

Narrative Approach in the Portfolio Method for Adult Education.

Guidance for the Recognition of Competences in the Perspective of Lifelong Learning

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Abstract:

The present paper is a contribution to the broad field of adult education within a lifelong learning perspective. It starts from literature and theories in this field, and develops a reflection based on empirical work, related in particular to the use of qualitative methodologies in the guidance process for adults engaged in the recognition of strategic competences acquired in non formal and informal learning contexts of civil service. The lifelong learning perspective places the valorisation of experience, reflective and transformative learning at the center to remove barriers that hinder adult participation. The outcome of this experimentation was the tutoring procedure to support reflexive and self-analysis activities for the construction of the competences portfolio.

Keywords: Biographical Methods; Guidance; Lifelong Learning; Recognition of Competences; Third Sector

1. Adult Education, Guidance and Lifelong Learning

The relationship between adults and their learning and education is characterised by an irrepressible complexity, due to the plurality of adult dimensions, the multiplicity of situations of relationship and communication, the plurality and diversity of learning contexts, and the pervasiveness and rapidity of change.

In this way, a perspective of lifelong learning is assumed, in which the concept of learning expands, beyond the specific dimensions of educational paths, and declines as a potential that can be realised throughout life and in a variety of situations (Morgan-Klein and Osborne 2007). The principle of lifelong learning conceives individuals as epistemic subjects, producing their own biographies, interpreting developmental processes in a transformative way (Mezirow 2003; Formenti 2017).

Lifelong learning potential represents an unquestionable aspect, even in the sense of a driving force (Jarvis 2004), in human beings. Regarding the knowl-

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)

FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Paolo Di Rienzo, *Narrative Approach in the Portfolio Method for Adult Education. Guidance for the Recognition of Competences in the Perspective of Lifelong Learning*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0151-3.10, in Vanna Boffo, Regina Egetenmeyer (edited by), *Re-thinking Adult Education Research. Beyond the Pandemic*, pp. 95-110, 2023, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 979-12-215-0151-3, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0151-3

edge society, such ability proves to be a complex issue, if we consider the new conception of the human mind and the deep changes that modern society is going through in all its different aspects. With the metaphor of the learning society, attention is focused on the concept of a social system in which knowledge is an emerging lever for development and learning is configured as a condition for the functioning and health of the system itself. The development of this system is increasingly correlated with the enhancement of so-called intangible resources; the heart of which are human resources.

With contemporary changes of social, economic and productive conditions and the formative trajectories in the pathways of becoming adults, the concept of lifelong learning is affirmed. Learning takes place during the entire course of one's life. It expands, goes beyond specific dimensions of educational pathways, and declines as a potentiality that can be realised throughout one's life in a plurality of situations: such as in the workplace, at home, in groups, alone; not only, therefore, in those situations that are defined as formal places and organisations aimed at education.

The freedom, self-realisation and autonomy of individuals are linked to the possibilities of accessing knowledge, competences and learning in general. The emphasis is on the human capacity to create and use knowledge effectively and intelligently. But managing one's own life projects and responding dynamically to the constant challenges of social life and work involves the need to acquire, maintain and develop the knowledge and competences necessary throughout one's life.

In this way, a universalistic and inclusive perspective is adopted that hinges on the right of each individual to be educated, develop his or her talents and be recognised for his or her own intrinsic value. This is constituted, among other things, by the knowledge and competences he or she has acquired in all the experiences of life. Therefore, the enhancement of a person's cultural and professional heritage, starting from the reconstruction of his or her individual history, is an innovative aspect of education policies and systems and constitutes a cardinal principle of adult education, consistent with the perspective of lifelong learning (Morgan-Klein and Osborne 2007; Di Rienzo 2017; Milana et al. 2018).

The most recent UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning report (2019) on adult education and learning is dedicated to the theme of participation and educational inclusion, recognising lifelong learning as a pivotal concept for raising the cultural profile of individuals, starting with the attention placed on the multiplicity of learning contexts and the enhancement of competences.

The transformations underway in society and in the world of work and education, however, bring to light problem areas that pertain to the sphere of educational inclusion, participation in the form of active citizenship, the recognition of cultural diversity, gender equality, and the enhancement of human and social capital. These problem areas require an overall view; in particular, a pedagogical perspective attentive to human development in its entirety and a transformation of the culture of education. Among the factors undergoing transformation, guidance plays a crucial role. From being an accessory and/or marginal element,

guidance must be understood as a constitutive component of educational processes in the lifelong dimension.

In literature (Rubenson 2011), the barriers that hinder adult participation in education and learning are connected to multiple factors, which give rise to three categories: situational factors (family, social and professional environment), institutional factors (the organisational contexts responsible for education), and personal factors (individual dispositions and attitudes towards learning).

Institutional factors include, in particular, those ways in which guidance activities are carried out. In this context, the provision of methods and tools aimed at the enhancement and recognition of the competences of adults, who return to education in formal and non-formal contexts, positively affects their participation and contributes, in this way, to making education contexts more inclusive (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2018).

Guidance inspired by a pedagogical accompaniment device of a biographical-narrative type (Dominicé 2000) can play a supportive role in the re-entry of adult individuals to education. These are methods that can be considered particularly functional in the implementation of processes for the reconstruction of one's work path and, in general, of life (Reggio and Righetti 2013; Honoré 2014; Breton 2019; Di Rienzo 2020).

It is within this horizon of meaning that the concept of lifelong guidance must be understood: guidance takes place during the entire course of life, expands, goes beyond the episodic and instrumental character in education and education paths, to constitute itself as a strategic resource for the life of individuals that can be used throughout life and for a plurality of reasons.

Guidance is today considered as a formative process of change through the exercise of one's own freedom, self-evaluation, and the search for meaning and existential significance. It is the process of evolution that has historically marked the development of theoretical models and the definition of guidance practices and systems. Considering the conception adopted, guidance is understood as a fundamental element in supporting people in facing the future and essential for the achievement of social objectives to which it provides a fundamental contribution (Loiodice 2004).

Guidance refers, therefore, also to the possibility of a learning process that occurs with individuals throughout the course of their existence, embracing different spheres of life: professional, private, familial, and social.

It is within this new context, derived from the explosion-dilation of learning, that individuals can actualise personal fulfillment and substantial citizenship, based on the ability to access knowledge, and competences; in general learning and knowing how to maintain and develop themselves throughout their lives in different organisational, social, professional and territorial contexts. Hence a completely new attention to the life experience of individuals, and their biographies, in which experiences are realised and the unexperienced possibilities and development of potential, including education, are manifested. The construction of personal and professional identity thus assumes the form of an unstoppable experimentation (Di Rienzo 2012).

Within this framework of reasoning, the category of transition is particularly significant in focusing attention on the processes of adulthood. We are talking about the process of becoming adulthood rather than a static and abstract idea of adulthood (Biasin 2012).

In this sense, the concepts of change and transition have been adopted as possible interpretative keys to contemporaneity. In short, individual biographies are increasingly presented as multiform, multiple or otherwise in motion. Crisis and/or transition increasingly represent a structural datum of the course of life. Even with conflicts, contrasts and hardships, the character of adulthood presents itself as a possibility to continue growing and learning in the dimension of lifelong learning. If one assumes this new scenario of adulting processes, transitions can be conceived as a dimension of life made up of expectations and needs/constraints, and a space between present and possible futures (Biasin 2012).

On a more descriptive level, the moments and spaces of crossing and passage (transitions) in adult biographies can concern:

- Transitions to the working world: in this category we can consider the transition from school or university; and, more generally, from various education paths to the world of work. In this type of transition, guidance services are fundamental in explaining the characteristics of various occupations and the framework in which they are placed, thus contributing to the preparation of the subject who is facing the transition;
- Intra-work transitions and transitions between work and non-work: these are moments of transition from one job to another, and very often between work and non-work, which necessitate monitoring and planning the development of one's professional career, moments of growth or slowdown, professional updating activities and continuing education, etc. The person in the middle of his or her career usually sets new professional goals and objectives, which necessarily involve transitional crises. Such crises are even more profound in the case of transitions between employment and non-employment and are relatively increasing;
- Vital transitions: other transitions, such as those of women/men who do not work (for example: maternity/paternity leave to care for their children) and who do so by choice or who wish to be reintegrated into the world of work; those of migration, those related to total changes and not only professional changes of country, context, culture, or of purely personal choices, of study, and of the realisation of desired projects of self-realisation which can involve even radical and difficult changes.

Going through transitions presupposes both a strategic individual dimension of action and organisational conditions of education systems that make it possible to deal with change and to be supported at key moments of transition, such as, precisely, guidance services centered on the individual, who is understood as a subject in constant becoming (Biasin 2012).

It is widely recognised, therefore, that there is the need to focus attention on the capacity of competences acquired in the many contexts of life.

Studies that have focused attention on the effectiveness and quality of adult students' return to education, highlight the importance of offering personalised guidance services with a biographical-narrative approach, which presents new forms compared to those traditionally provided for school and career guidance. This is an innovative approach that gives importance to the valorisation of the competences acquired in life experiences in order to favour the personalisation of education paths and the empowerment of adults (Loiodice 1998, 2004).

In accordance with the perspective presented, innovation in adult education systems cannot be sustained by curricular reorganisation alone. It must be approached with qualitative approaches on the level of education and organisational practices; in particular, in the manner of guidance. In this context, innovation implies a constant synergy between research, teaching and the organisational-institutional dimension, as a function of guidance, re-motivation, and the enhancement of the experiences of adult students.

The qualitative methods of guidance of the narrative-biographical matrix are characterised as individualised and personalised actions. They can be used within a project of re-motivation and guidance of students who have had a major slowdown, interruption or abandonment of their studies. There are students who in the meantime have found a stable job, while others have gone through multiple precarious jobs. We are in the presence, therefore, of a universe for which an approach from the point of view of competences and their reconstruction appears sufficiently justified and appropriate (Batini and Giusti 2008).

This approach offers the possibility of identifying and reconstructing, starting from experience, the wealth of competences available to the individual, by anchoring competences, knowledge and psychosocial resources to real events and situations. The meticulous description of work activities and of the ways of dealing with them, the analysis of the extra-work experiences and of the education history, the possibility of creating links, of establishing relationships, reinterpreting experiences lived, and identifying strengths and weaknesses, are all activities that allow one to make one's competences explicit and conceptually articulated and organised.

Guidance thus understood is proposed as a support, an accompaniment to individual planning, an opportunity to develop and/or acquire learning strategies and motivation, such as to support effectively, with continuity and harmony, both the commitments of study and those related to work, to be able to realise their personal and professional projects, and to deal with the demands, changes and opportunities for realisation (Breton and Pesce 2019).

Specifically, the objectives consistent with the paths of qualitative guidance consist of:

- Re-reading and re-attributing meaning to the biographical path with particular reference to the formative and work dimensions, as well as personal, of the student;
- Enhancing the value of narrative thinking and the autobiographical approach in a formative and orientative manner;
- Develop individual empowerment;

- Adequately and critically place the education pathway within the student's general planning, supporting the positive circularity of the different vital spheres of the person (work, education, values, self-development);
- Developing a project strategy in the short term (conclusion of education), in the medium and long term (career prospects, life projects).

Through unusual parameters and methods, the reinterpretation of the subject's personal, educational and professional biography facilitates the maturation of new awareness, especially in the direction of the usability of one's knowledge and know-how. The term awareness becomes the key word of a path that plays a function of empowerment, strengthening and re-motivation linked to the activity of self-analysis, self-assessment and awareness. A clear awareness of the wealth of resources possessed gives the individual the possibility of subsequently channeling them into the elaboration of a professional development project; and strengthens the feeling of self-efficacy. Without these prerequisites, any prospect of planning and returning to education would be compromised at the root.

2. Biographical Approach of Guidance in the Competences Recognition Procedure

Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education adopted by UNESCO in 2015 states that acquired competences resulting from participation in non-formal and informal learning contexts should be recognised and accredited, also in order to remove barriers to adult participation in educational and education pathways (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2018, 2019).

The recognition of the competences of adults returning to education can be traced back to a pedagogical device based on the principles of valuing experience and personalising the learning pathway, which are cornerstones in adult education (Knowles 1996; Jarvis 2004; Mortari 2004). This topic is part of the studies that point to the recognition of the value, particularly for adults, of experience, as a resource for learning, including the rediscovery of subjects in the education of knowledge and competences, often tacit, acquired in different contexts of life and work (Di Rienzo 2012; Reggio and Righetti 2013).

By adopting the pedagogical perspective that draws on the cultural (Bruner 2015), humanistic (Knowles 1996) and constructive (Mezirow 2003) dimensions of educational processes, the individual is seen in his/her totality as an active learning subject and the attribution of meaning that he assigns to his own experience is crucial.

In this sense, autobiographical narration becomes a fundamental tool to operate the reflection and reworking of one's own experience (Bertaux 2008). According to Bruner (1990) narrative thinking is one of the two main modes of thought by which human beings organise and manage their knowledge of the world, and indeed structure their own immediate experience.

The story has as its nature the property of expressing multiple meanings. The polysemy of the story means openness to the possible: the story becomes a way of open transmission of knowledge that cannot be limited to the demonstrative statements of science but conveyed by a process that refers to the desire

to know, to know how to listen, to know how to choose, and to know how to do. In addition, for the American psychologist, narrative thinking would perform an essential function for the cohesion of a culture as for the structuring of an individual life (Bruner 2015).

Jerome Bruner (2006) emphasised two fundamental aspects of narrative thinking. The first aspect is characterised by its interpretive dimension: in it, the canonicity of a narrative and its openness to possibility are contrasted. In this, narrative thought constitutes the means of stabilisation of a culture, but also of its continuous renewal. The second fundamental aspect of narrative thought is the narrative creation of the self, an essential dimension of the construction of subjective identity and at the same time of constant openness to others.

On the other hand, Mezirow (2003) himself has emphasised the transformative potential of biographical practices and paths of reflection on experience. According to Mezirow (2003), learning is a conscious, critical, and reflective process through which the adult attributes new and updated interpretations of meanings attributed to past experiences or thoughts in order to guide the present and direct future action. Transformative learning occurs only through the transformation of perspectives of meaning, understood as: the patterns of expectations that filter perception and cognition; the perceptual and conceptual codes to shape, limit, and distort the way we think, believe, and feel; and the how, what, and why of our learning.

In this sense, autobiographical narration becomes a fundamental tool for the reflection and reworking of one's own experience, in a transformative sense. An assisted activity of biographical reflexivity sets in motion a process of learning and self-determination project, which starts from the respect of identity in diversity, and from the protection of individual peculiarities, which has as its objective to enhance and safeguard the originality of the individual.

This is the case of the Bilan de compétences (BdC) that represents a method of qualitative and biographical narrative guidance. In adult guidance and more specifically in the accompaniment of transitions in adulthood, the BdC is known and used as a fine and in-depth tool for the self-analysis and assisted self-assessment of knowledge, and the competences and interests of individuals in the development of a professional project (Levy-Leboyer 1993).

The BdC, for its intrinsic characteristics, helps to support, facilitate, and encourage the process of reflection without which an experience is likely to slip by without leaving any trace or nourishing any project dimension. Reflexivity makes it possible to transform lived experience into experience and the acquisition of experience into knowledge. It enables 'doing' to become conscious and meaningful. It also makes it possible to give order to experiences, put them into a meaningful sequence, give them a rhythm, and indicate times and deadlines. The BdC, as a personalised tool to support and develop the reflective and planning potential of the subjects and as a process that develops within an established time – the sense is also governed by governing time – facilitates in the individual the metabolization and systematisation of their experience (Levy-Leboyer 1993).

Through the BdC, the person is accompanied on a path that leads him to reconsider, at different times – past, present, possible future – and in different ways, the same themes, behaviours, and events using his own view, that of others and that of the counselor. The valorisation of recursiveness, as a distinctive feature of the Bilan de compétences, recalls Wittgenstein's criss-crossing landscape, the crossing and re-crossing of the same contents of a domain of knowledge in a non-linear and multidimensional way, returning to the same place of the conceptual landscape several times, but in different circumstances and coming from different directions (Wittgenstein 1999).

With the BdC, again, the person has the opportunity – by using new ways of narrating their experiences and through the re-appropriation of a language (the autobiographical one) – to think and rethink their experience by making it the object of change. The person has, therefore, the opportunity to reconstruct their learning; and to focus on their interests and the pieces that make up the puzzle of their history and their professional identity. In short, the person has the opportunity to discover or re-discover, by enhancing their learning, the entire wealth of resources possessed (hidden curriculum) or accumulated over the years and to transform them into resources to reinvest in the future (Lemoine 2002).

The BdC, thus understood, maintains its nature as a device centered on the person, his or her motivations, his or her needs, as well as on the valorisation and appropriation of the competences necessary for the construction of a professional and life project. It also tends to specifically affect knowledge and meta-cognitive processes through an amplification of the subjects' ability to capitalise and reinvest in new contexts the experiences made elsewhere (internships, apprenticeships, real work activities carried out before, during or immediately after studies, as in the case of recent graduates) and develop the strategic competences that underlie and support specific and contextualised competences. The BdC aims, therefore, to create a virtuous circle between work, life and education experiences that are able to expand, in terms of knowledge and awareness, the horizon of one's future conduct and, therefore, of one's planning (Lemoine 2002).

All this takes place through the attention to the person, his or her learning potential, and the protection of otherness and difference that is inherent in the authenticity and uniqueness of each individual.

The general outline of the articulation of the BdC pathways, while referring to a specific model – the biographical-relational model integrated by the self-image model – and while maintaining the focus of attention on the individual history and the post-graduate professional project, represented a sort of light scaffolding that allows the counselor to move safely and with the necessary flexibility dictated by the adaptation of the pathway, to the needs of the individual case and the particular target. The path (i.e., the set of activities and actions) is organised according to the traditional structure of the French model, which provides and identifies three basic phases: reception, investigation/deepening and synthesis/restitution.

By way of example, here are some of the tools used, chosen from among those that best give an idea of the approach adopted and those most congruent with the objectives of the case study presented in the next paragraph:

- *The Competence Portfolio*. It is both a product and a process that, by recovering the traces of what has been achieved in education and work, brings out and reinforces the awareness of one's own knowledge and know-how. In a coherent way, it allows the organisation of one's own path of past educational and professional growth through the collection and production of data, information and evidence attesting to the learning obtained in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. It facilitates reflection on oneself and one's own potential and, by attributing/reattributing a dimension of meaning to one's own path, orients future choices;
- *The Competency Descriptor*. It is a tool that supports the recognition of learning because it reconstructs experiences in terms of knowledge and competences. Starting from a conception of competence as a dynamic, recursive and emerging construct (Bresciani 2004), the descriptive tool implements a process of analysis and synthesis that breaks down and articulates competences into the different resources that constitute them (knowledge, knowing how to do, knowing how to be, knowing how to act, wanting to act), starting from the description of the actions and activities carried out by the subject. A subsequent process of synthesis aims to relate the different resources and these, in turn, with personal characteristics, interests, attitudes and motivations. In this way, we arrive at a new, clearer attribution of meaning and project value onto the set of resources possessed by the subject. Among other things, the tool allows the subject himself to position his own competences with respect to a level of mastery supported by elements that justify self-assessment;
- *What I look for in work*. Several researches have highlighted some values regarding work. This tool, specifically designed to dig deep, proposes 13 of them (by way of example: absence of harmful factors, physical fatigue, risk, etc.; availability of free time; flexibility of hours; stability of position; independence; leadership; level of professionalism; social prestige; social utility). The beneficiary is invited to indicate which of these values most closely correspond to what he/she is looking for and/or expects from work, indicating a degree of correspondence between a little, quite a lot, much, and very much. Once his or her preferences for the 13 values are expressed (to which he or she may freely add others), the subject is invited to find the links and any points of contradiction between the values he or she has identified and the work, study or life experiences actually lived. Then, the subject is invited to summarise what he or she expects and/or would like in terms of the work expected. Finally, again with reference to work, he or she is invited to indicate what his or her constraints are (what he or she cannot do) and what his or her refusals are (what he or she does not want);
- *What I do when I'm not studying or working*. This tool allows us to broaden our viewpoints with respect to the analysis of competences, since it facilitates the re-appropriation of experiences that are apparently unrelated to work or education contexts and the development of knowledge and competences that are often undervalued, focusing attention on the competences developed by the

- individual in all activities that require a structured commitment outside of the work or study context (family, free time, associations, etc.);
- *Knowledge and Work*. Facilitates reflection on learning and its use in the professional context and above all on its evolution, promoting a shift in view of the elements of knowledge usually linked to education. The tool provides for the identification of the knowledge expected/required to carry out activities and self-assessment of the gap between the level of mastery of the knowledge possessed at the commencement and that acquired during the experience. The subject, in this way, has the opportunity to reflect on the acquisition and expansion of knowledge, as well as on the processes of change that have affected the knowledge acquired over time and their transferability to other contexts, sometimes completely different from those of acquisition;
 - *The point about my knowledge*. This is characterised as an interview outline that, starting from the reconstruction of the knowledge to be implemented, the knowledge possessed and the knowledge mastered, encourages reflection on the importance of the constant integration between theory and practice in the construction of knowledge as well as; the necessity of knowledge maintenance to avoid obsolescence and to plan professional evolution also through the transfer of knowledge;
 - *Temporal perspective*. This tool is used between the second and third phases of the BdC. Like 'What I look for in work', it is very articulate and digs deep because it represents the premise and logical structure on which to base the final project. The tool is divided into three parts. In the first part the subject is invited to identify and write down as precisely as possible the events (facts, situations, projects, etc.) that he/she believes may occur (or may happen) in the future; in the second part he/she is invited to group them and distribute them over time (events that may happen within six months; within one year; within 2 or more years) and by degree of importance from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (completely important); in the third part the subject is invited to produce an overall 'reading' and an argument (i.e., an attribution of meaning) about what is outlined in the grid;
 - *My personal project*. This is one of the last tools proposed in the third phase before the summary document and the conclusion of the BdC. It is a format that requires the person to indicate: a) the general objective of the project; b) the resources available to invest in the realisation of the project (intellectual, material, financial and time resources, etc.); and c) the areas of development for the realisation of the project. Then, the stages of development of the project are given with an indication of the relative timing. The format concludes with a section on general observations.

3. The Third Sector as Case Study

As part of the National Forum of the Third Sector (FNTS), a research project was carried out aimed at developing narrative-biographical guidance prac-

tices for the identification and validation of the strategic competences of civil service volunteer operators.

The research project entitled ‘The competences of Universal Civil Service youth serving the country’ was conducted in the period between September 2019 and March 2020.

The research group saw the involvement of several institutional entities, among which we include the Roma Tre University, the National Forum of the Third Sector, which is the representative body of the third sector recognised by the Italian government, and Arci Servizio Civile (ASC APS).

Civil service represents an important opportunity for education, personal and professional growth for young people, who are an indispensable and vital resource for the cultural, social and economic progress of a country. The activity of a civil service volunteer allows the acquisition of knowledge and practical competences, but more generally represents an opportunity for personal growth and education. For this reason, the Universal Civil Service (SCU) can be a useful experience in the work environment.

The regulation provides for the determination of so-called education credits for those who perform civil service, which can then be recognised in education or vocational education. Universities may also recognise education credits for activities performed during community service that are relevant to the curriculum of studies.

The study conducted by the research group has as its elective object of analysis the strategic competences of volunteer civil service workers. In particular, the research focused on the organisations operating in ASC APS and the most suitable ways to enhance and recognise these competences. The purpose of the research was to develop a study on the definition of a referential of the strategic competences of ASC APS volunteer operators and on the adoption of the same referential within the guidance procedure for the emergence of competences.

This goal was translated into two specific objectives that correspond to two phases of activity:

1. to define the areas and components of the strategic competences of ASC volunteer operators;
2. to adopt a guidance procedure for the recognition and competences of ASC APS volunteer operators.

On the basis of the scientific literature of reference and the orientations expressed in the national and international spheres, a multidimensional nature of strategic competences can be sustained in which cognitive, volitional, motivational and emotional factors among others emerge (Ryken and Salganik 2007; Pellerey 2010; Alberici and Di Rienzo 2014; Deakin Crick et al. 2014; Margottini 2017). In addition to these factors, there are other dimensions for volunteer civil service workers, specifically referred to by the most recent standards, which present an explicit call with respect to citizenship competences and key competences for lifelong learning (Consiglio Europeo 2018).

Starting from an initial reconnaissance carried out by the FNTS, the partnership has carried out an activity to identify the areas of competence that char-

acterise in a transversal sense the role of volunteer operators. This was a work that, on the one hand, referred to Italian regulatory provisions on volunteering, including in particular the Legislative Decree of March 6, 2017, n. 40 on the Establishment and discipline of Universal Civil Service. On the other hand, the key competences for lifelong learning defined by the European Union (Consiglio Europeo 2018) and the OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2016) were taken into account.

On this basis the object of the research was an articulated set of competences, defined as a reference of the strategic competences of volunteer civil service workers, consisting of the following six areas: interpersonal/social competence; personal competence; civic competence; learning to learn competence; intercultural competence; communicative competence.

The methodology refers to collaborative intervention research with the aim of both exploratory and cognitive investigation and education with transformative purposes (Shani et al. 2008). Consistent with this approach, a multi-method approach was adopted that referred to qualitative-quantitative tools (Creswell 2014). The research assumes the dimensions of participation and involvement of the context in which the intervention takes place as essential aspects to reach significant results which do not remain confined to the purely theoretical and speculative sphere, but are able to bring about a real transformation of the actors and an improvement in practices.

In the first phase of the empirical surveying of strategic competences, the tools used were a structured questionnaire, a focus group addressed to volunteer operators, and a semi-structured interview, addressed to stakeholders.

From the quantitative analysis carried out, it emerges that the competences most frequently used in the civil service experience are interpersonal/social (30%), personal (25%) and learning to learn (18%). Less important are the areas of communication (14%), intercultural competences (11%) and civic competences (2%).

In the second phase, a biographical-narrative guidance device for the recognition of competences was tested. The procedure for the enhancement and recognition of the strategic competences of volunteer operators has provided guidance service to encourage reflection on life experiences and the production of documents to prove the existence of the same competences. To this end, the function carried out by tutors was essential.

The experimentation phase of the guidance procedure involved 55 volunteer operators belonging to ASC APS.

The procedure for the recognition of competences implies a great ability to make explicit one's own experiences and to consciously rework them into competences. These processes also require the ability to collect and produce evidence of the competences; that is, to build a portfolio; all activities that require a process of accompaniment by expert figures (Di Rienzo 2012). This has led to the adoption of an overall qualitative approach, based on narrative methods and tools aimed at promoting activation, self-assessment, and reflection on the formative and cognitive biography by volunteer operators (Di Rienzo 2015).

The activities were based on the use of procedures and qualitative tools borrowed mainly from the method of the Bilan de compétences (BdC). The tools used are justified in a logic aimed at achieving a path of gradual acquisition of awareness of their competences. They are therefore tools that encourage the activation of a process of conscious reflection and self-assessment on the strategic competences contained in the reference used for the research.

The accompanying path to the recognition of competences has engaged volunteer operators in four meetings with tutors. The total duration of the path corresponds to 55 hours that include both the participation in the meetings and the work of producing the tools.

The first meeting, the moment of the establishment of a relationship of trust, used the techniques of biographical interview to guide the beneficiary in the journey of the recognition of life experiences. At the end of each meeting, the beneficiary was given new instruments to fill out. The initial instruments had the objective of broadening the horizon and inviting a reflective look at the present over the past, giving new meaning and perspective to lived experiences. Subsequent meetings allowed for a focus on the SCU experience.

The referential of strategic competences was the reference to place the behaviours acted by volunteer operators within a well-defined framework.

4. Conclusions

The qualitative approach with which the guidance model is presented here has been defined and refers to an educational perspective inspired by the life course. The theoretical and practical development of a model of guidance based on competences, for their recognition, the strengthening of motivation, and the individualization of paths as a function of improving the education outcomes of adults, have demonstrated the successful applicability of qualitative methods in the field of lifelong learning. These methods refer to tools capable of carrying out actions of personalised accompaniment to promote and improve the outcomes of education, the enhancement and recognition of the outcomes of education, the enhancement and recognition of competences possessed, the strengthening of motivation and potential, and the ability to self-design and/or redesign life paths.

Regarding economy of the discourse developed in this contribution, the actions undertaken with the use of methods borrowed from the BdC revolve around some key issues that unite the participants and that can be synthetically traced to the need to recognise, acquire, develop, and implement those competences considered strategic for dealing with change and the demands of the future. Competencies can be acquired for successfully managing the possibilities of realisation, self-assessment understood as the ability to explore one's own resources, identifying strengths and weaknesses, decision-making, and the ability to operate autonomously and cope with the difficulties encountered using the resources available to choose and decide. One can also develop project competencies of self-design such as the ability to project oneself into the future

using the opportunities available and to develop new strategies and choices in the educational and professional spheres.

The centrality of the individual in the construction and enhancement of his or her resources and his or her way of accessing knowledge, the need for him or her to manage his or her own education and work path independently, bringing into play for this purpose his or her wealth of competences necessary for the achievement of full self-realisation, are just some of the conditions that make these approaches, aimed at reconstructing and enhancing the experience of the individual as a whole, particularly suitable for developing in adults the ability to self-design and/or redesign education and professional paths and the strengthening of motivation and potential (Boffo and Fedeli 2018).

The originality of the proposed methods lies in the centrality of the planning dimension; that is, in the possibility of prefiguring other possible scenarios and making choices in the direction of change with greater awareness. It follows that every guidance path represents an action that mobilises and invests resources towards change. It is characterised as a path of transformation that affects the system of representations of the individual, his/her definition of reality and the objectives that he/she sets. The project translates the goals that the individual pursues into an appropriate and coherent strategy to achieve the mand bears witness to the will to change. Through the development of self-esteem, the sense of efficacy and the assumption of responsibility, a process is activated in adults that moves in the direction of the development of planning competences. Through the experience of guidance based on these competences, the participants have the possibility to reflect and to understand the reasons for their educational choice and concretely foresee the solutions to give an acceleration to the path, and resume or conclude it; precisely, because for the first time, thanks to the possibility of placing the educational choice undertaken in a horizon of meaning, the reasons for their being students are clearer. The identification of a temporal perspective in which the accent emphasis is placed on the relationship between the present and the future constitutes the scenario for orienting education in a more conscious way, in view of the objective identified and for developing the ability to construct contexts in which to use one's competences (Piazza 2013).

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