10.20856/jnicec.4708

Utopia revisited: Green Guidance

Peter Plant

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.

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 on 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 was crammed first with Irish refugees of the mid-century potato famine, and later with Eastern Europeans and Italians. 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 centre: the 'Breadwinner's Institute', renamed the 'Vocational Bureau of the Civic Service House' in 1908. 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.

Vocophors

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. 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) and Herschenson (2006)

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 whom, 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) 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. 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 of 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: new Utopias are under way, green ones.

Thomas More (1477-1535) wrote 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 may, too, be the case of the visons of Green Guidance, i.e. sustainable career development. However, the author of these lines has been an advocate for such ideas over the last 25 years, and 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), and 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' (p. 2). Environmental approaches, in this view, would be seen as socio-politically conservative or liberal. Ecologism, on the other hand, 'presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the non-

human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life' (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 (Maggi, 2019).

Conclusions and perspectives: Green guidance and social justice

There is a growing awareness of the clash between senseless economic growth, and environ¬mental/ 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 and 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, and 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 and Malik-Liévano (2019) to capture the links and tensions between environmental concerns and social justice issues.

Green Guidance, with its focus on sustainability in all respects, moves career-decisions centre stage, to a higher note of personal commitment, societal involvement, and meaningfulness. This is, indeed, my position: I see Green Guidance as a window of opportunity to make career guidance, and in particular career education, more relevant in both societal and individual terms. 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.

References

Barham, L., & Hall, R. (1996). Global guidance goes green. *Career Guidance Today*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1996, 26-27.

Beecher, J. (1986). *Charles Fourier. The visionary and his world*. University of California Press

Bregman, R. (2017). *Utopia for realists – and how we can get there*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Davis, H.V. (1969). *Frank Parsons: Prophet, innovator, counselor*. Southern Illinois University Press.

Di Fabio, A. & Bucci, O. (2016). Green positive guidance and green positive life counseling for decent work and decent lives: Some empirical results. *Frontiers in psychology*, 2016, Vol. 7, 261. Retrieved from https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4773606/

Dimsits, M. (2019). Bæredygtig karrierevejledning: det vigtigste redskab til at redde kloden. [Sustainable career guidance: The most important tool to save the planet]. *Vejlederen*, # 2, June 2019, 20-21.

Dobson, A. (2007). *Green political thought* (4th edition). Routledge.

Fourier, Ch. (1848). Œuvres complètes de Ch. Fourier. *Librairie Sociétaire*, 1841-1848.

Gummere, R. M. (1988). The counselor as prophet: Frank Parsons, 1854-1908. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, Vol 66, No 9, 402-05.

Herschenson, D. B. (2006). Frank Parsons's enablers: Pauline Agassiz Shaw, Meyer Bloomfield, and Ralph Albertson. *Career Development Quarterly*, vol 55, no 1, Sep 2006, 77-84.

Hooley, T. (2014). *The evidence base on lifelong guidance: A guide to key findings for effective policy and practice.* ELGPN.

Hooley, T., Sultana, R. G. & Thomsen, R. (Eds.). (2018). *Careers guidance for social justice: Contesting neoliberalism*. Routledge.

Hooley, T., Sultana, R. G. & Thomsen, R. (Eds.). (2019). *Career guidance for emancipation: reclaiming justice for the multitude*. Routledge.

IAEVG (2017). *IAEVG ethical guidelines*. International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance. Retrieved from https://www.vkotocka.si/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/IAEVG-EthicsNAFeb2018Final.pdf

Irving, B. A. & Malik, B. (Eds.). (2005). *Critical reflections on career education and guidance: Justice within a global economy*. Routledge Falmer.

Irving, B. A. & Malik-Lievano, B. (2019). Ecojustice, equity and ethics: Challenges for educational and career guidance. *Revista Fuentes*, 21(2), 253-263

Jones, L. K (1994). Frank Parsons' contribution to career counseling. *Journal of Career Development*, 20, 287-294.

Hulot, N. (2006). *Pour un pacte écologique*. Éditions Calman-Lévy.

Maggi, S. (2019). *Career guidance for kids is our best hope for climate change*. Carleton University. Retrieved from https://theconversation.com/career-guidance-for-kids-is-our-best-hope-for-climate-change-108823

Mann, A. (1950). Frank Parsons: The professor as crusader. *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXVII, 471-490.

Mason, K. (2013). Becoming citizen green: Prefigurative politics, autonomous geographies, and hoping against hope. *Environmental Politics*, 13, 1-19.

Meyer, N. I., Helweg, K. H., & Sørensen. V. (1981). *Oprør fra midten.* [Revolt from the center]. M. Boyars.

Monbiot, G. (2006). *Heat – How we stop the planet burning*. Penguin.

More, T. (1516). *De Optimo Reipublicae Statu deque Nova Insula Utopia.*

NCGE (2009). *Creative guidance in challenging times*. National Centre for Guidance in Education. Retrieved from http://www.ncge.ie/reports/Creative%20Guidance%20FINAL.pdf

NCGE (2021). *Promoting sustainable development and change - What is the contribution of Lifelong Guidance?* National Forum on Guidance, 14th April 2021. National Centre for Guidance in Education. Retrieved from NCGE National Forum on Guidance - April 2021 on Vimeo, https://vimeo.com/537365449

O'Donohoe, J. (2020). Green guidance counselling: Working with nature in mind. *Guidance Matters*, Issue 5/ Winter 2020, 18-21.

Owen, R. (1813). *A New View of Society: Or, Essays on the Formation of Human Character, and the Application of the Principle to Practice*. Longman.

Packer, R. (2019). *Greening HE careers education and guidance? An investigation into the perspectives and experiences of career development practitioners from English universities*. Master's Thesis. University of Derby

Parsons, F. (1894). *The philosophy of mutualism*. Bureau of Nationalist Literature.

Parsons, F. (1909). *Choosing a vocation*. Houghton Mifflin.

Pope, M. & Sveinsdottir, M. (2005). *Frank, we hardly knew ye: The very personal side of Frank Parsons. Journal of Counseling & Development*, 83 (1), 2005, 105-115.

Pouyaud, J., & Guichard, J. (2018). A twenty-first century challenge: How to lead an active life whilst contributing to sustainable and equitable development. In Hooley, T., et al (Eds.). *Career guidance for social justice: Contesting neoliberalism*. (pp. 31-46). Routledge.

Plant, P. (1996). *Economy and ecology: Towards a change of paradigms in careers guidance*. Paper at the IRTAC/ BCSCA/CGCA International Conference on Counselling: Enhancing Personal Issues in the Global Community, Vancouver, Canada, May 1996.

Plant, P. (1999). Fringe focus: Informal economy and green career development. *Journal of Employment Counseling* Vol. 36, No. 3, 1999.

Plant, P. (2003). Green guidance: Fringe focus. In Kalinowska, E. et al. (2003). *Counsellor: profession, passion, calling?* Dolnoslaska Szkola Wyzsza Edukacji.

Plant, P. (2007a). *When is enough enough? Economic and social goals in career guidance*. Gratisartikler. Retrieved from http://www.gratisartikler.com/articledetail.php?artid=241&catid=381&title=When+is+enough+enough?+Economic+and+social+goals+in+career+guidance

Plant, P. (2007b). An inconvenient truth: Green guidance. *IAEVG Newsletter*, 58/2007, pp.1-3. Retrieved from http://www.iaevg.org/crc/files/newsletters/Newlet58en.doc

Plant, P. (2008). Green guidance. *Career Edge* 19/2008, 4-6.

Plant, P. (2014a). Green Guidance. In Arulmani, G. & Watts, A. G. (Eds.). *Handbook of career development: International perspectives* (pp. 309-316). Springer.

Plant, P. (2014b). Grüne Beratung - Mehr als Grüne Woche. *NfB Newsletter* 2/2014, 3-6. Retrieved from nfb-Newsletter 02/2014

Plant, P. (2015). Guia verde: una guia para el futoro. *REOP*. Vol. 26, # 1, 2015, 115-123. Retrieved from http://revistas.uned.es/index.php/reop/article/view/14346

Plant, P. (2020a). Paradigms under pressure: Green guidance. *Nordic Journal of Transitions, Careers and Guidance*, No 1, 2020, 1–9.

Plant, P. (2020b). Green guidance for sustainability. *Guidance Matters*, Issue 5/Winter 2020, 6-8.

Roe, D. (2020). 'Green' Guidance. *Career guidance for social justice, 2020 (blog)*. Retrieved from 'Green' Guidance – Career guidance for social justice (wordpress.com) https://careerguidancesocialjustice.wordpress.com/2020/12/07/green-guidance/

Richards, L. (1881). *Vocophy. The new profession: A system enabling a person to name the calling or vocation one is best suited to follow*. Bratt Bros.

Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat. The new dangerous class*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Stern, N. (2006). *The economics of climate change: The Stern review*. H.M. Treasury.

Thunberg, G. (2019). *No one is too small to make a difference*. Penguin.

UNESCO (2018). *Issues and trends in education for sustainable development*. UNESCO. Retrieved from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000261445

United Nations (2015). *Sustainable development goals*. UN. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/

Watts, A. G. (1996). Socio-political ideologies in guidance. In Watts, A. G., et al (Eds.). *Rethinking careers education and guidance* (pp. 225-233). Routledge.

Zytowski, D. G. (2001). Frank Parsons and the Progressive Movement. *Career Development Quarterly*, vol 50, no1, Sep 2001, 57-65. Retrieved from Frank Parsons and the Progressive Movement. - Free Online Library https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Frank+Parsons+and+the+Progressive+Movement.-a078398529

For correspondence

Professor, Dr. Peter Plant

peter@roejle.dk

Professor, Dr. Peter Plant has worked in the field of career education and counselling since 1974 in schools, higher education insti¬tutions, and in the employment service in Denmark. 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), and in various guidance related capacities in many countries. His latest assignment was his professorship at the University of South-East Norway. 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.