

Comparing Guidance and Counselling in Lifelong Learning

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Guidance and counselling in higher education: A comparison between the career services in Germany and Italy

Abstract

As the number of career guidance services at European universities increased in recent years, this article focuses on their implementation from a pedagogical point of view. Therefore, we discuss how career guidance helps university students in Germany and Italy cope with the increasing demands of the employment market. The main aim of this contribution is to present, compare, and contrast several dimensions of the presence of career services at universities. To achieve this goal, the argumentation follows a four-step plan. First of all, the concept of career guidance, as it emerges from international literature, is defined. Second, national contributions are presented. Third, a comparison highlights similarities and differences that characterise the different national services. Finally, we outline one of the main challenges that Germany and Italy share regarding the future of their career services in higher education. The key contribution of this paper deals with the adoption of a comparative approach on a topic which can really impact on the creation of a European space of higher education and contribute to the redistribution of opportunity 'to progress, in relation with the diverse need of life ... following a double purpose of societal and personal development' (UNESCO, 1970, p. 52).

Introduction

In 2004, the OECD (2004) stated that there was 'little of no career guidance available for many students in tertiary education' (p. 20). As there furthermore is too little 'trained personnel to meet tertiary students' career development and guidance needs' (p. 20), the OECD formulates a demand for career guidance for this group of students. (p. 20). Furthermore, according to the Lisbon strategy, the European Union is 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (European Parliament, 2000; see also CEDEFOP, 2009, p. 12). This means for individuals to acquire 'completely new skills to cope with changing occupational profiles and skill requirements resulting from rapid technological and economic developments' (CEDEFOP, 2009, p. 12). As education and training systems 'are not very transparent for most individuals ...

policies and strategies for guidance and career counselling have become a political priority in Europe' (CEDEFOP, 2009, p. 13).

Therefore this article focuses on the research question: *How do career guidance services help students in Germany and Italy cope with the increasing demands of the employment market?* Career guidance in this understanding has the aim to 'enhance the employability of graduates' (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency 2015, p. 203). Therefore, '[c]areer guidance is regarded as particularly important for nontraditional learners, especially if it is provided throughout the whole student lifecycle' (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2015, p. 203).

In the following, we use the definition of career guidance that has been used by the OECD, the European Commission, and the World Bank (cf. OECD, 2004, p. 10; see also Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2015, p. 268). Career guidance here is being understood as referring to

services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training, and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Such services may be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in the workplace, in the voluntary or community sector, and in the private sector. (OECD, 2004, p. 10)

In addition, the definition says that career guidance may happen 'on an individual or group basis, and may be face-to-face or at a distance' (OECD, 2004, p. 10). That definition shows that career guidance for university students is one part of career guidance and that guidance may come in different forms. Aside from providing information on careers, career guidance includes the following services:

assessment and self-assessment tools, counselling interviews, career education programmes (to help individuals develop their self awareness, opportunity awareness, and career management skills), taster programmes (to sample options before choosing them), work search programmes, and transition services. (OECD, 2004, p. 10)

Therefore, we would like to point out how career guidance has been implemented at German and Italian universities and in what educational way they support the students.

Guidance and Counselling by Career Services in Germany

Since the end of the 1990s, several career services have been implemented in Germany (Jörns, 2002, p. 9). Jörns (2002), following Michel (2001), describes structural change, academic reforms, and the skills shortage (p. 122) as the framework

for the implementation of career services in Germany. Furthermore, Jörns (2002) adds the relevance of pilot projects (p. 122).

Regarding the employability of university graduates, career services are meant to be 'a genuine duty of academia, in addition to seminars with practical relevance' (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, 2011, p. 2). The German Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK), or German Rectors' Conference, defines career services as 'institutions of higher education that serve as an interface between academia and the labour market' (2011, p. 2, own translation). Their aim is it to strengthen the practice orientation of departments and faculties (p. 2). Therefore, it is the duty of career services to prepare students for the 'transition towards employability' (p. 2) and to enhance their 'vocational orientation' (p. 2; own translations). The HRK pointed out the following responsibilities of career services:

- (1) information, guidance, and counselling (*Beratung*)
- (2) connecting academia and the labour market
- (3) contact management and mediation (HRK, 2011, pp. 3–4)

According to the HRK, support can be provided in different ways: single guidance and counselling or coaching, cooperative projects, mentoring tandems with alumni, workshops with ac-training, or application checks (HRK, 2011, p. 3).

In its paper on quality assurance, Career Service Netzwerk Deutschland (2009) defines 'the preparation of future academics to manage their vocational biography in the context of the knowledge society' (p. 6, own translation) as the goal of guidance and counselling. Guidance and counselling topics include: 'vocational orientation, choosing an internship, reflecting on strengths and weaknesses, application and job entry, but also choosing a field of study, and deciding whether a master's course, a doctoral thesis, or job entry would be the best choice' (p. 6).

Therefore, career service staff should have an 'appropriate qualification or training in the field of guidance/counselling' (Career Service Network Deutschland, 2009, p. 6). Furthermore, supervision and advanced trainings are recommended (p. 6). This is to make sure that guidance and counselling services are confidential. The guidance and counselling approach being used should be made transparent to the client (*ibid.*, p. 6). According to Career Service Netzwerk Deutschland, guidance/counselling services should be person-oriented, context-oriented, and solution-oriented. The outcome of the guidance/counselling process should be evaluated only in terms of how helpful it has been for the client, not for the career service or the counsellor (*ibid.*, p. 7).

Guidance and counselling hereby appear to be one of the duties of career services in Germany. With aiming at the employability of the students, guidance

and counselling shall equip the students with competences for the employment market.

To sum it up, employability seems to be the main aim of career services in Germany. By organisations as HRK and the Career Service Netzwerk Deutschland guidelines for counselling and guidance have been worked out. Guidance and counselling hereby shall enable the clients to increase their employability and to get aware on their chances and possibilities on the employment market. At the same time the Career Service Network Deutschland emphasises the relevance of the personal outcomes of the guidance and counselling for the student.

Guidance and Counselling by Career Services in Italy

Guidance and counselling services emerged as university services in the late 1990s (cf. CRUI, 1995). The context in which this phenomenon took place was linked to the higher education reform that involves European countries, but it was also characterised by national issues. From a national point of view, guidance and counselling in higher education are parts of a broad lifelong guidance strategy, 'which guarantees the development and the support of individuals' decision-making processes' (Italian Ministry of Education, University, and Research, 2014, p. 2, own translation), providing information, training experiences, and counselling activities from the cradle to the grave.

In a broad perspective, guidance and counselling services in higher education are expected to:

1. find strategies to reduce early university dropout,
2. raise graduation rates of people in higher education
3. facilitate the transition to work.

For obvious reasons, which include the need to reduce the costs arising from dropouts, the guidance and counselling system at Italian universities has been structured so as to be able to respond to various challenges. Primarily, they have to answer to the information, training, and counselling needs expressed by students transitioning from school to university. Secondly, they have to facilitate the transition from one programme year to the next. Recently, under the pressure of community initiatives, professional practices designed to accompany students leaving the university have gained a central role contributing to the definition of specific career services (cf. ISFOL, 2011).

According to the latest report on the state of university and research in Italy, published by the National Agency for the Evaluation of University and Research (cf. ANVUR, 2013), the Italian system of higher education is highly fragmented

and unproductive in terms of graduates employed within the first year after graduation. These two elements, particularly relevant since the financial crisis, have placed guidance and counselling at the centre of many reflections that fit into the broader debate on the employability of young people. On the international level, the concept of employability can be understood from two different perspectives. The first assumes 'an employment-centred approach that focuses primarily on graduate employment rates' (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2014, p. 11). The second highlights 'the competences relevant for the labour market that need to be acquired through higher education' (*ibid.*). In Italy, the tension between these perspectives has not allowed university career services to refer to a solid and common framework, even if they work on an on-going basis at almost all Italian universities (cf. ADAPT, 2011).

Career services are being provided at diverse levels, mainly using an individual approach, although group and online activities are offered, too. As with other university services, the counselling staff is usually too small for the number of traditional and non-traditional students they serve (cf. ISFOL, 2011). The instrumental apparatus to support users to manage their vocational biography refers to a multiplicity of interventions, including work placements at companies, or skills assessments. The most common practices are generally aimed to supporting individuals in their exploration of the labour market and their active job search. Interventions related to the preparation of CVs and job interviews are offered alongside activities that focus on entrepreneurial education. This is often approached by directly involving companies in business presentations and workshops. Actions to stimulate self-employment through participation in specific programmes, support with spin-off processes, and incubator programmes are also common. Career services are also in charge of organising job fairs. They check students' applications and other documents, such as motivation letters.

As mandated by law (cf. Italian Parliament, 2003, 2010) Italian universities have created databases with graduates' curricula to better match labour supply and demand. Their function, however, is not limited to placement. Finally, Italian career services are devoting more and more energy to activities aimed at monitoring the quality of their interventions from the point of view of companies and students to find a balance between the need for improving graduate employment rates, upgrading students' skills, and affirming the primacy of training activities over advisory/informative and counselling services (cf. Cammelli, 2014).

Comparison

The brief overview on the ways in which career services help university students in Germany and Italy cope with the increasing demands of the employment market suggests that many differences and similarities can be identified.

From a general point of view, the main similarities refer to the temporal dimension of the implementation of career services in higher education and the implicit or explicit reference to the concept of employability. Concerning the first point, it is possible to say that the 1990s were a turning point in all the countries analysed. The Bologna process the associated national reforms were based on the assumption that it is a key responsibility of higher education to sustain 'the ability of graduates to gain initial meaningful employment, or to become self-employed, to maintain employment, and to be able to move around within the labour market' (Working Group on Employability, 2009, p. 5). Concerning the second point, we see that career services in Germany and Italy refer, implicitly or explicitly, to the concept of employability, in both its meanings. A recent publication recalls in fact how the adoption of a benchmark on graduate employability by the Council of the European Union in 2012 gave career services a prominent role in achieving this goal by fostering students' competences (Education, Audiovisual, and Culture Executive Agency, 2014, p. 61).

Despite these similarities, a deeper analysis shows some differences related to the presence of frameworks or guidelines on quality standards and monitoring processes that ensure success to career services in higher education. Concerning this, it's possible to observe that in Germany, universities have implemented a solid and common strategy of career services in response to the high demand for clarifying their tasks and procedures. Guidelines were created, especially through strategic cooperation of the HRK and Career Service Netzwerk Deutschland. In Italy, by contrast, the tension between an employment-centred and competence-centred approach to employability does not allow university career services to refer to a solid framework or specific guidelines. The only guidelines available are in fact the guidelines referred to in the implementation of a national lifelong guidance strategy (cf. *Linee guida*, 2014).

Focusing the analysis on some specific aspects, more subtle differences and similarities emerge. In Germany, career services see themselves as an interface between students and the labour market, working, above all, to increase the practical relevance of educational pathways, whereas in Italy, they assume this mission by reaffirming an educational role that helps them try to find a balance between their placement function and their advisory and counselling tradition.

Regarding the activities of the university career services in the countries analysed, it is clear that all of them consider it their duty to inform, guide, and counsel students in order to ease the transition from university to work, but Italy seems to put somewhat less emphasis on connecting students and companies. The German HRK, by contrast, defined contact management between students and labour market institutions as one of the main activities of German universities' career services (HRK, 2011, pp. 3–4).

Nevertheless, measures to enhance students' employability in the two countries seem include a quite solid and shared set of services. Newsletters, advisory and counselling interviews, projects and programmes for the development of specific competences, mentoring, workshops, CV and application checks, practical training, assessments, business presentations, job fairs, and placement activities, in various degrees, seem to be available for German and Italian students alike. Only entrepreneurial education can be considered a specific Italian service.

Concerning the definition of quality standards, Germany seems to have adopted the student perspective when defining quality criteria (e.g. confidentiality, transparency, and person-oriented, context-oriented, and solutions-oriented approaches), whereas Italy is still trying to identify a strategy to provide significant feedback to fulfil the expectations and needs of students, companies, and institutions alike.

What has been said in these paragraphs shows how Germany and Italy deal with the duty to equip students with all the required skills to manage their professional biography in the context of the knowledge society. This emphasis on students' labour market success exposes university career services to heavy criticism. In this perspective, in fact, they seem to support an understanding of higher education as having the only role of producing employable graduates while underestimating a range of other individual and societal outputs. This criticism highlights one of the challenges shared by these European countries. The above-mentioned challenge concerns the reflexions on career guidance and counselling in higher education in order to find a model that approaches issues related to students' employability both from a demand and a supply-side understanding of the labour market.

As a recent publication recalls, 'employability plays a central role in the European Commission's higher education reform strategy (European Commission, 2011) as well as both in the Europe 2020 (European Commission, 2010) and the Education and Training 2020 ('ET 2020') strategies' (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2014, p. 61). However, this doesn't mean that reflecting on what higher education institutions need to respond to labour market requirements blurs the reflection on what higher education institutions need to

achieve in terms of output. Employment certainly does not depend exclusively on the quality of education that graduates have received, but also on many other factors that influence an individual's employment prospects. Here, guidance and counselling can also have an impact.

In the context of the widening participation agenda, this means, first of all, to highlight the role of career services in the provision of (targeted) advice and career guidance to non-traditional learners throughout their student lifecycle (p. 65). As Thomas and Jones claim, 'besides providing access to relevant work experience for students with non-traditional backgrounds, higher education institutions have a particular responsibility' (2007, p. 23): to bring down the 'indirect' barriers non-traditional learners can face on the labour market. This goal is closely related to the possibility to 1) develop awareness about employability; 2) assess personal and professional strengths and weaknesses in different contexts, and 3) manage an appropriate job search and enhance application skills.

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Guidance and counseling: processes, methods and activities in a Lifelong perspective

Abstract

In 1996, the UNESCO presented the Delors' report, in the context of important changes which brought the society into an era marked by a very strong economic and cultural interdependence. As a consequence of spreading policies related to the idea that learning throughout life is the heartbeat of society, the need to build and improve national lifelong guidance systems, able to sustain the individual choice to undertake a lifelong process of learning, became clear. This paper deals with the concepts of guidance and counseling in order to present, compare and contrast processes, methods and activities carried out in Hungary, India, Italy and Portugal. The main aim of this comparative effort is to promote a common understanding of both concepts. Although the appreciation of different national perspectives captures quite different shades of meaning, the result of the analysis speaks about the possibility to define Guidance and Counseling processes as comprehensive educational processes which help people to cope with their future, using non directive methods, within a holistic and constructivist paradigm that includes a vast array of activities. The key contribution of the paper consists in the identification of some themes, issues and challenges which emerged from a global comparison.

Introduction

This paper deals, within an international framework, with the concepts of guidance and counseling. Recently, several authors have underlined lifelong guidance as one of the main tools through which policy objectives could be achieved by many countries (cf. CEDEFOP, 2005; Council of European Union, 2008; Borbély-Pecze & Watts, 2011). Their reflection impose a deeper understanding of these concepts. Consequently, the main aim of this paper is to enlarge transversal and thematic analyses of them; to promote a common understanding of both concepts, enabling the appreciation of different national perspectives; to share a comparative approach to global issues and to learn from each other's experiences.

To achieve these goals the paper presents, compares and contrasts guidance and counseling processes, methods and activities in Hungary, India, Italy and Portugal. First of all, each national framework will be outlined in order to show the peculiarities of each country. Secondly, category such as processes, methods

and activities will drive the comparison to the discovery of similarities. Then some differences will be underlined in order to conclude the analysis focusing on the main themes, issues and challenges which emerge from the comparison.

Carrying out a qualitative comparative analysis outlines several methodological difficulties. The main difficulty lies in using document' statements as unit of interpretation, underestimating that each country has its own traditions which result in a different use of terms. Although national concepts of Guidance and Counseling capture quite different shades of meaning, 'there is much that is common across Europe' (Sultana, 2004, p. 22). All European countries face a broad set of similar challenges for education, labour market and social policies.

In this perspective, it seems particularly interesting to pose the following questions: in which way can we consider guidance and counseling as educational processes in the different countries? Which methods are involved? Does informative, formative and counselling activities really allow individuals to become self-conscious, "to progress, in relation with the diverse need of life...following a double purpose of societal and personal development" (UNESCO, 1970, p. 52)?

Guidance and Counseling in Hungary

In Hungary, educational guidance and counseling has a long tradition. In 1959, the Labour Ministry established a psychology work group, which work on it. Eight years later, the National Career Counseling Institute (OPTI) has been created and later the National Career Counseling Council (later Committee). At the beginning of the 1970s, each county established its own counseling institute under supervision of the Ministry of Labour. In the 1980s, before the change of the economic and social regime (1987–1999), there was a functional national career counseling network operating. For political reasons, in the early 1980s, the system gradually lost its autonomy and independence, as the county institutes merged with institutes of pedagogy. At the same time, in schools the responsible career counseling institution kept on operating on a compulsory basis (cf. Sipeki, 2005).

During the communist era 'full employment' was an ideological hindrance of any serious development in the field of career Guidance. In the early 1990s, with the introduction of the market economy and the dramatic and fundamental changes in the labour market, massive unemployment exploded and the issue of advisory work in careers Guidance was brought back into the foreground. After 1991, the responsibility of career Counseling fell to the regional labour centres. However, the Human Policy Ministries did not manage to come up with a long-term strategic agreement concerning the operation and evaluation of Career Counseling services (cf. Benedek, 2000).

The EU accession gave a big push to national developments regarding the field of Guidance in 2004. The Hungarian LLG Council has been founded in January 2008 and the same year a new national programme was launched, which included the development of a new national lifelong guidance network. The main aim of the national council is to develop and promote a unified framework for lifelong guidance policy and to create a well-operating system. The work of the council is closely linked to the national development programme for lifelong learning. An important subtask of the council is to improve guidance processes developing new policy mechanism and unified guidelines for professionals in the field. Within this subtask, the council offers trainings at two different levels:

- for career counseling professionals (two years full diploma)
- for professionals in the related fields (30h modularised trainings)

In 2014, as part of the Social Renewal Operational Programme, a project, on the methodological and contextual development of the guidance system, introduced a new modularised training based on blended learning methods. During this training, 4000 future consultants will be trained to provide guidance in the field of education and work. Despite the training is mainly designed for teachers, social workers or counsellors, the only requirement for the access are a higher-education degree and user-level computer skills. Characteristics which vanished the possibility to identify a specific professional profile. Even if for someone is doubtful that 30 hours are enough to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge, those who finished the training should provide information about the labour market, the structure of education, the needs of jobs supply and their requirements as well as the main job search techniques.

To widen the access for all stakeholders for the career and educational Guidance services, the council also developed some new tools available at the National Guidance Portal such as questioners, textbooks, tools for improving self-knowledge, etc (www.eletpalya.munka.hu). Blended methods of fruition allow people to experience a vast array of informative, formative and counselling activities. The webpage provides complex and current information for user and professionals who can also update their knowledge on a new review called *Életpályá Tanácsadás/Lifelong Guidance* (cf. Hungarian, Lifelong Guidance Council, 2009).

Guidance and counseling in India

In India, globalisation and knowledge society processes are confronting people with great challenges and made them demanding as a result of demographic change. In a rapidly changing and technology driven country, the emerging

concept of Lifelong Learning points out that the initial education is insufficient to help people to live a better life. In such circumstances, great emphasis is placed on instruments to continuously adapt, expand and apply acquired knowledge and the concept of Lifelong Learning has a widespread impact in the community, especially among the diverge population (cf. Sharma, 2004).

As a result, Guidance and Counseling starts to play an important role to motivate people or make them aware about the importance of learning. Originally centred on problems related to vocations for young people, now they encompass every kind of assistance offered by qualified people to individuals of any age to help them to manage their own lives, develop their own perspectives make their own decisions and carry on their own burden. From this perspective, Guidance is understood as a relatively more comprehensive educational process that includes Counseling as its most specialised function. From this point of view Counseling can be seen as a process which enables the individuals to know themselves, their present and their potential future situation in order to make substantial contributions to the society and to solve their own problems through a face to face relationship with the counsellor.

Even if India has a rich and long tradition of learning throughout life embedded in society, culture and education, Lifelong Learning policies came under the influence of big international organisations such as the EU, UNESCO or the OECD. The echo of the European 'A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning', came in 2000, which includes key messages on 'Rethinking Counseling and Guidance', led India to envisages Guidance and Counseling as a continuously accessible service to all, stating that 'the practitioner's task is to accompany individuals on their journey through life, releasing motivation, providing relevant information, and facilitating decision making' (cf. Sharma & Sharma, 2004). For these reasons, within the XI National Plan (2007–2012), the University Grants Commission of India introduced guidelines on Lifelong Learning and Guidance in the Higher Education. In that field, all the different programmes initiated earlier under various terminologies were reformulated and developed as Lifelong Learning programmes.

This process, which aims to offer to Indians the necessary competences which fit the fast expanding global knowledge scenario, points out how the system of provision shifts from a supply side to a demand side approach, placing users' need at the centre of concern. As a consequence, professionals who have to accompany active citizens, who should be self-motivated to pursue their own personal and professional development, are called to provide relevant information to facilitate decision making. In so doing, the most appropriate methods to release awareness, motivation and self-direction towards the future, seem to be the ones which assist

individuals to become wholesome people. The most common activities carried out by counsellors are securing information, developing the habits, ideals, interests and techniques necessary to intelligent choice through interviews, developmental exercises, case study and group sessions aimed to select 'suitable experiences in accord with individual needs and potentialities' (Sharma & Sharma, 2004, p. 40)

This underlines how India focuses guidance and counseling' activities as an integral element of to make people aware about the necessity to meet the changing requirements of the knowledge society through continuing education and self-empowerment within the strategy to support lifelong learning.

Guidance and counseling in Italy

In Italy, the raising spread of the concepts of Guidance and Counseling can be contextualised since the past few decades. On this perspective, Italy, assuming the European commitment on Lifelong Learning as an oriented measure to meet societal and individual needs, stresses the importance of these processes in the enforcement of three main personal areas: awareness, planning skills, decision-making responsibility. This emphasis defines Guidance and Counseling as an educational process which helps people to cope with their future using non-directive methods within a holistic and constructivist paradigm (cf. Odoardi, 2008).

Even if Italy has not yet produced a national model of guidance and counseling, nor an updated legislation, a plurality of institutions composes the system. In general, the services are divided into four areas: education, universities and higher education, vocational training, employment services (cf. Guglielmi & D'Angelo, 2011). Due to the proliferation of new organisations, identifying a stable and complete catalogue of the involved institutions could be hard for a contribution of this extent. For this reason what is proposed below is a thematic overview of the Italian guidance system.

The educational system is one of the main provider of guidance and counseling in the country. From cradle to the grave students and their families can be helped by someone among the teaching staff to face the transition from a school to another (e.g. middle school/high school/university), from a specialisation to another (e.g. humanities/sciences) and during the alternating training. The most important activities carried out by schools are acceptance, demand analysis, initial assessment of knowledge, orientated didactic, internships, workshops (e.g. on choice, responsibility and awareness), individual and group interviews and a vast array of informative activities in connection with other network institutions at national and local level (cf. Guglielmi & D'Angelo, 2011).

In recent years, Italian universities have invested heavily in services, including guidance and counseling. Alongside, the services for future students and freshmen, the services for who needs help during the paths have been strengthened and many activities to help the transition to the labour market have been provided. In general, delegates, referents, trainers/counsellors and tutors organise and provide experiences related to open days, exhibitions, admission training, acceptance and support activities, internships, career management education, job meetings, career counseling and workshop on self-orientation and entrepreneurial skills.

If the activities offered by schools and universities are headed to Ministry of Education, the guidance and counseling activities related to vocational education and training depend on regional level. They focus on teenagers and young adults. The institutions which mostly provide vocational education and training oriented guidance and counseling are training agencies and the local public institutions. The first deliver courses while the second are in charge to provide this kind of services. Although there are some differences between regional systems, local services are usually concerned with incoming activities such as those that involve drop-out and young people who are not in employment, education or training. Their activity consists in the recognition of prior learning or in workshops on effective strategies of job and course seeking. On the contrary, training agencies are in charge of ongoing and outgoing activities such as tutoring and career Counseling (cf. Loiodice, 2004).

The strength connection of vocational education and training system with the local institutions underlines a close relation of its services with work-oriented guidance and counseling provided by municipal facilities, private and public employment agencies, trade-unions, trade-associations and no profit organisations which aims to social promotion of specific groups. These kinds of institutions, dealing particularly with subjects looking for the first job, unemployed and people at risk of occupational and social unrest, offer a vast array of activities. The most common are informative activities, acceptance, demand analysis, initial assessment, and recognition of prior learning, career management education, workshop on effective strategies of job seeking, self-orientation and entrepreneurial skills, job meeting, outplacement and replacement tutoring and individual and group career Counseling (cf. Bonini, 2002).

In conclusion, some final considerations on the Italian system can be made. Although this overview highlights an understanding of guidance and counseling that focuses on individual and its capabilities, some problems can be detected with respect to the possibility that the informative and counseling dimension overhang the formative and reflective one contributing to maintain unchanged

the individuals' disposition to change. A second element of reflection concerns the possibility that an over-emphasis on the role of the subject prevents policies from dealing with the problem of social inequalities that affect the choice to undertake a lifelong process of guidance and learning.

Guidance and counseling in Portugal

According to the EU guidelines, in Portugal, the lifelong learning agenda advocates a process of guidance and counseling prepared for the novelty and change as a result of the 'democratisation of the need to learn', where every individual is involved in the learning process and the result achieved determine his/her position in the society of knowledge and information on specific in their exclusion and integration (cf. Taveira & Silva, 2011).

The guidance and counseling process in Portugal is not new, as it emerged in the mid-twentieth century. Resulting from a break in the sense attributed to this process as well as the purposes for which it is proposed, the pre-specialisations in educational and vocational guidance, in newly created degrees in psychology, in national universities were created in the 1970s (cf. Pinto, 2004). Later, in the early 1990ies, the psychological services and guidance in schools emerged and there was a restructuring of similar services in the Employment and Vocational Training Institute, which innovated and enriched this domain (cf. Pinto, 2004).

Today, the Portuguese scene is characterised by the consequences of socio-economic and scientific-technological changes experienced in recent decades, but also by the livelihoods of a much older problems. On the one side, the demands of the labour market, which is known increasingly flexible, unstable and competitive, force the subject to rethink the professional future, in terms of acquisition of new skills, via vocational training (cf. Alves, 2000). On the other side, the persistence of low skills of the Portuguese translated into a rising number of unemployed, particularly the long-term has to be highlighted (cf. Carneiro, 2007). In addition to this scenario, the school early dropout within the youth population, as well as the extension of compulsory education to 12 years in 2009, have to be referred. All these reasons support the importance of an educational and vocational Guidance and Counseling process.

Presently, the two entities that hold formal and instrumental means with tasks in the field of Guidance and Counseling are the Employment and Vocational Training Institute, through the Centre for Professional Education Quality (CQEP), and psychology and Guidance services in schools. Added to these, other entities including higher education institution departments, as well as agencies devoted to different audiences and problems that promotes a vast array of informative,

educational and counseling activities such as definition of personal employment or training plan, recognition of skills acquired through individual's life, psycho-pedagogical monitoring and development of career management skills (cf. Pinto, 2004).

As it is the case with other countries, the Guidance and Counseling process in Portugal is more and more characterised by the introduction of new technologies of information and communication that results in the spread of blended methods of fruition. Despite the clear advantage of the computer as an intervention tool to allow quick and easy access to services, some authors point out that this can also contribute to mechanise and/or devalue the human dimension, which is a key factor in the process. In any case, Portugal, which has demonstrated a serious interest in new technologies, as Taveira and Silva argue 'openness to innovation is not yet ... duly reflected or even expanding within Guidance and Counseling' (Taveira & Silva, 2011, p. 93). In conclusion, this seems enough to suggest that the ability to make the most of this new component for the benefit of the professional and, above all, of the customers is a challenge and a goal to achieve (cf. Taveira & Silva, 2011).

Conclusion

This paper attempts to present the way in which Guidance and Counseling is conceptualised in Hungary, India, Italy and Portugal under a lifelong learning perspective. In doing so, it remains sensitive to the specificity of each national context, let the authors free to verge the discourse emphasising the more relevant aspect in the country's debate. At the same time, it is important to draw connections between the countries, in a way that common themes, issues and challenges can be identified.

From a general point of view the main categories on which authors have focused the attention were processes, methods and activities. Guidance and counseling processes are, generally, defined as comprehensive educational processes which help people to cope with their future within a holistic and constructivist paradigm. They also can be seen as processes which prepare for the novelty and change as a result of the 'democratisation of the need to learn'. Methods are often considered as non directive and able to release awareness and self-direction assisting individuals to become wholesome people. Activities encompass a vast array of informative, educational and counselling practices which conduct people to improve their personal and career management skills.

From the Hungarian point of view emerges, as a main national concern, the issue related to professionalisation of guidance and counseling staff. Since it can

be seen as a core element for the development of more efficient processes in the field. Concerning the methods the use of a blended approach seems to be linked to the strengthening of Hungarian informative guidance activities.

In India, the influence of international organisations seem to result in a deeper understanding of the importance to promote processes which put the individuals in centre. This understanding highlights the place given to methods which are able to stimulate awareness, motivation and self-direction. These dimensions, particularly relevant in the country which is called to face great societal challenges, such as the demographic change, emphasising the potential that guidance and counseling offers through activities that support lifelong learning and reveal the importance of self-empowerment.

In Italy, the processes of guidance and counseling seem to be defined as non-directive and aimed to the wholesome development of the person. The overview speaks about an option which encompass both formal and non-formal methods and which promote informative, educational and counseling activities. From this point of view, a particular interest can be place on two final remarks that point out the possibility that formative and reflective activities can be overhang by the informative and counseling ones, and on the possibility that the emphasis on subject prevents policies from dealing with the social inequalities that affect the access to guidance and counseling services.

Finally, in Portugal, guidance and counseling processes seem to result from a break in the sense attributed to them, as well as to the purposes for which they are proposed. The introduction of ICT, which appears as a central event, contributes to the development of blended methods of fruition which question the role of human dimension in the informative, educational and counseling activities.

There is, of course, some tension in presenting these points of view. The elements described, in fact, are not necessarily homogeneous and the focus depend on different country's cultural and historical background. However, it can be claimed with a certain degree of confidence that all the different country contributions do indicate an overall and common understanding of both guidance and counseling concepts. This understanding links them to the globalisation processes and to the need to cope with their impact on local, national and super-national communities. The points of view presented in this paper also suggest that there is a plea to European guidelines even in newly entering or non-European countries. Others similarities, on a less extended basis, are the importance of a person-centred approach. In European countries spread of blended methods of fruition and professionalization, can be seen as another common trend. Concerning the differences, it can be useful to remark that the relevant issue of professionalisation

seems central only in Hungary, as well as the shift from a supply-side to a demand-side approach in the provision system is very important only from the Indian point of view. In addition, despite in all the countries guidance and counseling are perceived as an instrument to improve the wellness of nations and people in a lifelong learning perspective, only occasionally some considerations on the role of national policy measures are made.

Because the discourse around lifelong guidance cannot but appear highly fragmented if national themes, issues and challenges are not unified in a global perspective, the comparative effort of this paper suggests that the main themes, issues and challenges which emerged from a global comparison are 1) the support that guidance can offer to public policy on lifelong learning goals, labour market and social inclusion, 2) the issues to widening access through more innovative and diverse delivery 3) the analysis of trends which involves the professionalisation of guidance staff 4) the identification of the sources that fund guidance services.

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