

The development of a lifelong guidance system in Hungary

A. G. Watts · Bors Tibor Borbély-Pecze

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Abstract The development of a lifelong guidance system in Hungary Systematic work is currently being undertaken in Hungary to develop a lifelong guidance system, in line with principles outlined by leading international organisations. The origins of career guidance in Hungary, and the nature of the current career guidance system, are outlined. The main features of the current development programme, supported by the European Social Fund, are presented, alongside the strategic work of the National Lifelong Guidance Council. Key issues relating to these developments are discussed.

Résumé. Le développement d'un système de conseil tout au long de la vie en Hongrie. Actuellement en Hongrie, un travail systématique est mis en œuvre afin de développer un système de conseil tout au long de la vie en accord avec les principes définis par des entreprises internationales majeures. Les origines du conseil en orientation en Hongrie ainsi que la nature actuelle du système de conseil en orientation sont définis. Les caractéristiques principales du programme actuel de développement, lui-même encouragé par le Fond Social Européen, sont présentées à côté du travail stratégique du Conseil National du Conseil tout au long de la Vie. Les questions clés de ces développements sont discutées.

Zusammenfassung. Die Entwicklung eines lebenslangen Beratungssystems in Ungarn. Systematische Arbeiten werden derzeit in Ungarn durchgeführt, um ein

A. G. Watts (✉)
International Centre for Guidance Studies, University of Derby, Kedleston Road,
Derby DE22 1GB, UK
e-mail: tony.watts@zen.co.uk

B. T. Borbély-Pecze
National Lifelong Guidance System Development Unit, National Employment Office,
Budapest, Hungary
e-mail: borbelytibor@lab.hu

lebenslanges Beratungssystem im Einklang mit den von führenden internationalen Organisationen skizzierten Grundsätzen zu entwickeln. Die Ursprünge der Berufsberatung in Ungarn und die Art des aktuellen Bildungs- und Berufsberatungssystems werden skizziert. Die wichtigsten Eigenarten des aktuellen Entwicklungsprogramms, unterstützt durch den Europäischen Sozialfonds, werden gemeinsam mit der strategischen Arbeit des National Lifelong Guidance Council [Nationaler Rat für Lebenslange Beratung] präsentiert. Aktuelle Themen im Zusammenhang mit diesen Entwicklungen werden diskutiert.

Resumen. Desarrollo de un Sistema de Orientación a lo largo de vida en Hungría. En Hungría se está llevando a cabo un trabajo sistemático para desarrollar un sistema de orientación a lo largo de la vida, de acuerdo con los principios establecidos por organismos internacionales. En este artículo se describe el origen de la orientación para la carrera en Hungría, y la naturaleza del sistema actual de orientación. Se presentan las principales características del programa de desarrollo actual, financiado por el Fondo Social Europeo, junto con el trabajo estratégico del Consejo Nacional de Orientación a lo Largo de la Vida. Finalmente se discuten los aspectos clave de estos avances.

Keywords Lifelong guidance · Hungary

The work being done in Hungary to develop a lifelong guidance system, with leadership provided by a national council and with financial support from the European Social Fund, is potentially of wide international interest. It is unusually systematic in nature, with strong efforts being made to draw from international practice. It is being applied within a country which has undergone major political and economic changes in the last 20 years, and in which universal career guidance services have not hitherto been strongly developed.

In many countries, efforts have been made in recent years to develop lifelong guidance systems in support of lifelong learning. A major stimulus to such policy development was provided by the policy review carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2004). This stimulated parallel reviews subsequently carried out by the European Training Foundation (Sultana, 2002) and Cedefop (Sultana, 2004) (in both of which Hungary participated) as well as by the World Bank (Watts & Fretwell, 2004) and the European Training Foundation (Sultana & Watts, 2007; Sweet, 2006), and provided the basis for policy manuals published by OECD and the European Commission (2004) and by the International Labour Organisation (2007).

The OECD review identified ten features of lifelong guidance systems:

- (a) Transparency and ease of access over the lifespan, including a capacity to meet the needs of a diverse range of clients;
- (b) Particular attention to key transition points over the lifespan;
- (c) Flexibility and innovation in service delivery, to reflect the differing needs and circumstances of diverse client groups;

- (d) Processes to stimulate regular review and planning;
- (e) Access to individual guidance by appropriately qualified practitioners for those who need such help, at times when they need it;
- (f) Programmes to develop career-management skills;
- (g) Opportunities to investigate and experience learning and work options before choosing them;
- (h) Assured access to service delivery that is independent of the interests of particular institutions or enterprises;
- (i) Access to comprehensive and integrated educational, occupational, and labour market information;
- (j) Involvement of relevant stakeholders.

Subsequently, the Council of the European Union passed two resolutions on the development of lifelong guidance systems. The first of these identified five key areas where, across the EU, reform was needed: the development of lifelong guidance systems; the broadening of access to guidance across the lifespan; the strengthening of quality-assurance mechanisms for guidance services, information and products, especially from a citizen/user perspective; the refocusing of guidance provision to develop citizens' career management skills; and the strengthening of structures for policy and systems development at national and regional levels (Council of the European Union, 2004). The second reinforced many of the key messages of the 2004 resolution, and looked to the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network—in which Hungary has been an active participant—as the means of strengthening European co-operation in addressing them (Council of the European Union, 2008).

The programme of work undertaken in Hungary represents one of the most systematic efforts in any country to implement the principles outlined by OECD and the European Union. The present article provides a critical review of this programme. It is based on a review undertaken by the first author in May 2010, using a methodology based on that adopted in the OECD and related reviews. This involved a review of key documents in English, and a 1-week study visit in the course of which semi-structured interviews based on key questions were held with relevant policy-makers and with guidance practitioners, trainers, and end-users, including first-hand visits to three career guidance services. All meetings were attended by the second author, who is the Programme Leader of the major development programme funded by the European Social Fund, and author of several of the key documents that provided the basis for the review. The article thus represents both an external and an internal perspective. The views expressed are those of the first author.

Origins

The roots of career guidance in Hungary go back over a century. The first professional publications appeared in the 1890s. Following an initiative launched in 1906, the first Career Guidance and Counselling Institute in Hungary was set up in

Budapest in 1924. But this fell into abeyance. Subsequently, in the post-war period, services remained dormant for many years under the command economy of state socialism (Sipeki, 2005; Völgyessy, 1996).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, more relaxed economic and social policies began to be introduced in the era of “Goulash communism” (Bozóki & Simon, 2010, p. 208). Service delivery was assigned to county orientation institutes, which were concerned mainly with guidance of school pupils. By the early 1980s, around 1,000 people were engaged in career guidance work, of whom around 600 were teachers, economists, sociologists, and psychologists, who had been trained as careers counsellors (Benedek, 2006).

From 1983, the county institutions outside Budapest were merged into the county institutes of pedagogy, which provided service support to schools, under the National Pedagogical Institute (linked to the Ministry of Education). In these institutes, the norm was for one or two specialised staff members to carry out the career guidance functions, which were concerned partly with service delivery and partly with support for school provision. There were strong differences between the counties. By the end of the state-socialist period, in 1989–1990, there was no longer an independent career guidance institutional structure or professional network. The professional career guidance staff now only numbered around 500–600, distributed across a variety of institutions (Györgyi, 2000).

With the transition to a market economy, the need to lubricate the labour market and the rise in unemployment led to the establishment of a Public Employment Service (ÁFSZ) under the Ministry of Labour in 1991. This service employed some of those who had previously worked as careers counsellors. Subsequent labour legislation identified career guidance as one of the functions of the service. Accordingly, the ÁFSZ has tended to take the initiative in recent developments by increasingly involving the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well. In May 2010, the Ministry of Labour was merged into the Ministry of National Economy, and education and social issues were integrated into a new Ministry of National Resources.

The current career guidance system

The current career guidance system in Hungary comprises three main sets of services: in schools, in higher education, and in the public employment service. Within schools, a key role is played by the form teacher, who usually meets students for an hour a week, and is responsible for collecting information about their progress from other teachers. In principle, vocational orientation is part of the National Core Curriculum (NAT) for all types of schools. In the most recent revision (2007), it is subsumed within a range of key competences including learning to learn, social and civic competences, and sense of initiative and entrepreneurship. Between 2004 and 2008, a curriculum-development project was carried out which focused more specifically on “career building” (i.e., career skills development) across grades 1–12, with particular attention to grades 7–10. It ran alongside limited piloting of an adaptation of *The Real Game* from Canada, and viewed career building largely as cross-curricular and extra-curricular provision.

Such provision is not, however, strongly evident in the daily life of most schools, in which more formal didactic content-based teaching is the norm.

In principle, support for schools' career guidance provision continues to be available from the institutes of pedagogy. But their current role as prescribed by the Public Education Act of 1993 covers a variety of functions, including therapeutic counselling, special-needs provision, and speech therapy, so educational and vocational guidance often receive only limited attention. Moreover, in many areas, these services have been contracted out by the municipalities in order to reduce costs (the core annual funding level for educational and vocational advice services is equivalent to 8 euros per pupil). As a result, the number of career guidance professionals operating within these services is still commonly limited to one or two people serving a large number of schools.

Within higher education, around half of the institutions have career centres. In most cases these comprise one or two staff members for large numbers of students. Many have close links with students' unions. Much of their work is concerned with educational guidance on learning pathways and credits.

The ÁFSZ comprises the National Employment Office and a network of Labour Centres. Its core task is to administer unemployment benefits, but it has also been involved in managing a range of active labour market measures, including job clubs, many of which are contracted out to NGOs and private-sector organisations. It also runs job centres, and has increasingly been changing into a service-providing organisation. Under a programme introduced with World Bank support, employment counselling services have been established within the ÁFSZ, based largely on the German model (see OECD 2002). Employment Information Centres (FIT) have been set up, modelled on the German BIZ system, with its various relevant resources including films and folders on occupations, and web access.

The ÁFSZ was initially established on a county basis, with 20 county labour centres supported by local branches. Each of the county offices had a FIT centre. The structure has now been regionalised, so that instead of 20 county labour centres, there are 7 regional ones, with 170 local branches. The plan is to locate FIT folders, films, and kiosks, in each of these. Currently, around 100 have open-space centres where such resources can be deployed. Not all of the centres provide employment counselling services: In 2006, there were only 119 employment and career counsellors spread across the branch offices (Benedek, 2006). Since the rise in unemployment following the recent economic crisis, some staff members have been withdrawn from the FIT centres to the "front-line" of unemployment registration work.

The ÁFSZ regional offices are also responsible for organising career fairs across the country. In 2009 these were attended by a total of 117,739 people. Most of these were school pupils, but some were university students and adult job-seekers.

The development programme

The Social Renewal Operational Programme (SROP) is part of the New Hungary Development Plan 2007–2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund. The

overall goal of the SROP is to increase the labour-market activity of the population of working age. Within the SROP, Measure 2.2.2 focuses specifically on lifelong guidance. It is designed to be implemented in three two-year phases. Of the funding, 85% is provided by the European Social Fund, and the remaining 15% by the Hungarian Government. The total funding for the first phase of the SROP 2.2.2 project (2008–2010) comprised 7.3 million euros.

The goal underpinning the project is “to build a sustainable national cross-sectoral guidance network providing services to clients of all ages.” The core principles are: that lifelong guidance “is not a luxury service, but a tool to support, and lay the foundations of, social inclusion, a well-functioning labour market, and trainability”; that it “must be made available to all citizens”; that it “encompasses support for the entire lifespan”; and that within the new system “inter-institutional and inter-policy co-ordination involving education, culture, social services and labour market services becomes reality” (Borbély-Pecze et al., 2009, p. 4). The project comprises four major capacity-building elements.

First, to provide a professional spine for lifelong guidance delivery, a new network has been established within the SROP 2.2.2 project. It comprises 50 professional career counsellors, based in 24 cities and towns. All have initially been appointed for 2 years. In around half of the areas, they are located in the ÁFSZ premises; in the rest, in separate premises. The service has its own brand, to distinguish it both from the FIT centres and from the ÁFSZ services for registered job-seekers. Of the career counsellors’ service-delivery time, 70% is devoted to providing individual and group guidance services to a target of 10,000 end-users per year; the remaining 30% to running short courses for teachers, social workers, and others, to train them in basic career guidance skills.

Second, alongside this core network, a further 20 staff members have been appointed for 2 years on a contracted-out basis as cross-policy and cross-institution coordinators. Their task is to work with other providers of guidance services (in employment offices, schools, higher education institutions, social service institutions, NGOs, and the private sector) in order to build their capacity and strengthen links between their different forms of provision at regional and micro-regional levels. The aim is to develop networks of guidance providers within each of the 20 counties, grouped into the 7 regions.

Third, it is recognised that the number of career professionals is at present too limited to support a lifelong guidance system. Accordingly, support is being provided for 83 people to start master’s level studies in career guidance, in two universities. This is designed to complement the training programmes for teachers, social workers, and others, provided by the core service. In the longer term, the aim is to build a much larger cadre of lifelong guidance professionals.

Fourth, a new National Career Development Portal is being developed, to include a number of innovative elements. These include an e-portfolio, to be maintained by the individual citizen with password-controlled access: This is designed to enable users to record their qualifications and competencies, and to store self-assessments, plus information on courses and occupations in which they are interested; it is viewed as a basis for self-reflection as well as self-presentation. There will then be an extended range of databases, covering all sectors of education, training and

employment opportunities, based on establishing—for the first time in this context—close collaboration between a number of public organisations. Alongside this will be a wide range of self-assessment questionnaires (on skills, interests, values, work preferences, and the like). Some 40 short questionnaires are being developed, addressed to different target-groups, to support self-understanding, alongside 8 longer ones designed to be used in future in interrogating the courses and occupations databases. In future phases of the development programme, Web 2.0 technology will be used to facilitate online contacts and discussions, with the possibility of using Second Life to explore occupations.

As part of the new web portal, a Virtual Community of Career Guidance Professionals is being developed, at two levels: trained career guidance professionals (of whom some 500–600 have so far been located through the regional networks, to add to the 50 in the core network); and teachers, social workers, HR professionals, and others (3,000 of whom have been identified to date). The web portal includes a range of professional resources. It also provides a facility for posting professional details (including photographs, services offered, any fees charged, etc.), classified by locality, to enable members of the Virtual Community to contact each other; and also with for a public option for career guidance professionals that makes it possible for end-users to select which one to contact if seeking their services (i.e., acting as an online Yellow Pages).

The web portal is not only a critical arm of service delivery: It also plays an important strategic role in the development of a more integrated lifelong guidance system. It makes the different parts of the system more visible to each other. In addition, it helps to weld the different services within the system by providing a common resource for guidance services to use, including the e-portfolio (subject to the individual permitting them access to it).

The national lifelong guidance council

Alongside this strategic operational work, a National Lifelong Guidance Council (NPT: *Nemzeti Pályorientációs Tanács*) has been established, along the lines of the national councils being established in many other European countries (CEDEFOP 2008). Its 13 members include the key ministries (National Economy, National Resources), other relevant public bodies, the social partners (employers and trade unions) and the Hungarian counselling associations. Its aim is to develop and promote a framework for a lifelong guidance policy. It acts as an advisory group for the SROP 2.2.2 project, and acts as a catalyst for using the resources of this and other operational programmes to support the strategic development of a lifelong guidance system in Hungary.

On professional standards, work has been started by the Council on developing a national competency matrix for guidance practitioners. Building upon a five-level model developed by Wieggersma (1978)—which ranged from information-giving to psychotherapy—it has been proposed that career guidance professionals might be distinguished at three levels: career *information* provision/advice, provided by adult training counsellors/consultants, practitioners with short-term (30–120 h) career

guidance training, and teachers without qualifications in career guidance; career *guidance*, provided by qualified career guidance professionals, and consisting of several individual or group sessions; and career *counselling*, requiring a postgraduate degree in career counselling available only to psychologists, or in psychology including special attention to career counselling (Borbély-Pecze, 2010). This classification has been used for the mapping exercise carried out as part of building the wider network of lifelong guidance providers. The matrix will need to be linked to ethical and quality standards, the need for which has been recognised by the National Lifelong Guidance Council (2008).

In addition, work has also been commissioned by the Council in four further strategic areas. The first is the legal regulation of career orientation, where a review of the existing legislation and regulatory frameworks has concluded that they are “fragmented and deficient” (Princzinger, 2009, p. 5) and has identified options for action. The second is impact and cost-effectiveness, where a paper has been prepared reviewing international research and approaches to relating costs to benefits; a study is being prepared for the next phase of the SROP 2.2.2 project to examine the cost-benefits of services at each of the three levels identified above, with control groups. The third is performance indicators, where a review of international research has identified six key dimensions for outcome measures: self-esteem, coping, career maturity and awareness, life skills, locus of control, and decision-making competence. Finally, on user perceptions, a focus-group study has been conducted and a national customer satisfaction survey is being prepared for all education sub-sectors.

Issues

Together, these initiatives being undertaken by the SROP 2.2.2 project and the National Council address all 10 features of lifelong guidance systems identified by OECD (2004). They raise, however, a number of issues. The first relates to the sustainability of the work. This depends heavily upon the extent to which the outputs and impact of the SROP 2.2.2 project are integrated into the ongoing responsibilities of the relevant operational ministries—of National Resources and of National Economy. For accountability purposes, strong walls are established between provision funded by the ESF and provision funded by the Government. This tends to produce a kind of “mirror” structure, which is problematic in managing the process of merging innovation into sustainable provision. This emphasises the importance of the NPT, in ensuring that the work of SROP 2.2.2 continues to be viewed strategically, and in acting as a bridge with other strategies within the operational ministries.

A second issue relates to the balance and relationship between the two key aspects of service delivery identified in the 2008 EU Resolution: access and quality. Sampson (2009) recently noted that these two aspects might at times be in some tension with one another. Sampson argued that extending access is a social-justice issue, and that career practitioners need to remodel their practices and their concepts of quality to take account of the needs not only of clients who come through the

door, but of all citizens who need help with career choices, at whatever points through their lives.

The current model of delivery used in Hungary tends to emphasise quality at the expense of access. The work on professional standards is based on a strongly professionalised model, in which career information and advice can be provided by people with limited training, but career guidance can only be provided by qualified career guidance professionals, and career counselling only by those with a postgraduate degree in career counselling, or in psychology including special attention to career counselling. Moreover, the model adopted in the core service under the SROP 2.2.2 project requires all individual and group counselling activities to last at least three sessions.

If Hungary is to develop a lifelong guidance system that is able to support all its citizens, work is needed on scoping the level of service this would require. Use might be made, for example, of an adaptation of the customer segmentation model developed in Scotland (see Watts, 2005). This defined the number of potential customers in each of a number of categories according to their life-stage and other attributes, and then defined the level of service appropriate for each of these categories. It also used a distinction between self-help, assisted, and in-depth help, drawn from the differentiated service-delivery model developed at Florida State University (Sampson, 2008). The latter model is designed to support a resource-based approach, in which centres are built as open resource areas, with users able to use the resources with a variety of levels of staff support. If the core network set up within the ÁFSZ were co-located with the FIT centres, it would be possible to move towards such a model. If these services were also co-located with the co-ordinators of the wider regional networks, these would provide hubs for those networks, which might be able to influence the nature of service provision in other sectors.

This relates closely to a third key issue, which is whether the core network being established within the SROP 2.2.2 project could be the prototype for a sustainable lifelong guidance service within the ÁFSZ, that could provide a professional spine to support sector-based guidance services. One of the key features of the SROP 2.2.2 project is that it is “sector blind” (Borbély-Pecze, 2010, p. 19). Many aspects of the infrastructure it is developing could be maintained within a diffused model, with the NPT and the web portal acting as integrative influences. But reviews of the existing all-age services in New Zealand, Scotland, and Wales, have demonstrated the strengths of such an all-age central service structure for supporting lifelong guidance systems (Watts, 2010).

A related issue is whether there is to be stronger standardisation of the models of delivery to be adopted in schools, with clearer specification of the roles of career specialists inside and/or outside the school, as well as of form teachers and subject teachers; or whether schools are to be permitted to determine their own arrangements on these matters. Linked to this are the relative merits of locating career specialists inside the school (where they will be more accessible and closer to the curriculum) and/or outside it (where they will be more impartial and closer to the labour market).

A fourth set of issues relate to future funding models. This includes whether the 1.5% training levy on employers might be used as a source of funding for adult

guidance services, and the role of services paid for by employers or individuals. On the latter, the approach adopted within the Virtual Community of Career Guidance Professionals—of including private-sector practitioners, and of making it possible for such professionals to promote themselves publicly—could in principle be a means of pump-priming a market in career guidance provision, and exploring the potential for such a market. In this context, it is important to note that the OECD report on career guidance indicated that while there is a public interest in the provision of career guidance, this does not necessarily mean that all such provision should be publicly funded. Some of the provision might be on a market basis, paid for by individuals and/or their employers. The roles of government might accordingly include stimulating the market, and quality-assuring it (both to protect the public interest and to build consumer confidence), as well as compensating for market failure by addressing needs which the market cannot meet where this is viewed as being in the public interest (OECD, 2004, p. 121). The Virtual Community provides an internationally significant initiative, which can be viewed as both stimulating and quality-assuring this market. It is interesting to note that it does so on the basis of quality-assuring the individual practitioner rather than (as, for example, with the Matrix standards in the UK) the service in which they work.

A fifth set of issues relates to the web portal. A critically important issue is the level of integration to be established within the portal. The databases have been developed by different public authorities, and the responsibility for updating them will continue to lie with these authorities. But from the user's point-of-view, many of the critical questions relate to cross-paths across these databases: showing progression possibilities between courses, and which courses lead to which occupations. *Strong* integration requires maximising these cross-paths; *weak* integration involves minimising them. Moreover, if the self-assessments are to be used to interrogate the databases, on either a separate or additive basis, this requires additional data, plus agreement on the matching algorithms that are to be used. The principle can be *broadening*, to aid exploration and flexibility, or *narrowing*, to support decision-making. All these require agreement on the underlying principles, and on how the additional data required are to be collected and maintained.

Further important issues in relation to the web-based services are the extent of references within the web portal to the possibility of contacting a counsellor (which again could be maximised or minimised); and whether such contacts should be made with individual career counsellors through the Virtual Community, or to a call centre where in principle resources can be managed more efficiently. At present, calls and online chat requests are to named individuals who indicate that they are available; e-mails can be sent either to named individuals or to the service as a whole. An important question, which Hungarian experience could help to illuminate, is whether this model or the call centre model is more cost effective, in terms of counsellor time, of user time, and of the quality of the interaction (cf. Watts & Dent, 2006).

The e-portfolio potentially provides a concrete way of placing the learner at the centre of a lifelong guidance system, housed within a portal which provides a range of resources for him/her, plus access to career guidance professionals for those who wish to use their services. If pupils could be introduced to the e-portfolio

systematically in schools, this would establish it in this role, as well as substantially increasing its levels of usage. It might be useful in this respect to examine practice in Wales, where Careers Wales Online (CWOL) has been established not only as the key guidance tool in relation to the pathways, but also as the key administrative tool for timetabling purposes. This means that all young people are likely in future to be using CWOL continuously between the ages of 14 and 19. Since their e-portfolio is housed there, potentially as the basis for sustaining their curriculum vitae, and including the individual's personal bank of relevant information resources, there is a chance that they will continue to use it post-graduation. In which case, it could genuinely become the basis for their lifelong career development, with their e-portfolio surrounded by other resources that they can access for support (e.g., Watts, 2009).

A final issue relates to marketing. At present, little effort has been made to market the services available, except through networking activities. This is largely because of concerns about the limited resources available to meet the demand that might be induced. The focus-group research conducted with users could however be built upon to provide a basis for developing a marketing strategy. International evidence demonstrates the impact of marketing in stimulating consumer awareness and demand (Watts & Dent, 2008). This would seem important if Hungary is to meet the injunction in the 2004 EU Resolution that lifelong guidance services “need to be viewed as an active tool, and individuals should be positively encouraged to use them” (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 6).

Many of the issues identified here are relevant not only to Hungary but to other countries attempting to develop more robust lifelong guidance systems. If the relevant organisations are able to address them effectively in the next phase of the development programme, this could make the developments in Hungary even more significant internationally.

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