

## GREEN GUIDANCE

# Utopia revisited: Green Guidance



Currently, our societies need new visions of a just and sustainable future for all. Green Guidance is a contribution towards this. In this second Guidance Matters article from Professor Peter Plant, he outlines a utopian vision for ‘Green Guidance’ and its link to social justice.

Utopians have visions for a better society, often with a view to social justice and equality. Some utopians have focused, more specifically, on career development and career guidance. Such visionaries include Charles Fourier, Richard Owen, and Frank Parsons. They are worth revisiting. Currently, our societies need new visions of a just and sustainable future for all. Green Guidance is a contribution towards this, utopian as it may seem.

## Key words:



## Introduction

Utopian visions play an important underlying role in career guidance and career development. Utopias are never fully unfolded, but they set out a direction, a vision, often articulated by a small, dedicated group of people. One well-known utopian with a view to career development was Frank Parsons, but there are many others, as demonstrated below, each with their particular contribution.

The flip side of the Utopia is Dystopia. The fine line between the two has been demonstrated, repeatedly, in fictional literature and films: Orwell’s 1984, Huxley’s *Brave new World*, Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and *The Truman Show*, just to mention of few from modern times. This

contribution will not venture further into this maze: there are plenty of dystopias, in reality, as well as in fiction.

Earlier, on a more positive note, in his famous book *Utopia*, Thomas More (1516) suggested that every citizen must learn farming, and at least one of the other essential trades: weaving, carpentry, metalwork, and masonry. Unemployment is eradicated: all able-bodied citizens must work. Working hours are six hours a day; many willingly work for longer. And lifelong learning is pivotal as all citizens are encouraged to take part in learning in their leisure time. This is More’s vision of career development, aligned with his focus on social justice. 500 years later *Utopia for realists* by Bregman (2017), calls for a re-orientation in terms of work

and wages, (re)introducing the concept of a basic citizens' income, as does Guy Standing (2011) with a special view to the Precariat. In my home country, Denmark, similar visions of a just and balanced society including a basic citizens' income, were forwarded by Meyer, Helweg & Sørensen (1981), proclaiming the Revolt from the Center, thus venturing into career development in their analysis that decent work, education, and training would hugely benefit from a basic citizens' income.

### Parsons and other pioneers

Such visionaries have often indirectly dealt with career development, or directly, as did Frank Parsons (1909). His visions reached far beyond career guidance/counselling itself. Based on 'Christianity and brotherly love', his societal vision was *Mutualism* (Parsons, 1894): he advocated for a balanced, just, and peaceful society. In the career development field, he is best known for his three-step matching approach to career guidance. This method resonated with the growing interest in scientific approaches to psychology during this period, including psychometrics. Parsons has been viewed as the father of career guidance and counselling, but other reformers had dealt with this question, earlier. We will return to this point, below.

Back in Boston, the Civic Service House was opened in 1901, during a period of massive immigration. The North End of Boston, formerly crammed with Irish refugees of the mid-century potato famine, became the refuge of Eastern Europeans in the 1870s and Italians in the 1880s: immigrants made up more than 75% of Boston's population. They lived in grimy tenement houses: whole families in a single room without sanitary facilities, working 10-12 hours a day, 6 days a week, in sweatshop factories, and in dangerous building trades, as noted by Zytowski (2001). Parsons and others in the Progressive Movement saw this as a waste of resources and as a societal plight. With this backdrop, a workers' institute was established, i.e., a continuing education center: the 'Breadwinner's Institute', renamed the 'Vocational Bureau of the Civic Service House' in 1908. It was privately funded, and its purpose was 'to aid young people in choosing an occupation, preparing themselves for it, finding an opening in the chosen field, and building up a career of efficiency and success.' Parsons worked at the Bureau less than a year, and wrote *Choosing a Vocation* (Parsons, 1909), published after his death. Several scholars have dealt with Parsons' life and influence on career guidance, including Mann (1950), Davis (1969), Gummere (1988), Jones (1994), Zytowski (2001), and Pope & Sveinsdottir (2005), some of whom viewed Parsons as a 'prophet', or as a 'crusader', no less.

### Vocophers

Parsons, however, was not the first to advance a notion of career guidance/vocational counselling. One of his predecessors was Lysander Richards, who published *Vocophy, The New Profession* (Richards, 1881): vocophers, i.e., vocational counsellors, career development facilitators, were to be the new profession. Aligned with this, Parsons sketched a training program for counsellors to be taken up by the Boston YMCA alongside planning the Bureau. Its purpose was "to fit young men to become vocational counselors and manage vocation bureaus in connection with YMCAs, schools, colleges and universities, and public systems, associations and businesses." Parsons died before these plans could be implemented. However, by 1909, teachers from each of Boston's 117 elementary and vocational schools were trained in vocational counseling. Topics included principles and methods of guidance, and occupational information. Several local progressive groups developed plans for placement services which, hopefully, would have a positive impact on juvenile delinquency. In short, Parsons was part of a broad progressive movement, as noted by Zytowski (2001). According to Herschenson (2006), many other people played an important role in the realization of the vision for better career guidance: Pauline Agassiz Shaw (financial support), Meyer Bloomfield (provided the venue for and subsequent direction of the Vocation Bureau), and Ralph Albertson (preparation of Parsons' s manuscript for posthumous publication).

Moreover, generations before the US-based Progressive Movement, both Robert Owen (1771-1858, Wales/Scotland), and Charles Fourier (1772-1837, France) had formulated societal utopian visions which included elements of career development. They were labelled, rather dismissingly, *Utopian Socialists* by their opponents, one of which, incidentally, was Karl Marx. Many other spiritual and social leaders could deserve mentioning. Below, however, with relation to career development in particular, we will limit ourselves to explore some of the visions of Owen and Fourier.

### Robert Owen

Robert Owen, manufacturer and societal reformer, is viewed as one of the most influential early 19th-century advocates of utopian socialism. One of his main points was the importance of educating the workers as an integral part of the social and industrial welfare programs in New Lanark Mills in Lanarkshire, Scotland. This was one of several such demonstration projects, which all had built-in elements of career development. Thus, Owen's vision was for "New Moral World" of happiness, enlightenment,

and prosperity through education, science, technology, communal living, and decent work. Owen envisioned that his utopian community would create a "superior social, intellectual and physical environment" based on his ideals of social reform (Owen, 1813). Owen also sponsored other experimental utopian communities, including New Harmony, Indiana, USA. Robert Owen's son Robert Dale Owen (1801-1877), joined by other siblings of Robert Owen, managed the day-to-day operation of this settlement, and he published widely on these matters, co-editing the *New-Harmony Gazette* along with Frances Wright (1795-1852), one of the few female activists in this field. Emancipation and social justice were pivotal concepts in these endeavors: career development, enlightenment, decent jobs, and healthy living conditions were seen as complementary aspects of emancipation and of social justice, for both men and women.

The New Harmony utopian community dissolved in 1827, but a string of Owenite communities in the United States emerged during the second half of the 1820s: between 1825 and 1830 more than a dozen such colonies were established in the United States, inspired by the ideas of Robert Owen. This movement antedated similar initiatives, inspired by Charles Fourier.

### Charles Fourier

Fourier saw work as passion (Fourier, 1848). This was radical idea in the early days of industrialization, in particular for workers. In his ideal world, jobs were vocations, and thus based on the interests and desires of the individual. There were incentives: unpleasant jobs would receive higher salaries, but, overall, mutual concern and cooperation were the pillars of societal success. He was obsessed with numbers: he believed that there were twelve common passions which resulted in 810 types of character, so the ideal phalanx would be a group of 1620 people, supplementing each other's talents and passions. He even designed such *Phalansteres*, i.e., buildings which would be the concrete framework for a just distribution of

products according to need; for assignment of functions according to individual faculties and inclinations; for constant change of functions and tasks, and for short working hours. Long working hours would take the passion out of work, as we well know. Career development was built into the variations of tasks, driven by passion, and thus a pivotal factor in terms of emancipation and of social justice, for both men and women. Fourier, incidentally, is credited for coining the idiom *feminism*.

Interestingly, and focusing again on the USA, Fourier's social views inspired a whole movement of intentional communities, as did Owen. One, in Ohio, was in fact called Utopia; they were to be found all over the USA. Indeed, modern times' Intentional Communities, of which there are thousands all over the world, may be seen as a further development of Fourier's inspiration. Some of his ideas have thus become mainstream; others failed, for instance his vision that one day there would be six million Phalansteres loosely ruled by a world Omniarch or a World Congress of Phalanxes (Beecher, 1986).

### Fall and rise

Did they fail, as Utopias tend to do? In some sense, the short answer is yes: the Owenites and most Fourier-inspired initiatives faded away after a few years of existence. Parsons' vision of Mutualism was never realised. But before they are dismissed as irrelevant shadows from the past, let us revisit some of their visions: emancipation, decent work, varied tasks, healthy living conditions, general education, free health services, gender equality, social justice. Such issues resonate with declarations of human rights, with goals of trade unions, with welfare policies, and with career guidance (IAEVG, 2017). Once they were viewed as extreme and radical: now, particularly in welfare states, these ideas are mainstream. They did not come about by the efforts of singular (wo)men: they are the result of combined struggles. We all stand on the shoulders of others, and we are nowhere the End of History (Fukuyama, 1989): new Utopias are under way, green ones.



Thomas More (1477-1535) told of a 'utopia', i.e., a perfect imaginary world, drawing upon the Greek ou-topos meaning 'no place' or 'nowhere'. It was a pun: the almost identical Greek word eu-topos means 'a good place'. Thus, utopian ideas have nowhere to go, or, on the contrary, they can find a place everywhere. This, too, is the case of new, perhaps not any longer so vastly utopian, visions of Green Guidance, i.e., sustainable career development. The author of these lines has been an advocate for such ideas over the last 25 years. Initially, Green Guidance and its emphasis on the environmental/sustainability impact of career choices was seen as radical, somewhat far-fetched, and, in short, utopian. Since then, gradually, sustainability has been accepted as an important and virtually mainstream concept, to a degree where, for example, Irish education across sectors cover sustainability as a pivotal component, including career education (NCGE (2021), and the United Nations have adopted the, by now, well-known 17 Goals of Sustainable Development (UN, 2015). These two examples, as part of programmes in many countries on ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) as promoted by Unesco (2018), point to the important links between social justice and sustainable career development. In this context, Green Guidance has moved from a marginal and extreme position to being a vital and, increasingly, mainstream component in developing the concept of future sustainable career development. This vision has been promoted by a number of scholars, notably Barham & Hall (1996); Di Fabio & Bucci (2016); Dimsits (2019); O'Donohoe (2020); Maggi (2019); NCGE (2009); NCGE (2021); Packer (2019); Plant (1996; 1999; 2003; 2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2014a; 2014b; 2015; 2020a; 2020b); Pouyaud & Guichard (2018); and Roe (2020).

On a more analytical note, introducing four aspects in terms of sustainable career development and career guidance, Packer (2019) has developed a 4-field analysis model to distinguish between Light Green and Dark Green

approaches, based on Watts (1996), thus differentiating between Radical, Progressive, Conservative, and Liberal approaches, and their respective practical consequences in terms of green guidance practices. In doing so, Packer (2019) helps to distinguish between 'light green' measures within the present society, versus a deeper, 'dark green' approach to rearrange societal structures. In these terms, Dobson (2007) makes a distinction between *environmentalism* and *ecologism*. Environmentalism 'argues for a managerial approach to environmental problems, secure in the belief that they can be solved without fundamental changes in present values or patterns of production and consumption' (ibid, p 2). Environmental approaches, in this view, would be seen as socio-politically conservative or liberal. Ecologism on the other hand, 'holds that a sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life' (ibid, p 3). Thus, ecologism is politically radical in nature. With this backdrop, the question remains whether Green Guidance should go Dark Green or Light Green? Thunberg (2019) would not be in doubt: radical approaches are required.

In a broader educational perspective, several scholars and organisations have dealt with environmental education (e.g., UNESCO, 2018), or from a sociological perspective in terms of developing Citizen Green (e.g. Mason, 2013). This points to the need for developing Green Career Education, as noted in examples from Canada, where climate changes and career education programs take their departure from the voices of children. On this basis Maggi (2019, p. 3) concludes that:

*'Students would learn about the careers of their own interest, the role that such work would play in the bigger picture of planetary health, and they would be counselled to reflect on how their professional choices could make this planet healthier.'*



## Conclusions & perspectives: green guidance and social justice

There is a growing awareness of the clash between senseless economic growth, and environmental/sustainability concerns (Plant, 2020a). Whereas economic growth in the narrow sense used to be the solution within a capitalistic mindset, it now creates as many problems. Jobless growth, a deterioration of the natural resources, and the undermining of workers' rights and wages: these are some of the present predicaments. Globalisation in terms of global trade with its long-distance transport to/from low-wage areas adds to the problem, as does mindless tourism, and industrialised farming and fishing, just to mention a few. In this situation, guidance must become part of the solution, rather than the problem. Social justice and career guidance are interdependent, and, though obviously embedded in social structures, even more profoundly linked to sustainability issues.

In these terms, an important link between social justice and Green Guidance is established. This aligns with Irving & Malik (2005) who argue that career choices,

individual as they may be, have implications beyond the individual, as they are linked to wider societal issues. Similarly, Hooley, Sultana & Thomsen (2018; 2019) take the social justice discourse further in terms of criticising neo-liberalism: without increased sustainability these will be no social justice. Green Guidance, environmental issues, climate changes, and social justice are critically interlinked. Ecojustice has been introduced to the career guidance field by Irving & Malik-Liévano (2019) to capture the links and tensions between environmental concerns and social justice issues.

Green Guidance moves career-decisions centre stage, to a higher note of personal commitment, societal involvement, and meaningfulness. In relation to globalisation, and to social justice, it places guidance in a central global position: environmental issues and sustainability concerns know no boundaries (Hulot, 2006; Monbiot, 2006; Stern, 2006). This is why it is so urgent that guidance workers and scholars make their contribution towards green changes, green career development, and a sustainable future: Green Guidance. Now, how utopian is that.

This article was first published in the [Journal of the UK National Institute for Career Education and Counselling \(NICEC\)](#). NCGE are grateful to the author and publisher for permission to reproduce here.

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