Entre realidades e representações: funcionamento e alcances do Programa Jovem de Futuro, Viçosa-MG, Brasil[1]

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Resumo

Este artigo contextualiza uma política assistencial voltada para o público jovem, elencando os atributos da participação pelos sujeitos da aprendizagem, enfatizando as opiniões, percepções, pontos de vista e apreendendo as representações de jovens acerca das experiências junto a esses programas. De natureza qualitativa, a operacionalização da pesquisa se deu mediante aplicação de entrevista semiestruturada, como instrumento para obtenção de dados. Da mesma forma, buscou-se analisar e aprofundar as concepções desagregadas por meio do emprego da Análise de Conteúdo, como método para a organização deles. Os resultados revelaram que as experiências vividas durante o período formativo renovaram e potencializaram perspectivas, que influenciaram as possibilidades de ação dos jovens interpelados, em especial quanto à capacidade de reflexão sobre si e a construção de novas concepções, com reverberações nos seus campos de possibilidade e suas relações frente às suas famílias e à vida futura.

Palavras-chave: Formação profissional. Juventude. Políticas públicas.

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Between realities and representations: functioning and scope of the Jovem de Futuro Program, Viçosa-MG, Brazil

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Abstract
This article contextualizes an assistance policy aimed at young people, listing the attributes of participation by learning subjects, emphasizing opinions, perceptions, points of view and apprehending young people's representations about their experiences with these programs. Of a qualitative nature, the operationalization of the research took place through the application of a semi-structured interview, as an instrument for obtaining data. Likewise, we sought to analyze and deepen the disaggregated concepts through the use of Content Analysis, as a method for organizing them. The results revealed that the experiences lived during the formative period renewed and strengthened perspectives, which influenced the possibilities of action of the young people questioned, especially regarding the ability to reflect on themselves and the construction of new conceptions, with reverberations in their fields of possibility, their relationships with their families and future life.

Keywords: Professional qualification. Public policy. Youth.

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Resumen

Este artículo contextualiza una política de asistencia dirigida a los jóvenes, enumerando los atributos de la participación de los sujetos de aprendizaje, enfatizando opiniones, percepciones, puntos de vista y comprendiendo las representaciones de los jóvenes sobre sus experiencias con estos programas. De carácter cualitativo, la investigación se operacionalizó mediante la aplicación de una entrevista semiestructurada, como instrumento de obtención de datos. Asimismo, se buscó analizar y profundizar las concepciones desagregadas mediante el uso del Análisis de Contenido, como método para organizarlas. Los resultados revelaron que las experiencias vividas durante el período formativo renovaron y potenciaron perspectivas, lo que influyó en las posibilidades de acción de los jóvenes encuestados, especialmente en lo que respecta a la capacidad de reflexionar sobre sí mismos y a la construcción de nuevas concepciones, con repercusiones en sus campos de posibilidad, sus relaciones con sus familias y sus vidas futuras.

Palabras clave: Formación profesional. Juventud. Políticas públicas.

Introduction

The experience of youth tends to be characterized as a period marked by experimentation and identity construction. As noted by Serafin, Mezzomo, and Pátaro (2016), during this stage of life, young people become capable of reflecting and perceiving themselves as individuals who participate in society, simultaneously influencing and being influenced by it. From this perspective, individuals become aware of the changes they are undergoing, making this moment an exercise in preparing for their social integration as citizens, gaining self-awareness and the ability to project themselves into the future (SERAFIN; MEZZOMO; PÁTARO, 2016).

Certainly, as pointed out by Cordeiro and Clementino (2012), the youth condition is experienced differently depending on social origin and socioeconomic disparities, which are social markers that constrain the strategies and means of action available to many individuals. For this reason, as highlighted by Silva and Silva (2011), it has become commonplace to speak of "youths" in the plural. In a society marked by significant social divides, young people particularly in the 21st century live in a world shaped by an accelerated process of globalization, sharing a historically unprecedented generational experience. However, the opportunities to experience youth as a period of preparation remain unequal and varied.

Thus, it is acknowledged that youth is affected by this altered social context and experiences the impact of these significant transformations in different ways. Consequently, this recognition has led to preliminary proposals aligned with public policies in Brazil, viewing young people as subjects of rights with unique characteristics and differentiated needs. This approach arises from the understanding that young people in the country do not share the same or even similar conditions for experiencing this stage of life (SPOSITO; CARRANO, 2003; CAMPOS; PAIVA, 2018).

These prerogatives, despite being inherently delayed and considering the condition of young people within this metamorphic universe, have underscored the need to address their demands and essential needs. However, the conception of youth as a governmental intervention agenda only began to take shape in the 1990s, with the first youth policy initiatives in Brazil (SPOSITO; CARRANO, 2003).

In light of this, 2005 marked the beginning of an important cycle of public youth policies in the country with the enactment of Law No. 11,129 of June 30, 2005. This law laid the foundation for greater coordination of actions aimed at young people, particularly through the establishment of

mechanisms to coordinate and integrate youth-oriented policies. These efforts were spearheaded by the National Youth Secretariat (SNJ), directly linked to the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic (PEREGRINO; PINHEIRO; SOUZA, 2018).

This prominent position in the public decision-making arena signaled a set of efforts to structure a National Youth Policy (PNJ), which began to take shape through the creation of programs designed as intervention strategies to provide opportunities and mitigate challenges specifically associated with the condition of being young (such as PROJOVEM, for example). Various legal, normative, and institutional instruments at the national level were required for these public policies to be sustained. These mechanisms served as multicausal and inducive tools to ensure that subnational governments, including state governments and municipalities, also adopted the youth policy agenda (SPOSITO; CARRANO, 2003; ROCHA; MELO, 2015).

Thus, experiences across various dimensions work, education, health, technology, land access, among others were implemented to address issues that most directly affect or affected this demographic (SILVA; SILVA, 2011). Discussing these aspects, Cordeiro and Clementino (2012) further explain that youth represents a period in the biographical trajectory during which many transitions occur simultaneously. In this phase, more than being marked by biological transformations, this stage of life is shaped by the relationships young people establish within their social environment. Consequently, this period combines diverse elements and is characterized by new experiences, interactions with other groups, and the establishment of personal, educational, and professional relationships. These processes serve as preparation for adulthood, involving formation, experimentation, and the construction of social networks.

In this sense, the context to which these individuals are exposed plays a fundamental role during this stage of life, which is filled with discoveries that impart values, rules, and expectations. These discoveries confront young people with critical questions such as: "Where am I going?" and "What direction should I give my life?" - questions central to their maturation process and related to their future projects (DAYRELL, 2013).

Within the dimensions outlined, these reflections raised questions about the meanings attributed by former beneficiaries of public educational/inclusive programs targeting youth. This intervention proposal contextualizes an assistance policy aimed at this demographic, highlighting the attributes of participation by learning subjects. It emphasizes their opinions, perceptions, and viewpoints while identifying formative experiences and capturing the representations of young people regarding their

experiences with these policies. These policies aim to address the challenges of overcoming inequalities.

Given the above, this article sought to qualitatively elucidate the perceptions of young alumni of the "Jovem de Futuro" Program in Viçosa, MG, considering the influences of the program's pedagogical-educational proposal on their daily lives. It also examined whether these experiences contributed to the shaping of their future projects and whether the opportunities provided triggered factors that facilitated change or enabled the acquisition of new knowledge, learning, and skills. These experiences aimed to offer, guarantee, or confer resources that could, in some way, foster transformation and, therefore, more promising possibilities for human development, while also seeking to understand the challenges and resources available within their range of possibilities.

In terms of scope and empirical proposition, this study focused on the case of young alumni from a social project developed in a municipality with just over 70,000 inhabitants, located in southeastern Brazil, in the state of Minas Gerais, within the Zona da Mata region: Viçosa. The "Jovem de Futuro" Program in Viçosa, MG, began its activities in 2015 as a social project aimed at contributing to the development of youth aged 14 to 18 in situations of vulnerability. It did so through investments in their personal development, citizenship, and professional improvement. The program's methodology was based on a multidisciplinary perspective of cooperation, focusing on the development of skills, knowledge, values, and practices through courses and activities tied to practical experiences in partner companies.

Within the dimensions presented, these disaggregations were measured based on narratives expressing the meanings attributed by the individuals. These aspects served as guiding threads for this investigation. In the case of the "Jovem de Futuro" Program, these idiosyncrasies provided analyses capable of fostering discussions that may contribute to understanding occurrences, dilemmas, and future horizons, particularly in relation to the daily lives of young participants involved in youth-focused actions.

Thus, even while depending on a series of causal relationships, this research may provide relevant insights for building knowledge related to the multifaceted nature of learning experiences as determinants of the invention of new meanings, perspectives, and possibilities for social action and engagement. This contribution aims to disseminate scientific knowledge of social and academic importance about youth and their interrelations with society, and perhaps even engage in dialogue with other Brazilian experiences.

Although the number of studies addressing these facets has increased substantially, there remains a need to expand reflections on youth realities and their challenges, particularly those related to educational development (CAMPOS; PAIVA, 2018).

In this context, the study is grounded in the Theory of Social Representations, which is considered appropriate for analyzing how social actors express their representations, opinions, and beliefs about objects, whether tangible or abstract (RESENDE; ESPÍNDULA, 2020). Representations are carried in words and embedded in the discourses produced. The analysis of content derived from these dialogues enables and even facilitates the identification of the collective imagination regarding a specific topic under discussion.

Jodelet (2001, p. 17) supports this perspective by stating: "The observation of social representations is, in fact, facilitated on many occasions. They circulate in discourses, are carried by words, conveyed through media messages and images, crystallized in behaviors, and material or spatial arrangements.

Analytical Framework: Youth Aspirations, Representations, and Public Policies – Different Perspectives

The discussion surrounding youth issues and the institutionalization of public youth policies has only recently progressed in Brazil. The formulation and implementation of such projects began to emerge in the discourse of various social sectors during the final decades of the 20th century. This process of recognizing the need for public policies, guided by the conception of young people as subjects of rights, remains relatively recent (a process that began and is still ongoing). Despite this, as argued by Silva and Silva (2011), the legal frameworks that initiated state action in interventions targeting youth date back to the 1920s (KERBAUY, 2005; SILVA; SILVA, 2011).

In Brazil, youth segments have traversed a long journey to encounter the possibility of seeing some of their pressing issues addressed on the government's political agenda (RODRIGUES, 2009). According to Sposito and Carrano (2003), for an extended period, this topic remained at a level interpreted as a "state of affairs," a rich metaphor aptly conveying how this issue was framed within the public decision-making agenda. This problematic situation affects broad segments of society in distinct ways without, however, mobilizing political authorities (SILVA; LOPES, 2009).

Authors who discuss the visibility of this generational group as targets of public action, such as Sposito and Carrano (2003), Silva and Silva (2011), Silva and Andrade (2015), Corrochano, Abramo, and Abramo (2017), and Tomasi and Corrochano (2020), argue that the sharper perception of the

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issues affecting the youth universe largely resulted from the complexification of the global political, economic, and sociocultural landscape. This period coincided with the depreciation of the existing model of labor organization. Within this context, which Mattei and Heinen (2021) identify as marking the beginning of the transition to a new logic of capital accumulation, a new regime emerged based on economies of scale to reduce labor costs.

In this sense, as Oliveira and Batista (2017) contend, this new context gave rise to conditions that facilitated the spread of neoliberal discourse and, subsequently, the crisis of wage labor and the weakening of social protection mechanisms. At the same time, unemployment fluctuated at higher levels, unions lost strength, and wage increases were constrained. These changes reverberated in the professional integration process within the labor market, which became more difficult, prolonged, and random. Such developments had significant impacts on the lives of many people, increasingly affecting their forms of socialization and ways of life (CORROCHANO; ABRAMO; ABRAMO, 2017).

From this perspective, this global phenomenon had significant contours in Brazil, marking the exhaustion of the Brazilian economic model known as developmental nationalism (1930–1980). This shift ended one phase and initiated a transition toward a new regime characterized by the adoption of neoliberal measures in the 1990s, including deregulation and opening the national economy. This choice positioned Brazil increasingly on the margins of the reconfiguration processes associated with these new economic policies (LEITE, 2020).

During this same period (from the 1980s to the mid-2000s), as argued by Corrochano, Abramo, and Abramo (2017), the social imagination surrounding the condition of youth particularly those experiencing dramatic circumstances was often linked to episodes of violence and perceived as a threat to social order. This perception "ultimately triggered public actions initially focused on combating violence and, subsequently, at the beginning of the 2000s, on unemployment (RODRIGUES, 2009, p. 138).

Put differently, as Ribeiro and Macedo (2017) highlight, the issues that emerged in the public sphere, as mentioned above, created disruptions that allowed new facts and realities to enter the public agenda, impacting the representation of youth in Brazilian social imagination and destabilizing previously established consensuses. Thus, a set of unresolved issues requiring public policies, which had previously been silenced, came to the forefront, exposing a contemporary youth condition (RIBEIRO; MACEDO, 2017).

Youth thus emerged as a thematic concern, a political issue, and a subject of public policies. Initially, public youth policies were primarily aimed at creating conditions for economically vulnerable citizens who depended on their labor power to be included in exchange relations.

Much of this progress was also due to the visibility gained by youth during the democratization processes that took place in Latin America in the 1980s (KERBAUY, 2005). In this context, advocacy initiatives emerged to defend youth rights, focusing on their participation in decision-making spaces and ensuring the protection of economic, social, and cultural rights not just for Brazilian children and adolescents, as exemplified by the Child and Adolescent Statute, but also for youth, with the establishment of a new legal framework in the country (PEREGRINO; PINHEIRO; SOUZA, 2018).

In this way, experiences across various domains work, education, health, technology, land access, among others were implemented to address problems that directly affected and/or still affect young people, acknowledging that this segment embodies specific identities and singularities. The current national youth policy defines youth as citizens aged 15 to 29 (SILVA; SILVA, 2011).

Within these same frameworks, the Youth Statute (Law No. 12,852, dated August 5, 2013) emerged with the primary premise of guaranteeing fundamental rights for the development of young people in Brazil. It established that youth public policies should be guided by various principles, including citizenship, social participation, employment, income generation, education, sustainability, among others.

This entire governmental framework stems from the premise that the political and social dynamics in which this demographic operates are characterized by exclusion and inequality. This is particularly true for young people who face challenges imposed by their social origins, enduring the effects of limited opportunities and the burdens associated with these conditions, such as low-quality education and restricted access to arts, leisure, and essential goods and services.

Assim, este processo de fragmentação da estrutura social, apresentado de forma breve até nesse tópico – intensificação da globalização, mudanças tecnológicas, precarização, algumas novas configurações associadas ao trabalho, bem como das relações nele estabelecidas –, constituiu-se como ator plural que refletiu diretamente nos espaços de socialização e, consequentemente, na condição e nos processos de construção social da juventude, com suas múltiplas e heterogêneas experiências de coletivização.

That said, as Dayrell (2013) elucidates, contemporary times have introduced new forms of temporality. Amid increasingly fluid social structures, the rapid transformations occurring in modern society continue to shape an environment with novel characteristics, instabilities, risks, and

uncertainties, generating a set of mutations that directly affect the social sphere (MAIA; MANCEBO, 2010; DAYRELL, 2013). This dynamic has caused "the process of transitioning to adulthood and the very notion of youth, within a panorama filled with paradoxes, where risk and uncertainty permeate the collective imagination, to acquire a diffuse and multifaceted character, posing new challenges for young people", thereby defining the universe of their experiences and the scope of their possibilities (MAIA; MANCEBO, 2010, p. 378).

In this context, given the transitional nature of this phase as a particularly sensitive period of life, marked by expected projections about the future, young people find themselves at the center of these metamorphoses. These changes have shaped a labor market that is increasingly erratic, discontinuous, dynamic, and characterized by temporariness, leading to a rethinking of the concept of time, particularly the future (DAYRELL, 2013).

This scenario encapsulates the emergence of a particular notion of a life project. As Dayrell (2013), drawing on Schutz's (1979) ideas, interprets, these life projects are plans that young people construct with the aim of realizing them at some point in the future, usually over a relatively extended period, within one of the spheres of their lives (work, leisure, professional achievements, among others). These plans aim to transform the desires and fantasies that sustain them into achievable objectives.

Additionally, as Maia and Mancebo (2010), Dayrell (2013), and Weller (2014) emphasize, these life projects consist of routines and/or actions through which individuals choose one of the possible futures. They represent a direction or course in life that involves developing plans and strategies aligned with the young person's perspectives on their future. These efforts aim to achieve specific goals in an attempt to bring concreteness to their expectations and outline opportunities to change their personal destinies. For socially and economically disadvantaged individuals with fewer resources and narrower choices, this involves overcoming structural barriers and constraints imposed by their social origins (DAYRELL, 2013; WELLER, 2014).

Dayrell (2013) further explains that these projects and/or strategies, although they involve a relationship with both the past and the future, gain coherence in relation to the situations experienced in the present. They are anchored in young people's experiences, aspirations, fantasies, potentialities, and understandings of the world.

According to Velho (1994), a life project is not purely an internal or subjective phenomenon. On the contrary, it is formulated within a field of possibilities, conditioned by cultural, historical, and

social aspects. For this reason, the author emphasizes that young people's expectations are shaped not only by individual interests but also by other factors, such as the conditions and needs of their families. Considering the transformations experienced by young people throughout this process, their projects may change because they are inherently dynamic. Velho explains that a life project "is permanently reformulated, reorganizing the actor's memory, giving new meanings and significance, thereby influencing their identity" (VELHO, 1994, p. 104).

Carbornari (2007) also discusses this topic, asserting that an individual's choices can shift based on their circumstances, values, and daily interactions with their environment. This results in a continuous flow of projected actions that individualize their life course or trajectory. These trajectories gain coherence through the design of projects with specific objectives, whose feasibility depends on a complex interplay of interactions with other individual or collective projects within the field of possibilities presented by each situation.

These exchanges and interactions with one's "environment," as Jodelet (2001) elucidates, are fundamental premises for understanding cognitive phenomena and the conceptual dynamics of social representations. These representations contribute to the establishment of a consensual universe and play an important role in the process of forming thought and social knowledge, serving as a link between individuals and society (ARRUDA, 2002; PAVARINO, 2003).

A social representation of something always develops through relationships with others, forming a socially constructed and shared type of knowledge. This knowledge manifests itself in various forms, including images, concepts, categories, theories, and experiences (JODELET, 2001; RESENDE; ESPÍNDULA, 2020).

Nonetheless, as argued by Naiff and Naiff (2008), in representational studies, the school environment is a significant focus for research using the framework of social representation theory to aid in understanding this phenomenon. From the same perspective, Lopes (2013) adds that collective representations are indispensable for understanding social dynamics, particularly in their informational and explanatory aspects, regarding the nature of social ties and the relationships between individuals and their social environments.

This form of socially constructed and shared knowledge, as Jodelet (2001) points out, contributes to the construction of a shared reality within a social group. As Arruda (2002) explains, the consensual universe is primarily established through informal conversations and communicative exchanges in everyday life, wherever there is a reality to be appropriated and shared—be it within the family, at work, in school, or other dimensions of social life (NAIFF; NAIFF, 2008).

The concept of "Social Representation" from Émile Durkheim's sociology began to be explored in its dynamics and diversity only in 1961, when Serge Moscovici developed a psychosociological approach to knowledge. This framework proposed investigating social construction based on collective consciousness (SÊGA, 2000; ARRUDA, 2002). From the Moscovician perspective, after individuals selectively retain part of the information circulating in society regarding specific knowledge about a given object, the constitutive nature of social representations unfolds in successive stages, involving two processes: objectification and anchoring (ARRUDA, 2002; LOPES, 2013).

Regarding this, Lopes (2013, p. 25160) further explains:

> Objectification is an imaginative and structuring operation that gives form to conceptual schemas by reabsorbing the excess of meanings. In objectification, the concept transforms into an image. In anchoring, the object is incorporated into a hierarchy of values, consolidating a network of meanings around it.

Behind these considerations, and recognizing that the period understood as youth is a time when many choices are made, a series of relationships are woven during this process. The vision young people have of themselves, their abilities, and what they wish to achieve tends to be more robustly constructed, partly due to the pressure they experience to make choices and/or at least gain a better understanding of their possible future paths. That said, understanding how representations are conceived within this context constitutes a subject of investigation that warrants deeper exploration.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives of this research, a qualitative methodological approach was adopted as the foundational reference, consistent with the propositions of this intervention and aligned with the conceptualization proposed by Gil (2002). The research process involved two stages: (i) the collection and systematization of information related to the discussed program; and (ii) the synthesis, analysis, and presentation of results, all of which are explained below.

Initially, materials and information about the *Programa Jovem de Futuro* of Viçosa-MG were collected to gather data on the practices implemented and to map the program's initiatives through research on its online pages and accessible publications.

To deepen the understanding of the outlined points, the second stage involved the collection of primary empirical data through in-depth, individual, and semi-structured interviews. These interviews created spaces for dialogue where participants could express their views on the central issues of the research. To facilitate this, an interview guide was developed based on a model previously designed

and applied by Carmo (2019). The guide directed interviews that lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

The interview questions were organized into thematic blocks. A critical aspect of designing the data collection instrument was the focus on capturing lived experiences, emphasizing the reality of the studied social group. The guide was structured to include segments of questions aimed at gathering such information. It consisted of questions addressing participation in the *Programa Jovem de Futuro* and its potential for fostering new relationships, focusing on the plans, projects, and aspirations of program alumni, and exploring whether these aspects correlated with the program's attributes.

The interviews were conducted online via video or audio calls through telephone connections and/or the WhatsApp application or Google Meet platform. The choice of platform depended on the participant's preference. These virtual or telephone-based intervention tools fully met the research needs, offering free and versatile access regardless of participants' conditions or contexts.

Participants decided whether their interviews would be recorded. In cases where recording was not authorized, responses were written down and read back to the participants for verification of accuracy. Once the data were collected, the information was transcribed and stored on a secure device. Interview data were transcribed using Google Docs and subsequently organized into a database accessible only to the researcher. Each participant's responses were recorded to allow for the observation of changes reported by the participating users.

The arrangement and initial pre-analysis of the gathered content were carried out. At this stage of the research, the software used for operationalizing, organizing, and presenting the factors under discussion was Microsoft Word. Regarding the data analysis process, it was guided by the principles of Content Analysis, based on the methodological techniques developed by Bardin (2011). The analysis focused on commonalities and divergences, singularities and particularities, considering the variables and the grouped thematic corpus.

In-depth interviews were conducted with seven program alumni, three program managers, and one member of the pedagogical team. These interviews were carried out with the objective of gaining a nuanced understanding of the reality of the policy under investigation. It is important to note that the project was submitted to and approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV). Furthermore, the entire data collection process was facilitated through the signing of the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF) by the research participants.

Results and discussion

Before contextualizing the breakdown of the aspects discussed, during the collection of information from the alumni interviewed in the research, many shared memories tied to their life experiences. Efforts were made to capture these recollections, emphasizing the narratives and meanings expressed by each young participant.

When asked about their motivations for seeking out the program, the responses revealed challenges related to entering the job market and financial difficulties, with some youths admitting that learning was their last priority when enrolling in the course. As observed by Bitencourt et al. (2014), the motivation to participate in programs of this nature is often closely tied to aspirations for labor market entry. This highlights that, from the perspective of the alumni, the alignment between what the market demands and what the program offers operates within these dimensions. This desire to earn income was also noted by Frigotto (2008), who argues that young individuals targeted by interventionist actions generally enter various work environments out of necessity.

A recurring theme in the reflections of these former students was the relationship between the past and the future. While referring to past narratives tied to their personal life trajectories, they live in the present and envision the future, resolving conflicts and experiencing new discoveries, emotions, and ways of relating to others and the world. Many alumni included future-oriented perspectives in their plans, an exercise that was broader for some and more limited for others.

In an attempt to identify elements related to social representations of participation in the program, the young participants were initially asked whether they had specific concerns, particularly regarding their own futures. The narratives revealed recurring themes of fear about not achieving a profession, which appeared most frequently in the responses. It became evident that these concerns were connected to the perception that, without the opportunities provided by employment, there were no alternatives for generating income or subsistence, as illustrated by the following example: "[...] I was worried about how long it would take to get my first job [...]" (Interview 5, male alumnus, 22 years old).

As explained by Corseuil, Poloponsky, and Franca (2020), young people generally face greater difficulties entering the job market. When they do secure employment, it is often in the most precarious positions. This is because young people tend to suffer more during recessive periods and face additional challenges, as they must compete in the labor market with more experienced

individuals. The author also notes that young people are less protected from layoffs (ROCHA, 2008; CORSEUIL; POLOPONSKY; FRANCA, 2020; KURNAZ, 2020).

As observed with other interviewees, as presented in Guimarães's (2005) research, work emerges as a central reference in the opinions, attitudes, expectations, and internalized experiences of young people aged 15 to 24. The centrality of work, as the author explains, does not stem solely from its ethical significance but also from its importance as a determinant for fulfilling the interests of the young individuals themselves.

Not surprisingly, Pochmann (2004) considers that children from the poorest families tend to view work as one of the few pathways to social mobility. This situation is markedly different from that of middle- and upper-middle-class youth, who generally experience prolonged childhoods and youth.

A brief analysis of participant profiles revealed traits typical of youth from lower socioeconomic strata. As in other studies examining the profiles of participants in similar programs (LEÃO; NONATO, 2012), the young people involved in this study were characterized by recent educational attainment; all had completed high school, with some pursuing higher education in evening programs, balancing college with work. Most alumni held jobs, some part-time, and nearly all lived with their parents, having attended public schools.

Pochmann (2004) further explains that individuals from these socioeconomic groups often undergo a process of early "adultification," entering the labor market at a very young age, typically occupying low-paying positions and balancing work with studies.

The *Programa Jovem de Futuro* of Viçosa-MG was designed around practices that integrated education with cultural activities, aiming to promote equity and overcome difficult circumstances. The program's curriculum was built on a multidisciplinary perspective, emphasizing the development of skills, knowledge, values, and practices aligned with the daily experiences of these young people. Social, work-related, and civic participation issues were interwoven into a comprehensive curriculum to better guide and orient the youth.

The training process, which lasted 12 months, involved various stages outlined in the program's educational materials. This experience was supported by PJF partners and a team of educators and interns. The methodology employed in the formative process assumed that knowledge was best acquired through practical experience.

The program also relied on partners, including service providers responsible for implementing some extracurricular activities (e.g., *Casa do Empresário de Viçosa*, the Federal University of Viçosa,

and other nonprofit institutions). Caruso and Posthuma (2020) support this approach, emphasizing that the training process often occurs within learning environments and companies. These organizations played various roles in the project, operationalizing activities such as museum visits and immersion in university and professional settings (offering internships)

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> [...] "We tried to offer the students as many experiences as possible, as a way for them to explore and get to know themselves as well [...]" (Interview 8, male, pedagogical team).

> [...] I reached out to UFV, which was one of my first partners [...] In partnership with them, we offered young people computer classes, English lessons, and opportunities to experience administrative and financial routines. They also had access to mini-courses delivered by Junior Enterprises and extension projects linked to UFV, which brought significant enrichment to the project for us [...]" (Interview 9, male, manager).

When the alumni were asked about how they viewed the *Programa Jovem de Futuro* after completing the training, many mentioned that they had the opportunity to immerse themselves in a space conducive to experimentation. In this space, they could engage in dialogue on a variety of themes and issues that simultaneously related to aspects inherent to their lives and personal histories.

When the young participants were questioned about their experiences through participation in the program's activities, their responses revealed narratives indicating changes that were achieved through their involvement, as demonstrated in the following statements:

> [...] The *Programa Jovem de Futuro* really opened my mind, [...] they managed to make me see a better future for myself, you know, [...] something I didn't have, something I couldn't foresee [...] they kind of talked [...] with us, you know, to make us more interested in our future." (Interview 1, female alumna, 20 years old).

> [...] To be honest, I still had doubts about it. I didn't have [...] anything figured out yet, and I think the course helped me a lot with that, to see what I really wanted, what I liked, and to focus on pursuing that [...]" (Interview 2, female alumna, 21 years old, student, employed).

> [...] With the mindset I have today, thinking deeply, thinking clearly, I have a better mindset to process things, to know how to distinguish right from wrong [...]" (Interview 4, male alumnus, 20 years old).

Thus, based on the statements, it can be said that the alumni experienced a process of identity construction, which was shaped and molded according to the relationships each individual was able to establish with classmates, internal team members, project partners, and the broader social world.

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It was almost a process of understanding and, at the same time, recognizing reality—but this time, with a new perspective on themselves and the new opportunities that had opened up. These dynamics, combined with the influence of the training process within the context of public policy, impacted the development of the life projects of the program's alumni, as illustrated by the following statements:

> Definitely. Like I told you, I developed a strong liking for the field of administration through the course. Before, I didn't know what I wanted or what I planned to do—it never crossed my mind. Then, through the course, I got to know the field itself; after completing the course, I started an internship, and that's when I gained a broader understanding of what it was. And I thought... I like this, I want to do this." (Interview 2, female alumna, 21 years old, student, employed).

> "I didn't think about my future. The program helped me gain more knowledge about what I wanted to study, which is pedagogy." (Interview 7, female alumna, 18 years old, student, employed).

> "So, like, what I wanted to do was finish high school, get a job and all, you know? But through the Jovem de Futuro course, it made me think differently, you know, that studies are important in our lives, right? That's something no one can take away from us. So, like, they managed to inspire me to pursue psychology, you know? Like, that would be my dream." (Interview 1, female alumna, 20 years old).

When asked about the meanings attributed to the training they received and their aspirations, the alumni who participated in the research expressed projections strongly tied to professional goals. Most of the young participants shared this consensus in their responses, highlighting aspects they deemed important for realizing their future plans. Through the interviews, it was possible to infer that these individuals were focused on establishing themselves. Their statements indicated the existence of opportunities to create pathways for building different futures factors that appear to have been significant triggers for their positive feedback on the contribution of the *Programa Jovem de Futuro* to their lives.

From the same perspective, the participants reported a desire to enter the job market, either to supplement their personal and/or family income or to achieve personal dreams. Thus, it was observed that these individuals perceive their participation in PJF activities as equivalent to a "course" that, hypothetically, could create opportunities upon completion of the training. This reflects, in contrast, the challenging scenarios described by the alumni when recounting their difficulties in achieving labor market inclusion.

The statements also revealed that many of these young people aspired to break free from the challenges and imbalances inherent to their stigmatized contexts through education and qualification, particularly with the hope of attending college in the future, as some were already doing. From their

accounts, these efforts can be interpreted as investments made by these individuals, which, hypothetically, could result in diverse returns in the not-too-distant future.

The observations of Naiff and Naiff (2008) align with these findings, as they highlight the increasing demand for qualified labor in the job market and the low wages commonly associated with jobs requiring low professional qualifications. This scenario often drives both young people and adults back into the educational sphere.

Analyzing the participants' accounts, it is evident that these young people were significantly concerned with work-related issues. For them, there is a close relationship between concerns about labor market inclusion and their future lives. This concern seems to stem from their perception that the possibility of upward mobility through better income opportunities could help create improved spaces for social participation. Many of these individuals expressed their desire to join the *Programa Jovem de Futuro* upon realizing that it could be instrumental in opening up new and better prospects for their lives.

Thus, these findings highlight and elucidate a set of meanings attributed by these alumni, correlating professional training with interpretations that acquire significance in terms of change and transformation in how they perceive themselves. Among the various meanings attributed by the alumni to professional training, their accounts revealed different perspectives regarding the contribution of the formative process to sparking reflections on their ability to intervene and transform their own realities.

These contributions, brought about by these experiences, enhanced the alumni's perceptions of improved chances for sustaining opportunities arising from the social environment. They believed they began to view themselves differently, feeling more confident and better prepared.

The analysis of the statements from the interviewed young participants also revealed that many of them, despite having completed high school, had been out of school for some time. Some resumed their studies after and as a result of the program, as noted by one alumna in Interview 7: "[...] the program helped me gain more knowledge about what I wanted to study, which is pedagogy [...]".

Subtle transformations, particularly regarding changes in attitude, were also mentioned by these alumni. They affirmed feeling more recognized by others and by themselves. Additionally, they reported that their self-esteem had improved, bringing about a healthier relationship with themselves as an outcome of the program. This change enabled them to take greater risks than previously possible, triggering numerous other shifts in attitude. For instance, their expectations and aspirations

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for the present and future were altered, thus changing their perspectives and possibilities for action. This, in turn, renewed subsequent ambitions, opening new pathways for social integration, as reported:

> [...] I became a better person, more mature, and more responsible. So, whether we like it or not, we change, right, with the people around us, our family. So, I think I have changed [...] to have [...] more responsibility in my things, in everything, and meaning in my life." (Interview 1, female alumna, 20 years old).

> "[...] I think it improved my social interactions [...] like, when I started the course, I began to interact more [...] because before it was just school and home [...] then [...] I started interacting with different people, and from that, one thing led to another. Sometimes the teacher introduced us to other people, and through that, I think it improved a lot with others [...] the fact of knowing how to deal with more people, with the public itself." (Interview 2, female alumna, student, employed).

For a more thorough diagnosis, participants were encouraged to present other positive aspects associated with the program stemming from their participation. When questioned, the participants highlighted positive changes anchored in dimensions such as the acquisition of practical knowledge and greater social engagement. These aspects relate to their pursuit of further education, urban involvement in the city, increased self-confidence, and other traits that, according to the alumni, are associated with the development of positive self-esteem. The changes experienced were linked to transformations in their relationships with school, work, family, and their personal lives.

Another interesting observation is that the program's learning experiences, as reflected in the participants' narratives, also appear to have influenced the alumni's relationships with their families. Activities commonly implemented by educators—rooted in games, dynamics, and mutual dialogue—provided opportunities for participants to express their positions on the issues addressed. Some alumni (more so than others) seem to have "transferred" these new skills and perceptions into their family lives, which, according to their accounts, contributed to increased harmony within their families.

In other words, the data from these individuals' life stories indicate that their participation in these mitigating actions appears to have enabled them to move away from a state of passivity and even a sense of invisibility. This shift allowed them to engage with other social segments, striving to find solutions to the needs that drive their social inclusion.

Final considerations

It is possible to conclude, based on the analysis conducted, that the meanings produced by the participating young individuals indicate how the program has contributed to their lives, as these same individuals frequently face, according to their accounts, difficulties in accessing the necessary resources to realize their plans.

The data collected from the participants, which have been discussed and contextualized here, highlighted important points regarding the contributions of the socio-educational actions undertaken. From this perspective, by observing the objectives outlined by the *Programa Jovem de Futuro* and connecting them to the participants' perceptions in this research, it can be inferred based on the data obtained that, concerning the program's contributions to their life contexts, the alumni seem to consider that their participation led to changes in certain aspects, primarily through the aspiration to overcome limitations imposed by their social origins.

It is evident that the participation of these young individuals in the various activities carried out by the *Programa Jovem de Futuro* exerted a significant influence on their future choices, particularly regarding professional decisions. According to the accounts, these choices were fundamental in driving the development of new interests and motivations.

Based on the representative categories that emerged from the participants' statements, it is clear that the program is perceived as a pathway for social access to the labor market and for addressing their needs. Initially, the educational foundation of the professional training proposal did not assume a prominent role from the participants' perspective. In all cases examined, professional choices were directly related to the practices they engaged in and the knowledge and skills they developed during this period.

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