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The development and transformation of mainstream notions on 'Career Guidance'. A discourse analysis on EU policy papers on (un)employment

***Christian Schröder**, htw saar - University of Applied Sciences (Saarbrücken)*

***Ute Karl,** University of Luxembourg (until 2017)*

***Claudia Muche**, University of Hildesheim*

***Inga Truschkat**, University of Hildesheim*

1 Introduction

After the turn of the millennium OECD, World Bank Group and European Union have undertaken comprehensive international studies on systems of career guidance, career guidance services (CGS) and models of best practices (Watts & Sultana, 2004). Against the backdrop of increasing political aspirations brought to career guidance practitioners by international organizations, Watts (2005) states: „internationally, career guidance is now higher on the public policy agenda than ever before" (p. 66).

The EU Commission has initiated political papers and studies on CGS conducted by CEDEFOP and the European Training Foundation. In these papers, career guidance and vocational training has become a main topic of Europe's development as a knowledge-based society. In 2004, the OECD and the EU Commission published a handbook for policy makers (OECD/EU Commission 2004). In addition, in 2002 the EU Commission appointed an expert group for lifelong guidance that was institutionalised in 2007 as the ELGPN. The ELGPN's work is dedicated to the practical implementation of the above mentioned resolutions of the EU Council (2004, 2008). It also relates CGS to other issues debated within the EU such as career management skills (ELGPN 2013a), flexicurity (ELGPN 2013b), youth unemployment (ELGPN 2013c), youth guarantee (ELGPN 2014a), work-based learning (ELGPN 2014b) and early school leaving (ELGPN 2015).

In the following paper we are especially interested in how the discourse on CGS evolved and became a discursive pattern within the EU policies. After a brief review of the state of the art (2), we provide in a first step a brief description of our methodological approach and the methods and data underlying this analysis (3). Afterwards, we present empirical examples to demonstrate how a dominant pattern of CGS has emerged over time (4). Finally, we reflect upon critical voices within and upon the discourse (5) and discuss the role of social work against the backdrop of the current state of research (6).

2 State of the Art

In the last decade the field of research on CGS has also been vibrant (Sampson et al. 2014; Crockett, Byrd, and Erford 2014; Cohen-Scali, V., Rossier, J., & Nota, L. 2018). In our review of the scientific literature, we identify two research strands dedicated to advance career guidance by either giving expertise to the historical evolution of systems of career

guidance and the transnational policy development (Moreno da Fonseca, 2015) or by practice-related research that evaluates the implementation of guidance services and develops future political strategies (Hoest, Jensen, & Nielsen, 2013; Szilagya & Petrini, 2014). Both strands are aiming at the enhancement of political programs and their implementation.

Recently, there has been more research published that critically examines policy papers as well as academic discourses. It has been pointed out that in the academic discourse „the way in which opportunity is structured by class, power and other forms of inequality" has been given less attention than the focus on self-efficacy, agency and individual aspirations (Hooley, Sultana, & Thomsen 2018a, p. 2). Especially, within governmentality studies, several studies have been carried out that analyse discourses of CGS from a Foucauldian perspective (Edwards 2002; McIlveen/Patton 2006). Recent studies in this strand have analysed how the pattern of self-management became dominant: We „are governed to self-manage our career and at the same time govern ourselves to do that" (Bengtsson 2011, S. 616; Fejes & Dahlstedt 2013). These studies aim at questioning the taken-for-granted, the 'normality' and the constructions of common sense in discourses on lifelong learning (see articles in: Fejes & Nicoll 2008) and lifelong career guidance by either applying a more synchronic or diachronic perspective to the discourse. Using a synchronic perspective, Fejes (2008) analyses the „desirable subjectivities" that are „fostered through the technology of confession" (S. 654). From a diachronic perspective, Nicoll and Fejes (2008) study the functions of lifelong learning (which is closely linked to career guidance and counselling) (cf. this paragraph Schröder & Karl 2017).

In this line of research, we assign our approach to the creation of reflexive knowledge that „interrogates the value premises of society as well as the profession." (Burawoy, 2005, p. 269). Our aim is to de/-reconstruct the normative implications of the role of career guidance and its changing faces over time. The aim of this paper is to reconstruct how the predominant discursive pattern of CGS has evolved within the EU discourse and thus to reveal the inherent power mechanism. For this purpose, we will rely on a critical analyses of discursive practices from a Foucauldian perspective (McIlveen & Patton, 2006), especially from the perspective of governmentality studies.

3 Methodology, method and design of the study

For studying the European policy discourse on career guidance services, we used SKAD (sociology of knowledge approach to discourse) and especially the heuristic approach of interpretation pattern as it is described in SKAD under a discourse analytical perspective (see Keller and Truschkat, 2014; Truschkat/Muche, 2018).

Within the framework of this research project, we decided to examine the CGS discourse at the European level because we found that the documents cited most often were published by the EU Council and the EU Commission. Next, we decided on the time period that we could take into consideration. In the case of the CGS discourse, we chose to mark the beginning with the first mention of CGS in EU publications. Therefore, in the sense of theoretical sampling (Truschkat, Kaiser-Belz, & Volkmann 2011) we searched for the terms „career guidance" and „lifelong guidance" in the search engines of the EU Commission, EU Council and CEDEFOP. This strategy was supplemented by searching for the terms in general Internet search engines (google) and by examining the references found within relevant documents. Observing the ways, the actors in the discourse refer to and cite one another helped us to identify more relevant actors and to create a data corpus.

At the end of the data collection, we had a data corpus consisting of 45 EU documents, 20 publications of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) and 24 papers of the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN). Moreover, we found three key publications produced by the EU Council and EU Commission that have been referred to by most actors in the field when publishing on CGS, namely

- EU Commission (2000): A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning.
- EU Council (2004): Resolution on Strengthening Policies, Systems and Practices in the field of Guidance throughout life in Europe.
- EU Council (2008): Resolution on Better Integrating Lifelong Guidance into Lifelong Learning Strategies.

In most cases, the other reports or published documents refer to these three major publications. Thus, they function as a source of legitimation displacing the question of why it is important to promote CGS within EU national states and beyond.

After the completion of our data corpus, we took two steps for being able to do a detailed analysis. We started with a rough determination of three phases (through a diachronic analysis) which then allowed us to apply a comparative approach to the documents falling into these (chronological) phases. We began the analysis by identifying paragraphs in which the role of CGS is described for a sequence analysis. This analysis was based on four research questions:

- How is the discourse legitimised; what knowledge legitimises the discourse?
- What kinds of subjectification take place?
- Which speaker position is taken by whom in the discourse?
- What normalising expectations are held, and at whom are they directed?

The selection of paragraphs for the sequential analysis was made according to the criteria of theoretical sampling (Strauss/Corbin, 1990; Truschkat/Kaiser-Belz/Volkmann 2011). The first sampling criteria for maximum contrast were the institutional authorship, the year of publication and the document type. Our data analysis was based on the principles of coding according to grounded theory methodology (Glaser/Strauss 1967). Selected paragraphs were first coded in a sequence analysis generating first interpretation hypotheses (Keller/Truschkat 2013). These hypotheses gained support by the comparison of the results with different text sequences in the course of the axial coding. In the final analytical step of selective coding, the categories were then systematised and related to each other within the framework of the phenomenon structure.

4 Findings – a diachronic perspective on discourses of Career Guidance Services[1]

A diachronic perspective allows the reconstruction of the discourse in its historical development with breaks, turns and phases of relative stability. According to our first findings we divided 'our' discourse on career guidance within the EU into three phases. These phases are periods in which the argumentation gradually shifts and expands. Our starting point was the first instances of usage of the term „career guidance" in EU publications in the 1980s. Starting here, we defined the first phase from the 1980s until the turn of the millennium. The second phase ends in 2010, and the final phase considers the time until the current day. Our decision for this specific time division is based on our analytical results and also correlates with the time of publication of important strategic papers by the EU: The Lisbon Strategy paper published in 2000 as well as the 2020 Strategy paper published in 2010. Within each time phase, we identified different patterns to frame the (job) crisis that legitimizes the promotion of CGS. A deeper analysis in respect to these three phases of the diachronic perspective led us to a hypothesis. Specifically, we discovered that the phases can be distinguished mainly with regard to the problematised aspects and the proposed ways of dealing with them. In order to be able to theorise on these insights, we use the distinction of diagnostic and prognostic framing to derive an analytical comparative description of the three phases (Snow et al. 1986; Benford/Snow 2000). In general, diagnostic framing identifies a situation that is perceived as problematic. By doing so, it implies the attribution of a responsibility. Prognostic framing complements diagnostic framing by presenting a solution to the „diagnosed" problem.

In our case of CGS, the diagnostic framing refers to the way the EU interprets a situation as problematic. The prognostic framing looks at the role of CGS within this problematic situation. By dividing the discourse into three phases, we will reveal a different understanding of crisis and change (i.e. diagnostic framing) in each of the phases. Moreover, we will thereby show how CGS plays an ever increasing role in terms of providing adequate solutions (i.e. prognostic framing).

4.1 Phase 1: The crisis will be solved! (1980s-2000)

One of the first references to the topic „guidance" in EU politics was found in the middle of the 1980s. A resolution of the EU Council from 1985 aimed at guaranteeing equal opportunities for girls and boys in education (EU Council 1985). In one central chapter of this publication, guidance is regarded as one of three important measures to promote equal opportunities for girls and boys in education. Here, guidance is a specific term used in a broader sense as a tool to encourage and support women at the transitions to work. This role of guidance has been in a similar sense used by the women's movement to promote the professionalisation of vocational guidance in the 1970s and 1980s (Gröning 2010).

However, this perspective changes in the discourse of CGS in the 1990s. Guidance is increasingly addressed in documents of the European Community which focus on employment and the impending consequences of unemployment. It is mainly legitimised in the context of the economic crisis of the 1990s and the risks of unemployment.

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[1] The following results are based on research examining the discourse on career guidance services (CGS) within the EU that has been developed in the framework of the project „Transition Processing" (2015-2018). The project was funded by the Luxembourg National Research Fund (FNR) under the funding number INTER / DFG / 14/8888406 / TransPro / Karl / Schroeder and the German partners were supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

At that time, a crisis rhetoric is used that considers the crisis as a job crisis that can be solved by the creation of new jobs:

> „In order to reverse the disastrous course which our societies, bedevilled by unemployment, are taking, the European Union should set itself the target of creating 15 million jobs by the end of the century." (EU Commission 1993, S. 11)

Unemployment is portrayed as a plague. It is the evil that must be eliminated. The wording demonstrates how all the problems in the White Paper of the EU Commission cited above are reduced to the „core issue of unemployment". The only possible alternative is, therefore, a policy that sets the creation of jobs at the centre of its efforts. The employment target, 15 million jobs by the end of the century, provides the source of legitimacy for further action in this context. The prognostic frame of the European Commission embraces measures more generally like flexibility, decentralisation and reducing labour costs. At that time, career guidance is only a small component in solving the expanding employment crisis.

However, in the mid 1990s, CGS becomes increasingly important because of a gradual shift of responsibilities in solving the crisis from the EU level to the member states, to the local level and eventually to the individuals themselves. In different publications – especially in the White Papers of the EU Commission – the solution to the crisis becomes more concrete. And the more concrete a solution gets, the more decentralised is the problem (and hence the responsibility): From the EU level (i.e., the EU Commission and EU Council), the problem is transferred to the member states as they are addressed in forthcoming documents of the EU Commission and EU Council to ensure the quality of a common approach to face the crisis. This is again specified even more by distributing the responsibility to the education and training sector of each member state. Ultimately, it is the individual who is addressed to find 'private' solutions to the job crisis in the business sector. In general, we can describe this process as decentralisation. For example, in the CEDEFOP document „Lifelong Vocational Guidance: European Case Studies" it is stated that:

> „The social and vocational integration of young people and the social and vocational reintegration of adults are key issues at a time when youth unemployment is particularly high and when it is very hard to break the spiral of long-term unemployment. With the difficulties being encountered by many people in the European Union as a result of the economic crisis, the provision of help, guidance and advice on vocational matters has become the focus of today's policies" (CEDEFOP 1998, S. 4).

There is an alarming talk of economic crisis. At the same time, difficulties are attributed to „many people" which makes the targeted group significantly enlarged. The problematisation is now no longer based on institutional public structures, but on the individual circumstances. This legitimises specific kinds of political interventions, including help, guidance and advice on vocational matters.

In particular, disadvantaged groups are addressed in the crisis rhetoric of the 1990s. The following paragraph is from a communication paper addressed to the member states from the EU Commission (1996). The paper refers back to the EU Commission's White Paper (EU Commission 1993) on „Growth, Competitiveness and Employment". In line with the White Paper, it opts for the general objective to enhance employment intensive growth. And this goal should be realized in four principal areas, that is, in employment opportunities for the target groups (1) women, (2) disabled, (3) young people without basic qualifications or

training and (4) vulnerable groups „who find themselves excluded from it [the job market], or at risk of being excluded from it" (ibid S. 1). For the first three target groups (1-3), guidance is only seen as a minor accompanying measure, such as delivering training courses. In contrast, for vulnerable groups, CGS is attributed an important role:

- „the occupational integration of disadvantaged people with the help of community infrastructure, information, advice and development of services,

- support for the development and delivery of integrated community-based services targeted at vulnerable groups and disadvantaged people, perhaps on an outreach basis, or through the organization of 'one-stop-shops' providing information and advice,

- support for labour market actions aimed at public services personnel and the social partners with a view to promoting tolerance and combating discrimination in access to the labour market in relation to vulnerable groups and disadvantaged people" (EU Commission 1996, S. 22).

Priorities are clearly set on the most disadvantaged groups as recipients of counselling. Career guidance should not only provide orientation for careers. Rather, CGS should actively track vulnerable groups and disadvantaged people on an „outreach basis or through the organization of 'one-stop-shops' providing information and advice" (EU Commission 1996, S. 22). People are not only considered to be disadvantaged when they are excluded from the labour market but also if they are excluded from CGS.

Between 1980s and 2000, the government reforms are no longer seen as sufficient to overcome the seemingly unstoppable rise in unemployment. This governmental loss of control over the crisis leads to the conclusion that the solution has to be found by the individuals themselves. However, the addressees of CGS are mostly groups at risk. After the year 2000, CGS is not only discussed within a government reform discourse but becomes a part of the Lisbon strategy (EU Council 2000) within the discourse on a new major strategic goal and mission: lifelong learning.

4.2 Phase 2: From crisis to change – lifelong guidance and active citizens (2000-2010)

The (jobs) crisis that has been presented before as something that can be solved is now reframed into a constantly changing environment. The crisis is no longer considered as a certain period that can be left behind when the problems are solved. Instead, the crisis becomes a part of the political programme: Doing politics means managing the crisis. In the Lisbon Strategy, the EU describes the world with the buzzwords „globalisation" and „knowledge economy". Both are drawing away from the EU's influence and thus have a strong unilateral influence on all aspects of people's everyday lives. Globalisation and knowledge-based society are the main political guidelines.

> „The rapid and accelerating pace of change means it is urgent for the Union to act now to harness the full benefits of the opportunities presented. Hence the need for the Union to set a clear strategic goal and agree a challenging programme for building knowledge infrastructures, enhancing innovation and economic reform, and modernising social welfare and education systems" (EU Council 2000).

The former, important crisis rhetoric is replaced by the more neutral formulation of „change" in the Lisbon Strategy. The new wording emphasises an expanding crisis; a crisis that is

continuous. Moreover, „change" is not limited to a period, but is a constant value, focusing on all aspects of life. However, 'change' stresses – unlike crisis – not only the negative consequences but rather indicates hidden opportunities. In contrast to a manageable crisis that has to end as soon as possible by going back to 'normality', change legitimatises talking about this new situation in a positive manner. Instead of setting up a solution (creating 15 million new jobs) to a problem (job crisis), the EU develops a strategic goal that aims at adapting to the ongoing change. This adaptation strategy promises to even gain benefits from the change (former crisis).

One cornerstone of this adaptation strategy is the renewed interest in lifelong learning. Under the umbrella of lifelong learning, career guidance is given a new name: lifelong guidance. Nonetheless, this 'new' lifelong guidance approach continues along the established lines of EU politics and its definition of the role of the state by taking on an intermediary role between the business world and the individual. This elevates career guidance to an important nexus between the labour market and the individual. In the memorandum on lifelong learning the EU Commission states:

> „In this context, a new approach is needed which envisages guidance as a continuously accessible service for all, and which overcomes the distinction between educational, vocational and personal guidance, and which reaches out to new publics. Living and working in the knowledge society calls for active citizens who are self-motivated to pursue their own personal and professional development. This means that systems of provision must shift from a supply-side to a demand-side approach, placing users' needs and demands at the centre of concern" (EU Commission 2000, S. 17).

In the knowledge society, guidance should become an all-inclusive service that no longer distinguishes between professional or personal advice. The dissolution of the distinction between personal and vocational, or between life and work, manifests itself in the image of the „active citizen". This active citizen who is each and every single person – without exception. This active citizen is characterised by self-motivated action (Schröder/Karl 2017). Paradoxically, the active citizen is simultaneously an essential premise for the knowledge society and its result. Moreover, there is no longer a differentiation between the target populations, and CGS expands to cover the entire life course.

Hence, CGS has now become an increasingly important factor which, according to the EU, has to be provided to all individuals. Published documents of the CEDEFOP facilitate forming of lifelong guidance. On the one hand, documents show an observational and analysing attitude, also descriptive and recording (e.g. in the presentation of study results or the description of the actual conditions of career guidance services in various European states). On the other hand, CEDEFOP published distinct guidance recommendations which have had a significant impact. For example, the CEDEFOP developed and distributed specific instruments (e.g. check lists or reference tools) or the „common European reference tools" of lifelong guidance policies and systems (CEDEFOP 2005). Major guidelines are to be defined on a European level and implemented on a national level.

In summary, the EU documents as well as CEDEFOP papers place CGS within the life-long learning discourse. External events (crisis) calling for reaction are substituted by a vision/strategy of assisting the so-called active citizen. This subjectivation knows no target group of vulnerable people but addresses each and everyone.

4.3 Phase 3: An omnipotent guidance faces a changing crisis (2010-2015)

The third phase, starting in 2010, can be considered as a transformation of the arena of the discourse. The EU Council published two main resolutions in 2004 and 2008 that set the framework for the expected role of guidance. After that, there are no more EU Commission or EU Council publications that primarily focus on guidance. Instead, in the third phase after 2010, the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN; founded in 2007) as well as CEDEFOP developed check lists, tool kits, examples of best practices, etc. for member states to implement lifelong guidance within their national political programs. ELGPN and CEDEFOP use two resolutions of the EU Council as a basis to negotiate the social significance of lifelong guidance. In this respect, there is a shift in speaker positions within the guidance discourse in which the EU gives further definition and refinement of advice to European and national public agencies operating within the context of education and guidance. Likewise, different institutions were established in the context of guidance by the member states, e.g. the „Nationales Forum Beratung in Bildung, Beruf und Beschäftigung in Deutschland" (National Guidance Forum for Education, Career, and Employment in Germany).

Besides, in the third phase, the crisis rhetoric resurfaces. However, this time the crisis and its consequences are opposed to an omnipotent guidance. Guidance still operates on the individual level but it is used for the benefit of the market.

> „Guidance is not only for people in particular circumstances. Importantly, it allows for developing workers' skills in a lifelong perspective, which can be carefully planned to combine personal with enterprise needs. Integrating this approach into human resource management can reduce skill mismatch in enterprises and increase productivity and work satisfaction" (CEDEFOP 2014, S. 1).

Guidance continues to be regarded as a nexus which connects different areas of society and individuals. By providing information about job prospects and individual learning and training needs that are demanded by other instances, it is attributed a high degree of flexibility. Thus, guidance becomes omnipotent as it promises to hold the key for a constant adaptation towards a changing crisis. However, the individual is held responsible for using the key that might open the personal doors of opportunity.

To sum up, guidance is introduced in the 1990s as a reactive instrument to manage a barely controllable crisis. From the 2000s on, the idea of political feasibility and controllability of social change is paramount. However, feasibility means adaptation to change. And this needs to be done by active citizens assisted by lifelong guidance. After 2010, actors other than the EU Council or EU Commission dominate the discourse that focuses on the implementation of career guidance. The crisis rhetoric resurfaces in the CEDEFOP and ELGPN publications, which makes lifelong guidance seemingly omnipotent. Guidance promises to be able to manage the unmanageable: a rapidly changing crisis. However, guidance is supposed to do that at the expense of the individual's freedom since she/he is now supposed to accept her/his innate need to be guided.

CEDEFOP papers reiterate that lifelong guidance addresses a group of people who are also addressed individually at the same time. Guidance affects all citizens, because the nature of citizenship leads automatically towards the attribute of the citizens as a subject of guidance.

In this sense, a citizen without guidance is almost unimaginable, and guidance appears to be a medium that cannot be scrutinised but affects citizens in any case.

5 Critical reflections within and upon the discourse on CGS

The first notable observation about the discourse on CGS in the EU is the fact that this discourse seems to be marked by homogeneity and uniformity between the most influential actors within the arena of the discourse. The discourse on CGS relies on three crucial documents to which all actors agree upon issued by the EU Commission (2000) and EU Council (2004; 2008).

Although, these key documents have not received direct criticism within the analysed documents, we were able to identify a typical mechanism in our analysis, which provides the basis for all critique. Especially, after 2010 more actors become actively involved in the discourse (ELGPN, CEDEFOP and others). This lays the foundation for more critical voices.

Critical voices within the discourse usually refer to a humanistic ideal. They unfold their criticism by attesting an imbalance between individual needs (personal fulfilment) and aspirations of the CGS's target population on the one hand and the demands of the market economy on the other hand. Within the CGS discourse, we have found three varieties of this imbalance between personal growth and demands of the labour market (Schroeder/Karl 2017).

5.1 CGS as social participation and personal development

We found, as a first strategy, a critical voice that repeatedly yet quietly indicates that career guidance not only supports the objective of the EU-Lisbon Strategy (EU Council 2000) or the EU-2020 Strategy (EU Commission 2010) by providing human resources to the labour market but also promotes social participation and personal development. Such a critical voice is latent and normally utilised as a part of papers that basically promote the idea of career guidance.

In the introduction of a CEDEFOP synthesis report on guidance policies, the author states:

> „Defining guidance as both a public and a private good, most countries are careful in emphasising that information and advice ought to serve both individual needs – by expanding their awareness of options and opportunities, and enabling them to make decisions wisely so they can have more fulfilling lives – and the needs of the society and economy" (CEDEFOP 2004, S. 8).

In this quotation, the way to a greater fulfilment in life consists of two steps. First, there are options and opportunities that are unknown by the individual but knowing them would increase the range of choices. In a second step, the individual will have to select. This selection has to be chosen wisely to have a more fulfilling life. The fact that individual needs as well as the stepwise compliance with these needs are mentioned in the beginning of the sentence creates the impression that the needs of society and economy are secondary to the personal ones.

However, the range of choices is limited to the labour market in the case of career guidance. Choices consist in either increasing the employability by (further) qualifications or by looking for other job opportunities that have not been in the focus of the individual before. A sensible decision that would lead to a more fulfilling life, consequently, can then only correspond with

adapting to the labour market. This assumption is substantiated by the fact that such interests of the individual are no longer mentioned in the remaining 184 pages of this document.

The critical voice in this paragraph is aware that the imbalance between individual needs and the demands of society and economy is inherent to career guidance. Nonetheless, the author recounts the aspect of individual needs. This leads to the conclusion that the author wants to stress both sides of career guidance and thus creates a critical awareness of the reader as the reader is asked to keep both aspects of career guidance in mind while reading the rest of the text.

5.2 Reporting critic on CGS by citing third parties

A second critical voice comes from relating CGS to other discourses and from reframing it in scientific papers and thereby reporting critique from third parties. In writing for an EU actor, the critique is expressed more latently than in scientific papers. For instance, the author of the above mentioned CEDEFOP report also expresses concerns in a publication for ELGPN by describing the critical position of trade unions towards the concept of flexicurity, which could possibly have an (future) impact on career guidance:

> „While some of the less radical trade unions have been cautiously open to the notion of flexicurity, the crisis has increased fears that flexibility becomes the monopoly of employers, and that flexicurity becomes in fact nothing but flexibility in disguise" (ELGPN 2013b, S. 7).

The distinction drawn by the author between radical and less radical unions shows that the concept of flexicurity might be even recognised by „reasonable" unions (in contrast to radical ones). The author then uses the financial crisis as an argument to explain the fears of unionists that the flexibility would potentially undermine the factor of security. In this way, the author relativizes the critique but still is able to voice it publicly.

In a scientific paper on the same issue of flexicurity, the author uses almost the same text but more openly expresses his concerns by adding quotations of other scientists:

> „Labour movements and critical social theorists working from within this perspective challenge the Commission, which is seen to promote a style of flexicurity that accommodates capital (Preece 2009)" (Preece 2009 cited in Sultana 2013, S. 153).

The author bases his critical arguments on labour movements (instead of just only on radical unions) as well as critical social theorists. This enhances the legitimacy of the critical arguments.

5.3 Advocating individual needs against economical demands

A third way to express critique is by portraying other discourses that are linked to CGS. Thereby, normative claims are made that distinguish between CGS and others. In such a critique, CGS play a role in advocating the individual needs against the requests of the economy. Particularly the ELGPN papers give space to such critical voices as they relate CGS to other discourses. For instance, one ELGPN paper states the aim to

> „[…] 'insert' career guidance in the flexicurity policy discourse, and to articulate the field's important insights and concerns within that discourse" (ELGPN 2013b, S. 9).

By introducing a different discourse – like the one surrounding flexicurity – the author is able to critically examine this discourse and to highlight her/his own major concern regarding career guidance. In an ELGPN paper focusing on flexicurity, the author draws the reader's attention to the potential dangers of the political claims related to flexicurity.

> „This change – i.e. the changing of jobs within the same employment sector; the change of employment sector; the change from full-time to part-time work, or from indeterminate to time-bound employment contract; the change from work to study, training, or an extended leisure periods – is, within the flexicurity discourse, often presented as enabling and life-enhancing, an antidote to the tiresome routine and predictability of a one-track life [...] and indeed it may very well be when freely chosen. It may be, however, that such change may be experienced as a non-negotiable requirement by the 'realities' of the new economy, resulting in all sorts of hardships" (ELGPN 2013b, S. 9).

The author's statements on the flexicurity discourse are easily transferable to the discourse on career guidance. The parallels are based on conflicting priorities of security and flexibility (in the flexicurity discourse) or between individual needs and demands of society and economy (in the career guidance discourse). In both cases, the author bases her/his critique on the imbalance not in favour of individual demands put on a level with security and in favour of the demands of society and economy that comply with flexibility. The critical question arising from this is a general one and can be reformulated as follows: 'Is adapting to change a free choice?' Consequently, this question has to be answered by career guidance, which then receives the task of re-balancing the conflicting priorities by advocating the individual needs and the aspect of security. Such a line of argumentation indirectly stresses a role of career guidance that counters the common perspective of career guidance by EU institutions, which revolves around an exclusive focus on job placements, subordination to labour market needs (increasing lifelong employability) and unconditional mobility.

The varieties of imbalance between personal growth and demands of the labour market are mostly addressed by strategies focusing on the individual: Individuals are addressed as deficient but capable to manage their own lives. We could not find any critique asking for structural changes. Thus, critical positions remain on a level that promotes individualised responsibility. This might even straighten the basis of legitimacy of CGS as a civil right. CGS has become a precondition for becoming an active and effective citizen. Against this background, the critical voices are also contributing to stabilising the pattern of CGS.

6 Discussion of the findings and implications for social work

As a result, the diachronic reconstruction shows how a pattern of interpretations of CGS evolves over time and stabilises as predominant pattern. This pattern individualises responsibility and thereby becomes a fundamental and unavoidable service for individuals. On the political side, CGS is framed as something meaningful for every individual citizen in the EU: Individuals can only become (active) citizens through career guidance.

No critique for structural change can be found in the political documents, a fact that seems to be expectable given the fact that neoliberalism is an unquestioned political leitmotiv. Thus, our findings are in line with the current research on career guidance and neoliberalism, the transfer of responsibility to labour contractors, the dismantling of the welfare state and other aspects (Hooley, T., Sultana, R. G., & Thomsen, R. 2018b). In Addition to that our research shows that even something that could metaphorically be called „voices of dissent", "minority

reports" or "warnings" of possible side effects or problematics of CGS nonetheless fit in that mainstream discourse without really challenging it.

The question remains, *what social work can possibly do with the presented findings, their interpretation and discussion?*

However, guidance and counselling are essential forms of action in almost all areas of social work. The opportunity to engage in gainful employment has a considerable place in the life aspirations for many addressees of social work. This is not a surprise, because being without work has many negative consequences. It goes along with social exclusion, due to inadequate participation in the social consumption. Besides, in a society in which people define themselves primarily through their professional activity, unemployment is experienced as a blemish. The weak social status due to lack of consumption and the blemish of being unemployed leads to a withdrawal from social life.

Therefore, assisting to successfully manage transitions to work has become an important field for social workers. For this reason, it seems more important to us to acquire in the discipline and profession of social work a critical attitude to forms of counselling, especially with regard to career guidance.

In social work research, this would include to question and deconstruct the omnipresent and dominant patterns that we and others have started researching (Bengtsson 2011). This pattern holds CGS as an indispensable common good, a civil right for everyone regardless of age, gender or situation in life. Individually, CGS helps to increase the chances for achieving the transition to gainful employment. Structurally, CGS is primarily helping to meet the demands of a changing labour market. Hooley, T., Sultana, R. G., & Thomsen, R. (2018) have asked the right question as a good starting point for such a research: They ask: „if career guidance is the solution – what is the problem?". They identify different frames that are all linked to human capital theories. Therefore, the authors suggest „to reframe the way in which the problem was represented and move from problems to problematisation" (p. 4). Within research and practice may develop different approaches to career guidance practices by thinking out of the box of neoliberalism that shift problems ensuing from structural level to the individual responsibility. Thus, social work(ers) should reflect upon their practices and how they contribute to a societal development that is in benefit for the people first.

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Author's Address:
Dr. Christian Schröder
Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft des Saarlandes
Fakultät für Sozialwissenschaften
christian.schroeder@htwsaar.de
https://www.htwsaar.de/sowi/fakultaet/personen/Wissenschaftliche-Mitarbeiterinnen-und-Mitarbeiter/dr christian-schroeder

Author's Address:
Dr. Ute Karl
ute.karl@me.com

Author’s Address:
Dr. Claudia Muche
Universität Hildesheim
Institut für Sozial- und Organisationspädagogik
muchec@uni-hildesheim.de

Author’s Address:
Prof. Dr. Inga Truschkat
Universität Hildesheim
truschka@uni-hildesheim.de