

Ways



Peter Plant (Ed.)

# Ways

– On Career Guidance

Danish University of Education Press

## **Ways – On Career Guidance**

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# Foreword

Guidance and counselling cover many different professional and research areas, all in relation to helping people finding directions in life which are meaningful to each individual and fruitful in relation to the wider society.

Thus, in an attempt to discuss and illustrate a number of current issues in Nordic career guidance, this anthology represents selected inputs from an informal Nordic network of experts within sociology, education, psychology, ethnology, informatics and philosophy – all focused on guidance and counselling.

The concepts of guidance vs. counselling are used interchangeably in this publication, thus reflecting different traditions and approaches.

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Peter Plant  
Copenhagen  
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# Introduction

Guidance—and in the case of this anthology particularly career guidance—is both a widespread and a contested concept. On one level it refers to helping individuals making educational and vocational choices, supposing that there are options to choose from, which, in turn, is disputed by some scholars (see e.g. Roberts, 2000). On another level, it encompasses wider societal issues. Nonetheless, the OECD has coined a widely accepted definition:

‘Career guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Such services may be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in the workplace, in the voluntary or community sector and in the private sector. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis, and may be face-to-face or at a distance (including help lines and web-based services). They include career information provision (in print, ICT-based and other forms), assessment and self-assessment tools, counseling interviews, career education programmes (to help individuals develop their self awareness, opportunity awareness, and career management skills), taster programmes (to sample options before choosing them), work search programmes, and transition services. (OECD, 2004a)

Even with this broad approach, the limitations of this definition are obvious, as the societal aspects of guidance are missing: guidance is also a tool for governments and policy-makers to channel and sometimes even allocate

individuals or groups to particular positions in society, in education, or in the labour market. Ironically, this happens, or is intended to happen, as one of the effects of guidance alongside a widespread rhetoric of the importance of free choice and the individuals' right to create their own futures (Irving & Malik, 2005). Broadly speaking, guidance has three societal aims in terms of (1) learning, (2) the labour market, and (3) social equity (OECD, 2004b).

## Guidance Activities

Clearly, then, guidance is much more than a face-to-face interview. Ford (2001) has identified a number of activities of guidance:

- Informing
- Advising
- Assessing
- Teaching
- Enabling
- Advocating
- Networking
- Feeding back
- Managing
- Innovation/Systems change
- Signposting
- Mentoring
- Sampling work experience or learning tasters
- Following up.

Few guidance services would cover all of these, but rather focus on some aspects. Some guidance practitioners, however, take for instance the Following Up and the Innovations/Systems change aspects much further. One such example is found in Swedish guidance, where a wide-ranging set of ethical guidelines (see [www.vagledarforeningen.org](http://www.vagledarforeningen.org)) have been adopted. They urge Swedish career guidance professionals to be proactive and stand up for the weak and the vulnerable in Swedish society. It is a 'moral obligation' to do so. The key concept here (in Swedish) is 'Kompensatorisk vägledning', i.e. guidance as societal compensation.

The anthology provides an overview of and an insight into aspects of Nordic and in particular Danish guidance and counselling issues. The contributions stretch from career guidance over supervision to philosophical counselling, thus depicting the breadth of the Nordic guidance and counselling field. The articles reflect this broad picture, divided into four main sections:

## 1. Overview: Nordic Guidance & Research in Guidance

First, Peter Plant, in his article '**Five Swans in 3-D: Nordic Educational and Vocational Guidance**' provides an overview of career guidance in the five Nordic countries, i.e. Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland: the Five Swans. The article covers key Nordic guidance issues with examples from the various countries under the headings of Professionalisation, Guidance Policies, Activities, Staff and Professional Background, Linkages, and Materials & ICT.

Further, Peter Plant, in his article '**Nordic Research in Educational and Vocational Guidance**', gives an insight into Nordic research in guidance. The balance between studies in guidance based on sociology, psychology, and even ethnology and philosophy varies according to the research focus and tradition of each of the Nordic countries. The article reveals the magnitude of Nordic guidance research with examples from the various countries.

## 2. Choice & balance

Birte Kaiser, in her article '**Changing Minds in Guidance: From guidance towards mentoring**', sheds light on changes in mental models in the process of guidance, thus discussing the very nature of guidance. Some of her main points are that each guidance situation is unique and that the guidance expert must build on a whole repertoire of different methods and tools.

Helene Valgreen, in her article '**The Notion of Balance in Guidance**', uses the wheel as a metaphor for some of the life-work balance challenges that guidance faces in the complex society of today. "The interesting thing about balance is the fact that balance takes a lot of work", she writes, thus introducing dynamic balance as a guidance concept.

Anders Lovén, in his article **'A life of choices – and the roles of the career counsellor'**, points to changes in society and their impact on career choices. The expectations and opinions of clients towards career counsellors have changed, but career counsellors are often seen as being unclear and overly oriented towards information retrieval. Inspiration from career coaching could be a way forward.

Noemi Katznelson and Mette Pless, in their article **'Parents, choice of education and guidance – on parents' direct and indirect influence on young peoples' choices'**, focus on the role of parents in supporting and guiding their children as they progress through the educational system. The reader meets curling parents and helicopter moms in the gap between parents' interest and their actual knowledge of educational options. There is thus a risk that increased parental involvement can put pressure on young peoples' free choice of education.

Ulla Højmark Jensen, in her article **'Youth with no formal education – who are they and how can they be counselled?'**, quotes a student for saying: 'I spoke with a counsellor, but I can't remember her name. I've talked with her once'. The article discusses how four different types of youth might benefit from guidance and counselling.

Christian Lystbæk, in his article **'Guidance in the Professions'**, has a slightly different approach to guidance as a concept: he concentrates on guidance as a fundamental *modus* of learning in professions. He argues that guidance in relation to professions faces a plurality of sources and forms of knowledge, as well as a multitude of values, i.e. contested and competing views on what characterises 'good practice'. How, then, to facilitate critical analysis and reflection through guidance?

### 3. Virtual

Karen Paaske, in her article **'ICT in career guidance'**, presents her research into opportunities for and limitations to using ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in career guidance: ICT in guidance or guidance in ICT?

Mia Lindberg, in her article **'Virtual, Visible Visions of ICT in Career Guidance Services'**, expands this theme by looking into ICT-supported career guidance activities in open career guidance centres.

## 4. Reflection & philosophy

Brian Kjær Andreasen, in his article **'Affectivity in Guidance'**, quotes Sartre: 'Emotions comprise a certain way of understanding the world'. The article positions affectivity as a central concept in the understanding of guidance, which in turn is seen as an activity orientated towards the very act of making choices.

Rie Thomsen, in her article, **'Reflection – an empty category?'**, considers guidance as an a form of assistance to make individual and/or as a societal channelling function.

Finn Thorbjørn Hansen, in his article **'Philosophical Counselling: A hermeneutical-dialogical approach to Career Counselling'**, claims that career counselling theory and practice has been dominated by social constructionism, i.e. a meaning-making-paradigm. He invites the reader to consider Philosophical Counselling as a way to approach the 'being-dimension' in career counselling.

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# Five Swans in 3-D: Nordic Educational and Vocational Guidance

*By Peter Plant*

*Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland: these are the Nordic countries, the Five Swans. This article covers key Nordic guidance issues with characteristic examples from the various countries under the headings of Professionalisation, Guidance Policies, Activities, Staff and Professional Background, Linkages, and Materials & ICT<sup>1</sup>*

## Geography and Demography

First, a short lesson in geography and demography: Scandinavia, i.e. Denmark (DK; 5 million inhabitants), Norway (N; 4 million), and Sweden (S; 9 million) together with Finland (FIN; 5 million) and Iceland (IS; 285,000) form the Nordic Countries. Three autonomous regions add to the richness: Åland (FIN), the Faroe Islands (DK) and Greenland (DK). The latter two countries, along with Norway and Iceland, are not members of the European Union (EU), whereas Denmark, Sweden and Finland are. However, Norway and Iceland (along with Liechtenstein) are members of the wider European Economic Area (EEA), which implies that most EU regulations are also implemented in these countries. Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Faroese and Icelandic are closely related Germanic languages, whereas Finnish has Ugrian roots. Important minority groups include the Samis in Finland, Sweden and Norway. A common and very open

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1. This article draws upon Plant, P. (2003). The Five Swans: Educational and Vocational Guidance in the Nordic Countries. In: *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2003, pp. 85-100. Dordrecht: Kluwer.