

From Career Decision-Making Towards Career Cruising – the Case of Hungary: the “U” Model

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the changing role, practice and institutional setting of career guidance and counselling in Hungary from the 1950s to the present time. The article defines the relation between the institutional settings (polity), changes in the content of guidance policies implemented in those decades (policy), and decision-making processes (politics). It is argued that the lack of institutional resilience and the vagueness of the career guidance theoretical models created a relatively unstable guidance system in Hungary. Our description concerns both the theoretical development of guidance and counselling and legislative and institutional changes. It addresses the changing role of career guidance and counselling, including access to guidance service, and the changing perception of the two manifested by citizens, companies and politicians.

KEYWORDS: history, policy, polity, politics, guidance theories and practice in Hungary, 20th century.

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As an activity, career guidance can be viewed from several different perspectives. Traditionally, we have discussed career development of individuals but thoroughly elaborated theories of career counselling were missing until the 1990s (Swanson & Fouad, 1999). Career guidance, however, can be observed as both a policy and a system (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2004; European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training [Cedefop], 2005; European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network [ELGPN], 2012) and therefore it has its own polity, entities or institutional settings, as well as power games taking place around these institutions. The ELGPN was in operation at the policy and system-design levels between 2007 and 2015 in Europe, but ultimately the ELGPN Resource Kit (2012) was never tested. This article not only takes into account a few reference points which were identified already in the reports mentioned above but also seeks to go deeper in certain categories such as the professional background of employees, institutional settings, etc. As career guidance also forms part of public policy (OECD, 2004; Watts, 2002; ELGPN, 2014, pp. 75-77), its content can also be circumscribed upon the “conventional triad” of politics-policy-polity as well as politicking and politicization. “Policy refers to a regulating aspect of politics. Politicking alludes to a performative aspect; polity implies a metaphorical space with specific possibilities and limits, while politicization marks an opening as something is political, as playable” (Palonen, 2003). This well-elaborated literature of political science is rarely reflected in the literature of career guidance. However, many career guidance roles cannot be observed without these relations, for example, the advocacy role of guidance links it with social mobility, and social justice and development of Career Management Skills (ELGPN, 2013) with the school system, etc. Therefore, how guidance has been recognized and put into practice by different governments in different historical periods is also linked with the emerging theory of guidance, career development, and with

how social peace has been maintained over decades. International best policy practices get transferred from one country/region to another, facing various challenges. Sultana (2009) made a distinction between policy lending and borrowing, arguing that happenstance in policy development is also often a reason for policy improvement as travelers contribute fresh know-how from time to time. This policy design and style of development was only partly applicable in such countries as Hungary, which was trapped on the Soviet side of the Iron Curtain.

At the international level our current knowledge about the Hungarian career guidance and counselling system is fragmentary and full of blind spots. Since the early 1990s, two descriptive reports and evaluations (Watts & Borbély-Pecze, 2011; Hughes, 2015) were published along with the ETF report (ETF: Sultana & Zelloth, 2003), which described the shape of career guidance policies within 11 European states just before the 2004 accession period. However, these reports provided a so-called helicopter perspective of the shape, goals and daily practice of the country's guidance systems.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the current research (which in 2018 was accepted in Hungary as a university habilitation dissertation (Borbély-Pecze, 2017)) is to examine and create a link between the changing nature of economy, labour market, the political system as well as the daily practice and theory of career guidance and counselling. The study is based on the so-called convention triad approach (politics–policy–polity) taken from political science. The triad was originally designed by Lange, Driessen, Sauer, Bornemann, and Burger (2013), who described processes of the EU environmental policy, but it can also be used to investigate the relationship between different political processes and the improvement of career

development, guidance practice and theory, as well as interdependencies between them. In this article, three main definitions will be used, all borrowed from political sciences and infrequently used by career guidance specialists:

- **Polity** is a form or process of civil government or constitution. The word goes back to the mid-16th century as derived from the obsolete French word *politie*, via Latin, from Greek *politeia*, meaning “citizenship, government,” from *politēs* (citizen) and *polis* (city).
- **Politics** is the activities associated with the governance of a country or area, especially the debate between the parties in power.
- **Policy** is a set of ideas or a plan of what to do in a particular situation, agreed upon officially by a group of people, a business organization, a government, or a political party.

The mode of government can be measured in an ideal scale between neoliberal via state-regulated toward state-run (based on central-planning) systems, where each political model of government has its own ideology (Watts, 2002) with respect to guidance: to retain guidance as a method of social control (conservative) or use it to advocate social change (radical). Moreover, each government model creates its own institutional setting (polity). It may be a national guidance infrastructure (such as Careers England, Careers Wales, the German Bundesagentur für Arbeit, and also the Hungarian model employed from 1971 to 1983), it can be outsourced (e.g. in the Netherlands or Australia), or it may imply a missing/segmented institutional setting (which is the case in most countries). The content (policy) of guidance refers to guidance-related activities, such as guidance for all age groups, strong or weak advocative role of guidance, using guidance to meet the immediate bottleneck needs of the labour market, etc. Finally, politics is about making decisions how any kind of guidance-related public political debates can be set (e.g. in the Balkan countries geographical mobility role nowadays cannot

be mentioned as resulting from the heavy brain drain of Western-Europe occurring since the 1990s). The actual polity-politics-policy of a country also determined the scope of research, guidance tool development, and the theory of guidance (e.g. after the 1990 re-unification of Germany the re-skilling aspect of guidance was very strong in Germany).

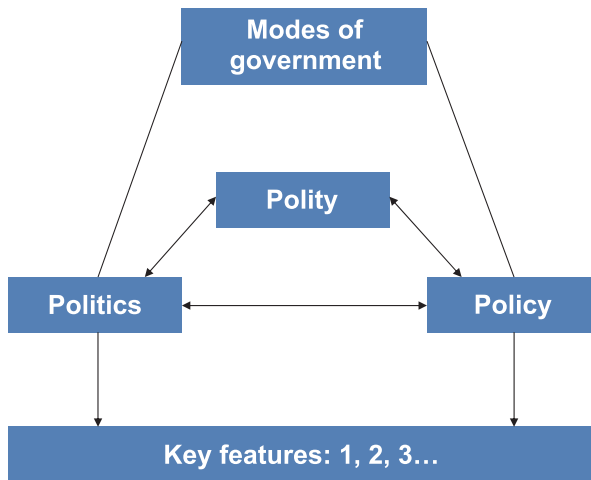


Figure 1. The convention triad in political science and career guidance.

Source: based on Lange et al. (2013).

The career development approaches and theories (both Hungarian and internationally) were confronted with the convention triad (see Figure 2). The methodology used here is based on literature review covering workbooks, handbooks and leaflets published at the county level, information provided by the National Career Guidance Office, and the country's legislation. We also used the available and copious internal documentation of the Hungarian State Career Guidance Office (1971–1983) and

its 20 county offices,¹ the records of the Ministry of Labour and the Hungarian State Wage and Labour Office (the latter was renamed to National Labour Office after the political transformation of 1990).

THE POLITY OF THE HUNGARIAN GUIDANCE SYSTEM FROM 1953 TO THE DAY

After the Sovietisation of Hungary the failure of central-planning was already evident by 1953. It was absolutely clear that the targets of the 1950–1954 Five-Year Plan were not going to be met (Berend, 1990, p. 13). Later on, the high level of dissatisfaction with the Soviet system threw Hungarians into a rebellion against the Soviet political system in 1956. From 1957 a new Economic Structure and Mechanism was suggested to the Governmental Economic Committee. The first governmental act on career guidance was issued in 1959 but it was still stuck in the narrow-minded paradigm of central, five-year-term labour market planning. The role and content of the methodology used in career guidance and development had been evolving slowly towards a more modern approach of the 1960s with contributions from such renowned researchers as Csirszka (1966) and Rókusfalvy (1969).

Major institutional changes started to emerge in the early 1970s, when the county guidance centres as well as the State Career Guidance Office were established, so several written sources can be traced to the 1970s and early 1980s. The national guidance system was dismantled in the mid-1980s in parallel with the halted reforms after the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party's Congress was convened in 1985. In the late 1980s, less official documents were created; however, some theoretical development of career

¹ The majority of these documents are preserved in the archives of the Hungarian Pedagogical Library and Museum.

guidance continued in different universities and under the aegis of the National Pedagogical Office.

Along with the political changes of the time, career guidance regained its relevance, as the subsequent governments led by Antall (1990–1993) and Horn (1994–1998) were both terrified by the scale of social change and massive unemployment. As a consequence, career guidance was taken away from education polity, and the newly established Public Employment Service (1991) became the key provider as well as content developer of guidance services (Borbély-Pecze, 2018). Most literature, new methodologies, for example, adaptations of different test batteries, new workbooks, and opening up new guidance space such as German Berufsinformationszentren (occupational information centres), or growing career information sources (e.g. occupational movies or folders) were dealt with mainly by the Public Employment Service. Such documentation is still available.

From the 2000s, chiefly after the EU accession (2004), the status quo shifted again. Firstly, new kinds of support were now available (i.e. the European Social Fund) for methodological developments in the educational policy. Secondly, the Hungarian economy became more stable than in the early 90s so there was less pressure on the labour administration. The documentation of several projects is available from that time, namely the national programme for the Development of the Trade Schools (2003–2006),² the Guidance Component, introduction of the national competency-based curriculum development programme (2004–2008),³ to name but a few. None of them were carried on in a stable manner and most of their outcomes have already disappeared from the education system.

² http://szakma.nive.hu/szfp/szfp2_program/index_new.php

³ https://www.srpszkk.hu/tamop412b/kompetencia_alapu_pedagogia/sulinova_kompetencia_alap_oktatsi_programcsomagok.html

Since the 2010 general elections, the current governments (2010–2022) describe the role of career guidance policy, practice and its institutions as a tool serving to foster higher labour market participation and nationalization of the economy. Therefore, the key policy and polity player was the Hungarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the previously structured dialogue between the different policies of sectoral guidance (the National Lifelong Guidance Council operating between 2008 and 2012) and providers ceased to exist.

RESULTS: THE “U” MODEL

As a former communist country, Hungary shares a partly common history with other regional counterparts such as the Czech Republic, Poland or Croatia – where vocational guidance recently celebrated its 100th anniversary. The history of career guidance in Hungary is in line with the segmented political development of the country - starting with the Austro-Hungarian dualist government at the turn of the 20th century, and then followed by the creation of the new, small and ethnically homogenous Hungary in the period between the lost World War I and World War II, until the emergence of the communist dictatorship as a result of the so-called “blue slips” widespread election fraud pulled off by the Communists in August 1947. After the collapse of the communist system (1989–1990) the meaning and purpose of career guidance and counselling was also adjusted in line with the pluralist party system and the open (labour) market. Western typologies concerning the history of the guidance profession (Savickas, 2008) are only partly applicable for this country.

Based on the above-mentioned model adopted from the literature of political science, the development of career guidance in Hungary of the last 60–70 years can be described with a “U” model that has two elements.

The first element is related to the ideology behind the career guidance practice, guidance policy, and system development including institutional settings. The central, dynamic aspect is the purpose of guidance interpreted as an element of labour market (central) planning vs. individual/personal career development. My argument is that the current Hungarian guidance system and institutional settings are closer to the centrally planned model of the 1950–1960s than those implemented between the 1970s and the early 1980s, a time when career guidance institutions were run under the supervision of the Ministry for Labour and the National Institution for Guidance Methodological Support and Development (1971–1983). By the early 1980s, around 1,000 people were engaged in career guidance work, around 600 of them teachers, economists, sociologists and psychologists, trained as career counsellors (Benedek, 2006).

The second element of the model is related to the issue of access to career guidance and counselling services and the corresponding professional and self-service tools. We also included crucial guidance theories and highlighted which one was taken into consideration by decision-makers to be implemented in politics. For example, the idea of career adaptability is often referred to as a term supporting the adaptation processes taking place in digital society, which does not mean that in the institutional setting (polity) the Career Construction Theory would be stronger and more applicable than the Work Adjustment Theory.

The second part of the description sets up three artificial periods in the development of career guidance and counselling in Hungary. The “U” model is also structured with respect to three main periods: a) career orientation – shepherding citizens towards full employment until the 1970s, b) career guidance during the people’s economy of 1980s, and c) global career construction after the political changes of the mid-1990s (see Figure 2 for more details). The first period ensued shortly after the crushed anti-Soviet revolution of 1956 when the first career-related governmental

Career choice as facilitator of labour planning, personal development and access

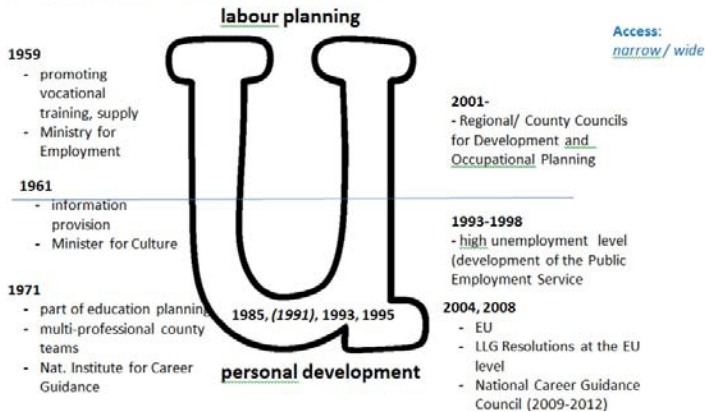


Figure 2. Career choice as a facilitator of labour planning vs. personal development and the issue of access to career guidance and counselling services in Hungary in 1959–2017 (Borbély-Pecze, 2018).

decree was issued in 1959. The role of guidance was deeply connected with the purpose of labour force planning. Then, from the late 1960s, the planned economy became less rigid as in 1966 the Central Committee approved the “New Economic Mechanism.” Finally, the third phase started with the changed political circumstances in 1989–1990, but it was especially perceptible only after 2004 as Hungary became an EU member and part of the globalized economy so the era of global career construction was acknowledged as a valid approach in Hungary as well.

THE KEY INDEXES OF THE MODEL

The “U” model takes into consideration the following factors:

- Mainstream guidance theory (theories) which was widely recognised in political debates and shaped the mission of guid-

ance services. We also included the key theoretical shifts that took place in the international arena.

- The role and tools of practitioners and customer groups.
- The institutional settings and goals of the guidance policy at the national level.

These indexes cover fewer topic areas than what was suggested by OECD (2004), Cedefop (2005) or ELGPN (2012), but these were selected on the basis of the available information, which is often insufficient as regards different guidance systems. Also, our research methodology was based on a retrospective review of the still available documentation. As a result, we simply had not enough information to find answers for other indexes, e.g. client-trained guidance staff ratio, such information was misleading.

Our frame of reference has two axes: a) the role and purpose of guidance in labour market planning, and adjustment of citizens vs. personal development, and b) a narrow or broad understanding of guidance policy, system, theory and practice as such. Here we describe the key features of the three time periods (Table 1 below provides an overview).

The “U” model was developed using this information and these details provided the three time frames as well. From the early 1960s, after the 1956 revolution and the period of consolidation, central planning was still the main ideology and it determined the logic of distribution of manpower within the Hungarian economy as well as the capacities of the VET system. In the meantime, a new generation of vocational psychologists such as Csirszka, Rókusfalvy, Magda Ritoók or Völgyesy started to map the paradigm shift from adjustment towards developmental theories, which put greater emphasis on the individual development as a process. Until the early 1970s, the state authority set up institutional structures for career guidance and the national youth career guidance network, as well as opening the State Career Guidance Office.

In many ways the 1970s and early 1980s were the happiest time for Hungarian career guidance researchers and for institutional history. As Hungary became the “happiest barrack” in the Communist Bloc, the real influence of the State Planning Office was not as powerful as before. Quotas were issued for each county and each vocational/occupational enrolment but often the beneficiaries of the guidance services and professional counsellors hacked these figures and provided counselling based on developmental theories. It is also a fact that guidance services were available only to the younger generation, and most of them could use only information sessions and not in-depth counselling. Those few students who had been offered career counselling sessions would often represent middle-class families. Ritoók also did a 40-years follow-up study with her own clients and found out that most of them had acquired career skills and effectively developed their own careers in line with the client-counsellor agreement at the end of the counselling process (Ritoók, 2008). Interestingly, this system was abolished just a few years before the political transformation because hard-line communists came to power in 1985. No career guidance system or institution was preserved in the country, and the professionals and professional materials were scattered around the county.

From 1988/1989 the economic and political changes in Hungary were easily discernible even for ordinary citizens as the macroeconomic imbalance became a burning issue. In 1990, when a new, democratically elected Parliament was installed, the National Employment Agency was established. It re-recruited most of the trained professionals but also applied a narrow-minded approach to career guidance since mass unemployment was already an issue. Although most guidance professionals arrived with a career-development attitude to the new institution, the daily practice was about placement and job-first approach. Also, the new training framework for career counsellors was launched in 1992 at the University of Gödöllő, where a three-year-long college course was

now offered under a World Bank project, in close cooperation with the Canadian and German guidance and research communities (e.g. later on the College was a model for the BA Programme at Mannheim University of Applied Sciences, Germany).

In 1991–2010, different mission statements of the state administration (putting people back to work as soon as possible) and the developmental approach of guidance professionals created tensions between the parties. As a result, many of them moved to the social inclusion services (Family Protection Offices run by the municipalities) or to civil agencies. The educational institutions woke up relatively late and although the first National Core Curricula (1995) mentioned career education as a primary task, the latter remained more of a theory than daily practice for the decades to come.

From the mid-2000s, partly inspired by the close chance for the EU accession, educational authorities started to activate and new curricula were developed for career education in schools (such as the unsuccessful adaptation of the Real Game or national developments for K12 career education). From 2010, after the change of the political leadership and in the wake of the global recession of 2008 more prime-age Hungarians started to commute or move to other EU countries (mainly UK, Germany, Austria), which also had a side effect, namely the culture of career construction was imported to the country. These theories are still far from the daily life of the citizens or the operational model of the government agencies. As the national labour market has been moving towards new forms of work (e.g. casual work and flexi-jobs) the understanding of career/lifelong guidance as a tool for both labour market and individual resilience will be a major issue.

The national government reacted fearfully to these changes and tried even harder to adjust people to the jobs available. This is why the representation of the “U” model has a little stem, meaning that the curve could turn back in time ending up in a “W” model, or change the curve again.

CONCLUSIONS

Career construction instead of career adjustment is a relatively new development in career guidance theory and practice; it is rarely addressed in the Hungarian literature of the subject. The concepts of boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) or protean career (Hall, 1996) are still far from the daily agenda of the policy design in Hungary, where major emphasis is put more on the endogenous growth of the national labour market than job security and less on employability and labour-force competitiveness. Therefore, any new government-initiated institutional setting will first address job security as well as the occupational congruency check from the supply side's perspective rather than career resilience and the flexibility of careers. The consequence of this approach is that policy goals are often set for short term and the institutional resilience of the national career guidance services remained low during the decades in question.

Table 1. Key characteristics, mission and client groups vs career development and theory of guidance from 1950s until today.			
Characteristics	Career orientation (mid 60s-70s)	People's economic career choice	Global career construction
Meaning of the term	labour (force) planning	labour supply	globalised economy
Social/economic political objectives	easing labour demand	tackling imbalances	entering into the globalised market
Labour market, economy	labour demand intensive market, GDP growth, New Economic Mechanism	restructuring, massive unemployment	global value chains, but dual company structure remains
Content of the activity	planned management	orientation, correction	career building
Professionals' background	vocational psychologists	employment counsellor, career orientation teacher, student counsellor, new counselling psychologist training	andragogy, EET, PhD, psychology in the field of pedagogics
Institutions	State Planning Office (OTH), Ministry for Employment, National Career Council	OPI, County Pedagogics Institutes, schools, PES from early 1990s	Career Orientation Council/PES since 2008; Chambers' system since 2011
Target groups	youths (vocational training)	adults (later youngsters) in need of retraining	youths and active-age persons
School structure	8+3 years	8+2+2 years	8+4 years
Theoretical framework	<i>Decision theory, psychodynamics, theory of work adjustment (TWA)</i> (Davis & Lofquist, 1984)	Emphasis on principle of development, Super's Self-concept Theory of Career Development	Career Construction Theory (CCT), <i>Gottfredson's theory of circumscription, compromise, and self-creation</i> (Gottfredson, 2002)

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