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Paris

***How can career and life designing interventions
contribute to a fair and sustainable development and
to the implementation of decent work over the world?***
**International Conference of Vocational Counseling,
Florence, June 4-6, 2015**

University of Florence and the UNESCO Chair 'Lifelong Vocational Counselling' (Institute of Pedagogy of the University of Wrocław) were co-founders of the International Conference dedicated to the current issues of vocational counselling: *How can career and life designing interventions contribute to a fair and sustainable development and to the implementation of decent work over the world?*. The subject of debates, researchers, representatives of state organizations, and international and creative practitioners were contemporary issues.

The University of Florence and the UNESCO Chair on Lifelong Guidance and Counselling (Institute of Pedagogy, University of Wrocław) co-organised an international conference on the pertinent issues in career counselling. The participants – scholars, members of national and international associations, and creative practitioners – addressed a variety of issues related to the dynamics of the contemporary work world and its effects on people. One conclusion was that the overall aim of vocational counselling, i.e. to help people find satisfactory employment in jobs adequate to their expectations, turned out very difficult to achieve. Counselling failed to meet the fond hopes that people's "proper" vocational career choices would promote progress, economic growth and a steady increase in the affluence of societies over time. The envisaged development and fair distribution of wealth proved myths only. Regrettably, vocational counselling cannot be credited with a substantial contribution to an increase in prosperity, optimal division of labour and dissemination of social justice. Given that, counselling professionals should define new goals and search for new theoretical and practical solutions.

A re-thinking of the social role of counselling has been prompted both by re-interpretations of human traits and properties in the humanities and social sciences as well as by technological progress, development of communication, changes in

social structure and a general increase in mobility. These developments posed new challenges to counselling as such, and vocational or career counselling in particular. Given the distinctly liquid reality, people must keep (re)designing their being-in-the-world because, on the one hand, new possibilities and new jobs keep emerging in the world labour market, yet, on the other, all guarantees of stability have disappeared and jobs can no longer be chosen for a lifetime. Consequently, it is necessary to re-define vocational counselling, which entails a shift from helping people adjust to the existing conditions toward assisting people in discovering their potential and in flexible choice-making. The urgent questions contemporary vocational counselling must answer include: Can individual career-design interventions ultimately aim to improve the general wellbeing across the world? If so, how can counselling contribute to people engaging with decent work and, further, to a sustainable and fair development of the world economy? The conference organisers proposed that for counselling (understood as help-provision in career- and life-constructing that aims at finding a suitable job in a particular “biographical” situation) to remain true to its tradition, it must reassert its relevance and value in the social context. This was the fundamental issue discussed at the Florence conference.

The Conference Scientific Committee included 24 people from research centres in Africa, South and North Americas, Australia and Europe. The ten members of the Organisational Committee were headed by Professor Annamaria Di Fabio (Department of Education and Psychology, University of Florence, Italy), Professor Jean Guichard (head of the UNESCO Chair, University of Wrocław, Poland, and CNAM, Paris, France) and Dr Violetta Drabik-Podgórna (Institute of Pedagogy, UNESCO Chair, University of Wrocław, Poland). The conference featured various discussion forms: plenary sessions (papers and discussions), workshops, presentations and the round table.

The opening ceremony was presided over by Professor Alberto Tesi, Rector of the University of Florence; Dr Fabio Lucidi, President of the Italian Association of Psychology (AIP); Professor Paolo Federighi, Director of the Department of Education and Psychology, University of Florence; and Fulvio Giardina, MA, Chairman of the National Board of Italian Psychologists (CNOP). The opening address was given by Professor Annamaria Di Fabio and Professor Jean Guichard, who outlined the general tenets of the conference, its schedule and expected outcomes. Both of them emphasised the importance of economic and cultural changes unfolding across the world as broad contexts for vocational counselling. Focusing on their ramifications, such as crises, risk and (causes and effects of) poverty, they dwelled on the urgency of helping people find decent work.

The first paper in the plenary session – *Counselling and guidance as a strategy of executing the Post-2015 Agenda* – was read by Shyamal Majumdar, Head of UNESCO-UNEVOC (International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training), Paris. As signalled in the title, he discussed the role of vocational guidance and counselling in executing the basic objectives of the UNESCO-UNEVOC

programme devised to foster vocational opportunities for youth on the labour market and to promote sustainable development policies. Drawing on his own biographical experiences, research findings and observations, he sought to highlight the crucial role of lifelong learning and the chances of guidance and counselling to be instrumental in achieving these goals by contributing to the global transformation of schooling and education systems.

The second keynote address titled *Which career and life designing interventions to develop decent work in a fair and sustainable world economy?* was delivered on the following day by Professor David L. Blustein from the Lynch School of Education, Boston College (USA). The paper discussed psychology of work: transition into the worker's role, relevance of mental health to work performance, career development paths and current work relations and culture. The speaker underscored the humanistic dimensions of vocational counselling.

In workshops, similar subject areas were tackled. The discussions in Workshop A centred on "Training for practitioners: implement research and build up tools for a fair and sustainable human development." The participants of Workshop B focused on "Training for practitioners: implement research and build up tools for to develop decent work all over the world." The involved groups shared research findings and ideas concerning these issues, with moderators and reporters having a particularly important function of coordinating the debates and providing recapitulations of the proceedings.

The activities of Workshop A were conducted by: Maria Eduarda Duarte (University of Lisbon, Portugal), Jean-Pierre Dauwalder (University of Lausanne, Switzerland), Diana Guglielmi (University of Bologna, Italy), Anna Grimaldi (ISFOL, Rome, Italy), Pier Giovanni Bresciani, (University of Bologna, Italy), Severino De Pieri (Centro COSPES Onlus, Treviso, Italy) and Annalisa Isdraele Romano (Salesian University Institute, Venice, Italy). The pursuits of Workshop B were coordinated by Jean-Luc Bernaud (INETOP-CNAM, Paris, France), Jacobus Gideon Maree (University of Pretoria, RSA) and Annamaria Di Fabio (University of Florence, Italy).

The insights accumulated in workshop discussions were presented at a symposium on the conference's penultimate day. The general conclusions formulated in presentations and discussions certainly provide an impulse and a basis for further research and reflection. One of the most important postulates ensuing from the conference was the injunction to develop the theoretical foundations of counselling interventions. The participants agreed that it was urgent to ground analyses and reflections on the premises of positive psychology and take into account the perspectives of sustainable social, economic and cultural development in efforts to generate methods of helping people from various backgrounds who are confused by permanent changes. The participants underlined also the shift in counselling which embraced the concept of the individual who, supported by the counsellor, undertakes to recognise and expand his/her own resources, develop his/her potentials and

navigate independently in a particular natural, social, cultural and economic environment. The proposed helping intervention methods and counselling tools largely corresponded to the model of “Positive Lifelong Self and Relational Management” developed by Annamaria Di Fabio (cf. *Studia Poradownicze/Journal of Counselling*, 2014, pp. 13-40/193-213).

During the plenary session on the last day of the conference, members of the international research group convened and a meeting took place to discuss the establishment of the UNITWIN network linked to Wrocław’s UNESCO Chair. Dr Geneviève Fournier (Laval University, Quebec, Canada) – Head of the Centre de recherche et d’intervention sur l’éducation et la vie au travail (CRIEVAT: Centre for Research and Intervention on Education and Working Life), home to Canada’s largest research team on independent learning, permanent education and work relations and practices – presented a draft of the questionnaire template developed for research in this area. She also invited the participants to join in the research and possibly offer revisions to the questionnaire. Further work on the questionnaire was to proceed in international video-conferences.¹ Also, a general initial agenda of forming the UNITWIN network was agreed upon and conditions of membership were defined.

Closing the conference, Violetta Drabik-Podgórna and Jean Guichard congratulated the organisers and the participants on their impressive efforts and invited them to continue their discussions at the following conference in Wrocław, Poland.

Importantly, the inspiring conference, which offered many novel insights, took place in the historical setting of Florence. The conference venue was provided by the University buildings located in the very heart of the Old Town. The hospitable organisers offered the participants an attractive range of events and pastimes. They could talk with Ms. Maria Federico Giuliani, Head of the Culture Committee, representing Florence’s municipal authorities, take guided tours in the city’s museums and enjoy dinners on the sunset-bathed Michelangelo Hill with a breathtaking view of the Duomo and brick-coloured tiled roofs of Tuscany’s capital.

Translated from Polish by Patrycja Poniatowska

¹ Dr Aneta Słowik participated in the video-conference as a representative of the Naukowe Towarzystwo Poradownicze (Counselling Association) (editors’ note).