

Foundations for an hope research team.

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The idea of an international research and study group on hope, optimism and resilience started on September 2011 in Padova, during the International Conference “Vocational designing and career counseling: Challenges and new horizons”. At that time several researchers attending the conference discussed about the relevance of talking in these times about counseling, vocational guidance and future. All these constructs, in fact, involve hope, optimism and time perspective.

Until recent past we were all used to believe that contexts are stable and that, at least in western countries, there are wide possibilities of choice and purposes achievement for everyone. Future is now unforeseeable, unstable, uncertain and threatening. It will be compelling from both cognitive, emotional and relational point of view. In the near future it the ability to be involved at the same time and during the same day on several different fronts will be crucial; we will be asked to share several projects and, according to situations and sensitivity, several different skills and competencies will be required in order to be appropriate to different roles we will need to cover. Psychosocial risks and uneasiness become more frequent and firm, given that new generations are mainly inspired by values of extrinsic relevance (Bartolini, 2010 p. 25).

Facing all these challenges cannot be dealt with by a single discipline; there is the need for multidisciplinary and heterogeneous supports and, certainly, hope, optimism and resilience.

Most of the so called “professions of help” suggest, in fact, to give support to those who are dealing with difficulties, with choices, with projects and future plans construction; to sustain those who aim at understanding and developing their resources in order to increase probability of a life full of meaning and quality; to assist those who aim at increasing their competencies while at the same time capitalizing their strengths.

We should care about future, hope and optimism, resilience and time perspective but also we should take into account risks. Differently from those who, because of their interest in diseases, are only able to foresee negative elements or things to be avoided, experts who deal with career decision making processes or future planning need to attribute more neutral, if not positive, meanings to risks; to consider risks as challenges toward themselves and nearest contexts. For some domains these actions are tailored to risks eliminating while for others there is the need to debate and to study how to face risks; how to control if not undertake them.

There is, however, the need to talk about resilience in education and in work contexts because we cannot completely eliminate or significantly reduce psychosocial stressors. We should be interested in prevention and in programs aimed at increasing adaptability, as defined by Savickas (Savickas, 2005; 2011).

In this context, a special role should be assumed by research. Although in the recent years there has been an increase in theoretical studies about these constructs (Elliott, 2005) there are still several knots to be solved and many actions to be undertaken.

The following are some of the most interesting questions which should be taken into account by a large international research group:

- a) In counseling, education and learning, in psychotherapy, in career guidance but also in sociology, economy and philosophy there is an increasing debate on hope, optimism and resilience. Are the definitions of hope, optimism, resilience overlapping under different views?
- b) Are these constructs multidimensional or can they be considered sufficiently independent and monofactorial?
- c) Is it possible to differentiate specific (oriented to goals and desires) or generalized, non-specific typologies? Is there empirical evidence supporting these typologies? Do they work jointly? To what extent are they influenced by situations and problems?
- d) Are measures currently available reliable?
- e) What are the sources of development and determinants of hope, optimism and resilience?
- f) Is there a role of gender, age and education?
- g) Is it possible to treat these constructs in terms of traits or state? And to what extent? What are the impacts of socio-cultural determinants? What is the relevance of cross-cultural analyses and researches in this context?
- i) Are there relationships between these constructs and quality of life, adaptability, future time orientation, self-efficacy, assertiveness, self-determination, empowermentand so on?
- l) How can we increase all these dimensions?