

Career Guidance in Remote Areas: The Case of Kato Vathia, Crete

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ABSTRACT: This paper delves into the challenges and opportunities of providing vocational guidance in rural and remote areas, focusing on the case study of Kato Vathia, Crete. Drawing upon insights extracted from career counseling initiatives organized by the Cultural and Recreational Association of Kato Vathia, led by Dimitris Samponidis—a career counselor and PhD candidate in vocational guidance—this study highlights the concept of "poverty of access" in such regions, where individuals lack adequate educational and career development opportunities. Through two case studies—a career event combining science education with cultural tradition and an international Raki Making Festival—the paper illustrates how cultural clubs and associations can serve as allies in addressing these challenges. These initiatives not only provide vocational guidance but also foster community engagement, empowerment, and international exposure. The paper concludes by emphasizing the importance of collaboration among universities, local communities, and businesses to promote career development and educational opportunities in geographically remote areas.

INTRODUCTION

Research indicates that both students and adults in rural and/or remote areas have limited access to vocational guidance services, highlighting significant concerns and practical challenges to be addressed. This study aims to closely examine the practical application of vocational counseling in remote areas, along with its difficulties and specificities. Furthermore, it proposes a tailored model for implementing vocational counseling in these areas, integrating adult education, experiential non-formal learning, and transformative learning principles to improve the attitudes and skills of young people within local communities.

This study focuses on two case studies wherein vocational guidance was

implemented in rural and remote areas through experiential workshops, impacting the empowerment and skill development of beneficiaries. In particular, the first case study focuses on vocational orientation and cultural events held in Kato Vathia, Crete, a small village 20 km from Heraklion, Crete. These events were primarily promoted by the Cultural and Recreational Association of Kato Vathia "Niros," whose secretary is Dimitris Samponidis—a career counselor and PhD candidate in vocational guidance. The cultural association organized two events combining professional orientation with Cretan traditions and hospitality.

Notably, the organized events brought the local community together, attracting over 300 different-aged people from across the borough.

In rural and/or remote areas, both literature and experience confirm the prevalence of the phenomenon of "poverty of access" (Gray, Shaw, & Farrington, 2006). This refers to the absence or, at best, severe lack of access to specifically tailored educational programs aimed at professional development, training, and skill enhancement. Individuals in these areas often think, function, and identify professionally and personally within the limited dynamics of their localities, rather than exploring their broader interests and occupational aspirations. Consequently, during vocational counseling, we encounter the following three predominant disempowering discourses—tendencies that usually coexist, with one ultimately becoming predominant. The first discourse involves a tendency to leave rural and/or remote localities owing to social pressures and limited professional empowerment (Gobert, 2007), considering relocation as the only way to realize one's professional plans and develop. The second discourse involves settling for local employment to sustain livelihoods ("wage earners"), regardless of personal fulfillment. The final discourse involves the adaption of career aspirations to existing educational/academic curricula without considering local employability opportunities, sometimes leading to either local (small) entrepreneurship or, more often, to unemployment. Regardless, both outcomes have psychosocial implications for young people who fail to express themselves and develop through their occupation, either because they are unable to find a suitable role or because they experience the disadvantages of unemployment and social stigmatization (Plant et al., 2003).

CULTURAL CLUBS AND ASSOCIATIONS: ALLIES OF THE CAREER COUNSELOR

According to Article 78 of A.K.11 (Government Gazette 164/A/24-10-1984) "an association is an association of persons, which pursues a non-profit purpose and acquires personality when it is registered in a special public register kept at the court of first instance. At least twenty persons are required for its establishment. Meanwhile, the Interpretative Dictionary of Modern Greek states, "an association is an association of persons with legal status, a specific administrative organization, a name, and a purpose of establishment" (Gavriilidou, Lampropoulou, & Angelakos, 2013).

Cultural and outdoor associations, by definition, organize actions that promote tradition (Louka K., 2018). Additionally, in the meta-COVID era and during the inflationary crisis, these associations organize activities for entertainment and education, providing a breath of life to remote areas (Mamounaki, 2021)

This is not magic; it is chemistry.

Dimitris Sampsonidis, career counselor at the University of Crete and secretary of the Kato Vathia Cultural Association, combined these roles to create a career event that united a remote local community through a science show attended by 250 students. Chemistry students from the University of Crete conducted experiments and explained the underlying science principles to children of all ages from the village of Kato Vathia and the surrounding area, helping them explore potential career options (Lichtenstein & Mendenhall, 2002). The event included an informative interview between the career advisor and chemistry students, who shared their experiences regarding their chemistry education at the local university (Crosby, 2010). The advisor also delivered a

presentation on the career prospects of a chemist, helping both high school and college students explore various career paths (Praskova et al., 2015).

University students were offered opportunities to practice presentation and public speaking skills (Marble, 2007). These students also explored career opportunities in chemistry education. As an added bonus, because the chemistry students were not originally from the island, they enjoyed local traditional dances, food, and drinks.

In addition, a local soft drink company with a small nearby factory sponsored the event, offering free drinks to the children and presenting the possibility of employing a chemist from the area (Hernández-Gantes et al., 2018). Students were also able to network with the company members and explore a career in food chemistry, thereby improving their career readiness (Hernández-Gantes et al., 2018).

The Cultural Association of Kato Vathia, which covered the costs of the event, even made a small profit by selling kebabs during the event. Overall, through this event, the community came together to celebrate science and career exploration. From kindergarten students to high school students to adults, this free and family-friendly event provided opportunities to explore various career paths.

INTERNATIONAL RAKI MAKING FESTIVAL WITH ERASMUS STUDENTS FROM OVER 20 COUNTRIES

Custom of the Raki Making Festival

On November 12, 2023, the cultural association organized a traditional Raki making festival event, inviting Erasmus' students from the Hellenic Mediterranean University and the University of Crete, along with visiting researchers from the Foundation for Research and Technology—Hellas.

According to Cretan tradition, during the month of November, the distillation of Cretan raki or tsikoudia takes place. During this time, people gather to join the "kazanaris," who make the raki, celebrating the successful harvest and the arrival of winter.

First International Raki Making Festival in Kato Vathia Heraklion

The cultural club revived this tradition with the help of a portable cauldron procured from the Heraklion Distillers Association, offering free wine and freshly made raki, traditional gammopilafo, and roast meat and playing live traditional Cretan music. Transportation arrangements to and from Heraklion were made. The association also made an open call for "refene," wherein every family could bring their own food and bake at the association's grill. This traditional and family-friendly atmosphere delighted international visitors, who had the opportunity to learn Cretan traditional dances after attending classes at the dance group of the university. At the beginning of the event, Dimitris Sampsonidis briefed the locals about Erasmus mobility, its benefits, and processes, thus encouraging them to interact with their international guests.

Parents and students engaged in discussions with these international guests regarding European mobility, discussing its benefits and challenges. In fact, some chemistry students explained the science behind the distillation process.

In total, 23 Erasmus and international students from 20 countries across Europe, Asia, and Africa had the opportunity to experience Cretan tradition and hospitality.

RESULTS

After the event, students and researchers acquired an unforgettable memory, feeling like members of the community as they even

communicated with grandmothers in the village with the help of translators. On the other hand, local residents were particularly pleased with the initiative and the international exposure it brought to the village. The grandmothers, in particular, felt honored that young people from all over the world enjoyed their dishes. Moreover, the Mayor of Hersonissos formally thanked the cultural association and pledged to institutionalize the event with support from the municipality.

The event was featured on the social networks of the University of Crete and posted as promotional material on its official website to attract international and Erasmus students. It was also highlighted at the European University Ingenium, which consists of 10 universities including the University of Crete, and promoted across all European Universities and partner Universities outside the European Union through international newsletters.

Several international and Erasmus students enrolled in the Spring Semester 2024 eagerly anticipated the 2024 Cake Cutting Ceremony hosted by the association. In total, 40 students from Europe, America, and Asia attended the event.

This event was covered by a major newspaper from Crete and by the island's largest television network, as well as by ERT. Finally, Mr. Sampsonidis also discussed this event at the international conference of the Asia Pacific Career Development Association, establishing it as an exemplary model.

CONCLUSION

Cultural clubs and associations can serve as valuable allies for career guidance counselors. By fostering collaboration among local universities, the local community, and local businesses, creative

actions can be implemented to strengthen career development and educational opportunities in geographically remote areas.

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