

## 1<sup>st</sup> slide

Hello,

My name is Jean-Jacques Ruppert and I am the Head of the Luxembourg-based 'Applied Vocational Psychology and Policy' research unit, known as AVOPP. The two co-authors of this talk are my friends and colleagues Andreas Frey and Bernd-Joachim Ertelt from the University of Applied Labour Studies of the Federal Employment Agency, which is in Mannheim Germany. Andreas, who is the rector of the university, has asked me to present his apologies to you for not being here today due to another commitment. The subject of our contribution today is "Guidance, Counselling and Social Justice: Mission Impossible?"

But first let me tell you a little fairy-tale:

## 2<sup>nd</sup> slide

"The Wondrous Story of Guidance and Career Counsellors and Social Justice" !

## 3<sup>rd</sup> slide

**Once upon a time** there was a planet far, far away where social injustices and divisions had created wide economic and social gaps between, and within, countries. A great number of the inhabitants of this planet were out of work - among them many and often highly qualified young people. Those lucky enough to be in jobs, were often paid less than those taken on with the same or even lower qualifications a couple of years earlier. At the same time, employers complained of a dramatic shortage of skills and competences in jobseekers - the future looked very bleak indeed. Furthermore, a number of policies to promote social inclusion and cohesion had actually worsened the situation, proving to be ineffective in the creation of a democratic, participative and inclusive society. But not all was lost, as there was a group of indomitable individuals who still held out against this terrible state of affairs: the Guidance and Career Counsellors ! Deeply committed to social justice, advocating for, and with their clients at both individual and system levels, they began to address the structural and societal barriers that oppressed the people. They argued that promoting equality of opportunity regarding access to education, training and employment was no longer enough. Indeed, they believed that all concerned had to strive to achieve nothing less than equity and equality of *outcomes*. The Guidance and Career Counsellors believed that social justice meant

recognising that people should not be subservient to the demands of the labour market, and that consequently, the careers agenda should not be driven by solely economic rationalist arguments, but rather encompass a holistic view through which the needs of all human development could be taken into account.

So, one day, the Guidance and Career Counsellors decided to go and see the Policy-Makers and asked them to reassess the contribution that careers education, guidance and counselling could make to promoting a just society, and how the Policy-Makers could provide the material and political support to make this a reality. As the Policy-Makers were wise men and women, though obviously not as wise as the Guidance and Career Counsellors, they promised to embrace social justice as a core value of their future policies. The Guidance and Career Counsellors were overjoyed at this good news as it would help to ensure that career practice once more became truly meaningful, and real career choice was made available to all the people.

**And they all lived happily ever after.**

Well, that brings me to the end of our little fairy-tale and back to the rather different realities of our time !

After the IAEVG Finland communiqué in 2009 on 'The Value of Career Guidance in an Economic Crisis', we warmly welcomed the new tone of last year's Montpellier communiqué as evidence of a real desire to think beyond current confines. Such "blue-sky thinking" however must nevertheless operate within the parameters of the possible, for what is at issue here is nothing less than how counsellors should engage with the "real" world in order to promote social justice.

So what now is **OUR** "real" world ?

Taking the present authors, you can see that we are white Caucasian, of a certain age, and we come from 'old' Europe. Our ideas on what constitutes social justice are deeply rooted in this cultural background. Our Western European culture however, together all its associated values, beliefs and assumptions is becoming ever less influential on a global scale. This is due, in part, to the growing populations coupled with technological, political and societal developments in many countries around the world. To demonstrate this in purely numerical terms, note that in 1900, Europeans represented 20% of the global population. In 2000, we were still 11%. However, by

2050 we will be down to 7% and by the end of this century, this figure is expected to fall to a mere 4%.

These demographic changes have political and economic impacts on Europe, both now and for the future. And the consequences for people in Europe are already, and often very painfully visible in, for example rising unemployment. There is also a huge impact on our collective psyche, on how we look at ourselves and on how we see others, not least the so-called emerging economies that are increasingly winning market-shares Europeans thought were theirs for good.

While we could take refuge in our past greatness, in the fading glory and nostalgia of a distant Empires, such a 'head-in-the-sand' attitude will not make up for our diminished role on the world-stage. Nor will it help to blame our new competitors for our economic woes, but rather, we need to reassess and adapt our systems to be more effective given the changing economic realities we face.

By the same token, our education system must also evolve so that it can appropriately equip coming generations to live and work in a world which is very different from the one in which we grew up. It has become common practice for people to claim that our education system fails young people, and that poor guidance and counselling is responsible for many of our present ills.

In the second half of the last century, many European countries enjoyed a hitherto unknown degree of upward social mobility, with successive generations of "winners". Assuming that this state of affairs would last forever, people are now shocked to discover that, in less affluent times, our democratic and free market economy can also create "losers". It is only now dawning on many of us that we and/or our children might be today's or tomorrow's "losers". The German "Wirtschaftswunder", the French "Trente Glorieuses", or the statement made in 1957 by the then British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that "most of our people have never had it so good" all refer to a golden age of economic growth and prosperity.

What has been forgotten however, and **4<sup>th</sup> slide** what Thomas Piketty, the new star in the world of economics and author of the much acclaimed 'Capital in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century' reminds us of, is that this period of unprecedented growth and improved

living-standards was underpinned by the enormous need for reconstruction and development after WW2, in other words, there simply was a lot of catching up to do. The 2013 Montpellier communiqué concluded as follows: *“The IAEVG, as the largest worldwide guidance association, appeals to providers, practitioners, academics and policy-makers, to increase their efforts by embracing **social justice** as a core value that guides their practices.”*

It is difficult to gauge whether such an appeal has any effect on the decisions policy-makers will end up making but we are reasonably optimistic that the European Commission and the various EU governments will heed the recommendations made by the ‘European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network’ and the individual National Lifelong Guidance Policy Forums.

Let me also stress that we fully agree with the Montpellier communiqué that social justice is indeed a **counselling concern** that has already been investigated by prominent scholars such as Nancy Arthur, Sandra Collins and Mary McMahon. They see guidance and counselling as an interface between the needs of an individual counselee and the broader needs of society.

Andreas, Joachim and I consider the pursuit of social justice foremost as a core **philosophical value** upon which a counsellor should base his or her practices; a **guiding principle** but not an actual practical approach or a specific counselling technique.

The 2012 UK Government report on Social Justice states that *“Social Justice is about making society function better ...”* , *“...to increase social mobility”*. This is indeed all very nice and noble and there is no way one could morally argue a case against it. But we also know that the idea of social justice is never a neutral one, it is at best a multidimensional and at worst a controversial and divisive concept. And if we have some issues with its premise of **equality of opportunities**, we seriously question the emphasis the Montpellier communiqué puts on **equality of outcomes**. To illustrate our qualms, let me read out a few lines from a book most of you will have read when you were children:

5<sup>th</sup> slide

*“First (the Dodo) marked out a race-course, in a sort of circle, (‘the exact shape doesn't matter,’ it said,) and then all the party were placed along the course, here*

*and there. There was no 'One, two, three, and away,' but they began running when they liked, and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. However, when they had been running half an hour or so, .... the Dodo suddenly called out 'The race is over!' and they all crowded round it, panting, and asking, 'But who has won?'*

*This question the Dodo could not answer without a great deal of thought, and it sat for a long time with one finger pressed upon its forehead (the position in which you usually see Shakespeare, in the pictures of him), while the rest waited in silence. At last the Dodo said, 'EVERYBODY has won, and all must have prizes.'* “

Well, contrary to this race in 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland', I suppose we can all agree on the basic premise that in a real race going over a fixed distance, all the runners start at the same time and from the same spot - this is put into simple words what basic **equality of opportunities** amounts to. The organisers of a race might even decide to let anyone who wants to run, do so; they might also insist that all the runners have the same running gear. Furthermore, they might possibly want to ensure that all the runners have access to the same training facilities and why not, even benefit from the same nutrition. You would then really have to applaud the promoters of the race for their efforts and give them credit for having done everything possible to promote **equality of opportunities**, i.e. for having eliminated many **arbitrary formal barriers** to the participation in the race. What the organisers of the race however will have no influence over is the different levels of talent that the individual runners possess i.e. the **informal barriers** that might determine their performance in the race. Nevertheless, so far so good.

But what about the **outcome** of the race ?

Well, we firmly believe that the organisers should not have any power over who finishes first, second, third and so on. **Equality of outcomes** would indeed mean that all the runners finish at the same time, that everybody wins and gets the first prize.

We argue therefore that policy-makers should not, and indeed do not, have any tools to create an **equality of outcomes**. Coming back however to the question of how equal the **opportunities** should be, we wonder whether significant interferences by policy-makers are desirable or whether they could lead to other, different types of injustice.

An extreme case of extreme social intervention is depicted in Aldous Huxley's dystopian 'Brave New World' where children are created, "*decanted*", and raised in "*hatcheries and conditioning centres*". They are from birth genetically designed to fit into one of five castes, which are further split into "*Plus*" and "*Minus*" members and designed to fulfill predetermined positions within the social and economic strata of the World State.

Although we cannot imagine any of us endorsing a societal model where life chances and trajectories are predetermined as they are in 'Brave New World', let us nevertheless have **critical look at the society we live in.**

50 years after Pierre Bourdieu's works on social reproduction, the opening lines of the French sociologist <sup>6<sup>th</sup> slide</sup> Camille Peugny's 2013 book 'Le destin au berceau: Inégalités et reproduction sociale', which roughly translates as 'Destiny in the cradle: Inequalities and social reproduction' states the following: "*In France today, seven out of ten children of white collar workers, have a position of white collar worker a few years after the end of their studies; however, seven out of ten children of blue collar workers remain confined to blue collar jobs. More than two centuries after the Revolution, birth conditions continue to determine the fate of individuals. One does not become a blue collar worker, **one is born a blue collar worker***".

It can be argued therefore that our society, with its class-based constraints, has some parallels to the nightmarish model depicted in 'Brave New World'.

To make matters even worse, it is doubtful that education alone can change this situation. Of course, there is more to education than its utilitarian value but when push comes to shove, the value of a qualification is only as high as the labour market is willing to pay for it. A young man with a Ph.D. in astrophysics who cannot find employment corresponding to his qualification and drives a taxi for a living, is at the end of the day unfortunately still only a taxi-driver, earning a taxi-driver's wages. Or as <sup>7<sup>th</sup> slide</sup> John Marsh remarks in his 2011 book 'Class dismissed': "*all the education in the world ... will not make those jobs pay more than they do. A waitress with a B.A. still hustles for tips*".

But back to the race I mentioned earlier on: let us assume for argument's sake that the race is organised by employers looking for new staff and that the runners are potential future employees. As there are many employers it follows that there are

also many different races of various lengths and degrees of difficulty. Finally, and as you might expect, the rewards for coming first, second and so on also vary from race to race.

So where do guidance and career counsellors fit into this picture?

Well, counsellors actually have **two** different **roles** to play: on the one hand, they are a kind of **referee** or **judge** who aids the organisers in selecting the best runners for a number of future races the organisers may have in mind. On the other hand, they are a kind of **coach** supporting the runners before, during and possibly even after any given race.

And what can individual guidance and career counsellors then do if they want to promote social justice ?

In the role of **coach**, they must focus on the **individuals**. If they base their practices on the philosophical guiding principle of social justice, they should be in a position to give **unbiased** counsel to individuals regarding their potential participation in any given “race”, accompany them in their preparation, and follow them up afterwards. This gives them **considerable power** at an **individual level** ensuring that **informal** barriers are eliminated.

In the role of **referee** or **judge**, they must focus on the **system**. If they also base their practices on the philosophical guiding principle of social justice, they should be in a position to ensure that the selection process for the “race” is fair and unbiased. In other words that everyone has an equal chance to acquire the relevant skills, competences and qualifications necessary. This gives them **considerable power** at a **system level** ensuring that **formal** barriers are eliminated.

So, is the pursuit of Social Justice by guidance and career counselors a Mission Impossible ?

We think the answer has to be an unmitigated **NO** even though it would be wrong to overestimate the impact that guidance and career counselors have.

Whether they are coaches or referees/judges, all guidance and career counselors should agree that *“a person’s race or gender or religion shall not be allowed to affect their chances of being selected for a job, of getting a good education and so on.”* (Swift, 2001).

When acting as **coaches**, counselors have no impact on the circumstances that individuals face, but they do have an influence on the **choices** and on the **decisions** the counselees will **make**.

However, when acting as **referees** or **judges**, counselors have no impact on the choices and decisions that individuals will make, but they do have an influence on the **circumstances** that the counselees **face**.

Needless to say that this is easier said than it is for guidance and career counselors to actually do. And that is why I will conclude this presentation with a reference to Thorkild Grosboel, a minister in the Danish Lutheran church who had caused great controversy in 2003 when he said he no longer believed in God. Personally, I have great sympathy for this gentleman because I often have the same doubts about guidance and career counselling as he has about God. I must however stress that my loss of faith is not in guidance and career counselling per se, but in how it has been preached and practiced for too long.

Anyway I do not think that in the end it will be allegedly bad guidance and career counselling that will lead humanity to its loss, but rather our refusal to accept what we do nevertheless know very well i.e. that without profound changes to our lifestyles, to our economic model and our social practices, it is unlikely that we will outlive the upheavals of the 21st century.

8<sup>th</sup> slide Thank you for your attention.

9<sup>th</sup> slide