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Desires, dead ends and new horizons

At the source of young people's vocational images of the future

Futures Studies

Master's thesis

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From an early age the heritage of work is planted in our identity and we begin to adore its everyday presence and resent its absence. The meaning of work seems to retain its essence in our lives despite its terms and conditions are in turbulence. This study looks at the presence of work in the lives of young people and the factors behind the educational and vocational decision-making process. There are prevailing thought patterns, traditions, disciplines and constitutions that are based on industrial society, but which still continues to influence our way of thinking and decision making and which can even block us from executing our true desires for our futures.

Young people are constantly exposed to various messages coming from different sources which might have a significant impact on their futures. The meaning of this study is to explore the personal images of the future of young people and the values, hopes and fears depicted in these images. The aim is then to identify and locate different message sources and examine their origin and impact on the formation process of these images. This study also aims to identify possible 'used futures' and whether the futures described by young people are truly their own and not set for them by somebody else.

Theoretical framework of the study is addressing the concept of late modernity and the difficulty of decision making as young people among their contradicting values and motivating factors in life. Most importantly the following message sources affecting the images of the future are further examined: 1) Other people; 2) Media and 3) Personal experience.

The research presents several short narratives in young people's own voices. The material was collected by composing a semi-structured, thematic, in-depth interview and the data was analysed by using qualitative content analysis. The interviewees included eight young adults from different high schools around Finland, majority of them were in Turku area or in neighbouring municipalities.

Key words: images of the future, work, young people, late modernity, decision making, used futures

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Nuoresta pitäen työn perinne iskostetaan osaksi identiteettiämme ja alamme ihailla sen jokapäiväistä läsnäoloa sekä paheksua sen puuttumista. Työn merkitys näyttää säilyttävän olemuksensa osana elämäämme huolimatta siitä, että sen ehdot ja olosuhteet ovat myllerryksessä. Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan työtä nuorten elämässä sekä koulutuksellisten ja ammatillisten päätöksentekoprosessien taustalla olevia tekijöitä. Useat vallitsevat teollisuusyhteiskunnan toimintaan pohjautuvat ajatusmallit, perinteet, tieteenalat ja rakenteet vaikuttavat edelleen ajattelutapaamme ja päätöksentekoomme ja voivat jopa estää meitä toteuttamasta todellisia toiveita tulevaisuuttamme koskien.

Nuoret ovat jatkuvasti alttiina erilaisille eri lähteistä tuleville viesteille, joilla voi olla merkittävä vaikutus heidän tulevaisuuteensa. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tutkia nuorten henkilökohtaisia tulevaisuudenkuvia sekä niissä esiintyviä arvoja, toiveita ja pelkoja. Tavoitteena on myös tunnistaa ja paikantaa erilaisia viestilähteitä sekä tutkia niiden alkuperää ja vaikutusta tulevaisuudenkuvien muodostumisprosessiin. Tutkimus pyrkii myös tunnistamaan mahdollisia ”käytettyjä tulevaisuuksia” ja tarkastelemaan ovatko nuorten kuvailemat tulevaisuudet aidosti heidän omia eivätkä jonkun muun heille asettamia.

Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys tarkastelee nuorten vaikeuksia päätöksentekoon liittyen, heidän ristiriitaisia arvojansa sekä motivaatiotekijöitä postmodernissa ajassa. Viitekehysten tärkeimpänä osana tarkastellaan seuraavia nuorten tulevaisuudenkuviin vaikuttavia viestilähteitä: 1) muut ihmiset; 2) media ja 3) henkilökohtainen kokemus.

Tutkimus esittelee useita lyhyitä narratiiveja nuorten omilla äänillä kerrottuina. Aineisto kerättiin puolistrukturoidun, temaattisen, syvähaastattelun avulla ja aineisto analysoitiin laadullisella sisällönanalyysillä. Haastateltavana oli kahdeksan nuorta aikuista eri lukioista eri puolilta Suomea, suurin osa Turun seudulta tai lähikunnista.

Avainsanat: tulevaisuudenkuvat, työ, nuoret, postmodernismi, päätöksenteko, käytetyt tulevaisuudet

For Beppe

Blindly following ancient customs and traditions does not mean that the dead are alive but, that the living are dead.

- Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406)

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1 Introduction and motivation for the study

Years ago, I came across an interesting opinion article called ‘Many young people's career dreams are being crushed’. The author was questioning her unsatisfactory education and career choices done in the past. Why did she ever apply for a profession and a job that she was not interested in the first place? When considering justification and reasoning for her situation, the author mentioned how her initial career dreams were constantly questioned and undervalued by her relatives. She also mentioned the influence of news coverage about unemployment rates and labour shortages in various fields and how she was confused after high school by misinformation about different degree programmes and occupations. The author concluded that her own career dreams were crushed already at an early age and finally questioned why are we allowing such culture to prosper that is discouraging people instead of empowering them? (Martikainen 2018.)

The initial idea for this study was sparked by the above-mentioned opinion article along with my own life experience. I contemplate that young people are often in extremely vulnerable situation and their hopes, fears and needs concerning their future might be sometimes easily ignored by parents, relatives, friends and the surrounding institutions along with the educational system. This study is also based on a societal concern about the increasing uncertainty of the future of young adults and their vocational desires and options for the future. In today’s rapidly changing working culture it seems that building preferable and solid vocational plans is getting even more challenging and confusing when comparing to earlier generations. The challenges along with complexity and confusion related to vocational decision making are negatively affecting the abilities and opportunities of young people. They have been forced to face and cope with different changes and structural reformations occurring in the labour market, social structures, and educational institutions. The transition from school to work life has also altered and prolonged becoming unpredictable and fragmented when compared to earlier generations. Extended education phase has also delayed the time when young people are dependent on the safety net of their families. (Furlong & Cartmel 2007, 1.)

Despite these changes, young people are still forced to make decisions about their future along with educational and career choices at an early age and sometimes without a proper guidance or understanding of different possibilities towards meaningful self-realization. Recent surveys conducted in Finland indicated that only 20 % of high school students felt

that they were provided enough guidance and information about career planning and that 66 % would like to receive more information about working life. (TAT 2020.) Four years earlier the same institution informed that only 30% of high school students reported receiving enough guidance for career possibilities. For most of these students, their mentioned career preferences consisted of well- known, classic occupations such as teachers, psychologists, police, lawyers and so on. (TAT 2016, 39.)

It seems that this very problem is not only current and neither does it solely occur in Finland. Julien (1999a, 47) revealed that Canadian youth (14 yrs.-19 yrs.) were living in this 'state of uncertainty' and 50 % were struggling with issues of not knowing where to obtain information about career options and most were confused about the whole process of career decision making. These initial findings could suggest that since young people are still developing and trying to find out where they belong and which career path to aim for, the functionality of guidance becomes increasingly important. The guidance offered and received from different institutions and close environment should be holistically built to enable young people to think more openly when imagining contemporary alternative career possibilities. At the same time guidance should be able to assist in narrowing down excessive options that are in fact undesirable. It needs to be underlined that one of the fundamental aspects of guidance should be the ability to listen and truly support and advance the young person's own wishes, desires and dreams (Opetushallitus 2014). This thesis study also slightly indicates that there is a demand for more detailed and systemic individual centered guidance.

One of the main focuses of this study is to examine the origin and effect of the information coming from other people and especially close environment. This specific message source has a significant influence in the development process of personal images of the future of a young person (Rauste-von Wright & Kinnunen 1983). TAT (2017) supports this claim by stating that the influence of close environment (parents, relatives, friends and acquaintances) was considered as a very strong source of information when it comes to decision making regarding further studies or the scope of possible future occupation. Rubin (2000b, 104) further adds to this by indicating that when young people pondered their personal futures, the importance of family, friends and colleagues was clearly highlighted. The above emphasizes the importance and influence of the close environment as an information source for young people and their decisions as well as their images of the future.

This study is based on the domain of critical futures studies and emancipatory knowledge interest. Critical futures studies intend to look in depth and expose traditions, assumptions, cognitive frameworks and different ways of knowing of our social reality (Slaughter 1996, 139-140). Emancipatory knowledge interest is related to critical futures studies since its function of science is the critique of ideology while the main objective is to “be released from false consciousness” (Malaska & Mannermaa 1985, 56). In short, why we think about the futures the way we do and what kind of assumptions and sentiments are influencing our imagination and envisioning process? Has our ability to imagine alternative futures been silenced by something or somebody? Is something or somebody dominating our images of the future unconsciously? Deep-rooted and old-grained thought patterns, the constitution of industrial society, patriarchy- and hierarchy-based traditions, dichotomy of our education system, extreme work-oriented ethos, compartmentalization of individuals and pleading to old rules and disciplines are all influencing us and sometimes even preventing us from reaching our true self.

“Thus, we ask: Who owns the future?”

(Demneh 2018, 54)

2 Objectives of the study and research questions

The main objective of this study is to first examine the personal images of the future of Finnish high school students, how they perceive these images and what might be the consequences of these images. The sources of the images of the future will be discussed more closely as well as the tone and values depicted in these images.

The second objective of this study is focusing on identifying possible ‘used futures’ and deconstructions of these used futures especially relating to career plans and dreams. In other words, young people have ideas, perceptions and assumptions depicted in their images of the future. Where do all these thoughts come from in the first place? What is the original source of these thoughts? Are the images of the future their own or somebody else’s?

Therefore, the meaning of this study is to examine who or what are the actual actors empowering, establishing or questioning the images of the future of young people?

The impact and influence of **1. media**, **2. personal experience** and **3. other people** in the formation process of images of the future relating to educational and vocational images will be examined. This study is placing emphasis to the influence of information coming from the people in the close environment which in this study referred to parents, stepparents, foster parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, friends, teachers and study advisors or anybody playing an active role in the lives of interviewed participants. This research does not intend to analyse on how these specific images of the future are constructed from the different elements and attributes but instead is trying to comprehend and recognize some of the actors that are affecting the construction process of these images.

2.1 The research questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. What personal images of the future high schoolers have relating to their educational and vocational plans? What kind of fears, hopes, values, dreams and expectations are displayed in these images?

2. What is the origin, purpose and impact of the message sources that might have contributed to the formation process of personal images of the future especially relating to educational and vocational decision making of high school students?

3 Conceptual framework

The aim of this chapter is to introduce and discuss the conceptual framework of this thesis. The main idea is to showcase and reason the idea of the thesis and introduce the interrelationships between different concepts and theories. The following concepts and theories are important and need to be discussed since they play a significant role in the lives of young people and their images of the future relating to decision making and therefore are essential when answering the research questions.

3.1 Images of the future

One of the most important and fundamental research questions in futures studies is the nature, cause, and consequences of images of the future (Bell 1997, 82). A youth researcher Helene Helve (1987, 13-14) states that our worldview, or image of the world, consists of different perceptions, beliefs, values, images, interpretations, and norms about the world. Mikkonen (2008, 81) adds that when all these are then directed towards future, one can talk about images of the future.

The research around images of the future especially among young people can be fascinating and at the same time important, since they might expose what kind of attributes and elements the future might hold for us (Rubin 2013, 40). According to Rubin & Linturi (2001, 267) image of the future could be regarded as a mental tool or construction that addresses possible future states an individual might hold. These images also include different expectations, anticipations as well as hopes and fears about one's own future (Son 2013, 2).

The images of the future have a significant impact on young people as they guide them towards the future both consciously and unconsciously and have an influence on their current behaviour by making decisions associated with their preferred future image (Ono 2003, 737, 738). Through actions and nonactions young people are trying to increase the probability to make their preferred image come true (Whaley and Whaley, 1986) but as we live in such turbulent times, it becomes increasingly difficult for young people to construct these personal images of the future in the first place (Demneh & Morgan 2018, 55). The way images of the future are eventually constructed is a complex event which

begins in early childhood lasting a lifetime (Rauste-von Wright 1997, 31). These images can be transformative, flexible, private and systemic in nature (Rubin & Linturi 2001, 269; Rubin 2013, 40) and they can be adopted from others, invented from nothing, defended from skepticism (Rubin & Linturi 2001, 270) and even exterminated (Rubin 2013, 40). Anita Rubin (2013, 40) continues by clarifying and summarizing that images of the future are “composed of beliefs, expectations, opinions, and assumptions of what the future might be like” and that “they (images of the future) are formed from knowledge and flavoured with imagination”. “They are built with information about the past, perceptions from the present, cultural and social knowledge, personal taste, values, and needs, as well as the expectations of how things ‘normally’ are.”

3.2 The young and precariat

This thesis is presenting and comparing several previous studies about young people extensively and mainly in Finland but also abroad. Finnish youth law (Finlex 2016) defines a person under 29- years as youth and United Nations defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years (United Nations n.d.). When referring to young people in this study we refer to a person between the ages of 15 and 29. A more precise age is highlighted where possible. Also, it needs to be underlined here that high school students are the focus group of this study, and this level of education is also called as upper secondary school in Finland. This thesis is using the term high school when implying to Finnish word ‘Lukio’ and the term Junior High school is used when implying to ‘Yläaste’.

Youth, or being young could be considered as a staging post or a bridge between childhood and adulthood (Raitanen 2001, 187; Vuorinen 1997, 199). It involves social, mental and biological maturation (Nivala & Saastamoinen 2010, 10-12), establishment of individual identity, detachment from parental influence as well as acceptance of additional responsibilities (Vuorinen 1997,199). The era of youth can also include insecurity, behavioral disorders, fears, hopes, dreams, wandering and different crises but also the joy of discovery (Kemppinen 1995, 93).

It needs to be underlined here that young people, or youth is not a uniformed or a collective crowd (Nikolova 2015, 249) and they are not united nor connected by anything other than being included in the definition of ‘youth’ (Lähteenmaa 2000, 48). Instead, young people are a group of individuals with differing thought models, operating models,

goals, and values. However, the concept of youth is an ideological structure or a design which includes certain expectations and assumptions. Young people are a subject to certain forms of social definition and coercion, as well as cultural representatives, and for this reason have been classified as a social group. (Lähteenmaa 2000, 12, 48). Also, the concept of 'growing up' seems to hold similar patterns and outcomes that can create a collective experience of growing up but is also experienced differently in different environments and settings (France 2016, 13). The director of the Finnish youth research society Leena Suurpää informs conveniently how 'the youth of today' is a very diverse concept and talking about 'the youth of today' as a whole is as silly as talking about 'the adults of today' as a coherent and uniformed group (Vilpponen 2016).

Globalization along with wage system flexibility, restructuring of fiscal policy and social protection system as well as educational commodification has created a new kind of 'class-in-the-making' (Standing 2012, 588, 594-595). This class is called 'precariat' and it is often brought up in discussions when talking about paid work (France 2016, 110). A precariat is a class of temporary, part-time, self-employed and project natured workers with a low job security, unsafe future and a poor sense of occupational identity (Standing 2012, 590).

These changes in the labour market needs to be considered in this thesis because they have a substantial effect on the experience of the young entering the world of paid work (France 2016, 110). In addition, Standing (2012, 595) says how 'frustrated educated youth' is one of the progressive sources in the class of precariat. This new class is considered as a 'mass phenomenon' (Standing 2012, 589) and seems to be commonly known also in Finland. Yet, there is only weak empirical evidence about fragmentation of employment and increasing part-time positions that this class is truly growing significantly in Finland (Statistics Finland 2015; Heikkilä et al. 2017, 24; France 2016, 110).

3.3 The role of work and its significance for identity formation for young people

Work seems to play an important role in our society, and it seems that its significance is transferred from generation to generation. One of the first things we are asked in preschool and in elementary school are related to our vocational future and could be considered as quite unreasonable and even complex for such a young age. The question

of ‘what will you become when you grow up’ is familiar among adults as well as young people in our society. Apparently, the meaning of this question is to guide us to think about our personal future career choices and aspirations. Therefore, already from an early age we are partly accustomed to build our identity around the concept of work and it seems that we continue to carry this heritage with us just like our parents and grandparents once did. Marttinen (2017, 63) supports this by stating how our career choices and identity formation are a key developmental task in youth and early adulthood. Choosing a career is a process itself just like developing life designing skills (Vanhalakka-Ruoho 2010, 121).

Identity is something that includes individual’s different perceptions of their own interests, abilities, and values and this consists also employment and occupational related identity. Employment and occupational related identity refer particularly to an individual’s commitment towards a career or profession. (Vasalampi 2020). Identity formation goals therefore include finding out meaningful questions for example, ‘who am I?’ ‘What are my values and goals?’ ‘What is my life purpose?’ (Schwartz 2001, 7).

Therefore, it is understandable that young people are struggling to find answers for these questions in today’s turbulent world, or what Nikolova (2015, 24) calls ‘multi-identity societies’ with diversity of routes (Furlong & Cartmell 2007, 10) and insufficient guidance (Julien 1999b, 47). Unfortunately, the inability to find clear answers for these questions might lead to incompetence in clarifying one’s future prospects. Anita Rubin (2013, 39) confirms how in today’s fragmented and rapidly changing environment it has become difficult to construct personal images of the future and harmonious and durable identity. Marttinen (2017, 58) supports this by sharing a worrying research result which indicated that 40 % of Finnish young adults had a ‘diffused identity’ at the age of 23. ‘Diffused identity’ means that their life was ‘on hold’ and they were just waiting for things to happen.

A futurist Perttu Pölönen is addressing to additional problem or a challenge that is related to the identity issues associated specifically with our employment and occupational identities. Pölönen (2020a) informs how we are sacrificing half of our lives in building our personal occupational identities and how firmly we stick to these different job titles and job descriptions when we introduce ourselves and tell other people about us. Pölönen continues how we are strongly defending these titles and job descriptions and how

reluctant we are towards any kind of change or disruptions that might challenge or undermine our work along with our identity. We do all this despite that we know how fragile and fragmented the world of work truly is. To conclude, Pölönen shares a noteworthy question: What happens to us, our self-image and our identity if we continue to build our lives solely around the concept of work and then suddenly one day, our work and our fundament in life ceases to exist? Pölönen (2020a).

A Finnish working life researcher Matti Kortteinen indicated already in 1992 in his doctoral thesis (*Kunnian kenttä: suomalainen palkkatyö kulttuurisena muotona*) how sacrificing oneself for work is perceived as a matter of honor in the Finnish culture (Ågren 2019). Moreover, Helena Helve (2002, 61) argues how traditional Finnish work-ethic seem to only appreciate the ones that are involved in working life activities. To summarize the structure of work, Inayatullah (2004, 13) states that seeing people as creative resources could be considered as an unconscious deep story or a myth that is difficult to question because of its mythical appearance. However, this ‘myth’ can still provide essential guidance in our lives (Abramyan 2009, 55) and even in modern society work and employment are still seen as one of the building blocks of life and could be considered as both life-shaping activities and part of our lifestyles (Cannizzo & James 2020, 275).

What we choose to do on our day-to day activities, whether it is paid- work, voluntary work or our hobbies, the choice is a fundamental component of our lifestyle orientations (Giddens 1991, 82). Information in the media, different political and economic institutions along with education policies are apt in constructing this work-centered entrepreneurial ethos, where the meaning of a person is measured solely by their ability, capacity and willingness to perform constantly and produce in an ever-changing environment (Bröckling 2016, xi-xiii; Mononen-Batista Costa & Brunila 2016, 22).

It could be argued that the issues and questions revolving around building occupational related identity is one of the reasons why today’s youth are stressed and depressed since a notable amount of pressure is piled on them in a form of different expectations from an early age. They might feel hopeless, inadequate and unsuccessful if one cannot immediately find their own place from the different compartments of society (Rubin 2002, 792).

A survey conducted for Finnish secondary education students revealed that 76% of the students worried and felt anxiety about working life and professional identity

development (Vasalampi 2020). Marttinen further adds how stress related to career goals also weakened occupational related identity. Rumination, or in other words, obsessive thinking concerning personal goals has been proved to be a vulnerability factor in individual's identity formation process. Marttinen (2017, 57)

This self- searching and wandering are linked to goal pursuit and these goals could be considered as future-oriented destinations and outcomes that young people are trying to reach. Therefore, the activity of goal pursuit is an important part of identity formation (Marttinen et al. 2016, 186). The inability to determine and allocate these goals might lead towards certain 'undiscoverability', which is again apt to cause anxiety among young people. Likewise, Vehkasalo (2019) supports this by stating that the anxiety of young people in Helsinki has increased enormously due to different pressures related to 'coping' and making a living. A very relevant metaphor related to this 'coping' and wandering was given by a 26-year-old student interviewed in a study conducted by Eriikka Oinonen (2018). In this study, the student was comparing herself to a jelly: "always flexible, not shaped, insecure" and forced to create her own personality without knowing what to become (Oinonen 2018, 1352).

3.4 Societal and productional transitions

The importance of work and employment in everyday life seems to retain its meaning, even though society is under constant transition. The latest societal transitions are from agricultural- oriented society to industrial- oriented society of mass production and mass consumption of tangible goods. Now we have reached a phase of information society which is based on usage, distribution, and creation of information. (Rubin, 1998b, 41). As a physical and visible results of these abovementioned transitions, "workers shifted from farms to factories and from factories to offices" (Pölönen 2020a).

It needs to be underlined that society has always been transforming but the university students graduating today are facing much deeper and completely different challenges, uncertainties and changes when compared to the previous generation (Oinonen 2018, 1345; Furlong & Cartmel 2007, 1; France 2016, 110; Song 2012). Global warming, the depletion of natural resources, biodiversity loss, the freeze of the economic growth, political and economic re-organization, the effects of fast-developing technology and climate refugee crisis are all unpredictable challenges that have not been faced by previous generation. Also, according to current information the ongoing Covid-19

pandemic has been proven to drop the satisfaction level of life among young people to record low (Martikainen 2021).

Of course, the previous generation have had to fight through the recession of the 1990s for example, but this challenge has been somewhat different and non-existential unlike the possible collapse of the environment (Räty 2020). Rubin (2000a) argues that the scope and measure of these changes in the current time are incomparable to any historical epoch and concerns about some of these planetary problems are already being raised when interviewing young people about their future (See Heikkilä et al. 2017, 18).

3.5 Unwritten rules of late modern society

The societal and productional transformations and different unprecedented crisis have not only relocated jobs, but they are beginning to modify and defy our old rules and habits. Through the ages younger generations have survived by following old rules and listening to old wisdom but as the world is rapidly changing these old rules are no longer valid and new rules and orders have not yet fully emerged. (Song 2012)

Pölönen (2020) is talking about a deeply ingrained old activity of ‘master and journeyman’ which is based on the transfer of knowledge, skills and values from the older generation to the younger generation. Now it seems that there is an unprecedented disruption and this thousands of years old activity might be losing its relevance for a while as suddenly children and adolescents are transformed to masters and are uncommonly guiding their journeymen parents and grandparents to cope in the technology-driven world (Pölönen 2020, 62). The current disruption in this activity is also threatening the old and controversial, sometimes even unquestionable patriarchy- and hierarchy-based tradition. However, the benefit of this ‘master and journeyman’ tradition enabled uncluttered route and well-trodden paths for young adults in their transition phases towards adulthood by offering them these old, established and ready-made rules and value systems of the past (Song 2012).

It could be argued, that although this tradition of sharing skills, values and traditions is important and vital, it needs to be executed in a way that it will still support the young individuals own interests. The activity of passing knowledge and skills also needs to be executed without foisting the old and ingrained information structures (Rubin 1998a, 496) and without transferring the outdated doctrines to the next generation (Pölönen 2020, 10).

To share an example, Ulrich Beck wrote in 1986 how we are going to witness a social transformation and how people are going to be breaking free from the social norms of industrial society. Beck listed changes such as shifting from structural employment to part-time employment while losing job security in pretty much all occupations, but at the same time people would be breaking free from age-related behavioural patterns and norms along with heteronormativity (Leiss et al. 1995, 4; Rubin & Linturi 2001, 276). It seems that all these changes are relevant in our modern society.

Even if these changes seem to be occurring now in our late modern society, it needs to be understood that there are still many deep-rooted thought patterns affecting our surroundings such as the continuation of mass production, necessity for continuous economic growth, usage of cheap non-renewable energy and the false belief of endless raw materials. These are all structures and concepts that have arisen from the constitution of industrial society. (Jousilahti et al. 2017, 7, 10). There is still plenty of work to do to bury this debris from the succeeding generations and begin to cause disruption to the habits of industrial society. The liberation from industrial society and the transformation leading to it seems to be happening slowly since Jokinen & Rubin (2006, 91) informed already fifteen years ago how the current intensive work model is coming to its end. They add that even in the name of efficiency we just cannot assume that this currently operating labour system works well since it produces mentally exhausted and early retired working-class heroes (Jokinen & Rubin 2006, 91). Unfortunately, in the recent years, we have witnessed some of the results of this defective operating labour system in unprecedented force since the absences due to mental health problems continue to rise sharply (Valtavaara 2020). Furthermore, Olavi Sydänmaalakka, who has a long career history in youth work and mental health, estimates that one of the main reasons for growing mental health problems among youth is due to increasingly individual-centered lifestyle. This individual-centered lifestyle has its roots in the post-war glorification of hard work, which originated and launched the ethos of coping and trying alone. (Kellomäki 2021). This proves that even if the world is rapidly transforming while breaking down certain old rules, habits, and mental models, the transformation is still very slow. This is going to be both mentally and physically expensive for the society if mental health problems continue to rise especially among young people.

It is often stated especially by the older generation how young people struggle to adapt to the rules, regulations, and values of today. It needs to be fully addressed here that as the

world is rapidly evolving and as we, including young people, progress to even deeper layers of late modern society, the common foundation around us becomes more complex and fragmented. This dive to late modernity further complicates young people's opportunity to utilize the common foundation as a support structure for identity building. For this reason, young people that are on the verge of adulthood are even more aware that their personal values, characteristics, and priorities are transforming faster and longer when compared to earlier generations. This might be the reason why younger generations are sometimes colliding with and resisting the old policies and commonly acknowledged ways of thinking and acting of the old society. (Rubin 2002, 791-792).

3.6 False expectations, broken promises and unreachable images of the future

The prevailing societal path or basic narrative that was often offered to build a good life used to be a) school, b) work life, c) marriage, d) moving away from home and finally e) family (Savickas 2009, 243; Kasurinen 1996, 241; Ollila 2008, 30). Nowadays young people must force themselves to continuous self-development and life-long learning which have also shattered the standardized and obvious transition from youth to adulthood and from school to employment (Oinonen 2018, 1345; Furlong & Cartmel 2007, 10). These transition activities are designed to guide young adults 'into society' (Mononen-Batista Costa & Brunila 2016, 19) and shape their life course (Oinonen 2018, 1348). Young people have adopted a certain promise that a successful transition to working life is a path towards adulthood and independence (Pimlot-Wilson 2017, 289; France 2016, 109). Therefore, it could be argued that it is important that each of these phases goes smoothly, and the young person can proceed according to plan in peace. What if this transition continues to stretch and the individual feels that they have failed in this transition phase?

One of the first important transitions we do in our early lives is the transition from school to work. This transition from school to paid work is considered as the focal point of finally proceeding to adulthood (France 2016, 109). If this transition does not go according to plan, it could be perceived as an occupational failure for an individual who has obtained a work centered mindset (Nuorisobarometri 2019, 173) and this failure, if it occurs, it will most likely occur in the early phase of one's life. Clear directions used to guide young people towards social reproduction but now the growing uncertainty is becoming a cause

for vulnerability and stress (Furlong & Cartmell 2007, 1). Rikala (2018, 166) is supporting this by stating that young people are becoming more and more stressed about their future and possibilities to cope, which can lead to incapacity for work (Rikala 2018, 166).

Unfortunately, the transition to work has become prolonged, complicated, and tricky (Mononen-Batista Costa & Brunila 2016, 21) and occupational prospects have become unpredictable and more difficult to define (Savickas 2009, 240). For example, research made by Anu Mikkonen (2000, 124) a few decades ago hinted that back then young people had a very strong belief and trust that education is a guarantee of good standard of living. It seems that the respect and faith towards education in the labour market is still maintaining its prestige among young people although now they admit that their university degrees do not guarantee anything on the job market (Oinonen 2018, 1356, 1358).

In brief, young people are forced to face uncertain futures which are not promised by the old values (Song 2012) and yet they understand how they need to be even more workable, movable, resilient, adjustable and versatile than ever before to compete in the labour market. Even if young people have adopted these new standards, they still have had to admit to themselves that they will still most probably have many occupations and work several different jobs during their lifetime and even these jobs are most likely to be precarious. (Oinonen 2018, 1356, 1357.)

One of the important roles of society and schooling system is to create a certain perspective and images of the future which guides our thinking and gives us hope towards future among aspirational quotes like 'by working hard you can achieve everything you want'. According to ALL YOUTH- research project conducted in 2018 and 2019, the youth nowadays have assimilated the very same familiar work-oriented mentality as previous generations (Ågren 2019) and may have also simultaneously embraced the financial achievements that have been justified for them by the promise of working hard. Furlong & Cartmel (2007, 9) notifies how young people in this late-modern individualistic society have embraced a certain confidence about their own abilities and capabilities to 'make it' in this competitive society and creating this kind of atmosphere of positivity, success and capability is truly important since according to Polak (1973, 19) these kinds of positive images of the future are the ones that are flourishing culture.

However, the real problem arises when society is incapable in delivering their promises and there is just not enough work for everybody who urge it? In other words, what happens when the society is suddenly reluctant or incompetent in delivering the material happiness and safety that should belong to young people in line with the expectations promised to them since early youth?

It could be argued that distributing this 'you can have it all'- mentality is a contradictory promise for youth since the future along with its vocational prospects could be considered slightly fragile and fragmented for several reasons. Firstly, it has been stated already several years ago that the class of precariat's is growing globally and rapidly (Standing 2011, 26; Leiss et al. 1995, 4; Standing 2012, 589) and the amount of full-time employment positions will be declining in the future (Green 2019, 52). Although, at this point the statistics in Finland do not fully support this statement about the precariat (Statistics Finland 2015; Findikaattori 2020). Secondly, today even a higher degree diploma will not guarantee a secure position in the labour market (Ristikari et al. 2016, 100; Pouri & Wilenius 2018, 12) and even low-skilled occupations are demanding university degrees in the future (Green 2019, 52). Thirdly, it seems that there is more competition for jobs (Oinonen 2018, 1353) and school places (Räty 2020; Vuorinen & Valkonen 2005, 66) and the overall number of employees is decreasing (Jokinen & Rubin 2006, 91). Fourthly, it has been presented in the US, that up to 47 % of jobs might be automated by 2036 or earlier (Arntz et al. 2016, 7). This radical change, if it occurs, might happen very rapidly, and will unfortunately affect the youth unemployment rates most (Nedelkoska & Quintini 2018, 6, 8). Fortunately, the disappearance of jobs due to automation is not yet considered as a notable threat in Finland since employment statistics do not indicate a significant change (Jousilahti et al. 2017, 10). However, Sneck (2020, 7) indicates how rapid artificial intelligence solutions are already interrupting careers in Finland and in addition to this, these new competence requirements have not yet emerged and are very unpredictable.

These disruptions and changes might have already affected the images of the future of young people and the signs are somewhat visible. Otto Tähkäpää talks about the decline of faith in the future among young people and how this obscure social problem is progressing unnoticeable. Tähkäpää continues by stating how particularly distinctive is the decline of faith in personal futures and how this social problem is going to have a far-reaching consequence on the choices, well-being and lives of these young people.

(Tähkää 2021b). This contradictory mentality of determinate success might be partly hazardous itself since it nurtures the presumption that everybody can achieve middle-class expectations of a permanent, steady job which allows us to purchase vacations, houses, and cars (Brown 2011, 19-20). On top of this, the possible unpleasant feeling and experience of failure is pushed down to the individual to suffer (Nuorisobarometri 2019, 173; Furlong & Cartmel 2007, 5) possibly without acknowledging that the individual itself might not have failed, but instead the surrounding society has failed in fulfilling their own obligations. In addition to this concern, society as an institution is very intangible and vague and it is difficult to channel anger and frustration into it. (Rubin 2000a, 118). Although, even in this thesis study, there are indications of how the existence and impact of the structures of society today are understood at an ever earlier age, and perhaps the frustration can sometimes be directed and expressed towards specifically at these prevailing structures.

It also needs to be addressed here that the understanding of late modern realities about unstable employment situations might have modified young people to become very reality conscious about their future standard of living. Tähkää (2021b) informs about a worrying phenomenon of how young people may have even begun to belittle the importance of traditional employment for a surprising reason; they do not consider traditional employment even possible or probable for themselves. A similar notion has been done by an Australian commission for the future study already in 1996 which stated the following:

Youth seem unusually apathetic about the future. They are not negligent or ignorant of the challenges; they just feel powerless to do anything about it. It is a sense of being disenfranchised and disengaged, awaiting the outcome of events rather than anticipating a role in them.

(Eckersley 1997, 246).

This is an alarming notion and refers to a longer-term nationwide phenomenon or a trend that should not be neglected. The possibility to grow up in late modern society can also offer unforeseen potential. Living in today's welfare society and especially in Finland could be defined as a privilege. Young people often have a variety of routes to choose from when approaching adulthood and these routes are not as bound to traditional expectations as earlier. People can enjoy the freedom of young adulthood; higher education is becoming more general and our understanding of the social world is getting

more broad-minded. (Furlong and Cartmel 2006, 9-11, 70). The spectrum of possibilities is extensive, and the safety net provided by the welfare state with its services provides a lot of security in times of uncertainty.

3.7 The contradicting values and motivating factors of young people

The meaning of this section is to reflect on the current dominating values young people obtain in late modern society and how values and aspirations especially related to work have changed over the years. Values contribute to what we consider to be right or wrong or good and bad and for this reason values are strongly involved in decision-making and therefore an important aspect when examining the images of the future (Rubin 2002, 796-797).

As previously discussed in section 3.4, about the societal and productional transitions from farms to factories and from factories to offices (Pölonen 2020a) there has also been a corresponding shift in terms of value system among young people. Halava & Pantzar (2010a, 18, 20) are sharing a similar example to illustrate the shift in value system as follows: first there was an agrarian obligatory community which shifted to industrial performance economy and finally reaching experience society, in which we are currently living. Therefore, value system has been slowly shifting from obligatory collective performance society towards appreciation of individualism and experientialism (Halava & Pantzar 2010a, 18, 20).

The main trend at the heart of this transition seems to be increased individualism and in the latest phase, experience society, also the shift away from instrumental thinking towards self-expression and emphasizing emotions (Halava & Pantzar 2010a, 18) and emphasizing the permanence of place and people (Oinonen 2018, 1357). According to several research by Ronald Inglehart, the world is shifting to late modern time even on a global scale (Halava & Pantzar 2010a, 18). In this thesis, late modern society and late modernity is referring “to a world of individuals where emphasis is on individual creativity and originality. Late modernity supports and approves the differences between people instead of encouraging towards a culture that is based on homogeneity and generalization” (Rubin 1998a, 496). Late modernity is also “the age of uncertainty, unpredictability, unexpectedness and confusion” (Rubin 1998a, 494).

Values are perceptions and beliefs about what is right and wrong, and they give us tools to navigate and understanding on what should be desirable (Helve 2002, 16). Values are guiding individuals when trying to choose suitable and desirable education and career (Kasurinen 2019, 9) and values can also be detected from young people's images of the future (See Ono 2003). The definition of a good life has changed among young people and the changes in these values are the motivating factors on guiding young people to make decisions that seeks spiritual and experiential values rather than financial prosperity (Häkkinen & Salasuo 2016, 187).

As mentioned previously, the concept of work itself is still valued and respected among young people in late modern society. According to Finnish youth research conducted from 1998 to 2016 reveals that the main aspirations among young people in the future are still revolved around work and family. Young people have hoped and are still hoping to achieve and maintain so called traditional values and aspirations which seems to include the above- mentioned work and family but also friends and education (Laurila 2006, 2; Oinonen 2018, 1355). Traditional values are retained but the motivating factors or driving forces behind their actions might have slightly shifted.

For example, in 1987 Helena Helve interviewed Finnish 17-20-year-old people and carried out a fortune-telling assignment which is familiar to many futurists. In this assignment young people were able to ask questions from the 'fortune teller' concerning their own personal lives in the future. The questions inquired from the fortune teller mainly consisted of traditional and expectable concerns relating to personal lives such as: 'what will I become when I grow up?' 'What is my occupation?' 'How will I cope in life?' Will I get kids? Will I get married? When will I get my own apartment? and will I be happy? According to Rauste-von Wright & Kinnunen who conducted a similar interview in 1983 containing 18-year-old people, the questions were also mainly related to career and education issues. (Helve 1987, 153). Similar responses and interest towards employment, family relations and profession were also revealed in Anita Rubin's work in 1998 (Rubin 1998b, 143).

In Anita Rubin's doctoral dissertation "Growing up in Social Transition: In Search of a Late-modern identity" published in 2000, she was examining the images of the future of young people between the ages of 10 and 22 more closely. She was able to indicate certain values and motivating factors from these images. In the study, the interviewed adolescents

that perceived their personal future as a success story which was based on money, career and traditional nuclear family. Success as a concept was defined mostly by materialistic values. Hopes and dreams were based on models constructed by industrial society where happiness was presented and composed purely of financial success and material ownership. (Rubin 2000a, 116-117). Likewise, a study made by Kankaanrinta & Virtanen in 1988 indicated that most junior high school boys believed that society appreciates materialistic values (Mikkonen 2000, 135). To summarize, the above-mentioned studies indicated a quite substantial interest towards education, work, family and materialistic values among young people in between years 1983 and 2000.

However, there is also contradictory data from that same era which is slightly indicating towards a decreasing interest in materialistic values. Anu Mikkonen was examining the views of the future and futures education of 11, 14, and 17-year-old people in her doctoral thesis in 2000. In this doctoral thesis there was an indication how values were shifting from purely materialistic values towards non-materialistic family-centered values. Money and power were mentioned only in 5 percent of the replies from the survey and in addition to this, most of the replies included references to the worsening condition of nature (Mikkonen 2000, 132, 135). Likewise, Hicks (1996, 4) proposed a growing interest among young people towards non-materialistic values also in United Kingdom. That same study indicated outright hostility towards consumer-oriented society in United Kingdom in 1985. A glimpse at these old studies reveals a clear contradiction at least towards materialistic values of young people between years 1983- 2000.

When examining more recent studies concerning the values of young people towards work in today's society, we are able to spot similarities as well as differences. Firstly, there are references that indicates a certain continuation of relevance and importance of work among late modern society. A strong work-oriented mindset has shifted successfully from parents to young people (Ågren 2019), however young people do not consider work or career as the most fundamental aspect in their future lives (Oinonen 2018, 1354) and some even criticize the extreme work-oriented ethos (Oinonen 2018, 1357). The approach and opinion towards work has slightly changed but is still seen as an important part of our lifestyles in late modern society, regardless of age. Work is not seen as just a source of income but more of an apparatus that enables the individual to build meaning in life, express oneself, craft their identities and become part of the society while earning the appreciation and respect of others in it (Jousilahti et al. 2017, 7, 9). The content of work

itself has become more important and the amount of wage has lost some of its significance among all-ages (Jousilahti et. al 2017, 9). Heikkilä et. al (2017, 25) are supporting this very same claim by revealing that the content of work is ruling over wage also among young people and that the actual content of work is even listed as the most important aspect among young people between 15- to 20-year-old when they were defining their future dream work in 2035. Likewise, when examining attitudes toward work among high schoolers, it was revealed that the desire and urge to carry out meaningful assignments (78 %) was more important than making a lot of money (57 %) (TAT 2020, 81, 83). This phenomenon relating to importance of the content of work was taken into account already in 2005 in a study made by Sari Pöyliö ja Leena Suopajarvi (Heikkilä et. al 2017, 25). In addition to this, Halava & Pantzar (2010b, 9, 37) are asserting that material values and the desire for power are truly losing their relevance and importance among the new generation of young people. A study conducted by the Association of Youth Research Society 2019 confirms the statement by Halava & Pantzar since health, home & family, love & relationships, free-time, work and even wellbeing of the environment were stated as more important than material well-being (Nuorisobarometri 2019, 879).

What is notable in the research by Youth Research Society is the fact that even if work itself is very valued and respected, the importance of leisure is still perceived more valuable than work itself. The main finding also by Twenge et al. (2010, 1133) revealed that the most notable change in work values between old and young generations was the increased urge for work-life balance. It seems that younger generations understand the significance and importance of leisure for the well-being of the mind or as Oinonen (2018, 1344) states; “work and income are no longer trusted as grounds for a good life”. Oinonen (2018, 1355, 1357) also further reveals an alarming notion how university students are afraid of ‘burnouts’ even before fully entering work life and that finding a balance between work-life and private life was the biggest concern among young people.

However, it needs to be taken into consideration that even if materialistic values seemed to have lost some of their significance, wealth, material and the urge to own things are still relevant and wanted among young people (Miettunen 2004; Laurila 2006, 33; Marttinen 2017, 57; TAT 2020, 89). Likewise, there has been clear indications about such things as ‘good salary’ in images of the future of young people and also notions about different places to travel, cloths to wear and different things to do (Vieno 2013, 8), which presumable requires ‘a good salary’ to be implemented.

The overall perceptions and expectations towards financial positions in life among the z-generation or the ‘new lost generation’ are very negative. The concept ‘new lost generation’ is conveniently referring to a generation born after 2000, abandoned by parents and society and forced to face labour market insecurity, slow economic growth and economic uncertainty (Häkkinen & Salasuo 2015, 188). The overall negative perception towards economic unsustainability can be also partly explained by a long economic recession phase in Finland starting in 2008 (Myllyniemi 2016, 46) and which resulted in high unemployment among young people (France 2016, 1). In recent years, the faith towards economy and financial perceptions has slowly taken a positive turn among young people (Kasurinen 2019, 8) but it seems that they are now more worried about climate change and public safety than economics and financial issues (Aittokoski 2018, 186).

Also, it remains to be examined in the future what kind of generational experience the Covid-19 pandemic will truly be and how it will affect young people’s values, motivating factors and attitudes towards their future. As a slight indication to the possible future consequences of Covid-19 could be seen in an essay published in Helsingin Sanomat and written by a Finnish high schooler who explained how his previously clear and certain path towards future had suddenly been covered in ‘thick mist’ (Kanniainen 2021). Previous generational experiences, such as wars and the depression of the nineties have modified the value base of different generations (Laurila 2006, 32). It can be argued that the ongoing pandemic will have similar far-reaching consequences.

The information available regarding the values and motivating factors of young people in this chapter are slightly contradicting. The reason for this conflict and fragmentation of values might be partly explained by the own uncertainty of young people towards their values and motivating factors and that their value base is still shaping and transforming (Etelälahti & Gardemeister 1995, 16). The collective and individual values of young people differ from one another and even the individual values might change in different situations (Miettunen 2004: Laurila 2006, 32). For example, TAT (2020, 81, 83, 89) informs how high schoolers valued meaningful work assignments over money when specifically inquiring about values towards work but however, when inquiring for different factors influencing their own choice of industry in the future, money seemed to be slightly more important than the opportunity to do things that are considered as important for them. There have been many examples about fragmented and conflicting

values among young people in the history, for example Venkula & Raustevaara in 1992, Helve in 2002 (Etelälahti & Gardemeister 1995, 16-17), Rubin (1998a, 498) and Rubin & Linturi (2001, 292, 298).

3.8 Steady income as a foundation towards “normal life”

Traditional values such as secured job (Vieno 2013, 8; Heikkilä et al. 2017, 24; Kariniemi 2020; Sutinen 2010, 82), importance of family (Halava & Pantzar 2010a, 19; Oinonen 2018, 1355), relationship and own apartment (Kariniemi 2020) are still desirable and honored in late modern society among young people. In addition to these traditional values there are indications about the importance of meaning in life and enjoying life (Nuorisobarometri 2019, 89), meaning of work (TAT 2020), close relationship with friends (Kariniemi 2020: Oinonen 2018, 1355), as well as maintaining the well-being of one's mental health and the well-being of the environment (Nuorisobarometri 2019, 88).

Surprisingly, young people have hoped for such things as the possibility to “stay put and have a normal life” (Oinonen 2018, 1356) which indicates towards very modest and reasonable values but at the same time these kinds of notions may also contain seeds for a larger problem simmering below the surface. Lowering one's expectations of life can have a negative effect on the life of young people since these life expectations have a significant impact on their life choices and if there are too much uncertainty and pessimism involved in their images of the future, young people might begin to lower their own expectations of life, even unnoticed (Tähkäpää 2021b).

Traditionality and traditional values seemed to have preserved in the life of youth. At the same time the length of adolescence has stretched since it seems that the ability to reach certain goals in life has prolonged (Kariniemi 2020). Young people nowadays perceive work more as an ‘importer of meaning and identity in life’ and it differs from earlier generations ‘necessity to provide a livelihood’- mentality (Heikkilä et al. 2017, 25). But in spite of this, a steady income from a permanent job seems to be one of the most important values and aims in building a secure and sustainable future (Vieno 2013, 8; Heikkilä 2017, 25; Sutinen 2010, 82). Once this important milestone or a foundation of steady job has been reached, it is easier to begin to acquire additional, or next in line, aspirations such as marriage, kids, own house and other meaningful things in one's life. Work and paid employment have been described as ‘force fields’ that are protecting and helping the young to reach independence, self-reliance and social mobility (France 2016,

109). If these ‘force fields’ are missing it has been proven to lead to a decrease in relationship-related personal goals (Marttinen 2017, 58). A steady job and permanent income, after all, enables us to finance and acquire everything else that is possibly needed in a happy, ideal and meaningful life, whatever that is for young people in the future.

However, there seems to be a dilemma in this plan. Acquiring a permanent job is not necessarily taken for granted among young people since they are well aware of the erratic and unstable realities of the world (Oinonen 2018, 1344). If steady jobs become even harder to acquire, this might shatter the very foundation in young people’s lives. If young people are unable to acquire such things as a school place or a permanent job after graduation or this milestone has been delayed for some other reason such as schooling inflation for example, this problem has been predicted to lead to a prolongation of adolescence informs youth researcher Sinikka Aapola-Kari (Kariniemi 2020). Disappointments and setbacks concerning future plans and expectations about employment and regular income have even led to the loss of control over life (Kojo 2003, 29). It is perfectly understandable that if one fails in acquiring a permanent job, all other plans are put to break since financial security is deteriorating (Kariniemi 2020) and this will then have a significant effect on individual’s life course (Kojo 2003, 23). Tähkää makes a clear statement that we should intervene on this current development of losing faith towards personal futures. If we do not intervene, we might encounter a situation where young people simply do not have the courage to dream about the things that previous generations took for granted such as a life-sustaining planet, family, own house and a permanent job (Tähkää 2021b).

3.9 Individual decision making as a precariat in late modern society

Humans in general are trying to control life and navigate through it by setting goals and making choices (Marttinen 2017, 8). According to Oinonen (2018, 1357) most university students in Finland are making decisions to reach an ordinary life with sufficient income, steady job, and a wealthy social and private life. Therefore, it seems that the goals and objectives they cherish and have set for themselves are not too far-fetched and are based on certain realities in life. The goals for which this important decision making is needed are mostly related to education, career, future family as well as friends (Salmela-Aro 2009, 141) and therefore are highly important aspects in one’s life.

The era of youth has been protracting and increased in complexity for a long time (Kasurinen 1996, 241) and its consequences can be serious. TAT (2014) informs that Finnish schools do not provide young people with enough information to support their educational and career choices and TAT (2017) supports the argument by revealing how one-out-of-four high school students were unsure about their further educational options. The latest TAT (2020) informed that only 20% of high school students were satisfied with the amount of information they were provided about career planning. In addition to these statistics, the number of students having a 'gap year' has been increasing steadily (Konttinen 2019) which could be linked to uncertainties and insufficient information about future options. Research conducted by Heidi Julien (1999b) revealed how Canadian adolescents were distressed and baffled for the career related decisions they had to make due to lack of clarity in the overall decision-making process. When they were then helped in career related decision making, some respondents did not even know which questions they would ask (Julien 1999b, 47) which indicates towards widespread lack of guidance.

According to Marttinen (2017, 6, 64) as many as 40% of the 23-year-olds who participated in her study felt insecure about their current life situation and direction as well as had unclear or partially unclear identity. The abundance of life and career related choices were connected to a large number of unclear identities and thereby connected to welfare problems (Marttinen 2017, 65).

The structures of society are making sure that young people are constantly reminded about the importance of decision-making in life and career counsellors are making sure that this will not be forgotten (Brunila 2011, 321). Making important and sometimes even lifelong decisions in life is difficult no matter your age but this must be especially difficult for young people without the necessary life experience to help them adjusting their decisions. Giddens (1991, 80-81) emphasizes the importance of decision making related to career life since he argues that work is the foundation of our lifestyle.

When it comes to educational decision making, the high schoolers have two major challenges to defeat. First, they need to be able to identify their further education objective and after that they need to pass the entrance exams if they wish to be admitted to higher education institutes (Inkinen 2013, 7). Vuorinen & Valkonen (2005, 13) informs how granting a desirable education place is highly important for young people, yet, receiving a rejection can be a frustrating experience of failure and lead to discouragement. Vuorinen &

Valkonen (2005, 135) adds that the most satisfied young people in their life situations were the ones that were successful in granting an education place.

High schoolers in Finland are also anxious that the choices they make are irreversible (Oinonen 2018, 1351). Kettunen (2013, 9) and Vieno (2013, 6) supports this by stating that many high school and university students in Finland felt that their choice of further education seemed to be definitive. Furthermore, the prevailing expectations about rapid transitions to further education seemed to be placing unnecessary pressure on decision making among Finnish high schoolers. The fear of making a wrong decision about further education was considered as a high risk according to some high school students (Kettunen 2013, 9). Vuorinen & Valkonen (2005 23, 24) also reveal that the final decisions about further education were carried out mainly in the last year of high school or vocational education or even after the education was finished. Last minute decisions can also be problematic since they might not be very well thought out and it is also possible that last minute decisions are based on insufficient information due to time management issues (Garam & Ahola 2001, 27). Insufficient information and lack of prior knowledge about the obtained place of education then leads to possible problems in the future. If one has insufficient information about the obtained place of education, it will direct interest elsewhere, reveals a study conducted by Erkki Laukkanen in 1988 (Vuorinen & Valkonen 2005, 66). Also, the reason for commonness of changing or termination of education was most probably the lack of information and knowledge about the obtained education (Vuorinen & Valkonen 2005, 135-136). Some university students in Finland and Spain seem to be more worried about making a wrong decision, missing their changes, and steering away from the right career path than 'finding a job' (Oinonen 2018, 1351).

To conclude: when we combine hurry, compulsion, young age, insufficient and incorrect information and pressure related to important decision making, the result may be everything else than desirable.

3.10 Different sources influencing the personal images of the future

Young people's own images of the future are formed both on the basis of their own knowledge and experiences but also through different cultural and social expectations, hopes and fears that are reflected by society (Rubin 2002, 793). Education system, different traditions, values, attitudes, and media, including television, newspapers, radio, films and literature are involved in the process of shaping and creating thoughts about

what the future might look like and what it would like to look like (Rubin 1998b, 84-85; Rubin 1998a, 499).

Ryota Ono (2003) has previously studied the message sources and origins that might have had influence on the formation process of personal images of the future of young people in Taiwan and U.S. The message sources that were mentioned in Ono's research article were:

1. The young person's previous experience in life
2. Information obtained from the media
3. Information obtained from other people

As a part of this thesis study, Ryota Ono was approached via email in 2021 and he commented his research as follows:

I still think that the major message sources are media, people and personal experience. If I carried out a similar survey, I would ask questions in two steps. In the first step, I would ask, 'do you recall that any of 'media content', 'people' and 'personal experience' helped you imagine your future career'? In the second step, I would ask, 'what message/inspiration/lesson, etc. related to your future career did you get then'?

(Ono, Ryota 2021, personal communication, 1.6.2021)

This study is examining the same three sources as presented by Ono. However, the main emphasis is placed on the influence of other people in decision making and the formation process of images of the future.

3.10.1 Media driven images

The influence of mass media in the lives of young people cannot be ignored or underestimated especially among young people and in today's information society. Rubin (1998a, 499) stated already almost two decades ago how the images of the future are mainly constructed and influenced by our social environment, especially media. This information still seems valid since TAT (2019, 14) informs how the role of media, along with social media, is becoming increasingly important since they have a strong influence on the futures perspectives of young people. Unfortunately, the information conveyed through the media is heavily appealing to emotions consisting of small and fragmented pieces which makes it even more challenging to understand the cause and effect behind

the big picture (Rubin 2000a, 117). In addition to this, Furlong and Cartmel (2007, 59) have indicated their concern toward the significant influence of mass media and the numerous attempts of adult profiteers in trying to sell ready-made identity scripts for young people. This concern seems valid since youth nowadays are not influenced by just television, magazines and youth culture but countless number of new channels and influencers embracing varying values to choose from (Vilpponen 2016).

3.10.2 Personal experience driven images

The influence of personal experience in life and its effect on the formation process of the images of the future needs to be clarified. It could be argued that the impact of personal experience in images of the future is the most significant one. According to Zheng et al. (2014, 1) when we think about the future and make plans about the future, we use our previously acquired experience and knowledge consciously or unconsciously and use these experiences and knowledge as a foundation to reconstruct novel ideas about the future. Rubin (2000b, 77-78) elaborates how, “as time passes, the future continuously transforms into the past and adds its lessons to personal (as well as societal) experience, which in turn has an impact on the images of the future”. In addition to this we, also have different perceptions of the present along with wants, hopes, fears and dreams which are also affecting the formation process of personal images of the future (Rubin & Linturi 2001, 270-271). Rubin further (2002, 792-793) explains that when we evaluate the desirable and undesirable alternatives of the future and make decisions, we use information from two different sources: **1)** adopted sociocultural knowledge (this includes information from other people as well as information from the media) and **2)** on the interpretation of the above information through the individual’s own experience and personal history.

3.10.3 Other people driven images and their influence in the decision making

The message source having an effect in the formation process of images of the future that is central in this study are other people and for example the knowledge, general beliefs, moral ideas and values we absorb through other people (Rubin & Linturi 2001, 271). We, as human beings tend to make decisions based on the messages and information provided to us by other people. Also, we receive feedback from other people based on our actions

and choices and these messages have a vital significance in the formation process of images of the future as well (Rubin & Linturi 2001, 270).

The decision phases, or ‘making the right choice’ in achieving goals becomes increasingly complicated since young people living in the era of information society are constantly surrounded and bombarded with different kind of information which can be fragmented and unreliable (Mäkinen 2013, 1). Decision making and career related exploration are a complicated matrix of human relations and issues (Young et al. 2006, 16) involving several participants with multifaceted results. As young people are beginning to hit the transition phases, or crossroads in their lives, their future related decisions are not merely set by themselves but can be affected by different models obtained from parents, teachers, siblings, grandparents, relatives, friends, media, acquaintances and strangers (Salmela-Aro 2009, 141; Ono 2003, 748; Silvonen et al. 2018, 19; Mäkinen 2013, 1; Kettunen 2013; Vieno 2013, 9; Lahtinen 2019, 123,134; Aapola-Kari & Tolonen 2019, 80; Helve 1987, 243).

Jari-Erik Nurmi, who has researched motivation and learning in transition phases discussed in 1983 how parental demands guide young people’s future orientation in many ways (Nurmi 1983, 8). Although the world has changed since 1983, the influence of parents still holds a significant impact on young people’s future orientation as well as decision making. Research conducted by Marjalakka-Ruoho (2010) revealed that parents were mentioned most often as partners when regarding their decision-making process (Marjalakka-Ruoho 2010, 116) and Junior high school students seem to rely more on advice from close ones in their study choices rather than on information provided by schools (TAT 2014). Another research conducted among Swedish high schoolers indicated how the information coming from study counsellors and relating to career decisions was seen as contradictory. Young people felt that study counsellors were just reading information for them by heart (Mäkinen 2013, 1). On the other hand, Vanhalakka-Ruoho (2010, 120) stated how study counsellors were rarely noted when mentioning influences towards career related decision making. However, regarding to study counselling, it needs to be addressed here that the professional ethics of study counsellors prevents them for offering a simple solution towards a complex problem (Vieno 2013, 9) and this could partly explain the contradictory feeling and criticism towards study counsellors.

There are also other people influencing the career related decision-making process in addition to close environment with varying weight of effect. According to Mäkinen (2013, 1) the impact of parents, adults but also acquaintances and friends, who had already made a career choice, were considered as the most important information providers when high schoolers were pondering their own occupational prospects. Vieno (2013, 9) adds how the strongest influence in decision making among high schoolers came from friends, siblings or even total strangers. On the other hand, research by Kettunen (2013) and Vuorinen & Valkonen (2003) seemed to indicate how the influence of close environment, including parents, siblings, relatives and friends seemed to be only a minor influencer on educational decision making among high schoolers (Kettunen 2013, 7). To conclude and notwithstanding the contradictory information, we can state with certainty that the effect of 'close environment' has a significant impact on educational and vocational decision-making process.

It is highly important to understand the level of magnitude and the positive influence family members can have on the career development of individuals since it is very likely that they will seek assistance from their family members (Whiston & Keller 2004, 493). However, the negative influence of family members needs to be addressed here as well. Whiston & Keller (2004, 544) further informed about a study conducted by Larson & Wilson (1998) which utilized path analysis to investigate college students and their experiences related to intimidation in their families and their obligations to reach their parents' expectations. The feelings of intimidation towards these obligations directly predicted the amount of trouble the college students experienced later in their career decision-making process. And vice versa, the college students career development was improved by encouragement, warmth, self-determination support and emotional support received from parents (Whiston & Keller 2004, 549).

Vieno (2013, 8) adds how young people with lack of experience might easily drift into debate with more experienced adults about their possible educational or vocational choices which then become questionable. In worst case scenario, this kind of intimidation, questioning and embracing stereotypes might suddenly turn ones' vocational and educational aspirations into something undesirable.

In these kind of situations young people are placed in uncomfortable situations and forced to choose whether they please themselves by choosing what they truly want or then they

choose whatever their parents think its most suitable and beneficial for them. This situation might be further complicated if the young person decides not to listen advice from his or her parents and then fails on their dedicated path, they might feel difficult to return to their parents and rely on their social and financial safety net after refusing to listen for recommendations from their parents.

Similar experiences of rejecting one's own choices in such distinct way seemed to be visible in some narratives (Vanhalakka-Ruoho 2010) about decision making among young people but still not very common. Furthermore, when young people were expressing the engagement of other people in decision making process, the most common way was self-regulation with joint decision making. This means that the decisions made were self-regulated but someone significant participated along in the decision-making process. (Vanhalakka-Ruoho 2010, 116-117). Study by Brunila (2011, 321) also showcased that the choices made among young people were negotiable, and that young people are compliant and even willing to choose something that is not resonating to them as 'the right choice'. The long-term impact of this activity of compliance may be questionable and remains unclear. Although, it needs to be remembered that the influence of one's family do not cease to exist once they enter adulthood reminds Whiston & Keller (2004, 549).

However, it is evident that young people are in urgent need of help, support and guidance when navigating into the future, but this navigation support needs to be conducted in such subtle way that young people do not become confused or anxious. Rubin (2013, 43) states that young people especially need guidance and nurturance in helping to decide which decisions towards the future could and should be made and why (Rubin 2013, 43). Pouru & Wilenius (2018, 13) supports this by informing how young people are in the need of different abilities to better understand, navigate and live in this world of uncertain futures. Although, it needs to be remembered that even if young people are in a desperate need of guidance and nurturance, the instructor must be careful with the supervisee for not implanting the supervisors' own thoughts or belittling the supervisee's own choices or preferences.

3.11 Family heritage and the misrecognition of parental influence in decision making

It has been stated by Bertaux & Thompson (2005, vii) that family functions as the main channel in transferring different central aspects of identity and culture towards younger generations including aspirations, skills, procedures, values, habits, attitudes and relationships for example. Several career development and family of origin related studies (see Whiston & Keller 2004; Young et al. 2006) reveals a clear connection between the social background of a young people and further education options.

Whiston & Keller (2004, 493, 496) observed how different family relationship and family structure variables such as parents' occupations and socioeconomic status, family interactions and support as well as family expectations have been influencing adolescents and young adults in realizing the importance of career exploration, commitment and determination and how their career should construct. According to Silvonen et al. (2018, 24) the family heritage of a young person is mainly built on the parents educational and vocational history, as well as their overall values toward employment and education in general.

Still, both young people and their parents seem to misrecognize parental influence in the decision-making process of young people. Young people generally feel that they are fully in charge of their own decision making, for example relating to education options while parents also emphasize the same independent decision making in their families. This principle of independent decision making seems to be generally accepted but contains a pedagogical paradox: in reality, parents are affecting the decision-making process even if they state otherwise. (Silvonen et al. 2018, 27, 31; Kleanthous 2014, 674.)

Furthermore, Kleanthous (2014, 670) adds how it is also possible to 'misrecognize' parental influence on their children when it comes to educational decision making since this influence may be transmitted through social and cultural capital of the family and for this reason can be unidentified. Some studies even indicate how young people from middle-class families most often leave their family background and heritage unidentified in their decision-making process (Silvonen et al. 2018, 32). Silvonen et al. (2018, 30) continues how parents are structuring educational transition phases of young people through their own education and employment history as well as influencing choices by simply being involved in educational and work-related decision making.

Kleanthous (2014) shares an interesting and fascinating example on somewhat extremity hidden parental influence and a fallacy of independent decision making while she was conducting an interview in indigenous family with a 16-year-old student and his mother:

(Student):

She lets me choose on my own, but she will tell me her opinion. Or I might tell her [about my choices] and she will say yeah that's good

(Mother):

He completed the [university entry] form and he said, 'mum do you want to see what I have chosen?' And I said 'I will see it; I don't have any problem with that. Since you have decided about these and you think this is what you like what can I say?'

From this interview Kleanthous was able to highlight two important phrases to reveal hidden parental influence or 'misrecognition of parental influence' as Kleanthous frames it. Firstly, the phrase 'she lets me choose' indicates at least some form of parental influence and at the same time this parental influence does not necessarily appear to the student as such. Secondly, the mother seems to deny her influence on her son by reassuring 'what can I say about his choices if he already made up his mind' and then continues by stating 'I don't have any problem with that [his choices]'. This suggests towards parental influence likewise and it reveals inconspicuous consensus between the parent and the student. The student is making the 'right choice' while the parent is then giving a permission for him to carry on. This kind of pattern was common in all interviews that were addressing communication between young people and their parents in this specific study. (Kleanthous 2014, 674).

Silvonen et al. (2018, 32) shares an interesting explanation that could partly explain this pattern of behaviour related to denying the influence or involvement of the parents in decision making process: in some situations, young people understand and recognizes the pedagogical family heritage and its impact on decision making. However, simultaneously they might feel that the ability and permission to make independent decisions is seen as desirable while admittance of parental influence is seen as undesirable.

3.12 Used futures

Sohail Inayatullah urges young people to recognize how much we take influence around us and accept other people's futures as our own. This is called the concept of used future

developed by Inayatullah and it refers to an image or an idea of the future that has been borrowed or adopted from others and is in fact, desired future of someone else. (Inayatullah 1998, 388; Inayatullah 2008, 5). These used futures might have been created in some other context but nevertheless we are still unconsciously holding on to them and this blind and prevents us from imagining and developing alternative and more authentic futures. Used futures can also be beneficial if the purchased future from others becomes relevant and natural after time and deconstruction. (Ramos 2017; Inayatullah 1998, 388). The concept of used futures has been discussed previously in different contexts such as the future of urban planning and education system (Inayatullah 2019; Thenextwavefutures 2019), the future of electronic health applications (Sheraz et al. 2013) and the future of life after capitalism (Hines 2018). The role of the concept of used future in this study is to help unveil the hidden and visible actors steering our ways of thinking. It reminds us that planning for our future is always tied to the past, and actively acknowledging this can support us to break away from the path to unpreferred futures and encourage us to take steps in the direction of our desires.

4 Data and methods

For this study, the data was collected through thematic in-depth interviews and the questions were formulated based on the presented theoretical framework. Data was analyzed by using qualitative content analysis.

In following chapter the setting of the study will be explained and the processes of material collection and analysis will be discussed.

4.1 Setting of the study

The interviews were conducted between 21st of January and 26th of February 2021. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic it was required to conduct the interviews online using video conference platform Zoom. The interviewer as well as the participants were accustomed to using Zoom since the pandemic had started almost a year before the first interview was conducted. At first the researcher was hesitating on conducting the interviews online without the possibility of normal face-to-face interaction which he thought might lead to poor quality of the interviews. Very quickly the researcher realized that the concerns were irrelevant since the contact and communication with the participants seemed genuine, the participants were direct and open and they began answering the questions carefully but enthusiastically.

The interviewees included eight young adults from different high schools around Finland but majority of them were in Turku area or in neighboring municipalities. Interviewees were obtained from Kerttuli Upper Secondary School, Turun normaalikoulu also called as Norssi, Kaarina Upper Secondary School, Turku Classical Upper Secondary School, Pietarsaari Upper Secondary School and Jämsä Upper Secondary School. Some of the interviewed students were attending high schools that had specialized programs such as IB-diploma programme, ICT programme and theatre programme but most of the participants attended normal programmes. During the time of the interviews seven participants were 18 years old and one was 19 years old. All the participants were attending high school on second or third level and were preparing themselves for the life after high school. They pondered the same questions about what to do after high school and how to get closer to the desired occupation or field of occupation. The gender of the interviewees is irrelevant in this study due to the low number of interviewees, and it is not the intention to take gender differences into account in this study.

4.2 Collecting research material

The research material in this study is composed of a semi-structured, thematic, in-depth interview. The semi-structured interview consisted of a few warm-up questions, envisioning exercise and 32 questions which were divided into four guideline themes. The interview questions are available at the Appendix. The idea was first to let the participants engage in free flow and imagine their personal and probable future in the year 2040. This phase was exceptionally effective since it allowed for the researcher to collect small details from the images and use these details as a support in later stages of the interview. After the future related imagination phase, it was time to move backwards from the future and ask the individuals to remember the events in their past that might have helped them in envisioning the future.

Thematic interview can be beneficial when examining emotionally sensitive issues which can be oblivious for the interviewees and they can provide valuable information about more rarely addressed issues such as values, intentions, ideas (Åstedt-Kurki & Heikkinen 1994, 420) and in this case, the source of images of the future. As a research method, thematic interview is flexible. Youth researcher Helena Helve has studied the worldview of young people and states how flexibility is important when addressing such issues. Flexibility allows for the researcher to clarify different attitudes, opinions, and interpretations by presenting supplementary questions and deepen or enliven the issues which appear from the interview. (Helve 1987, 54). It could be argued that such flexibility is equally important when exploring young people's images of the future and as the interviews for this specific study were proceeded it turned out to be crucial to ask additional questions to reach deeper levels and receive more specific information. Therefore, in this study, the thematic interview can also be considered to have come close to the in-depth interview since it was based on relatively long and informal interaction and contact with the participants (Helve 1987, 54) since all the interviews lasted from 81 minutes to 116 minutes and were occasionally taking a relatively free form. Helve (1987, 54) shares an interesting example about the stages of an in-dept interview and these steps were somewhat identical in terms of the researchers own interview experience in this study:

1. Mutual probing and doubt from both the interviewee and the interviewer such as “what exactly is going on here”

2. Openness. The interviewee tells and the interviewer listens
3. The interviewee explains and structures what he or she is saying

In this study each of the participants were given the same guideline themes but the order and form of the question varied. The interviews were semi-structured in way that they had predetermined themes and questions but as the interviews went forward the interviewer slightly wandered and changed the order and shape of the questions as the interview proceeded. The interviewer had to move smoothly during the interview between different questions and themes since some of the themes were overlapping and the questions sometimes intentionally repeated themselves. In this study, repetition was beneficial since it made it possible to find new dimensions, findings and meanings in subjects which had already been dealt with. It was important to communicate the possibility and meaning of repetitive questions for the interviewee so they would not be confused and think that they were not listened. The interviewer also tried to change the direction of the interview in a discreet way every now and then to get the best possible information from the interviewees in the given timeframe but at the same time remain in the context of the study. It was also important that the interviewee did not drift too far from the theme, matter or context which was being dealt and discussed with a given moment. During the interview, it was important to stay in context to avoid possible misunderstandings on the data analysis process but also to allow the voices of young people to be heard without interruption. The interviewees often spoke very passionately about their life experiences and this was not just extremely desirable for the researcher but also very beneficial for the study as well as for the interviewees to go through their possible future step by step.

4.3 About the interviewees, saturation and limitation

Eight people participated in the interviews. Five of the participants signed up for the interview randomly after the school principal or study counsellor announced about the interview on the school's electronic bulletin board upon the researcher's request. Two of the participants signed up after The Union of Upper Secondary School Students was contacted. One participant was recruited through an acquaintance who had knowledge about the study and its purpose. This needs to be taken into consideration when addressing possible bias since the researcher cannot be absolutely certain what has been told to the participant in advance about the purpose of the study. To conclude: everyone who

participated in the study were chosen without a separate selection process and only general information related to the study was communicated. Before signing up for the interview, the participants were informed that the interview would address their personal images of the future and the fears, hopes and perceptions they had mostly relating to their vocational aspirations.

Presumably the ongoing global Coronavirus pandemic made it challenging to acquire interviewees. People were living in an exceptional time in Finland as well as abroad during this study. Education system in all levels and young people in general were in a challenging life situation due to the prevailing pandemic and therefore participation in optional and additional research interview was not the first thing on the priority list of the students or the school staff. Another issue which might have affected the recruitment of the interviewees was the relatively long 90-minute duration of the interview which was communicated when searching for volunteers. It could be speculated that how many 18-year-olds would voluntarily participate in a 90-minute interview with a total stranger online, during a global pandemic and on top of that without a compensation. Here is an excerpt from one of the interviews after asking for comments about the interview. This comment indicates toward a low interest in these kinds of activities:

I have to comment this.... at first, I was like...okay, so I must sit for an hour and half answering questions with somebody that I don't know at all and I was wondering how it is going to be? But it was extremely nice, and I liked sitting here and talk about these things with you. I am positively surprised.

Participant #5

Also, as the topic of the interview was heavily related to their personal vocational futures and possible plans after high school, which could be considered as difficult questions for an 18-year-old. Therefore, the possible perception about the difficulty related to the interview might have driven away the ones who did not have clear or certain ideas about their vocational future. Even if it was specifically mentioned on the interview request that one did not have to have knowledge or certainty about their vocational futures to be able to participate in the study. The participants were also informed that the interview would be conducted based on safer spaces policies. In short, the meaning of safer space is to create practices that helps building a sense of internal security for those attending an event or activity (Nevalainen 2019). Before the interview researcher familiarized himself with several safer space guidelines provided by different actors such as Feminist Culture

House and Allianssi (Feminist culture house 2021; Allianssi 2021). The researcher was trying to be conscious of his position and space he took during the whole interview process. The researcher concentrated on not making any assumptions and giving the participants chance to express themselves in best possible ways online.

The researcher is well aware of the impact of limited sampling on this thesis study. The unstable societal situation, lengthy interview and the distributed request for research itself may have led to the participation of only certain type of participants. Although it should be noted that all the participants are individuals with different mindsets but this study seemed to lack those who had partially or completely unclear future plans. Nevertheless, the researcher felt that all the participants focused on the interview and managed to communicate their thoughts and perspectives fluently and continued to inspire and surprise the researcher one after another, and therefore formed an interesting sample for this thesis study.

The sample size in this master's thesis was relatively small as the most common sample sizes in PhD studies, as comparison, were 20 and 30, followed by 40, 10 and 25 (Mason 2010, 13). Although Mason (2010, 1, 3) adds that it is not the sample size that should be the guiding principle but the point when all "the new" is already discovered and revealing "newer" will not add anything significant to the study or framework. Even though the interviewees continued to surprise the researcher, it was already possible to detect certain patterns from the interviews and the researcher felt that the data would be enough to answer both research questions. For this reason, the researcher concluded that the data was already saturated and decided to stop the interviews after eight interviews.

Once all the interviews were completed the next step was to transcribe the recorded interviews. This was done manually, and the material accumulated a total of 93 pages. After transcribing the data, it was time to begin the actual content analysis.

4.4 About the method

The meaning of this study is to better understand the lives of young people and their images of the future as well as the effects and origins of those images. Therefore, the intention of this qualitative study is not to examine statistical probabilities or facts about the topic but instead understand human beings, their different life-experiences as well as phenomenon and perspectives. According to Varto (2005, 28, 164) qualitative research is

specifically interested in understanding such things. Syrjälä & Numminen (1988, 120) states that qualitative research intends to find answers to the following questions: How can a phenomenon be understood? How does one experience the phenomenon and why does this human being react the way they do? This study is precisely interested in these questions and the issues they point to.

Qualitative analysis can be divided into two phases which are **1.** simplification of findings and **2.** Solving the riddle. Simplification of findings is also divided into two phases. In the first phase the data collected will be simplified in a way that the researcher will regard only the essential and necessary parts from the data which then allows the researcher to answer the research questions while staying in the boundaries of the introduced theoretical framework. After this, the essential observations from the data will be combined and the aim is to connect the data into one large observation or set of observations. However, combining the data does not mean that the intention is to look for averages or paradigms but rather seek for differences between different people or units of observation. (Alasuutari 2011, 39-40.) It needs to be underlined that even though qualitative research is about unique events, humans, and life experiences, qualitative research still aims at theory formation by obtaining generalizations from the data that will re-emerge in new contexts. Therefore, these generalizations should both lead the attention to the uniqueness of each item but at the same time be conceptually generic. (Varto 2005, 164).

This study followed the process of simplification of findings step-by-step. The first phase of simplification of findings was executed during the initial read-thru of the transcribed data and the essential parts were highlighted from the text while keeping in mind the theoretical framework. The second and third review of the transcribed material concentrated on certain conventionalities, metaphors, repetitions, similarities, and differences as well as social and cultural issues which were surprising to the researcher. Each time the researcher returned to the data, it produced something new. All these findings were ultimately coded, combined and divided into essential themes that were data-driven but were leaning to theoretical framework.

By solving the riddle Alasuutari refers to interpretation of the research data. This means that the leads and clues produced from the research material are used to interpret the studied phenomenon and finally form a structural entity (Alasuutari 2011, 44). This

interpretation phase of different clues and leads was performed by using content analysis since the researcher assumed that this was the best way, as Alasuutari (2011, 81) describes, to get behind the observations. According to Krippendorff (1980) content analysis is a research method for making valid, explanatory observations from data to their context. Solving the riddle reflects the difficulty of finally selecting the appropriate analyzing method for this study. As mentioned earlier Varto (2005, 164) argues that the items drawn from the qualitative research data should be conceptually generic while at the same time unique. Finding such items from the data can be difficult and as Kuhmonen & Kinnunen (2017, 14) states personal images of the future are per se individual and therefore the research challenge is to find a proper way to identify the general items but also the unique items from the images of the future. While conducting this study, the researcher felt occasionally that the creation of the final structural entity happened somewhere in between systematicity and randomness. The researcher had clear idea and operating models for the data analysis process but nevertheless it seemed that when analysing the material there were a lot of coincidences and luck that brought a little more content to the analysis.

The methodological approach, or the logics of analysis used in this study was deductive. Deductive reasoning is a traditional analysis model, and it implies that there is already an existing or initial theory or a way of thinking. This means that the phenomenon under study is defined according to something already known. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018). As the initial codes for the analysis were leaning to theoretical framework, it was concluded that the methodological approach towards the analysis was deductive.

5 Findings

The meaning of this study was to examine the personal images of the future of young people, discuss how they perceive these images, what are the sources of these images and what are the possible consequences of these images. Theoretical framework in this study was addressing the concept of late modernity, the difficulty of decision making as young people among their contradicting values and motivating factors in life and finally the sources affecting the images of the future were presented.

In this section, the essence of the gathered research material will be presented reflecting on both theoretical framework and other theories or guiding ideas which could provide support or explanation for the findings.

5.1 About the participants

The researcher felt that the interviewees who participated in this study were somewhat exceptional. They seemed determined and relentless when addressing objectives in life and they had knowledge and opinions about different occupations and ways to reach them. They did not seem to crave for excessive material possessions, and they were relatively realistic about their own abilities and opportunities towards the future. The participants openly shared their fears, hopes and dreams without hesitation or shyness and showed strong confidence and maturity when addressing issues among the surrounding educational and social institutions. Based on the interviews, it could be speculated that the ones who were certain about their future plans and had enough self-confidence decided to participate in this study and the ones who might have hesitated about their plans disregarded the interview request. Also, it could be claimed that it requires a special interest in one's vocational futures to be willing to participate in this type of lengthy 90-minute interview. Could a low level of interest to be interviewed indicate that more and more young people have unclear plans for their future? All the volunteers that finally decided to participate in the study knew what the study was about and possibly because of this they had carefully planned and precise ideas about their future and for this reason they were ready to share their thoughts. This following statement from one of the interviewees describes appropriately the exceptional sample group that participated in this study:

So....I am the only one.... I have like 12 close friends, and I am the only one who knows where I am applying. And we are on the second level of high school. There are so many with no ideas about what the heck are they going to do in life. About half of those have absolutely no idea and then they are actually very good at school, and they are all doing better at school than me and are smart but have not come up with any ideas.

(Participant #8).

It is by no means surprising in uncertain late modernity that youth are struggling to find the best possible option from all the available alternatives. The speculation of multiple different options is laborious and therefore the assessment of future impact of these decisions is ignored and making it increasingly difficult to set goals that are both realistic, achievable, challenging and worth pursuing. (Rubin 2002, 794). However, this was not the case with the participants of this study but instead, they knew reasonably well what they wanted and how to get there. As mentioned earlier, the reason for this might be that the interview request particularly attracted the individuals who had clear and certain future plans while possibly leaving out the individuals with unclear or non-existent plans.

The first step is to introduce the participants and their ideal future professions, as this research has a strong emphasis on young people's professional future.

The participants' desired future occupations were as follows:

("P" stands for participant)

P1- NGO worker [non-governmental organization worker (United nations)]

P2- Music producer

P3- Game developer

P4- Cultural researcher

P5- Police/Psychologist

P6- Actor/Media worker

P7- Educational consultant

P8- Child protection worker

Police/Psychologist and Actor/Media worker communicated two options since it seemed they had not yet reached a full closure on which profession would be preferred or more realistic or that they were planning on how to possibly combine these two professions.

From now on, the participants will be addressed as NGO worker, Music producer, Game developer and so on if applicable or using the form “s(he)” or “their”. Due to the low number of interviewees, gender did not become central in this study and the researcher does not want to make assumptions related to gender. Also, their imagined future occupations will be added to the analysed text whenever applicable which makes the material more interesting for the reader. There are a few exceptions in the data analysis section where different institutions are being critiqued and the researcher wants to ensure the anonymity of the participants by concealing which participant and occupation is behind the criticism. Also, some of the citations are long but this needed to be done because it is important to tell the story in the young people’s own words and as uniform as possible to make their voices heard better.

5.2 Time perspective, futures thinking frequency and other general observations about the images of the future

This section addresses the sub questions and warm-up questions that are not in the central focus of this thesis study but which, however, are useful to discuss since they also revealed important notions related to the research questions. The interview began on enquiring about the interviewee itself such as age and the school they attended and their family background. Also, questions such as “do you ever think about the future?”, “how often do you think about the future?” and “how far into the future do your thoughts usually set?”. There was also a brief discussion about what the word ‘future’ recalls and whether Covid-19 has influenced their future prospects. After these questions it was time to begin envisioning the participants probable future in the year 2040. After the envisioning exercise it was time to proceed to more specific questions and themes in the following order: **1.** Path to high school, **2.** Preliminary plans after high school, **3.** Work, meaning and values and finally **4.** Guidance.

When the participants were inquired about the time perspective and frequency of their future related thoughts, the answers indicated a strong variation and were dependent on which was the object of thought. The time perspective of future ideas varied depending on whether it was a test coming on near future, university entrance exams, a future career

or thought about starting a family. One participant did not mention a specific time perspective at all, but their thoughts were tied to a specific transition phase such as securing a school place, getting a job or starting a family. Time perspective varied from weeks to 20 years from now. One of the participants stated how s(he) began “looking over 20 years from now and what I would like to have there” and how this navigation to the future began to take place already in junior high school.

When enquiring about “how often do you think about the future”, the participants replied with comments such as “very often”, “everyday”, “all the time” and to an “increasing extent” but also “seasonally”. When asking for clarification about the seasonal futures thinking the participant (Actor/Media worker) replied:

I feel that usually if I have a lot of stress in life, I somehow have a habit that if I stress one thing then I start to stress about everything else...so in that kind of situations

and further elaborated:

...and so as in some stressful life situations, it (futures thinking) is there at the top.

When asking from another participant about how far away their thoughts about the future situated s(he) replied:

Yeah, so when I am such an overthinker and I stress about things very much so pretty easily I think about the future, whether it's in a week or not, it's an exam or a deadline, but then it can escalate to what I'll do in a year

(NGO worker)

Three of the participants associated futures thinking with stress or anxiety and both variables (the amount of thinking about the futures and stress) seemed to grow exponentially. The word “overestimation” was also mentioned by two participants in the context of imagining the futures and this word was also associated with stress. NGO worker further elaborated how the activity of futures thinking is launched by stress and how “this is not always a good thing”.

The first official question of the interview was presented in the form of an imaginary exercise about their probable future in the year 2040 and how they envision their future at that time. First, it was unexpected for the researcher to realize how quickly and effortlessly all the participants described their future in the year 2040 since according to

research by Rauste-von Wright & Kinnunen (1993) the focus in personal images of the future of 18-year-olds was commonly set to 5-10 years from the present (Rubin 1998b, 103). All the participants were successful on envisioning their future and they were able to portray their residences, living environments, families, and their occupations in detail. It felt almost like the participants were prepared for this question. Zheng et al. (2014, 7) provides a simple explanation for this observation by stating that personal goal setting has been seen as a fast track towards detail specific future envisioning.

One of the participants (NGO worker) got confused about the word “probable” (Fin. todennäköinen) and was hesitating on how to answer the question correctly especially when the researcher highlighted the word “probable”. The participant then stated: “This is now difficult when talking about probable future...”. After the confusion the researcher assisted the participant and clarified the question by asking to “think about a future where life would ‘roll on’ as you would think that it would ‘roll on’ and nothing very groundbreaking would happen, then how would you think that your life would be?” The participant was then able to continue with the question. When addressing such questions as “describe your probable future” to anybody, especially young people, the choice of word should be taken into closer consideration to prevent confusion. In this example the participant had already revealed to the interviewer that s(he) wants to work abroad in some role for United Nations in the future. The researcher was able to identify this future as completely probable or plausible for the participant and therefore was able to encourage the participant by offering clarification to the question. A futurist Alex Fergnani is addressing similar issue in another context relating to ‘futures’ and ‘foresight’ jargon and how to frame for example positive images of the future in futures workshops so that it is clear for the participants what kind of futures they should be envisioning instead of just “engage in free flow thinking about the future”. Fergnani suggests that when addressing positive images of the future it should be more closely elaborated that the envisioned futures are plausible futures instead of utopias and these could be even framed as expectations. (Fergnani 2021). In the case of this study, would the word “expectation” have prevented the confusion about the word probable? Also, when enquiring about a probable future, then did the participant began pondering how realistic their aspiration to work for United Nations really was and whether it was more likely not to happen than more likely to happen? This issue of jargon in futures and foresight is fundamental and important since we need to be very cautious for not accidentally planting

ideas that might question the pursuit of probable and fully reachable futures. Another participant (Music producer) seemed to hesitate about the question of “describe your probable future in 2040...” and the sub-question of “where do you think you work in 2040”. Before answering the question, the participant first made the following clarification: “I will now say this as it would happen...” and then continued envisioning their future without remarks to any kind of probabilities.

As already stated, the participants envisioned their futures effortlessly, in detail and indicating self-confidence. It could be concluded from this that their images of the future were strong and intensive. Rubin (2002, 796) argues that if images of the future are strong enough, one can invest considerable amount of resources in order to fulfil and reach these images. This was especially relevant when interviewing Music producer who was aware of the difficulty of the industry and the stress involved in the music business but nevertheless was still determined to succeed on the chosen path and was willing to make sacrifices on the things that were important for them.

Music Producer:

I am going to have to work a lot and make a lot of sacrifices and work long hours.

Music producer also stated that one of the fears s(he) had was related to the amount of stress and how this stress might take time away from the family.

Question:

“So, you are worried not being able to balance between work and family?”

“Yes, and because I am already that kind of person that puts work ahead of other people.”

(Music producer)

Nevertheless, in this case the images of the future were so strong that Music producer was willing to make sacrifices about the things that were considered as important. Music producer also acknowledged that the sacrifices s(he) is willing to make are temporary and eventually s(he) would have more time for the family in the future.

So yeah, of course and I hope that as soon as I don't have to work from eight to four five days a week, and then I will also have time for... if I have a family

by then, so I would spend time with them too. Family is important, of course. Equally important or more important than work.

(Music producer)

Another example of an exceptionally strong image of the future was held by Child protection worker. The participant had a long history as a child protection client and s(he) elaborated how child protection services were “insanely big support”. S(he) was also aware of the difficulty of the industry and that there is a risk of burnout and a risk that the work itself becomes too personal. As s(he) further explains:

News related to child protection informs how there are too few of them (child protection workers) with too little knowledge and they are getting burnouts and how it does not work, and it is probably stressful and chaotic.... but in my heart, I know that this is the right thing for me to do even if it might remind me of my own childhood. If I get like an awful flashback from it. I might have insight and benefits that could be hopefully utilized in this industry.

(Child protection worker)

The participant also had a close, important and very long relationship with their personal child protection worker from kindergarten to adulthood and to whom s(he) was able to share initial ideas about future occupation. As Child protection worker informs:

Although the first time I told I was studying to become a social worker s(he) told me that ‘oh baby honey, don't exhaust yourself in that profession’ but later stated how I was going to be become very good at it.

(Child protection worker)

Both of these, Music producer’s and Child protection worker’s, exceptionally strong images of the future seemed to guide their holders very strongly in the direction they felt as morally right or as their passion. As Demneh & Morgan (2018, 55) states, if the images of the future are right, they can work as a social and cultural power that stimulates people to execute immense creative projects. Nevertheless, the awareness and understanding about their future challenges on their chosen path did not cause the participants to change their minds. They had already made difficult decisions and significant amount of work just to brighten their plans on how to successfully reach these images. The calling for these images was stronger than the fears related to them.

5.3 Meaning of work

In 1958 philosopher Hannah Arendt introduced three different states of activities in her book called 'human condition'. These activities were 'labour,' 'work' and 'action'. According to Arendt labouring is simply something we do in our everyday lives to stay alive such as eat and maintain our own shelter. Work is something we need to build and enhance the surrounding society collectively to fit our needs such as building furniture's or cars to share with one another. Action on the other hand differs more clearly from labour and work since it is something we do just for the pure pleasure of action and activity for ourselves and not to exchange our actions to money. (Jousilahti et al. 2017, 7; Stonebridge 2020). Andre Gorz (1982, 17) offers another description for the concept of work by stating how work is something that we do for somebody else than us, we exchange our actions in compensation and we do this according to the forms and timetable set by the payers and lastly, we do all this towards goals we have not chosen ourselves.

When enquiring about the meaning and concept of work from the participants, it seemed that none of the abovementioned activities fully fit the participants characterization, understanding or hopes about the concept of work. Most of the participants stated how it would be important for them that work would be something that they enjoy and find interesting, meaningful, or rewarding. As Game developer states:

"It (work) is kind of a mandatory thing, so it is worth fixing up in a way that it's fun" and further continues "... if you are able to do interesting stuff it won't feel like it is work". And likewise, Educational consultant shares:

My work should be something that I would be able to choose, or it would increase the happiness in my life... or that I don't feel like my work somehow restrains me but rather it would do good for me.

NGO worker stated as follows:

... It is not my first choice to join a company that is like 'give me the biggest profit right now!' because anyhow I am pretty interested in how ethical some things are and how society is suffering when everything revolves around money" and same participant concluded that "I don't want that my life will revolve around work. In the end, it's just work, and life should also be something else, like...then you go home and you do whatever you want to do.

The possibility to help others and the possibility to have a positive influence on people's lives were mentioned as essential aspects several times by the participants. Money was

also mentioned to some extent when enquiring about the meaning of work and several times in other parts of the interview.

Work means money to me also in the future. I am not saying that I am materialistic, but I am saying that I respect money and for me it means that I am able to support myself and my family and do things in the future that are above the basic level. But then work also means that I help other people and I do what I enjoy doing and that I like to transcend myself. Maybe that is the point that I am looking for.

(Music producer)

Another occasion where money was mentioned when enquiring about the meaning of work was as follows:

I don't desire any luxuries or expensive cars or expensive apartments but maybe that when I go to the store, I don't have to count whether I have money for a better brand and that I don't have to worry about money in normal situation.

(Educational consultant)

It is a much better idea to go after a job that you enjoy and not that kind of a job that just gives you money from it

(Cultural researcher)

It seemed that money did matter for the participants, but it was only playing a supporting role and other more in-depth issues came up before the topic of money, wealth, and ownership. Two participants described money as a kind of safety net that provides freedom and safety towards preferable futures:

And maybe for success... I feel that if you can be free and do the things you like. Here also comes the issue of financial freedom so you can occasionally travel and maybe have a slightly more expensive hobby. For me success is that you can be 'a lord of your own life.

(Educational consultant)

Money has a big meaning since it enables other things in addition to the mandatory things. And if you are somehow stuck in life, money works as a safety buffer, so you are able to do strategic choices and take risks in life and try to reach for that dream job if you have money in the bank to back you up for six months.

(Game developer)

...money does not matter if the job you do is rewarding and fun and it provides enough support to pay rent and living.

but on another context the same participant mentioned:

with my grades I should be getting a job good enough that I will be able to afford holiday trips.

(Game developer)

There were also some elements in the images of the future that were conflicting with one another when money was in question.

“I don’t want that my life revolves around money because it does nothing for you” and “...it does not matter if you don’t make lots of money from it (work)”. (NGO worker). However, the same participant also explained how there is a risk of getting stuck if one is not accepted to university right after high school.

If I would get that taste of money and the desire to keep on working would increase and then you would no longer want to let go of it”.

Maybe this ‘getting stuck’ and ‘taste of money’ was more like a dystopian image of the future for the participant (NGO worker) where money would basically determine how life should be. Either way, it is no surprise to come across conflicting matters in images of the future and Rubin (2002, 797) confirms how it is possible that personal images of the future contain conflicting elements. These conflicting elements can also be existent in values and worldviews and according to multiple studies even if the images of the future are held by one single actor, they can still be discrepant and irrational as well as include elements which can be incompatible with each other (Rubin 2013, 40).

The participants ideas about money, ownership and wealth seemed to correspond with research conducted for university students in Finland. The research revealed that young people are not really expecting for luxury life with fancy houses and high incomes in the future. Instead, they are hoping for a chance to afford a small apartment and a holiday abroad once a year as well as the opportunity to visit grocery stores without having to count all the pennies. (Oinonen 2018, 1353.) In the interviews of this study house ownership was mentioned by two different participants, although the concept of ownership itself was not separately discussed. NGO worker stated:

one of my dreams is my own apartment...or I am not sure whether it is the ownership that's important, but I would like to have a nice home and that I would enjoy living there.

However, the possibility and reality of owning an apartment in the future must be taken into account since it might be something that young people expect to happen in their future once they reach adulthood. Is it safe to dream about holidays, financially free-grocery shopping and owning an apartment if young people are forced to rely on their parents' money because their own income from paid work is just not enough to support them? (Krappe et al. 2013, 9).

The absence or scarce amount of wealthy and money-ridden images of the future in this study could be considered as positive, since building a future image strongly based on material abundance can be risky. If society, along with education system, parents and guardians delivers a certain message for young people about the possibility to achieve the same level of material possession and material happiness as the previous generations, then there is a serious risk that these material images of the future are built on something that are not on a durable basis and therefore potentially unreachable, which can lead to a feeling of failure (Rubin 2000a, 118) and increase cynicism and mistrust towards society (Tähkäpää 2021b). This applies not only to material images of the future of young people but also to personal images of the future in general such as one's desired job.

It seems that the participants had, at least partly, chosen their future occupational paths according to their own values, wishes, passions and ultimate purposes in life. The same result is also evident in different working life surveys which one of them (Kautiainen & Kokkonen 2014) was examining work-related trends and weak signals. According to them work is 'tuned' to be unique, where possible, and match one's own values. Apparently, the estimate about 'tuning' of work seemed to be correct since organizational psychologists are calling this 'job crafting' and according to extensive research the ability to customize work has a positive effect on job satisfaction, efficiency and the desire to stay put (Grant 2021). Meaning and the role of voluntariness guide choices to an increasing extent (Kautiainen & Kokkonen 2014,10; Halava & Pantzar 2010b, 9) and from this one could draw a conclusion that young people are aiming to be able to define their own goals? For example, one of the characterizations of work that Gorz (1982, 17) offers states how we do all the work towards the goals we have not chosen ourselves. This does not seem to fit the idea of meaning of work with the participants in this study. Also,

the description of work by Arendt (Jousilahti et al. 2017, 7; Stonebridge 2020) of how work is something we need to build and enhance the surrounding society collectively to fit our needs such as building furniture's or cars to share with one another does not coincide with the worldview of the participants. Surely, building and enhancing the surrounding society collectively seemed to play a key role when inquiring about the meaning of work such as "it would be meaningful if I would be able to help other people in some way" (NGO worker) or "work should be something to calm you down at night such as hoping that I have been able to relocate a child" (Child protection worker) or "it would be great if I would be able to create a possibility for people to escape from this reality" (Game developer). When reflecting on these examples, it did not seem that enhancing the surrounding society collectively would signify something like producing physical things to share with one another but instead these examples perhaps narrate about a strong desire to make a deeper impact. Arendt's description of 'action' seems to resonate most strongly in the participants responses when discussing the concept of work. The central issue of 'action' is something we do just for the pure pleasure of action and activity for ourselves and not to exchange our actions to money. (Jousilahti et al. 2017, 7). So, the problem with concept of 'action' is that it is not linked to paid work and all the participants seemed to understand the necessity of money and expected to receive money from their services. One of the participants (Educational consultant) is comparing their work to hobby and states:

it would be worthwhile to receive income from developing work communities than do it as a hobby since that is my passion and I enjoy it so why not get paid for it.

The importance of passion in what we do in our daily lives seem to emerge from the participants narratives. Could we imagine a society as a place where everyone would do something in their daily lives that they have a passion for or even a slight passion? Could we combine pleasure and enhancement of the surrounding society as 'work' in our daily lives in a way so that the welfare state would not deteriorate? This might sound as a utopia, but by making social and structural changes, we will certainly be able to slowly move towards a reality in which the passion and aspirations of young people are taken seriously and into consideration especially in guidance situations and in transition phases. This should be done even if the ideas of young people would be contradicting with old policies and commonly acknowledged ways of thinking or be in some way socially or

structurally unacceptable or abnormal. Unfortunately, according to one of the participants we are very far away from this utopia:

Because I know that there are many people that are just drifting to the idea of ‘okay, I would like to do something, but it’s not reasonable or possible and those other people didn’t’ do it that way either.... and there must be a reason why other people are following this rat race, so I have to follow too’. Because in school, during those 12 years nobody will ever come to you and say, ‘do whatever you want to do’, and that is a fact. Everybody just wants you to go somewhere in the education system...teachers and study advisors and everybody....so because of that I am worried that very many... I have friends that are like ‘I would like to do this’, but they won’t, and they just start studying something so they might be employed more easily in the future or stuff like that.

The statement above seems to associate with the importance, difficulty and rapidity of lifelong decision making among young people and the ostensible freedom of choice. According to German sociologists Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim we are living in the era of individualism which is a social condition. In this individualistic society the ability to make choices is defining the life of individuals unlike previous generations, where their lives could not be influenced the same way. (Roos 1987, 77–86). As Rubin (2002, 816) explains the industrial society with its educational institutions used to offer ready-made, distinct and unquestionable values in which young people were able to lean but now these same values and foundations are outdated. This means that young people are forced to construct their own biography without the standards of previous generations. (Eräsaari 2019, 221, 228; Wehner & Abrahansom 2004, 4).

Many studies also indicate how self-reliance and increased acceptance of personal responsibility are recognized and internalized among young people (Oinonen 2018, 1351, 1356). However, the responsibility of individual decision making seems to be increasing in importance into a point where it is not seen as just a positive condition (Wehner & Abrahansom 2004, 4). This in turn leads to the ostensible idea of freedom of choice which gives the impression that their own strengths and aspirations are regarded without considering the structural differences that are still affecting in our society. This means that young people are encouraged to follow a path that are expected for ‘their kind’ for example. (Brunila 2011, 321). One of the participants mentions:

...From there (previous high school which the participant dropped) I was not able to get any support for my own thinking. It was more like social thinking about how we all kind of want to reach the same goals in a way...so we did

not talk about what individuals would like to do in life and how this could be made possible.

Another participant shares how s(he) feels that they are “beaten into a mold/cast” and further questions him/her their decision about high school. S(he) explains how unmotivated it is when they (high school) “pours information from the bucket to your head” and you can’t miss a single hour because otherwise you’re in trouble and s(he) further questions that why should s(he) study mathematics and physics when s(he) could just sit at home and code and still get the job s(he) desires even without completing high school? Same participant explains about the whole experience of high school:

It left a shitty taste in my mouth and there are several courses that are mandatory and of no use and you need to be able to invest in these subjects constantly. This is difficult, especially for young people, when sometimes there can be mood issues and all sorts of problems that can take you by surprise, and which can complicate life for several months....and after that you have this absurd mountain to climb, and you can just hope that you will be able to reach the proximity of the summit. It is also forbidden to build a staircase to side of the mountain so one could climb your own pace but instead you must join this running competition among other people, and you have no other choice unless you want to be late, then you will be late from army service and then you are late from university and suddenly your life is two years behind, so to speak. They promise that we are allowed to walk our own path but what they really mean is ‘which side of the road you want to walk

Ulrich Beck talks about ‘negative individualization’ which could be connected to the abovementioned statements. ‘Negative individualization’ is first removing the security and protection that is provided by the surrounding environment and different institutions and after this the growing competition, education system, welfare society and other rules of the labour market are then forcing young people to make rapid decisions. (Roos 1987, 77–86.)

When interviewing the participants, it became evident that work played an important role in the lives of these young people. It seemed that they are still compliant to sacrifice themselves for work but only on the condition that their passion, desires, and values have been considered. As Game developer states the occupation s(he) has chosen “requires concentration and commitment but greatly rewards hard work”. When enquiring about success in life from the same participant, it was strongly related to self-development both in hobbies and working life and to develop yourself one “needs to take a knockout to be able to push forward again.” One of the participants (Music producer) feared how s(he) might not have enough time for family due to work and Game developer felt that:

if your career is already so far when you meet somebody then you might only have little time for your family since you have already made the decision to prioritize your career before family.

5.4 About hopes, dreams, delights and fears

The overall hopes and dreams depicted in the images of the future in this study were the kind one might expect from young people. The participants were mainly hoping for friends and family, a safe place to live, own house, good health, possibility to have hobbies and a job that they enjoy and consider important. As delights were mentioned different technological advancements, ability to fulfil oneself, tolerance and equality, the functionality of everyday actions, pets, possibility to travel, development of residential areas and new digital solutions. Also, the overall fears included loss of loved ones, climate change, stock market crash, different political conflicts among which for example the political and social movement Black Lives Matter, overconsumption and nuclear wars. This study aims to concentrate on vocational images of the future of young people and because of the delimitation of the subject global and national images of the future are not taken into closer examination.

The hopes and dreams related to vocational images slightly varied. As one of the few career options that were clearly defined as dreams instead of hopes or wants was the occupation of a professional poker player: “Yeah, it’s kind of a daydream for me” and “if it would happen it would happen by itself and accidentally” (Police/Psychologist). As Alex Fergnani states there are two types of positive thinking about the future: expectations and fantasies. Expectations are the plausible and desired futures in which we try to guess the probability, and which motivates us to reach that expectation. Fantasies on the other hand are the desired futures that we fantasize about without increasing motivation and we are not really concerned whether if it happens or not. (Fergnani 2021). The above-mentioned daydream is a perfect example of a fantasy type of thinking about the future in this specific study. The other introduced examples seemed to fulfil the criterion of expectations.

As hopes and wants the participants mainly hoped how they would be able to “have a job that would not feel like a job” (Police/Psychologist) and “do exactly what you like and enjoy” (Actor/Media worker). The participants also mentioned comfortable work environment (Police/Psychologist & NGO worker), the opportunity for mobile work and the ability to work whenever (Music producer).

Vocational related fears were mainly related to “not being able to fulfil yourself“ (Actor/Media worker), “running the rat race” (Music producer & Game developer) and if “the thing you like turns into work” (Cultural researcher). Also, the fear of getting stuck was mentioned by NGO worker:

then someday I suddenly wake up and I’m a middle-aged bitter woman who didn’t go abroad to study even though I wanted to I don't want that to happen.

Burnouts, overload, or mental health problems were mentioned by five participants. According to Ågren (2019) there have been concerns to be able to combine leisure and work among the people who are studying toward profession. These difficulties in coping with workload were mentioned by some of the participants in this study as a fear already when they were transitioning from secondary school to high school. Also, two of the participants, NGO worker and Game developer, were attending demanding specialized programs and they both stated how it was a good idea to suffer during high school and get used to big workloads already at an early phase and therefore working life would not feel too demanding once you have gotten used to it at an early age. It could be concluded that it is slightly worrying if burnouts, overloads and mental health problems are being mentioned on several occasions by people who have not even entered working life yet. Unfortunately, Haikkola & Myllyniemi (2019, 38) supports this finding in their study by stating that 47% of interviewed young women and 36% of young men feel that their work is emotionally challenging.

One of the fears mentioned by Police/Psychologist was “the inability to help people in need even if you try really hard” and the fear that work might become too personal was mentioned by Child protection worker. Child protection worker also seemed to be worried about the message from the media regarding lifelong learning and how media informs that “one needs to learn new things all the time” and “to succeed in working life you need to be able to acquire knowledge at a lightning speed”. This issue has also been brought up for example in studies by Rätty (2020) and Oinonen (2018). They discuss how there is now more competition as well as the need for continuous performance, self-improvement and self-marketing (Rätty 2020; Oinonen 2018, 1346, 1353). Rubin (2006, 91) seemed to have been worried about this for a while since she adds how the necessity for lifelong learning becomes a problem since then we are doomed to subjugate our lives just for constant learning and this kind of reality is not desirable.

The fear of unemployment was mentioned by Educational consultant and Child protection worker and the “the fear of failure” by Music producer. Educational consultant concludes the following when enquiring about fears related to work:

Well...of course unemployment and stuff like that. And what if you are not able to develop on your own career or that running your own business might be too laborious and takes too much resources from you and it's just too big of a burden. Another thing that frightens is that if you work too much and then suddenly you don't have free time? What if work absorbs you completely? And then.... the unemployment, is kind of big thing....at least the unemployment in one's own sector.

(Educational consultant)

Concerns about job losses in young people's images of the future must be taken seriously. Oinonen (2018, 1353) indicates how steady and permanent jobs are converting into short-term, temporary and project natured assignments and projects.

The fear of livelihood must be also discussed when addressing unemployment. Money related issues seemed to be a secondary value when discussing about the meaning of work with the participants. However, when fear related issues were taken into closer examination with the participants it turned out that livelihood is an obvious concern and the fear of livelihood begun to materialize. It also needs to be taken into consideration that the fear of livelihood and coping financially might differ from questions such as “how important money is for you”. NGO worker stated how “financial concern is more or less always present”. Cultural researcher told how s(he) feared if her own choice of career is not so popular in 2040 and how it might be difficult to find a job from that specific industry and how “then it is hard to get along”. Cultural researcher also shared a slight confusion about the occupation of a visual artist:

I have a lot of friends who want the profession of a visual artist and I have also checked online. If I end up on choosing that career and how it works, and I think it seems a bit awkward.

(Cultural researcher)

Question: “Do you mean that you would not work for any institution that pays your salary?” “Yes, that seems a bit stressful.”

Other participants also shared concerns related to livelihood by revealing that some of the occupations they had considered for themselves at some point might be underpaid or

otherwise risky such as blogger or a youtuber or a professional poker player. In some cases, the uncertainty about livelihood negatively affected the attractiveness of the profession.

Overall, and as already stated, the hopes and dreams depicted in these personal images of the future were modest and based on realistic understanding about one's own personal abilities and possibilities. Also, the fears related to these images were understandable, well justified and current. This is a very positive notion from the data, since Rubin (2013, 42) informs that if the images of the future young people have set for themselves are not based on realistic goals and are lacking understanding about personal abilities making them impossible to achieve, then problems might appear. Research by Rubin from 1998 and 2000 indicated how the personal images of the future of young people are often built on hopes and dreams rather than realistic goals. In addition to this, the research by Rubin indicated how young people did not pay attention that to reach their images of the future, one needs to work for them and know which decisions should be made. (Rubin 2002, 794-795). Another research by Aapola-Kari & Tolonen (2019, 86) indicated how the perceptions of young people about different professions may sometimes be rather superficial and be based on rapidly formed impressions. When the research results by Rubin (1998 & 2000) and Aapola-Kari & Tolonen (2019) are compared to the small sample of this study, it becomes evident that the participants in this study may have been of a special nature? The participants were precise, calculative, and realistic towards their abilities and aspirations and on top of this, most of them even had a contingency plan if their priority plan did not go as planned. They had also carefully considered their career choices from many different perspectives. The participants in this study also did not hesitate when they were asked to share a step-by-step plan after high school and what are the concrete actions one should made to get closer to their goals. On top of this, most of the participants emphasized how much work needs to be done in life and the ones who did not emphasize this, mentioned the fear of burnouts and mental health problems for example, which indicate an understanding about certain unfortunate realities of life.

5.5 Influence of media in decision making

The influence of mass media along with social media seemed have only a minor impact on young people's decision-making and formation process of personal images of the future in this study. The messages obtained from the media might have had a more

significant meaning on the formation process of national and global images of the future. However, this study did not provide an insight for national or global images of the future, but if we look at the research done by Ryota Ono (2003) for example, then it is possible to indicate that media has had a significant relevance specifically on the formation process of national and global images of the future (Ono 2003, 756).

There were several implications about the influence of media when discussing about career related decision making and formation process of vocational images of the future. Although, most of the shared examples about the influence of media were not in a significant position or as primary sources of the formation process of the images, but their influence was mainly giving courage, nurturing fears or questioning young people's decisions. For example, Child protection worker stated that “if you haven't noticed, there is never anything positive on the media about this occupation” but this did not seem to have any effect on the young person's decision to pursue the occupation. Music producer instead mentioned artists in the media who acted as a kind of role model and Game developer also mentioned newspaper headlines about game developers who believed in their own ideas and had eventually succeeded in game development. NGO worker stated how s(he) had sometimes dreamed about living in Stockholm because of the beautiful apartments s(he) sees on Instagram and maybe that is why s(he) has also built her future around that dream. The depth of the impact of these role models, news headlines and pictures seen on Instagram remained unclear due to delimitation of the study but there is a possibility that these might have unconsciously influenced young people's decisions to stand behind their dreams and choices.

A slightly more drastic examples about the influence of media were presented by Cultural researcher and Child protection worker. Cultural researcher informed how his/her second choice for occupation was “a boring office job” and that “sometimes you just have to do something you don't necessarily like and then you try to find something you like where you don't have to sit on the same place several hours a day”. When asking for clarification about the concept and source of this idea the participant stated:

Well, partly because it's on the media and people joke about 'having to do office work for living' and I guess my mom is doing exactly that kind of office job and she does not like it....so I guess it comes from there.

(Cultural researcher)

The reason why this was mentioned as one of the career options by the participant was that “it would be a so called ‘easy option’ ”. It seemed that the participant did not have a clear and worthy idea for a second career option if the initial goal of cultural researcher did not come true and possibly to save resources, the second option was chosen as an easy option which does not require significant planning or calculations to be implemented.

The previous plan for the cultural researcher was to become an English language teacher. As an inspiration for this idea was a memory about their own teacher in personal life. “I had a most wonderful person as a teacher in elementary school and I thought that I will go and pursue the same thing”. At some point s(he) then realized that s(he) is interested also in other things than just language and decided to expand the possibilities by choosing cultural studies instead of an English language.

So I kind of woke up to it...maybe I was limiting my options and my interests too much towards one thing...I realized that cultural research is a much wider entity and that I am able to include language to these studies as well...

(Cultural researcher)

S(he) had then carefully and precisely planned the steps after high school so that s(he) could be able to secure a place at the desired university. The main idea to get in touch with the main interest, Korean culture, was to gain admission as a university exchange student to Korea. S(he) had also already completed three Korean language courses as voluntary studies at the Open University and in addition to this visited Korea with their parents. When enquiring initial source of interest towards Korea and its culture the participant stated how dance videos s(he) saw online had impressed them.

Well, it’s funny because I started to listen Korean music after my friend showed me songs (music videos) and then I just began to listen to them and then I just ended up...I have now studied three courses of Korean language in open university and then we even went to Korea because I wanted to go there.

(Cultural researcher)

In other words, something as surprising and random as video online had sparked such a strong interest towards something so foreign and distant from us Finns as Korean culture. Nevertheless, for this participant it did not matter, and the image of the future had strengthened along the way and that precisely planned ideas and paths had already been constructed and implemented. This is an example of a positive impact of the media on a young person's images of the future.

A less positive example of the impact of media on a young person's image of the future was given by Child protection worker. S(he) explained how her dream for a long-time had been a career as a psychologist. Unfortunately, at some point along the way s(he) had realized barriers which made it difficult to enter university to study psychology such as dyslexia and difficulties in studying mathematics. S(he) stated:

Yeah, I'm not smart and I'm not oriented enough to get a *laudatur* and *magna cum laude* *approbatur* (good enough grades) from matriculation examination in the future. And all the time it feels that all the teachers are like 'your high school certificate determines your whole life'. I know it is not that straightforward but the message we get from school and media is that if you do good on your matriculation examination then your life will be a great success and you will receive rainbows and goblins that are carrying purses full of money.

(Child protection worker)

S(he) further adds:

and every year there is a list which states that 'you need top papers (excellent grades) to get to this school and that school and the articles you read from media every year about the people who get excellent grades...I am just wishing to pass all the examinations and subjects. Also, it feels like every time I hear these stories how you will get to certain places only with top papers, I tend to automatically narrow down quite a lot of professions which are somewhere in the top 30 lists most difficult to get in...'. S(he) later asks that "who goes to the psychologist's office and then suddenly your problems are solved with tertiary functions?"

(Child protection worker)

Apparently, the participant had not discussed about this specific career option with study advisor since s(he) had already made alternative plans to specialize in social work. According to Aapola-Kari & Tolonen (2019, 86) there are some occasions where young people have not checked their perceptions with professionals and therefore, they might exclude possible and even plausible career options based on mere assumptions. It might not be the case in this situation, but it needs to be addressed here, that what kind of messages media and educational institutions are distributing and how significant their impact might be on young people's images of the future. This is again related to the complex problem on distributing realistic, attainable, and positive images of the future. Rubin (2000b, 46) has expressed her concern about this challenge faced by school system, decision makers, educators, and parents already a few decades ago: How can different institutions and individuals support young people in constructing attainable and realistic

images of the future that will work as a model and frame towards a good and happy life? What makes this task particularly challenging is that these images of the future should be achievable at some point in individuals' life (Rubin 2000b, 46) but at the same time it is desirable that young people have positive perception towards future, even though it might not necessarily match with reality (Fergnani 2021). However, in this situation, the system has failed, and the mind of this young person has been filled with fear instead of hope:

Yeah, so I feel that I am pretty sensitive to that kind of intimidation although, of course you can already reason that well, maybe it (getting excellent grades) won't crush the rest of my life now after all? But still, just terrified I look at the matriculation exams and think 'so if I don't get excellent grades, I will never be accepted to any schools and I will just stay here (small town) and I will become that girl who forever lives in daddy's basement.

(Child protection worker)

Ono (2003, 756) also shows concern relating to young people accepting information from media and if they accept and believe all the information and construct their images based on that then this could lead to an image of the future not being the young person's own but somebody's else's.

5.6 Influence of personal experience in decision making

Most of the participants in this study emphasized their own decision-making for the future. The decisions relating to their future occupations have for the most part originated from the young person's own desires, interests, or life experiences and all the participants felt that they were satisfied with the goals they had set for themselves. However, there were small external influences in the background that influenced the formation process of the images of the future. The participants initial sources of ideas are listed below in their own words:

NGO worker:

Um, maybe the idea for united nations have come up because I have godparents that are working for United Nations so I have heard what they do and it sounds interesting. Also, the concept of NGO has been introduced for us in high school and I have become more and more interested about social issues and what is really going on in society...

Music producer:

Well, the idea of record company has come from that I have always been interested in music and loved music and listened a lot of foreign and Finnish music and then just hang out with people that are doing music and it has just grown on me...

Music producer also informed that operating a night club could finance their living as a side business until getting started in the music business.

Game developer:

I have become interested in this through my current studies (ICT high school) and personal experiences, the experiences of friends and then I have been listening to people that have done these jobs already”.

Game developer also mentioned how being surrounded by computers as an early age and hanging out in fathers IT- company has worked as an inspiration and “the gaming world has always been close to my heart”.

Cultural researcher: Initial idea towards Korean culture sparked from seeing a Korean music video.

Police/Psychologist:

Well, in high school we began studying psychology and that has been quite interesting, and I have liked it. The other idea is that I have half-heartedly been thinking about this police profession and how it could also be interesting, and I could also utilize psychology studies in that some way...

and

Police has been...I have always thought that it is a great job but I haven't always thought that I would like to be one.... but when I was little my cousin invited me for a visit in police academy and I went. It was pretty great, and I had a great experience there. He is kind of a role model for me and is very successful and for that reason I have a good image about police profession and maybe for that reason it has stuck to my mind.

Actor/Media worker:

I have always been an extrovert and have been engaged in theatre and I like to be on display in really any way possible whether its singing or dancing or acting. Whenever in elementary school or junior high school there has been an opportunity to host or hold an event then I have been really excited about it. Somehow, I get a really good feeling to be able to arouse different feelings in others or especially arouse good feelings in others.

and Actor/Media worker continues:

I have attended one or two journalism courses in high school, and I have been writing articles and we had an assignment that we had to do journalist work and we interviewed people and I interviewed a roller derby teacher and I thought it's really cool to meet people and find out how they think about different things that are important to them and gain perspective. And probably like Maria Veitola (Famous Finnish journalist) said that in journalism it is important to dare to talk to people who disagree, because otherwise you won't develop your own thinking and won't gain journalistic skills. It has a bit of that stuff that interests me.

Educational consultant:

Well...I think because people are interesting and their behaviour and actions....and also because sometimes I don't always understand....I would like to get more information about human behaviour and I am really interested in learning and that how could we involve people with learning disabilities to educational planning. And maybe most importantly I am interested in influencing and increasing equality so I think that education and development of education would be the typical way to improve equality. It is important for me to pay attention to different people and involve them in planning, development and provision of education.

Child protection worker:

I lived with a mother who had a mental health problem, so I lived in real close contact with child protection and it was just an insanely big support. And I have had unpleasant experiences at the same time, so I want to give that support forward and not make the mistakes I experienced. I might have insight or benefits or other help in this area that could hopefully be utilized.

As it is evident from these narratives, the participants have clearly highlighted their own agency and participation in the formation process of these images. It is not surprising since we live in western late modern society which emphasizes individualistic culture along with individual decision making and the ability to establish one's own choices (Marttinen 2017, 63). In research by Vanhalakka-Ruoho (2010) adolescents were asked to create narratives about decision making and she made similar observations how these adolescents, at times, emphasized self-made decision making and excluded others from this identity formation process. According to her, these neutral type narratives can be seen as indications of improvement of co-operation in young people and individual decision making. (Vanhalakka-Ruoho 2010, 117, 120). It needs to be taken into consideration that what happens if this custom and trend of coping and deciding alone becomes too difficult for young people? Inkinen (2013, 7-8) states how identifying one's own goal, overcoming it, and finding one's own direction was considered as mandatory among Finnish high school students. The ability to make independent decisions and achieving goals is

necessary in life to receive feelings of success but it might lead to a situation where requesting assistance would be prohibited. It seems that in some narratives the participants were reluctant in accepting or even revealing possible influence of external factors which might then indicate to other people that someone else was participating in their decision-making process.

5.7 Influence of others in decision making

There were several different examples in the participants narratives which indicates the influence of other people in decision making process. The overall agency of other people in the formation process of images of the future is clearly visible and the participants in this study have been directed or have been attempted to be directed by other people.

The effect of different institutions and education systems were visible in the participants interviews and it seemed that all the participants were aware of their impact. School staff, including study-advisors were mentioned in the participants narratives. The participants praised their study-advisors although narratives about strong experiences of being assisted were rare in this study since most of the participants had not needed the help of a study-advisor at all. Their own plans were already so far that the study-advisors were not able to offer additional assistance in most cases.

It needs to be addressed here that role of teachers and study-advisors in guiding young people is particularly important and therefore their agency in the formation process of images of the future is vital. Most of the help and guidance received from teachers and study-advisors was generally positive according to the participants.

There were a few occasions where education system, teachers or study-advisors were mentioned in a negative tone. As stated previously, Child protector worker felt that school was responsible for distributing information about the necessity of receiving excellent grades:

Yeah, all the time it feels like that all the teachers say how your high school certificate defines your whole life and that you have to get excellent grades or otherwise your life is over.

(Child protector worker)

Music producer informed how s(he) was thankful that somebody listened to them at school but unfortunately, they did not encourage or give directions on how to reach goals

but instead they introduced 15 different options on what the music producer should seek instead. It seems that the hopes and wants of this young person was not listened to, even though the central discourse of study guidance and guidance theories should emphasize the young person's own free choices (Mietola 2010, 186).

Also, it needs to be addressed here, that the participant was aware of the difficulty of chosen industry and for that reason s(he) had generated even more precise plans or staging posts which were to be carried out while pursuing the main objective. These other plans were supposed to secure his/her financial situation while pursuing towards the main objective. This clearly indicates that the decisions and career aspirations had not been made hasty but instead they were realistic and planned carefully. The participant was also aware of their exceptional and non-mainstream career choice but nevertheless s(he) seemed disappointed at how little support s(he) had received from official and respected institutions such as educational facilities. In 2016 Jatta Herranen and Anne-Mari Souto interviewed young people who had chosen for their educational options something that were deviating from the norm and found that they had been receiving questions, mistrust and negative as well as astonished reactions due to their differing educational choices. According to Herranen and Souto, this is an indication of the dichotomy of our education system, the hierarchy as well as the compartmentalization of individuals, even though the system is seemingly open and it is supposed to be equal for everybody. They continue by pondering that how many young people aged 16 or over have the readiness, courage and other needed resources to make these unusual and socially marginal, but self-meaningful choices? And then what happens if this decision of choosing differently is legitimized by only a small minority? In their view, this poses a particular challenge in the realization of fair opportunity of equality. (Herranen & Souto 2016, 220-221.) However, the issue becomes even more complicated and Rubin & Linturi (2014, 42) inform that apparently teachers and educators are sharing this confusion related to images of the future since they are still rooted in the foundations of industrial society and their teaching is leaning towards the needs and ideals of the old industrial society. So basically, young people are just trying to introduce unfamiliar but functional ways to cope in the society but the guidance from teachers and tutors might be outdated. At the same time the values and meaning of work among young people is slowly transforming and driving these generations even further away from each other.

Rubin (2002, 802) offers some advice by stating that in today's society we do not survive with traditional norms, habits and attitudes anymore and that we need to narrate our reality and future to both ourselves and society with new kind of words and metaphors. In this thesis study, an example of such narration and means of explanation for older generation was shared by Game developer. S(he) had initial plans on starting own streaming for gaming during free-time and playing video games also professionally was mentioned as an object of interest for this participant. S(he) was also taking an active part in TGA (Turku Gaming Academy) which is a service offered by City of Turku and they arrange e-sports activities in Turku. Game developer feels that the mere existence of TGA makes it easier to explain to parents and other people about the emerging gaming industry and such things as why gaming is acceptable, what it actually is and how you can even earn money by playing video games.

So... playing video games is not really the dream of parents like 'so are you now really going to spend your time on that' and my dad.... he has at least some kind of an idea and understanding about these games and such. My mom is trying to understand and she does listen when I explain but they are kind of...well I don't know if it is just generally scary for our parents to think that we would actually start doing something which they do not understand? There are many people that are advised by TGA and how they have been able to bring such reasonable gaming hobby while at the same time they teach for young people as well as their parents that how these things work and how you can earn money by playing games and so on.

(Game developer)

Game developer further continues:

So I think that it is such a great thing that these kind of hobbies are being supported by the city and that if something comes up, then parents can contact the youth counsellor and they are able to explain and encourage parents. So let them speak with parents so we are able to find the solutions and help people understand if somebody just don't get it. This is just so cool. When I was young, we did not have things like this.

(Game developer)

It is important to realize that understanding these new emerging images of the future becomes increasingly important and the confusion among the older generation is not a minor issue. In this specific situation the participant explained how they were unable to explain to the parents about the rules and policies of the new world, but instead they needed the help from an official operator who was credible enough to explain about the

gaming industry and its potential benefits for the young person. The participant also wished that s(he) could have had similar help already when s(he) was younger.

According to Tähkäpää (2021a) images of the future are the key to transform societies and if young people hold strong enough images about their future and the fact that they could be doing something good with this image, then this is a vital step towards a better future. In the previously mentioned case, luckily the young person had received enough support and encouragement for their career in game development but what if it hadn't been? The society could have lost something important since Game developer further informs:

It would be great if I could be able to create a possibility for many people to escape from this world so you wouldn't have to feel sad and you could just forget everything and jump to another world and for example, how virtual reality has been used in pediatric therapy when there have been traumatic experiences. It would be such an absolute goal that if I could produce something that people could enjoy...

(Game developer)

What was surprising when discussing about guidance related issues is that participants attending the same school had completely opposite experiences towards the study guidance they had received. Game developer was praising the study guidance s(he) had received both from study-advisor and from youth counsellor while at the same time Music producer was very disappointed in the overall process of guidance which comes up several times in the participant's interview. It could be stated that both career options are somewhat non-traditional although Kerttuli Upper Secondary School (ICT- programme) offers a direct connection to University of Turku to study game developing.

Very often and generally everywhere people ask 'what do you like to do yourself or what would you want to do' and if you don't know then we will look at suitable direction for you by checking out your hobbies and other points on interests and then direct you to the right places.

(Game developer)

And a completely opposite experience:

I wish somewhere was a study-advisors for me that would be like 'okay, clearly you do not want to go to university, and it is not your place to be so this is what you should do now...' or that somebody would have told me that what I should do if I want to be a music producer. Because I think that the objective of high school is that those study-advisors tell me what to do. Now

I am attending a course called ‘after high school’ but still I haven’t been given any kind of help or keys that what should I do with my interests after high school? Because if you have like a dream of some kind to be an actor or a singer which is not one of these traditional occupations then you will not receive any help from school.

(Music producer):

Music producer further continues:

So basically, they are not introducing any other options to live your life besides attending university. For that reason, I have lost my faith on study counselling.

The confusion around images of the future might have happened with the occupation of music producer. The teachers along with study advisors might have been so alienated and ignorant about the operating models of this specific field that they could not understand how it works and what exactly is the logic of earnings. Study counsellors should be able to offer a clear hint where young people should begin to unravel their dilemma of decision making (Vieno 2013, 9) and aid them in revealing alternative futures.

The other, most likely more significant reason for the poor quality of guidance in this situation was that there was no clear path towards further studies for music producer, unlike for game developer and since the aim of high school education is to smoothly transition students from secondary to higher education (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö 2017, 3) then advising otherwise would have been against the generally accepted protocol of high school study advisors. Music producer shares another example about guidance situation where they had to make this same exercise over and over again about further study options:

I remember how we have now during the last three years done the same exercise five or six times and in this exercise we are supposed to apply for six different university spots and this has just stayed in my mind because I don’t really want to apply to any of them and I have said ‘I have these kind of plans and dreams’ and then s(he) (study-advisor) has just replied that ‘no no no, just apply to wherever you want to apply’ and then in the end, this paper is always blank because I have never wanted to apply to any of those traditional university educations.

(Music producer)

This is an apt example about the seemingly open and free system when in reality:

they promise that we are allowed to walk our own path but what they really mean is ‘which side of the road you want to walk’.

(Game developer)

There were also other participants that shared similar stories relating to educational and occupational choices in which had signs of tension, expectations from others, expectations from society, routine like behaviour and a certain compulsion to continue studies regardless of whether the chosen industry was even something that the individual was interested in:

Well I know for sure that I am not going to settle on some backup alternative and I am terrified by the idea that many students are against the idea of a gap year and then they still don't know what they want to do and then they just began applying to somewhere and then they just study towards a random university degree.

(Educational consultant)

It becomes evident in the following narrative and is also supported by the results of other studies that the education system, friends, family and the media work together in order to convey a strong message for the youth that it is forbidden to rest or that one should not quit something they once initiated. This might mean wasting several years towards a degree which, after all, does not benefit the individual's own goals and desires. (Vieno 2013, 4, 9.) Related to above-mentioned Actor/Media worker states:

For example, when I told my mom that I might take a gap year after finishing high school my mom was like ‘well that now is definitely not ok’ and that I should do something, and I just have to get any kind of education and as fast as possible. And sometimes it feels like one needs to do something just because otherwise it's not.... well if I would now search for myself for a year then it would not be very respected in my mother's view. And sometimes when pondering about a school place, before I didn't know what I wanted, I suddenly got the feeling that which occupation would be valued and respected in the eyes of society and what if I would become like an actor who would not be very mainstream and would do small scale performs in theaters, so how would people see me then? Would they see me like I am not giving enough or that I am not doing anything important? And then I also know that some of my friends really appreciate education, and I don't really know.

(Actor/Media worker)

Herranen & Souto (2016, 203) propose how educational decision making has a cultural and a social tension in it because it involves pressure relating to expectations from society such as questioning and challenging different traditions and norms. These traditions and

established routines along with dichotomy can be deep rooted, harmful and contradictory and therefore mislead the young person (Herranen & Souto 2016, 200-201). All these norms, traditions and routines seem to be no longer universally accepted or functioning for everyone, and the sooner we let go of them, the sooner we can begin to learn the rules of the new world. Acknowledged futurists Anita Rubin (2012) Mei Mei Song (2012) and Perttu Pölönen (2020b) are all sharing their concerns about novel and yet unwritten rules of late modern society. It seems that the common rules, orders and paths of life in this late modern society have not yet been written, decided, or even fully emerged (Song 2012). This problem is further widening the gap of procedures and worldviews between young and the old. Furthermore, this creates uncertainty and confusion among young people when trying to navigate into the futures (Rubin 2012, 792).

The effect of close environment in the formation process of images of the futures seemed to be dominant and their effect as well as purpose was discussed with the participants. The tone, purpose and the style of the message which were distributed for these young people varied radically. Some of the messages were clear and direct when some of them were instructional and gentle and were transmitted moderately and with understanding. It needs to be addressed here that most of the participants were exceptionally strong-minded to fight against the messages and beliefs that did not serve their own aspirations and goals. There were negatively as well as positively armed messages and they were transmitted from parents, teachers, friends, aunts, uncles and other people having a relationship with the participant. Most importantly, none of the participants had fully abandon their aspirations towards the future.

NGO worker seemed to have gained the idea for occupation from godparents who were both working for United Nations. In addition to this, social issues had begun to interest them, and the concept of NGO's were mentioned in high school lessons and this increased the interest further. NGO worker had already made precise plans on how to acquire suitable education and the plan also involved moving abroad. The influence of the godparents seemed to be significant as the conversations with them also came up in other phases of the interview, such as 'which languages to start learning' and 'when to begin the application process'. Although, at some point the participant stated that:

Well, the United Nations is also kind of like 'at the thought level' and I haven't really familiarized myself that what kind of job opportunities they really have and what do they actually do?

(NGO worker)

This clearly indicates the power of close circle and how young people are prone to receive information from one's close circle. Lahtinen (2019, 80) and Aapola-Kari & Tolonen (2019, 86) highlights the important role of parents and relatives when considering the young people's career choices especially if someone close to them is a role model for that specific profession. The director of the Youth Research Society Leena Suurpää also adds how young people easily embrace stereotypes and pre-made truths' since they do not have their own contact or experience about things (Vilpponen 2016). Another such example about the impact of role models from the interviews was from Police/Psychologist. The idea for their chosen occupation had initially sparked as a young child when s(he) had visited their cousin, considered as a role model, in the police academy. This had then impressed the young child and apparently the image of the future was still valid, alive and viable. Some images of the future were strong but there were also narratives where the image of the future seemed weak and thus not ready to be defended by the owner of the image. For example, NGO worker also mentioned their interest towards interior design which s(he) enjoyed and had received more inspiration for the idea from social media.

Question: "So have you ever thought that interior design might be somehow be involved in your career?"

Well I think that I might have at some point? I have been talking about it with my sister and it might be that this occupation is challenging like are you sure that you are going to be able to live with that? As fun as it might be it might not work out....and that is why it has kind of remained as a hobby.

(NGO worker)

Apparently and if understood correctly, in this specific situation it seems that a vague preconceived notion of the interior designer's livelihood and a brief discussion with somebody from the close environment had led to this interest being removed from the career options. It is possible that young people's single assumptions about different professions might lead to a total exclusion of the career option (Lahtinen 2019, 86).

People from the close environment questioned the preferences and options participants had made in different ways and therefore challenged and tested the images of the future young people had. This is no news and according to Young et al. (2006, 2) joint discussions between adolescents and their parents included both supporting and

challenging elements in their research. For example, Cultural researcher mentioned their parents questioning and mistrust relating to their options:

Question: “In what ways they question? Are they asking things such as ‘are you now sure that this is a good idea? In what ways this questioning comes up?”

Well I have heard that question many, many times especially after I took interest in Korea....or then they might ask ‘Are you now sure that this is the right option and is this the right thing you want to do for sure?’

(Cultural researcher)

Question: “Why do you think that is?”

Well, if my interests are totally opposite from my parents interests then I guess it is just a normal reaction to question the things that you are not interested in yourself and also like ‘are you going to manage that’ and they want you to....maybe because it is about their own child then they just want to make sure that it is the right decision.

(Cultural researcher)

Similar notion relating to questioning by parents was made by Game developer who wondered that “...well I don’t know if it is just generally scary for our parents to think that we would actually start doing something which they do not know too much about?”. Being afraid of the unknown is sensible and it has been stated for example by Bertaux & Thompson (1997, 1) how it is characteristic for our culture that older generations are seeking to transfer their material and immaterial values to younger generations and in addition to this we tend to imagine the future by relying on remembering the past (Zheng et. al 2014, 2). Therefore, our parents rely heavily on the past and build ideas for the future based on things that are familiar and have worked in the past bringing them the feeling of safety and security. Therefore, the older generations might find it difficult to consent if there are no indications in their own past about the possibility to make a living by playing video games, producing music or by making YouTube videos.

Also, it could be argued that young people are not as history oriented as their parents are since they do not have the long-life experience and temporally strong connection to the past. Despite this, there were also connections to the past in the participants narratives and therefore the past had both a significant and interesting impact on young people’s vocational images of the future. It needs to be addressed here that despite the disadvantages of remembering the past, it is still exceptionally effective tool for

imagining valid and functional futures. For example, Game developer informed how spending time as a child in fathers computer company had a big role in their career development. Police/psychologist also referred to their early youth visit to the police academy:

It was pretty great, and I had a great experience there. He is kind of a role model for me and is very successful. And for that reason, I have a good image about police profession and maybe for that reason it has stuck to my mind.

(Police/Psychologist)

5.8 Identifying and fighting against used futures

As stated before, remembering the past seems to be significantly affecting the personal images of the future. We like to lean on to the past although we know that sometimes it would be good to let go of it but letting go of the past is difficult since it seems that we automatically or unconsciously imagine the future with the help of the past. If we are given a task to imagine a future that is totally different than the past existing in our memory, then this task would prove to be difficult (Zheng 2014, 1). If old habits, behaviours and operating models keep sticking with us then when and how do we know if this ‘oldness’ becomes outdated and defunct?

Sohail Inayatullah talks about the concept of used futures. These used futures are imitating what everyone else is doing and they consist of things that we do just because we have always done so. Used futures do not usually fit into the list of preferred futures, and they are preventing us from imagining more novel and opportune futures. (Leponiemi et al. 2014, 6). These used futures can be purchased, accepted, or borrowed from others even unconsciously and therefore they might be preferred futures of someone else (Inayatullah 1998, 388; Inayatullah 2008, 5).

In this study it was possible to detect parts, fragments, or glimpses of used futures. But it seemed that the participants were mentally strong enough and fully aware of the expectations, old habits and rules as well as outdated operating models that they refused to accept these used futures. As a perfect example of a close triggered used future in the narratives of this study was revealed by Music producer. S(he) informed that as a child their initial plan was to become a doctor.

Question: “So where did this idea of a doctor come up?”

Well maybe it has been the need to help other people but there has also been pressure from the family. I have even been given a name after a doctor and for that reason the doctors occupation has been all the time like 'it is such a great occupation', and 'you will become a great doctor' and even myself I have also been like yeah, I am going to become a great doctor.

(Music producer)

Apparently, at some point the interest in the medical industry declined and was replaced by other interests such as music. Music producer further explains:

But I have always had this problem that my own options have never been 'normal' options but instead they have all been kind of crazy. Yes, as a child I did want to become a doctor....or I have always wanted to help other people so at one point I wanted to be a volunteer worker and then I just wanted to be a rich person so I could really help out poor people. I think that the idea of becoming rich is still there and if I ever become one, I want to give back (to society).

(Music producer)

Well definitely there is a norm in the society that everybody is supposed to attend school until they are adults and study towards a 'normal' occupation. Especially in Finnish society people do not appreciate you if you don't study. And I am now talking about so called real occupations such as a teacher or if you go to a vocational school then a baker or a waiter or something that you can say that you have 'a real job'. And of course, from home I have received a lot of pressure and I am still receiving a lot of pressure to apply for university and do this and do that and I am sure that others are receiving the pressure just as I am. I am also receiving pressure from school that I have to progress on my studies all the time...

(Music producer)

And because I have....this is kind of personal but it relates to this....so every time I have been talking something about my dreams or what they are then they have been just ignored and people have been like 'no no no, you will become this and this' and then if someday I reach my dreams and will succeed then that would be great. I would be able to show them.

(Music producer)

If people at home are expecting from me to become a doctor or a teacher, then....like I said I am a 'people pleaser' so of course I get bad conscience if I don't reach the things that my parents and family are hoping for me to reach. So kind of... if I am able to reach something that I want for myself and succeed then I am able to show my family that I have succeeded and I am not a loser....so basically for me...this is success.

(Music producer)

In this narrative we are able to witness how a socially accepted, respected and traditional, ready-made future as a doctor was served on a golden platter to the participant by somebody else. Expectations and pressure related to future had also been planted already ahead of time by somebody and without asking for permission from the participant. When it was time to transition to junior high school and then high school, then these same pressures, norms and expectations along with pre-arrangements emerged. But only this time they were presented by a respected educational institution. The participant received unnecessary pressure from that institution and refused to imitate what everyone else was doing and instead of picking a used option s(he) executed the hard work of imagining more novel, opportune, and preferable futures. Despite the hard work of planning and envisioning, the questioning and opposition continues both at home and school also in the form of embarrassing blank university applications. All this pressure is there just because the plans and aspirations of a young person are to become a music producer and a night club entrepreneur instead of something traditional and more “acceptable”. On top of this, the participant experiences guilt for not meeting the wishes and expectations set by the parents. It has been evidenced that some parents have issues with adolescent independence (Young et al. 2006, 17) and this may lead to undesirable situations and growing confrontation between the parent and young people if common ground is nowhere to be found. Also, Vanhalakka-Ruoho (2010 116-117, 120) introduced so called ‘conflict narratives’ between the parents and adolescents concerning education and occupational decisions and these narratives portrayed different conflicts, disagreements, pressure and discordant decision-making situations. In this specific situation the discordant decision-making was absent, and pressure just seemed to strengthen the participants aspirations and make the image of the future even more impermeable.

How easy it would have been to just give up and purchase a ready-made used future already a long time ago? There were so many opportunities to give up and decide to apply for medical school and just accept the future of others and all the consequences that come with that decision. If this would have happened already a while ago then the participant would be spared from all the explanations to friends, family, or study-advisors about why s(he) did not just pursue a ‘real job’. Apparently, the transformation is slow since youth researcher Helena Helve (1987, 149) demonstrated already 35 years ago that young people do not want to adopt a ready-made interpretation of the world from their parents but instead, they want to build their own worldviews and plans. In addition to this,

Giddens (1991, 84) also highlights how it is important for the individual to plan and decide on their own actions.

Pressure from the society as well as the expectations from the close environment should be emphasized in societal discussions as they emerged in the interviews several times. Normal conversations in everyday situations might seem as insignificant but in reality, they might hold a notable and irreversible effect in the life of young people. As mentioned earlier Leena Suurpää stated that young people are willing to absorb different pre-made truths since they don't have the experience or the knowledge (Vilpponen 2016).

...So you know when you talk about the future with slightly older people and then they go like 'well you are such a smart girl, so why don't you study to become a doctor or a lawyer? They get good money'. And if I mention that I am interested in influencing then they go 'well then apply to become a politician or even a minister.... you would be good at that, and they get loads of money'. So....it is hard to explain but...these are all commonly respected professions which are hard to obtain...so that is kind of a social thing that there are some professions that get more respect than others? But luckily, I believe that we are getting rid of that once when people realize that we also need other people in the world than just doctors and lawyers to keep this world rolling.

(Educational consultant)

Question: "Do you remember who said that?"

Educational consultant: "Older relatives mainly. Those aunts and aunties you don't see that often."

Once again, the appreciation and respect towards traditional occupations resurfaces. Is it that the career of educational consultant would not be as respected in the eyes of uncles and aunts? How would they then react, if the participant would explain that the idea of educational consultant in this case would be to 'improve the interaction of different work communities? Would they understand the importance of such practice if they did not have experiences of it in the past? How would their negative (verbal or non-verbal) reaction then affect the one holding the image of the future? If the formation process of images of the future is under continuous transformation and re-organization (Rubin & Linturi 2001, 270) then it might be concluded that such light conversations might, in some situations, have the potential to change a young person's opinions and direction toward the futures. As Richard Eckersley states, without a clear and proper guidance and attractive alternative futures, young people become vulnerable (Eckersley 2002, 5) and especially during these

vulnerable moments they might be inclined to adopt a future that is not necessarily on the list of their preferred futures. Linked to this context and to used futures, Child protection worker mentions:

My dad is an engineer and the whole extended family is full of engineers, all really academic. My dad and his brothers all received excellent grades and when we talked, they said ‘are you going to apply to Jämsä high school or Jyväskylä high school?’ I was instructed at home that if you don’t go to high school then you won’t get anywhere in life. So, for me, high school was automatic. I did not even think about it.

(Child protection worker)

As in this narrative but almost in all other narratives seemed to regard high school as somehow predetermined and unquestionable. Most participants felt that it was the best option for them but there were also signs of criticism and questioning and whether it was worth spending time on high school rather than trying to spend time on own projects and therefore reach one’s dreams sooner.

“I had this preconception about vocational school” (NGO worker)

“I had no choices” (Child protection worker)

“I had no option to do anything else than high school. Afterwards I have been thinking that I had to push my dreams aside because of high school” (Music producer)

“Study-advisors always urged us to go to high school” (Music producer)

I would have so much other stuff to do and in IT industry, you don’t always need the certificates if you have the know how so it is really worth reading math and physics because if I just code every day, then I will get a job anyway

(Game developer)

“Going to high school is self-evident. I did not even think about going to vocational school” (Police/Psychologist)

“I did not know anything else, so high school it was” (Actor/Media worker)

Vieno (2013, 5) affirms that when picking between vocational education and high school the vocational education did not even seem like a viable option and the opinion of parents was significant. It seems that the concept of high school recalls as what Anita Rubin terms as “official truths of the future”. These are images of the future that are never fully

revealed and therefore are never questioned, analysed or discussed. These images exist as a presumption and are automatically accepted or adopted as such (Rubin 2013, 41).

Child protection worker continues:

I have now just somehow end up to the conclusion that I will make my own decisions even if dad would say that social work sucks and that I should study math and programming if I want to succeed in life...then I just plug my ears with my hands and start walking my own direction or at least try....

The fact that the young person has attractive alternative futures and the resources to defend their image of the futures might be a significant factor when fighting against used futures. Not all young people are in the same situation. Research by Vanhalakka-Ruoho (2010) revealed narratives about 'repressed decision making' which implies to life decisions strictly controlled by other people. As an example of repressed decision making, a comprehensive student was inquired about his further education and occupation decisions, to which he responded aptly: "what decisions? I decided nothing, my mother did." Vanhalakka-Ruoho (2010, 117). Raila Pirinen (2013) shares another such example on her interview how the interests of a young person were totally ignored and bypassed by her parents. The young person then decided to abandon her own interests and based her educational choices on the hopes and expectations of others and in this situation, her parents (Pirinen 2013, 4).

The fundamental principle is that when parents seek to influence the decisions and opinions of their children their intentions are almost always aimed at benefitting the child (Whiston & Keller 2004, 524). They want their children to succeed in life, so they urge their children to choose subjects and seek education they are expected to benefit from in the future and the youth mainly realizes and understands that their parents' intentions are good (Pirinen 2013, 1). Although situations might occur where parents want to avoid a decline in their family status and encourage their offspring to pursue life which would lead to same or higher status (Rytkönen 2015, 113). This would most probably happen at the expense of the child if their wishes, desires or dreams weren't included in this future.

Yeah, and my dad is really materialistic and money-centric person so of course....jobs at social sector are definitely not the well-paid. And of course, programming (fathers' occupation) is a secure choice as an industry in the future, that's almost 100% certain. I am sure his intentions are good that 'with this kind of job you will get good money, so you are able to live'. But it is not

for me. It is not my mission so I will now just accept that I will go my own path and try so hopefully it will be ok.

(Child protection worker)

This narrative included various interesting confluences to the formation process of images of the future as well as the concept of used futures. Luckily, in this case again, the used future was bypassed and own route to futures was already found. As Rubin (2002, 797) informs the images of the future can be defended in several ways and it seems that in this case the image of the future was strong enough due to the participants experiences in the youth and was therefore more easily defensible. Nonetheless, the pressure and expectations from father had already affected since Child protection worker had begun to study advanced mathematics in high school at the father's request. This was then later discontinued which was not mentioned to dad.

And immediately after I informed my study advisor that I will drop it I got the feeling of freedom that I don't have to anymore bang my head to the wall for not understanding X or Y. Best decision ever. I still haven't told him, but he can read it out of my certificate then....

(Child protection worker)

The pressure and expectations had also led the same participant to question their own goals and whether they were ambitious enough in the eyes of other people and the surrounding society.

Question: "Do you feel that your own expectations and wishes about the future are different from you parents' expectations?"

Somehow....sometimes...I dont know. Many people have, I don't like to say megalomaniac because it may seem like unrealistic, but they have somehow really colorful and fancy dreams like 'I want to do a number one song to Spotify' or 'I want to be an executive of a company' or have a fucking cool mercedes. And myself I am like 'I would be happy in some nice place, and I would have a cat and a job that would not be awful, and it would be of some benefit to the universe and then I would be happy. So, every now and then I am like 'should I come up with something huge and remarkable and stuff'. So, like yeah, I don't know if I should have better dreams? Maybe it is stupid to say this since it is really valid to be happy, but should I try to reach for something bigger and better?

(Child protection worker)

The tone and style of the involvement of the past in the formation process of some of these images of the future varied. The core narratives in the following stories were related to the experiences of the participants parents and then how the parents' experiences reflected to the young causing a powerful reaction. In other words, the participants were able to identify used futures from their parents' past.

Well I do want to make a promise to myself that when I have become an adult, I want to do the things in my life that I enjoy. And I can tell by my parents that my mom did something what she did not like for 20 years and then she finally found a new job. And my dad has always been working as a blue-collar worker which is not really his passion but just a job and I would like that my ordinary life would be somehow enjoyable.

(Actor/Media worker)

And later s(he) continues:

my dad always says that he wishes that he would have had the option to do what he wants and study something he likes. He feels like he is somehow stuck in life. This has had an influence on me, and he has encouraged me to do what I want and financed my studies so that I have been able to do whatever I want. So basically, my parents influence on me has been that I will try to avoid these kinds of things.

(Actor/Media worker)

Well I have to say it has had an influence on me (the impact of parents career choice) because my mom has been studying in University for like five to six years and she is now a child inspector in family law unit and is doing the eight-to-four thing and has a low wage so that for me has been kind of a motivator for not to join the rat race.

(Music producer)

Well, I have talked with both of them, so one of them did not get accepted to the school that they wanted and then ended up going to their backup option. And then I asked like 'why didn't you take a gap year and applied again' and they replied that 'during those times people just didn't have those'. The other one said how they were too scared to apply to the school of their dreams because they accepted so few people or it was so difficult to get in. So maybe they have just encouraged me even more to follow my dreams and I know that if I am not accepted the first time I will surely apply again.

(Educational consultant)

These narratives clearly indicated how the participants were able to identify and process other people's used futures from the past and this might have helped them on imagining more preferable futures if they knew better that what kind of futures should be avoided.

As Inayatullah enquires: “What is that one thing that you are doing, and it doesn’t work, and you just keep on doing it? What is it? Because that is the used future. Get rid of it!” (Next conference 2020). These narratives also indicate about a slight shift in the mindset of both parents and the youth since a cross-cultural study by Kasurinen (1996 241, 245) revealed that the plans of young people appeared to repeat the life of their parents. Luckily for now, there are clear indications that families seem to avoid putting pressure on their children because of personal experiences of pressure in their own youth (Silvonon et al. (2018, 26).

Well, we actually had a conversation with my mom about this (pressure) and we thought about if she has...or she brought it up that if she has put too much pressure on me to pursue same industry where she is at. So, I would say that...we haven’t had anything like that but it’s more like when you live in an environment where we talk about work a lot, then it somehow affects you even if you wouldn’t acknowledge that. But I would say that it hasn’t, and I haven’t been pressured to continue doing the same work they do...

(Cultural researcher)

However, encouragement and understanding from the close environment did not emerge in all the interviews, but instead there were still clear narratives about questioning and attempting to influence the decision making of the participants. Narratives about discouraging appeared as well but they emerged mostly from somewhere else than parents such as friends or acquaintances and appeared in the form of laughing behind one’s back for example.

Young et al. (2006, 16) are exemplifying in their research that career exploration and decision making is a complex issue and linked to communication and relationship between the parents and adolescents. Occasionally the decision-making process becomes indistinct and even if parents are not meant to influence young people’s decision-making, this may still be the case and it can happen unnoticed and unconsciously. Such example of hidden parental recognition was demonstrated in the narrative by Police/Psychologist despite the fact that one's own decision-making was emphasized separately.

Well, the police thing was kind of... they did not prohibit me for doing it but they were like ‘think one more time’. They told me that I would be a good cop and do well but then they thought that it can be kind of harsh and how is that going to affect me. They just want to make sure that I will pick the one that I am interested in and really want to do it. But then when I said I would study to be a psychologist then that got a lot of encouragement from them. They thought it was a really good idea.

Question: “Then how do you think that they would react to the idea of professional poker player?”

Well they wouldn't be that excited about that. It's not that stable and certain. And it's kind of gambling so...If my parents would choose, Poker player would probably be the last one on the list out of these three options. And understandable, that is why its third on my own list also.

(Police/Psychologist)

Even if the option of professional poker player was stated as a 'kind of a daydream' by the participant, it was still not discussed or even presented to parents. Also, it was not discussed with the cousins either who were in the close circle and had played poker for their profession. In this case, was the participant reluctant to share their thoughts in the fear that this image of the future, regardless it was labelled as a daydream, would have been subdued or strongly disputed? This is understandable and as it has been stated by a psychologists Hal & Sidra Stone that we have formed multiple dominant personalities and we tend to exploit these personalities to protect us. As society requires us to 'perform' and 'make a living' these dominant personalities are mainly exploited when dealing with other people's expectations and demands to 'make it in the world'. Some of these personalities wants us to be financially secure and well fed and if dominant self takes over it can protect us but at the same time it may restrict our growth and creativity. (Andrews 1998, 3.)

6 Discussion

6.1 Images of the future of young people

A futurist, Wendy Schultz, recommends us to challenge and expand the prevailing images of the future, reflect on our own values and defend our futures from colonization (Sitrafund 2018). The images of the future should be optimistic, positive, realistic (Rubin 2004) and worth pursuing for (Rubin 2002, 794) but at the same time not too difficult to reach (Rubin 2000a, 118).

Young people living in late modernity along with their images of the future seem vulnerable to the various messages coming from different sources. The decision making and the process of envisioning alternative futures are still affected by prevailing power structures as well as old rules and norms, which can be deep-rooted and hidden but still influential, even unconsciously.

When examining the images of the future of young people in this study, it became evident that the participants believed in themselves and their images were realistic, achievable and contained healthy values. In addition to this, they highlighted their own agency in decision making yet they were aware and cautious of external influences. Participants were exposed to pressure and in some cases they showed vulnerability. It also became evident that the generation gap was affecting the lives of these young people and occasionally confused them when they were trying to decide what was acceptable, respectable or worth reaching. However, there are indications in the interviews of this study that the mutual understanding between young and the old might be slowly improving which will certainly improve the lives of young people and help them to refuse to adopt ready-made futures.

The participants in this study appeared to be fairly independent and mature and their occupational decision making seemed to be driven by greater powers in life, such as helping others, overall well-being and passion. They were alert enough to recognize most of the external expectations and pressure targeted at them. They mainly seem to ignore the messages that seek to colonize their future and did not serve their own desires and goals or were contradicting their values.

However, the interviews also revealed indications of young people's sensitivity and natural tendency to adapt to the advice and encouragement coming from outside, as well as to the prevailing and resounding thought patterns in the surrounding societal structures. It can often be challenging to go your own way, not to please the will of others and seek for suitable personal guidance. Sometimes it can be easier to just surrender to one's 'destiny' and start pursuing an occupation that is more acceptable and understandable in the eyes of society. What if the music producer had decided, or will later decide to please their parents and finally pursue a career as a doctor? Then, what would happen after gaining admission to medical school and then slowly transitioning to work? Would this used future then deconstruct at some point and turn into something suitable, natural and preferred after time passes? One cannot know for certain and therefore the risks involved in the important decision-making process needs to be addressed.

If the initial wishes and aspirations of young people are ignored, it may lead to the individual ending up ruminating and regretting their choices which could then have a significant impact on an individual's quality of life. Unfortunately, the evaluation of future desirability can only be done afterwards (Mannermaa 2004, 33) and since we cannot really know anything certain about the future, it would be beneficial to dig up and examine the values depicted in our images of the future. The values that are visible and exposed in these images could work as an indicator in the present and which we can utilize when searching for the alternative futures. After all, the images of the future are the only thing about the future that exists at some level in the present time. However, it needs to be underlined here that searching for the images of the future can be difficult since they often remain hidden and unprocessed and as they deal with power, they are also effective by nature (Rubin 2013, 41).

Finnish social system allows us to enjoy a wide range of privileges and services which in turn enables re-educations and exchanging occupations, for example. Yet, the support of system alone may not be enough to make such fundamental changes in one's life, but it may also require the support from partner, family and parents. Therefore, the support and aid of close environment in young people's transition phases and in finding alternative paths through life is fundamental.

Individuals can possess many different images of the future at the same time which can be contradicting with each other (Rubin 2013, 40) and these images can also be

continuously invented from nothing (Rubin 2002, 797). It could be useful for young people to learn about the used futures and acquire the ability to detect them specifically when they do not fit into their list of preferred futures. Ono (2003, 756) recalls the responsibility of teachers and educators about the importance of teaching critical thinking skills to young people so that they can use their own knowledge when building images of the future. Study advisors are supposed to provide useful guidance for the young but only to the extent where it is appropriate and that they do not accidentally guide the young person too much or feed them their own opinions or preferences. Anybody offering guidance along parents should also be aware of those policymakers and individuals that are having power over people and institutions (Rubin 2013, 40-41) and consider for example the effect of global technology companies and their attempts to colonize our future narratives (Ikäheimo 2018). These different actors and actions might influence the opinions and worldviews of guidance providers who might unconsciously forward these opinions to young people and thus continue to maintain the prevailing power structures, assumptions, disciplines and rules of the old world.

As stated previously, work itself seems to maintain its importance in our lives. Organizational psychologist Adam Grant (2021) affirms how “work isn’t just our livelihood. It can be a source of structure, belonging and meaning in our lives”. Therefore, its’ significance and role in our lives should be explored in more detail and especially when pondering between important early phase decisions affecting our long-term future. This is where the courage to challenge the used future becomes vital.

How often do we adopt the future of others as ours? How self-regulated the decisions we make are in reality? Are we in charge of our own futures or is somebody or something else guiding us unconsciously and feeding us the narrative of the old world?

“Emergence only happens when you are open to the possible, and when you are ready to let go of the past.” (Conway 2013)

6.2 Ideas for further research

The limitations of this study motivate to plan further research around the images of the future of young people. The main limitation of this study lies with the low number of participants in the interviews which has likely affected the diversity of the views and images of the future included in the study. This could be also the reason behind the

absence of participants with less precise plans for the future. The inexperience of the researcher certainly also contributed to the construction of challenging interview situations, which, however, became more fluid as the research progressed.

Research situations were conducted in accordance with the principles of safer spaces. Balancing between the aim of getting into deep conversations and being cautious of overly personal or sensitive questions was a challenge of its own in each individual interview but an instructive experience which could be further developed in future research. Ethical considerations of the research and the researcher's methods are changing and modifying over time and there is certainly much room for improvement and development in general, especially in studies involving young people.

From this conducted thesis study emerges ideas for further research that can include extensive quantitative online survey for senior high school students and based on that survey, about 20-30 interviewees can be selected for an additional in-depth interview. This way it would be possible to acquire a wider spectrum of different participants and try to make as many different voices heard as possible. A longitudinal study can also be highly informative where the same participants would be interviewed again after 10 to 15 years when they have reached the age of 28 to 33. This would add considerably more depth to the research. The main focus of such a research could be on the supportive guidance of young people in achieving their aspirations and expectations regarding their future career plans. In order to reveal more in-depth information from the images of the future, Causal Layered analysis can also be utilized along with analyzing the constructs of colonized future, empty future, silent future, obvious future, yesterday's future and rhetoric future.

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Appendix

The questionnaire frame and instructions translated from Finnish to English.

Interview frame and instructions 7.1.2020

Before the interview:

- Remember a short introduction for the interviewees
- Explain the meaning of the research
- Explain confidentiality, anonymity & safer space policy. Ensure permission for recording and request permission to use any live excerpts.

Orientation towards the future and opening questions:

- Please tell your name, age and high-school you are currently in
- Shortly explain your family background and where do you live
- Do you ever think about the future? How often? If you do think about the future, how far to the future your thoughts are concentrated? (Day, weeks, months, years, 5 yr., 10 yr., 30 yr. etc.)
- Shortly: What kind of thoughts the word 'future' brings in mind?
- Do you feel that Covid-19 has affected your plans about the future? How?

Your probable future in 2040:

1. Imagine that you are waking up in your bed on a normal weekday in the year 2040. You are now 38 or 39 years old.

- What do you see from the window? (*People, vehicles etc.*)
- Where do you live?
- Form of housing?
- Are you living near your parents or brothers, sisters, grandparents?
- How are you living with? Spouse? Kids?
- Where do you work? Are you traveling to work? How?
- Do you like your job(s)?
- Are you happy with our overall life? Why? Why not?
- What kind of fears you might have in your life at this point?
- What kind of joys or hopes you have in your life?

- What kind of hopes, dreams or expectations you might have in your life at this point?
- Is there something else in your life that should be mentioned at this point?

2. What kind of things might have affected your thoughts relating to your occupational images of the future? How do think your thoughts/images have emerged in the first place? Who or what might have affected them?

If unable to answer, clarify:

Do you remember that any of the following sources would have helped you in some way to imagine your future occupation? Where could have these images come from?

- **Media.** Something in the media that stuck in your mind (TV, radio, magazines, internet etc.)
- **People.** Any advice from people around you? Any conversations? (Parents, grandparents, relatives, friends, acquaintances, teachers, study advisors etc.)
- **Personal experience:** Personal desires in your life and previous experiences in your life that might have affected your thoughts

3. Can you say in more detail what kind of inspiration, guidance, message, or teaching you have received from one of these sources?

4. What about other things in the image? Do you think any of the following sources have helped you imagine your future image?

If unable to answer, clarify:

- **Media**

- **People**

- **Personal experience**

5. Do you have any kind of dreams? What are they? Do you think you will reach them at some point in your life?

Theme # 1: Path to high school

6. Could you explain how you ended up as a high school student? What steps or choices you have gone through?

7. Did you have other options besides high school? Vocational school?

8. Has other members of your family graduated from high school or are you the first one?

9. What kind of thoughts and feelings about going to high school invoke in you? Has studying in high school come natural to you and have you liked it?

Theme # 2 - Preliminary plans after high school

10. Could you explain what kind of preliminary plans you might have (if any) after you have graduated from high school regarding further studies or working life?

11. Thinking about your current plans and situation, where / in what field are you more likely to work in 2040?

If cannot answer to previous: Do you have any kind of thoughts or ideas about what job or field you might be working on in the future?

12. Is it easy for you to build plans for the future? Why? Why not?

Theme # 3: Meaning of work and values

13. What kind of expectations do you have related to work?

14. What kind of meaning does work have in your life?

15. What kind of fears or hopes do you have regarding work?

16. Which things are important for you in your future work?

If unable to answer, clarify:

salary, meaningfulness, interesting work tasks etc.

17. What does success in life mean to you? How do you experience success in life? What does the word 'success' bring to your mind? Is success only related to work or is it related to other areas of life?

18. How do you experience the future of work and any possible changes associated with it? You mentioned the career of x and y. How do you think these occupations might change in the future?

19. Have you ever had a dream profession? Have you had to give it up? Why?

20. What is your dream job for the future?

Theme # 4: Guidance

21. Do you feel that you have received enough guidance or support on study / career choices?

- what kind of guidance have you received?

22. Do you feel that you have too many or too few choices regarding your study / career options?

23. What kind of sources of information influenced your decisions regarding your study or career choices? How?

If unable to answer, clarify:

- Study advisors
- Teachers
- Parents
- Grandparents

- Relatives
- Friends and acquaintances
- Media (TV, radio, magazines, internet)
- Educational or similar websites or other brochures
- Education fairs
- Previous life experience
- someone/something else, what, who, how?

24. Do you feel that your own hopes and desires have been listened when regarding your study / career choice issues?

25. Have you made study / career choice decisions according to your own wishes and desires?

26. Have you been encouraged to act according to your own preferences?

27. Have your plans or career dreams ever been underestimated or questioned by something or someone?

28. Do you think the career path of your parents (or someone close to you) have influenced your own choices?

29. Do you think your parents expect you to follow the same routes as they have traveled career wise?

31. Do your views about your future aspirations differ with those close to you (family, relatives) or with someone else you have talked to?

32. Do you feel that the choices you make now in high school are final and defining for the rest of your life?

33. Do you feel that society, education system, parents, grandparents, relatives, etc. have set expectations for you? How do you feel about these expectations?

Thank you so much!

Would you like to comment this interview? Was there something that I forgot to ask or something that you feel that you should tell me? Was there something that I did not understand?

