

SUSTAINABLE CAREER GUIDANCE: LEARNING TO LIVE AND LEARNING TO CHANGE THE WORLD

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Young people might be losing their vocational hope

Many young people in Denmark and globally are deeply preoccupied with the sustainability crisis. In Denmark we have had the Fridays for Future demonstrations inspired by the school strike of the young Swedish activist, Greta Thunberg. Young people were for one day quitting school, for the more important task of saving the planet, so there would be an actual fundament of existence and livelihood, where one could participate in further education and create opportunity for actual career paths to tread. A symbolic act that nevertheless left an important message for politicians, legislators and the older generations as such, that 'without action now, we will lose hope and engagement in education and future career paths'.

Reports performed by the UN Environment Programme along with the UN unit for climate change, the UNFCCC, show that not only are the young generation the most concerned and preoccupied population group with the sustainability crisis (V. D. Hazel 2019), it is also the population group with the least hope and confidence that the crisis will be resolved (Hart, Fisher, & Kimiagar, 2014; Ojala, 2012; Sanson, Van Hoorn, & Burke, 2019).

When young people are losing their hope and engagement in education and labor market, career guidance practitioners engage themselves in trying to understand the background of these sentiments and look into ways of supporting young people in this situation.

Sparking young people's hope and engagement in education and labor market – a main task for career guidance

A main target group in career guidance historically has been and currently still are *young people at risk*, the risk being, early school leaving, not gaining a minimum set of professional competence, eventually leading to exclusion from the labour market, poverty and a low quality of life. If this risk is not being addressed it can potentially challenge the economic and social coherence of the entire society and of course jeopardize the autonomy and freedom of individuals to live good lives (Eurofound 2012, Quintini and Martin 2006). Different approaches in career guidance to solve this multifaceted challenge in terms of individual, collective and more contextual and structural approaches have been sought out and put into practice (Cedefop 2021, OECD 2016).

It is fair to say that probably not all young people are discouraged about the sustainability crisis, maybe there are groups who are feeling optimistic about solving the sustainability crisis, and furthermore there are young people who are not engaged in this subject matter at all.

The professional response is in this regard intricate. Which methodologies would be the most ethically and professionally relevant in terms of addressing discouragement regarding the condition of the planet, and which would be relevant addressing optimistic or even ignorant attitudes regarding sustainability?

Green guidance and sustainability

Emeritus Professor II at the University of South Eastern Norway, Peter Plant, coined the concept *green guidance* as an appropriate response from the career guidance field to the changing and critical ecological situation in 1996 (Plant 1996). By *green guidance* Plant wishes to stress the importance and responsibility of the career guidance practitioner in promoting green values in guidance. Here he also draws on the historic account of Frank Parsons' first known vocation bureau and his ideas of a profession based on societal responsibility. Plant argues, that in Parsons' spirit, a profession with a built-in social justice ethics is bound to be preoccupied with environmental matters too, and would have been, if the profession were founded today with the environmental knowledge we have today (Plant 2014). The practitioner practising *green guidance* should aid the counselee in finding *green* career paths, jobs, careers, that have positive environmental outputs (Plant 2014, 2020). Other scholars (see e.g. Guichard 2013, Irving 2014; Guichard, J., & Di Fabio, A. 2015; Di Fabio, A. 2016), in the career guidance field have contributed to this discussion through the years all with a shared idea of career guidance as a key instrument for bridging people, planet and social justice.

Since 2015 the concept of *sustainability* has been on everyone's lips as the name tag of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG15), the 17 goals we need to reach by 2030 (UNORG 2015, UNWCED 1987). Sustainability as a concept has emerged from the natural sciences and was later appropriated by political discussion in the realm of UN policy in the 1960'es. The concept then moved to the center of discussion in the 1980'es with the UN Report, *Our common Future*, also known as the Brundtland Report. Sustainability as concept embraces the societal challenge, and the solution, as an intersectional one, where the needs of people, nature and economy must be met at the same time (Elkington 1997).

The Brundtland Report defines sustainability and sustainable development as a "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UNWCED 1987).

Sustainable career guidance

I will argue that the concept of sustainability has a certain richness that could inspire the career guidance field. The definition does not have a particular mentioning of nature and ecology but frames the *needs of the living* as pivotal, and is an outcry for feelings of solidarity between generations. Sustainability thereby presents itself as a holistic concept, that stresses the balance of living together and sharing the same planet and resources.

Following the argument of Danish nature philosopher, Mickey Gjerris, who argues that the core of environmental problems can be found in man's view on nature, the anthropocene worldview. The anthropocene worldview has been predominant in the western world, founded and

legitimized in central texts and ideas in the judeo-christian cultural realm, and covers ideas of man being in the elevated center of god's creation and set to rule over everything else (Gjerris 2019). Anthropocene man has so to speak compartmentalized the world into ruling areas and has separated himself from these compartments (ibid.). Hence the anthropocene worldview, according to Gjerris, has created an ontological decoupling, that has misled man in his experience and cognition of the world to think that he is elevated and detached from the world, when he in fact is part of the world in intrinsic an intricate ways as merely one of nature's creatures. The human race needs to realise that we do not just live *off* nature but *with* nature, and as Gjerris further claims, if we only view our global challenges of climate and ecology as *environmental problems* or as matters of *green*, we are at risk of not understanding how our global challenges have emerged and how they can be solved (Ibid). Following the argument of Gjerris, the idea of green guidance can thus be elaborated with the concept of sustainability, since this concept has potential for a more holistic understanding of and response to the challenges we are amid. As Gjerris argues, if we change our way of thinking about these matters, our actions will follow (ibid.).

I therefore propose a definition for a career guidance perspective called *sustainable career guidance*, that builds on the definition of the Brundtland Report, a definition that by adding the concept of *career* overtly links the individual to its societal and global context. *Sustainable career guidance* therefore is career guidance that supports *career* development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Dimsits 2019).

Linking sustainable career guidance and vocational hope

Sustainable career guidance would in this respect be recognized as a practice that supports the individual in connecting with their societal and global context. It would be a practice that discussed values and the politics of nature and people openly, and also a practice with a focus on linking empowerment, agency and hope together.

The focus, as produced in the definition on sustainable career guidance, is to bring the individual to see that their individual career trajectory is connected to the societal and global trajectory, and that "I too" through my education, work and career can contribute to the actual creation of a sustainable future. How does this link to the concept of vocational hope?

Professor of Counselling Psychology, Steven D. Brown proposes the concept of vocational hope as a determining component in young people's choice and interest strategies. Vocational hope, he finds, prevents drop out and increases your belief and goal setting in a positive dialectic movement.

Brown et al. defines vocational hope as "a positive emotional and motivational state associated with envisioning a future in which satisfying and meaningful work is attainable" (Brown, Lamp, Telander, & Hacker, 2013).

Brown has described the components of vocational hope and segregated them into three parts in an earlier dissemination article:

First, hope focuses on the future. Second, the envisioned future includes working in a job that will be meaningful to the person and bring him or her satisfaction. Third, the adolescent must see that finding meaningful and satisfying work is a personally attainable goal – envisioning a positive, but personally unattainable future breeds hopelessness and despair (Brown 2010).

What springs to mind concerning vocational hope is the insoluble tie between future as context and the individual expectation of meaningfulness through work in that specific context. Comparing this notion to a young generation's feelings of discouragement and frustration with the sustainability crisis, it is easy to see that their vocational hope is challenged. Their envisioned future is at best a worrying blur, at worst complete environmental disaster. This kind of envisioned future can most likely constitute a stop block for the individual to consider and imagine their future career paths, and satirically put, which jobs and careers would even be available in apocalyptic times?

Looking at the concept of vocational hope, light is shed on the fact that helping the individual with feelings of discouragement about the future, the societal and global context cannot be ignored in career guidance practice. The issue of future will come up in career guidance practice since the core focus of this practice is preparing people for the future.

The role of the career guidance professional would be to engage with an overt normative response to the sustainability crisis, that something needs to be done to change the course of society and planet, but that it can be done through concrete agency. In this way sustainable career guidance could be the sought after approach to spark the vocational hope of a discouraged young generation at risk of losing hope and engagement in education and career.

Sustainable career guidance in practice – working with vocational hope

I will here present a methodology for sustainable career guidance practice. I am proposing a three-phase model leading counselee progression from creative reflection, career learning to tentative choice making. These phases I call 1) Imagining the world, 2) Learning about the world, 3) Changing the world.

Imagining the world

Inspired by the decision-making framework *Positive Uncertainty* designed by American counselling psychologist and researcher H. B. Gelatt, I propose a first phase, where you engage your counselees in *imagining the world*. Gelatt poses, that to work with career decision making in modern society you have to teach counselees to challenge deterministic accounts on how the future will be, the reason being that these accounts often will be flawed, but also because they nourish the conception that individuals have no shaping power over their own and their shared collective future in society. He instead invites the counselee to “treat your facts with imagination, but do not imagine your facts”, to “know what you want and believe, but do not be sure”, and to “be rational, unless there are good reasons not to be” (Gelatt 1989). Gelatt is not making any references to the sustainability crisis here, but even so his methodology can help us on how to work with both the things we do know, and the things we do not know, and to realise that putting

forward ideas on future visions of the sustainable planet, we wish to inhabit and see our careers unfolding in, empowers us to pursue and built this future. As Gelatt puts it “the future does not exist and cannot be predicted. It must be imagined and invented (Ibid.)”.

Exercises as “What would be the most preferred scenario for our future society” and “Brainstorming the perfect state of the world”, then working out values and more specific details for nature, labour market, consumption, making room for utopian and far out innovations, will serve as good foundation for a future worth hoping for and believing in.

Learning about the world

Once you have *imagined* the world it is time for the phase where you follow the steps backwards from the imagined future to see the steps that would precede this development and hence finding the means in the present to unlock this future. Using Gelatt's perspective of not imagining your facts, but treating them with imagination', spurs us in the direction of knowing and learning about the present world e.g. with career learning as a valuable means.

British career guidance theoretician Bill Law is a central figure in career learning and career education, who has sketched out a taxonomy for handling knowledge about education, jobs and career, that will take you through a systematic processing of the things you observe and learn about in order for you to build your own opinions about what you have learned work, so you do not rely on gut feeling or invasive social discourse (Law in Watts et al. 2006).

A good career guidance exercise could be looking at the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and asking “who are the people, who are going to solve these goals?” Then the 17 goals suddenly transform into career themes or career interest areas, who all will include many kinds of professions in order for this specific goal to be reached. The next task is to pick out either goals of specific interest or randomly chosen ones, and then to explore which professions hold the key to solving this particular goal.

Changing the world

After the phase of learning about the world and a solid foundation of knowledge about the world, education, work and careers have been built, the road for a tentative choice making has been paved. When you know how to connect to future objectives from present pathways, it is time in the third phase of sustainable career guidance to connect the individual career trajectory to the societal and collective trajectory. The future is made up of people working in different fields and contributing in different ways in society and thereby creating the future society that we are going to live in. Existential methodologies can be useful here in order to seek out how the individual life is situated in time and history, and what the individual life purpose should or could be. Danish counselling philosopher and researcher Finn Thorbjørn Hansen argues that to live a life with ethical self-care we need to live and act in congruence with our life philosophy. The first step here is to familiarize ourselves with our *touched not-knowing*, which is an existential knowledge rooted in the individual containing existential notions of goodness, truth and beauty. The next step is trying to live in accordance with these notions seeking out what should be the ethical response and life expressions of my now hopefully *uncovered existential knowing* (Hansen 2008).

A helpful methodology could also be one of professor in career guidance Tristram Hooley, who has put forward five central career questions, which he argues, should be at the core of every career guidance service. These questions include both existential questions and questions of learning, in order for the individual to connect to the world and see themselves in context as people who have been shaped by structures but also as people with power to potentially change structures. The questions are 1) Who am I, 2) How does the world work, 3) Where do I fit into the world? 4) How can I live with others? 5) How do I go about changing the world? (Hooley 2015).

Exercises building a dialogue between these five questions and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, can support reflection on identity, community and existential rootedness. Particularly the fifth question in Hooley's taxonomy has the power to empower and help the individual to connect to the world, and see "how my individual career path" is contributing in changing the world.

Looking at the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, counselees are perhaps able to seek out one or two of the goals, as beacons of a career path, a tentative choice making, not deciding on a particular profession, but on a goal to pursue and potentially helping to solve. In this respect the individual aligns their career path with collective goals of a sustainable development, as an overt marker of an actual contribution in changing the world.

Concluding remarks

Looking at young people's discouragement related to the sustainability crisis it becomes clear that career guidance indeed could contribute to reversing this motion. The feelings of the young generation related to the sustainability crisis, are mirroring all societal crisis, where societal challenges become individual challenges, and individual challenges become societal ones. When crisis play out the intersection of the individual and societal realm, a pedagogic practice taking its point of departure in this intersection, historically and professionally, is called for.

In this article I have argued for the legitimacy of installing the concept of sustainability in the professional career guidance ethos. I am proposing a definition for sustainable career guidance which can address the frustration and discouragement of a young generation, helping them to connect their individual career trajectory to the societal trajectory. Sustainable career guidance could help spark vocational hope for the young generation that there is a future worth believing in, and that this future is attainable through present existing career pathways.

The young generation are crying out for political solutions and rightfully so. However, while waiting for this to happen, they could be supported in connecting dots to see how they could contribute to a process of shaping the future through sustainably enlightened career pathways. I have therefore described a framework for sustainable career guidance taking different methodologies into account that could be useful in this endeavor. Working in career guidance practice *with imagining the world, learning about the world, and changing the world* career guidance practitioners are perhaps enabling youths to see, that "I too" can impact the world through my individual career trajectory.

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