1. Introduction

With the resolution of the Council on Accompanying Life Guidance in Europe, the European Union emphatically documented the high priority of this endeavour. In the second paragraph of that document reference was made to the substantial role of schools in enabling youths’ successful steps from the initial education systems to further education in second-chance education and vocational education. This is the prerequisite for the sustainable processes of life-long learning which in turn form the foundation for taking part in economic, social and public life (EU Council 2004).

The significance of professional orientation in schools reaches far beyond the economic dimensions. It is about Europe’s youths, and they represent the richness of our society today and in the future; the White Book of the European Commission (2001) »New Drive for the Youths of Europe« also refers to this.

The consequences lead to the terms participation and information. These terms include access to the job market and employment as well as to orientation and counselling. The lack of information on job market issues is most strongly criticised by Europe’s youths. (ibid: 46).

1.1 Comprehensive understanding of professional orientation

Professional orientation is to be understood in its comprehensive, socio-political significance. Preparation for and guidance on professional paths as a part of a successful life is just as much included as are all of those human and social dimensions that are closely linked to them and which are referred to in several European documents.

An example for this is the communiqué of Maastricht, which corroborates the significance of life-long counselling as was mentioned in the Copenhagen Decree. Particularly in connection with the development of new instruments, such as the European Qualification framework, new challenges for professional orientation arise as a result. In addition to formal education these extend to non-formal or informally gained competences and qualifications (EU Commission 2003).

The increasing significance and complexity of creating the transition from school to working life had been emphasised years ago in large-scale inquiries. The OECD project »Transition from Initial Education to Working Life« defines key issues and core elements of developments at interfaces and transitions between school and working life, by including 14 countries, ten of which are European (OECD 2000).
1.2 Transition as a process

One of the core statements specifies that one has to define the transition from school to working life no longer as that of an interface, but rather as a process extended over an ever-increasing period of time. Initial education periods are becoming longer and longer and entry into working life happens later. This would mean that effective professional orientation must occur even earlier. This awareness primarily affects schools.

A process leading from one system, schools, to the next system, the job market, shall be able to be set up all the more effectively, the better the information, communication, and cooperation between the systems functions. Competences und resources there are often not readily available. Thus the support of partners, institutions, and projects are necessary. Professional orientation will also become efficiently sustainable, as soon as the process is supplemented and supported by a network.

This extends the obligations of professional orientation in schools to a more essential element of personal and social development and transition processes: Transition itself. Yet in some phases the elements of education and jobs, school and working life, overlap, complementing each other and limiting each other in different degrees of significance.

Reference is clearly made to this in the working document of the EU Commission (2005) on job counselling, which diagnosed several unsatisfactory prerequisites in schools and detected a lack of relevance to the working world and to institutions. This handbook is essentially based on the results of comprehensive studies conducted by the OECD and the European Commission on national policies in the field of job counselling in over 30 countries (OECD 2004). It offers ample approaches and arguments for developing and implementing efficient strategies for advancements in professional orientation, not only in schools.

Professional orientation and job counselling has thus definitely become the key element of strategies for life-long learning and for achieving the Lisbon Goals and a central aspect of education and social policies, particularly in schools.

2. Orientation for a Working World that is Changing

In such a complex field of activity as professional orientation is, terms must be clearly defined. What does orientation mean? In European documents as a rule it is understood to be an aspect of life-accompanying counselling; this in turn includes a variety of activities such as information, counselling services, competence assessment, conveying skills on taking decisions and planning a career. (EU Council 2004).
Terms such as orientation, guidance, or counselling have different contexts in different national, institutional, and operative connections. In this instance, professional orientation and orientation in the broader sense are used in the area of schools as super-term including all of the relevant instructional, scholastic measures and activities and those reaching beyond these fields. In our connection it is primarily about the dimensions of information, counselling, orientation in a more narrow sense of the word, and guidance / support.

Whereas job information refers more to knowledge transfer, supplementation, and insight on a cognitive level, counselling means structuring and analysing processes that simplify orientation. They follow the often used scientifically based diagnostic, yet are quite frequently precisely targeted, addressing individual issues.

Orientation in the more narrow sense of the word refers to educational measures that connect information on the training possibilities and access to the working world by using manifold process oriented method for reflecting on one’s own physical, cognitive, and mental prerequisites for choosing a field of education or a profession. These measures can be organised in an instructional-curricular environment in connection with individual elements.

More intensive forms of longer term development processes are described with the terms guidance and support which could also include such elements as supervision, coaching and so on. Except for their general quality, these measures are particularly significant whenever professional orientation in schools has to take responsibility for youths with special needs.

2.1 Professional orientation is becoming more and more important

All of these dimensions are important and several reasons for this can be mentioned as to why professional orientation in today’s Europe has been gaining significance.

The changes in the working world are apparent to all of us. They mean more than the external changes of some professional activities. Apart from the fact that contents und job procedures do change, there is an increasing amount of »knowledge work« going on in just about every field and the degree of abstraction of the activities is increasing due to information and communication technologies. Professional reality, which is increasingly to be found in virtual spaces, is much more difficult to be presented graphically than in spaces where an occupation can be visibly or noticeably perceived.

A business and working world becoming ever more international is principally changing much faster than the schools, which, more often than not, are regulated by public law. This is not to be taken as a judgemental statement, but rather as a reference to the danger of the ever-increasing distance between scholastic preparation and professional requirements. Professional orientation has to contribute actively to closing this gap, or even better to not letting it occur in the first place.
Professional orientation in schools in a European comparison

The notion that professional orientation could lead young people to take a decision on their profession which could accompany them a life long, has less and less to do with the reality of today’s and future professions.

Even the notion that an ever more frequent change of occupation arises from a certain concept is dissipating. An occupation is no longer just a clearly described sum of activities and functions, for which one can become qualified by following a clearly structured path of education, and which, once one has achieved it, will characterise one’s future career.

In a growing measure, professional development consists of processes, changes and transitions, which, in addition to core qualifications, demand alternating and supplementary competences in knowledge, ability, and personality, on which different emphasis is placed.

2.2 Repercussions on the orientation systems

These developments affect the occupational training and orientation systems of the European countries quite differently. It is of substantial significance for professional orientation, whether an occupational training system is oriented on an occupational concept, as it is in a large number of Central European countries, leading to more closed and limited qualifications, or whether it is more competence oriented, modularised and open, such as is the case in Great Britain and some countries in Northern Europe.

Theories on career choice assumed up till recently that at the end of initial education a choice will be made that will have repercussions on the rest of one’s life. In the meantime other aspects are moving to the foreground: Weighing different options, thinking of alternatives and perspectives and the ability to take decisions. The goal is finding the best possible development chances for the next manageable phase of life, learning, and working, which one can take in whichever constellation should fit, to build up one’s career perspective of the future.

This has both burdening and supportive aspects. The growing insecurity with regard to longer term life planning and professional development stands in opposition to the advantage of once having made a career or educational choice that this no longer need be a tie for life. A bad choice is not a catastrophe but is a decision that can be corrected by taking other decisions.

In order to bypass this one must learn to make certain that the prerequisites are met. This in turn challenges both the schools and professional orientation in particular.
2.3 Professional orientation as a part of education on the whole

Professional orientation can only be efficient if it is embedded in an educational environment that recognises changes and reacts to the requirements for lives and career that young people have after finishing school.

The first prerequisite is a basic education. Those who cannot read cannot inform themselves. Those who cannot calculate cannot deal with numbers. Both of these skills are absolutely essential for life in general and for many professional developments. The best professional orientation cannot replace these prerequisites. Educational quality in core areas thus has to become one of the most important requirements for professional orientation.

The respective PISA placement and the employment situation of youths do not correlate clearly in any of the European countries. This shows that there certainly must be other relevant aspects for successful transition processes from school to the working life. The OECD mentions five core criteria (OECD 2000):

– a healthy economy
– well organised education paths, connecting initial education with the working world and further education
– a close-knit security net for those youths in danger
– good information and counselling
– efficient institutions and processes

All of these factors are closely linked. Of course, economic development cannot be directly influenced by professional orientation alone. Leading young people to professional careers, in which they can develop and use their skills and potential to their best possible advantage, will without a doubt have repercussions on the entire economy.

2.4 Economic power and youth employment

It is not surprising that there is a close connection between the economic situation of a country and its youth employment. Nevertheless, there can be significant differences between countries with similar economic power regarding their success in transition processes.

In the Czech Republic for instance the rate of employment among 20-24 year-olds is a good ten percent higher than in Portugal; in Great Britain the rate of youth employment is higher than in Sweden; in Finland and in Switzerland there are proportionally more 20-24 year-olds employed than in Norway. These figures were reached with comparable gross domestic product per capita.
Even the interaction between the educational system and professional orientation is obvious. Even if no clear connection between the type of system (i.e. primarily full-time school or a dual system) and the transitional success can be made, it has been shown that well-organised, multi-faceted, and differently designed systems offer youths more flexible chances and better transitions after initial education.

It is this type of educational system that demands more intensive counselling and orientation, because otherwise the opposite effect could occur.

**2.5 Insight in the real working world**

It has been proven that being led quite early to the working world, having insight in real professional situations and combining forms of education with schools and businesses fundamentally have a positive effect, when these orientation measures are embedded well in the educational system. Insight into the real working world, however, is only possible in the here and now. When those who own a garage, an industrial hall or an office today compare the situation with five, ten or fifteen years ago and then try to project these scenarios to five, ten, fifteen years from now, working with professional orientation, they will have to recognise quite quickly that orientation cannot become stuck in the superficial.

Orientation has to be connected to strengthening the skills and willingness of youths to be able to feel their way in a new environment, to progress independently, to learn to take actions and decisions. Most of all, however, it has to be about making young people aware of their own potential and use it coherently to meet the professional, economic and business requirements and perspectives of the future. Orientation is thus not only a process directed outwards—that is from the schools towards the real world of work and business—but rather more importantly to the inside, towards one’s own personality, one’s own values, and life perspectives.

»Know thyself«, is the message of the Oracle of Delphi, and it is a good basis here too. It is all about dealing with one’s own strengths and weaknesses—in that order!!: Strengthening strengths and reducing deficits; reflecting in self-consciousness and building up self-confidence to be able to analyse and structure challenges in open and unsure situations and to be able to prepare oneself under ever-changing situations and take responsible decisions in a self-assured manner.

**2.6 What is orientation?**

It is helpful to visualize the difference in the meanings of »orientation «.

Orientation can, on the one hand, be understood as a condition: Being aware of conditions, alternatives, and options, of one’s own position and the resulting decision possibilities.
Professional orientation in schools in a European comparison

Orientation can also be interpreted as influencing and intervention, as a bunch of measures, showing someone the way, giving advice, setting paths. This can undoubtedly be an important task of professional orientation, yet it runs the risk of making subjects into objects and forcing them into a passive role, even acting paternalistically.

That is why orientation also needs to be seen as a personal process: Creating access to a bunch of actions and individuals that offer insight into the targets of an educational and professional landscape and into one’s own values and perspectives; actively using all of the information and counselling opportunities in order to be able to take independent decisions and responsibly pursue one’s own educational, professional and life path.

Professional orientation in schools is in this sense a task of a truly European dimension, strengthening youths in their personal independence and sovereignty in an increasingly more open, integrated Europe and to contribute to widening their perspectives in a working world that is changing. This is also to be the basis for successful processes of life-long learning.

3. Models of scholastic professional orientation in Europe

The basic tasks of professional orientation are represented in all of the European countries in nearly the same way, albeit under quite different conditions. This is described in the Synthesis Report of Cedefop (2004). It is based on studies by the OECD, the World Bank, Cedefop and the European Foundation for Professional Education and documented trends, challenges and approaches in 29 European countries: The 25 current Member States of the EU, the candidate countries Bulgaria and Romania as well as the EEA Member States Iceland and Norway.

The results of the studies do not allow for any generalisations on the strategies in Europe, as there are numerous differences among the countries in the concepts; some basic common and typologically different positions are able to be worked out.

3.1 Significance of the economic system

Countries whose transition to a market economy lies in the recent past have only recently been confronted with upheavals in the traditional, professional structures; the perceptions of new life, professional and career concepts and their reception in the system. The schools are immediately affected by this. Moreover, there is still a certain degree of distrust arising from the background of controlled economy experience wherever any hint of guidance methods are ascertained. Gaining access to any reliable information on the job market is much more difficult in these countries than it is in countries that experienced these changes much earlier. Naturally such differences can be felt in both the economy and prosperity of the countries and have an effect on the professional landscape and professional orientation.
Professional orientation in schools in a European comparison

The span of the scale for prosperity, the GDP pro capita, is nearly 10:1 in the countries examined. (Luxembourg at nearly 50 000 Euros, Romania at less than 6000 Euros). At an average of 8.4 percent for the EU, even the unemployed rates fluctuate between two percent in the Netherlands and nearly 20 percent in Poland. A similar relationship shows the rates of youth unemployment on a drastically higher level: They range from Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Austria with six to seven percent each to nearly 40 percent in Poland.

Yet this by no means allows for simple conclusions to be drawn. To a certain extent it is just those countries such as Poland that are particularly challenged to make efforts to improve the situation at the transitions between the educational system and the working world. In each case these external characteristics of the economic and job market situations also have repercussions on the system und measures of professional orientation.

In the Syntheses Report (Cedefop 2004: 25 et seq.) reference is furthermore made to the quite distinctive significance of the informal economy, to the significance of the size of the countries, the layout of residential and business structures and the resulting different regional conditions as well as to differences in the homogeneity of the ethnic constitution. All of these factors have elementary repercussions on the way in which professional orientation can be set up and which challenges it will face.

Not least, countries, which due to their educational traditions, differentiate at a quite early stage in the education process, find themselves faced with other questions of orientation than those countries, which to a large extent have integrated school systems to the end of the secondary stage II.

That is why it is all the more important that the joint European challenge is to become aware of the different characteristics and come to terms with them, drawing conclusions and deducing strategies that meet not only to the European obligations but also those conditions and prerequisites that exist on a national and regional level.

3.2 Typologies

Depending on the point of view, different typologies and systems of professional orientation can be detected in European countries. In its transition project the OECD (2000) generally differentiates between two types of countries.

The first type tends to have more open and flexible professional general conditions. Membership in employer and employees’ organisations are not mandatory and frequently function in a decentralised manner. The job market is not very regulated, working hours regulations are quite open as are the regulations concerning social security.
Professional orientation in schools in a European comparison

In these countries economic power is mobile, jobs are changed frequently, and there is a great deal of limited and part-time employment. In many cases there is much employment in the service sector, which in turn is open to young people. They are often only employed for a limited amount of time, in part-time jobs or in the low wage sector. This type includes for instance, Anglo-Saxon, Northern European, or Southern European countries.

The job market in type two countries tends towards being organised by professions in which the qualification and professional requirements are more clearly specified and more formally set up. There are defined professional paths of educations, both scholastic and dual, that lead to clearly described and legally regulated employment opportunities, regardless of what the job market really looks like.

In comparison, the proportion of trade-craft professions and the high-tech production field is high in these countries. Access to specific activities, particularly to trade permits is strongly based on formally attained qualifications; certification of informally or non-formally attained qualifications is less common (Cedefop 2001). Central European German-speaking countries as well as the Netherlands can be counted among the type two countries.

It is obvious that the scholastic measures in type two countries can differ from those of type one countries with regard to requirements and characteristics of professional orientation. However, many of the criteria that represent the basis of this typology increasingly begin to obliterate the differences.

Without a doubt there is a difference even today, as to whether at the end of compulsory education youths faced with the decision of choosing among 300 or 400 different professions with apprenticeships, such as the case is in Germany and Austria, ill choose them, or whether most of them will remain in school until the end of the secondary level II, where their paths will take them to further education in post-secondary or tertiary institutions as is the case in Finland, France, Great Britain or Sweden.

3.3 Curricular Models

In all European countries initiatives for improving measures of professional orientation in schools can be found. As diverse as the individual strategies seem to appear, there are basically four curricular models to be identified, which can be used either parallel or linked with different emphasis (Cedefop 2004).

In the first model the curriculum includes vocational-prep teaching and the subject of professional orientation with a certain amount of hours. This is implemented to different degrees, for instance, in Finland, Greece, Austria, Romania, Spain, the Czech Republic, and Cyprus.
A second form places professional orientation in more broadly positioned subject combinations, frequently in social sciences, personality training, social education, and the like. This is practised for instance in Latvia, Malta, Poland, and Hungary.

A third possibility is including the elements of professional orientation in several or all of the subjects of any curriculum, such as is done in Denmark and Greece.

The fourth curricular model passes on professional orientation in special seminars and workshops, reaching either pupils in the same age groups or in contexts which are conceived to cover specific themes. This is practised for instance in France, Malta and Poland.

Many of the models are used alternatively, in an integrated manner or differently depending on the region. This is not to be classified strictly according to national selections but is conceived quite differently: Depending on the competence distribution (federal organisation such as in Germany), on the degree of autonomy (high for instance in the Netherlands) or the basic obligation to an offer but also to a choice between a separate subject or being among all of the subjects of a curriculum (such as in Austria).

These differences in execution are so large because the attitude towards consciousness, qualification and active options of the institutions and people involved strongly differ. By no means do the same understandings and consciousness for the significance of professional orientation exist in all of the fields of general education on the secondary levels I and II.

The degree of professionalism and qualification of those people, who perform this task in schools, is greatly varied. This is due to the fact that comparable organisational, operative, and legal opportunities for open cooperation with the ex-scholastic working world do not exist.

The qualifications of those trusted with the task range from comprehensive training with a corresponding university degree in Psychology, Educational Science, Social Science, or Business Science, to auxiliary training for university graduates specially geared towards education and job counselling, to courses of instruction, training courses, or seminars for full-time teaching staff.

Models of comprehensive qualification are used in many Central and Eastern European countries (for instance Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, the Czech Republic and Finland), while in other countries (for instance France, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg) relatively brief courses of instruction are sufficient.

In most cases people who conduct professional orientation or job counselling in schools, are predominantly active in curricular teaching. In several countries full-time teaching staff are additionally remunerated for their activities in counselling or orientations.
What is now common in nearly all European countries is the fact that the value and significance of professional orientation is being increasingly noticed and initiatives for developing quality are being set. The individual development of each person with regard to the ever-expanding education opportunities in the field of secondary and post-secondary and tertiary education in particular, as well as a more flexible and increasingly confusing professional and working world are being placed even more in the foreground.

Depending on the structure of the educational system these measures are set predominantly in the secondary level I. This particularly occurs where a higher percent of youths at the age of 15 or 16 chooses educational paths leading to job qualification after compulsory school, even in dual forms, such as in Germany and in Austria. In other countries, like Finland and France, the focus in the secondary level I lies more in counselling and orientation to choose main areas of education in the secondary level II.

Setting the focus on professional orientation in the secondary level II depends not only on the situation in the job market for graduates, but also on participation in education in the post-secondary and tertiary fields. In European countries these range from nearly 30 percent in Austria and the Czech Republic to more than 70 percent in Finland at an OECD average of about 50 percent. Counselling on courses of studies plays an elementary role here and has increasingly begun to align itself internationally with regard to the development of the European university education.

Even institutions such as Euroguidance and projects like Leonardo da Vinci: Transnational Vocational Counselling with its partners in Germany, Austria, Poland and Hungary, are beginning to grapple with the topic.

What most European countries have in common is that there are few offers on the primary level. On the one hand, this is understandable, for as a rule no job-relevant educational decisions are made. However, the question that needs to be posed is what significance basic education, personality development and fundamental impressions of perceptions on one’s future life have at this educational level.

In countries, already displaying differentiating school systems on the surface at the secondary level I (in particular Germany and Austria), decisions that are taken at ten years of age for secondary modern school, secondary school or high school could have far-reaching consequences for the characteristics of future paths of education.

Even if the transparency between the paths of education has been increased (for instance the school leaving examinations taken after having held a job in Austria), this transparency is insofar asymmetric as that there is higher percentage of pupils having attended secondary modern schools being awarded their A-Levels and their higher education entrance qualification through schools offering further training on the secondary level II. The path to dual professional training as an apprentice is however one taken almost exclusively by graduates of secondary modern schools.
As long as this situation exists, there will also be the need for counselling on the consequences for professional developments on the primary level, particularly for those parents and family members responsible for taking decisions.

In any case promotion has to be made on the primary level for those fields of education which will later become relevant for jobs: particularly elements of basic education, reading, and arithmetic. Any subsequent competence deficits in these fields can be traced back to the primary level and retard successful transitions from school to working life. PISA II offers sufficient reference to this.

Not least basic perceptions on gender specific professional roles are reflected in these age groups. By sensitively dealing with this question is an unconditional task evolving from this gender perspective.

Something which is becoming more crucial to successfully sustainable transition processes is the personality development of young people. Leading them to independence, decision-taking skills, developing social competence, the skills of independently gaining knowledge, openness regarding changes and new developments, the willingness and the skills to take charge of something and to shape it, that »entrepreneurial spirit« in the best sense of the word these things are more and more becoming the really crucial prerequisites for entering the working world and creating a personal career in one’s professional life.

The earlier these basic competences are consciously promoted in the field of education, the more sustainable they will subsequently be developed and used. Taking professional orientation into consideration even in early stages of education, does by no means mean aligning scholastic education ostensibly to the economy and jobs. Fashioning holistic and quality educational processes with an application-oriented, true to life approach is the best prerequisite for ensuring the subsequent success of professional orientation in schools as a part of life orientation.

4. Scholastic Professional Orientation in Context

Professional orientation is thus a core task of scholastic educational activity and is perceived in European countries in different ways yet with a common understanding.

The first and most important task naturally affects the teaching staff. They approach this task by teaching their own specialised subjects, by offering interdisciplinary education, by teaching full or part-time, alone or in a team with different qualifications, training and further education backgrounds.

In addition to that teachers also conduct individual educational and career guidance the consequences of which go far beyond the scholastic perspectives.
4.1 Competences of the teaching staff

What teaching staff have in common as a rule is that their primary profession is teaching in schools. Thus this is predominantly their background experience.

Along with the teaching and educating processes professional orientation subsists on the relevant environment of youths and their goal of entering the professional and working world. Teaching staff can organise and guide them but not without having any partners from ex-scholastic fields.

Their work here extends far beyond classic teaching or imparting knowledge. Various records have proven this: Teachers of professional orientation (Austria) or orientation counsellors (Belgium), information and documentation specialists (Greece), pedagogic counsellors (Bulgaria), job prep leaders (Iceland), career teachers (Czech Republic), studies counsellors (Finland) or education guidance counsellors (the Netherlands).

The changing roles of teaching staff was dealt with by the scientific head of the programme Schools – Economy/Working World in his keynote address at the conference »Professional orientation as an Educational Standard?« in autumn 2004 in Potsdam (Famulla 2004). His aspects on this topic:

– career choice is understood to be a process.
– youths are strengthened in their independence and self-reliance.
– youths are active subjects, teaching staff as facilitators.
– job and professional orientation is interdisciplinary and is understood to be the task of the entire school (school programmes).
– schools cooperate and network with partners.

Professional orientation is thus defined as an educational field, challenging teachers to leave their roles as those imparting knowledge and take on the function of a development guide, a coach, a facilitator.

These changes come easier to teachers in those countries that at least partially separate the traditional function of an »intermediary« from that of an »assessor« as well as those having experience with external evaluation.

The opinions on instruments of external forms of testing and assessment such as the centralised school leaving examinations given in Finland and France are quite diverse. In any case their use leads to teachers becoming partners and guides for youths in their education process, and thus being perceived as supportive and beneficial more so than in systems in which they have to take on diverse functions of personal support and support youths as well as assess them. Professional orientation can thus only be successful when the supporting and guiding character of the educational process is in the foreground.
4.2 Influence from the surroundings

Naturally the transition from school to working life affects at least two systems of society, schools, and the working world. They are joined by all those social players and institutions, linked to both systems and the processes of transition.

That is first and foremost the family. The influence of parents in education and career choices is well-documented (for instance Arbeitskreis Einstieg 2004), yet quite ambivalent. What is undeniably to be striven for, even absolutely essential, is that the family has to support the career choice process of youths. Frequently, however, those involved only have an imperfect overview of developments in the field of education and on the job market and make recommendations based on experience gained from their own professional and educational decisions, which no longer need be relevant. In addition, these involvement processes are frequently loaded with well-meant advice that is not necessarily suited to the aptitudes and potentials of the children’s perceptions and future perspectives.

What is just as important, if not increasingly significant, is the influence of friends and colleagues, peers at school as well as in other areas of life. Values, educational intentions, and professional perceptions frequently arise in these environments often remove youths from the direct influence of schools and the family.

Further players could be institutions of the job market, social partners, and institutions of extra-curricular youth work as well as public and private counsellors.

What may not be overlooked in this respect is the virtual world with its special information that has a quite broad spectrum and is oftentimes rather diffuse. Youths are generally more comfortable here than are those who are guiding them in their education and career choice process. Yet the skill of being able to filter serious and far-reaching decision-taking aids from this sea of information is a target which is often not sufficiently pursued in scholastic education and professional orientation.

Among the most important partners are the players in the target field of transition itself. Business owners and companies, human resource staff and trainers, decision-takers and multipliers in companies and business associations have to be convinced to become involved. In the end all of those leaving school only find access to a professional career based on decisions taken by certain people in these areas.

It is not even about the question as to whether companies are looking for staff right at the moment, due to the current company competition situation or based on staff development plans that specific qualifications are required, it is particularly about an attitude towards wanting to give youths a chance and contributing to having this commitment perceived.
This is referred to by the OECD (2000) as »youth friendly economy«, the principle approach to taking youths seriously and accepting them. This also means accepting their peculiarities and the special situations that arise out of the culture of youths along with their different sets of values and behaviour. These can perhaps not be understood by the older generations but they can offer the economy, customers and the production of tomorrow’s priceless potential.

This basic moral-ethic concept of being friendly to youths can adamantly be taken into economic consideration: Competition among top graduates of the cadres has become global and companies along with transnational businesses place great value in recruiting the most ambitious graduates.

Particularly young, innovative technologies can only be successfully implemented by young, innovative staff. This is not an either/or decision between young and old but sketches out the functions and qualities that the young generation can bring into the economic process, in which the older generations take on indispensable roles, which are quite underappreciated.

The generation spectrum is shifting and the number of those young people standing on the threshold to transition between school and working life is sinking throughout Europe with only a few exceptions. In the same proportion the responsibility of schools, the economy and society and the demands placed on them are allowing these young people to take steps successfully from school to working life.

This is not only true for the so-called top talents. Everybody has the right in our society to be needed and be able to make a meaningful contribution to social and economic values with their own efforts and potential.

One of the most important prerequisites for gaining access is taking a look at and experiencing the working world one is preparing for early enough.

4.3 Real working world experience

One can only experience this where work and efficiency actually take place: In companies, in workshops, taking part in activities, that are as close as possible to the future fields that young people have chosen in taking their career decisions.

Real encounters with the working world are elementary elements in professional orientation in most of the European countries: Taking tours through companies, encounters with experts from the working world, internships that take place during studies or in addition to them (Kämmerer 1991). Some examples of these real encounters can also be found in the Cedefop (2004) Synthesis Report.

Some basic information is referred to here.
Professional orientation in schools in a European comparison

Job or industrial placement, »taster apprenticeships« or other forms of exploring the working world are only as good as they have been prepared, are pedagogically led, are organised and as they have been coordinated followed-up, reflected and assessed with partners in the companies and businesses.

European countries have developed diverse models for this. In numerous EU-countries pupils take part in one to two week industrial placements before they take their decision on which subject combination they want in the respective level of schooling. This is valid for Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, Great Britain and Cyprus. In other countries there are similar offers which differ depending on the type of school and are not always consistently implemented as is the case in Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Ireland, Iceland, Austria, the Netherlands and Slovakia.

Practice companies, pupil-run companies and junior companies can essentially contribute to obtaining business and entrepreneurial competences, thus simplifying access to a profession.

Much points to the fact that these types of activities are increasing and are doing so not only in vocational schools. In Austria following a comprehensive school reform, the »Professional Placement Days and Weeks« in polytechnic schools have proven most effective in connection with measures for basic vocational education for guiding young people to their desired profession (Härtel and Kämmerer 2005).

The cooperation between schools and companies is acquiring an essential role here. Much speaks for teaching staff that have their own experience in the working world outside of school being able to guide job or industrial placement with much more quality and more effectively than those lacking such experience. Thus, teacher education has to be open to opportunities and access to experience in the working world outside of school in order to prepare for and guide professional orientation, reflecting on it together with the youths (Härtel and Kämmerer 1995).

Quality and the effectiveness of professional orientation are influenced in the best possible manner where there is a clearly structured, professional basis in schools themselves: Teaching staff that has suitable training and time for counselling, or professionals with another background, whether in psychology, educational science or in therapy available for support. Both variations would be best.

A clear concept for success it viewing professional orientation as an original task of the schools, linking it and cooperating with those who are relevant for transition into professional life, in particular in the target field of the economy, along with all of the further players in these interfaces. Regional examples of integrated, linked projects such as »BerufsFindungsBegleiter« (Austria) prove this approach to be successful (OECD 2003).
Professional orientation in schools in a European comparison

The best prerequisite for successful processes of transition from school to working life is offered in cooperation with companies and business by including important people in the environment of youths, particularly their parents and family as well as those influential factors in their free-time. In addition, the involvement all of those institutions that are competent and interested on the success of these processes, such as social partners, job market institutions and other counselling services is also essential.

4.4 Special needs

Basically this obligation needs to be the same for everyone yet there are target groups for which special offers need to be developed: Youths with special needs, with special education support needs, with physical or psychological limits, learning disabilities, other obstacles due to their mother tongue or those having other risk factors.

The problems with youths who leave school much too soon, with drop-outs whose situation is to be considered differently, and with those so-called social deviants or other challenges are quite virulent in different characteristics in most European countries and are taken up on a national or regional level or by specific programmes.

Innovative measures are promoted in Europe intrinsically and diversely by the European social funds in programmes such as Equal. There are examples here of successful European social and educational programmes. In Austria such approaches found to be innovative within the scope of Equal development partnerships contribute in the national educational system to creating legal regulations for integrated professional training in the dual apprentice training.

5. Quality Aspects of Professional Orientation

What does professional orientation do in schools? What are its qualities? Investment and efforts are not only legitimised from the ideal point of view but have been effectively proven. Yet there is still room for development in Europe.

The Cedefop (2000: 130) Synthesis Report notes that in the 29 countries examined the quality of educational and job counselling, that also includes professional orientation in schools, is hardly regularly or systematically analysed. As far as analyses are conducted they are mostly of a quantitative nature whereby the processes are hardly investigated. The necessity of intensive coming to terms with the quality aspects is, however, increasingly being recognized.
5.1 European Discourse

Three transnational cases are to prove the growing interest in the quality of professional orientation.

The conference on the topic of »Professional orientation as an Educational Standard?« in the autumn of 2004 in Potsdam comprehensively came to terms with quality and made substantial statements that were discussed in detail and well-documented (Famulla 2004).

Within the scope of the conference »Developing quality in Professional, Studies and Career Counselling« in the autumn of 2004 in Bern the »Quality of Professional Counselling Services taking Accounts in Different European Countries into Consideration« was dealt with in detail (Ertelt 2004).

For some time not the International Association for School and Educational Counselling has intensely dealt with quality aspects and ethic standards, that among others led to an agreement on international standards for quality and professionalism in counselling (SVB-ASOSP 2004: 148).

Apart from the different quality and evaluation concepts that refer to professional orientation in European countries for their national school systems, a series of transnational European and global project approaches also exist.

The Leonardo project »Mevoc – Quality Manual for Educational and Job Counselling«, in which partners from Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Romania, Sweden and Hungary took part, was predominately concerned with quality standards for the competences of educational and professional counsellors (www.mevoc.net). »Transnational Vocational Counselling«, which was also a Leonardo project, develops quality features and a comprehensive curriculum for the field of Euro-Counselling (Banka o. J.).

One of the prerequisites for debates on quality and its structure is a taking holistic view of professional and educational counselling that includes all approaches and to that effect is to be used in every field of professional orientation in schools. Quality refers to several dimensions of the process.

5.2 Dimensions of quality

The quality results »Output« prove the effectiveness and efficiency of measures for professional orientation. These are determined by previous optimisation of processes and job procedures, of »process quality«. These are based on clear, expert and method standards, on »input quality«. Prerequisites, in turn, are well-formulated goals and visions that can be described using the term »leadership quality« (Dauwalder 2004).
Ertelt (2004) takes a double classification of quality dimensions in hand. He differentiates between quantitative and qualitative indicators. Counting among the quantitative indicators are some successful professional crossroads, information material distributed, measurable input factors such as hours spent; the qualitative indicators could be satisfaction of those affected, sustainability and the development of professional careers.

The elementary quality dimensions on four levels are to be further documented with these indicators:

– structure quality: personnel and material resources
– process quality: assessment of the procedure
– result quality: decentralised consequences of professional orientation
– effectiveness quality: long term repercussions of professional orientation

Even the OECD (2000) concerned itself in the transition project in detail with the quality aspects, recommending in particular a differentiated point of view with the result indicators. These assess and compare not only the youth employment of a country, but based on 14 parameters, they also compare the education results, the employment dimensions, the level and length of unemployment for youths, their transition and job changing behaviour as well as sustainable effects with regard to stable employment circumstances near the end of the process. In addition gender specific parameters are to be documented as well as special social and regional aspects are to be considered.

With all of these approaches the focus is on documenting the total quality of a process which offers young people perspectives and good prospects for a »successful life« including the professional dimension.

The fact that there is no simple formula for this is obvious. That is why it is all the more important to become seriously involved in all dimensions with quality aspect on individual and social, national and European goals and not only to assess quality, but also improve it.

5.3 Supervision: from input to output

Examples as to how quality assurance and improvement are dealt with in European countries show that this question is increasingly being considered and the challenge taken on: The development of quality indicators for professional orientation (Austria), a career choice pass (Germany), evaluation standards and a professional orientation pass (Austria), descriptions of professions for career counsellors (for instance in Denmark, Greece, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain), connecting internal and external evaluation (for instance in Denmark).
Weight should be further shifted from the supervision of input to output. In the end it is about results and effects, which do have to be assessed from different points of view: In addition to objective conditions such as rates of employment and unemployment, completing education and income realised, there are also individual values, regional conditions and developments as well as nationally defined targets that have to be classified in a common European strategy.

Transparent argumentation and documentation however, have to contribute to attaining non-committal particular approaches to a comprehensive strategy, defining quality aspects according to common European value perceptions.

6. Conclusions and Perspectives

»Could you please tell me where I want to go?« This is a question that Karl Valentin posed to disconcerted passers-by in Munich in the 1920s. This is exactly the absurd situation that professional orientation and education counselling are frequently confronted with.

Professional orientation in schools has to resist the temptation of telling young people who are uncertain about their future, which path they should take.

It is much more the task of strengthening those powers and potential that young people have, enabling them to become independent in choosing their own educational and professional paths, paths which are open to theme in rapidly changing professional environments, offering perspectives for a personal professional career and life development. At the same time both the economy and society have to guarantee that abilities, skills and motivation are used in a valuable and beneficial manner for the common good along with minimising social exclusion and problematic situations.

6.1 Challenge for schools and the educational system

This is a call to the entire school system to assure for all young people that basic education and those basic competences that are prerequisites for a successful entrance into further education and professional careers.

This also includes the task of having influence on the development of youths’ personalities, promoting independence, self-confidence and decision-taking abilities, those features that are decisive for successful professional development.

This also requires that structured and professional processes are offered for professional orientation that start at the teaching level, carried out by people, the appropriate qualifications both inside and outside of schools and are implemented in open, processually set up networks including parents, companies and businesses.
6.2 Challenge for those politically responsible

The imminent duties and responsibility have to be perceived as being at the schools. On the system level, politically and administratively, however, those prerequisites have to be created and options for action that are necessary for qualitative processes of professional orientation have to be offered.

For this the manual for those politically responsible (EU-Commission 2005) offers helpful references. Especially in the chapter entitled »The Education system and Job Counselling in Schools« political tasks are defined for the compulsory, secondary level II and all teaching levels and questions are posed to which politics have to find an answer.

The examples of successful solutions offer approaches as to where such developments could lead, from motivation, planning the personal and professional future during school time to be considered as one of the basic learning fields to structured portfolio systems and comparisons, how successful connections to the working world can be set up.

6.3 European programme and projects

These suggestions can be supplemented by the results of the Comenius-networks »school and business«: It surveyed European-wide developments and activities, documented and evaluated those. 200 projects with participation of all Member Countries of the European Union are included, many of which with special issues dealing with young people showing special challenges, handicaps or in structure weak areas. (www.schoolandbusiness.net).

This European Programme is named after the Czech philosopher and Theologian Jan Komensk (1592–1671). Komensk alias Comenius set up the at his time revolutionary educational principle: »omnes omnia omnino – teach everything to everybody as profoundly as possible «, adding: »and everything that is taught is to be useful«.

This is not a call to a reduced utilitarianism. This call makes reference to an entire spectrum of educational understanding, from writing and reading to philosophy, from natural science to religion.

6.4 On benefit, value and sense

The postulate of usefulness, however, has to be interpreted as a call to a truth to life, application reference, effort to understanding, why something will be taught and why something shall be learned. Thinking about benefit and purpose does not only aim at ostensible »usefulness« but contains the question of sense which is finally decisive in education– and for the career choice.
Sense can be found in goals which one sets oneself for one’s life and profession. Professional orientation can be supportive as attitude and principle of scholastic pedagogy, almost as a turntable for the educational development as a whole. Beyond the original educational goal it is also responsible for contributing to the further development of the system and processes in school and education and in the working world as well as to its active cooperation – in the interest of the youths, of economy and the European Community.

7. Literature