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Coping with discrepancies: implications of career guidance and counselling for migrants' social inclusion in Finland and Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Career guidance and counselling (CGC) plays an important role in the 'egalitarian tradition' of the Nordic countries' perspective of education, since it aims to support all students in developing skills and knowledge to access further education and the labour market. Inspired by the critical institutionalism approach and focusing on education aimed at migrant students, this article explores the strategies that school actors implement to cope with the discrepancies between CGC policy and practice by analysing two cases: one in adult vocational education and training in Finland and the other in the Language Introduction Programme in Sweden. The ecological framework facilitates an understanding of the complex policy – practice dynamics within the local learning ecologies while also opening up a discussion on their implications for migrant students' opportunities for social inclusion. The findings show how the shortcomings of the policy – practice relationship affect teachers' and counsellors' work, and how students consequently may end up relying on self and peer support.

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Career guidance and counselling; social inclusion; migrant students; local learning ecology; policy

Introduction

According to the Council of the European Union (2008), career guidance and counselling (CGC) supports individuals' life design processes by taking into consideration their abilities, previous educational and work experience as well as interests and inclinations. A recent EU report described 'effective career guidance' as a social structure that 'helps individuals reach their potential, economies become more efficient and societies become fairer' (CEDEFOP, 2021, p. 2). When working with disadvantaged groups, a social justice approach to CGC is recommended to facilitate transitions from education to further studies or employment, while also considering how ie. discrimination based on ethnic and linguistic grounds may affect individuals' opportunities (Hooley et al., 2018, 2019a).

In the Nordic region, economic integration is promoted by national policymakers as the most effective route for newcomers to become active and productive members of the local society. The benefits associated with entering a new country's labour market go beyond mere economic ones, as migrants may thereby also broaden their sociocultural understanding of the new place as well as their range of social contacts (Fedrigo et al., 2021). This rhetoric permeates the integration discourse regardless of the much-

discussed disparity between the intentions of educating and preparing migrants for their professional futures and the opportunities available for them beyond education. The rates of unemployment among those not born in Finland and Sweden are much higher, particularly when considering individuals from non-EU countries, and work-related discrimination remains a prominent issue in both countries (i.e. Ahmad, 2015; Vesterberg, 2016).

An employable refugee or migrant nevertheless represents an 'ideal migrant', hence the continuous demand for the recently arrived to update pre-existing skills and develop new knowledge to become employable (Masoud et al., 2020). The idea of inclusion presupposes exclusion in the first place, and becoming employable relies on an individual's unemployment (Vesterberg, 2016). Thus, it is important to explore the relationship between policy intentions and their practice and whether this relationship is in fact grounded in social justice principles.

Using empirical material, this article explores the dynamics of CGC policies and practice and their possible implications for migrants' social inclusion in Sweden and Finland. It contributes to the discussion on CGC's role within the Nordic region by presenting different actors' experiences of its practices.

The article addresses the following research questions:

How do school actors manage the dynamics between CGC policies and practice in education for migrant students?

Considering these policy–practice dynamics, what are the implications of CGC in supporting migrant students’ opportunities for social inclusion?

We begin by introducing the theoretical framework that inspires our analysis and the Nordic context within which the two studies are located. We then describe the phenomenology and methods, after which we present our findings. Finally, we draw some conclusions on the consequences of our findings within CGC research.

Education and guidance in the Nordic context

The Nordic countries have a long tradition of CGC connected to a strong aim for social inclusion and equality in educational and occupational opportunity (Schulstok & Wikstrand, 2020). As one of the key elements of the Scandinavian welfare model (cf. Esping-Andersen, 1990), comprehensive education is firmly connected to the principles of equity, participation and welfare (Antikainen, 2006). Although the state and future of ‘Nordic’ inclusive education policies have been questioned for almost two decades (Arnesen & Lundah, 2006), the Nordic countries maintain the idea that providing good education for all is a way of creating a more just society (Beach, 2017).

The close connection between CGC and the welfare state means that the former shares several key elements with the latter – for instance, active labour market policies, youth services and services that seek to re-engage young people who are currently not working or studying or recently arrived migrants in education and training (Haug et al., 2020; Sultana, 2022). The integration discourse in the Nordic countries emphasizes the importance that migrants access the labour market, since becoming active and productive members of the local society represents a sign of successful integration (Kekki & Linde, 2022; Ministry of the Interior, Finland, n.d.). Thus, the task of guiding newly-arrived migrants through their transitions through education and work is vital for their inclusion in schools and society (Hertzberg & Sundelin, 2014; Sundelin, 2015).

The integration policies also stress the importance of valuing individuals’ experiences and needs (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Finland, n.d.). Nevertheless, inclusion in the labour market is one of the key areas addressed by EU policies, and it is seen as a fundamental tool for migrants to become part of the host country’s economic and social life (European Commission EC, 2019). In Europe, almost 25% of migrants are highly educated, but over 40% are overqualified for the job

they do (EC, 2019), which highlights the continuous demand for migrants to update pre-existing skills and develop new knowledge to become employable (Kärkkäinen & Tarnanen, 2022; Masoud et al., 2020). Although lifelong learning should recognize a variety of career competences (e.g. self-understanding and self-development; see e.g. Thomsen, 2014), the skills for social inclusion are often defined through skills leading to employability.

Furthermore, the intention of educating and preparing migrants for their professional futures is not necessarily matched by opportunities beyond education, although previous studies have stressed how expectations of career mobility may positively affect individuals’ opportunities and access to security as well as the satisfaction that can come from being part of a family, being included in society and feeling a sense of belonging to a place (Hooley et al., 2018). There are many initiatives aimed at incorporating migrants into higher education and working life. However, statistics point out that the employment rates for migrants in Finland (74%) and Sweden (79%) remain lower than those for the local born population (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2023). Employment gaps between migrants and the local born population are large in the Nordic countries, and a relatively large share of migrants are also unskilled (no completed education), especially in Sweden (36%) compared to Finland (27%), with the average in the Nordic countries being 32% (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2023; Pekkarinen, 2019).

Although the official ‘integration’ discourse emphasizes the dual effort by both migrants and local society towards the settlement process, it very often leaves the newly arrived to find their own place in society and prevent exclusion (i.e. Anthias, 2013; Pötzsch, 2020). Thus, CGC practices that disregard people’s experiences, intersections and life designs by prioritizing the fulfilment of the local society’s needs fail to consider the importance of social inclusion that goes beyond a next-step, utilitarian approach; neither does it account for the importance of inclusion and sense of belonging beyond the economic aspects.

CGC and migrants’ social inclusion

The obstacles that migrants may encounter when attempting to enter the labour market can hardly be overlooked. Recent studies conducted in several European countries have shown how applicants with a migrant background face discrimination when applying for jobs, even on the basis of their surnames alone (Ahmad, 2020). The working conditions experienced by migrants are frequently worse than those by their local-born counterparts (Ahmad, 2020; Saukkonen, 2017) because of their necessity to be employed due to visa regulations (Ahmad, 2020). As

Maury (2017) points out, the position of these ‘student-migrant-workers’ within the labour market is characterized by precarity and poor conditions, which they have few choices other than to accept to satisfy the requirements related to visa renewal. Although local-born youth and students may also work in low-skilled jobs, they have greater chances of social mobility (ibid). Recent research in educational settings in Finland have also denounced how racialization discourses and practices based on ‘immigrantisation’ may result into migrants being guided towards certain professions that are considered ‘suitable’ for them, ie. the caretaking sector (Kurki, 2019, Kurki et al., 2019).

The intention of CGC is to support the development of people’s skills and knowledge about themselves and their contexts, which may equip them to make informed choices about their futures (Council of the European Union, 2008). Career guidance and counselling is expected to operate as a mediator or enactor of political or labour market needs. When working towards migrants’ inclusion, it clearly faces particular challenges to strike a balance between policy, organizational conditions, individual needs and structural barriers (Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2012; Linde et al., 2021). Upholding emancipatory aims for CGC practices, previous research calls for an intersectional approach that takes into consideration the structural and everyday barriers people might encounter while at the same time supporting their agency (Hooley et al., 2019b; Vehviläinen & Souto, 2021). According to Hooley (2014), by definition, CGC highlights the values of equity and equality, and thus has the potential to promote social justice. Since individuals’ experiences are shaped by the landscape of opportunities and the support they are provided, career guidance may facilitate social justice if it considers how migrants’ backgrounds and social dimensions, combined with institutional boundaries, can affect the array of opportunities available for them (Kekki & Linde, 2022; Sultana, 2022).

Previous research on CGC practice in the context of migration has also shown that CGC poses challenges due to language, knowledge and power asymmetries and raises difficult topics, such as how to deal with racism and experiences of discrimination, and that these are often ignored or omitted from the discussions (Kekki, 2022; Ribeiro, 2021; Sundelin, 2015; Vehviläinen & Souto, 2021). The existing research also suggests that, due to political and economic agendas, counsellors face a dilemma, since they might be pushed to making a choice between supporting individuals’ personal and professional development and complying with the market’s needs (Kekki & Linde, 2022). Moreover, studies have highlighted that migrant students’ need for support may not be matched due to counsellors’

limited time and resources and that teachers’ involvement in supporting the students’ career learning thus becomes significant (Sundelin & Lundahl, 2022). However, teachers working with recently arrived migrants find it challenging to compensate students ‘for the shortcoming or neglect of society’s institutions’ and being positioned as the ‘reluctant gatekeeper’ for the students (Högberg et al., 2020, p. 7). In summary, previous research displays challenges that emerge in guidance practice in relation to both policy and the normative ideals of CGC guidance.

In accordance with its definition at the European level and social justice principles and approach, social inclusion can be regarded as the fundamental aim of CGC (Sultana, 2010), transcending an oversimplified identification of social inclusion with mere access to paid employment (Korhonen & Siitonen, 2018). In light of this, CGC could play a key role in social inclusion and the transformation of social hierarchies through social mobility (Souto & Sotkasiira, 2022). However, as this review points out, there is a complexity in the dynamics between the different levels in the CGC system. If the goal of guidance is to support social inclusion for migrants, it is important that research continues to contribute knowledge on how actors manage the dynamics between these levels.

In this article, we align with the social justice approach to CGC for social inclusion as it takes into consideration the structural and everyday barriers people might encounter while at the same time supporting their agency and ultimately upholding emancipatory aims (Hooley et al., 2019b; Vehviläinen & Souto, 2021). On the other hand, we adopt a critical perspective when showing the possibilities of such an approach and the shortcomings that the gap between policy and practice may originate.

Theoretical framework

Influenced by the critical institutionalism (CI) approach (Cleaver & de Koning, 2015; Cleaver & Whaley, 2018), we seek to localize individual experiences within wider political contexts. This approach leads us to analyse how integration policies have been adapted to a more practical, institutional framework (Cleaver & de Koning, 2015). Within this process, the actors tweak and tinker with the institutions to make them fit better with livelihood priorities. This work is referred to as ‘bricolage work’, where the actors navigate between different interests and try to smoothen the discrepancies – for instance, between regulation and practice. To analyse the dynamics of CGC and its implications for students’ social inclusion in both countries, we are influenced by the ‘ecological framework’ proposed by Hodgson and Spours (2013, 2015) to explain local learning ecologies

(LLEs), since it facilitates a multilevel analysis of the policy 'ecosystem'.

Our theoretical standpoint is based on a multilevel ecological analysis (Hodgson & Spours, 2013, 2015) of the dynamics within our LLEs through an evaluation of the effects that international phenomena and national policies (macro level) have on students' opportunities for inclusion (micro level) while also considering the role that other policy actors at the meso level – school in this case, combined with exo-1, which is curriculum, and exo-2, represented by the national contexts of each case – play within this ecosystem.

The decision to adopt this framework also stems from the significance it offers in the interconnection among the policy actors, from governmental and national policy to individual students and staff members, through intermediate levels. The ecological model intends to 'cast light on how a process of mediation of macro national and international factors and the micro experiences of young people by key actors within the LLE (e.g. educational professionals, employers and local authorities) impacts on the condition of that environment in order to effect positive change' (Hodgson & Spours, 2015, p. 26). Hodgson and Spours (2013) blended multiple theoretical approaches into three components, which enables us to understand novel complex changes in the world with ecological modelling.

The first component borrows from Bronfenbrenner (1979) the idea of ecological setting (micro, meso, exo and macro). At the meso level, the school context in particular constitutes the empirical focus of our research, where students' 'imagined future' begins to take place. Compared with the micro level – the confined place with family, friends and teachers – the macro level is a broader context with a more diverse and complex set of relationships. We analyse the meso level as a reflection of the exo-1, exo-2 and macro levels. Exo-1 means the settings that affect people without them being directly involved in the setting (e.g. institutional arrangements and curriculum). Exo-2 has its focus on local and sub-regional factors (e.g. further and higher education institutions and the labour market) as well as macro international trends and the national political level (Hodgson & Spours, 2013).

Regarding the second component, the LLEs are 'shaped by the actions, practices and perspectives of the individuals who inhabit the meso, exo-1 and exo-2 levels' (ibid, p. 28). Within LLEs, the dynamics between macro-level effects, micro experiences and the mediating capacity of stakeholders at the intermediate levels (meso, exo-1 and exo-2) affect people's 'opportunity landscape' (ibid). LLEs are also bounded by their conditions; they can potentially flow for positive or negative movement – that is, with the ecological framing and LLEs, the low opportunity

progression equilibrium and high opportunity ecosystems can be recognized and analysed.

By drawing inspiration from the ecological framework, we explore how different school actors manage the dynamics between these different levels. Our interest lies in how the meso and exo levels interact with and mediate the relationship between macro level policies and micro level experiences; alongside discussing the implications for CGC to support migrant students' opportunities for social inclusion.

Research setting

We intend to offer a broader perspective on CGC policies and practice by presenting integrative descriptions of CGC's implementation in two cases in two Nordic countries. By using a phenomenological approach (e.g. Friesen et al., 2012), we focus on the experiences of migrants and their teachers and counsellors to analyse the strategies that the actors implement in the context of CGC policies concerning education. As Henriksson (2012) argues, 'schools, educational policy, and curricula aim at producing citizens who are foremost productive in a societal perspective' (p. 120). However, she continues by stating that teachers know that their teaching in the classroom cannot be reduced to a technical or intellectual endeavour: it involves, among other things, 'a way of feeling and acting' (p. 120). Following the thinking of Ahmed (2012), we consider 'a phenomenological approach is well suited to the study of institutions because of the emphasis on how something becomes given by not being the object of perception' (p. 21). We use hermeneutic phenomenology to grasp the experiences of teachers, career counsellors and students in educational guidance. Following this methodological approach, we describe and interpret these meanings and position these actors and their experiences within the LLE model.

Since our (national) case samples and respective practices are drawn from two different contexts, our aim is not to build a comparative research design. Nevertheless, both cases as well as their participants share more similarities than differences and together they enable integrative research design to interpret the CGC policy-practice dynamics within the LLE model (Hodgson & Spours, 2013, 2015). The practices analysed here target migrant students at the upper secondary level – namely, English-speaking VET students (adult education) in the Finnish study and students at introductory programmes for students who do not qualify for upper secondary school in the Swedish study. In the Finnish study, the main body of data consists of the micro experiences of students and their relationships with peers and meso-level actors such as teachers and counsellors, mediating the macro level. In the Swedish study, the main

data concern the meso level (counsellors, teachers, principals and project leader) and its actors' communication with the macro level and mediating it to the micro level (students). Hence, we consider that our participants provide knowledge from multi-sited CGC environments and provide us contextually rich data for the LLE model.

Context

The empirical studies presented in this article were carried out in Finland and Sweden, two countries that place great significance on CGC in educational settings. The migrant population in both Finland and Sweden has grown significantly in recent decades. In 2022, roughly 50,000 people immigrated into Finland (Statistics Finland, 2023) and 102,000 to Sweden (Statistics Sweden, 2020). The immigrant population is larger in Sweden (25% of 15–64-year-olds) than in Finland (8%) and in the Nordic countries as a whole (18%) (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2023). However, the number of newly arrived people in Finland has steadily risen since the 1990s. Immigration in Sweden has gone from being dominated by labour immigration to immigration for more humanitarian reasons. Since 2010, refugee immigrants and refugee relatives have increased more significantly than the number of people who migrated for other reasons, ie. work, studies, etc. (Statistics Sweden, 2020). The motivation for immigration to Finland is mainly related to accessing the labour market or on the grounds of studying and family ties, which have both steadily increased (Finnish Immigration Service, 2023).

In Finland and Sweden, the main providers of guidance services for migrants at the meso level are municipalities. Educational guidance has holistic aims in both countries and is provided at each level of education. In Finland, the Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE) affirms the right of each student enrolled in vocational education and training (VET) to be granted opportunities for educational guidance (FNAE, n.d.). Every student is entitled to guidance and counselling, with the purpose to support students during their studies and ensure that they acquire the knowledge and skills required for moving on to further studies and employment (FNAE, 2023). A VET qualification includes studies that reinforce the capacity to study and plan one's career. Guidance and counselling are provided by counsellors, tutors and teachers, and each student draws up a personal competence development plan during such counselling (FNAE, 2023).

The curriculum for Swedish upper secondary education stipulates that schools must offer study and vocational guidance so that students, among other things, 'can make decisions on continued study and professional direction on the basis of accumulated

experiences and knowledge' (SNAE, 2011). Counselling activities and their organization are not regulated further; the schools thus decide themselves how the goals are to be achieved locally. However, SNAE has produced general guidelines on study and vocational guidance work where the overall responsibility of schools in this respect is emphasized (SNAE, 2013). In these guidelines, principals' responsibility for organizing such work is highlighted, as well as career counsellors' and teachers' different roles and tasks. In sum, it is recommended that counsellors work on providing individual counselling, information and teaching on career issues in collaboration with teachers and that teachers integrate career matters into their subjects. The guidelines also emphasize that schools must contribute to counteracting study and career choices that are limited by gender or social or cultural background and to compensating for students' different circumstances. That being said, the national goals for CGC are expected to be concretized and organized locally in municipalities and at schools.

Cases

Our study offers an integrative perspective on guidance services as an ecosystem. We seek to provide *integrative descriptions* of students', teachers' and counsellors' experiences in two empirical multi-sited cases. The Finnish case is based on observations and interviews that the first author conducted in adult programmes at a VET school (upper secondary education). The continuous education programmes observed targeted students over the age of 18 with upper secondary qualifications and work experience. The programmes were taught in English, lasted 1.5 years and led to a vocational qualification in Business or Information and Communications Technology.

The Swedish case departs from a study that the third author conducted at the Language Introduction Program (LIP) in Sweden. The LIP is one of four introductory programmes for students who do not qualify for the national programmes on upper secondary level after primary school. The LIP is organized within upper secondary schools with the aim to make the students eligible for the national upper secondary school programmes, other education or work. The LIP is aimed at students who foremost need teaching in the Swedish language to become eligible for national upper secondary school programmes. The focus of the teaching at LIP is on the Swedish language, although students can also learn other primary school subjects that they need to progress in the education system. Students have the right to start a national upper secondary school programme until the year they turn 20. After that, they

are referred to adult education, other education (eg. folk high schools) or work.

Data and participants

In this paper, we use the term ‘migrant’ due to its broader and more inclusive connotation (Anderson & Blinder, 2019; Masoud, 2024) to refer to foreign-born, recently arrived young and adult people whose first language is neither Finnish or Swedish, and who were enrolled in educational programmes in order to access further studies or the labour-market in Finland and Sweden, at the time the authors carried out this study. There were some exceptions in the Finnish case in terms of length of stay, however the majority of participants can be considered newly arrived.

Both cases build on studies that combined several data collecting methods, including fieldwork and qualitative interviews (Bryman, 2012) (see Appendix 1). The Finnish fieldwork consisted of observations conducted during lessons and individual meetings between students and teachers involved in the programmes; it also included an additional discussion session that the researcher planned with the participants after completing data collection as well as some preliminary analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students ($n = 12$), teachers ($n = 2$) and career counsellors ($n = 2$). The students were young adults and adults aiming to change their careers or further their education by attending courses lasting 1.5 years in either IT or Business Studies.

The Swedish study was conducted at four upper secondary schools in three different municipalities. The fieldwork consisted of participatory observations of the schools’ CGC practices. The third author collected the data on site while observing educational events as well as social interactions during individual counselling, information sessions in classes, study visits at workplaces and meetings with teachers working with the LIP. Interviews with school staff were carried out with counsellors ($n = 4$), teachers ($n = 6$), principals ($n = 4$) and one project leader.

Method of analysis

Both cases were first conducted and analysed independently. The first author conducted the Finnish study as part of her doctoral research.¹ She transcribed and coded both interviews and ethnographic observations and continued the analysis by grouping the codes by means of thematic analysis to identify thematic descriptions related to educational and career plans and to any advice or guidance that students might have received (Braun & Clarke, 2006).² The Swedish study was also part of a larger study,² and the third author conducted the thematic analysis for it. The analysis sought the inclusive possibilities of

career guidance offered at the LIP by investigating the different roles of the actors and aspects of the CGC policies.

Departing from these initial thematic descriptions (four from each study), essential descriptions of both studies were identified by using the hermeneutic phenomenological approach through co-authored re-reading, reflective writing and interpretations (Laverty, 2003). Final thematic descriptions were selected based on their strength to illustrate the experiences related to the interaction between different levels (micro, meso, exo and macro levels proposed by Hodgson and Spours (2013) and their ability to complement the interpretations from the other study. Once the most promising themes that complemented each case had been selected, the authors applied the ecological framework proposed by to explore the relationships between the micro, macro, meso and exo levels of the CGC policies ecosystem. Discussions on the findings and collaboration among the authors were established through shared documents and discussions. The findings have been presented with four integrative descriptions, where one case introduces the essential theme with examples and the other complements its description.

Findings

In the following sections, we outline four thematic descriptions that emerged from our analysis. These are integrative examples of strategies that the school actors implemented in response to the policy-practice dynamics within the LLEs. In alignment with the CI approach (Cleaver & de Koning, 2015), we presume the existence of discrepancies between the intentions of CGC policies and practice at various levels of the LLEs. Striving to manage their workload while at the same time meeting students’ needs, the policy actors – namely, in our case, school staff – adopted their own strategies; at the same time, since students encountered limited opportunities for support in terms of dealing with career issues, they acted autonomously or relied on their personal networks.

Next-step counselling at the meso level

The first theme we identified describes how the interaction between the meso and exo levels affected the counsellors’ work. We built our analysis on the Swedish case and completed the interpretation here with the Finnish case. First of all, there was no local plan at the exo-1 level for the overall work on CGC at any of the schools in the Swedish case, except for the career counsellors’ annual planning and the schools’ common calendars.

And then, I don't think we have a real plan for career counselling at this school. I've made something like a year wheel where it says ... it's like this, a bit of my rough planning of what I'm going to do during the year. And I showed it to the teachers too. Or, yes, to sort of clarify how I work. (Lovisa, counsellor, Swedish case)

According to the counsellors in the Swedish case, their work predominantly consisted of individual counselling sessions with the students at the LIP. The counsellors experienced that it was often difficult to assess students' comprehension in a group context and easier to create mutual understanding in individual conversations. They provided classroom information and fulfilled other tasks, such as arranging school visits in connection with choosing an upper secondary school. However, they focused on individual counselling, and the task of teaching was not mentioned in the interviews.

So, guidance before the school choice is quite a big part of [the work] with this group, and then I have classroom information, show a film sometimes, some Powerpoint that I have, and so on. We share high school catalogues; we go on study visits to the high schools when they have an open house, when they show their programmes. (Ulrika, counsellor, Swedish case)

The counsellors argued that limited resources, students' complicated situations and their need of individual support were factors affecting the orientation of their work; in other words, students' complex situations required individual solutions that would be challenging to manage in a group setting. In the LLEs' terminology, the students in the Swedish case met counselling activities mainly at the micro level, while experiences at intermediate levels were rarer. The opportunities for most students to learn about career issues were limited outside the counselling conversations.

Unlike in the Swedish case, in the Finnish one, both counsellors and teachers were responsible for the delivery of CGC. The school relied on its own career-related unit, the services of which students were encouraged to use by tutors and teachers. The career counsellors provided ad hoc sessions whenever they saw it to be beneficial. In addition, the school organized employment fairs and events. Despite these structural differences, the gap between the students' needs stated by the policy documents and the implementation of CGC in both cases showed through the mismatch between the number of staff members who were able to provide the services and the high number of clients. During the interviews at School A, the counsellors mentioned that the barriers to providing individual and tailored counselling related to time and resources, thereby showing how their agency was 'bound by external factors' (Kekki & Linde, 2022).

We have actually only two of us, so—who are career coaching [the] students. There's only two of us for 2000 students, so we cannot have private sessions with all students. That's why we prefer to go to the groups or classes and talk to all those possible students at the same time. (Mari, counsellor, Finnish case)

This quote shows how the policy content at the macro level did not match the resources available and how this affected the counsellors' work at the meso level. The strategy deployed by the counsellors to tackle these boundaries involved visiting groups when invited by the teachers during a relevant session as well as offering on-demand services, which the students were reminded to attend by tutors and teachers. When asked about the content of the sessions, the counsellors repeatedly mentioned their commitment to making sure that students knew how to write CVs and where to look for jobs, thereby showing how the exo-2 level, represented by the labour market requirements, influenced their practice towards next-step counselling strategies.

We can come and tell more about how to get a job and those kind of things. Then we also arrange some webinars on different topics again. Like work rules or then job search things or LinkedIn, or those kind of things. (Mari, counsellor, Finnish case)

In the Swedish case, the school's career counsellor was mostly in charge of CGC implementation within the school by means of individual sessions with the young people. The counsellors described it as an urgent matter to find individual solutions for the students' futures after the LIP, and the conversations were foremost focused on the next step in the education system.

I: Is that what you prioritize in your work; that they will be able move on?

R: Yes, exactly.

I: To solve this task, to choose high school and find a place that is possible?

R: Yes. So, just the transition to the next step ... It can be either high school or adult education – folk high school. But really, make sure they get support in that then. (Lovisa, counsellor, Swedish case)

According to the counsellors' experiences, newly arrived students had a great need for CGC, but at the same time, the counsellors had limited frameworks to manage. They described that they had limited time for their work and needed to prioritize individual counselling in their work (cf. Lipsky, 2010). On the one hand, the counsellors' work was affected by limited time and resources in both studies, and on the other hand, it was affected by underdeveloped meso-level practices; hence, their strategy to adopt a next-step counselling approach. However, this was implemented in different ways. In the Finnish case, students gained experience at the meso

level, and in the Swedish case, this was at the micro level.

Teachers' support and mediating role between the meso and the micro level

As mentioned earlier, in the Finnish case teachers guided students through their career plans and options, providing practical tips and support and thereby complementing the counsellors' work. In one programme, the students and teachers drew up a study plan at the beginning of the programme, which they reviewed together during the last few weeks of the course to check on progress and plan the next steps. Before the internships took place, the teachers delivered a career-related module, during which the students wrote a career plan. The students were also advised to use the school's database to access a list of companies that they could contact to arrange on-the-job learning. One of the teachers mentioned that they would visit the students during the internship and be involved in their progress and said they offered support in multiple ways.

We did a plan in August, when they started, and now this is like a check-up. How has it gone? What still needs to be done? What's the time schedule? And how can we, you know, if they need any help or whatnot? And now they are also looking for their on-the-job learning company. So, giving them a few ideas and they're sharing their ideas and so on. (Päivi, teacher, Finnish case)

In the Swedish case, albeit with some exceptions, the teachers' work on career matters mostly consisted of sporadic interventions regarding the choice of upper secondary school and the transition from the LIP.

We'll probably do something at the end of the autumn term, that's when they choose for the first time. And then we show these films from the National Agency of Education. So, we talk, ... we teach some kind of lesson, but it's not much more than that. (Caroline, teacher, Swedish case)

These teachers considered supporting students' career learning as important but regarded themselves foremost as subject-knowledge experts and defined their task within that domain (Cuconato et al., 2015).

But in my teaching, I do focus on the curriculum goals that are connected to my subject. So, that's it, and that's what I'm thinking—that it will also help them in ... the future, so to speak. (Gustav, teacher, Swedish case)

An exceptional example of a teacher's mediating role at the meso level was that of Eva, a teacher in the Swedish case. Eva worked strategically to include career matters in her regular lessons and also used her mentoring time to teach and discuss matters such as professions, education and gender issues related to careers and the

future. She regarded her teaching on career matters as a democratic issue for the students and that it was important that she as a teacher worked with it, since the career counsellor did not have time to meet the great need for knowledge and support that the students had when it came to career matters.

So I think it is necessary, either you have to add many, many more resources on the career counselling side or you, as a teacher, have to step in and take a part of it. (Eva, teacher, Swedish case)

Eva considered the time dedicated to career matters as pivotal for migrant students' meaning-making processes about the future and that it was value-loaded content that needed to recur to support this process.

This is not like a course in maths or biology or Swedish or something else, where you can kind of feel, now we've done it and so. But this is about something; it's not just knowledge, but it's also about letting it land inside you. It's about your future, your values, and you have to struggle with the values you have, your desires for the future. (Eva, teacher, Swedish case)

Although she addressed career issues in her teaching, Eva would have liked to contribute even more. However, she found this difficult due to the amount of content that needed to be covered during the LIP to make students eligible for upper-secondary education. They had ideas about introducing work-life experiences and study visits for the students, although refrained from doing this, as it would have taken too much time away from the subjects that the students needed to learn, and it was also too complicated to organize.

The teachers offered their support, even if it at times exceeded the scope of their duties. In the Finnish case, Emma personally kept track of her students' employment, and her approach to CGC was indirect and continuous throughout the year. However, being constantly available added to her workload, and she mentioned that it was essential to set boundaries to maintain some balance.

If they ask for help, I never say, 'No, it's not my business. Do it yourself. I do lots more, in that sense, than what is asked from me, but I try to still remember that it's my job ... A balance between giving energy and taking energy—that's what I'm looking [for] here—so, not burning myself out by being there, all the time there. (Emma, teacher, Finnish case)

In this excerpt, the teacher stresses her willingness to go the extra mile to contribute positively to the students' future steps. Being responsible for a large number of students, the impact of this extra help could become detrimental to her well-being.

As seen above, one consequence of the discrepancy between the macro and micro levels is the teachers' work required to compensate for the lack of meso-level practices to strengthen the LLE for the students.

We now explore the strategies that the students used when managing their career issues in relation to their limited access to CGC activities.

Students managing career issues at the micro level

As the previous sections show, both counsellors and teachers face limitations at the meso level when managing the relationship between the macro and micro levels. Our cases highlight how the school actors feel that students need more support at both micro and meso level than the schools can offer. They also claim that a consequence is that students are left to their own ability to manage career issues and in addition, might have limited opportunities to receive support from their families and networks.

Their parents probably have more difficulties with Swedish. I don't know but they usually don't have that help from home, I think. (Lovisa, counsellor, Swedish case)

The Swedish case does not contain any student interviews covering this consequence, but the Finnish case provided examples of strategies adopted by students to manage their career pathways.

The participants were migrants who were either continuing previous studies or striving for a career change. All students had previous work experience or were working at the time of study, mainly in the service sector if employed in Finland. Thus, the programmes represented for many an opportunity to reskill or update pre-existing skills to enhance their 'employability' (Masoud et al., 2020; Vesterberg, 2016). Regarding students' micro experiences, the interviews showed different forms of engagement with the CGC activities organized at the meso and exo-levels. Some students acknowledged the initiatives promoted by the school and career service that the school offered by stating their interest in it. They were generally aware of the available support and some stated how they might avail themselves of it in the future.

In this school, they tell us about [name of service]. 'You can find job here, career planning, what type of job you want. We also have school teachers here; you can make an appointment with them, and you can meet them'. So, like, different things. Yeah, I think it's satisfying for me. They care about us. (Rayaan, student, Finnish case)

Despite being informed of it, none of the students had used the career service at the time of the interviews and only one student recalled their experience of meeting with the school counsellor at the beginning of the year. Other answers showed that, despite the students' acknowledgement of the support provided and available, they were unable to pinpoint or

recall receiving much institutional support towards their choice-making processes. Several times, students stated instead that they had been planning their future independently. Given the gap experienced at the micro level, when talking about their plans, some students seemed to have worked these out independently and wished to take control of their lives in a self-directed way (Hughes et al., 2017). The theme of self-reliance as a strategy used by the students to manage the discrepancies between policy and practice regularly emerged during the interviews.

I: Did you have any – I know that at the beginning of the school, you had a meeting with a career counsellor; do you remember any of that?

A: Not career counsellor ... I mean, I want to set my own career path, and it's OK. And the thing is, nobody has given me counselling related to my career, but the thing is, I have given counselling to others, and there I have done really successful. And they actually gave me credit. (Ali, student, Finnish case)

If self-designed trajectories played an important role in the students' narratives, so did the support provided by their families and friends. Thus, the students considered their social networks to be among the most reliable sources of support. During the lesson observations, one class participated in a survey carried out by other students. When asked how they had found out about the school, some students answered that it had been suggested by family, friends or other students. In the case of people who have migrated to a new country, the networks often consist of other individuals with a migrant background (ie. Ahmad, 2015).

R: I also got the marketing project for a shopping centre hair salon.

[...]

I: Ah, not bad. Nice!

R: Yeah [names other student] ... She shared the information with me. (Ray, student, Finnish case)

Although they formed a rather heterogeneous group in terms of previous experiences, the students' intersections – race, gender and class – combined with their recent arrival to the country and the limited knowledge of Finnish, might affect their encounters with the labour market. Nevertheless, the differences between foreign-born and local-born students' needs were at times reduced to matters of practicalities. Discourses around the disparity between societal expectations, on the one hand, and structural and institutional barriers such as the discrimination and racism these students might face when fulfilling their professional and more general life plans, on the other, were omitted during the interviews (Haugen, 2021).

Given the unequal circumstances that newly arrived students navigate, an over-individualizing approach to life design may potentially harm their possibility of achieving satisfactory goals (Hooley et al., 2019b).

CGC policy – practice dynamics at the exo-2 level

Yes, it was actually to somehow get them more integrated into society via internship. (Sven, project leader, Swedish case)

In both cases, the schools sought to use the exo-2 level to support the students' inclusion and knowledge about work-life conditions in the respective country. The courses in the Finnish case included a mandatory period of internship that was supposed to last for over three months. In the Swedish case, organized encounters between students and work-life were generally rare, but Free School 1 was an exception, since it was trying to implement a project with two-week work placements for its students. However, collaboration at the exo-2 level was connected with several difficulties – in particular, recruiting workplaces and matching them with the students' education and vocational orientation. The schools managed this in different ways, but with the common denominator that the students were left to manage their contact with the workplaces largely on their own.

The school in the Finnish case provided a digital material bank listing companies that had previously collaborated with the school. The students were expected to apply for internships at the workplaces themselves, with some support provided by the teachers and counsellors.

I also asked them to list, you know, three defined companies where they could ... they could think of applying, so it forces them to ... So we try to help them away, along the way to think and figure out things. (Päivi, teacher, Finnish case)

Some of the students were quite young and newly arrived, but all of them had work experience and were considered to be adults and experienced in contacting employers. Applying for an internship was, however, found to be challenging by several of the students. The following quote describes one student's frustration in applying to employers:

We have to find it [internship] ourselves, which is hard, because I'm looking at ... looking for it, like, currently as well, and I'm applying for so many. And it's so annoying when you wake up in the morning and the email: 'Unfortunately, we're going forward with another candidate'. So it's so frustrating seeing those emails, but I'm still always on LinkedIn. Apply, apply, apply!" (Yasmeen, student, Finnish case)

According to the student, applying for an internship involved both hard work and experiencing repeated rejection by employers. When asked about their upcoming internships, several students had chosen to look no

further than their current occupation, although it did not correspond with the orientation of their education. While these were suitable opportunities for some, since they could get paid during their internship, for others, it represented the last resort, and one that they did not particularly aspire to.

I: Do you have an idea where you're going to do your internship yet?

A: Uh, in [name of restaurant], cos I don't want to arrange it, but I will apply for the other job also, cos I would like to improve my skills. (Ray, student, Finnish case)

In the Swedish case at Free School 1, a project leader (PL), Sven, had been appointed to a project that included recruiting workplaces, preparing the students and visiting them during their internships. Because he had previously experienced difficulties in recruiting workplaces for students from the LIP, this time, he had chosen not to inform the workplaces that the internships involved newly arrived students. Thus, he had managed to get workplaces to agree to participate, but that meant that the workplaces were not prepared for newly arrived students to join them. The students were expected to contact the workplaces themselves before the internship period, to check that they could handle meeting the employer and to give the employer a chance to say no, 'if he felt it would not work' (Sven, PL). One employer had declined participation after meeting the student. There had also been difficulties finding internships that could match the students' educational choices. Several students planned to apply for education within the care area, but those employers had declined their participation, citing a lack of time. Finally, most of the workplaces involved were in retail trade. Altogether, the empirical material indicates that the internship project did not work very well from a social inclusion perspective. Several students had high absenteeism, and those attending the workplace seemed to work mostly on their own, with limited contact with other work colleagues.

The overall impression from these two examples is that the responsibility of managing the collaboration at the exo-2 level was largely left to the students, without the schools providing sufficient support, and risked students experiencing micro-level experiences of exclusion without the school mediating this. A strategy that can be considered to have managed that risk was found in the Swedish case. City High School 3 developed a career orientation course for the 'adult group', which consisted of students who would not have time to qualify for upper secondary school due to the age limit of 20 years. The background to the course was that the school noticed that these students had lost their motivation at school, and the idea was that the course would give these students hope for the future.

They are often dejected when they do not get into national programs. But then they get a little more hope that yes, but it's not over: 'I can still become an engineer' because there they get to know which path they should take via Komvux (adult education), and so on, to achieve their dreams. (Sonja, principal, Swedish case)

The course was compared to a subject for which the teachers, in collaboration with the career counsellor and the principal, had worked out a syllabus. It contained teaching about professions, the labour market and the education system and included visits from companies and education providers to the school and study visits to companies and businesses in the area. Therefore, the students did not have to manage the work-life conditions on their own.

The principal and the teachers had important roles for the implementation of the course – the principal took responsibility for changing the students' syllabus, since the students took this course instead of other subjects, and the teachers developed a course that did not previously exist in the school. The example thus shows that school actors can use their mediating role to prevent students experiencing discrimination at the micro level and to prevent collaboration at the exo-2 level taking place solely in terms of work life. However, the work was felt to require exceptional commitment and effort.

This requires quite a lot of commitment from those who work with it, that you think this is fun, because it takes time to call and book visits and arrange for someone to come and so on, so you have to both have the time, and as teachers, we never have enough time, but also you have to be committed, because this is a different way of teaching. (Lena, teacher, Swedish case)

The commitment to strengthen the meso level seemed to stem primarily from an empathetic understanding of migrants' exposed situations and challenges in terms of managing career issues in the Swedish context.

Discussion and conclusions

In this article, we explored how school actors managed CGC policy-practice dynamics in education for migrant students and what the implications of these dynamics were for the migrant students' opportunities for social inclusion. When looking at the relationships between macro-, meso- and micro-level experiences of using the CI approach, we identified discrepancies within the LLEs, to which the actors involved responded by adopting various strategies.

First of all, although the examples in our data showed how the career counsellors performed their tasks in different ways in the Finnish and Swedish

cases, the high demands set at the macro level were matched by underdeveloped meso-level practices, such as the unbalanced ratio between the number of staff and students and a general lack of guidance at the local level. The teachers supported and bridged the gap between the counsellors at the meso level, and the students at the micro level, by integrating guidance in their own subjects and supplementing the existing CGC practices, while at the same time coping with their own workload. The teachers and counsellors conducted 'bricolage work' and navigated between different interests and mismatching resources, trying to smoothen the discrepancies (Cleaver & de Koning, 2015), although the limited resources provided at the meso level and the scarce cooperation between meso, exo-1 and exo-2 levels reduced opportunities for holistic approaches to CGC and resulted in next-step counselling practices. Given the discrepancies between policy and practice, and consequently the reduced opportunities for CGC at the micro level, some students perceived their pathways as having been devised independently or through the help of families, peers and friends.

Lastly, the cooperation between the intermediate levels through the internship projects aimed at enhancing students' opportunities for inclusion by providing them with experiences of the exo-2 at the micro level. The examples showed that inclusive ambitions at the meso level could risk having an exclusionary effect if they failed to tackle the challenges involved (cf. Hertzberg, 2015). To avoid students being left to manage their inclusion on their own, stakeholders need to have a good understanding of newly arrived students' challenges in terms of career issues in the Nordic context. Cooperation between the school and the exo-2 level can be considered to be a 'push factor' (Hodgson & Spours, 2013) enabling students' transition from education to employment. However, our analysis shows the risk that it might effect the opposite by contributing to a feeling of exclusion on a micro level. The insufficient support can be interpreted as partly connected to the school actors' limited understanding of students' challenges in meeting working life and inability to adapt support to their needs and situation. However, it might also reflect the complex challenges involved in collaboration with the exo-2 level. The exo-2 level has a different agenda to that of the education system, and in addition to having limited practical opportunities for participation, it may be characterized by exclusionary structures, such as discrimination, which is a possibility that we cannot exclude. It can also be experienced as too demanding due to language challenges. Thus, the study shows the importance of developing the intermediate level based on knowledge and understanding of newly arrived

students' situations and need for support in career learning. Otherwise, a good intention risks countering its purpose in supporting students' inclusion. Hart et al. (2020) argued for the importance of supported employment for people at risk of social exclusion, such as working with employers to reduce discrimination and stigma in the work environment and enhancing employers' willingness to participate in training programmes.

As shown by our findings, in order to comply with visa regulations and gain experience, some of the students in the Finnish case were working in low-skilled professions. Most of these students were young, newly-arrived migrants, with limited Finnish language skills and social contacts. These 'student-migrant-workers' may be disadvantaged when attempting to move away from those occupations and their future steps hindered by reduced social mobility compared to the local-born counterparts (Maury, 2017). Thus, the lack of support and career education can determine these young people's lives by leaving them to their own devices when designing their future.

On the one hand, the emphasis on individual agency to be proactively in charge of one's own life design celebrates individuals' autonomy, but on the other hand, it fits the neoliberal ideology that removes responsibility from the institutions and places it on the individual. Peer guidance constitutes a reliable source of CGC, which may obviate the lack of institutional support, and it may be one of the consequences of the neoliberal policies adopted in Finland in recent years (Heimo et al., 2020). In the case of people who have migrated to a new country, their networks often consist of other individuals with a migrant background. Peer networks in migrants' professional attainment can be beneficial by supplying social capital and fostering a sense of community and belonging. On the other hand, relying solely on these networks can hinder migrants' opportunities for social mobility by relegating them to low-skilled professions (Ahmad, 2015).

The findings of this study have some limitations. In order to explore the relationships between the different levels of the CGC policies ecosystem, we have contrasted two case samples that are drawn from different contexts. We acknowledge that our conclusions would have been more solid had the research design been comparative. We also acknowledge that the LLE framing, the aim to interpret themes that would complement the Finnish and Swedish cases, and the critical discursive approach excluded many interesting themes that need to be analysed in the future. With our framing we did not achieve a holistic view on the guidance policies and practices, or on individual experiences. Nevertheless, our hermeneutic phenomenological approach

enabled us to build integrative descriptions of two contextually rich cases by contrasting the similar and different experiences and mediating roles of the actors in multi-sited CGC environments. This method enabled us to bring the individual experiences to the fore and integrate them with the inclusive aims and means of career guidance policies. For future research, we would recommend comparative research that would build on the recognition of the CGC policies ecosystem.

Our analysis showed that the gap between CGC policy and practice at the different levels might limit the opportunities for a critical approach grounded in social justice to support migrants' social inclusion. Despite social justice being embedded in CGC policy, limited resources and lack of recognition of individuals' needs and situations may restrict CGC's scope to a next-step counselling approach. Our findings show that the policy goals presuppose LLE high-opportunity structures, while the practice cannot live up to it. To improve opportunities for social inclusion, the discrepancies between the intentions of career counselling policies and their implementation should be considered; as well as a more direct focus on CGC beyond next-step counselling, thereby contributing to a shift of the LLEs' condition towards a 'high opportunity progression ecosystem' (Hodgson & Spours, 2013, 2015).

Notes

1. Encounters and Belonging: Adult Migrant Students' Experiences in Finland.
2. Inclusion and recognition of newly arrived migrant youth through educational and vocational guidance. A study of professional considerations and priorities.

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Appendix1. Data

Finland	Case school:
Big city	Upper secondary school, continuous adult education Vocational qualification in Business Vocational qualification in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Observations: Six with the ICT-related group and 12 with the Business group; 11 group sessions and one session comprising four teacher – student assessment meetings Interviews: Twelve students Two teachers Two career counsellors (responsible for employment guidance)
Sweden	Case schools: Upper secondary, Language Introduction Program
Municipality 1	Free School 1
Larger city	Inner City School 1
Municipality 2	Inner City School 2
Big city	Inner City School 3
Municipality 3	
Medium-sized city	Observations: Twenty-three observations of the school's career counselling practices Twenty-seven career conversations between counsellor and students Three information activities Two visits to workplaces participating in the internship project Two meetings with teachers Interviews: Four counsellors Six teachers Four principals One project leader

^aIncluding planning meetings and interviews.