

FEATURE ARTICLE

'Green Guidance' for sustainability



As we look forward across the world to a new post –pandemic- normal world, the guidance community must take account of how our work can contribute to a more sustainable and Green agenda. In this article, Professor Peter Plant of Denmark describes and outlines the vital importance of Green Guidance, in developing sustainable practice and supporting access to “green” careers.

'Carbon Trader', 'Logistics Engineer', 'Recycling Coordinator', and many more such careers: current challenges will focus on sustainability issues and will bring a renewed relevance to career guidance. Green guidance is pivotal in future societal development.

What?

Career guidance, and perhaps in particular career education, has a golden-green chance to become even more relevant. It represents a window of opportunity in opening wider green perspectives in relation to career development (UNESCO, 2018), and to foster Citizen Green (Mason, 2013) to mention but two aspects of Green Guidance. Green career education brings climate changes and career guidance together in career activities which take their departure from the voices of children. One such Canadian example led to this conclusion (Maggi, 2019, p. 3):

'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. We cannot expect that everyone will want to become an environmentalist or an activist, but we can expect that the children of today will want a future for their own children, and therefore they will also want the best for our planet. We only need to show them how the two are connected through the work they will do.'

This is encouraging news in times where the tectonic plates of society are moving, and careerquakes, as pointed out by Watts (1996), are shattering traditional career concepts, and thus creating new challenges for career guidance counsellors. Green Guidance brings an urgent dimension to careers work, making it even more relevant to students

and other users of career services. This point has been supported by Ireland in its approach to Creative Guidance in Challenging Times (NCGE (2009)).

Why?

Whereas economic growth used to be the solution, it now seems to create 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 need for 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 its relation to career guidance are interdependent, and, though obviously embedded in social structures, even more profoundly linked to sustainability issues.

Green Guidance defines guidance, and especially career development, in terms of ecology rather than just economy. Environmental and sustainability concerns will be put to the forefront of many daily activities, including guidance. Guidance workers will have the difficult task of transforming this concept into daily practice - with a view to global perspectives. It does matter, now perhaps more than ever, what people do with their working lives: whether they produce lethal weapons, or simple water-pumps for irrigation. The need to make such choices is globally evident: pollution, overconsumption in some areas, and fundamental needs in others, the pressure on scarce water resources, overfishing, global warming, ozone holes, etc, the list is unending. Greta Thunberg, for one, has mobilized youth, globally, in relation to pressing environmental issues (Thunberg, 2019). The United Nations has highlighted these issues in their 17 renowned goals for sustainable development (UN, 2015).

How?

First it might be helpful to establish some principles for Green Guidance:

- Guidance should take into account and create awareness of the environmental impact of career choices and career development;
- Guidance should play an active role in establishing training and education opportunities with a positive contribution in terms of sustainability;
- Informational materials on career options should include environmental aspects;
- Guidance results should be measured, not only by an economic yardstick, but also by green accounting, i.e. by relating sustainability goals to guidance activities;
- Guidance theories and practices should address broader sustainability career development issues in addition to individualistic approaches.

Incidentally, these principles align with those of the ILO Green Jobs Program (ILO, 2015) in linking sustainability and green economies to decent jobs:

'The Green Jobs Programme signals ILO's commitment to act on climate change and to promote resource efficient and low-carbon societies. Decent work is a cornerstone for effective policies to green economies for achieving sustainable development. This implies that efforts to reduce adverse environmental impact must lead to socially just outcomes with employment opportunities for all.'



Secondly, inspirational lists of green careers might help to clarify the points made above. This is by no means an exhaustive directory, but you get the drift:

- green activist working with neighbourhood ecological gardening
- green greenkeeper with a no-pesticide approach to maintenance of sports grounds
- green lawyer working with environmental cases
- green transport engineer work with non-pollutant means of traffic and transport
- green farmer working with ecological practice in fields and stables
- green painter using non-toxic and degradable paints
- green builders using natural insulation materials
- green wind-turbine designer
- green fashion designer
- green hairdresser...etc.

The USA-based Career Onestop Centres present some 200 green careers for a start (see <https://www.careeronestop.org/GreenCareers/ExploreGreenCareers/explore-green-careers.aspx>). In short, most careers could be seen as potentially green. A variety of new green career options are under way: 'Carbon Trader'; 'Logistics Engineer'; and 'Recycling Coordinator', to mention a few from the Career Onestop list.

More?

Green Guidance may be seen as questioning mainstream ideas, concepts, and theories in the career guidance field. Green Guidance is based on the understanding that guidance should build on visions of sustainability. Over the years, the author of these lines has fostered such views (see Plant, 1996; Plant, 1999; Plant, 2003; Plant, 2007a; Plant, 2007b; Plant, 2008; Plant 2014a;

Plant 2014b; Plant 2015; Plant, 2020). This does not make the argument redundant, but all the more pressing. Pioneering the concept, Green Guidance was initially seen as a radical and marginal idea. Decades later, in its urgency, it is gradually being recognized, and frequently linked to social justice. It questions current mainstream values, such as the link between (individual) career development and economic growth as a yardstick for societal achievements. In doing so, it puts career guidance in a pivotal societal position in terms of sustainability issues (Packer, 2019).

Utopia?

Does this sound utopian? Perhaps to some. But then, new approaches would often pose a threat to older ones. Thomas More's Utopia dates back more than 500 years (More, 1516). Frank Parsons was a practical utopian: his societal vision was 'Mutualism' i.e. a balanced, just, and peaceful society based on 'brotherly love' (Parsons, 1894). Fourier (1848) commended the phalanstère; Owen (1813) improved living and working conditions for workers. Such utopians were labelled, rather dismissingly, Utopian Socialists by their opponents, one of which was Karl Marx, by the way. But new utopians are essential: green ones.

Green Guidance is pro-active, questioning, probing, reflexive, and human-centred in the real sense: it moves career-decisions to a higher note of personal commitment, societal involvement, and meaningfulness. Moreover, especially in relation to globalisation, and to social justice, it places guidance in a central global position: environmental issues and sustainability concerns know no boundaries (Monbiot, 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.



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Professor, Dr Peter Plant has worked in the field of career education and counselling since 1974 in schools, in the employment service, and in universities. He has worked as a researcher in many European projects on guidance, as a consultant to the EU-Commission, and to the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN). He is active in rural policies, the chairman of the local village council, and the chairman of a regional EU rural fund in his home country, Denmark.

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