

G.I.A.N.T. Guidance: Innovative Actions and New Tools. A Leonardo da Vinci Project

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1 ABSTRACT

GIANT is a two years long Leonardo da Vinci project (2008-2010) that involves 8 partners: the promoter ASTER s.cons. p.a. (Italy), Ce.Trans (Italy), Friuli Venezia Giulia Region (Italy), Marche Region, Milan Province (Italy), Bologna Province (Italy), Universidad de Santiago de Compostela (Spain), Institute of Education Science (Rumania). The GIANT Project intends to implement a model of guidance services' governance that was defined by GIRC (Guidance Innovation Relay Centres) a previous Leonardo da Vinci project. The general aim is to support improvements in quality and innovation in guidance system. The concrete application of GIRC model foresees three principal lines of work:

1. adaptation of the model for transfer to the needs and features of the geographical/institutional contexts concerned;
2. the sharing of support tools to facilitate the model's transfer within the partnership;
3. application of the model in the transfer settings.

Besides these actions, the project foresees assessment of the transfer process, publication and dissemination of the results, and, of course, transnational coordination of the actions for the entire duration of the project.

The paper presents the activities that have been realized up to now.

2 INTRODUCTION: AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND CONTEXT OF THE GIANT PROJECT

GIANT - Guidance: Innovative Actions and New Tools is a two-year project (October 2008-September 2010) financed under the Lifelong Learning Programme. Specifically, GIANT is a project pursued within the Leonardo da Vinci sectoral programme, "Multilateral Projects 'Transfer of Innovation' (TOI). The objective of the TOIs is "to improve the quality and attractiveness of the European education and vocational training system by adapting and integrating innovative content or results from previous Leonardo da Vinci Projects, or from other innovative projects".

Given these goals, the aim of the GIANT project is to transfer and apply (also partially) an innovative model for a linkage device/guidance service centres devised by a previous project entitled Leonardo GIRC. Guidance Innovation Relay Centres, which concluded in 2007.

The purpose of the GIRC model is to foster innovation and quality in career guidance through integration and linkage among systems with different and complementary competences: the school system, the employment system, and the vocational training system.

To favour this integration, the model identifies four strategic function, whose undertaking at local level may satisfy needs of the career guidance system regarded as crucial in the debate and the literature on the topic. These functions were identified by means of complex survey and analysis

conducted within the five European partner countries in the GIRC project (Italy, Spain, Romania, United Kingdom, Malta) and they can be summarized as follows:

- *technical support*, understood as support for the definition of strategies of guidance governance;
- *support for the training of guidance practitioners*, understood as support for the skills enhancement of guidance practitioners, both upon entry to the profession and through updating schemes;
- *quality improvement*, understood as support for enhancing the quality of services by acting on standards, tools, assessment, and the integration of services.
- *research and development*, understood as support for innovation and for the devising of strategies to develop the guidance system not determined solely by emergency but anchored in research results.

Complex analysis has defined the following aspects for each function:

- (a) the *overall goal* to be achieved by the specific function;
- (b) the set of *individual objectives* combining to determine the *overall goal* of that function;
- (c) a series of *activities* through which to pursue fulfilment of the *individual objectives* defined;
- (d) outputs from the process, i.e. *products* representing tangible results of individual actions;
- (e) the *actors involved* in the various activities as either the promoters or the recipients of the specific activities.

Within the framework just outlined, the GIANT Project involves:

- four partners which participated in development of the GIRC model: two Italian partners, Aster and Ce.Trans; the University of Santiago de Compostela (ES); and the Institutul de Stiinte ale Educatiei – Institute of Education Science (RO)
- four public institutions, which, after being involved in the experimentation or dissemination phases of the GIRC Project as beneficiaries, are now partners in the GIANT Project as centres for the transfer/application of the GIRC model. These are Italian authorities participating in the project through their departments concerned with career guidance: the regional government of Friuli Venezia Giulia, the regional government of Le Marche, the provincial administration of Milan; the provincial administration of Bologna.

The concrete application, at provincial or regional level, of an operational *linkage* system among the various institutional actors delivering guidance actions/services is a possible ‘technical’ solution to the problems of the sector’s governance frequently cited in the European debate and literature. The technical solution proposed for the problems of guidance governance – the main aim of the GIANT Project – obviously does not gainsay the need for parallel ‘political’ action. This, however, falls outside the scope of the project.

The Cedefop (2006) publication *Improving Lifelong Guidance Policies and Systems* describes the key features which an ‘ideal system’ should possess with a view to improving policies and instruments. The most important of these features are *coordination*, declined in terms of *cooperation* among different sectors furnishing guidance (education, training, work) and *coherence* between regional and local services which, by means of arrangements among decentralized and central structures, assure equality in the benefits accruing to citizens regardless of geographical location.

The conclusions of the “Finnish EU Presidency Conference on Lifelong Guidance Policies and Systems: Building the Stepping Stones” (held in November 2006 at Jyväskylä), drafted in its official version by the international expert Tony Watts, emphasise that the principal tasks to be undertaken by the European countries in remedying the persistent ‘fragility’ of guidance systems are:

- identifying common goals and principles among all guidance services;
- developing quality-assurance systems, preferably on a cross-sectoral basis;
- developing closer links among guidance policies, research and practices.

Aside from the most recent citations, the broadening of the perspective with which Europe since Lisbon has addressed guidance in ‘system’ terms is evident. As a consequence of this change, besides ‘traditional’ analyses on all psycho-pedagogic methodological aspects concerning the practice of ‘helping the person’, the professional community of guidance counsellors and decision-makers now increasingly focuses on the most effective ways in which to enhance guidance as a means to fulfil public policy objectives in the field of learning, work, and social equality.

The GIANT Project therefore carries forward this strategy and intends to furnish transfer centres with a reference framework within which they can:

- give unitariness and complementarity to local guidance services, supporting their quality development;
- ensure the better use of services by citizens;
- invest in the development of practitioner skills;
- guarantee coordination between facilities delivering guidance services to citizens and research centres operating in the education sector and the labour market.

Hence the project’s direct and short-term recipients are guidance practitioners, the managers of guidance services, and policy-makers concerned with problems of the sector’s governance.

The project’s indirect and long-term recipients are the residents of the regions and provinces involved in the partnership, who may access guidance services that give them effective support in managing their learning needs and opportunities and their careers.

3 MAIN LINES OF ACTION

The GIANT Project is structured around three principal workpackages:

4. **adaptation** of the model for transfer to the needs and features of the geographical/institutional contexts concerned;
5. the **sharing** of support tools to facilitate the model’s transfer within the partnership;
6. **application** of the model in the transfer settings.

Besides these actions, the project foresees assessment of the transfer process, publication and dissemination of the results, and, of course, transnational coordination of the actions for the entire duration of the project.

The **adaptation** phase has involved detailed analysis of the GIRC model to be transferred in view of the model’s functions which each transferee centre intends to implement. On conclusion of this workpackage, each Italian experimentation venue (Bologna Province, Milan Province, Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, Marche Region) has defined its own specificities in application of the model.

The **tools sharing** phase is of extreme importance in operationalizing transfer of the system for guidance service integration. As said, the distinctive feature of the GIANT Project consists in the transfer of a career guidance service ‘model’ within a number of Italian public authorities. However, a ‘model’ must by definition be *abstract* and *general* so that it can be adapted to diversified contexts without distorting its overall objectives. What happens, therefore, when this model must be used in real contexts? How can the GIRC model become a concrete tool for institutional decision-makers concerned to promote quality and integration among guidance services? The responses given by the GIANT Project to these questions have been, first, the sharing of operational methods and instruments within the partnership and, second and especially, among the actors in the various sectors (school, work, vocational training) which, with different competences, operate in the field of guidance, and which each Italian public body has involved and will involve in application of the model. The areas identified by the GIANT Project for the sharing of methods and tools have been:

- a) evaluation of guidance actions;

b) use of guidance methods;

c) the collection of good practices in guidance services for young people aged under 25.

As already mentioned, the activities for **application of the model** as envisaged by workpackage 3 have closely interwoven with the activities in regard to tools sharing.

The link between these two work phases, already envisaged during the planning phase, have been delineated and specified better in the more applied aspects undertaken, so that the work plan for application of the model has been defined. In this phase, the task of each Italian public institution is to identify, within the GIRC model, the functions it deems most strategic for the qualitative development of its local guidance system and, on the basis of that choice, to draw up a work plan to foster integration and linkage between at least two different sectors (e.g. between schools and guidance services, or between employment services and vocational training services in the same local area, etc.). It should not be forgotten, in fact, that the main result expected from the model to be transferred is the remedying (even partial) of the fragmentation of competences in the guidance sector which gives rise to a supply unsatisfactory from the point of view of the user.

4 FIRST RESULTS

The GIANT project are carrying out the first year's activities. Only at the end of the second year it will be possible to know the whole results obtained to this project, and on the basis of these, it will be possible to outline the implications for the career guidance services system at european level.

Anyway, some interesting results have already reached and it will be worthwhile to present them to the career guidance practitioners' community.

As said, the first workpackage has involved detailed analysis of the GIRC model in order to identify the functions which each institutional partner (Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, Marche Region, Bologna Province and Milano Province) intends to implement to apply in concrete terms the GIRC idea of coordinate provision of career guidance services. On conclusion of this workpackage, each Italian transferee centre has pursued to the drafting of a work plan in order to specify the activities for the application of the model (workpackage 3).

The Figure 1 shows the main activities scheduled by each partner.

| GIRC MODEL FUNCTIONS | Friuli Venezia Giulia Region | Marche Region | Bologna Province | Milano Province |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| Function: TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE Objective: The promotion of communication among the competent socio-institutional players | Creation of a technical working group among the Guidance Services providers belonging to School and Vocational Training Systems | Creation of a technical working group among the Guidance Services providers belonging to School, Vocational Training Systems and Employment services | Creation of a technical working group among the Guidance Services providers belonging to School System and Social Services | Creation of a technical working group among the Guidance Services providers belonging to Employment Services and Vocational Training Systems |
| Function: QUALITY IMPROVEMENT Objective: The sharing of best practice and innovative tools. | Methodological seminars oriented to Vocational Training System operators and school teachers. | Methodological seminars oriented to Vocational Training System and Employment Services operators | Promotion and improvement of the Provincial Career Guidance Instruments' database. | |
| Objective: The monitoring and the evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of career guidance services. | Definition and experimentation of an evaluation system shared by different systems | Definition and experimentation of an evaluation system shared by different systems | | Definition and experimentation of an evaluation system shared by different systems |
| Function: RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT Objective: The support of the career guidance interventions' planning (at local, national and international levels) | | | Improvement of operators' planning competences | Improvement of operators' planning competences |

Figure 1: Functions and objectives of the institution work plans

It is important to underline that:

- Every institutional partner (Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, Marche Region, Bologna Province and Milano Province) accepted to involve two or more territorial sub-systems (education, training and labor market) of vocational and career guidance services. Infact:
 - Friuli Venezia Giulia Region has been involved School System and Vocational Training System
 - Marche Region has been involved Employment Services, School System and Vocational Training System
 - Bologna Province has been involved School System and Social Services
 - Milan Province has been involved Employment Services and Vocational Training System
- Regarding the four functions identified by GIRC model (technical support; support for the training of guidance practitioners; quality improvement; research and development), every institutional partner has selected the most strategic functions for the specific context in order to promote the integration and linkage among services with different and complementary competences, that are part of the career guidance system. In respect to the selected functions, every partner has specified one or more goals to achieve through the activities scheduled by the work plans. The Figure 1 shows the different selected objectives of the institutional partners. It is important to underline that the choices of institutional partners are focus on a limited and shared objectives as compared to the wider set of objectives individualized by GIRC model. Infact, the sharing of the same

- objectives makes comparable the local experiences and it facilitates the evaluation of application process in the transfer settings.
- The main criterion, that guided the selection of the functions and the operationalizing objectives in the planning of activities like so in their realization, has been the sustainability of the innovation introduced by GIANT project in the career guidance system. Concerning the sustainability, it is important not to underestimate the unpredictable influence of political and economical issues on the management of the career guidance services.
 - The work plan of application has been drawn up by any institutional partners with great care to provide some useful information to the European partners in order to facilitate the replication of the transfer process in other European countries. For this reason, every work plan describes:
 - the facilitating contextual conditions to transfer the model;
 - the innovative elements that GIANT model permit to introduce in the system;
 - the expected results of the transfer process;
 - the potential unwanted effects and risks of the transfer process;
 - the possibility to adjust the transfer model to the contextual demands.

As mentioned, the activities of the workpackage 3 have closely interwoven with the activities of workpackage 2. As Figure 1 shows, the activities of the workpackage 2 are aimed to improve the quality of the guidance practices. In particular, it is possible to distinguish two specific objectives regarding the function “Quality improvement”:

- The sharing of best practice and the development of innovative tools
- The monitoring and the evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of career guidance services.

In other words, the activities of the workpackage 2 regard two issues of extreme importance for the future development of the career guidance system:

- The identification of common goals and principles among all guidance services;
- The development of quality-assurance systems.

The GIANT action plan schedules the activities of sharing of best practice and the development of innovative tools during the first year, while during the second year it is scheduled a period of testing of the new tools in the services involved in the transfer process. This testing will be the object of the evaluation activities. First at all, the evaluation activities will assess the effectiveness of the shared tools, and, consequently, they will provide a indicator of the utility and the feasibility of the GIRC model’s application.

The project partners has agreed to focus the attention on a specific group of career guidance services’ users: the young people aged under 25. The first step to share the tools has been to identify the vocational needs expressed by these users. This activity has involved the technical working groups, that has worked with the Cetrans professionals. Milan Province involved in a focus group about this issue the Job Centers and Vocational Training Centers’ operators in a focus group about this issue.

In general, the activity of the vocational needs’ definition has shown some limits of the present career guidance system. In particular, as the scientific literature (Bernaud, Di Fabio, and Mpouki, 2006; Miller and Edens, 2003; Rochlen, Milburn, and Hill, 2004). affirms there is little attention on finding a common way to define the typologies of the users according to their vocational needs and this fact makes difficult to coordinate the interventions of different career guidance services. Despite that, each technical working group has identified a guidance actions’ aim that they consider very important to meet the vocational needs of the young people who apply to the services involved in the project.

The selected aims are:

- Friuli Venezia Giulia Region has chosen to work on the objective “Developing a vocational choice”
- Marche Region has chosen to work on the objective “Supporting the transition school-to-work”
- Bologna Province has chosen to work on the objective “Supporting a transition between different educational levels”
- Milan Province has chosen to work on the objective “Developing a vocational choice”.

In order to achieve these aims, it is necessary to elaborate a plan, that will outline:

- the contents
- the activities
- the instruments

On the one hand, regarding the aim of “Developing a vocational choice”, a possible plan of intervention could contain:

- as contents: the consideration of personal school experience (abilities, interests, attitudes); the information about opportunities in employment and training market; the development of decision-making abilities; the development of a individual action plan;
- as activities: the reflection on the personal school performances (results; emotion; learning abilities.); the personal resources self-awareness (interests, abilities, aspiration, aptitudes); learning how to find, process and use information; the career planning
- as instruments: the modalities of managing the activities.

On the other hand, regarding the aim of “Supporting a transition between different educational levels”:

- The contents concern: the emotion aroused by the transition (which are? How to cope with them?); the identification of the demands of the new educational context;
- The activities concern: the clarification of the personal representation of the context; learning by others successful school experiences; the personal resources self-awareness; coping with potential difficulties;
- The instruments regards the modalities of managing the activities.

Finally, regarding the aim of “Supporting the transition school-to-work”:

- The contents concern: the job search abilities; the information about opportunities in local labor market;
- The activities concern: the job search abilities training; the job interview simulation; learning how to find, process and use information about labor market; the evaluation of a job offer;
- The instruments regards the modalities of managing the activities.

At the present, every institutional partner is engaged in realizing the methodological seminars oriented to the operators. At the end of the seminars, the participants should have defined a plan of intervention to test during the second year of GIANT project.

Only when the plans are completed, it will be possible to define in detail the evaluation process. The evaluation activity will offer a interesting contribution to the debate about the effectiveness of the career guidance practices.

According to the scientific literature (Bernes, Bardick, and Orr, 2007; Plant, 2004), the past research about career guidance intervention is fragmented and unsystematic and the evaluation activities promoted by the career guidance services has often confused the monitoring activity with the evaluation of effectiveness.

The evaluation activities of GIANT project will be planned following two main principles:

- It will be distinguish clearly the monitoring indicators (e.g. users’ vocational needs; kind of intervention) from the effectiveness indicators (e.g. individual learning outcomes).
- The data will be obtained by different sources of evaluation (e.g. participants; operators).

To sum up, even if at the time of writing, workpackages 2 and 3 are still in progress, the first results suggest that GIANT project would be a real good opportunity to promote the *coordination* among different sectors furnishing guidance (school, vocational training, work) and *coherence* between regional and local services and, therefore, to improve the quality of career guidance system

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