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► To cite this version:

Jean Guichard. What competencies do career practitioners need to help clients design and develop their careers and lives?. 2011. hal-03236534

HAL Id: hal-03236534

<https://cnam.hal.science/hal-03236534>

Preprint submitted on 26 May 2021

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What competencies do career practitioners need to help clients design and develop their careers and lives? (*)

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Summary:

Developing a career in today's societies requires that individuals not only manage their educational and work pathways but also design and construct their own lives. These activities, for which the individual is personally responsible, imply that individuals employ certain competencies built upon previous experiences. These competencies vary, depending on an individual's social position and gender. For pupils and students, the development of these competencies also depends on the specific organisation of the school system in which they are educated. Consequently, people have available to them for their orientation, competency portfolios that differ greatly in capacity and quality. Three types of career interventions may help them to develop these competencies: information activities, psycho-pedagogical guidance, and counselling interaction. To provide these different types of interventions practitioners must master certain fundamental, supplemental, and technical competencies. Twelve competencies have been identified: they seem to be necessary to lead career counselling interviews which are the most complex type of intervention. Each of these core competencies can be decomposed into different operational, personal, and social competencies. Such a conception of career development – viewed as a self-management of one's life aiming at self-achievement – is frequently seen as a kind of violence by the more destitute members of society. One may question the limitation of such a view of life and career development: Can it permit our societies to manage the challenges with which they are confronted?

To quote this text:

Guichard, J. (2011). What competencies do career practitioners need to help clients design and develop their careers and lives? *Erasmus Academic Network Nice* [online]. http://www.nice-network.eu/fileadmin/erasmus/inhalte/dokumente/Guichard_What_Competencies_do_Career_Practitioners_need_to_help_Clients_design_and_develop_their_Careers_and_Lives_01.pdf

1. Introduction

What competencies do career practitioners need to help their clients design and develop their careers and lives?

Answering this question initially requires an understanding of today's career development problems. Indeed the changes in Western societies arising from economic and cultural globalisation confront people with problems that differ fundamentally from those they encountered just a few years ago (Bauman 2000, Bauman, 2007). Now we believe that each individual is personally responsible for constructing their own life and career. These self-construction tasks involve questions beyond how to manage one's education and career and thus require additional competencies.

But what are these competencies? How can people develop them? Which roles might the school play in their development? These questions must be answered before addressing the two central topics of this text namely, "What help do people need to develop the competencies required for constructing their lives and careers nowadays?" and "What competencies do career practitioners need to guide people as they construct their lives and careers?"

2. Constructing one's life and career in contemporary Western societies

2.1 Constructing one's life and career – a socially produced task

Constructing one's life and career is a task produced by society. Consequently, social factors shape this task's formulation, and these social factors are of varying types. Some factors are features that characterize the essential core of a social community. Today's Western societies are societies of individuals (Elias 1991): Everyone is considered to be responsible to care for themselves. Our societies aren't "holistic" (Dumont, 1966) or "collectivist" in the sense of Hofstede (1991): in the latter societies it is the collective that decides which of its members should contribute to the common good in a particular way.

In our societies, career development is the task of individuals who must wonder what they should do. This view can be summarized in the terminology of Michel Foucault (1984 a& b, 1994 a& b): Constructing one's life and career means to be concerned with the care and the government of oneself. This view provides the risk of an illusion, condensed well by the literary critique Florence Noiville. Everyone is confronted with "the contradictions of the common discourse that stresses that everyone is personally responsible of his/her existence, but under the guises of personal blossoming requires excellence and faultlessness from everyone" (*Le Monde des Livres*, Jan. 9, 2009, p.1).

If we suppose that constructing one's life and career is a task for the individual, if we think that controlling oneself is something that should happen by itself, we are forced to postulate that individuals need to master certain competencies – or certain virtues, to use the vocabulary of the ancient Greek – to be able to do this. What are these competencies?

2.2 The central role of work

To answer this question it is necessary to discuss a second characteristic of society that plays a major role in shaping the activities which construct one's life and career: industrialised Western societies are based on a division of labour and their members survive by exchanging

their work. Now, work is a complex social phenomenon in our industrialised western societies, as Yves Clot (1992) has explained. We aren't dealing with a simple activity such as everyone gathering crops to nourish him/herself and his/her immediate family. On the contrary, modern work involves everyone in sophisticated organisations (where workers fill different roles, accustom themselves to a certain collective history, adjust themselves, and adapt the organisation to themselves). In addition, modern work places everyone in social positions arranged by the particular society.

Considering these characteristics, the activity of working plays a major role in constructing an individual's identity: the individual transforms through her employment. This thesis – especially originating from Henri Bergson (1907) – was integrated into a psychoanalytic perspective by Christophe Dejours (2009). Through her employment, the individual develops specific competencies of varying types (technical skills, knowledge, ways of interaction, etc.). In this way she gathers certain experiences which in turn constitute the foundation on which she is able for herself to construct self-conceptions such as self-efficacy beliefs, major interests, and a value system.

Correspondingly, in our societies we tend to consider work as offering us a major opportunity to fully achieve oneself. We think, as Judith Schlanger (2010) has shown, that our employment is the (main) occasion for realising our vocation. Consequently, for Westerners, career development isn't only about taking care of oneself, but above all is an effort to attain self-actualisation through working (Blustein, 2011). This is the origin of the English terminology used to describe the activity of constructing one's life and career: "career development" or "career construction". What is conceived as "finding one's way" in other languages (e.g. *s'orienter* in French) is primarily interpreted in terms of knowing how to control the development of one's career and education.¹

2.3 Constructing one's life and career in an uncertain world

The social context is also present in our understanding of the activity of developing one's career via the mediation of a set of collective or social representations, or of beliefs connected to social phenomena. Thus, in most wealthy societies, the last two decades have been marked by increased feelings of uncertainty concerning the future. Numerous recent works by sociologists, social psychologists, historians and philosophers emphasize this point. Their titles speak for themselves; for example, "*The Uncertain Individual*" (Ehrenberg, 1995) and "*Risk Society*" (Beck, 2000).

Feeling that the future is unpredictable doesn't only concern individuals but also states. For example, in France from 1946 to 2006 a "General Commissariat for Planning" was in charge of conceiving the economic planning of the country. Until 1993 the Commissariat determined five-year-plans which identified important objectives for economic development and defined the resources to achieve them. In this context, where economic development plans were designed, it was also assumed that individuals could elaborate 'projects' (future prospects) for their career development at least in the medium term. As Boutinet (1993) emphasized, the notion of 'project' was omnipresent. There was a lot of talk about education projects, establishment projects, projects for pupils etc. Indeed, it was projects, not plans insofar as the implementation of the activities with regard to the realisation of the underlying anticipations could lead to redefine them. The objective of the project (of the prospect), being defined at the

¹ As the original text is written in French and partially refers to English terminology, this passage has been slightly adjusted by the translators in order to capture its meaning.

beginning, wasn't established as binding the way it would have been in the case of a plan (which determines a goal and the steps to achieve it) but could be changed, made more precise or be challenged in conjunction with unexpected events possibly taking place during implementation (Guichard, 1993).

- ***Constructing one's life and career under uncertainty requires a strategic mindset***

In 2006, the French "General Commissariat for Planning" was replaced by the "Centre for Strategic Analysis". This name change is significant, as the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia displays in the French article on "Stratégie" (February 2011): "Whereas the idea of a plan follows linear reasoning by focusing on the objective-constraint relation (i.e. following the belief that one will reach one's goal immediately by eliminating all obstacles), strategic thinking is of a complex nature, reversing the given problem: Here, the course is determined by the resources, not by the objectives. Depending on the resources, objectives are determined, or at least adjusted. Reflecting upon these resources considers the value of what exists and how to derive advantage from it. Accordingly, reflection comprises the identification and mobilisation of human resources, [...] capturing all possibilities and favourable occasions. [...] Concerning constraints and obstacles, one tries to modify them, to evade them, or ideally to transform them into resources."

The distinction between planning and strategizing mindsets seems to be essential in describing the tasks of constructing one's life and career in the contemporary context. At the same time that the state forgoes the practice of making medium-term plans for economic development, individuals must forgo the practice of making medium and long-term plans for career development. Correspondingly, the idea emerges that individuals can identify elements in a situation which permit them to anticipate some opportunities for themselves in the short or medium term.

The perspectives differ as regards their anchoring points and their time spans. On the one hand, consider the "planning" attitude. Its starting point is the definition of a future "goal," an ideal to be attained. It can be more or less far away. The means and resources to attain the goal are clear. On the other hand, consider the "strategic" attitude. Its starting point is current reality. The actual contexts provide possibilities to those who can recognize use these possibilities. The resources appear almost at the same time as the possibilities. Individuals identify these opportunities e at the same time that they become aware of the resources they possess to make opportunities become real.

In this social context of an uncertain future, constructing one's life and career requires the capability to take advantage of unexpected or chance events. That's what Kathleen Mitchell, Al Levin, and John Krumboltz (1999) have called "planned happenstance." Transforming unexpected events into career opportunities implies a strong reactivity, flexibility, and masterful adaptation (Savickas, 1997).

- ***Constructing one's life and career in an uncertain world includes finding one's life bearings***

Such a strategic mindset requires that individuals know what matters to them. Indeed, individuals are able to discover what might become an opportunity only if they have already thought about (or immediately begin to think about) what is import to them. Recognizing a potential opportunity implies that the possibility is meaningful to the person. Using the

terminology of James Jerome Gibson (1979), we can say that an opportunity is an *affordance* as it is perceived in a certain way by the person because she/he immediately anticipates its usefulness.

A strategic behaviour is only possible if the person has a “sense of self” (to use the terminology of Bill Law, 1981). And to develop such a sense of self, “individualized” persons in our societies must engage in reflection about themselves, their activities and interactions, their expectations, and the world in which they live. This reflection corresponds to the never-ending work of *personalisation* (Malrieu, 2003). Indeed, our societies no longer provide many social and organizational frames with which to – for example – organize everyday life by structuring time and space and understand specific roles for men and women. The function of support, or holding in the sense of Donald Winnicott, 2002, provided by the great social institutions (religions, ideologies, parties, guilds, syndicates, etc.) is fading. And, as authors like Charles Taylor (1998) and David Parker (2007) have discussed, individuals don’t have any other alternative than to determine by themselves what life means to them. They must identify for themselves their fundamental values or “key-goods” that serve this holding function and allow them to construct their lives and careers. People now have to get their life’s bearings, and to get them not only once and for all, but repeatedly.

In summary, it can be said that constructing one’s life and career, for the individuals in industrialized Western societies, means to take up an actual opportunity, and even to create such opportunities in the different contexts wherein they interact. They must do so to achieve aims that seem of fundamental importance to them. Alternatively, they may redefine their own fundamental aims. The definition and redefinition of major aims requires a reflective activity that is essential to life and career construction.

2.4. Work Organization and Life and Career construction

The activity of constructing one’s life and career has become so complex because our societies offer decreasingly institutions that provide the holding function. Work organizations have dramatically changed. Companies of the 1950s to 1970s offered the possibility of career development (Super, 1980). The employment contract included a psychological dimension by which, in return for a loyalty to the company’s success, it provides employees with regular employment and opportunities for promotion along relatively well-defined professional pathways (Rousseau, 1995). In this context, one could make a career for oneself at ... at General Motors, Fiat or Volkswagen. Today it is becoming less possible because of the growing flexibility of work and employment.

- **Flexible work and protean careers**

Today, the notion of trade, occupation and professional pathways are challenged by a mode of organisation of work identified as “boundaryless” (Ashkenas, Ulrich, Jick & Kerr, 1995). In such organisations, certain employees – generally called collaborators – are gathered for the time required to achieve a mission that they have agreed to perform. In each new mission, they have to prove anew their competencies. Nothing is ever assured. A qualification is never permanently recognized. It is only seen as a set of competencies displayed in a specific setting.

In this mode of organisation of work, companies do not guarantee any future commitment to its collaborators (Rousseau, 1995). In turn, collaborators are not expected to remain loyal to

the company. And a growing number of them don't think they have to be: careers become "boundaryless" (DeFillipi & Arthur, 1996) or "protean" (Hall, 1976). They are considered to depend exclusively on the individuals, on their strategies, and their own career and life management abilities.

In such work settings, constructing one's career means first to take stock of one's competencies, that is to say to be able to adopt a certain reflexive standpoint on one's activities. It means then to know how to spot the actual opportunities in a certain work setting: an opportunity spotting that is made possible only in relation to an analysis of one's own situation and, notably, of one's competencies. It means, in the end, to be capable to invest wisely one's competencies in this or that mission. From the perspective of these authors (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996; Bender, Cadin, & de Saint Giniez, 2003) the criterion of a good choice is the return on an investment. A good investment of competencies produces two kinds of profit: dividends (for example: a good income) and an increase in capital (a rise in the competencies capital).

The capacity to relate - by a reflection of a certain type - to their different experiences appears of major importance to the employees in a boundaryless organisation, who are under a continuous obligation to construct their careers and lives. They must analyse their activities from a standpoint that allow them to identify their competencies. In addition, they must consider the competencies beyond their specific context and envision their more general use. But above all, they must make sense of general competencies in relation to their priorities in life. What is essential or indispensable to be achieved tomorrow or reached today?

- **Flexible work and vocational and personal chaos**

If work, as we have noticed, has become very flexible for a number of workers, so did employment for a growing number of employees (and auto-entrepreneurs). The just-in-time methods of production imply that companies employ peripheral workers who are hired for a fixed-term contract, rapidly trained in simple tasks, and laid-off when the tasks are completed or the economy worsens. Transitions from being a peripheral worker to becoming central worker aren't frequent. Those whose employment is uncertain (frequently: immigrants, women, young adults, particularly: children of immigrants) often go from one precarious employment to another, to periods of redundancy and to diverse training schemes: they tend to stay on the secondary segment of the labour market (Doeringer & Piore 1985). Their occupational pathways don't form a career, but are rather a vocational chaos, to quote Danièle Riverin Simard' terms. (1996).

In addition, job uncertainty is statistically related to uncertainty in all life domains (Palmade, Ed., 2003). People whose employment is precarious have to face more numerous psychosocial transitions (Murray Parkes, 1967) than those who have a more stable career: divorces, moves, health problems, etc. are notably more frequent in uncertain employees. For them, life and career construction means mainly to be able to cope with multiple and repeated transitions. This implies, as Nancy Schlossberg (1984) has shown, that they have to be able to analyse their current situations in their different dimensions, to mobilise all sorts of resources, and search for all kinds of supports. They have also to know diverse coping strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) aimed at a modification either of their situation or of the signification of the problem, and also how to deal with the stress, etc. Should it be underlined that this task of constructing one's career and life is much more difficult, complex – and sometimes even unachievable – for those whose employment is precarious? Indeed, on the one hand, they

have to face more often than the others more complex issues. On the other hand, they often lack of many kinds of resources (social networks, economical capital, general and technical knowledge, etc.) that could help them (Amossé & Chardon, 2007)

In summary, it seems clear that life and career construction issues are not exactly the same in peripheral or uncertain employees and in core ones. Moreover, among core employees, this issue differs according to the kind of organisation where they work: either a still bureaucratic organisation (like the French public service still is) or a much more flexible one as regards both work and employment. Anyway, beyond these differences, this activity of constructing one's career and life is seen as a task for which everyone is personally responsible.

2.5. Career and identity capital

To cope with this societal demand to construct one's life and career, for which everyone is considered to be personally responsible, individuals of liquid societies (Bauman, 2000) are seen as having to rely on different competencies. Those have been conceptualized in terms of career competencies or career capital (for adults) and of identity capital (for adolescents and young adults).

Robert DeFillippi, Michael Arthur and Denise Rousseau (Arthur, 1994 ; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) have constructed the notion of career competencies (or career capital) which they differentiate into three categories. The first category - *knowing how* - relates to knowledge, know-how, skills, expertise, attitudes, etc. that allow a person to carry out any activity he/she is able to do. The second one - *knowing whom* - designates the social network on which an individual can count. The third one - *knowing why* - refers to the meaning that people make of their various endeavours in different life domains, in relation to their major expectations concerning existence. In France, these analyses have been resumed and developed by Anne Françoise Bender, Loïc Cadin, Loïc & Véronique de Saint Giniez (2003).

James Côté (1996, 1997) is the author of a particularly elaborated reflection and empiric works in this domain. To describe the factors permitting people – notably adolescents and emerging adults – to construct their lives and careers, he has proposed the concept of “identity capital”. He defines it as follows (Côté, 1996, pp. 425-26): “The term ‘identity capital’ denotes what individuals ‘invest’ in ‘who they are’. These investments potentially reap future dividends in the “identity markets” of late-modern communities. To be a player in these markets, one must first establish a stable sense of self which is bolstered by the following: social and technical skills in a variety of areas; effective behavioural repertoires; psychosocial development to more advanced levels; and associations in key social and occupational networks. At the very least, given the apparent chaos of late-modern society, key resources for bargaining and exchanging with others in the late-modern communities are apt to involve skills in negotiating life-passages with others, such as securing validation in communities of strangers, and attaining membership in the circles and groups to which one aspires. The most successful investors in the identity markets presumably have portfolios comprising two types of assets, one more sociological and the other more psychological”.

“On the one hand, these assets can be *tangible* in the sense that they are “socially visible”. These more sociological features comprise such things as educational credentials, fraternity/sorority and club/association memberships, and personal deportment (e.g. manner of dress, physical attractiveness and speech patterns). As such, tangible resources should be effective as “passports” into other social and institutional spheres, inasmuch as they are vital

in terms of getting by the “gatekeepers” of various groups with whom one wants to be a member, as well as being accepted by established members. These groups vary in their concreteness (from specific memberships to abstract reference groups), making these tangible resources important in the micro-politics involved in identity negotiations. Being thus involved in day-to-day interactions over a period of time, these resources should also increase one’s identity capital through the accruing of negotiable self-concepts and self-presentations (see Lerner *et al.*’s, 1990, goodness-of-fit model for a similar conception of how personality strengths can be nurtured). In addition, identity capital resources are also *intangible*. These more psychological factors probably include the exploration of commitments, ego strength, self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility and complexity, self-monitoring, critical thinking abilities, moral reasoning abilities, and other character attributes that can give individuals certain vitalities and capacities with which to *understand* and *negotiate* the various social, occupational and personal obstacles and opportunities they are likely to encounter throughout late-modern life” (Côté, 1996, p. 426).

To deal with the actual career and life issues they face, individuals rely on certain specific competencies. These are, notably (a) certain feelings of self-determination in such a situation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), (b) different self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977 ; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), (c) some abilities to decide both thoroughly and rapidly (Gati, 1986 ; Peterson, Sampson, Lenz, & Reardon, 2002), (d) a certain capability to spot certain opportunities and seize them (Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999), adaptability (Savickas, 1997 ; 2005) and (e) a power to integrate their career moves in a life story that makes sense to them, that is to say to “biographize” themselves (Delory-Momberger, 2009 ; Guichard, 2004; Savickas, 2005; Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, van Esbroeck, & van Vianen, 2009).

These competencies play a specific and fundamental role in the processes of career and life construction. These specific competencies may be considered as the outcomes of the interactions (multiple interrelations) between the three grand categories of career competencies distinguished above. For example, the formation of certain self-efficacy beliefs first of all depends on the knowledge, know-how and skills a person progressively has learned to master. It secondly depends on the valorisation of this kind of knowledge, know-how or skills in the different circles forming the social world of this person and also on that these talents bring him/her recognition in these circles (that is to say: that they are attributed to him/her). But the formation of this same self-efficacy beliefs depends thirdly on the recognition by this person him/herself (a) of his/her mastering of these competencies that are attributed to him/her and (b) besides, that these competencies are important components of certain aspects of his/her identity, aspects that are today of major importance in relation to his (general or current) life expectations.

3. The development of career and life construction competencies

3.1 Context and interlocations in competency construction

The observation of these career and life construction competencies (career competencies, identity capital and correlative “specific” career competencies) raises the issue of how they are constructed. Numerous researches (for example: Bronfenbrenner, 1979 ; Law, 1981 ; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986 ; Côté, 1997 ; Young, Valach & Collin, 2002) have suggested that the activities, interactions and interlocations which individuals carries out in their different life settings play a determining role in this construction.

In each of the settings (family, occupational, academic, sports, community, etc.) in which the individual interacts: (1) certain social representations prevail (for example: about the social roles of men and women or about what means “to achieve something in life”); (2) certain values are in current use; (3) certain role models (real known persons or media figures) are admired; (4) certain types of activities are required, encouraged, discouraged, prohibited, etc., in such or such a person, depending on their position, age and gender; (5) certain interlocutions are common practice (one speaks or not of such or such issue and one speaks of it, this way); (6) certain retroactions occur (one is or not recognised for doing such or such activity and encouraged to do it and at the same time discouraged or even persuaded not to do another); and (7) certain positioning are more or less strictly attributed to the different actors.

Individuals’ involvement in such setting of interactions and dialogues depends closely, on the one hand, on the volume of the different types of capital (economic, cultural and social; cf. Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) that they obtain (or that their family possesses in the case of teenagers or emerging adults) and, on the other hand, on their gender (Oakley, 1972). However the experiences that the individuals can carry on in some settings lead them to construct certain competencies that have a social bigger utility or value - as regards their life and career construction - than the experiences they can make in other settings. Furthermore, individuals can interact and dialogue in a more or less important number of settings (in general: the better a person is endowed with the different types of capital, the greater is the number of settings she participates in). These different settings may be more or less dissonant or consonant. The more dissonant they are, the more the individuals have to get involved in what Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) called mesosystemic transitions, that is to say: in repeated switching back and forth from one setting to the other that lead them to develop a great flexibility in the way they are, act, interact and relate to themselves.

All of these factors combine to produce the same result: the capital of competencies a person may rely on to construct his/her career and life may considerably differ - in terms of nature and volume - from the one of another person. Individual agencies in this matter considerably differ and appear to be closely bound to individual social positioning. Therefore, one have to subscribe to the analysis of Michèle Grosjean and Philippe Sarnin (2002, p. 16), quoted by Christine Delory-Momberger (2007, p.13): “The almost exclusive attribution to the individuals of their career management (...) may appear as a progress to those who have latitude of choice in their system of activities, and as a social regression, doubled of a psychological ordeal, to the precarious workers, since they are put in the paradoxical situation of having to consider that their career depends on them whereas what they live is an undergone course of events. (...) It is the same in blue collars when talks about individual career management run counter any possible projection in a future career”.

3.2 The formation of career and life construction competencies in adolescence and emerging adulthood

In our societies, adolescence and emerging adulthood (20-25 years) are fundamental time periods when career and life construction competencies develop. Indeed, as Robert Havighurst (in the fifties) and Jeffrey Arnett (at the beginning of the 21st century) have shown, youth then accumulate varied experiences, which may be seen as trials permitting them to develop the knowledge, know-how, and knowing-why that are now required to construct one’s career and life.

Through the various activities, dialogs, exchanges, retroactions, etc., youth perform in the different settings in which they interact (family, love affair, tentative coupledom, school and trainings, sports, leisure, job, religious, community or political practical experiences, etc.), they construct various degrees of : (a) specific skills related to the activities they may or not be involved in, (b) modes of relating to themselves and their various experiences that lead them (or not) to perceive themselves as having such interests, qualities or competencies, as able or not to self-determinate in this or that life domain, etc. (c) some views of roles that may suit them or, on the contrary, they reject, (d) identifications with (or rejections of) certain public figures or images of professionals.

To some extent, these various experiences depend on what might be called “grand patterns of youth socialisation” that differ from one society to another, as it was shown by Cécile Van de Velde (2008a & 2008b). She compared the representations, socialisation standards, and expected behaviours of emerging adults in four European countries. The two northern countries (Denmark and the United Kingdom) have in common a normative model of socialisation that encourages youth to leave the family and live an autonomous life at a quite young age, around 21 years old. In the two southern countries (Spain and France), a stronger relationship to the family remains for a longer time.

In each of these two groups, both countries aren't comparable. In Denmark, after leaving the family, a long period of experimentation begins-- a time of personal development involving studies, employment, training, abroad journeys, etc. In Denmark, young adults are expected to “find themselves.” This experimentation is made possible by a welfare state, which offers all youth a direct allowance that provides them with economic independence. Furthermore, higher education offers very flexible educational pathways. In the United Kingdom such an allowance doesn't exist. The social standard is “to become rapidly self-sufficient” - that means to become an adult as fast as possible. The time of tertiary education is short. The transition to work occurs quickly. Marriage and parenthood come early. The differences are also notable between Spain and France. In Spain, youth tend to cohabit with their parents until an advanced age. They build up their individuality within their family. The familial affiliation plays a major role in self-definition: the social standard is “to install” oneself in a family life. In France, a family semi-independence is typical: multiple situations exist having in common a family solidarity associated to an ethics of autonomy. But in France, the stake is different: youth is considered as a period in life when a major education investment has to be made as it should determine precisely – and for the entire life – the individual's social status. Youth have “to take up a position” and, as a consequence, they have to go get right their choice of an academic or training curriculum, as educational pathways are linear and don't allow any mistake.

3.3 Youths school experience and development of career and life construction competencies

As we have seen, important differences between European countries may be observed in the way the school experience of youth combine with their experiences in other life domains. Nevertheless, in all of these countries, school plays a major role in their socialisation, education and training. It contributes to the formation of their career and life construction competencies both explicitly and implicitly.

Its explicit contribution occurs via career education interventions (Cf. Hoyt, Evans, Mackin, & Magnum, 1972). These interventions may be implemented through workshops or specific

programs, as in the case of the “Methods of Activation of the Vocational and Personal Development” (Pellerano, Noiseux, Pelletier, Pomerleau, & Solazzi, 1988) or the “Identifying Occupational Activities and Personal Plans” workshops (Guichard, 1987). They may also be infused into the regular curriculum as it is the case in Québec with the “a school for finding one’s way in life” (école orientante) (Gingras, 2007).

But more important is the implicit contribution of school to the formation of competencies that are socially required today to construct one’s career and life. This implicit contribution is brought about by the architecture of the school organisation and the processes of selection and distribution of students.

To provide schooling for a period that has become longer and longer during the 20th century (especially in its second part) the school had to get organized. Especially, because of the differences in the social and cultural backgrounds of youth similar questions were brought up about the structure of the organisation (that is to say about which architecture should be given to the school institution as a whole) as well as the processes of student selection and distribution. Answers given to this question varied among countries with diverse historical, social and political traditions. These traditions include a certain conception of the role of the state (it could be more or less centralised, it could play a more or less important role compared to the powers of the civil society), the country’s tradition of religions’ involvement in education, the respective powers and interest in education of labour and employer unions, etc.

These different factors led to school organisations that differ among countries that are very similar from an economic, social and political point of view. In some of them, for example in France, vocational and technical training is part of the organisation. In others, like in Germany, it depends on the enterprises. Certain school organisations early distribute their children (when they are about 10-11 years old) to different academic establishments and curricula, like in Germany. Other countries, like France, distribute their students to different courses of study when they are 15 or 16 years old. Some others, like Finland, extend the elementary school until the entrance to the secondary school when students are about 16 years of age, and offer them a range of modules among which they have to choose according certain rules.

Furthermore, the processes to select and distribute students vary from one country to another. These processes can be unified at a national level (like in France) or vary in relation to the different institutional powers upon which schools depend. They can even vary in recruiting policies specific to each school. Often these processes are controlled by the school that enrolls students. They may then involve specific exams, tests, interviews, files, etc. In this domain, France appears atypical as the process (nationally unified) during high-school fundamentally relies on the current teachers’ judgments about their students’ potential success in further courses of studies.

The architecture of the school organization and the actual processes to select and distribute students play a major role in the ways students learn to conceive their future and to face the problem of their life and career construction (Guichard, 1995). For example, numerous studies have shown that the current French school system, with its specific processes to select and distribute students, lead them to think about their future in referring to their previous results at school. They ask themselves: In which subjects do I excel? What are my chances of success in such or such further course of study in relation to my current academic qualities? This way to

wonder about one's future was named by Bernadette Dumora (1990 ; Guichard et Dumora, 2008) "surmising reflection" (or "probability reflection") (reflexion probabilistique). It is a way to consider one's future strictly in terms of the curricula that are within one's reach. Dumora has shown that the French students progressively construct this form of future planning, between the age of 11 and 16, in relation to the kind of experience they have during junior high-school.

In comparison, certain kinds of school organisation, like the Finnish one, plant the question of choosing a subject or a curriculum in an extracurricular future. That was observed by Michael Motola (2001) in his thesis that compared the French and Finnish senior high-school students. After entering high-school (when they are about 16 years of age) the Finnish students have to combine modules "à la carte" to construct their educational pathways. Hence, they are confronted with questions about their academic career development, similar to the problems of career development they will face in their adult lives. They have to examine their present situation from the future perspectives that such or such modules' combination might open to them. They are led to wonder: what sense does it make to choose this module and to combine it with that one? What consideration can guide me in my decision? To which kind of future perspective may I relate this choice?

Each school organisation – in relation to its own processes to select and distribute students – can be seen as a general frame of experience in which youth progressively learn how to wonder about the future. The way Finnish high-school students consider it may be summarized by the following question: "who do I want to become?" The question of the French students would rather be: "What do my past and present academic results let me expect as regards my future?" Likely, the Finnish way is more in line, than the French one, with what the advanced modern societies require from the individuals who want to construct their lives and careers.

4. Helping young people build their career construction competencies and design their lives

In our 'societies of individuals', as stressed above, people are seen as responsible of their live design and career construction. Each one is also perceived as owning a certain capital of career competencies. Nevertheless we also consider that everyone may be helped to carry out the complex task of designing and constructing their career and life.

To do so, three major kinds of interventions may be distinguished. They may be ordered across three levels according to the importance of the reflection that they request from clients.

4.1 Information about the world of work (and subsequently: on education and training)

The first level of interventions concentrates on information. These interventions help people construct a clearer idea of today's jobs and related curricula and training. This kind of information aims to help people answer questions such as: What major activities does one do in this job? How is work organized? What are the working conditions? What are the employment prospects in this professional domain? Are some evolutions foreseeable? What are the requirements to do such a job? Are there some specific curricula or training programs that prepare for such a job? Information about the recruiting procedures (résumé, letter of application, etc.) belongs to this level.

These first level interventions are mainly educational. They don't ask clients to reflect on themselves and their experiences, although they predispose them to do so. As a consequence, those in charge of these information interventions must have an excellent information about today's work organization, labour markets, economy of employment, and the major curricula and training programs. They also need to know how different clients can assimilate such information, as well as the methods and tools that may be used to that purpose. This means, for example, that if high-school teachers are asked to lead such interventions, they need to have first a solid training in these domains.

4.2 'Psycho-pedagogical interventions' or career and school guidance

The second level of interventions may be called "psycho-pedagogical interventions" (or guidance interventions). Their intention is to help clients create or develop specific ways to relate to themselves, to their experiences and to fitting work activities.

Here, the objective is not, as it was the case in the interventions of the first level, to familiarize clients with information. Instead, these interventions help clients establish specific links between today's work activities and their own past, present and possible future activities in their different life domains. The core object of these interventions is about the competencies that are required to do such or such work functions, the way that people doing them have developed these competencies, the competencies that clients involved in such interventions have already constructed, the way they have developed these competencies (on the occasion of their school, training, leisure, sport, job, family, etc., experiences), the competencies that clients may now construct and how.

The bilan de competences or the competencies portfolios (for example: Aubret, 2001) and some career education workshops may be seen as prototypical examples of this kind of interventions. The former are targeted at adults having already a certain work experience. On the contrary, many career education workshops are mainly intended for students or emerging adults. This is the case of the workshops "Découverte des Activités Professionnelles and Projets Personnels" (Identifying occupational activities and personal plans) (Guichard, Ed., 2008; for a presentation in English, see: Collin & Guichard, 2011). Their objectives are to help participants construct future expectations in terms of work activities (and not in terms of jobs, occupations or professions to avoid the typical stereotypes in these matters; Guichard appearing 2011). To that purpose, participants are led to consider the different aspects of their current situation and to concentrate on the activities, the interactions and the dialogues they could put a lot into. During the workshop, participants have to (a) identify the various activities forming a job, (b) realize the importance of a variety of life experiences that plays an important role in the construction of competencies and interests, in the setting up of social networks and in the meeting with key figures who may smooth the transition to a first job, etc.; (c) consider all aspects of their current life (school, family, leisure, odd job, work experiences, sports, etc.) and analyse them in terms of activities, competencies, self-efficacy beliefs, resources, attitudes, etc.; (d) identify certain (mainly: work) activities they would like to do in the future; (e) become involved in activities that may be a training to (work) ones they expect to do in the future and (f) integrate all what they have discovered during this workshop in their current life.

These guidance interventions should be led by professionals who have received a sizeable education and training in vocational and counselling psychology. This is because the purpose

of these interventions is to help clients construct new ways to relate to themselves and to their experiences and to work activities they may fulfill in the future. These interventions have an important psychological dimension. Therefore one can hardly imagine that teachers could lead such workshops with their own students. Nevertheless, some of them might get involved in such interventions, with other students, after an adequate education and training.

4.3 Life designing counselling

Although important, the goals that may be reached by the psycho-pedagogical (or guidance) interventions aren't sufficient in our current society context because of the grand uncertainty about the future. As we have seen, in such a context, people wonder about their major life bearings and the values they need to design their lives and careers. Surely, guidance interventions help them construct some modes of relating themselves and their diverse experiences to work activities and jobs. But they only marginally permit them wonder about their current major life perspectives and even much less about the fundamental values and principles that might guide their lives. To say it, using the DeFillippi and Arthur (1996) expressions, psycho-pedagogical (or guidance) interventions fundamentally deal with the "knowing how" and "knowing whom". But they only marginally address the "knowing why" that leads to making major life commitments.

As we have shown above, our current societies and organisations don't provide the social and ideological frames that they once did. No longer can individuals easily adopt firmly established and obvious values, conceptions of the world, ways to act, and clear trajectories of life patterns and careers. In our current societal context, people who construct their lives and careers must find their own major life bearings, which provide them with the "holding" that the previous social and ideological frames used to give them. They have to develop their "sense of life" (Law, 1981), a sense of life that had better not to be "one-dimensional" (Marcuse, 1964) but rather plural and adaptable. Therefore, they must become involved in reflection activities of "personalization" (Malrieu, 2003).

This is precisely the kind of reflection that third-level interventions intend to help people develop. Such reflection concentrates neither on the educational and training pathways nor on career as the second level interventions do. Instead, they aim at the integration of these pathways into a career and a life that make sense to the person. From this point of view, life and career development is redefined as a continuing process of life designing (Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, van Esbroeck, & van Vianen, 2009).

To lead such a reflection about the perspectives from which to make sense of their lives, people have to get involved in dialogues with others and with themselves (intrapersonal) (Jacques, 1982, 1991). This is the reason why the interventions that aim to help people in this endeavor take the prototypical form of counselling interviews. They are "deliberation processes" (tenir conseil) (Lhotellier, 2000 ; 2001) that aim to help clients see their various experiences from different potential future points of view and to make sense of them for themselves. The development of such reflection primarily concerns adolescents and emerging adults. For them, career development means first an ability to construct some life perspectives (from which to make a sense of their present life and its diverse component parts) that are important to them in the short, medium or long term.

There are now numerous types of counseling interviews (general or career development ones) that aim to help people (and especially youths) (a) to define (according to the case: outline,

circumscribe, specify, etc.) their expectations about their future, and to that purpose, (b) examine their present and their past, and eventually (c) help them specify some concrete ways to contribute to the achievement of some of these expectations (for a review, see for example: Brown & Lent (Eds.), 2005 ; Brown & Lent (Eds.), 2008 ; Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2009). The career story interview (Savickas, 2011) and the self-construction interview (Guichard, 2008) aims at such goals. This last one, which is mainly designed for adolescents and emerging adults, refers to a synthesis of recent works (in the fields of sociology, social, cognitive and dynamic psychology, semiotics and philosophy) about the processes and factors of self-construction (Guichard, 2000 & 2004).

The objectives of the life-designing counseling interventions are ambitious. Fundamentally their purpose is emancipatory. Certainly, they intend to help clients cope with the social demand “to be an entrepreneur of their lives”. But to do so, these life-designing interventions help clients construct certain kinds of self-reflection, by leading them to new perspectives, from which to envision their current ways of relating to themselves, others and objects in their worlds. These “deliberation processes” fundamentally intend to help a person develop certain kinds of inquiring into themselves and their lives. As observed by numerous authors (for example: Rogers, 1951; Kelly, 1955; Bourdieu, 1997, pp. 276-288) such reasoning enhances individuals’ awareness of the ways they organize their current experiences (the ways, they have organized it without being aware of it). Therefore, it is a liberating process in that individuals distance themselves from “what goes habitually without saying” in their lives and daily routines. Then, they see and symbolize them differently. And, as a consequence, they become inclined to develop new experiences and future routines.

Of course, these counselling interventions don’t ignore people’s immediate problems (for example: their actual questions about an educational choice or a turn in their career). But rather than trying to answer the questions in a direct way, these interventions help people to consider them from a more encompassing perspective-- that of their life designs. At the end of the process initiated by these counseling interviews, clients should indeed have answered their initial questions. Furthermore, they should have become acquainted with certain ways for reflecting upon themselves, others, and the objects in their worlds.

It requires time to achieve such an objective. It is likely that a few short counseling sessions do not permit clients to develop such reflection processes. Several sessions spread over some weeks seems to be necessary. What is happening between these sessions indeed plays an important role. Numerous studies of the effectiveness of career guidance and counselling interventions (for survey see: Brown, & Ryan Krane, 2000) have shown how important it is for the development of the clients reflection, that between counseling sessions they become involved in different activities (like keeping a diary, answering questions or a questionnaire given by the counsellor, meeting with significant people, etc.). The importance of the preparation of written documents has been stressed.

Only counselors with a high-level of education in counselling psychology (a Master Degree seems to be a minimum) and a supervised internship are able to implement this kind of interventions. For the two categories of reasons mentioned above (the important reflection and analyses required from clients and the time a qualified counselor needs to work with them), counseling interventions are expensive. Nevertheless, their visible costs are little in comparison to the social, human and political costs of high unemployment and the danger of people finding their life bearings through a commitment to ideals based on the rejection of groups of people because of their skin color, religion, culture, or sexual orientation.

5. Professional competencies for informing, guiding, and counseling people about their careers and lives

As already noted, professionals who help people in their career and life designing rely on varied competencies. Competency may be defined as the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified by virtue of possessing a specific range of skills, knowledge, or abilities. The development of intervention competencies is grounded in theoretical knowledge (notably in social, developmental, vocational and counseling psychologies, in work sociology and psychology, in employment economy, etc.) and in know-hows developed during supervised training. For the purpose of drawing a precise plan for such an education and training, the Lausanne University scholars have recently catalogued these competencies. Their taxonomy – which may be considered as a model of the genre – distinguishes five key competencies, five supplementary and two transversal competencies (see: Annex. Table 1-12).

The key competencies are to:

- counsel
- interview
- diagnose / assess
- inform
- train / teach

The supplementary competencies are to:

- guide / coach
- plan and deliver educational and training modules
- do research
- inform on issues related to life and career development
- lead a project

The two transversal technique competencies are to:

- work as a network (networking)
- control quality

The Lausanne team has defined each of these competencies. For example “counselling” is a dialogical activity that aims “to help individuals design educational, training, occupational, or career plans.” This competency requires that counselors “understand clients explicit - and often implicit - needs, to determine with them coherent goals and make sure they aren’t unrealistic.”

Each of these twelve competencies enable counselors to perform operational tasks. They also implies certain social and personal skills. The intervention tasks are functions to perform or objectives to achieve. For example, competencies in “counselling” enable counselors to perform well the following operational tasks:

- Clarify the client’s need
- Establish goals
- Agree on an intervention
- Form a working alliance
- Provide the agreed intervention
- Monitor ongoing process

On the other hand, “counseling” competencies implies that counselors master some social and personal skills:

- build confidence
- adapt to different target groups
- be dedicated to clients
- deal with stress and conflicts
- prioritize issues
- respect deontology
- communicate easily (both orally and in written form)

Criteria to assess competency for each operational task were specified. For example, the task of establishing counseling goals involves counseling competence of establishing a working alliance.

If we link together this analyze and the three categories of interventions that were distinguished above, it is clear that the Lausanne catalogue concentrates on the competencies required for counseling interventions (that is to say the third level ones). But, in doing so, it also precisely describes the competencies needed for information ones and for psycho-pedagogical guidance. For example, the key competency “to inform” (see table 4) is a core one in information interventions. It consists of giving useful documents and addresses and, if necessary, to redirect clients to relevant services or organizations. Five operational tasks (with their corresponding assessment criteria) are enabled by the competence of being able to inform:

- clarify clients’ information needs
- locate relevant sources of information
- communicate information that is appropriate client needs
- teach clients information-seeking behaviors
- integrate information into client plans

The key competence required to conduct psycho-pedagogical interventions is “to lead a workshop”. Its definition is the following: “Leading a workshop requires pedagogic qualities that aim to energize the clients’ individual processes by stimulating interactions, behaviours and attitudes involved in the achievement of their plans”. Doing so involves five operational tasks (of which assessment criteria are specified):

- clarify participants needs
- specify contents
- use appropriate group methods
- manage group dynamics
- assess outcomes

Thus, the Lausanne catalogue actually draws a full panorama of all the competencies required and tasks involved in the three kinds of life and career interventions that were distinguished above. Indeed, in concentrating on the counseling level of intervention, they necessarily described competencies that are required in less complex types of interventions.

6. Conclusion. Our current view of career and life development: scope and limits

At the end of this cursory inquiry, it seems that the question – *What competencies need career officers to help their clients design and develop their careers and lives?* – may be answered only after a preliminary question is dealt with: *what does career development mean today?*

As we have seen, career development is considered in our societies, at first, as an act of governing one's educational and occupational pathway. Each person is considered personally responsible for this project. In the context of the prevailing work organization and job distribution (*boundaryless organisations* and *uncertain jobs*), this project generally requires that a person adopt a strategic mindset rather than commits him/herself to medium or long-term planning. But such a mindset presupposes – as well as medium or long term planning – that people reflect carefully on what really matters to them in their lives and careers. This is precisely this “sense of self” that permits a person to find an occupational opportunity in one of the settings he/she interacts. Yet, our liquid societies don't provide anymore individuals with obvious choices for life trajectories. Therefore, determining the current meaning of one's life appears as a recurring process of personalization. This implies that people get involved in reflexive activities on the meaning of their different life domains and, more fundamentally, on the primordial values and principles that allow them make sense of their lives. In our industrialized Western societies, career construction requires that people rely on a set of reflexive processes that aim at designing and constructing their lives.

Life designing and career construction through reflexivity are difficult tasks. And as we think that individuals must do them, we assert that they need appropriate skills. Therefore we speak of career competencies, career capital, or identity capital. These competencies provide individuals with a certain capital they should invest well. This means that they must find out by themselves various assignments which could fulfill some of their major expectations. There are different categories of career competencies. Some are an individual's capital of knowledge, know-how and skills. Others relate to the individuals social world: they correspond not only to the scope of their various social networks, but also to the ways individuals behave, talk, interact and present themselves: their departments and garments, etc. All these “social” competencies permit individuals to make themselves recognized in a certain way in such or such setting or situation (for example: during a hiring interview). Another subset of career competencies refers to the abilities to construct modes of relating to themselves, others, and to their experiences that allow them design some – revisable – life perspectives that provide a sense of self, one that is unique, plural, and adaptable. At least, some competencies relate more specifically to current career problems (as they depend on the settings and tasks): self-determination feelings, self-efficacy beliefs, planned happenstance, adaptability, “self-biographization”. These specific competencies appear as the outcomes of the three previous sub-sets of career competencies.

Individuals construct these career competencies via their various activities, interactions and interlocations in different life settings. Now, these various experiences depend on the economic, social, and cultural capital that people accumulate (or that their family possesses in the case of teenagers or emerging adults) and on their gender. This means that, as a consequence, individuals interact in more or less important settings, and that these different settings have “unequal value” as regards the career competencies a person can construct. The result of these social differences is that the capital of competencies that people may rely on to construct their careers and lives, may differ considerably. This is probably the principal reason why the current conception of career and life construction is adopted by those in a dominant social position. They see self-governing of their lives and careers as an opportunity. Other people, being in dominated social positions, consider it negatively – as violence – as most of their experiences don't allow them to conceive themselves as self-determining subjects holding a vast capital of competencies.

Adolescence and emerging adulthood are life periods when people have many experiences (school, leisure, love, odd jobs, etc.) through which they develop their capital of career competencies. Among these experiences, those in school are of great importance. School contributes to this development explicitly, via career education interventions. It also contributes to this construction by its architecture (in modules, educational paths, etc.) and by its selection and distribution of students. Quite obviously, some modes of organization are more beneficial than others in helping students to develop the career competencies that advanced modern societies require of them.

If the responsibility to construct their lives and careers is attributed to individuals, modern societies must help them in this endeavor. Three kinds of help can be distinguished. Information interventions are the first. They aim to develop knowledge about today's work activities, work settings, careers, employment perspectives, training and education, etc. The main goals of "Psycho-pedagogical" (or "guidance") interventions are to help people construct some modes to relating to themselves and their diverse experiences in relation to occupations. Therefore they lead people to investigate on two complementary directions, in asking questions as: "What competencies have I constructed on the occasion of this experience?" and "What competencies are required to carry out these working duties?" "Counseling" interventions are the third kind of help. Their fundamental goal is to help clients determine some major life bearings with which they can make sense of their lives and, as a consequence, of their careers.

Each of these three kinds of interventions requires that career officers who lead them rely on a certain capital of competencies which form the very heart of their craft. Information competencies are seemingly the less complex ones. Nevertheless these duties require competencies as: "to select information appropriate each clients' needs and convey it to them" and "to teach clients adequate methods to search for information". Such competencies refer to precise knowledge about the three major kinds of "social cognitive representations" of occupation, education or training and of the factors and processes of their constructions and transformations (Guichard, 2007 & 2011). Furthermore, such duties require a practical mastery of a variety of information methods and methodologies. "Psycho-pedagogical" interventions require these same competencies. But, in addition, they imply to know how to specify contents and use group methods that are appropriate to the clients' characteristics, their needs and their expectations. Counselling interventions require a mastery of all competencies enacted in information and psycho-pedagogical ones. But they also require counseling know-how, how to lead an interview and how to diagnose and assess. Each of these key competencies relates to a set of operational and social tasks, of which some (as those performed to construct the working alliance with clients) can be trained only through supervised practical experiences. Therefore, these third level interventions can be carried out only by professionals qualified in counselling and vocational psychologies.

Counselling interventions need a certain amount of time to reach their goals. They are time-consuming for both clients and counselors. As only qualified professionals can carry them out, they are also expensive. But, in the current European context, where the already limited offer of public services in this domain is continuously shrinking in many countries, and where more and more private companies provide life and career counseling, one may wonder if those whose capital of career competencies is the most fragile – in relation to their modest social position – could benefit in a near future of this kind of help. As a consequence, should many of them be reduced to look for their major life bearings in subscribing to fundamentalist

religious movements, cults or ideological groups based on a rejection of those (“them”) who are perceived to be different (“we”)?

As it may be observed, our conception of life and career construction – when it is related to the services that actually provide help in this domain – arise serious social equity issues. But, more fundamentally, we may wonder whether such a conception can bring about an answer to the major challenges that humanity is confronted with today. These are of different kinds: (a) economic ones with a financial crisis in many countries, high unemployment rates, considerable disparities between Northern and Southern hemisphere countries, (b) ecologic ones with climate warming, an oncoming water crisis, extinction of living species, etc., (c) human ones with what the International Labour Office calls a “deficit of decent work” (International Labour Office, 2001& 2006), a world demographic explosion and massive migrations of populations who can’t survive within their native environment.

Yet, our conception of life and career construction confines itself to see it as a self-government in relation to some society and institutional standards about certain relevant ways to relate to one-self and one’s own experiences. Career and life designing implies in our societies that individuals concentrate on their self-construction. Certainly, when they get involved in such a reflection process, they are generally led to care about others around them. This is the case, for example, when they wonder about the possible repercussions of their career decisions on close relatives. Nevertheless, most often, people who govern their careers don’t care about the consequences their choices might have on distant others or on mankind in general. Sometimes it even happens that people get involved in duties they know the consequence of which should only be harmful to others. The subprime mortgage crisis is a perfect example of such involvements, as one of its causes was an offer of loans to people whom bank credit officers and their supervisors knew should not take them.

In the current alarming world conjuncture that was just outlined, one may wonder if care about others shouldn’t become a major component of care about oneself and self-government. This would lead individuals to question the consequences of their career decisions for themselves and mankind in general. From such a point of view, the issue of *caring* – caring about others – would be placed at the very heart of self-government reflections. The career construction topic would then change. It would no longer consist only in an identification of certain opportunities in relation to the person’s technical competencies, social networks and the meaning they currently make of their lives. It would encompass an inquiry into the human consequences – on themselves and on others – of their involvement in such or such assignment. Such an inquiry might rely on the “Imperative of Responsibility” maxim proposed by Hans Jonas, 1984 (p. 37): “Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life on earth”. Certainly, such a change in career construction could make sense only in relation to some major changes in the world organization of works and distribution of jobs: those being then understood in relation to maximization not of financial profits but of human development they could foster.

Annex

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