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

Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland: these are the Nordic countries, the Five Swans. The next IAEVG conference in August 2006 will take place in Copenhagen, Denmark and Malmö, Sweden. This article gives a glimpse into some Nordic guidance issues

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. A common and very open labour market has existed among the Nordic countries since the 1950s: for Nordic citizens, no work permit, extra health insurance or even passport is needed to move from one Nordic country to the other. Such regulations were implemented decades before the European Union pursued similar procedures.

Philosophical basis

The Nordic guidance professionals are organised in NFUE (Nordic Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, which in turn is a member of IAEVG, the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance). As part of developing professional standards, all professional guidance associations comply with (national) ethical guidelines, some of which are inspired by IAEVG's Ethical Standards (1995). This is the case in Iceland where national ethical guidelines have been developed on this basis, supplemented with inspiration from other Nordic ethical guidelines. Sweden, for example, has adopted a wide-ranging set of ethical guidelines (see www.vagledarforeningen.org), which urge Swedish career guidance professionals to be proactive and stand up for the weak and the vulnerable in the Swedish society. Guidance as social engineering is the key concept here: in Swedish, 'Kompensatorisk vägledning', i.e. guidance as societal compensation. Interestingly, in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, outreach youth guidance services based in each municipality render a radical version of this societal compensation model. In the Danish case, youth are contacted twice a year until their 19th birthday if they are not covered by other guidance services. This highly proactive guidance offer walks the thin line between providing a societal safety net for the vulnerable on the one hand, and a societal control system on the other: a conflicting set of professional roles. Societal compensation and control walk hand in hand. This is typical for Nordic

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guidance, which is part and parcel of what had been labelled the 'Nanny State' by its adversaries, but which is known as the Welfare State in the Nordic countries.

3-D
Three dimensions of guidance can be distinguished in Nordic guidance which seems to be expanding in all three directions: length, width, depth. With the advent of the concept of lifelong education came lifelong guidance, i.e. the notion that guidance reoccurs during many phases of the lifespan, including the 3rd age (Plant, 2000a). The concept of lifewide guidance is underpinned by the growing demand for guidance intervention into many life spheres: how far into therapy should guidance go? How much of a holistic mentoring role should the guidance practitioner take on? How broad a range of topics: anorexia, suicide, as well as career development? And finally, the depth of guidance: how deep should guidance dig in psychological terms? How personal or rather intimate should guidance become? These are all questions that the Nordic guidance professionals are struggling with in order to identify the specific nature of guidance in a modern, complex society.

The Nordic countries have moved along different paths in terms of developing careers guidance activities: the professional background, the focus, and the scope of guidance differ, even though a common Rogerian client-centred approach is adopted in most cases. These days, client-centred theory and practice is often supplemented with a constructivist approach (Plant, 1997; Peavy, 1998; McMahon & Patton, 2006). By contrast, trait-and-factor based testing-and-matching routines are uncommon, except in the few (but growing) private recruiting and outplacement companies.

Guidance Policies
Educational and vocational guidance, nowadays commonly labelled ‘careers guidance’ or (support for) ‘career development’, plays a pivotal role in modern societies such as the Nordic countries. Modernity, in these terms, has been characterised as ‘the knowledge society’, ‘the hyper complex society’, and even the ‘risk society’. Such concepts reveal the fluid and transitional societal conditions which are part and parcel of modernity: all societies are under pressure in terms of globalisation of the economy, migration, the weakening of traditional societal structures, etc. The ensuing demands on educational and labour market policies are evident in current concepts such as flexibility and mobility. If people are to navigate in this volatile environment, guidance/counselling/coaching will move from the periphery to the centre of education and work: people are expected to manage their own tailored learning paths, their personal career development, and their portfolio of personal skills and capacities in an ever-shifting learning and working environment. This is life-long learning: formal, informal, and non-formal learning. Life-long guidance is an integrated part of this development. It starts in schools (e.g. via portfolios and developmental guidance interviews with pupils) and continues with the validation of prior learning (‘real competencies’; see e.g. www.realkompetanse.no) until the gradual withdrawal in the Third Age (Plant, 2000a). As the tectonic plates of society move, career quakes occur more frequently: guidance helps people manage their careers in lifelong, and a lifewide perspective (Plant, 2001). This is the short version of the rationale for the pivotal role of guidance in modernity and complexity. Yet, in many countries, including most of the Nordic countries, guidance policies are formulated in separate structures (typically the Ministries of Education and Ministries of Labour which issue separate guidelines), where careers guidance often is seen as an adjunct to educational, labour market, social, industrial or economic policies (see e.g. Sultana & Watts, 2006).

Staff and Professional Background
Guidance workers, in many countries outside the Nordic ones, are often psychologists. Not so in most Nordic countries, except in Finland where the guidance specialists in the public employment service are precisely that, known as Work Psychologists (Arbetspsykologer). In most other cases in the Nordic countries, guidance staff are based in educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities), thus often combining a teaching and a guidance role. Thus, a pedagogical/learning approach runs through most Nordic careers guidance. This is the case in school-based guidance in Norway, Iceland, Finland where careers teachers perform the dual role of teaching and guidance. Denmark subscribed to this model from 1976 to 2004 when new independent cross-municipal guidance units (Ungdommens Uddannelsesvejledning) and
regional guidance centres (Studievalg) were established. The debate is still on whether in fact this was a wise move, and what may have been lost in this process in terms of proximity and availability of guidance in schools, and in terms of the quality of careers education in schools. Sweden, already in the 1970s, abandoned the teacher-based model, which was known as Career Choice Teachers (Yrkesvalslämare), in favour of guidance specialists attached to each school, known as Study and Vocational Advisors (Studie- och Yrkesvägledare, SYV). Most guidance teachers hold a post-graduate diploma in guidance (30-60 ECTS points), in some cases (e.g. Iceland & Sweden) obtained through partly IT-supported distance education. But some parts of the guidance system are staffed with ‘barefoot counsellors’, i.e. guidance staff with no or sparse formal qualifications in careers guidance. Very few guidance professionals hold a Master’s Degree in Guidance or a Master’s Degree in Education, and only a small elite holds a Doctorate.

Linkages

Links between different parts of the guidance system reflect different levels of commitment and intensity, on a scale from
1. information (mutual knowledge about guidance offers elsewhere)
2. co-operation (working together on specific tasks)
3. co-ordination (bringing different services into line)
4. integration (merging services)

In the Nordic countries, few examples of level 4 linkages exist (apart from the above-mentioned One-Stop-Centres/Guidance Houses), where as categories 1-2-3 are more common - in that order. In terms of this 1-4 taxonomy, the ambition of e.g. national co-ordinating bodies, such as R.U.E. and its successor, the National Forum mostly lie in categories 1 and 2. On a regional level guidance staff and systems may work together in co-ordinated efforts (category 3) in e.g. establishing career fairs or bridging/taster courses between different parts of the educational system. Such efforts are often backed by regional guidance co-ordinating bodies (e.g. Denmark: VFU, i.e. Regional Guidance Committee) or School-Work boards (e.g. Norway: Partnerskap Skole-Arbeidsliv). In the Danish case, the very range of different careers guidance offers in a variety of administrative settings pose a challenge to such co-ordination, especially in the adult guidance sector. At its best, the great number of guidance offers form a patchwork pattern; but more often the picture is like a jigsaw puzzle with a few odd parts.

European linkages are numerous: multilateral guidance links with Nordic participation or leadership are formed as part of EU-programmes (Leonardo, Grundtvig, Equal, etc). Such projects have a developmental scope, aimed at specific issues or target groups. Some are aimed at the guidance community itself in terms of e.g. enriching the links between practice and research in guidance (see www.guidance-europe.org). Other examples include targeted guidance for low-paid workers (Workplace Guidance, see www.gla.ac.uk/wg); guidance to prevent educational dropout (Spiderweb, see www.ru.is/english/rannsoknir/spiderweb.asp); guidance in the 3rd age (Third Age Guidance, see www.gla.ac.uk/tag); guidance for refugees and migrant workers (Refugee Guidance, see www.gla.ac.uk/rg); Guidance, Ethnicity and Gender, see www.celi.dk; or the use of ICT in guidance (EGA, see www.guidanceforum.net).

Conclusions

Career guidance is widespread in the Nordic countries. It has had a long history, ever since psychometric testing emerged in the 1880s in Denmark with German inspiration (Plant, 1996). At that time, old-fashioned guidance within the family became inadequate in the emerging industrial age: son could no longer follow father in his career footsteps, nor could daughter expect to follow mother in hers. After a long period of directive, psychometric and test-based guidance, modern, client-centred (and in many cases, school-based) guidance emanated in the 1970s. Thus, most guidance needs are currently met, and many guidance offers are available in most educational and labour market settings. Guidance for young people in particular has a strong base with a long tradition. Adult guidance, on the other hand, has traditionally been aimed at the unemployed and those in need of rehabilitation. Now there is a growing recognition that the present workforce need life-long, and indeed, life-wide guidance, including guidance in the actual workplace (Plant, 2003; 2006). Thus, for example, both the Swedish adult guidance effort (Kunskapslyftet), the Norwegian
Competence Reform (known as Realkompetanse, i.e. validation of formal and non-formal qualifications), the Danish Realkompetence project, and, on a more poetic note, The Joy of Learning (Läringens Glädje, Finland) all contain a pivotal adult guidance component.

Professionalisation of guidance staff is uneven in the Nordic countries: it ranges from the highly skilled Arbetspsykologer (FIN), through the specialised Swedish SYV-konsulenter with a university degree, to nothing at all - and often with no requirements in terms of a professional background, apart from that of a teacher or social worker, to mention two typical professional backgrounds. Guidance in the Nordic countries is not a highly regulated profession, and no accreditation or certification procedures are in place to protect the profession: it is an open and diverse field. Yet the concept of accreditation has been promoted by the guidance association in e.g. Iceland.

So far, only Denmark among the Nordic countries has had a National Council for Educational and Vocational Guidance or a similar national cross-sectoral guidance policy forum. This was replaced in 2004 by a National Forum on guidance across sectors. The very essence of guidance is to reach across sectors and sustain transitions in peoples’ lives. Thus guidance is pivotal in modern, complex societies where reflexivity and career planning are crucial, not only for the individual, but for the society as a whole. In these terms, Nordic guidance is a typical example of the necessity of guidance in complex modern societies which need guidance (coaching, mentoring) as a support mechanism to sustain social coherence. Thus, guidance has changed with societal changes. It is no accident that for instance constructivist (McMahon & Patton, 2006; Peavy, 2005; Plant, 1997) and philosophically (Hansen, 2000) based guidance methods are developed currently, as opposed to trait/factor oriented testing approaches: testing is and was based on the idea of a rather stable job-and-person matching exercise. This makes little sense in a volatile and versatile labour market in which the societal tectonic plates move fast. Current constructivist and philosophical guidance approaches, on the other hand reflect the urge of each individual to make meaning out of his/her life in a state of flux and instability. Thus, career development these days is much more like a narrative, a personal story to be told and retold in a lifelong, lifewide and lifedeep perspective. This is the basis of Nordic 3-D guidance.

References
Career Guidance in European Public Employment Services

Professor Ronald Sultana (Malta) and Professor Tony Watts (UK) have recently completed a study for the European Commission of career guidance in Public Employment Services across Europe. Here they present the main results.

In many countries, many of the main career guidance services are located within Public Employment Services (PES). This is particularly true for adults; but in some cases it is true for young people too. In many countries, substantial public resources are invested in these services. They accordingly have a significant influence on the extent and nature of the career guidance services available to citizens. Yet the place of career guidance within PES has always been somewhat problematic, in two respects:

* The tension between the tendency for career guidance to address longer-term goals, linked to lifelong learning and sustained employability, and the pressures for PES to focus on short-term goals, seeking to get unemployed individuals into employment (and therefore off benefit) as quickly as possible.
* The tension between PES guidance activities and their gatekeeping and policing functions in relation to public resources.

The relationship between career guidance and Public Employment Services is therefore a matter of significant policy concern. An opportunity to explore this relationship within an international perspective was recently offered by a study carried out for the European Commission. The study covered the 25 Member-States of the European Union, plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. It had three parts: a literature review; a questionnaire survey; and 7 country visits. Career guidance offered within PES is reviewed in three categories:

* Career guidance elements within the personalised employment services applied to unemployed clients. These elements include relationship-building, diagnostic assessment, making occupational/educational suggestions, and action planning.
* Specialised career guidance provision. Some PES offer this; some do not.
* Other provision, notably providing career and labour market information, and providing services to students. The extent and nature of these services varies considerably across countries.

Four trends were particularly notable:

* Towards self-service provision, both through use of ICT and through the reorganisation of office space.
* Towards tiering of service, to distinguish different levels of service (self-service, brief staff-assisted, intensive case-managed) for different categories of clients.
* Towards decentralisation of services (though with some counter-moves to produce greater national coherence).
* Towards outsourcing of services.

Issues identified included:

* Quality assurance and impact measurement.
* Role tensions – e.g. between customer-oriented services and organisational pressures to seek particular outcomes (notably speedy entry into employment).
* The need to foreground more strongly the identity of career guidance within PES.
* The need to clarify the role of PES in relation to national lifelong learning strategies.

The report (Career Guidance in Europe’s Public Employment Services: Trends and Challenges by R.G. Sultana and A.G. Watts) is published by the European Commission (ref. CE-V/1-06-001-EN-C). It can be ordered from cora.dewulf@cec.eu.int or corinne.couez@cec.eu.int. Downloadable from: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/employment_strategy/pub_empl_services_en.htm
Book review

Constructivist approaches view career as a holistic concept in which work and personal life are intertwined: individuals are experts in their own lives, actively constructing their careers. This comprehensive book
* provides a theoretical background to constructivism
* outlines a range of constructivist approaches to career counselling
* gives examples of the practical application of constructivism.

Constructivists think that reality is a construction. Or rather that we all have different constructs. This has deep implications for career guidance and counselling: career guidance practice must move from its previous positivist world view, with its massive tests, the counsellor as expert, and the client as a passive responder, to more holistic constructivist approaches. This is what this important book is about. It is an essential read: illuminating and highly stimulating. The contributors, many of whom are prominent IAEVG members, are from all over the world, from Australia to Finland, including: Mary McMahon, Wendy Patton, Mark Watson, Nancy Arthur, Hazel Reid, Norman Amundson, Kobus Maree, Maisa Molepo, Elizabeth Grant, Joseph Johnston, Judi Miller, Timo Spangar, Polly Parker, and Heidi Viljamaa.

Conferences
Latin American Congress of Counsellors Formation, Venezuela, July 25-28, 2006

International IAEVG Conference, August 23-25, 2006, Copenhagen, Denmark
*Crossover: Guidance in Transition*

The concept of crossover exists in art (fusion music), in food (fusion kitchen), and in other cultural phenomena, such as language, ethnicity, and even gender. In a global society, cultures mix, they cross. In career guidance and career development, crosscurrents and crossover phenomena take many forms, and guidance faces the challenges of becoming increasingly:

- cross-cultural: across cultural barriers, multicultural
- cross-national: across national boundaries
- cross-medial: across different media and various forms of ICT
- cross-clusive: across social inclusion/exclusion, in terms of gender, ethnicity & age
- cross-methodological: across and beyond well-established guidance methods
- cross-theoretical: across and beyond well-established guidance and career development theories

The IAEVG International Conference, Copenhagen, Denmark AUG 23-25, 2006 takes place on both sides of the Öresund, the stretch of water that links Denmark and Sweden. Two days, Day 1 & 3, are devoted to keynotes and workshops in Copenhagen; one day, Day 2, is a day for study visits to career guidance centres, projects, activities, HRD on both sides of Öresund – focused on crossover guidance. For more details, including conference application form and Copenhagen accommodation, visit the conference website: [http://www.iaevgconference2006.dk](http://www.iaevgconference2006.dk)

International IAEVG Conference, September 4-6, 2007, Padova, Italy
*Guidance and Diversity: Research and Applications*

The theme Guidance and Diversity will cover theoretical reflections, comparative issues, research models, and guidance practice on how to integrate and to handle diversity in educational and vocational guidance. Four main sub-topics: Realities of Diversity; Challenges for guidance practice; Challenges for employment systems; Diversity and new paradigms in guidance theory development, practice and training
Conference languages: Italian, English, Spanish, and French in case of enough participants. Call for papers by December 1, 2006. This 2007 conference will include the IAEVG General Assembly and will be preceded by a collaborative IAEVG-SVP-NCD Activity Symposium on September 3, 2007. Organiser SIO (Società Italiana per l'Orientamento) and by the University of Padova. Information and contact: Salvatore Soresi, University of Padova. E-mail: salvatore.soresi.iaevg2007@unipd.it

International Conference, 18-20 September, 2008, Buenos Aires, Argentina
‘The Role of Guidance in Achieving Social Ecology and Ecological Economy’
Conference website www.archipelago.org.ar or contact alopezal@salvador.edu.ar or info@fundovo.com.ar

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