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The Importance of Career Centres as Mediators between HE Students and their Potential Employers

Introduction

Over the past two decades, some important obstacles have influenced the (proper) employment of young highly educated first job seekers, not only in Slovenia, but also in the majority of other EU countries. Namely, the altered competitive conditions in the labour market mainly influence less competitive individuals (Coleman, 1991; Sprangers, 1992), including young first-time job seekers. On the one hand, employers have increased their demands with regard to competences of potential employees. In addition to certificates, which confirm formal education, employers have begun to pay great attention to additional skills and experience needed to start work efficiently upon entering the workplace. On the other hand, young first-time job seekers have no work experience compared to their older counterparts on the labour market, nor extra skills and competences exceeding the education programmes they graduated from.

With regards to higher education in EU countries, the population of youths with the highest education degrees has been rising relatively quickly over the past two decades; over-qualification is becoming evident in some segments of highly educated people (OECD, 2000). Over-qualification may be ascribed to the massive expansion of higher education (Trow, 2000), and to the fragmentation of academic disciplines (Clark, 1996, Barnett, 2000). For some authors, although over-qualification is not taken for granted, it is still the subject of discussion (Teichler, 1999; Allen, van der Velden, 2011). But in light of the new perspectives on so-called knowledge society, a higher education degree no longer guarantees a proper job with opportunities for professional career development and a high standard of living. It has become obvious that the supply of graduates exceeds the demands of labour markets,¹ which is particular significant for “soft” education fields, where the incidence of unemployment (Reimer et al, 2008), as well as the risk of job mismatch (Halaby, 1994, Wolbers, 2002), has grown.

First part of the paper documents an increasing trend of uncertain graduates’ employment prospects for first employment seekers, especially those from so-called soft HE programs. Data from two very different research projects are used - large scale international project HEGESCO-REFLEX and a small case study of Slovene students. The second group of data is used to expose the marginal position of

¹ EUROSTAT data on unemployment rates of graduates (ISCED 5-6) by age groups 20 - 24 years and 25 - 29 years shows the general upward trend during the period from 2000 to 2011: EU 2000 - 12,3% (20-24years) and 8% (25-29 years); EU 2011- 16,5% (20-24y.) and 9% (25-29y.) In regard to individual country members some have had stable rates during this period, like Belgium, Czech Republik, France, Sweden (around 11% for both age groups together). The largest increase shows the data for Great Britain (4% in 2000 and 8% in 2011), Hungary (8% in 2005 and 14% in 2011), Portugal (16% in 2005 and 22% in 2011). Some countries exceed with high rates all over the period, like Italy (25% in 2000 and 22% in 2011), Portugal (16% in 2005 and 22% in 2011), Spain (22% in 2000 and 28% in 2011). (EUROSTAT,2012)

students and graduates who still insist on studying in fields that offer no employment opportunities. To improve students and graduates' prospects we also present some proposals.

The second part focuses on career centers. So far these centers have been successful forms of assistance to students preparing to enter the labor market under these new, severe conditions. Small comparative study of Slovene, German and British career centers focuses on centers' activities, which support cooperation between students/graduates and their (potential) employers. These activities could be considered good practices and implemented on a wider scale.

Do educators and students invest enough in matching the proper job after graduation?

According to Allen and van der Velden (2011), in new circumstances, highly educated professionals find themselves in a confusing situation; on the one hand they are asked to master top-notch and highly specialised knowledge, while on the other, they should be adaptable and flexible, able to perform professional tasks that are close to their area of specialisation. In today's highly sophisticated knowledge-based society, higher education is a prerequisite, albeit insufficient to achieve key positions in the work environment.

These findings pose two questions: are university educators responding to changed conditions on the labour market and through adapting study programmes allowing students to obtain additional knowledge, skills and experience sought by employers, and, are the young people enrolled in university education informed and aware of the conditions they will face when entering the labour market. And, are they ready and willing to contribute additional individual efforts, to allow them to become part of the "elite"² on the labour market? We will endeavour to answer these two questions in part by presenting a selection of the results of two different studies: one large-scale European research HEGESCO – REFLEX of graduates' transition from the university education to employment and a Slovene micro-extreme case study of third and fourth year students of study disciplines for which demand has fallen over the past decade.

REFLEX-HEGESCO responses

European projects HEGESCO and REFLEX³ describe some of the most important factors affecting graduates' transition to the relevant employment within five years of graduation. Bearing in mind the

² The "elite" on the labour market are those seeking jobs for which demand exceeds the supply, who find suitable jobs and earn above-average income and have strong career potential.

³ The REFLEX-HEGESCO projects conducted large-scale surveys on a representative sample of graduates. The REFLEX research was carried out in 16 member countries. The HEGESCO project included, in addition to the sample of countries included in the REFLEX project, another 5 countries, amongst them also Slovenia. In each of the countries, research was conducted using a unique questionnaire on a sample of graduates with educational level ISCED 5A and who graduated 5 years prior to the research.

scope of this article, we shall limit our overview to only those that show the efforts of both educators and students to overcome the above obstacles on the labour market and contribute to the relevant employment after graduation through preparing for future work and making contacts with employers. Namely, one of the results of all studies, i.e. the large scale EU studies as well as the Slovene extreme case study, is that work experience relating to the field of studies during studies, as well as connections with employers' needs or/and with them personally, improve the chances of graduates, newcomers to the labour market, finding proper jobs in a shorter period of time.

The results of the REFLEX-HEGESCO study showed that only a small number of surveyed graduates found themselves amongst the "elite" upon entering the labour market. Most found employment that required additional and advanced studies at the post-graduate level. Two factors proved to be most significant for becoming a part of the "elite": study discipline (doctors, lawyers, managers and engineers were most frequently placed among the "elite") and the educational level (higher education graduates had better prospects of finding employment than more junior graduates).⁴ Results showed that additional competencies and experience the graduates gained during studying either in formal university programmes or through occasional work experience, were highly influential in securing better employment (Allen, van der Velden, 2011).

In general terms⁵ the authors assessed the transition of the surveyed graduates from education to the labour market in 2005 and 2008 (five years after graduation) as successful (ibid.). However, as regards career prospects, the results were much less positive: only a small number of those interviewed (25-33%) stated that their "current employment offers good career opportunities" (Allen, Coenen, Humburg, 2011/a, p. 53).

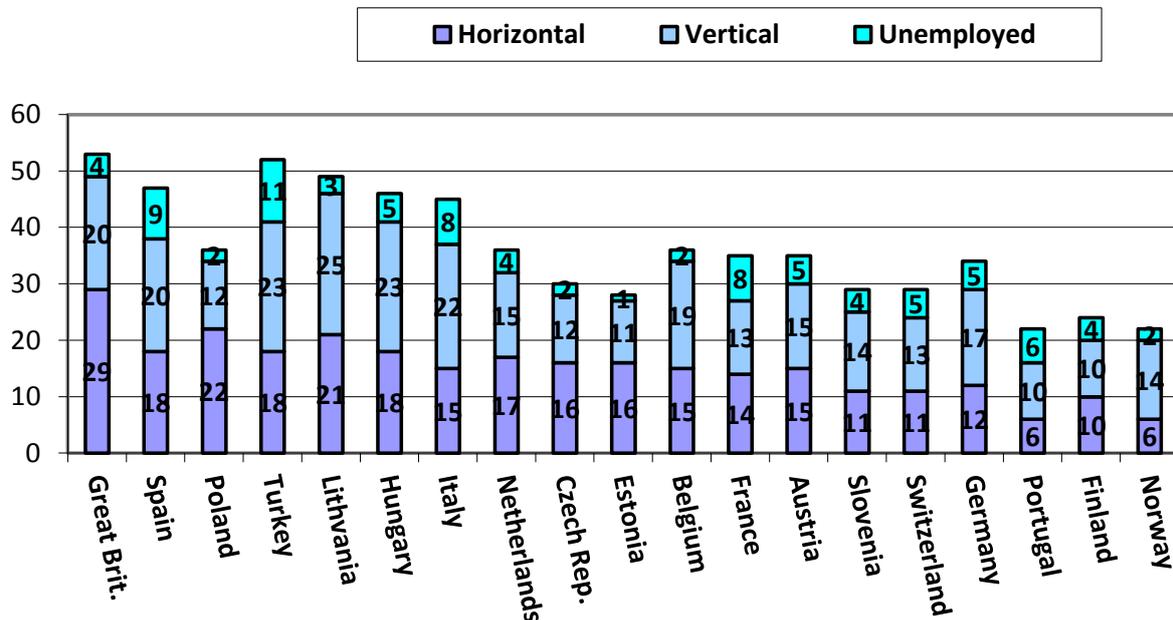
In terms of individual countries included in the REFLEX- HEGESCO research, results were less satisfactory as they show significant differences with regards to the success graduates have when finding employment. Figure 1 shows the shares of inappropriate employment including horizontal and vertical unsuitability as well as graduates' unemployment rate by country.

Figure 1: Graduates' Job Mismatch five years after graduation in EU countries from the REFLEX Project. Source: Allen, Coenen, Humburg (2011), Figure 3.8, Figure 3.11, Figure 3.12

⁴ Level two graduates (ISCED 5A), with direct access to doctorate studies, earn more than their colleagues who completed level one studies.

⁵ Against the expectations of the authors, the group of new EU members did not show standard characteristics. In Hungary (as well as Turkey), the results showed a prevailing pattern of unemployed students that is characteristic of "south European countries" (as designated by the sample REFLEX project). The lowest unemployment rate of students (five years after graduation) among all the countries included in the study was recorded in Estonia and Poland (Allen, Coenen, Humburg, 2011/a, p. 53).

Job Mismatch: Horizontal, Vertical, Unemployment, by country, 2005 and 2008, in %



The table shows major deviations of individual countries from the average in terms of high unemployment (Turkey, Spain, Italy and France), as well as in terms of high job mismatch of graduates (Great Britain, Turkey, Latvia, Hungary and Italy). Slovenia’s unemployment rate is almost 1% below average, while horizontal job mismatch is more than 3% lower and vertical more than 1% lower. Slovenia is among the group of countries with a solid job mismatch structure of employed graduates 5 years after graduation.

The following factors proved to significantly reduce the risk of job mismatch and unemployment: using social networks; work experience relating to the field of studies during studies, and completing studies at prestigious and vocationally-oriented study programmes. University degree of at least one parent reduced the risk of vertical job mismatch and unemployment; however, at the same time this slightly increased the risk of horizontal unemployment⁶ (Støren, Arnesen, 2011).

Regarding completed study programmes, job mismatch and unemployment are most frequent in graduates of humanities (35% job mismatch and 7% unemployment), while high job mismatch and unemployment rates were recorded also in studies in the area of “services” and sociology (around 30% job mismatch and 4% unemployment) and natural sciences (26% job mismatch and 7% unemployment). (Støren, Arnesen, 2011).

⁶ Støren and Arnesen (2008, p. 232) explain the gap between the social networks of children whose parents have a high level of education, which opens up interesting employment opportunities also outside the framework of the completed study programmes.

The results of the REFLEX- HEGESCO research show that most study programmes are not practically oriented as they focus on theory and paradigms; lectures are the most frequently used teaching method and students are not involved in research work. Most employers are not informed of the contents of the study programmes; this also applies to vocational study programmes (Allen, Coenen, Humburg, 2011, p. 26, 27). With regards to how successful the programmes are in ensuring that students are sufficiently qualified to enter the labour market and obtain suitable jobs, the data shows that the suitability of these programmes is assessed as relatively low; only 53% of interviewed graduates stated that the completed programmes made a sufficient contribution to preparing them for employment.

Ratings of vocational orientation of completed study programmes and their recognition by potential employers vary significantly. Only 30-40% of graduates from all countries stated that employers were familiar with the content of study programmes, with the exception of Norway (60%) and Turkey (20%). (Allen, Coenen, Humburg, 2011). Slovenia is somewhere in the middle as regards both the rating of vocational orientation of study programmes and familiarity of employers with the content of the study programmes.

Involvement in work and work experience as part of higher education programmes varied by country with the highest recorded in the Netherlands (60%), Hungary (about 57%), France (almost 45%), and the lowest in Latvia (less than 10%) and the Czech Republic (around 17%). In Slovenia, involvement stood at around 30% (Ibid.).

In terms of the study programmes' flexibility to adapt to conditions on the labour market demonstrated by the ratio of how much practice work and potential job positions are part of the study programme, there are major differences between countries included in the research with the Netherlands topping the list with a ratio of 60 and Latvia at the bottom with a ratio of 3. There are, as well, major differences with regards to on-the-job work experience associated with studies: 100% of Turkish graduates stated they took part in both, while only 22% of Italian students were included in on-the-job work experience. 54% of Slovene graduates stated they gained work experience through on-the-job experience as part of the study programme or through doing occasional jobs during their studies. According to Allen, Coenen and Humburg (2011, p. 23), the emerging pattern shows that in the countries such as the Netherlands, Hungary and France with high rates of vocational work and on-the-job experience included in study programmes, a high proportion of graduates actually gain work experience and knowledge during their studying. In contrast, graduates from the Czech Republic and

Italy where study programmes do not focus on knowledge for work, are less likely to be involved in practice and work experience.⁷

The results show that Slovenia ranks among the group of countries with relatively high inclusion of opportunities to gain “knowledge for employment” as part of formal study programmes and the actual involvement of students in activities aimed at gaining work experience and knowledge during their studies. 60% of Slovene graduates stated that study programmes included learning “knowledge for employment” and that they were actually involved in work experience or work associated with their studies during higher education.

Slovene Small-Scale Case Study responses

Starting from the general statements on the changing conditions for young highly educated first job seekers over the last two decades, some of which are mentioned above, the small-scale national case study research began in Slovenia in 2004. It focused on investments during the period of HE study among the population of final-year students and graduates of academic disciplines that are not truly in demand in the Slovenian labour market,⁸ following the hypothesis that greater individual investments in higher education and especially in extra-curricular and work activities could reflect students’ adapting to the new challenges. According to statistical data for Slovenia and some other EU countries the cohort of graduate first job seekers, who did not find proper job began increasing already in the 1990s and expanding among the study fields. Namely, this unemployment trend among graduates in Slovenia began with the unemployed cohort of humanities and social sciences graduates and expanded to management, law, economics and IT studies in 2010. In light of these findings, the extreme case study research method was chosen to focus on these graduates, who were and still are the most vulnerable group among other first job seeking graduates.

The first study was performed in the 2005/2006 academic year and was repeated in 2010/2011.⁹ The results of both studies show the following: analysed students are insufficiently prepared for the problems awaiting them once they step into the job market; during their studies, they do not sufficiently participate in extra-curricular work and they do not find employments or work practices

⁷ However, the authors point out large inconsistencies in the pattern with regards to Turkey and Latvia, namely the high share of actual involvement in work experience and at the same time low share of statements that study programmes included obtaining knowledge required for suitable employment (ibid).

⁸ Podmenik, D., Ivančič, A., Černigoj Sadar, N. (2006). In the framework of the research project titled Evaluation of Investments in Educational Capital and Youth Labour Market, the survey was done on the target sample consisting of 150 senior students, finishing their studies of HE programmes, for which a lack of demand on the Slovene labour market had been documented. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 graduates who had been searching for a (proper) job for more than 1 year.

⁹ Repetition of the survey from the research Evaluation of Investments in Educational Capital and Youth Labour Market (Podmenik et al., 2006) on the target sample consisting of 180 Slovene students, chosen by the same characteristics as in the previous sample, is based on the proposition, that after five years of crises the marginal group of students has changed the pattern of investments in obtaining knowledge and skills. (Research work in progress. IRSA Institute, Ljubljana)

complementing their studies and future professional careers. Rarely do they have a clearly outlined career path, ideas and skills, and rarely have they established professional networks that could help them during the process of finding the proper job. They are also not oriented to search for possibilities for employment and career-building abroad.

Both studies examined also educators' investments into improving their students' and graduates' (future) position on the job market. Respondents, both students and graduates, evaluated educator investments into training for successful employment as insufficient. The results suggest that HE institutions do not perform this task successfully, neither in regard to providing information and skills¹⁰ nor in regard to providing contacts with future employers.¹¹

Comparative case study on Career Centres (CC)

In light of the results presented above, which show that students do not invest enough into additional work skills and networks, needed for (successful) employment in future, on one hand, and on the other that HE formal programs do not prepare the graduates for entering the labour market and meeting employers demand, career centres should be put under the spotlight as a bridge, which could mitigate this double insufficiency.

The presented research on CCs is based on two premises: 1) that the main purpose of CCs is today, beside to inform, counsel and support career orientation, to connect students and employers. According to Dizdarević and Tušar (2011), the attitude of employers towards employment improves when they are included in the contents of the education process. And: 2), that the innovative practices aimed at connecting employers with students are very important.

The presented research focuses on two types of career centres, the "average" ones and "good practices". Two criteria were used in this categorization: the run time of each and the content of each centre's activities. Those with long-lasting practices including inventive activities are presented as good practices. The emphasis is on those (inventive) activities that enable or improve the networks among students/graduates and (potential) employers.

¹⁰ 40% of respondents replied that their study program did not provide them with sufficient information on employment possibilities and only 11% of respondents stated that they got sufficient knowledge as regards their employment possibilities.

¹¹ To a certain degree, such contacts were provided to one quarter of the respondents, while only 7% were of the opinion that sufficient contacts were established.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the research method. The sample consisted of 8 career centres; four of them are considered good practices. Four Slovene CCs were selected as representatives of four Slovene universities: the CC of the University of Ljubljana, the CC of the University of Maribor, the CC of the University of Primorska and the CC of the University of Nova Gorica, while four good practice centres were selected in advance: the CC of the Faculty of Economics of the University of Ljubljana, the CC at the Free University of Berlin, the CC at the Zeppelin University of Friedrichshafen and the CC of the University of Bristol.

The majority of Slovene Career Centres were established as part of an EU initiative. Universities applied to the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology¹² for funds for developing and implementing CCs in higher education. The project was partly funded by the European Social Fund under the Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007 – 2013.

With regards to the umbrella EU project, “by 2006, the incentives at Slovene universities for creating a formal system of career services were ever more frequent and nowadays, all the largest universities have their own career centres on the level of the rector’s office, whereas some of the faculties of the Ljubljana and Maribor universities have their own separate career centres” (Zadel, et al., 2011). The CC of the Faculty for Economics represents a model of Slovene good practices, since it was the first Slovenian CC and presented good practice for all subsequent CCs. With regards to inventive activities, other Slovenian CCs follow foreign practices and have some of their own innovative ideas.

Common Characteristics of Career Centres

All 5 Slovenian career centres provide services that can be divided into three groups: (1) information, advising and counselling services, (2) workshops (3) contacts between employers and students, organizing events (See table 1)

¹² As part of the project, the Ministry provide funding of up to € 1,187,201.72, of which 85% will be contributed by the European Union's European Social Fund and 15% by the Republic of Slovenia.

Table 1: Comparative characteristics of career centres

Comparative characteristics of Career Centres	University of Ljubljana	EF Ljubljana	University of Maribor	University Primorska	University Nova Gorica	University Berlin	Zeppelin University Friedrichshafen	Bristol University UK
Established	2008	2000*	2011**	2008	2011	1997	***	app. 35 years ago
Employees	9	3	4	2	1	3	1+1 student	12 ¹³
CC Information services	- CC web site - Presentations ¹⁴	- CC web site	- CC web site - Presentations ¹⁴ - Introduction week ¹⁵	- CC web site - Presentations ¹⁴	- CC web site	- CC office directly - Brouschures ²²	- CC Web site	- CC web site - Presentations ¹⁴
CC Workshops ¹⁶								¹⁷
Counselling	YES ¹⁸	YES ¹⁸	YES ¹⁸	YES ¹⁸	YES ¹⁸	YES ¹⁸	YES ¹⁸	YES ¹⁸
Cooperation with University	Cooperation in planning ¹⁹	Active cooperation ²⁰	Active cooperation ²¹	Active cooperation ²¹	CC is passive ²²	CC is isolated ²³	***	Permanent connection with

¹³ In career guidance section.

¹⁴ CC Self presentations to students, potential employers, companies and stakeholders.

¹⁵ CC University of Maribor pays special attention to present themselves to students at the introduction week at the beginning of study year.

¹⁶ All career centres highlighted following workshops, which we consider as AVERAGE: CV and concerning letter writing, Job searching, job interview simulation, internship promoting, Rhetoric/ public performing skills workshops.

¹⁷ Bristol PLUS Award which helps students gain extra-curricular skills.

¹⁸ CC offers Individual and group counselling.

¹⁹ Sometimes CC ask University staff for ideas, suggestions. Sometimes professors join presentations and it is obvious they are more and more aware of graduate unemployment. They have some future plans for cooperation.

²⁰ Each of the lecturers has a guidance steering committee Quality Department, to include training for employment in their subject Professors have contacts with companies and invite guests from the practice.

²¹ Mostly Interested to cooperate

staff								departments ²⁴
Internship	NO ²⁵	NO ²⁶	NO ²⁵	NO ²⁵	NO ²⁵	YES	YES	NO ²⁵
Students need analysis	YES ²⁷	***	NO ²⁸	YES ²⁹	***	***	***	YES
Cooperation between CC	YES ³⁰	YES ³⁰	YES ³⁰	YES ³⁰	YES ³⁰	YES ³¹	/	YES ³²
Student using the CC services	**	1 % ³³	app. 10% of students	up to 600 students/ workshop	20-30 students/ workshop	5000/ year in workshops	850 students	100 consultations/day
Alumni club	NO ³⁴	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES

²² As told the representative of CC: they do not have the authority to encourage professors to integrate careers issues in classes.

²³ The CC representative minded that: Professors usually think of their subjects and do not want to integrate our activities in their curricula.

²⁴ As told the representative the professors are mostly interested to cooperate with CC, which keeps in touch with one of the professor from each department.

²⁵ Only non-compulsory internships, encouraging and presenting internship programmes abroad, help finding internship, if employers shows interest they connect them to faculty internship coordinator

²⁶ CC can help, but students have to find company where they will do compulsory internship by themselves.

²⁷ Analysis has been done before CC started to work.

²⁸ Not yet, but planning to. Activities are currently planned by following other CC practices.

²⁹ Survey is annual at the end of year.

³⁰ With other Slovenian CC.

³¹ Meeting at conferences and under Career service network in Germany

³² Association of Graduate Careers Advisory is Association of all CC, where they are connected, get educated, get literature...

³³ 1% of 6000 students. 4000 students registered in CC portal.

³⁴ Not at the University level: except some faculties separately.

Networking CC with potential employers and employers with students	Regular Intrraction and promotion ³⁵ - Excursions to companies - Career fair	Regular Intrraction and promotion ³⁵ - Career fair - Meeting company representatives ³⁶ - “Job opportunities” ³⁷	Regular Intrraction and promotion ³⁵ - Career fair ³⁸ - Excursions to companies - Round tables ³⁹	Regular Intrraction and promotion ³⁵ - Career fair - Round tables ³⁹ - Excursions to companies	Round tables ³⁹ - Meeting company representatives ⁴⁰	Organising workshops ⁴¹	Regular Intrraction ⁴² - Career fair - Brouschure ⁴³	Regular Intrraction and promotion ³⁵ - CC promotion - Career fair ⁴⁴
Innovative practice	/	/	- Volunteer student help - Cooperation with partners abroad ⁴⁵	- “Couching” ⁴⁶ - Cooperation with partners abroad ⁴⁷ - “Entrepreneurial Challenge”	/	/	- Student fair organisation ⁴⁸ - “Tandem coaching”	- Bristol PLUS award ⁴⁹ - CC Funding - 3-day graduates workshop

³⁵ CC employees are in contact with potential employers, companies. They take care of student promotion in the labour market and company presentations to students.

³⁶ Professors have contacts with companies and many times invite guests from practice.

³⁷ Job opportunities is the event when company representative presents type of workplace and company expectations, students can apply for workplace or just get information.

³⁸ As well participation in career fair in Austria.

³⁹ With company representatives.

⁴⁰ CC informs employers about their activities and hold presentations of occupations of their graduates.

⁴¹ Often they do not have money to organise workshop so they work together with companies or other supporters who give some money or offer free activities.

⁴² Contacting companies all around the world as potential employers.

⁴³ CC has brochures and information that students can send to companies where »Tandem coaching« is explained.

⁴⁴ Employee fairs to recruit students (admission fee) Fair Organization for companies to present themselves to students

⁴⁵ Career fair in Austria.

⁴⁶ Is the only one in our sample that is introducing »couching«, but actually they are following US practices.

⁴⁷ Univerza na primorskem je ravno v navezovanju stikov z eno od italijanskih multinacionalk, ki želi soledovati s fakulteto FAMIT in FM Koper.

⁴⁸ Team of 20 students that helps organise employee fair.

The CCs in our sample were established from similar reasons but in different periods. The first Slovene CC began operating at the Faculty for Economics in 2000, while the others were established between 2008 and 2011. The main goal was to spread information on the importance of timely planning and career counselling among students and graduates, and to prepare them for the transition to the labour market and employment. The CC at the University of Bristol is the oldest career centre as it was established nearly 35 years ago like as the CC from Frei Uni, have a long history and were opened with the aim of overcoming increasing graduate unemployment. In the words of the representative of the CC Frei Uni: *“Career centres in Germany as we know them nowadays, started in the early 1980s, as the labour market was down at that time, we had a lot of students and they were all worried about unemployment. Researchers tried to create practical programmes for students besides regular studies.”*

With regards to employed professionals, nearly all interviewed CCs are understaffed. Bristol University Career Centre, for example, has the highest number of employees. In the words of its representative: *“The CC is divided into 3 sections: Career Guidance, Information Service, Contact with Employers. Each section has part-time and full-time employees. At my department- Career Guidance, there are 5 full-time and 7 part-time employees”*. In contrast, at the Zeppelin University CC, only one full-time professional and one part-time student take care of 850 students. However, in the words of its head, they bridge the lack of employees with inventive integration of Uni students, *“I use student teams for organizing and this also represents a kind of contact we have... I have a team of 20 students who organize career fairs. They are organized just like a company.”* As the case of Zeppelin illustrates, also some other CCs seem to be quite innovative in their inclusion of volunteers. A Slovene example is the CC at the University of Maribor; in the words of its representative, *“We try to get volunteers, students that already have experience, and in return we give them a letter of recommendation or inform them of free positions before others...”*

With regards to cooperation with professors the interviewees emphasized that cooperation mainly depends on professors' willingness and is mostly not organised or formalized. The practice of the University of Bristol, where networking is established at the department level, can be highlighted as the best cooperation. In the words of its representative, *“Usually they are prepared to involve some CC activities in their classes, but it depends of each professor's personality”*. The Faculty of Economics in Ljubljana is also a good example of organised cooperation between the CC and professors, as: *“...each of the lecturers has a guidance steering committee at the Quality Department, which strives to include training for employment in their subject. Professors have contacts with companies and they sometimes invite guests from practice.”*

As the representatives of Ljubljana University CC stated, those CCs that are financed by the project that ends in 2013 are in financial uncertainty after the end of EU financing. They all have a vision of

their future existence, but are unsure about funding. The representative's of the CC of the University of Primorska comment: "... *this is going to be very difficult because we provide services to our students free of charge. If we focus only on obtaining funds from projects, we may forget our fundamental mission, which is to work with our students.*" All Slovene CCs are in favour of future free services for students. They hope that their services will become a University priority and will be financed by it, such as is the case in Germany.

Main CC activities

The structure and content of activities of the researched CCs are quite similar. All of them offer information services, both in-person and through their websites. The information they provide students includes: career centre services, internship presentations, providing information on free positions, events, organising the alumni club. All career centres in our sample offer group and/or individual counselling, career fairs, and exchange programme presentations (e.g. Erasmus, Leonardo Da Vinci, ISAC). CCs also promote themselves to the students.

Another indispensable activity are workshops, which can be divided into two categories (1) skills workshops (e.g. rhetorical skills workshops, job interview simulation workshops) and (2) useful learning workshops (e.g. CV writing workshops, cover letter writing workshop, appropriate job searching workshop, internship searching workshop). Nearly all CCs have workshops where they promote non-obligatory internship, especially abroad and provide help with finding internships home or abroad. Namely, motivating internships in students who are not yet decided on what they would like to do after their studies helps kindle an interest, motivates and even provides a source of spontaneous career guidance. Students who during their studies gain at least some experience in the field of their studies have much less difficulty contacting potential employers (Dizdarević, Tušar, 2011).

Establishing connections among students and (potential) employers is carried out through organized career fairs, where potential employers and students/graduates can meet. The Bristol University CC organizes thematic fairs, such as the law fair. The CC of the University of Maribor organizes a career fair abroad in Austria, as described by the representative, "*As part of our cross-border cooperation with Austria, we offered a Career Centre accompanying activity, namely the »Career Day«, which included three sets of workshops related to career development.*" At Zeppelin University CC, they contact companies all around the world if they want to recruit their students. "*Sometimes employers come to the University and inform students of special career paths within the companies.*" At the Faculty of Economics, they encourage employers to examine students before graduation.

Inventive activities

The CC of the University of Primorska is introducing “coaching”, with which it aims to follow US good practices. The “Entrepreneurial Challenge” competition, which challenges students to show their skills and rewards them through employment, is also very innovative. As the representative said, *“...we are searching for a company to implement the “Entrepreneurial Challenge”. The company would publish a challenge and students/graduates would have the opportunity to solve the company’s problem. The author of the best solution would then be employed by the company as a reward”*.

The CCs at the University of Primorska, and, as we already mentioned, the University of Maribor organize cooperation with partners abroad; the former with Italian and the latter with Austrian partners. Currently, the University of Primorska is aiming to find an Italian multinational interested in working with the FAMIT and FM faculties in Koper. As stated by the representative of the CC, they regularly monitor the implementation of career counselling abroad. In his own words, *“we ensure we monitor what activities are implemented and transfer some examples of best practice into our won environment”*.

Zeppelin University offers so-called “Tandem Coaching”, which connects each student with one “important other professional”. The connection is completely voluntary and based on agreement; the coaching professional chooses the student in regard to his study and career preferences and introduces him to his professional experiences and networks. As the head of the CC told us, *“...we have this mentoring program and they meet at least twice a year. The aim or the goal is to get in contact with companies to help find a mentor who also tries to provide the student with a job.*

At Bristol University Career Centre, they organise a 3-day workshop for graduates. The coordinator noticed that often students become aware of their situation with regards to the labour market after graduation and when they start searching for a job.

As mentioned above, innovative practices are introduced also with the intention to resolve staffing problems.

Analysis of student and employer needs

The interviews show that CCs meet the problem of disconnectedness between students/graduates and potential employers needs and demands. The question remains how career centres know what the needs of students and potential employers are. It could be said that student and employer needs should be analysed more often and widely. Most interviewed CC are aware of this problem and organize roundtables with potential employers to discuss their needs for potential highly educated employees. Some CCs (Bristol University, University of Primorska) conduct annual surveys (or are planning to)

or have regular contacts with employers (See Table 1). At Bristol University Career Centre, one section is responsible for discussing with employers the skills they miss in graduates. As the representative said: “...students are lacking extracurricular activities, non-academic skills... from this point of view we introduced BRISTOL PLUS AWARD, which helps students get non-academic skills from different fields.”

Various forms of regularly monitoring and reconciling the needs of students and employers should also be highlighted as examples of best practice. Informing employers with regards to their involvement in CC activities and the resulting expression of their needs and being informed with the needs of highly educated potential job seekers is also often successful. At the same time, networking among employers and potential job seekers via the CCs could also potentially contribute to including employers as potential sources of CC fund. In summary, employers should more broadly be informed of the fact that as mediators, CCs also operate in their benefit.

Conclusion and discussion

All interviewees are fully aware of the severity of the problems with which the graduates are confronted with and are willing to help. All express a great deal of enthusiasm, as well. The younger ones were more excited about interesting work and those more experienced feel the need to fulfill their professional mission. The representative of the CC Uni Maribor reflects both motivations: » *At our CC we have a vision to become the most successful CC... CC essential activity should be to support the students... our vision is to provide students with what they are missing... what study programmes don't give them*«. Most of them also reported that the number of students who are looking for help increase every year, even the first-year students have begun using CC's services regularly.

Both parts of the presentation document that we are dealing with very complex issue, which should be discussed and solved with the participation of various actors, who are involved in production, dissemination and efficiency of HE knowledge. Maybe the innovativeness which some CCs from described sample have used to overcome their problems could be a good example for starting the discussion.

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