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Subordinating careers to market forces?

A critical analysis of European career guidance policy

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Abstract

This study explores language regarding career and career development in European policy documents on career guidance in order to disclose underlying view(s) of these phenomena conveyed in the texts. Qualitative content analysis was used to approach the subject in the texts, followed by a sender-oriented interpretation. Sources for interpretation include several sociological and pedagogical approaches based upon social constructionism. These provide a framework for understanding how different views of career phenomena arise. The characterization of career phenomena in the documents falls into four categories: contextual change, environment-person correspondence, competence mobility, and empowerment. An economic perspective on career dominates, followed by learning and political science perspectives. Policy formulations convey contradictory messages and a form of career 'contract' that appears to subordinate individuals' careers to global capitalism, while attributing sole responsibility for career to individuals.

Keywords: career; career development; lifelong learning; guidance; European policies

Introduction

At the end of the 20th century, a new social arrangement of work emerged. Occupational and educational prospects were no longer linear, predictable or stable, and employment was no longer secure nor lifelong (Savickas et al., 2009). Globalization – economic and social conditions, business and industry – required a knowledge economy and a more knowledgeable workforce (Jarvis, 2009a). By the late 20th century, a renewed interest in lifelong learning had thus emerged which emphasised the economic perspective, ideas of global capitalism and competition, in contrast to the humanistic perspective of the 1960s (Rubenson, 2009). Transnational agencies such as the World Bank, UNESCO, OECD and the European Commission have played key roles in communicating this increased interest in lifelong learning strategies in European

countries (Jarvis, 2009b) and have promoted a neo-liberal model of globalization (Torres, 2009). The intensified focus on lifelong learning in Europe (e.g. European Commission, 2001; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 1996) was followed by an increased focus on career guidance policy making. As part of the adult education field, career guidance is recognized to play an important role in implementing lifelong learning strategies in European countries (see, e.g., European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training [CEDEFOP], 2005; Jütte, Nicoll & Salling Olesen, 2011).

A more fragmented working life has entailed recurring transitions for adults. Guidance practitioners in different countries and settings often serve as support to adults transitioning between different educational and working settings. Assisting and supporting adults in their career prospects and choices, they are influenced by several kinds of theories, such as career and counselling theories (Kidd, 2006). Theories of career choice and decision-making (e.g. Kidd, 2006), narrative approaches to career guidance (e.g. Cochran, 1997; Savickas, 2005), adult learning theories such as life history approaches or biographical approaches for instance (e.g. Alheit & Dausien, 1999; Merrill, 2009), are found relevant for supporting adults in today's environment (see, e.g., Savickas et al., 2009). Kidd (2006) stresses that career guidance is 'essentially educative.... helping individuals learn, sift and make sense of material in order to come to a greater understanding of themselves' (2006, p. 68).

While the organization of career supportive activities may differ within and between countries, and the directions for practice may differ, it should not be taken for granted that the aims of career intervention are always clearly defined or articulated. Nilsson (2010) states that, although aims inform the direction of practice and express some kind of underlying ideology, it has never been seriously analysed whether guidance shall primarily satisfy individual interests or the interests of the market. Different trends have influenced guidance practice in line with changing views about career and career development (e.g. Kidd, 2006; Nilsson, 2010). Several authors (Arthur, Hall & Lawrence, 1989; Collin, 2007; Kidd, 2006; Patton & McMahon, 2006) point to a conceptual confusion regarding career and career development due to multiple meanings and differing interpretations among the different fields of practice, perspectives and disciplines. Collin (2007) notes that the concepts are used for various personal, scholarly, social, managerial, economic and/or political purposes. In addition, according to Manninen (1998), education has different roles that lead to different guidance policies. From a career management focus, guidance is based upon adjustment to changes; from a career planning focus, guidance is based upon future opportunities; and from a career designing focus, guidance is based upon interests and strengths.

One should not ignore the influence common policies can have on career guidance practice in virtue of the fact that they somehow communicate the main purpose of education. The creation of common policies to be applied across the diverse career guidance structures, delivery systems and practices of EU member states would seem to occasion the imposition of some particular view of career phenomena. However, dilemmas that may occur when understandings of career phenomena are contradictory, seem to go unrecognized. As indicated by Jütte, Nicoll and Salling Olesen (2011), it is a paradox that adult education appears to lose both visibility and contour the more it becomes central to debates of lifelong learning. This appears to also be the case for guidance practitioners as part of the adult education field. The need for further knowledge concerning career guidance and adult career development, in relation to changing conditions and about policy strategies designed to connect education, working life and the supporting societal system has been identified by several authors (e.g. Lindh

& Lundahl, 2008; Watts & Sultana, 2004). Therefore, it is important to scrutinize the language regarding career and career development in the relevant European policy documents. The expressions, statements and view(s) concerning career phenomena therein certainly influence the directions for career guidance practice in European countries. This study aims to explore characterizations of and disclose underlying views concerning career and career development as revealed by the language of European policy documents for career guidance.

Previous research

With the emergence of the new landscape of working life, researchers connected to the career field started to look at the possible impacts it would have on the career field (e.g. Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth & Larsson, 1996; Hall & Mirvis, 1996; Nicholson, 1996). From the organizational literature, the concept of ‘protean career’ was introduced (Hall & Mirvis, 1996), meaning that ‘to adapt and survive in a changing world, the individual needs to be self-generating’ (Patton & McMahon, 2006, p. 5). Patton and McMahon describe a change in focus from linear career development ‘to development through work and other life roles’ (2006, p. 6), where careers are no longer predicted and individuals need to focus on employability instead of job security. Hall (1996) states that, increasingly, the new career will be a continuous learning process; he suggests the need to develop meta-skills, such as learning how to learn, as well as self-knowledge and adaptability. As a result of this development, some new approaches to career guidance suggest that guidance practitioners need to work preventively with their clients (e.g. Plant, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009). Several authors also state that there is a crisis in the core concepts and models within the career field and that these need to be ‘reformulated to fit the postmodern economy’ (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 240). The emerging connection between lifelong learning strategies and career guidance policy, however, is not further analysed. These approaches do not clarify what the point of departure should be for career guidance practice, even though they recognize career as belonging to the individual (Savickas et al., 2009). Neither do they clarify the view(s) from which career shall be understood given the conditions of a knowledge-based society; they simply indicate that further analyses are needed. Arguments for an existing crisis in the fundamental theories, methods and models within the field, however, presuppose that there used to be a common understanding about the core concepts. This does not seem to be the case, as there is no common definition of the concept of career in the literature. As this study concerns the understanding of career phenomena, the focus will be on career theory.

Reviews of career theory suggest that the field is predominantly composed of psychological views and secondarily of sociological views (e.g. Arthur, Hall & Lawrence, 1989). An overview by Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989) describes different disciplinary positions on the career concept. For example, from a psychological perspective, career is regarded in one of three ways: as *a vocation*, as a *vehicle for self-realization*, or as a *component of the individual life structure*. Theory developed from the first position, accepts the traditional psychological position on stability of personality in adulthood and intends to help guide individuals, organizations and society. The second position is humanistic, focusing on the opportunities a career can provide for personal growth and on the benefits of individual growth to organizations and society. The third position regards transitions throughout a career as predictable. From a sociological perspective, career is regarded as either *the unfolding of social*

roles, recognizing the individual's mutual contribution to the social order, or as *social mobility*, regarding an individual's title as an indicator of social position. Also mentioned is the economic perspective, where career is regarded as *a response to market forces*, emphasizing the short-term distribution of employment opportunities and the long-term accumulation of human capital. The political science perspective regards career as *the enactment of self-interest*, emphasizing wealth, power, prestige and autonomy as principal objects of self-interested behaviour in the context of institutional political realities (Arthur et al., 1989, p. 10). Conceptual confusion and lack of clarity concerning the aims of career guidance practice creates uncertainty and challenges for practitioners and their clients.

Theoretical approaches

This article is guided by the view that the language of policy documents about individual career and career development derives from certain views and perspectives which, in turn, influence directions for career guidance practice. Given the lack of a common understanding of career, a framework is needed to capture how the different understandings of career arise. As a means of providing such a framework, and because the relationship between objective and subjective career is involved in career guidance practice (cf. Kidd, 2006; Nicholson & de Waal-Andrews, 2005), this article rests upon pedagogical and sociological approaches which conceive of society both in terms of objective and subjective reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Freire, 1972; Simmel, 1971a). Freire (1972) suggests that objectivity and subjectivity coexist in a constant dialectical relationship and that objective social reality is a product of human action. The meaning of objective career is thus a product of human action. Berger and Luckmann (1966) describe how the production or construction of social reality occurs, and explain that we take the reality of our everyday world for granted. Their view of reality as socially and linguistically constructed through an on-going dialectical process composed of the moments of 'externalization, objectivation and internalization' (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 149) provides a framework for understanding how different views and perspectives on career and career development arise. Human actions are repeated, disseminated and sorted into patterns – externalized – and practiced by others as habitual activities that are, institutionalized. Certain habitual patterns are typified and finally passed over to others and the institutionalization becomes objectified (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). When habits of communicating about something in a certain way, say, career and career development, become institutionalized, they are difficult to change because they are already given. Language, relationships and the era and context in which we live, all affect the way we understand reality (see, e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 2009). Gergen says that - in our case, views and perspectives on career and career development – get their meaning through their social usefulness: 'The way we describe and explain, so do we fashion our future' (Gergen, 2009, p. 11). Simmel (1971a) describes how individuals are influenced by and thus become bearers of cultural and structural conditions and institutions in society. His dialectical perspective employs the concepts of objective and subjective cultures. According to Simmel (Frisby & Featherstone, 1997), the reciprocal interaction between subjective and objective culture is conflictual because the development of objective culture encloses forms of domination. Simmel (1971b) suggests that individuals can be subordinated to impersonal objective principles; that is, we can be subordinated to a relation of ideas and moral constructs that we have not initiated. According to Freire

(1972), objective social reality does not exist by coincidence, but as a product of human action; therefore, it will not change by coincidence. His pedagogy (Freire 1972, 2000) provides a perspective of reciprocal interaction between subjective and objective conceptions of career that help bring our taken-for-granted views into awareness. Dialogue is central to Freire's pedagogy, (as it is to the profession of the guidance practitioner), and the key objective in his pedagogical approach is the creation of awareness to enable a process of liberation. The role of education, according to Freire, is to develop individual awareness so the individual can choose and decide for herself and independently change her situation, rather than adapt to a pattern that is already given.

The present article regards career guidance practice from an adult education perspective: as a supportive and educative practice (cf. Alheit & Dausien, 1999; Cochran, 1997; Kidd, 2006; Savickas et al., 2009) with focus on the individual, in which learning is regarded as 'a qualitative change of understanding, rather than the quantitative increase of knowledge' (Bron & Wilhelmson, 2004, p. 14). Moreover, it is inspired by humanistic ideological discussions about lifelong learning (e.g. Gustavsson, 1996; Rubenson, 2009).

Methodological approaches

To capture the socially and linguistically constructed, objective social reality concerning career and career development that is produced by human action, focus is turned towards relevant European policy documents. The documents contain statements and expressions about career and career development that come from the societal level (thus representing structural conditions and institutions in society) that in turn influence both guidance practitioners and their clients. Based upon social constructionism, the intention here is to explore statements and expressions of and underlying view(s) on career phenomena that are socially and linguistically constructed. The following questions will be answered: *How does the language of European policy documents for career guidance characterize career and career development? What does the language disclose about the underlying view(s) regarding career and career development conveyed by the texts?*

Sampling

Because of the particular focus on European strategies to improve and direct the guidance field in implementing lifelong learning strategies in European countries, documents published by European Union agencies that in some way expressed one or several of the following words in combination were traced: *policy/policies, guidance, strategies, and lifelong learning*. With help from reference lists in articles and books that in various ways addressed career, guidance and issues of lifelong learning policy, and through web searches, four documents were located, selected and downloaded as empirical material for this study: Council of the European Union (2004, 2008); European Commission (2004); and CEDEFOP (2005). The selected texts represent a top-down perspective, and the language is therefore assumed to contain indications of and give expression to the senders' underlying view(s) of career and career development.

The analysis and processing of data

Qualitative content analysis as described by Graneheim and Lundman (2004) was deemed the appropriate method for approaching the texts. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), a conventional approach involves an inductive development of categories. This approach was used in the initial part of the analysis to explore the texts with regard to the first research question. The result of the first research question will be presented descriptively; the resultant categories, as per Graneheim and Lundman (2004), will refer to the manifest content.

First, the texts were read several times to gain an overall understanding of their content. Thereafter, meaning units corresponding to formulations of career and career development were identified. This way of identifying meaning units analysis was inspired by other studies (e.g. Curtis, 2004; Wallengren, Segesten & Friberg, 2010) which used questions aimed towards the texts to ensure that correct meaning units were included in the analysis. The search for meaning units in the present study is based on a holistic conception of career (Collin, 2007) and from the only definition of career found in the texts: 'Career refers to pathways in life in which competences are learned and/or used. The term covers life wide experiences both formal (education, work) and informal (home, community)' (CEDEFOP, 2005, p. 24). The following question was formulated and addressed towards the texts: *What textual units describe and express career and career development?* The meaning units identified were then extracted from the original texts, pasted into a table in a Word document and numbered according to chronology, meaning unit and page number of the original text. The meaning units were coded with synthesis key words or phrases. The material was reduced by bringing meaning units with the same or similar codes together. The reduced meaning units with codes and the inductively formed subcategories functioned in this process as tools with which to think. The subcategories were abstracted into four categories.

To gain a deeper understanding of these inductively developed categories, the following part of the analysis rests upon the textual model of Hellspong and Ledin (1997), described in five components: A text is constructed as we, 1) in a certain context, 2) use words (the textual) 3) to say something (the ideational) 4) to someone (the interpersonal) 5) in a certain way. To gradually disclose the underlying view(s) about career and career development in the texts, a sender-oriented interpretation was made according to the textual context and various disciplinary perspectives on the concept of career (Arthur et al., 1989). In the discussion section, I will look at what impact this may have for the role of future guidance practice and will further elaborate the result in relation to pedagogical and sociological approaches.

Result

How does the language of the selected European policy documents characterize career and career development?

The characteristics of career and career development that emerge from the analysis of the texts are captured in the four categories presented below.

Contextual change

Career and career development is characterized by *instability* and change. 'Citizens of any age and at any point in their lives' (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 2) are

Table 1. Example of the analysis process, going from meaning units towards code, sub-category and category

Meaning unit	Code	Sub-category	Category
Citizens of any age and at any point in their lives (1:1:2)	Recurrent life-changes	Instability	Contextual change
Learning at all ages and in a range of settings (1:22:5)	Changes in different settings		
Prepare Union citizens to develop their learning and professional pathways in a broader geographical context (4:3:1)	Being prepared for learning and professional pathways Being prepared for mobility	Preparation	
Develop their skills and competences throughout their lives (1:25:6)	Constantly being prepared	Preparation	Environment–person correspondence
linked to changing needs in the labour market (1:25:6)	Develop capabilities for correspondence – matching labour market needs	Adaptation, adjustment	
Transition to work, as well as return to studies (1:17:5)	Change from one condition/circumstance to another	Readjustment	
during periods of transition: – learning about the economic environment, businesses and occupations – understanding education, training and qualifications systems (4:22:5)	Environmental understanding	Transition learning	

Source: Author

expected to expose themselves or be exposed to recurrent life changes, to ‘lifelong career transitions’ (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 3), and to pass ‘through the range of learning, work, societal and personal transitions they undertake and/or encounter’ (CEDEFOP, 2005, p. 13). This requires individuals to be constantly prepared for these changes, as they need to ‘adapt their skills...to remain ahead of foreseeable or necessary changes’ (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 1). Thus, individuals’ career and career development includes continuous *preparation* for change. They also need to be prepared for learning—not occasionally, but constantly. They should look ahead and be prepared ‘for learning at all ages and in a range of settings, manage their learning and work access and progress through diverse learning opportunities and career pathways’ (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 5) and ‘develop their learning and professional pathways in a broader geographical context’ (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 1) for geographical and professional mobility. Thus, individuals’ careers and career development includes *preparation for instability*. Individuals are expected, either through their own commitment or in response to demands from surrounding conditions, to pass through multiple learning, work, societal, and private transitions: ‘Citizens’ lives are increasingly characterised by multiple transitions: notably from school to vocational education and training (VET), higher education or employment, or from employment to unemployment, further training or departure from the labour market’ (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 1).

Environment-person correspondence

The requirement of preparation for instability implies that individuals need to *adapt* their careers to reality. Guidance practitioners shall support individuals in ‘their choice of realistic and meaningful careers’ (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 3). The meaning of career, as per the above mentioned definition, thus implies that requirements for preparation for instability lead individuals to adapt and adjust their pathways in life – educational, working, private, and community pathways – to objective reality. Individuals need to ‘develop their skills and competences throughout their lives linked to changing needs in the labour market’ (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 6), so they can become ‘employable and adaptable staff’ (CEDEFOP, 2005, p. 11). Individuals thus need to adapt, develop and relate their abilities and their capacities to correspond with, or match, labour market requirements. They need to raise their ‘awareness of current and future employment and learning opportunities and through geographical and occupational mobility’ (CEDEFOP, 2005, p. 14). Matching is expected to improve through individuals’ environmental understanding and their geographical and occupational mobility (and thus, their increased employability). In addition, it is expected that individuals’ motivation, employability and adaptability will increase if they continuously engage in training and learning opportunities within and outside the workplace. The ever-expected, recurring contextual change, or this instability, requires a certain type of *transition learning* for individuals. Individuals need to gain a certain environmental knowledge, an understanding of the environment and surrounding conditions; ‘particularly during periods of transitions...[they need to learn] about the economic, environment, businesses and occupations...[and understand] education, training and qualifications systems’ (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 5). In addition, individuals need to be able to ‘evaluate [themselves], know [themselves]’ (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 5), ‘identify their transferable skills’ (CEDEFOP, 2005, p. 14) and describe their interests, abilities, and skills ‘acquired in formal, informal and non-formal education settings’ (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 5), as well as complete their educations. The multiple transitions of different types require individuals to *adjust* or *readjust* their pathways in life according to market requirements.

Competence mobility

The term ‘career development’ occurs only once in the texts, where it is expressed as part of improved matching: ‘...improving work performance and motivation, rates of job retention, reducing time spent in job search and time spent unemployed through improved matching of individuals’ competences and interests with work and career development opportunities’ (CEDEFOP, 2005, p. 14). Individuals are expected to continuously, at different ages and stages in life, make their capabilities visible (*visibility*), as well as describe their capabilities and the skills they have learned or used in different contexts: ‘to identify their capacities, competences and interests’ (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 2), ‘to identify competences gained from non-formal and informal learning; and to develop other competences’ (CEDEFOP, 2005, p. 24) and to ‘manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used’ (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 2). As a way to create conformity between individuals’ different life paths, personal development and employability, individuals are expected to describe their interests as well as to validate, or otherwise gain acknowledgement (*recognition*) of their non-formal and informal learning: ‘validation of non-formal and informal learning that includes reference to the role of guidance in helping citizens to identify

competences developed through such learning' (European Commission, 2004, p. 4). This implies that the competences an individual has learned or used in one context shall be used in a new context (*utility*). An individual's career and career development thus includes a kind of competence mobility.

Empowerment

Individuals are expected 'to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings' (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 2). They are thus expected to be independent and to control and manage their careers, thus their life paths, in different contexts in which they learn and apply their skills. They are expected 'to self-manage their learning and career paths effectively' (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 9), their 'work access and progress through diverse learning opportunities and career pathways' (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 5). Individuals thus need to learn how to make informed educational and vocational choices, to control their access to learning and work, and to progress through active involvement and participation in various learning opportunities and career paths. Learning throughout life in life's various venues and developing one's own management skills, such as learning to learn, social and civic skills and 'a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship' (CEDEFOP, 2005, p. 24) constitute the foundation for the empowerment of the autonomous individual. Likewise, the ability to independently search for learning opportunities, guidance and support 'is essential for an individual's personal fulfilment, professional development and social integration' (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 2). The individual's responsibility, her independence, or *autonomy*, is therefore essential for positive outcomes in which staff, pupils, students, and trainees become well motivated and 'capable of accessing and benefiting from learning opportunities both within and outside the workplace' (CEDEFOP, 2005, p. 11) and 'take responsibility for their own learning and set their own goals for achievement' (CEDEFOP, 2005, p. 11). Individuals will manage, plan and be responsible for their learning and work pathways in accordance with their life goals, while they also relate their skills and interests to the market. They are responsible for defining their own goals. Personal fulfilment is gained through self-government, preparation and correspondence with the market. Individuals are expected to govern themselves and manage their multiple transitions, 'to self-manage their learning and career paths effectively' (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 9), to 'manage...the transitions' (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 8).

What does the language disclose about the underlying view(s) regarding career and career development conveyed by the texts?

To understand the underlying view(s) regarding these phenomena conveyed by the texts, we need to turn our attention to the senders of this message and to the context in which the texts have emerged. The categories that emerged from the analysis will thus be elaborated according to a sender-oriented interpretation, followed by a receiver-oriented interpretation in the discussion section below.

Conditions and responses to these conditions

Contextual change and its subcategory of *instability* refer to the context of changing social and economic conditions governing an individual's career or – under a more holistic conception of career, – life prospects. The social and economic conditions of instability can be understood as a consequence of globalization processes and the

transition to a knowledge-based society, in which the reality of instability appears to be taken for granted. Under the category of *environment–person correspondence*, the sub-categories of *adaptation*, *adjustment*, *readjustment* and *transition learning* can all be regarded as required responses to these conditions. The categories of contextual change and environment–person correspondence are closely related. For example, *preparation*, as a subcategory of *contextual change*, seems to be a prerequisite for the required responses. Senders who appear very clearly in these categories are those representing labour market needs and those representing enterprises and workplaces, as exemplified by the following quotes: ‘employees and enterprises to have access to information, guidance, counselling to pursue a strategy for developing the competences of individual workers’ (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 7); ‘well motivated, employable and adaptable staff, capable of accessing and benefiting from learning opportunities both within and outside the workplace’ (CEDEFOP, 2005, p. 11). Thus, it appears that the texts are communicating views concerning individuals’ career and career development that derive from an *economic perspective* on career, that regards career as *a response to market forces* (cf. Arthur et al., 1989). Moreover, the career management focus, based upon adjustment to changes (cf. Manninen, 1998), appears to dominate these categories.

Transition learning, in turn, addresses a *learning perspective on career*, which is not mentioned as a dominant view on the career concept in Arthur, Hall and Lawrence’s review (1989). The relationship between career and learning has been recognized, however, by other authors (see, e.g., Merrill, 2009; Patton & McMahon, 2006). According to Patton and McMahon (2006), the concept of learning has been a part of career decision-making, anchored in the theory of Parson (1909) and learning came to include the concept of adjustment with the approaches of person–environment matching. As the senders communicate a matching perspective, transition learning then appears to embrace adjustment and the closely related concepts of adaptation and readjustment. If instability is imposed upon individuals, then learning might as well mean adjustment to sometimes less favourable conditions for the individual. The economic perspective and the learning perspective on career can be understood in relation to the increased interest for lifelong learning driven by business and industry (cf. Jarvis, 2009a) and ideas of globalised capitalism (cf. Rubenson, 2009).

The category of *competence mobility*, embracing the sub-categories of *visibility*, *recognition and utility*, and the category of *empowerment* can be regarded as *tools and behaviour with which to respond for the purpose of utility*. The expressed need for individuals to continuously highlight their capacities and competences and identify their interests corresponds to a career-designing focus in guidance policies (cf. Manninen, 1998), but it discloses the needs of the senders—that business and industry benefit from utilizing individuals’ capacities and competences. In combination with the economic and the learning perspectives, individuals need to respond to social and economic conditions; they need to adapt, adjust or readjust their interests and strengths by validating their capabilities in order for their capabilities to be mobile (i.e., available for other uses). Within the category of *empowerment*, the texts appear to communicate a *political science perspective on career* that regards career as the enactment of self-interest, emphasizing autonomy as the leading object of behaviour (cf. Arthur et al., 1989). There are contradictions, however, between formulations of the individual as independent and self-managing and the requirements to respond to the labour market. Formulations of the individual as self-managing might refer to the meaning of the individual as autonomous in a positive sense, but the other side of the coin implies a huge individual responsibility for keeping oneself suitable for matching, adaptable, adjustable, readjustable and prepared for constant changes. Individuals may need to

cope with unwanted changes and imposed requirements. In this sense, it can be questioned whether the career really belongs to the individual.

Given the context in which the selected texts occur, the emphasis on autonomy can be understood in light of the dominant neo-liberal political agenda in Europe, which is underpinned by agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, UNESCO and OECD (Torres, 2009). These agencies have influenced the policy area of lifelong learning (see, e.g., Ouane, 2009; Rivera, 2009; Schuller, 2009). Ouane (2009) describes the view of lifelong learning of the European Union, the World Bank and the OECD as primarily 'work- and economy related' (Ouane, 2009, p. 307). Together with the holistic definition of career (CEDEFOP, 2005) this implies that individuals, in designing their careers, that is, their lives, need to learn to adjust, adapt and readjust their life paths for the purposes of utility in order to correspond with the needs of the market.

The texts convey career and career development as the search for environment–person correspondence. 'Environment' is placed deliberately before 'person' because it seems that the individual is subordinated to the demands of the environment. The language in the texts appears to be influenced by a view of careers as 'protean' (cf. Hall & Mirvis, 1996), but not for the purposes of individuals. The career meta-competencies suggested by Hall (1996) are recurrently mentioned in the texts but are used for purposes that suit the overriding political goals of competitive economic development: The overall aim of the European Union is to become 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010' (CEDEFOP, 2005, p. 3). This may be a thread of the neo-liberal view in which the state, according to Plant (2009), functions as an enterprise association, galvanizing and mobilizing resources in the pursuit of a dominant end. The state pursues 'a single overriding goal or a comprehensive goal within which other values will be given a subordinate place' (Plant, 2009, p. 7).

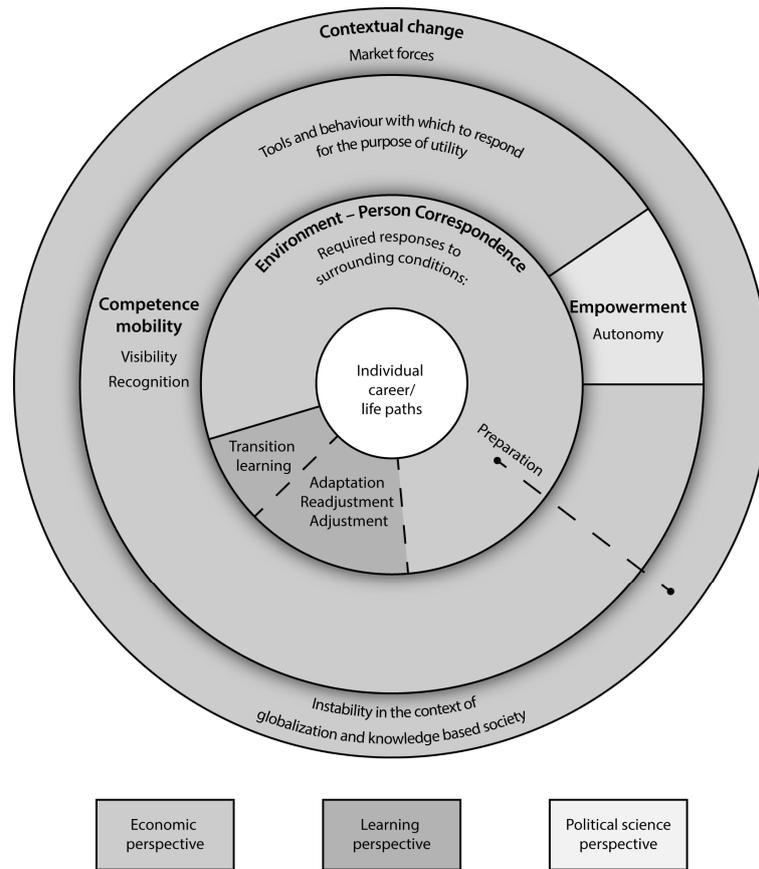
In summary, the categories disclose several views about career and career development that derive from disciplinary positions of career intertwined in the formulations. The most prominent is the economic perspective, followed by a learning perspective and a political science perspective on career, as presented in Figure 1.

Discussion

The attempt to integrate lifelong guidance policies into lifelong learning strategies appears to have brought the economic perspective to bear on career guidance practice in the texts analysed. Together with the intertwining of learning and political science perspectives, a rhetoric emphasis has been placed on the individual as autonomous, but in fact, it appears that the individual is *subordinated to a principle* (cf. Simmel, 1971b), namely that of global capitalism (cf. Rubenson, 2009), while simultaneously being left with sole responsibility for career and all that this entails.

This subordination of the individual challenges the humanistic position of career as a vehicle for self-realization described by Arthur et al. (1989). It challenges the view of career and career development as belonging to the individual and it indicates that what is communicated in the texts is an idea of a career contract that is inequitable. Moreover, the subordination of the individual requires reconsideration concerning for whom – that is, on whose demands – career guidance practice is conducted, as practitioners are supposed to work impartially and focus on the individual (e.g. CEDEFOP, 2005). The prevalence of different views regarding career and career development intertwined in the texts communicates contradictory messages: paradoxes

Figure 1. Perspectives on career found in the texts analysed. Source: Author.



emerge when rhetoric in policy documents both emphasizes the individual's self-management and subordinates the individual to surrounding demands in the sense that the individual is responsible for keeping him or herself employable, adaptable, motivated and mobile in order to respond to market forces. According to the views on career and career development disclosed in the texts, the main issue for career guidance practitioners is to work towards preparation and to support individuals in transition learning for adaptation, adjustment and readjustment to changes. Are adaptation and adjustment the only possibilities remaining for individuals' careers in the 21st century? Even though the texts mention the creation of awareness, this becomes problematic and contradictory when the dominant emphasis is on adaptation. With the dominance of the economic perspective on career, it appears as if transition learning first and foremost embraces an adaptive approach to learning.

Divergence in what is really meant by learning, as noted by Fenwick (2010), and the different views on lifelong learning as a phenomenon (Rubenson, 2009) need to be highlighted. Concepts such as career development are hardly mentioned in the texts, and personal development, rather than being treated as an end in itself, seems to be relegated to the status of happy by-product of more legitimate efforts to respond to market forces. There is a need for intensified pedagogical discussions in European countries concerning these mixed messages and different views connected to the field of career guidance practice. The mixed messages create difficulties because tensions between opposing meanings of career, career development and learning and opposing expectations concerning the goals for career guidance practice may arise in career guidance practice. Policymakers and career guidance practitioners within different

working fields need to be aware of different views and perspectives regarding career and how these might influence directions for practice.

Several authors have cautioned against uncritical acceptance of conceptions of career self-direction, saying that it could lead to decreased employer responsibility (e.g. Brousseau et al., 1996; Nicholson, 1996). Based upon the work of Simmel, Honneth (2004) argues that the goals of self-realization in Western societies are lost and transmuted into support of the system's legitimacy. He says that the individualism of self-realization has become 'an instrument of economic development, spreading standardization and making lives into fiction' (Honneth, 2004, p. 474), where individuals will most likely suffer more than they will prosper. The meaning of self-realization – peoples' wishes, opportunities and struggles to reach certain life goals and realize their dreams – appears to have been made secondary to the requirements for adaptation: a match is perfect as long as it is a match for the benefit of society.

One should not assume that individuals regard their careers and career development in the same way as the views disclosed above. According to Nicholson and de Waal-Andrews (2005), one of the most important challenges for theory and research is the relationship between objective and subjective career. I believe there is a need to include voices from the subjective perspective of reality and, thus, the subjective career in the debates on career phenomena and in policy making, because the objective perspective is predominantly communicated based on the needs of the senders. As argued by Freire (1972), this objective social reality does not exist by coincidence; rather, it is a product of human action. The ideational message in the texts appears to communicate a vision of the knowledge-based society with the new working life conditions, a different slant on Hall and Mirvis' (1996) protean career contract. This is formulated based on the needs of the senders for overriding economic and political purposes, and the expected responses to social and economic conditions will be repeated and sorted into patterns, thus becoming habits. These habits, according to the theory of Berger and Luckmann (1966), will be externalized and practiced by others as habitual activities, thus institutionalized, and finally, the nature of career and career development will be objectified. To paraphrase Gergen (2009), the way policy documents describe and explain career and career development fashions our future understanding of the phenomena.

There is a need to refocus what seems to be a taken for granted view on the new conditions of working life and the new career contract in the knowledge-based society. The exchange between individual and surroundings may not to be mutual, and the outcome for the individual tends to be less observable. The trend of unpredictable career choices and career development and unstable or unforeseeable career paths challenges guidance practitioners and educational policies that base their activities upon concepts of career planning (cf. Manninen, 1998). The difficulty of making decisions in a world of constant change has led to a shift in rhetoric from individuals searching for self-realization towards a requirement for individuals to adapt. Guidance practitioners are in turn expected to support individuals according to the dominant principle of global capitalism, with the mission to construct an adaptable workforce. In this sense, the language of the texts analysed communicates *subordinated careers*, in which individuals, in their career prospects, become 'beings for others', as expressed by Hegel (Freire, 1972, p. 73). It therefore appears that education, in its broader sense, aims to enforce an educative, disciplinary strategy for the purposes of the market above all. It becomes problematic for guidance practitioners and their clients if their main object – career and career development – is actually made secondary within this framework of common policy making to a hidden agenda of the disciplinary process of working life.

They are thus caught in a struggle between adaptations to structure vs. personal development towards true empowerment. If career and career development are to *actually* belong to the individual, not just rhetorically, and if individuals are to *actually* be able to choose and decide for themselves, and not just be solely responsible for their responses to market forces, there is a need to support individuals in emancipation processes and to equip them with critical awareness. If the aim to empower individuals to be autonomous and self-directed is to become a reality, the role of education must shift its focus from adaptation to a given pattern formulated with economic concerns in mind and based upon the needs of the senders, who represent the market, towards the promotion of critical awareness and empowerment as the central role of education, as found in the pedagogical theory of Paulo Freire (1972). So, what limitations and what possibilities might emancipatory career guidance bring forth against the backdrop of the powerful influence of market forces? According to the perspective of those who regard guidance as a tool for achieving market purposes, emancipatory guidance might be regarded as not necessarily leading to market efficiency. The result of emancipatory guidance will not be measureable in the short term. In the long run, however, emancipatory guidance creating awareness, promoting personal development and empowering individuals through facilitating qualitative changes in their understanding of themselves and their conditions, should result in the achievement of precisely those objectives pursued, with individuals becoming autonomous and self-generating and deciding for themselves. There is a major difference between subordinated adaptation to overriding principles and requirements, and making decisions based upon awareness of one's own conditions.

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