

Round table “The concept of relationship to working”
Valérie Cohen-Scali et Geneviève Fournier

CONCLUSION
Geneviève Fournier

The aims of this round table was to discuss the notion of relationship to working, especially to enlight the role of social and cultural contexts, as well as the role of the evolutions of the relationship to working in different parts of the world. Each guest has raised important issues about these themes and questions and has proposed singular manners and perspectives for answering them. The very rich presentations that we have heard here are impossible to synthetize in few minutes. I won't come back on the distinctive theoretical frameworks that has been exposed or all the concepts that have been defined. I will briefly underline 2 or 3 ideas.

So, it has been said and said again here and since yesterday that the labour market has undergone profound changes over the last few decades. In this transformative context, an issue that has been addressed here is that of one's individual freedom and responsibility to build and give meaning to one's work life, to *manage it* and make one's place in the world, to ensure one's social and occupational integration (Guillaume, 2009). How and to what extent individuals can and must assume this responsibility to make their place in the job market and in the society? This is a great question that we cannot reply in 1 hour. However, the development of people's entrepreneurial self-capital or people's relational workplace civility, for example, as Annamaria has spoken, can be considered as promising strategy to implement or, at least, an important line of thought, to help individuals in meeting this kind of challenges.

In this transformative context, another issue that comes to mind and that has also been addressed here is that of social inequality with regard to one's capacity to construct one's meaningful and decent work life and, by extension, one's decent life project. We know that in our contemporary context, choices and possibilities are increased for some, while others encounter more obstacles and difficulties.

Everybody here have observed, in different manners and in different perspectives, that there exist sizable differences and considerable interpersonal and intergroup inequalities in how well people have the real choice to build a meaningful and decent working life. Related to this issue, Marcelo has suggested that personal and professional development can be defined as the possibility to make choices and have control over one's life. He also pointed out that the stability in people's relationship to working is achieved through their active positions in their relationships with working contexts, in order to produce experiences of continuity and meaningfulness working and working life.

In addition, everybody here have observed, in different manners and in different perspectives, how people's work value can be different. On this point, some here,

including Jonas, have stressed that these differences are likely to be more salient between subgroups in a same generation, according to their educational levels, for example, than between generations in themselves. Jonas has also stressed that the fact that work is “unable” to play a structuring role in the life of workers does not mean that workers do not assign a psychological function to work and that work has not a very important value, even a central value in their life.

In sum, the flexibility context can clearly increase individual freedoms and be a source of emancipation and creativity. But it can also restrict these freedoms and reduce people’s possibilities and room to manoeuvre. The phenomenon of core and peripheral workers is another illustration of these two polarized situations. So, even if everyone has the necessary personal resources to succeed in a more flexible, more “liquid” labour market, as Bauman (in De La Vega, 2005) said, I think that we came to a consensus here around the idea that the local and surrounding resources that people have access to, will increase or decrease the effectiveness of their efforts and strategies, and increase or decrease their capacity to act. The idea was particularly evident in the discourse of Gabriella. Data on the context of the labor market in South Africa reported by Marius say also a lot about it. Let’s recall, for example, the 600 000 (hundred thousands) unemployed graduates in South Africa.

Numerous research themes have been suggested and questions have been raised during the round table. Among them, let’s point out:

- The contemporary notions of stability, insecurity, meaningfulness work, trajectory and identity.
- The impact of poverty and lack of access to decent work on the working relationships
- The recursivity and bidirectional influences between relationship to working and identity construction: what is the precise role that relationship to working plays on the way people make vocational choices (vocational identity) and on the way they define themselves as workers (work identity)? On the opposite, how does vocational and work identity shape relationship to working?
- How to develop individuals’ strengths, potentials, talents in a lifelong perspective as resources
- How to deepen our understanding of:
 - Decent work and decent lives
 - What contribute to healthy organizations and healthy business

All in all, this is where, I believe, we can see the extent to which life-long counselling and guidance can become an essential element for both people and communities. This is where we take note that counselling and guidance is applied and works at the crossroads of our personal, collective, and occupational realities. It is also here that we can measure the importance and complexity of accompanying people all throughout their career path, of the complexity of the issues and obstacles that they are faced with, and that, very often, extend beyond their work life. At the same time, we can understand just how complex the work of counsellors and career counsellors can be, since one of their

missions is to guide and accompany people in their quest for a decent job, a sustainable integration in the labor market and a life project that makes sense.

Références

De La Vega, X. (2005). Vivre dans la « modernité liquide ». Entretien avec Zygmunt Bauman. *Sciences humaines*, 165, 34-36.

Guillaume, Jean-François (2009), « Les parcours de vie, entre aspirations individuelles et contraintes structurelles », *Informations sociales*, vol. 6, no 156, p. 22-30.