of many countries have included school-to-work alternance programs in upper secondary school as an integral part of the school curriculum. In fact, school-to-work alternance is considered a useful pedagogical approach to improve the employability of young people and their future experience in the labour market (Costa, 2016). In particular, these paths aim to: promote students' professional skills and help them identify their professional goals; expand the connections between learning in formal, informal and non-formal contexts, allowing students to familiarize themselves with the work context; improve young people's propensity for entrepreneurship and active citizenship (Hadjivassiliou et al., 2016; European Commission, 2018). In this regard, in Italy, the Pathways for Transversal Skills and Orientation (PCTO) have been made mandatory for students in the last three years of upper secondary schools, recognizing a central role to the acquisition of soft skills, as well as to the orientation value of the paths (MIUR, 2019). However, in the Italian context, the implementation of this policy has to deal with both the plurality of actors involved in their design and implementation inside and outside the schools, and with the significant differences in the territorial socio-economic contexts, that risk increasing inequalities instead of reducing them (Scandurra et al., 2021).

This paper presents the main evidence that emerged from an analysis on multilevel governance of PCTOs, part of the national research project "Evaluating the School-Work Alternance: a longitudinal study in Italian upper secondary schools", coordinated by INVALSI in partnership with University of Genoa, Sapienza-University of Rome, University of Milano Bicocca and financed by MUR. In particular, the analysis has included qualitative interviews involving over 50 stakeholders from upper schools and public institutions at the national, regional, and local levels. It has highlighted PCTO's objectives, functioning, obstacles and

facilitating factors, pointing out organizational and implementation strategies. It explored in depth stakeholder roles, activities, way of coordination, and critical issues of PCTO multilevel governance. The different views that emerged underline the complexity of PCTO implementation as well as that of the governance of the system. The study results have shown that the planning of PCTO offer is not homogeneous, but presents a differentiation based on the type of educational institution within which it is offered, the territorial contexts, and the multilevel governance structures. The analysis provides a dynamic portrait of PCTO in Italy, identifying relevant aspects that could improve future planning of this policy.

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