

# A PRACTITIONER'S **GUIDE** TO UNCHARTED WATERS OF CAREER COUNSELLING,

A CRITICAL REFLECTION  
PERSPECTIVE



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**A Practitioner's Guide to Uncharted Waters  
of Career Counselling,  
a Critical Reflection Perspective**

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## GUIDANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY - PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE VALUES IN CAREER GUIDANCE

Miriam Dimsits, Helena Košťálová

As career guidance practitioners, we often forget how influential a profession in career guidance is. We see many kinds of people and try to help them think about themselves and the society in which they live. We make an impact on young peoples' lives that hopefully helps them make good and meaningful choices along their career paths. Career guidance as a profession helps to shape individuals' values, ethics and independent thinking – it is a way of changing society and the global community step by step.

Career guidance as a profession arose in around 1900 in response to significant societal challenges when many people started moving from the countryside to the city, or other countries and continents with the hope of finding jobs, prosperity or a way out of poverty. Frank Parsons, originally an engineer, who after personal experiences with unemployment and the financial depression in America in late the 1800s, was led by thoughts of social reformation and social justice to establish the first known 'vocation bureau' in the world. In the city of Boston, his vocation bureau helped newly arrived immigrants to find their perfect match with the industries of the city (Brewer 1942, Plant 2014). At the core of this vocation bureau was career guidance, where practitioners sought to find solutions for societal problems on an individual level. Career guidance practitioners throughout history have tried to solve intersectional challenges in modern society, and in many ways, they have succeeded in their task (Watts 1996).

Now we face a new societal task, an environmental challenge dealing with the livelihood of our global community. If we fail to deal with this task as an international community, it will have a tremendous impact on billions of lives. Again, career guidance could be the most important means to turn this negative spiral around and help find new solutions in the intersection between society and the individual.

### STOP AND THINK

- Do you agree with what John Donne said – that 'no man is an island'? Who is part of your island?
- What challenges do career practitioners face today?



Professor Peter Plant at the University of South-Eastern Norway has proposed a concept for a shift in guidance policy and practice called, *Green Guidance* (Plant 2014). Through *Green Guidance*, Plant wishes to stress the importance and responsibility of the career guidance practitioner in promoting green values in guidance. Here, he draws on the historical account of Frank Parsons' (who is considered the founder of career guidance) ideas of a profession based on societal responsibility. Plant argues, that in Parsons' spirit, a profession with built-in social justice ethics is necessarily concerned with environmental matters, too, and would have been if the profession had been founded today with the environmental knowledge we currently have (Ibid.). The practitioner practising *green guidance* should aid the counselee in finding *green* career paths, jobs, careers, that have positive environmental outputs (Ibid.).

However, an elaboration of the position of *green guidance* can be made here. If we only view our global challenges of climate and ecology as *environmental problems* or as matters of *green*, we might risk not understanding how our global challenges have emerged and how they can be solved. If we only pin environmental challenges to a specific segment of society, namely 'nature', we risk failing to grasp the intersectional nature of environmental problems fully.

The concept that can be most helpful here is the one on everyone's lips. It was coined in UN policy in the 1960s, then moved to the centre of discussion in the 1980s with the UN Report, *Our Common Future*, also known as the Brundtland Report. Since 2015 it has been a buzzword under the 2030 UN 17 goals: The concept of 'sustainability' (UNORC 2015/UNWCED 1987). Sustainability as a concept embraces the societal challenge and the solution as an intersectional one, where the needs of people, nature and economy have to be met at the same time (Elkington 1997). It is a concept that inspires global consciousness in all choices, even career choices.

If we look at the concept of sustainability and sustainable development as it was presented in 1987 by Gro Harlem Brundtland and the UN Commission gathered to investigate and address global environmental challenges, they define sustainable development as '*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*' (UNWCED 1987). This definition has no mentioning of nature or ecology but frames people and people's needs as pivotal. It calls for an ethical awareness in our dealing with our own current needs that we do so in a manner that people of the future, people we have not yet met or will never meet, will have the same

opportunities for meeting their own needs, as we have today. The definition is a call for inter-generational solidarity and also a plea for ethical behaviour, that does not rely on direct experience or feelings connected to 'another person's pain, but a call for an ethics of duty, relying on reasoning and categoric imperatives' (see Levinas 1991/1980, and Wood 2007).

What does all this have to do with young peoples' careers and career decision-making?

The concept of sustainability helps us to see our intersectional connectedness with nature, other people, society and the economy. It helps us to see that we are not isolated individuals with a free choice of either choosing or not choosing, a sustainable career. Our so-called free choices in light of sustainability are always firmly tied with responsibility and consequence concerning nature, society, community and the economy. Our free choices can, over time, limit our freedom, or as the definition of sustainability suggests, our 'free choosing' can potentially reduce the freedom and the quality of future generations' livelihoods.

### So how can we connect this understanding of sustainability to career guidance?

We suggest that career guidance practitioners enable career development for individuals striving towards a secure and meaningful livelihood without compromising future generations' access to a secure livelihood and a meaningful career path. We thereby propose a definition for a practice called *sustainable guidance* that builds on the definition of the Brundtland Report.

**Sustainable guidance is, therefore, 'A career guidance practice that supports career development, which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'**

Looking at the UN17 goals, we see 17 target areas that are all connected are prerequisites of each other or are linked together in a domino-effect sequence. Career guidance as a profession and practice targets goals such as quality education, reducing inequality, ensuring gender equality, working for decent jobs and so forth. But looking at all the targets, we also see 17 challenges that young people today need to familiarise themselves with, also in terms of making individual career choices. The 17 goals or challenges could serve as beacons of personal career development, thereby supporting and guiding the specific career path. By choosing one or more of the 17 challenges to engage in, you can choose an

What changes could be introduced at your school to make it more sustainable? Ask the students for their ideas.



Which 3 values would you like to pass on to future generations?

education and career path that involves working to solve various sustainability challenges. Both in the present and the future, we need people to think about how they can train, choose an education path, and choose a job that addresses one of the 17 challenges represented in the UN Sustainability Goals. This is, of course, a central task for *sustainable career guidance*, where information, discussion and facilitated reflection on these global challenges are essential. This practice, therefore, can support individual decision-making in terms of a career path that addresses and impacts sustainable change.

Below, we have listed several examples of types of exercises that exemplify sustainable career guidance.

### Jobs for future

Material: cards, whiteboard, paper, pens

Aim: foster critical thinking and creativity; broaden horizons; draw attention to social responsibility and sustainability; show students that everyone can contribute to improving these issues.

#### Part one:

Before you start, you need to create cards with the names of the following professions: Aquaponic fish farmer, Organic voltaic engineer, Residence manager, SmartCube technician, Biofilm installer (you can find brief information about the professions below).

1. Divide the students into groups. Each group receives one card.
2. In groups, students discuss the following questions and prepare posters:
  - a) In your opinion, what is the job description? What does the person do?
  - b) Why is the profession needed? How can he/she help (people, the planet, animals...)?
  - c) What kind of knowledge, qualities or skills does the person need to practice the job properly?
3. Let the students present their ideas, group by group. The members of other groups can add their thoughts.
4. The teacher sticks the posters on the wall.
5. Finally, the teacher wraps-up this part and adds more information, if needed.

#### Part two

1. Let the students brainstorm 'what makes me angry' or 'what worries me' (e.g. food is wasted in the school canteen, people buy goods they do not need and send them back, children are involved in the production of some goods, we don't understand why we have to learn certain things... etc.).
2. Ask the students to choose at least one of the problems and think of a profession that does not yet exist and could solve the problem.
3. Students can create a poster – information about the profession, including a job description and the skills needed.
4. With the students, you can discuss whether they see a link to social responsibility (Will the others also find this profession useful? How many people will benefit from this?) or let the students 'vote' for the most ... (helpful, funny, popular, innovative...) profession.

Tip: Part one and part two can be organised as two independent activities.

Part two can be organised in pairs, small groups or individually. You can link the brainstorming to a topic of your subject (e.g. arts, science, language...) or you can ask students to make a home reading before the brainstorming to provide them with some background information. The posters can be 'paper' or digital (you can use infographics or online boards, e.g. <https://www.canva.com/>, <https://padlet.com/dashboard> etc.)

### ORGANIC VOLTAIC ENGINEER

To meet the needs of people living in the modern world, we need energy. However, the current method of generating electricity is unsustainable in the long run. We need to increase the efficiency of energy, using the forces and non-toxic resources of nature in a way that is healthful and renewable. Organic voltaic engineering focuses on creating this kind of energy, considers all forms of non-polluting, naturally-sourced energy, seeks the replacement of toxic elements of energy production, storage and use with non-toxic substitutes to existing infrastructure and works in collaboration with others around the globe to minimize the environmental impact.

### RESIDENCE MANAGER

Because many homes are not affordable for younger families, they will choose to purchase a larger home to share with extended family or friends. Co-housing arrangements may also include the shared ownership of one or more vehicles. Co-habiting people share the mortgage and the use of the property, and the residence manager organises everything. He/she ensures that the group's bills are paid

on time, and the vehicles are running well. He/she is also there to help mediate and solve interpersonal problems.

### SMARTCUBE TECHNICIAN

90% of goods traded in today's world travels by sea. Several innovations have extended the options to track packages through 'smart' shipping containers—SmartCubes—that can be tracked by shippers and recipients. These systems are automated. However, moving millions of containers through a port still means that problems can arise. A SmartCube technician works with a tracking system to make sure that shipments arrive at the shipment point and the destination.

### BIOFILM INSTALLER

In 2030 technologies may exist that allow people to process sewage and waste at home. This is made possible through biofilms, substances formed when many living cells stick together to create a living surface. A biofilm installer has a significant role in building and retrofitting energy-efficient buildings. They might fit bathtubs with a film that feeds on mildew or install a 'living wall' in a bedroom that improves air quality. They also educate people about renovation options for their homes.

### AQUAPONIC FISH FARMER

Populations of wild fish are disappearing. New methods like aquaponics will step in to replace the fish we can no longer catch in the wild. Aquaponics combines fish farming with gardening, where plants grow over the water, covering its surface, while fish live below. The plants return oxygen to the water, and the fish produce waste that fertilizes the plants. Aquaponic fish farmers will be able to set up operations almost anywhere. This system is small-scale and needs fewer resources and space than traditional fish farming.

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