

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

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### **Abstract**

*Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland: these are the Nordic countries, the Five Swans. This article covers key Nordic guidance issues with characteristic examples from the various countries under the headings of Professionalisation, Guidance Policies, Activities, Staff and Professional Background, Linkages, and Materials & ICT<sup>1</sup>*

### **Geography and Demography**

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. Three autonomous regions add to the richness: Åland (FIN), the Faroe Islands (DK) and Greenland (DK). The latter two countries, along with Norway and Iceland, are not members of the European Union (EU), whereas Denmark, Sweden and Finland are. However, Norway and Iceland (along with Liechtenstein) are members of the wider European Economic Area (EEA), which implies that most EU regulations are also implemented in these countries. Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Faroese and Icelandic are closely related Germanic languages, whereas Finnish has Ugrian roots. Important minority groups include the Samis in Finland, Sweden and Norway. 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. In many cases, such common Nordic policies are formed in the Nordic Council of Ministers (Nordisk Ministerråd). In short, the Nordic countries form a patchwork of similar, but not identical cultures, nowadays being supplemented by migrant workers and refugees from all over the world. Common societal traits for all five countries and regions include democratic traditions and the concept of the welfare state, based

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on principles of solidarity and equality, although this is currently being challenged on both political and fiscal grounds.

### **Philosophical basis**

The Nordic guidance professionals are organised in the NFUE (the Nordic Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, which in turn is a member of the IAEVG, the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance). Nordic guidance Summer Seminars are held on a biannual basis, and many bi- or trilateral links are in operation. 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, and have also been inspired by other Nordic ethical guidelines. Sweden, for example, has adopted a wide-ranging set of ethical guidelines (see [www.vagledarforeningen.org](http://www.vagledarforeningen.org)), which urge Swedish career guidance professionals to be proactive and stand up for the weak and the vulnerable in Swedish society. Guidance as social engineering is the key concept here: in Swedish, 'Kompensatorisk vägledning', i.e. guidance as societal compensation. Wrongs should be put right through guidance. Interestingly, in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, outreach youth guidance services based in each municipality (S: Uppföljningstjänst) render a radical version of this societal compensation model. In the Danish case, youths are contacted twice a year until their 19th birthday if they are not covered by other guidance services. If telephone or letter contacts are unsuccessful, the guidance practitioner will travel to the home of the young person to meet person to person. 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. Moreover, some of these outreach services extend into the streets: in some Danish towns (e.g. Frederikssund, Esbjerg) guidance workers, as part of a peer-guidance concept, walk the streets at night, thus embodying outreach guidance at street level. Close contact is kept with social authorities: links between (careers) guidance and social work and crime prevention are manifest in these cases. Other examples of such preventive approaches are found in, for example, Iceland, where the decentralised town councils, known as Hverdasamráð, coordinate the guidance efforts of priests, youth clubs, police and guidance staff. Societal compensation and control go hand in hand. This is typical for Nordic 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 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 third 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 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. Such private placement services, which may offer some limited guidance and coaching, will not be explored further in this paper.

A few researchers have aimed at understanding the nature of guidance from an historical point of view. Mattson (1984) depicted Swedish guidance since the 1940s as a public policy intervention of the type of a soft labour market measure. A highly personal Swedish account along the same lines was given by Vestin (1991), based on her 50 years of experience in the field. In his studies, Plant (1996) analysed the shift and its underlying societal forces in the focus of Danish guidance from the German-inspired, test-oriented psychometric tradition dating back to the 1880s (where a scientific testing approach was adopted), to the educational and client-centred tradition of the 1960s and into the 1990s, where a humanistic base struggled with cost-benefit inspired approaches.

The following sections cover major guidance issues with characteristic examples from the various countries under the headings of Guidance Policies, Activities, Staff and Professional Background, Linkages, and Materials & ICT.

## **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 that 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 lifelong learning: formal, informal, and non-formal learning. Lifelong 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](http://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 a lifelong, and indeed, a lifewide perspective (Plant, 2001a).

This is the short version of the rationale for the pivotal role of guidance in modernity and complexity. In policy terms, however, such basically cross-sectoral societal developments are seldom reflected in guidance policy-making structures. In many countries, including most of the Nordic countries, policies are formulated in separate structures (typically the Ministries of Education and Ministries of Labour which issue separate guidelines), where careers guidance is often seen as an adjunct to educational, labour market, social, industrial or economic policies (see e.g. Sultana & Watts, 2006). Few countries have structures that cut across such structural partitions. Yet, guidance is in essence precisely about crossing such boundaries (from school to work, from work to learning options, from employment to unemployment, from work to retirement, etc). Paradoxically, only one of the Nordic countries has the necessary cross-sectoral structures in place in order to facilitate the coordination of guidance policy making: Denmark, by law, has had a National Council for Educational and Vocational Guidance (known as R.U.E., established in 1981) in which the social partners, the relevant ministries, students' organisations, different minority groups, and interestingly, the guidance professionals themselves, are represented. But even this coordinating body, with its broad representation and legislative backing, found it difficult to perform its policy-coordinating, let alone its policy-making role (Oxford Insight, 2002): in reality, policies are more often than not formulated in ministries, in employers' organisations, in trade unions, in confederations of municipalities and counties, etc. On these grounds, in 2003, the Danish government decided to abolish the National Guidance Council altogether: this generated an intense debate on the value of the Council as a focal point and common forum for guidance and policymaking in this field. In the end, the Guidance Council

was replaced by a National Forum for Dialogue in Guidance (see [www.uvm.dk/vejledningsreformen](http://www.uvm.dk/vejledningsreformen)), which in essence is a talking shop. Its influence lies in debating issues which are mostly tabled by the Ministry of Education (Plant, 2005). In short, the cross-sectoral policy-making position, which is so crucial in the cross-sectoral field of guidance, is weakened precisely by the fact that it operates in more than one field – with no executive powers. Thus, in many cases, links between policy and practice are informal and often dependent on the clout of particular individuals. Interestingly, in Norway, where no formal national body co-ordinates guidance policy making so far (but one is on its way, modelled on the Danish experience), the Confederation of Norwegian Business and Industry (NHO) plays a prominent role in terms of criticising the guidance currently offered in Norwegian schools (for having no requirements for professional qualification of school-based guidance staff; no requirements for the allocation of time for careers guidance; lack of publicly produced career information; etc), and of formulating guidance policies which would improve the knowledge and information base for career decisions.

Guidance is often included in other policy initiatives. Currently, for example guidance is written into the globalisation strategy aimed at making Denmark one of the most competitive knowledge-based countries in the global market. The way forward in this area is education, education, and education, followed closely by guidance, guidance, and guidance (Regeringen, 2006).

## **Activities**

Careers guidance in its traditional form has four aims and activity areas, known as DOTS (Law & Watts, 1977): Decision making skills, Opportunity awareness, Transition skills and Self-awareness.

In the Nordic countries, the order of the letters DOTS is OSDT, as the bulk of careers guidance activities revolve around O (for Opportunity awareness): most individual guidance interviews and group guidance interventions put an emphasis on imparting information on educational and (to a lesser degree) labour market issues. There seems to be less emphasis, in most cases, on S (for Self awareness), as most guidance professionals prefer to keep more deeply rooted personal matters at arm's length. They often view this side of careers guidance as leaning towards therapy. Being non-psychologists, they see this as being outside their guidance role, although the profession is drifting towards dealing with more personal matters in, for example, career portfolio work, where students are encouraged to depict themselves as a whole person. The two other skills, D & T, play an even lesser role in careers guidance in most cases. In short, attention is unevenly paid to the three parts of the guidance triangle, i.e. the personal/social, vocational and educational aspects of careers guidance, where a clear emphasis on (information on) vocational and educational

options has traditionally been the prevailing model. In all Nordic countries, however, a growing demand for more personal and social guidance/counselling/coaching/support is putting pressure on guidance resources. The more individualised the career path of each student becomes, the more the demand grows for personalised tutoring and coaching as part of the main guidance role. Not all guidance professionals are prepared for this. Some guidance services, however, as depicted below in the Norwegian example on 'Reducing Complexity' (see Box 1), aim at covering all three aspects of careers guidance, including heavy social and personal issues (e.g. suicidal attempts, anorexia, depression or sexual abuse), which may lead to an overload of the careers guidance role.

### **Careers education**

Careers education in many forms is a prominent feature of Nordic careers guidance (TemaNord, 1995). This has been the case for at least 50 years. The most common activities include informational career lessons, and, in particular, extended work experience programmes, workplace study visits, and the setting up of mini enterprises. In some countries, notably Finland, careers education is timetabled as part of the curriculum in years 7–9, 76 lessons in all with variations between general upper secondary and vocational education (the guidelines are currently under revision). This particular approach, no doubt, places career issues within the logic of the school framework, i.e. as a subject with its own time slot. But it is questionable whether much career learning takes place under these circumstances, as pointed out by Eskelinen (1993). In other countries (e.g. Denmark) careers education is part of the curriculum, but has no place in the ordinary timetable. It is, however, a cross-curricular compulsory subject matter which must find its way into other subjects, across timetables, classes, and other structural obstacles: an integrative approach which leaves a great deal of room for variations in terms of the length, width and depth of careers education. Consequently, the quality of careers education differs hugely from one school to another. Curricular guidelines are loose in any case. Thus, a planned progression (e.g. through sensing, sifting, focusing, and understanding) (Law, 1996) in terms of career learning is not always apparent, although careers education in the Danish context starts in grade 1 at the age of 7, and continues to the final years of compulsory learning in grades 9 or 10. Iceland, by contrast, places the emphasis on grade 10. However, 45% of the Icelandic students in grade 10 get no or very little guidance: 12 lessons on average (Vilhjálmsson, 1995).

In short, there is no easy way out in terms of creating ideal frameworks for true careers learning. Learning by doing, i.e. work experiences etc, is still a highly popular and effective way of creating a learning environment. Modern work is invisible in many respects and hidden away in sealed-off buildings and inaccessible computers. Thus, in an attempt to present a broader variety of work options, work

experience programmes are used extensively in all Nordic countries. Most students in grades 8-10 take part in at least one week's individual work experience, some take longer periods, whereas others (especially potential drop-outs) may work part-time and attend school two or three days a week as part of an individual programme. Individual work experiences are evaluated by students as the single most powerful experience in careers education, both positively ('It felt like coming home') and sometimes negatively ('Now I know a vocation I DO NOT want'). Various forms of work experience programmes have been developed over the years, including programmes that focus on

- \* night work
- \* shift work
- \* equal opportunities (gender/ethnic)
- \* lifestyle (urban/rural)
- \* starting one's own company
- \* health and safety issues
- \* sustainability

However, attention is rarely drawn in this framework to the experience of being unemployed. This would be seen as controversial. Therefore, most work experiences are middle-of-the-road programmes; the informal economy, including, for example, LETS (Local Exchange Trading Schemes: Williams et al, 2001), is not even touched upon as an issue. And yet, many jobs are hidden in this sector. Nonetheless, work experience programmes are still controversial in many respects: do they just reinforce stereotyping or do they in fact broaden the scope of vocational options? Work experiences are often designed to enhance career choices, but in some cases they act to the contrary.

Study visits to enterprises, factories and service providers are numerous. Less common are work shadowing and work simulation programmes, e.g. setting up mini enterprises in schools or providing other forms of mirrors of work. But generally, most such activities are common practice in Nordic careers education. Icelandic youth traditionally work all summer in the catering, construction, fishing and tourism industries, perhaps more so in the past than now. Still, they have all the work experience they need, albeit often a narrow one. Moreover, Nordjobb, a Nordic work and exchange programme for youth (see [www.nordjobb.norden.no](http://www.nordjobb.norden.no)) provides a framework for work experiences for youth (ages 18-26, minimum duration of four weeks) across the Nordic countries during the summer months. It can be quite an eye-opener for a young person from an urban area to work as a farmhand in a remote sheep ranch in another country.

## **Individual action plans and personal guidance**

In a number of countries, various forms of Individual Action Plans (IAP) have been introduced. In the Nordic countries one such example is found in the Danish Uddannelsesbogen ('The Education Book'). The book itself, if it is a book at all, can take many forms: anything from a prefabricated (black!) book with fixed questions and dotted lines to fill in ('What are your strengths? Your weaknesses? Your plans for the coming years? Your career goals?') to a more portfolio-oriented approach where each student is encouraged to express her/himself in terms of a collage, videotapes, narratives, and other self-expressive ways: a reflexive exercise, these days often in electronic form. Each municipality, and even each school, decides for itself what form the IAPs takes. This is one of the results of decentralisation: a model book does in fact exist, but it is merely a suggestion from the Ministry of Education. The main guidance activities included in the IAPs are the individual interviews with each student from grades 6-10 (annually in grades 6 and 7; biannually in grades 8-10). These interviews, which sometimes include parents, are carried out by the guidance teacher. They have added significantly both to the workload of the guidance worker, and to the general understanding and appreciation of guidance work in schools. The key thing is that guidance in schools has thus become more visible. The challenge is to develop appropriate guidance methods: conducting a massive number of individual interviews calls for creativity in terms of developing innovative methodologies. In Finland, for example, a personal Internet-based IAP for each student in higher education is currently being considered.

A further Danish example of highly individualised guidance approaches was found as part of the Education for All policy, an educational concept of the mid-1990s which emphasised the social inclusion aspect of education. Education for All was a multifaceted range of policies, which included new flexible and individualised forms of basic vocational training, known as EGU (Erhvervsgrunduddannelse), and the highly flexible and tailorised Open Youth Education, known as FUU (Fri Ungdomsuddannelse). The latter comprised a variety of educational components, such as formal learning, informal learning, self-formulated projects, and studies or work experiences abroad over a period of two-three years. Even the time spent in FUU was flexible. Interestingly, the main societal control and contact mechanisms in both programmes (EGU & FUU) were the counsellors who entered into a personal contract with the students. Individual action planning was the hub of the guidance activities in these programmes (Plant, 1999a), and heavy emphasis was placed on guidance in terms of close and personal follow-up. FUU in particular turned out to be such a success that it became a threat to mainstream education. It questioned the traditional educational planning and rationale to such a degree that it became dangerous, and with a flow of 16,000 students during its seven years of existence, it was one of the first programmes to be axed by the right-wing government that came into power in 2001. One of the inspiring aspects of FUU, however, was that it did not

stigmatise the participants as educational losers as so many dropout schemes have done. It attracted both resourceful and more vulnerable youths (Plant, 2000b). The educational narratives of FUU students tell a story of revitalising the joy of learning for highly different individuals (Sørensen, 2001), as the students had regained the crucial ownership of their life as an ongoing developmental project. Interestingly, in 2006 the present right-wing government introduced a 95% plan, with the aim that 95% of youth should have an education beyond basic schooling. This time around, however, most measures are pointed in the direction of forcing students to enter into and stay in the established educational system, not 'wasting' their time outside the formal system. Guidance is part and parcel of these efforts.

Whereas some group guidance work and some class-based informational work do take place, the main guidance activities in the Nordic countries, especially in schools, are in fact individual guidance interviews. Much time in these interviews seems to be taken up with imparting basic information on learning options (study routes, training options, educational possibilities), while less time is devoted to the vocational side of careers guidance in most cases. This, no doubt, is linked with the staffing of guidance: most professionals in the field are teachers or part of the support staff of educational institutions. It is to staffing issues that we now turn.

## **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 at 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 as to whether 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 (Rye, 2005). Already in the 1970s Sweden abandoned the teacher-based model, which was known as Career Choice Teachers (Yrkesvalslärare), in favour of guidance specialists attached to each school, known as Study and Vocational Advisors (Studie- och Yrkesvägledare, SYV).

Each model has its advocates: those in favour of school-based guidance teachers (DK: Skolevejledere; N: Rådgivningslærere; IS: Náms- og starfsrádgjafi) point to the advantage of the (potential) close and personal links between the student and the guidance teacher. Most guidance teachers hold a post-graduate diploma in guidance (30-60 ECTS points), in some cases (e.g. Iceland) obtained through 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. Ironically, this lack of formally qualified guidance staff is widespread, in particular, in universities and other HE institutions, i.e. in the very institutions that promote the concept of education in formal settings. 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 (PhD). Several Nordic countries, however (e.g. Iceland, Finland and Denmark) already offer or are developing a Master’s Degree in Educational and Vocational Guidance.

Those opposed to the model of education-/teacher-based guidance point to the disadvantages of possibly biased views based precisely on the potential intimate knowledge of students and their family background, and, perhaps more importantly, the institutional interests of the school or college. They, in turn, advocate the more balanced, even neutral, approach which is possible from an independent position as an outsider, i.e. a non-teacher, as is the case with, e.g., the Danish external guidance experts, and the Swedish SYV, who, on the other hand, may feel somewhat marginalised in the teacher-dominated culture of the school.

Other contrasts are apparent in the overall Nordic picture: Denmark, even after the so-called Guidance Reform from 2004 still has a dozen different guidance sectors in a highly decentralised system, whereas Sweden, Norway and Finland each have four or five. The training of Danish guidance staff takes place in six regional colleges (CVU) under a common 30 ECTS-point curriculum whereas, e.g., Swedish guidance students by contrast attend a common three-year study programme in one of three universities (Umeå, Stockholm or Malmö), and Norway is still on its way to a regional approach, based on the Danish model.

In short, there is not a single, commonly agreed upon Nordic model. On the contrary, even the prevailing models are questioned and in some cases seen as inadequate. In Norway, for example, the well-established Guidance Teacher model is currently seen as overloaded: it needs refocusing. This is why a number of experiments have been conducted in several Norwegian regions in terms of splitting the tasks into social and personal guidance on the one hand, and educational and vocational guidance on the other, in an attempt to reduce complexity (see Box 1).

### **Box 1: Reducing Complexity - a Norwegian Example**

Career development specialist; career resource librarian; team leader; social worker; tutor; empathic personal counsellor; careers education teacher; psychologist; networking policy maker. The roles of the careers guidance specialist are numerous. In some cases, too complex to handle.

Norwegian careers guidance staff in schools ('Rådgivningslærere', i.e. guidance teachers), as in so many other countries, are often overwhelmed by the magnitude and complexity of the issues they have to deal with. Students may contact guidance teachers concerning problems ranging from career choice over study techniques to drugs, anorexia, dyslexia or suicidal attempts: a whole range of social, personal, psychological, educational and vocational issues. Life is complex, especially, perhaps, when you are a teenager. Traditionally, Norwegian guidance teachers have tried to respond to all these issues.

The result has been that acute and pressing problems have tended to overshadow the long-term issues. In short, anorexia wins over careers guidance, to a degree where some guidance teachers have found that they spend up to 80% of their time dealing with pressing psychological and social issues, rather than with careers guidance and education in a narrower sense. Not that psychological and social issues are unimportant, on the contrary, but the (im)balance was beginning to alarm the professionals and the policy makers of the field.

With this backdrop, a few regions ('fylker') in Norway started to fine-tune their strategies in terms of focusing more strongly on careers education and guidance through programmes such as 'Conscious Career Choices' ('Bevisst utdanningsvalg') which intensified school-industry partnerships, adding more study visits, better information materials, career expositions, and extended job experiences to the already existing programmes and curriculum. One result of this strongly focused strategy was that it became even more evident that the role of the guidance teacher was heavily overloaded and imbalanced in terms of social-psychological concerns, with little room for careers guidance per se. Thus, from early 2001 and with the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Education, four regions in different parts of Norway split their guidance services into one mainly focused on social/psychological issues, and another focused more strongly on careers education and guidance, thus making the division of tasks and topics clearer for students, parents, employers and other partners. The two parts work closely together, thus still forming a coherent school-based guidance service. Intensified training of the guidance teachers and their networking partners is part of this strategy. The anticipation is that this, in itself, will add to the professionalism of everybody involved.

Apparently, this splitting-and-focusing approach works in practice, but the question remains whether it is in fact possible to split the concerns of young people into distinct categories; or is perhaps the very nature of careers guidance that it deals with the whole person and thus requires a holistic approach? Norwegian researchers followed and reported on the developments as they unfolded during the three-year trial period, 2000-2003 (Buland & Havn, 2003). From the start they were highly positive in their evaluations, and left little room for contrasting views.

The Norwegian example is typical of the predicaments of many guidance practitioners: they see the individual as a whole person, yet they cannot deal with everything. Careers guidance is focused on particular issues in terms of career development and often linked with particular educational and labour market policies (reducing educational drop-out, job retention, etc). The task of the guidance specialist may become so overwhelming and complex that something must be done to reduce this complexity. In short, this situation calls for specialisation. This is the simple answer. Yet, the irony is that precisely by reducing one type of complexity via specialisation, new orders of complexity are created. This calls for highly effective networking in a new, even more complex organisational form. So, by reducing complexity, a new order of complexity is created. This is part of the hyper-complex society. Networking is essential.

Combining the role of a teacher with that of a career guidance specialist puts a strain on both roles, as the Norwegian example depicts. In Finland, recruiting sufficient guidance staff with this dual role in educational settings is currently a problem in both rural areas and in Helsinki, the capital of Finland. This is seen as a threat to the general Finnish policy goal of creating equal educational opportunities.

Separately from education-based guidance services, all Nordic countries offer careers guidance through labour market authorities. In most cases, the Public Employment Services (Arbetsförmedlingen, Arbejdsformidlingen, AF, Vinnuumidlun) perform this role as part of its main employment/ placement services. Most AFs offer specialist careers guidance through guidance officers (Arbets/Yrkesvägledare, Erhvervsvejledere), who may have a short formal education in guidance as their professional foundation. Finland has a different approach: vocational guidance psychologists (Arbetspsykologer) hold a Master's Degree in psychology, followed by a period of supervised vocational guidance practice. At times, however, employment office based guidance services tend to get submerged by the main job placement activities of the employment services (Sultana & Watts, 2006). In fact, some employment services have difficulties in maintaining a high level of commitment in this area, as labour market authorities in most countries often find themselves under

political pressure to perform in terms of easily counted job placements, or the production (!) of action plans. Guidance is more difficult to quantify, and thus more vulnerable in policy terms.

Other guidance roles in terms of the labour market are performed by the trade unions, which, for example in Denmark, are heavily involved in the management of the labour market, including unemployment. Unemployment benefits (one third of which are publicly funded) are disbursed through the Unemployment Insurance Fund Offices (A-kasser), which, in turn, are directly linked to the major trade unions. In Norway, by contrast, unemployment benefits are distributed through regional public offices in each county (fylke).

Cutting across these sectorised structures, a number of One-Stop-Information Shops, known as Guidance Houses or Information Centres (Vejledningshuse, Infotek) have been established in the Nordic countries, notably Sweden and Denmark. Such structures have proved vulnerable to changes in funding as they are cross-sectorally funded in most cases: thus they grow and wither according to regional policies, particular outreach campaigns etc. In these settings, the guidance concept is largely based on the philosophy of self-help with extensive use of computerised information and brief interventions from guidance and information staff, some of whom have precious little professional background in terms of formal education in the guidance field. Such cross-sectoral information and guidance centres are often staffed with different categories of guidance staff in an attempt to create better links between different parts of the guidance systems. We will now turn to such linkages.

## **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), whereas categories 1, 2, and 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 (mentioned above) 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 poses a challenge to such co-ordination, especially in the adult guidance sector. At 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. This has been the case ever since careers guidance diversified and differentiated its activities in the 1970s.

European linkages (mostly categories 1 and 2) are, however, commonplace within the Euroguidance network, which consists of partner organisations in the European Union (EU) and the European Economic Area Member States (EEA) as well as Central and Eastern European Countries. The National Resource Centres for Vocational Guidance (NRCVG) play the pivotal role in this network. The NRCVGs promote the European dimension in national structures of educational and vocational guidance in close co-operation with education and labour authorities. In Denmark, this centre is placed in CIRIUS under the Ministry of Education, as is the case in Norway under Utdanningsdirektoratet. In Finland, the Centre for International Mobility (CIMO) is an independent organisation. So, here as elsewhere, the Nordic countries have chosen different models. The centres all advance European interaction and mobility in education, training, work and among youths. Guidance experts and practitioners such as school counsellors, vocational guidance psychologists, Euro-counsellors and information officers working in education and labour administrations and dealing with international mobility issues form the most important target group of the NRCVGs.

European linkages are not limited to the NRCVGs: 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](http://www.guidance-europe.org)). Other examples include targeted guidance for low-paid workers (Workplace Guidance, see [www.gla.ac.uk/wg](http://www.gla.ac.uk/wg)); guidance to prevent educational dropout (Spiderweb, see [www.ru.is/english/rannsoknir/spiderweb.asp](http://www.ru.is/english/rannsoknir/spiderweb.asp)); guidance in the third age (Third Age Guidance, see [www.gla.ac.uk/tag](http://www.gla.ac.uk/tag)); guidance for refugees and migrant workers (Refugee Guidance, see [www.gla.ac.uk/rg](http://www.gla.ac.uk/rg)); Guidance, Ethnicity and Gender (see [www.celi.dk](http://www.celi.dk)); and the use of ICT in guidance (EGA, see [www.guidanceforum.net](http://www.guidanceforum.net)). It is to the issue of ICT that we now will turn.

## **Materials and ICT**

### *Guidance materials*

In the mixed economies of the Nordic countries, guidance materials are mixed in the sense that some are publicly funded while others are produced on a commercial basis. Publicly funded resources used to include a spate of informational pamphlets and booklets from, e.g., the Danish National Council for Educational and Vocational Guidance, RUE. In its heyday, with a dozen titles and 800,000 copies produced yearly (most of which were distributed for free), RUE was by far the largest publishing company in the guidance field. Their backlist included booklets for students and employees on educational and vocational options, theoretical books for guidance workers on guidance methods and the history of guidance, research reports and policy documents, along with ICT based (CD-ROM) information. Some of these materials were sold on the market. The backlist of books has now been taken over by a private publishing company. Thus, a number of private publishing companies are able to survive in the Danish guidance market: e.g. Studie & Erhverv (see [www.se.dk](http://www.se.dk)), which sells books and Danish computerised guidance resources and has also managed to export an innovative careers guidance computer program for grades 3-5 (!), known as 'Paws in Job-Land' (Vaks i Job-land) to the USA, Canada, South Africa and the UK, as well as Sweden. This is unusual, as most exports of ideas and concepts in this field tend to travel one way: from the USA to Europe.

The Swedish scene has very little public input in terms of guidance and information material. This is a result of the deliberate downsizing of central government in Sweden over the last decade or so. The result is that several small publishing companies issue competing materials for the limited Swedish market (see e.g. [www.tremedia.se](http://www.tremedia.se); [www.trinom.se](http://www.trinom.se)). The latter collaborates with Danish Studie & Erhverv on developing career guidance software such as Implus (an occupational profiling programme, originally from England, known as Adult Directions; in Danish: Spor) and Max i Jobb-landet, the Swedish equivalent of the Danish Vaks i Jobland mentioned above. Recently, Norway has adapted Danish learning materials (e.g. Plant, 1999b) into Norwegian versions for use in careers education.

### *Internet*

As in most other countries, the Internet is of growing importance to guidance in terms of swift information delivery. Nowadays, students will approach their guidance teacher or their advisor with a broad, albeit often flimsy, informational base, ready to discuss what this might mean to them personally. Thus, the Internet has developed into a main source of educational and vocational information, but already a number of services, apart from the traditional public databases on educational and career options (see e.g. [www.vidar.dk](http://www.vidar.dk) or [www.ug.dk](http://www.ug.dk)), are now being offered on a more commercial/sponsored basis (see e.g. [www.uddannelseogjob.dk](http://www.uddannelseogjob.dk) or [www.jobzonen.dk](http://www.jobzonen.dk)) with FAQ, questions & answers, job hunting hints, interest tests, virtual chatrooms etc. Even commercial publishers feel forced to join this trend,

offering email career advice (see e.g. [www.se.dk](http://www.se.dk)). Some Internet-based question and answer services are run by counselling students (see e.g. [www.idan.is](http://www.idan.is)), including IT-moderated contact with role models. The latter website is developed by the Federation of Icelandic Industries in co-operation with the counsellor education programme at the University of Iceland.

Some sites are based on a particular theoretical guidance approach: this is the case with the Norwegian career development tool Veivalg (see: [www.aetat.no](http://www.aetat.no)), which is based on John Holland's congruence theory, and the Finnish equivalent at [www.mol.fi/avo](http://www.mol.fi/avo). A further Finnish example of particular approaches is [www.careerstorm.com](http://www.careerstorm.com), which is a comprehensive career development tool, based on constructivism. On the whole, the Finns are at the cutting edge in terms of innovative ICT approaches and applications. Thus, the Finnish guidance portal, [www.opintoluotsi.fi](http://www.opintoluotsi.fi) (i.e. 'Study Pilot') brought together all relevant national and regional informational guidance resources under one public umbrella. In addition to career information for clients, the portal has a separate interface for guidance practitioners. This particular resource has been inspired by a similar Canadian concept, known as the Counsellor Resource Centre, [www.crccanada.org](http://www.crccanada.org). Other Nordic guidance portals include the Swedish [www.syoguiden.com](http://www.syoguiden.com), which is a commercial undertaking. Such services exist alongside public websites with comprehensive information on employment, job-seeking skills and educational options in all Nordic countries (see e.g. [www.utbildningar.ams.se](http://www.utbildningar.ams.se) or [www.af.dk](http://www.af.dk) or [www.aetat.no](http://www.aetat.no) or [www.ls.no](http://www.ls.no)).

In some countries, notably Canada, USA, and the UK, telephone helplines such as LearnDirect (see: [www.learndirect.co.uk](http://www.learndirect.co.uk)) are part of the general guidance and information offer (Watts & Dent, 2002). Not so, as yet, in the Nordic countries. Numerous telephone helplines do exist on various topics (suicide, anorexia, incest, aids, health, parents/children etc) many of which touch upon careers guidance issues from time to time, no doubt. But few, if any, helplines are aimed at careers guidance, apart from temporary initiatives such as e.g. adult education campaigns or campaigns on educational leave schemes, none of which have been sustained over longer time spans. One exception, perhaps, was the extensive Swedish adult education programme (with a massive guidance component), known as Kunskapslyftet (see: [www.kunskapslyftet.gov.se](http://www.kunskapslyftet.gov.se)), in which telephone guidance was an integrated part. However, the integration of telephone helplines, computerised information and/or videoconferencing has so far not been taken much beyond the pilot stage in careers guidance (see e.g.: [www.cimo.fi/estia/video.html](http://www.cimo.fi/estia/video.html)). With a Call-Me-Back facility, as is the case with LearnDirect, the guidance professional, in future, will be able to deliver personalised Just-In-Time guidance directly to people's homes, when they need it, via the computer and the telephone: in other words, kitchen table guidance.

Interestingly, the extensive use of the Internet in guidance has also brought about new professional guidance periodicals, in the Danish case two, which is unusual for a small country: one professional periodical, known as *Via Vejledning* is produced in three thematic issues per year for the Ministry of Education, by the private publishing company *Studie og Erhverv* (see [www.vejledningsviden.dk](http://www.vejledningsviden.dk); available for free). The same company, and indeed the same editor, also publish another professional (commercial) periodical, *VejlederForum*, with thematic articles, photo reports, interviews, portraits, news etc, issued four times a year in both digital and paper versions (see [www.vejlederforum.dk](http://www.vejlederforum.dk)), which in 2004-2005 featured 100 downloadable articles, many of which were written by Nordic and, indeed, International guidance experts.

## Conclusions

Career guidance is widespread in the Nordic countries. It has had a long history, ever since German-inspired psychometric testing emerged in the 1880s in Denmark (Plant, 1996). At that time, old-fashioned guidance within the family became inadequate in the emerging industrial age: a son could no longer follow his father in his career footsteps, nor could a daughter expect to follow her 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 needs lifelong, and indeed, lifewide 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.

Similarly, few quality control mechanisms are in place to sustain and develop quality in guidance, but this is a growing field. Inspirational handbooks, and even directive manuals, have been issued to steer guidance activities in the preferred, cost-effective direction, with quality indicators and the like. Thus, centrally issued guidelines are now filled in locally and regionally. It is a two-way street: centralisation and decentralisation go hand in hand. This reflects the New Public Management ethos behind these policies. Benchmarking is on the bench so far, but ready to step in. Thus, quality issues are in general high on the Nordic guidance policy agenda, as is the case internationally (Plant, 2001b).

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. As noted, 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 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 lifedeeep perspective. This is the basis of Nordic 3-D guidance.

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